

A Comparative Study of Different Cases of Installation Art from Arabic artworks and global artworks

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Abstract:

This paper discusses the influence of the political situations on changing the idea in the material used in contemporary installation art in the Arab region. There was a change in the idea of the Arabic artworks which used the same material as in other global artworks but with a different idea. The study compared artworks (study sample) and global artworks that used the same material. The study sample contained two Arabic contemporary installation artworks from 2010-2015 to confirm if political situations were the reason for this change in idea. The findings proved the influence of these political situations on changing the idea in Arabic contemporary installation art.

Keywords: Political Situation, Idea, Material, Contemporary Art, Arab world.

Introduction :

According to Tolstoy from his book "What is Art?", he believed that the importance of art lay in its connection with life and its contemporary issues. Additionally, it would lose its value if it moved away from the main goal. And Marcuse, a philosopher, noted that art was essential in contemporary communities, and he confirmed the revolution of this art and the role it played in the contemporary issues in its community (Spens, 2013). Where the political situations were considered as among the most prominent issues and situations that affect and affected contemporary art in the world in general and the Arab world in particular, due to many of the difficult political events.

Haidar (2012) confirmed that the Arab region faced more difficult situations than other regions in the world. He stated that at the beginning of the twenty-first century the Arab region witnessed shocking events that exacerbated into a dangerous political juncture that caused the birth of Arab Spring. Based on what Haider said and what we see in present from internal conflicts and revolutions and ruling class repression, we can conclude that the Arab nation region is one of the

most conflicted regions in the world, because of the internal and external political strife, where these events certainly affect various life areas positively or negatively. Mar'ae (1985) noted that the internal and external dangers and challenges in the Arabic community have a huge impact on its development. He further noted that art is an important field in life that affect and would affect the surrounding situations.

ALyasiri (2011) agreed with Mar'ae that the relationship between the individual and society and surrounding environment are shared; he noted that the surrounding environment was the external influence of stability, peace, development, culture, freedom, and others. All these influences help to create scientific, technical, literary, technological, industrial and social development aspects. The political situation is considered more influential in current time.

The Director of the International Art Exhibition of Contemporary Art (Minas Art), Laure Diotevil, confirmed the political challenges that faced the Middle East region as well as "Arab Spring" contributed to the rapid growth of contemporary art in some Arab countries (Bashir, 2011). We noticed in the contemporary Arab art that it was affected

by surrounding political situations, and these are shown through many of the artworks that studied in this research. This research studied the impact of contemporary political situations in contemporary Arab installation art to discover the influence that appeared to change the idea due to these political situations.

Problem Statement :

Smith (2012), Setlar (2010), Melkonian (1997), Ramadan (2014), Hard (2014), Seismpolire (2015), Demirel (2012), Al-Qumari (2009) and Obaidat (2013) were some researchers who studied the impact of political situations in the installation art. Most of these studies and researches focused on the relationship between art and politics in general. However, some of them such as Smith (2012) and Melkonian (1997) discussed generally the impact of political situations in contemporary art in the Arab world and Middle East.

Smith (2014) viewed the problems faced by the Egyptian community and showed the artistic interventions that happened in public space in the

period of the revolution in Egypt, and he showed the effect of art in these places with the political changes.

Further to that, Melkonian (1997) argued about the effect of the political situations in many artists' experiences from the Middle East who lived as refugees and how they were able to express their issues, thoughts and feelings through contemporary artworks.

Ramadan (2014) confirmed in his essay that it was necessary to develop the art system to face art history needs. He also thought that it was time to change the art strategy in the Arab world, and he saw that goal of art was to participate in directing the future.

Nevertheless, there were no previous studies or researches that confirmed the impact of political situations on changing the idea of the material used in Arab contemporary art. Therefore, this study is important to review on how the political situations influenced contemporary art in changing the idea.

Comparative framework:

