

The aspects of the artistic works of Rakan Dabdoob

The article studies the artistic works of the Iraqi artist Rakan Dabdoob (1941–2017). The article describes and analyses the art of this artist, his study in Europe and how he was influenced by several artistic trends, and the development of his work during his career. The author observed that the artist was influenced by his historical roots such as the Sumerian and Babylonian cultures and his environmental surroundings in the city Mosul. The researcher chose a collection of artistic works of the artists as intentional samples to analyse them.

Keywords: sculpture, painting, «holes», calligraphy, Mosul, expressionism.

АЛЬ-ЧАЛАБИ ОМАР ФАВВАЗ ДЖАББАР
АСПЕКТЫ ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННЫХ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЙ РАКАНА ДАБДУБА

В статье исследуются творческие работы иракского художника Раkana Дабдуба (1941–2017). Статья описывает и анализирует искусство этого художника, его исследования в Европе и то, как на него повлияли несколько художественных направлений, а также развитие его творчества на протяжении его карьеры. Автор отмечает, что на художника повлияли его исторические корни, такие как шумерская и вавилонская культуры, и его окружение в городе Мосул. Представлены наиболее заметные работы художника.

Ключевые слова: скульптура, живопись, «дыры», каллиграфия, Мосул, экспрессионизм.



Introduction

The current study views the most important aspects of the Artist Rakan Dabdoob, the most important artistic station through his life and his experience, how he was influenced by various types of art on both sides sculpture and painting and taking care of composition the painting through using different types of symbols which has important spaces in his intellectual trends.

The problem of the study is embodied in the following question: Does his architectural study and sculpture influence his painting style? Because we can clearly see how does he mix between sculpture and painting. A number of art critics and writers talked about this style of Dabdoobs among them is Talal Hasan Agha.

The artist Rakan Dabdoob, through his pioneering creative career in the field of painting where he centered his activities and his fairs, springs out of several intellectual, artistic, and interactive backgrounds. His resources were collected from the perspective of realism school and the visual storage of the city of Mosul in its modern architecture or the historical one beside the European window which was opened for him represented in Italy, where he was studying in Rome during in the sixties of the former century, and his communication with the triumphs of the modern school though the conservativeness and classicality both of which distinguish the artistic direction in Italy at that time.

From the inside feelings of the oriental artist, it is revealed that this tendency to impose The Self and reflects the environment which the artist lived in (Mosul city) and paid a great deal of attention to compose paintings and entered various symbols

in them, even in his most abstract periods, when he presented his sculptures which were tied up with colored cloth when he got back from studying abroad, and what they represented as prominence, lowering and curve referring to what is there in the human body as composition that transfers into a language made of relational constructions of the reality of the abstract visual discourse (Illustrations 1, 2) [1, 241].

Historical Review for the life of the artist

Rakan Abdul Aziz Dabdoob (born in 29th of May 1941–2017) is an Iraqi plastic artist who was born in the city of Mosul in northern, in the locality of (Assarjkkhanah), he descends from a well-known Arabian tribe in the city of Mosul called (Al-Igadat). The history and the origins of this tribe goes back to the Arabian Peninsula, and related to the great Sahabi (Ibn Ma'adi Karib). Dabdoob's family came from Deer Alzoor in Syria before three hundred years, and inhabited Mosul, and worked in trade particularly the trade of sheep. The locality of Assarjkkhanah, which is one of the traditional areas, where curved alley, Shanasheel, décor, balcony, and heavy wooden gates, where he started to pay attention to painting since he learned the Arabian Alphabet in the primary school, then he started to resemble the alphabet with the natural shapes. He painted by means of the Chinese ink, at the same time he was dealing with the dry mud on the banks of the river Tigris during the student picnics, and he formed from this mud artistic shapes.

Rakan did not find what quenches his thirst of homesick in this period of time. So he headed to search for his ego in the past of his nation, then to change his ambition and wishes to return to the

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Illustration 1. Painting in yellow color. Rakan Dabdoob, 1967, tied canvas, size: 50x50 cm. The painting now is among the personal properties of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.



Illustration 2. Painting in blue color. Rakan Dabdoob. 1967. Tied canvas, size: 50x50 cm. The painting now is among the personal properties of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.



