

Figurative Abstraction of Memory

The 21st century has now made its mark, and this epoch comes with many orientations towards a new vision. It emanates from the mentality of a new generation of people, living through some rather different social and economical constraints, from those of a century ago. In spite of the progress and advancements, we live in a new time, where art and the artist, are part of the many geo-political developments. In fact, they follow these developments closely, even though art remains a substance derived from an individual artist, who shares with our time, products of personal creativity. Creativity that doesn't develop from an image born out of direct events, but rather creativity that is born out of the "thrill" of memory.

This method of argumentation, divides artists into two major groups, within which reside subgroups of many different natures. During an in-depth study of artist Lina Ogaily's paintings and her background, I often found myself wondering my gaze as well as my doubts. It was only in that lucky moment, when I discovered Roland Barthes's notions of "studium-study" and "punctum-detail", towards the discovery of the photographic phenomenon, that I clarified my idea that Lina Ogaily's painting is a vast image, created by an artist that belongs to the "thrill of memory" group, in other words, the image as a trace of memory, indented by the force of her inner world. An inner world that is not really concerned with emotional photographing, but rather, with the moving sensations of memory. This becomes even clearer, when the artist is revealed to me as an introvert, whose psyche carefully controls the outer world through the inner breathing and eyes of the mind. This psyche has created works of art and subjects inspired by the alternating force of emotions caused by her memory, her birthplace, faith, culture and the impact of people.

Lina Ogaily is an artist, born in Kuwait, living in Britain and exhibiting and working in the Middle East and in UK. Her next destination is a small city in the Balkans, Fier, Albania. Many questions could arise, many "why" in Fier questions. All these "why-s" would eventually get an answer. One of them is answered after a final simple and sincere mediation. How many artists originating from the East or from poor countries in the Balkans and Eastern Europe have left their birthplace for political, social or economical reasons, to find themselves in developed Europe and beyond? Since the end of 20th century until present day, we find many large groups of people, as well as artists, migrating to territories they find more fit and optimistic. Artists from Albania, Iraq, Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Rumania etc, have moved and are educated as expat artists in artistic environments that differ from their countries of origin. How often are we part of these artists' group exhibits or forums, and how much are we able to discover within their art about the existence of a common thread linking their memories, nostalgia, childhood, culture and motherhood of their lands of origin, which we all understand to be universal perceptions? And are we able to recognize how much these now smaller or sometimes peripheral or Eastern cultures have influenced and enriched ancient cultures and great civilizations. Lina Ogaily's art gives a comprehensive answer to all these questions like why she chose to exhibit in Fier as well as why her artistic life takes place in developed countries. Lina Ogaily wants to share her visual concepts about nostalgia and memory, with a new peripheral but also ancient European public. Through and through she wants to make public, the shapes of her inner soul which unfold through a context of modern art values. Lina Ogaily presents her work to the Albanian public, so she can tell the history of her training as an Iraqi artist in the British art world,

as well as her resistance towards transformations we can't avoid.

She wants to show her greatest efforts at finding her own creative expression in the vast and bumpy world of art in the international arena. She wants to show her place in the international art scene of the 21st century and her choice is not a didactic portrayal of the natural habitats, nor is it the inactive posing of the human figure, or the classically painted surfaces referring to individual emotions. She chooses to carve these deep marks and trace the figurative abstraction of memory. Lina Ogaily chose a modern figurative conceptual way, which is built based on her meditations since early childhood; her perceptions as an adolescent trying to discover the magnificently rich Arab and Middle Eastern culture; as well as the stimuli coming from cultural, architectonic and artistic echoes and parental resonance. Lina Ogaily memorized the Iraqi atmosphere and abandoned its direct representation as a common ordinary image. During her education in art academies in Britain, the artist attached meaningful concepts to her figurative productions. During this learning space, she was acquainted with the history of art worldwide as well as her Middle Eastern nationality and she came to know that this meaningful centurial imagery had affected her intellectual upbringing. Faced with many different contemporary practices, she found her own figurative way, which manifests a modern product, with a new vision that is layered with, lines, forms, hues and an utmost feeling of calligraphy, all in all cultivated from the art of the mesmerizing East.