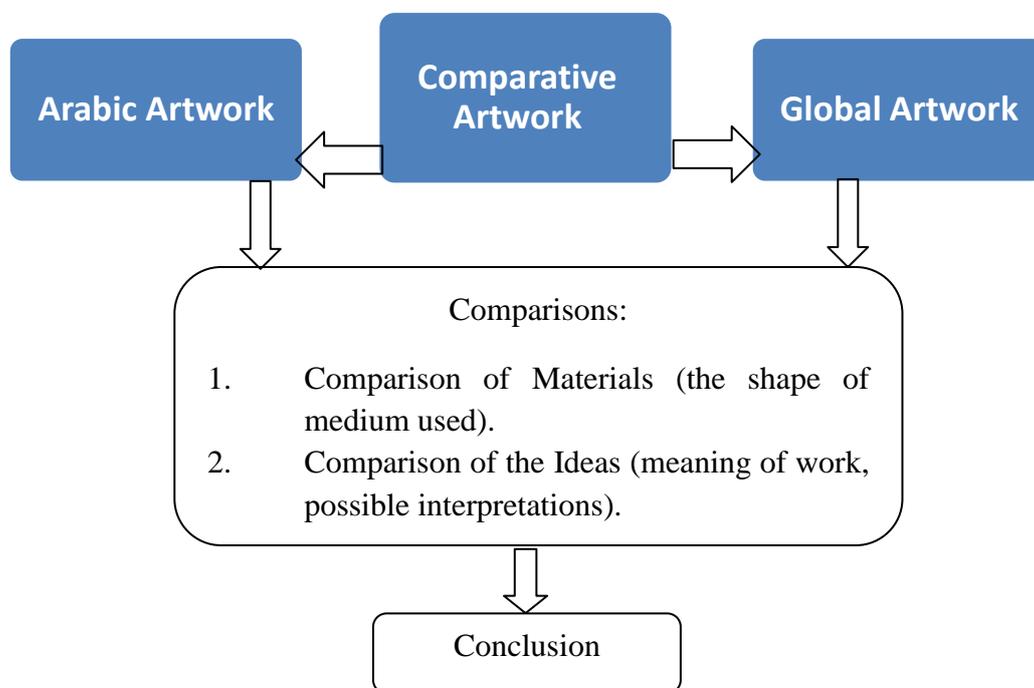


Figure 1. Comparative Research Framework.

This study discusses the formal elements (style and materials) used for each artwork. Then, it discussed the specific purpose, for example, religious, political, and commemorative, as well as the meaning of work and possible interpretations, to arrive at the main idea of these artworks. The study then compared the materials that were used in these artworks and the meaning and ideas in each case (the case contained two artworks, one Arabic and other global). The conclusions that confirmed the assumptions of this study were presented.

Case 1



Figure 2. Installation art, *Suspended* by Mona Hatoum (2011). 35 black and red swings and each one of them has a map for a country from the 6 continents.

The artwork philosophy:

White Cube (2011) stated the idea of *Suspended* came about to create a feeling of geographical deference as an alternative of connecting. It points to the continuous flow of immigrant in the world, and these swings stay in movement, even after the visitor leaves, which gave this work kind of weirdness.

Wilson-Goldie (2011) emphasized that Mona Hatoum's work discussed political and social contemporary issues faced in the Middle East:

" But, curiously, seeing her work in a Middle Eastern context served to amplify the universality rather than the geographic or biographic specificity of her themes. Her ongoing work on maps, domestic environments, and institutional architecture often hums with low-intensity rag ".

McPherson (2013) pointed out that Hatoum's works showed movement and a sense of belonging and refuging. Previous discussions confirm that Mona Hatoum was affected by political situations and she showed that in her works, as her works

were considered as a module for interaction between politics and aesthetic issues. Brodiel (2014) confirmed the personal history of Mona Hatoum was mixed with the semantic purpose behind her work. At most times, even in her works that were less impression of political concepts, interpretations were placed within the concepts of exile, political identity and nostalgia for the homeland.



Figure 3. Installation art, *swing* (2012), by Moradovago. Interactive fun composition contains a combination of four swings.

The artwork philosophy :

The swing installation is considered as a simple tool to produce energy through activating general interaction and thoughts in participants about how they should use renewable energy and know the capacity by which the simple engineering system can produce it (Ainsworth, 2012). This artwork reflects the industrial history of Guimaraes City, where it produced electricity from the kinetic energy by using simple rustic materials (Johnson, 2014).

Discussion :

The researcher found that both artworks (figure 2) and (figure 3) used the same material, which was the swing, but there were differences in the philosophy of the work and the idea received by the recipients. Where we can see in (figure 3) that the artist used the swing, where the idea of this work was produce installation artwork that is fun and entertaining, which produced simple energy and connected the participants with the industrial past of the city.

However, for the artwork shown in (figure 2) that Hatoum used swings as a political symbol that was connected to political issues in the Arab world such as refuging, displacement and migration caused by

the wars and conflicts that happened in the Arab countries. The number of swings which reached 35 emphasized the idea of geographical differences instead of communication.