Illustration 3. Alhub Assaakhri (Lit, The Rocky Love). Rakan Dabdoob, 1994, ink on paper, 28x21 cm, from the personal properties of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.

bosom of the culture of his nation into dreams where he wanders among the corridors of the eastern art to express his Assyrian roots with sharp lines and the clever features of his faces and the depth of his creative experience which communicates his ancestor the Sumerian sculpture with a streamline of composition square and simplicity, and a sentiment of the rhythm of constructions movement in the compositions of Alwasiti artworks in front of an opaque backgrounds express a mysterious joy in their colors and fear from the unknown in building their spaces [1, 248–247].

Since the start of his artistic life he showed his attention by using the outline with black color in many treatments and many attempts to reach his aim which is making the outline a part of the painting composition, and we should not forget that he is genuinely a sculpture and the effect of sculpting is very apparent in many of his artworks.

When we follow his first sketches, we see that the outline appears as a basic part of the total sketch and sometimes the center of all the sketch. In 1976 he started to apply the study for

those attempts to many sketches in the following years and develop them in his paintings later on.

In the decade of nineties his sketches took another path when his sketches were colored and well plotted in their themes in a way that the sketch itself became a single complete painting, and the treatment of the outline appeared very clearly in this collection of his sketches. Then in the end of the nineties of the last century the production of Rakan reduced making sketches and he concentrated his experiments on the outline on the paintings. This appeared in his great number of his abstract sketches which later on were changed into paintings after choosing the best of them [2, 13–14].

His style was characterized with paying a great deal of attention to heritage and folklore, and he was inspired by the distinctive artistic vocabulary in them, in addition to his borrowings from the Arabic Alphabet and employing the heritage and folklore for the themes of treatment in his artistic paintings. The poetic verses surround the bodies, and appear as in a dream full of scripts of ancient times. He, by research, experiment and reaction, could constitute a special style for him which enabled him to occupy an advanced place among the Iraqi artists within the movement of the Iraqi contemporary art [3, 12].

The carrier of the artist included many fields in plastic arts and sculpture reaching to photography. His studio



Illustration 4. A girl with a baby. Rakan Dabdoob. Oil painting on canvas, 1960, 60x80 cm, the archive of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.

itself is a painting contained plastic art paintings represented various artistic schools (Illustration 3).

Dabdoob's family came from Deer Alzoor in Syria before 300 years, and inhabited Mosul, and worked in trade particularly the trade of sheep [4]. Rakan Dabdoob was born in the city of Mosul in the locality of (Assarjkanah), which is one of the traditional areas, where curved alley, Shanasheel, décor, balcony, and heavy wooden gates.

He exploited the folkloric celebrations to benefit from the used candles, because they accorded his vision at that time. During the period of intermediate school his concerns started to take more clear paths and he transformed the melted wax into blocks and artistic shapes, and his attempts were successful and they paved the way to him to join the Fine Arts Institute in Baghdad in 1959.

The Artistic experience of Rakan Dabdoob

Before joining the institute, he used to make free tours in which he drew the nature. The nature of the city of Mosul charmed him by all its beautiful vocabulary and he reflected that love by water color. This early start with nature made him acquire fastness in painting through racing the beam of the sun and its movements towards the west. Therefore, nature is considered the first school of the artist. After that comes the stage of studying in the Institute of Fine Arts where he put forth all the dimensions, all of which flow in the stream of art, when the experiments of the masters and the artists affected him and deepened the artistic cognition and feelings in him scientifically beside the continuous visits to artistic fairs which were held in Baghdad at that time [3, 12] (Illustration 4).

There, in the artistic fairs, was the first communication with the artistic world, where he apprenticed by the most important masters of the Iraqi plastic arts, among them in the art of painting were Faeq Hassan, Ata Sabri, and Ismael Al-Sheikhly, and in the art of sculpture Jawad Sallem and



Illustration 5. Alfajr (Lit, The Dawn). Acrylic colors on canvas. 2005, 60x48 cm, the personal properties of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.

Khalid Al-Rahhal. Rakan was studying painting in the day study, and sculpture in the evening study, the matter which lead to the appearance of mixing painting and sculpture in his artwork [5, 7]. He graduated from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and he was degraded the first student and got a scholarship to the Soviet Union but he refused it and went to Rome on his own expenses because his father refused him to go to a communist state.

In Italy the real experience with art started. He stayed six months without painting even one line. The artistic fairs are too much, and the museums are full with various paintings referred to various historical periods, the galleries are busy with different artistic works from all modern artistic schools, in addition to many statues spread in the public squares and parks, decorations that decorate the facades of buildings and churches. This situation made him stand in the middle of huge quantity of art, and he was obsessed with confusion.

