

Symbolic Manifestation of Saudi Women

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Abstract:

The use of symbols in visual art is a technique which has been handed down over generations. In contemporary art, it has had a particular resonance, particularly in societies where limits are imposed on a particular demographic, within legal regimes which do not guarantee the right to free expression, or under censorship. But the political and social movements, indeed, the changes which have taken place in the religious sphere with regard to women in Saudi Arabia over the last ten years, have made their struggle itself into a symbol, and its artistic expression through symbols into a rich source for analytic readings.

The current study discusses the use of symbols in Saudi art in general through examples of Saudi women artists who depict either directly or through symbols the Saudi women's issues, either as individuals in the community or through personal expression within social, familial or even personal restrictions. It focuses on the experiences of the Saudi artist Manal al-Dowayan and two young artists who graduated from the Visual Arts Department at the College of Art and Design at Princess Noura Bint Abdulrahman University, one of the largest women's universities in the world, whose work was prepared under the supervision of the arts program at the university. The pieces move beyond the artistic monotony of two-dimensional work to multi-dimensional work making use of a range of materials and techniques, which discuss social issues or issues relating to women in particular without fear of educational, social or political censorship through the use of symbolism. They cast light on the importance of the use of symbols as an artistic means of expression in societies subject to limitations on freedom of that expression, or for artists with anti-social characters, and on the role of symbolic style in extending the freedom of artists to be creative through symbols instead of being trapped intellectually within social limits.

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