

## **The Influence of Heritage multiplicity on Contemporary Egyptian Painting**

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### ***Abstract:***

For more than two centuries, Egypt was clearly suffering from the pressure of the British occupation, the Western European domination, the influence of foreign interference in its cultural affairs, and the claims of alienation and differentiation between different Egyptian communities from the colonialist and orientalist perspective, which were all aspects that could have pushed the Egyptian art movement into a long tunnel of desperation, loss of identity and fragmentation of the cultural components that emerged with successive civilizations.

However, what happened was the exact opposite. Egypt's belonging to the traits of ancient Egyptian, Coptic Christianity, and Arab Islamic cultures has not lost its influence. Rather, it can be said that religion did not prevent painting from flourishing, unlike what happened in Europe during the Middle Ages, or what Protestant Britain witnessed during the nineteenth century, and what followed the religious ban of painting from the migration of painters, or their search for sources of inspiration far from their homelands. While this was the case in Europe in the recent past, a large number of artists in Egypt were able to employ the Arab-Islamic component and the Arabic calligraphy in its various formations to execute paintings that reflect the Egyptian personality with a unique Islamic spirit, without religion being an obstacle to the continuation of creativity and the flow of art streams.

The schism between modernism and traditional values has always been present in the cultural and artistic scene in Egypt, but it was the major factor in propelling the artistic movement, nourishing the spirit of research and developing awareness. Egyptian artists often found themselves among various and partly opposing streams, so each of them took part, for the sake of building national and cultural entity within the modern Egyptian nation.

This state of schism was not a spur of the moment, but it has deep origins that began from the moment Egyptians opened their eyes to the traits of the modern renaissance during the reign of "Muhammad Ali" and his successors, for example, the prosperous movement of translation, the establishment of printing houses, the rise of scientific missions, the emergence of the intellectual works of "Qassim Amin", "Al-Tahtawi", "Lotfi Al-Sayed", "Al-Akkad" and others, and the determination of reviving the ancient Egyptian identity as the basic component of the Egyptian personality. On the other hand, religious and conservative streams were witnessing an upsurge in the formation of civil societies. Jurisprudential, legislative and - even - literary works, saw that the true value of Egypt is in being part of the Islamic world, in favor of the idea of the Arab identity.

The recurring momentum of intellectual and political events and conflicts inside Egypt in the modern era, in addition to the influence of the Arab region and the African continent affairs, which resulted in several wars, had a role in shaping the artistic movement in a rich and pluralistic way, Starting from depicting national sentiments towards the ancient heritage, then, the artistic movements expressing the changes of the era during the two world wars and the internal political movement, to contemporary impressionist and abstract movements.

This research aims to highlight the role played by intellectual and heritage pluralism in the art of contemporary Egyptian painting, through a historical review of the journey of the modern art movement in Egypt, and to shed light on examples of the most important artworks that emerged during the twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first century, and their art analysis century in the context of depicting the cultures and cultural heritage production that has grown and flourished over successive eras, which formed the cultural and artistic climate in Egypt.

**Research Problem:** Highlighting the intellectual and cultural diversity that led to the enrichment of the artistic movement in Egypt, in order to answer the query about whether the Egyptian artist succeeded in absorbing all forms of Egyptian heritage, and expressing them with a special vision that

fits with the cultural component on one hand, and the issues of this era on the other hand.

**Research Objectives:** The research focuses on the following points:

- 1- Highlighting the different intellectual dimensions that have shaped the contemporary Egyptian painting.
- 2- Analyzing some contemporary Egyptian artworks that reflect a multiplicity of sources, ideas, and cultural roots.
- 3- Outlining the characteristics of the Egyptian personality in contemporary Egyptian painting in the context of global changes.
- 4- Explain the development that occurred in the art of Egyptian painting starting from the pioneers to the contemporary generations, by drawing inspiration from the Egyptian heritage in its various forms.

**Research Methodology:** The researcher applied the analytical historical method.

**Research Results:**

- There was an urgent necessity for the existence of an Egyptian artistic movement during the project of building a modern Egypt in the reign of Muhammad Ali and his successors.
- Modern Egyptian art was taking its first steps through Western Orientalist concepts. However, it was able to create a distinct personality for itself by re-assimilating the Egyptian heritage.
- The multiplicity of Egyptian intellect in the modern era between liberal streams and the claims of religious fundamentalism had a great role in grabbing the artists' attention to the ancient Egyptian heritage in its many forms: Ancient Egyptian, Coptic, and Islamic.
- Contemporary artistic experiences came to be more accommodating to the spirit of the Egyptian heritage, with a vision that does not lack academic foundations, and openness to world cultures.
- The ancient Egyptian civilization was an important source in the work of many contemporary Egyptian artists, through the use of artistic vocabulary, myths, and symbols through a contemporary vision, and various techniques.
- Coptic heritage represents an important link in the journey of Egyptian civilization and culture, by preserving the spirit of the ancient civilization and preserving many of its artistic and intellectual features, and creating values, models, and symbols related to the concept of conflict and heroism.
- The contemporary Egyptian artist detached the figurative painting from the traditional two-dimensional framework to the space of technologies and materials developed in three dimensions in a rich, multi-level visual language, which made the artwork a global language in its content.
- Many Egyptian artists absorbed the spirit of Islamic culture and heritage through their upbringing, studies, and their connection to Islamic architecture and arts. As a result, their work came as a true expression of their association with this heritage, without falling into the trap of repetition, and superficial directness.
- The modern artistic climate was an important factor that contributed to the emergence of a generation of Egyptian artists who took upon themselves the idea of reviving the Egyptian heritage in its many forms in more than one artistic experience.

**Keywords :**

Contemporary art, National character, Egyptian heritage, Islamic arts.

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