Dabdoob says: «I was lost in that artistic atmosphere which is full of everything. I stayed stunning without knowing which way I will take and from which artistic movement I start. I spent my days looking consciously until I apprehended the artistic yard and apprehended the movement to start the lesson, then working quietly and objectively» [6, 21–20].

During that period of time, he found himself touched by the Expressive School which was the beginning. It moved inside him much of the stored energy because it is characterized with the colorful flow and the long daring strikes of the brush, in addition to its concern in seducing the humanitarian self and the exaggeration in expressing actions. He continued reacting with this school, then Rakan Dabdoob produced these expressive pieces in painting and sculpture, paying attention, at the same time, to the paintings of children and the eastern spirit, showing in them strength in line and a violent movement in composing the subject. Also, the movements of hands and legs appeared softly and expressively in harmony with the rest part of the painting. His paintings at that time were brilliant by horses and women in various subjects and natural view [7, 6].

During his study in Rome, Rakan joined the evening study in Sak institute to support his sculpture study. This institute actually was a place for coinage of currency and medals which were distributed in the athletic competences and the like. The artist also gained a diploma in sculpting on wood from San Jakomo.

In 1965 he held his first personal fair in Rome during his study, then he transferred it to Baghdad in Al-Wasiti



Illustration 6. Portrait. Rakan Dabdoob. Oil colors on wood, 2002, 62x50 cm, personal properties of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.

Gallery Hall, and it was the first fair in Al-Wasiti permanent gallery hall. Dabdoob says: my first fair reminds me with the contemporary impressionism school at that time, but it carries a European characteristic and contains lots of abstract. The Iraqi environment did not get into my artworks, then with coexistence and the environmental effect the local and folkloric relations got back [8, 16].

After he came back from Rome, he was very much affected to an extent that he stayed long time as an abstract painter. But he, somehow, moved from his European culture. Therefore, he resorted to heritage with a distinctive style, where prominence is clear in his paintings and sculpture pieces to give the first signal and give us a sensational tension between sculpture and painting. These fluctuations continued with him until he changed them into a colorful visual trick, before reducing bronze from a block into a color [9].

In a previous interview with the artist, he referred to taking a deep look into everything in his country, and he searched in his environment and his reality looking for the themes of things, trying to reach a new style and new distinct productions that express the essence of all humanitarian arts in traditional oriental and subjective style. He reached to what he wanted by mixing his European and local experience [10].

As you wander through the arcade of Rakan Dabdoob, you feel you are in front of unique and distinct experience. Everything about this Mosul artist is associated with an artistic and stylistic specificity. Perhaps those holes that accompany his paintings are a sign of recognizing his style and his spirituality, so sometimes you do not need to look at the end of the painting to read a signature indicative to it. Dabdoob says: «The idea of holes was born in the sixties when I was a student there and we were working on drawing the model in the classroom. I found myself interested in the bumps in the human body and developing them little by little. I noticed this uniqueness in the thing, and I looked closely at it, and I found that it had an extension in our Sumerian civilization. Tens of sculptures prove and confirm the interest of early man in holes, you will find eye quarries are inlaid with black and white ... Meaning holes» [13]. The crater that developed from the hierarchical protrusions in his early works remain the most prominent characteristic of modern artwork, until they became the main subject in many of his paintings (Illustration 5).

These holes are unique, and each painting has a special expression. If it comes in the head, it expresses the eyes, and if



Illustration 7. Mua'alaqat Poetry (Lit, Hanged Poetry). Oil colors on leather. 1989, 71x69 cm, personal properties of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.

it comes in the jaw, it expresses the mouth to give the meaning of the cry or challenge, and if it comes in the chest it has the meaning of giving or referring to a woman ... and so on.

The novelist Elias Khouri says: «Your body is your history». Do the holes of a body of a character in your painting explain this history? The holes on the human body are important. If one of them becomes clogged, he will go to the doctor. Holes in space are originally stars that are extinguished or deflated, this is what contemporary physics says, which they call (black holes). The holes under the fallen lobes of rings and the holes found in the ancient Sumerian civilizations are found on statues in archeological sites, and even in construction you find gutters and niches ... it is more than history) [10].

From here, we find him moving to a variety of methods and artistic treatments that have no decision, despite the presence of a large number of his works that are to him only, and form his own characteristic through which he highlights his artistic identity, as he presents the holes, the nozzles or the protrusion that appears in many of his works so that he became known by it as if they were his tattoos and signatures on his paintings, and the specificity he continues to work and diversity in it and treat it in different directions [11, 41–40].