Based on the above, we can conclude that political situations in the Arab world have influence in changing the idea of the material used in the artwork (figure 2), where Hatoum was able to transfer her political ideas by using the swing which was usually related to play and fun. She further confirmed in one of her interviews when she said:

" I wanted to make work that privileges the material, formal, visual aspect of art making and try to articulate the political through the aesthetics of the work " (Antoni, 1998).

Case 2



Figure 4. Installation art, Arab Spring (2015) by Faisal Samrah. Three sands heaped in the shape of graves and have three balloons on them.

The artwork philosophy :

Faisal Samrah, in one of his interviews about his work (Arab spring), said:

" This work was presented in many shapes until it rests in this shape. And I see that western name Arab Spring describing the movement of Arab people was a hasty naming because these revolutions were never completed, and they haven't yet reached the spring. And the proof is the current situations in these countries " (Haider, 2015).

It can be seen in this dialogue, Samrah rejected the political events that happened in the Arab countries which was called Arab Spring, because in his view, this Arab spring was not a Spring and the evidence was the outcome from it such as war atrocities and destruction. It appears that he embodied this painful reality through sand heaps that represented the graves which indicated the number of people

killed and the destruction that happened to the people because of what was called as Arab Spring.

Haider (2015a) also confirmed through his analysis that the artwork:

" ... Makes you wonder who is in these three graves, is it the dead bodies of the Arab people who asked for freedom and they didn't get it. And what is the secret from these balloons, Was the Arab Spring a test balloons that reveals the ability of the Arab people for changing its future. And what is the secret behind it's filling with air, do people continue believing that Arab people still alive, even if they are under the sand they still breathe and the hope is coming. Also, what is the secret behind the cans on each grave, which have three foreign coins in? "

The questions asked by Haider about Arab spring was a confirmation of what Samrah concluded from the Arab spring impact on the people and the western interference in internal issues of the Arab world. Hence, we can see clearly the influence of political situations in the Arab world on Faisal Samrah's artwork through the idea that appeared in it.



Figure 5. Installation art, Work No. 360: Half the Air Given Space (2015) by Martin Creed. Interactive installation artwork, consisting of over 37,000 pearly gray balloons

The artwork philosophy :

Creed's artwork is a spatial installation that activates visitors and makes art a physical experience. In the balloon-filled rooms, you are invited to get lost and find your own way around. Creed's artwork offers a combination of ease and depth, as well as space for play, humor and reflection that give the work an instant appeal. What Creed does in his artistic practices is to often transform everyday objects into surprising and humorous considerations about our existence, and

his works interact with both people and places. His humorous and thoughtful artworks have made him one of the biggest names in the international contemporary art scene (IDOART.DK, 2018).

Balloon rooms for Creed are typical examples of smartness and humor that fulfil the work. The idea of filling half the room with balloons has a great joyful and magical effect on the visitor, where the artwork is connected for interaction with the visitors (Phoenix Art Museum, 2015). According to Trimble (2016), while museums usually prefer the “Do not touch” slogan, especially for artworks, this composition calls for interaction. Guzman (2016) too confirms that this work is great and childish.

Discussions/Results:

Through the erudition of what was written about (figures 4, 5), the researcher found that that they both used balloons as the main material for their installation artworks, but there was a big difference in the idea on how the balloons were used in both works.

Creed, in his work ‘Half the Air in a Given Space’, (figure 5) aimed to create joy and fun feeling experience for his visitors, so they can remember their childhood by interacting with the balloons and connect with it. The visitors become a part of the work through their active participation, and the impression that the leaves in the participants after the completion of this wonderful experience, include wonderment of being able to return to childhood.

While in Arab spring (figure 4), the idea is totally different, even if it used balloons as the main material like the previous work, the idea has gone to a politically deep direction. The artist presented the political situations in the Arab world which was represented in the Arab spring, and the influence of these situations in Arab countries through the eloquent metaphor in this artwork. Though these colored balloons in the artwork (Arab Spring) on top of the graves represent the Arab people who suffered from the effect of Arab spring, we can see through this artwork that the artist refuses the Arab spring.

Based on what was mentioned, the strong political sense is the most common thing that appeared in the Arab Spring artwork. Hence, we can emphasize

that there is influence of political situations in the Arab world on the change of ideas using balloons as a material in the installation artwork of Arab spring), if compared to the previous work (figure 5).

Conclusion :

We can conclude from our discussions on the artworks that there is a clear influence of political situations in the Arab world on the change of idea of the material used in contemporary artworks, especially installation art. This study arrived at this conclusion by comparing Arabic contemporary installation artworks and global installation artworks that used the same materials.

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