This visual experience, this meditative art form and this creative discord brings Lina Ogaily to Fier, where she will present one more time her nostalgia in the form of modern art.

Lina Ogaily's painting is as she herself admits, "the personal dialogue with every element of art in order to do or undo a relationship with myself". It is my opinion that her paintings demonstrate the communion and combination of Middle Eastern and Arab culture as well as Islamic nature with the woman artist's psyche and the laboratorial creative process in her style. Paintings are a new and developing generation of a multi-layered culture that is especially true to Iraq, whose roots of cultural legacy reside in the times of Babylon and Ancient Mesopotamia. The artists of the time reached the same heights as Ancient Egyptians.

Invasions and angry conquests by the Mongols in the 12th and 13th centuries, destroyed the traditional art and culture, which were risen again in the 16th century, when Iraqis became one of the most well-known countries for their famous miniatures. Again in the 17th century, influenced by Iran, it became one of the most prominent centers of calligraphy, literature, poetry and art. In the 20th century, culture and tradition of the arts gets replenished, inherited traditions combine with new ones, giving birth to the modern artists of the Middle East, who practiced their art through contemporary visions and embracing the modern movements. Artists from this time, like Jawad Saleem (1919-1961), Ismail Fatah Al Turk (1934/38-2004), Dia Azzawi (1939) are initiators of the group "New Vision". Lina Ogaily is clearly influenced by their art and experience, as she also states in her CV, with much honor and respect. In order to develop the abstracted and modern physiognomy of creation, she discovered the inner layers of art, poetry and literature of Iraq. She embraced the goals of the brilliant masters of the 20th century mentioned above, who formed a unique language of art in Iraq, which came from ancient civilizations of Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrian, and Mesopotamian as well as intertwined with art of Europeans of the 20th century like: Picasso, Klee, Calder, Matisse, Kandinsky etc. Lina Ogaily adapted to the goals of the Iraqi masters and her art is in their continuity.

Lina Ogaily's painting has many figurative values, but it mainly belongs to the abstract, geometric and the expressive. She is two-dimensional. The abstracted subject starts from a main point in the center and organically opens up throughout the whole surface, in many cases letting the background take the form of a frame. In some paintings, the hues are strong, sensitive, warm and striking. The greens, blues, yellows, blacks and whites seem to be having a "strong" discourse. Lina Ogaily knows colors very well and like an emotional formalist, she has used them to discover their endurance on the two-dimensional surface, but also as an expression of her own psychological state at the time the painting took place. The tonalities of the black and white marks are beautifully accented, informing us of the contrasts as if we're in a field of chess. Maybe she wants to tell us about the contradiction, the doubt, the game, the battle and rivalry between the introvert and extrovert and vice versa. She plays in this field with all shapes and sizes, which are liberated within the diversity of tonalities, thus harmonizing the strength and fragility of the paint. The rhythm of the shapes on the surface of the painting is at times laying horizontally and at other times raising vertically, but most importantly it strikes in constant amplitudes, which remind you of Sumerian cuneiforms, engraved on clay. The drawing style conforms to a single line that is at times straight at times arched and at other times interrupted and oscillating. At all times, it creates the universal motherly figure, in whose depths we find many geometric prints. Using color, Lina Ogaily achieves two types of surfaces; the impasto and grainy, as well as the smooth and polished surface, the latter giving her paintings a graphic look. Her painting can be read because it is narrates like in "Family portrait", 2017 but it also abstracts to the core like in "Grandmother", 2018.

The themes in Lina Ogaily's painting are closely linked to the expressive abstraction of human emotions, actions and exteriors. The titles inform, in a very consequential way. The subjects in the paintings are human faces, gestures and physical stances, women dressed and covered in burqas, birds; man and bird, discussed in cycles; orphans, spouses, social circles, family, time and emotions like: contemplation, nostalgia, exodus, anticipation etc. Lina Ogaily's body of work seems like a vast "déjà vu" of diverse human shapes, where the elegant line is dominant and through the artist's agility and proficiency, it seems to go on and on and on without ever stopping. The artist testifies by saying that, "Seeing this journey of discovery on the faces of people as they reflect on my paintings is the greatest reward I could wish for, and the thoughts and feelings they take with them is the reason I continue to paint."

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