Rakan Dabdoob tried various methods, drew, sculptured, sailed and slashed many paths in order to reach his own path. Therefore, we, many times, find his works in the state of serious, new and advanced transition.

And if we find some of his paintings similar to others, this does not mean that he is repeating and exhausting them, but he presents his own style, his artistic dictionary, and his distinctive uniqueness. And because Dabdoob is passionate about women and embodies her world in most of his paintings, the late Arab poet Nizar Qabbani found in Dabdoob the best person translates his poems into language of art painting, from here Dabdoob's paintings were associated with Nizar Qabbani's poems in more than one poetry collection [14].

And if women are frequently present in Dabdoob's paintings, it is because he is able to present his method of using nozzles or circles that excuse him from drawing the details of women's components, which makes him far



Illustration 8. Visitors of The City. Rakan Dabdoob, Oil colors on canvas, 2003, 84x52 cm, personal properties of the artist. Photo by the author, 2021.

from photography and takes him to the journey of plastic expression that carries his own voice and his own unique chromatic melody (Illustration 6).

We note other things developed by the artist Rakan, which are birds, horses, hand movements and their formations, in addition to his use of advanced Arabic calligraphy, when the interest in the shape of the letter and its aesthetic flow movement remains more important than its linguistic meaning and its ordinary image [15].

In his paintings, which were inspired by ancient Arabic poetry, especially the poet of the Mu'allaqat, drawn on different skins with a spiritual richness that is less than that of other artists, he says: «Our letters are an aesthetic work of art specific to the Arabs and the East. This is what makes me love the letter. I borrow its privacy and uniqueness in the world as a form and composition. Since my style of drawing is a modern contemporary style that is close to abstract, the Arabic letter must take a certain dimension after rejecting the phonetic and linguistic aspect, so that the effect remains formal and aesthetic, entering into the painting as an important element in forming its vocabulary [10] (Illustration 7).

The artist Rakan Dabdoob proceeds towards clarity and excellence in the architectural construction, which borrowed from the pride and the spirit of Islamic architect, so he was characterized with uniting the units and the vocabulary of the subject within the frame of the form with a beautiful symmetry between the masses, the spaces and the parts of construction. He also took from the colors of his environment its heat, richness, and symbols, from the grades of green

color, blue, turquoise, grey, red, and yellow, and he used their derivations with a thing of discreetness and skillful craftsmen. He achieved this in most of his paintings after the period of seventies, derived from the city of Mosul, especially the shapes of doors, windows, arches and its mosques. From these units and elements, the symbols of his unique contents and form are conformed [16, 68] (Illustration 8).

Conclusion

- 1 The form in all the works of the artist Rakan tries not to escape the form from the subject, and he tries to embody the contradictions of the blocks inside the painting, where the form remains a prisoner of the subject that is not easily revealed by the viewer, but the subject sometimes, does not come as specific embodiment of one particular idea, but rather for more than one issue within one artwork. What the artist seeks to build by means of close symbols and by a unified formal (design) style.
- 2 We can see in the works of Rakan Dabdoob that this attempt to combine painting, sculpture and ceramic art is definitely that the painting is still within the limits of the known understanding, but sculpture intervenes in all works, as a clear sculptural form suggests space and the weight of blocks, and the other meanings of sculpture too. This sculpture also belongs to the contemporary schools in which the sculpture expresses through mass, its disintegration and transformation to an aesthetic form intended to be an expression of contemporary situations.

- 3 The artist Rakan Dabdoob presents in his paintings part of the suffering of contemporary man and achieves his subject within his interest in heritage, specifically his inspiration of some Islamic artistic features and some linguistic metaphors such as Arabic letters and arithmetic numbers, subjects his treatment to the surface of the painting to rough texture with beautiful pictorial sense in which the third dimension appears as in the form of protrusions, holes and masses achieved by modern photography.
- 4 Also, we observe the integrated construction which is repeated in most of his paintings, particularly the woman that constitutes for him a symbol for nature, life, birth and love, in other compositions and different parts approach to abstraction until the personality dissolves in the content. Thus, he makes of women and of the things in nature his treasured symbols of joy and love of life, all of these are dominated by his color richness, his processing and his frugal formal technique.

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Статья поступила в редакцию
28 августа 2021 г.
Опубликована в сентябре 2021 г.

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