

Hassan Sharif and the Memory Box

By Dr. Abdulkareem Al Said

Any artwork must have a source or origin and such a source is inherent in the (motivator, Subconscious). It springs from the collective underlying value of the universe known to everybody in all human races. And due to this source inherent in our subconscious every human gets his gestures and from the same source gets the artist his first gestures to address the other “Piero Manzoni”

An artist creates a visual situation to be turned into a subject theme for getting viewer’s response or feedback. Hassan Sharif is a good example, involved in his work he doesn’t know when to stop, and it may take him hours or months to terminate his work. The basic idea is stored in his memory whose box or store contains abundant objects and memories. Some of it is revealed separately at times, or in huge quantity. The result is reflected into his work that his style or method – It is for Hassan, that is method, a ritual, a totem, and a sensual pleasure. He sits on the ground brings large slices of abandoned sacks makes of it – put a stress on make – a rope by wrapping it with woolen strings. No matter how long or thick is the string. It changes into a new rope and by doing so he comes to satisfaction.

Sometimes he lays randomly his ropes or puts them in a sack, again no matter how he decides to choose. However it is vital for him to introduce or create an artwork-as reflection of a childhood memory or scene, it might be as a bare-footed child on sea-side hitting a brick or an empty old can; then he passes in front of ship builders or rope makers even all traditional handicrafts. Now things have changed, town is at the origin – civilization development have negated the existence of man – seemingly – why doesn’t Hassan Sharif restores back man to the front image? This is my work – This is the making of my own hands This is what he wants to emphasize through his artworks: it is not just man that he wants to value, but these sacks and old newspapers pages – if not put on table under food when dinning they might be disposed off in letters – why not to transform them into artworks? Why not to be wrapped in form of cylinders varied in terms length and thickness, details are not very important, what matters is to create artworks out of it. If they were to be displayed in an exhibition hall, they certainly turn into works of art. Why don’t people have them seen in their new form? They are provoking? Perhaps, but in any way they raise big questions in their minds and thereby they retain a new importance. This exactly what Hassan Sharif likes to demonstrate, to offer us this experience or work, however being its value or importance. He wants to draw attention to it.

Sometimes he pastes his papers using gum another confirmation of his will to have such objects remain together, is it a human condition or status? It is perhaps so the case for in the Machine Age man is deprived from all his energies then abandoned to his history, perhaps so, do these objects represent real people within the artist’s living memory, were they the “yellow” books that he has read evoking the idea of changing cheap metals into gold? All that is quite possible. In fact the artist has undergone at his early stages many experiences, he took interest in preparing caricature drawings for a while, then studied in U.K, during his studies over there and later on he familiarized himself with various styles of art – he headed toward

abstract painting... then geometrical one – it is traditional in nature despite claims talking about “modern art”. It is a type of work connected with the studio the painting (cloth) spread on wood that he applies colours to then put a frame on it to be ultimately hanged on a studio wall (if being a lucky work), may be it is going to be kept in a store and get enormously dusted. Hassan has felt being imprisoned by all such routine, does he act as “Jackson Pollock” who strongly believes in the “work of art”, that is its rituals, but in this way he puts a frame to his work and display it, a certain movement from the relative to the absolute? Is it a revolt against the real? Perhaps so but, he took the canvas cut it into pieces of varied size and he kept putting them into a mixture of gum and white colour then expose them to heater that is the sun till they get dry enough, thus he assumes the identity of a sweet-maker. Going back to the living memory of the artist actually he used to admire or follow the artisans thoroughly-their regular movements fascinate him, he is fascinated by the sounds resulting from each work. (He loved sounds so he organized a performance work using such sounds in a balance like movement) Does this lead us back to the enchanting “Marcel Duchamp” who used to indicate by his stick to any object and it turns instantly to be a work of art? Yes, some sort of a similarity but there is a difference that Duchamp frequently uses the “ready-made” or puts his signature to it and by that he makes it belong to him. It becomes a work of art. Hassan Sharif creates his own works and in his own fashion no matter how it is shaped, he sometimes displays his works on wall or on the floor, what matters is the work in itself and not its position.

And as he says, “the method we use to deal with the open universe had been a remotely hidden or Latent skill in man’s spirit” making us difficultly ready to imagine the devices of nature.

It is not non-sense in any way what Hassan Sharif offers all the time, it is destroying the concept of the traditional work of art, a departure from school learned stereotypes as well as an attempt to reveal to us what goes on at the subconscious level. This is besides the personal pleasure taken while preparing his product.

A Dialogue

Hassan Sharif: Madness is a refined stage.... I don’t know why?
My art is beautiful, exciting...and popular?

