

The image of Middle East woman between Western Orientalism and Middle Eastern Art

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Abstract:

The "Era of Image", as described by Shaker Abdel Hamid, has a deep impact on our individual and social mind. The image has the ability to affect indirectly and to make an unrecognized change in thoughts and opinions of individuals and entire societies influencing consequently social behavior. Albert Einstein mentioned before how serious is the effect of an image, which has the "effect of a thousand words", which means how immediate and concentrated the message is delivered to the viewer as visual communication. Like everywhere in the world, women in the Middle East are the essential motor of society, as main source of life; she represents civilization and culture, and each civilization or culture cares about how to provide the image of the woman that represents it. It becomes a symbol or even an iconic sign to this civilization or culture, as if all the meanings and semantics are included in the features of the image. But more likely than their Western counterpart, they have always been looked at as a mystery and thus they generated a particular attraction to men who desired to discover, analyze, and dream about. The reason behind this lies in a one sided interest of the Orientalists in the Nineteenth and Twentieth century for the woman of the Middle East. How the woman is represented by most of the Western artists at that time, often as dancers, concubines, inhabitants of veiled harems, has been studied and analyzed by art critics later, demonstrating of how much it affected and influenced strongly the general impression about the Middle East in the Western world. In contrast, in the Twentieth century a new and different image of the woman has been promoted by local artists, when they focused on representing real live scenes and traditions; among these artists, in particular the female artists were able to enhance a different image from the Orientalists because of being themselves women from the Middle East. The research of this paper studied along a timeline from the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century including Contemporary art works paintings which focus on the image of the woman. The study compares on the one side paintings of Orientalists and on the other side paintings from local artists from the same geographical area, including studies, discussions and art criticism. In this way, the paper is viewing the most important studies of local and international critics and analysts about the sources and implementations of the Orientalists' works; then it reviews the art works from Middle East artists representing women and women related issues. As result the paper wants to contribute to a different image of the woman in the Middle East, based on reality and pragmatism, shifting away from the imaginary world of Orientalists, which created an unreal image for entire Western generations.

Keywords:

Nazek Hamdy , Women Art Image, Orientalism, Batik art, Affiche

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