Hassan Sharif is considered to be an artist of the second generation of the U.A.E artists this is in spite of the fact he practiced art since 1972. He used by that time to publish his caricatures in the dailies and magazines. He had his diploma of Fine Arts from the Byam Shaw School London in the year 1984. However, he passed through various trials or experiences and he painted using various styles and methods. He experienced the various known art schools: impressionism, cubism and even abstract art before traveling abroad. After his return home most of works were abstract in nature (geometrical or painting ones). He also made some trials on the “minimal art”...Afterwards his works took a radically different line compared with his earlier works and works usually displayed at home land.

His most recent works abide by using ordinary or familiar objects that are customary to us; he sometimes wraps newspaper pages as poles piling them to display them in his own style. And at the other times he wraps cotton-made strings around wooden poles, puts them in a corner, or he creates paper made cups puts them inside a box and then he displays his product in that condition... He also used a good deal of everyday objects in the same way having in his mind that the very origin or the word (ART) is to "work". His works of art have created a wide range of discussion between artists among themselves as between ordinary viewers. There had been the "for" and the "against". In many a case there were the angry people, this urged us to go near to them and try to know what actually goes on in their own minds as ideas...

* You have reached a certain stage in your artistic career, do you consider it to be the end, or are you going to continue the change process, and where do you expect to get?

-It is a difficult task, and I call it an end. An artist could very easily reach a new stage and it is very difficult to tell whether it is the end. In my opinion I consider the ever first brush put on canvas by an artist in his early life or beginnings till the end to be a single work of art. As for the periodical changes to take place from time to time, I don't believe in it, and especially if they claim that an artist has evolved on the contrary I believe that takes place in a spontaneous way. I can make the link between my recent works and the first caricature ones. A strong bond exists between all of them.

* Is it from the theme/subject or style point of view?

- It is target-wise; there are caricature traces in my new works in particular.

* Do you mean that you are deliberately shocking your viewers?

- I don't calculate shocking viewers through a work of art, at the same time I guess that my latest works are more powerful to excite the viewers minds situation-wise...this is a very healthy aspect.

* Following your last exhibition a number of interrogations or questions were raised, some consider your works as improvised or resulting from hazard, could you explain to us whether you exercise your work in a fully conscious spirit, I mean that the inspiration is already there then you produce your work after well meditating the idea, or is it just hazardous to be followed by repeating and refining attempts till you are exhausted to a stop point?

- At the very beginning stirs the idea as a small flame or ignition. I respond to it and say to myself that I shall start work within days or a week. During this period I think on the medium or material I am going to use possibly modify in it...the idea takes a more detailed form sometimes I cancel it all and restart to work, then change my basic idea that I already called the initial ignition and not a preoccupation as it intervenes suddenly, I feel great pleasure during my work time.

* I was supposed to interrogate you on your feeling alongside your work.

- It is a strange latent pleasure; I cannot reach it except when preparing a work.

* Is it similar to what Jackson Pollock says about the verb paint or draw?

- Your last question has “confused” me a bit.

* Is there a link between you and “Pollock” who used to have pleasure during his work; also he used to concentrate on the act of drawing more than the product?

- No doubt there is a certain affinity, but my works are different, after finishing his works he puts frames on to them in a conventional way...this happens although he treads on “canvas” laid on the floor, throws and splashes colours as he paints. On my behalf I display my works in the same way as I prepare them. I focus on the aspect of having my works displayed on floor. There is the difference between him and me. As for feeling pleasure during work, it is common and relating me not just to “Pollock” but also with all other artists. Everyone feels pleasure but differently.

Among the shared similarities, I don’t show my movements to the viewer, it is hidden, but again the viewer could very well imagine how I sat and made this work. I don’t present “performance” art; this is the reason why I don’t support “Pollock” all that much. His is a performance art and doesn’t present the movement but its resultant. As for my version of art it doesn’t rely on movement but on the final output to the viewers. Movement is hidden and I like keeping it so.

* Could you perform your work openly to the public?

- In the past, I produced 5 or 6 performance works; it was while I had been abroad.

What is your relationship with “Picabia” and “Marcel Duchamp”?

Duchamp is very close to my works but Picabia draws the movement of machines and particularly overlapping objects. He used to mock the machine that is there is just an intellectual link between both of us. I feel more respect for Duchamp, he achieved machine drawings and he used coffee grinder, the pump as well as various substances as glass, iron and wood.

* Don’t you contemplate a return to drawing?

- I don’t feel any shame in drawing and there is no danger in doing so, but I don’t feel the same pleasure I get during this work.

* At a previous time, it was suggested to you to work on traditional themes of the abstract school the cubism and you were very reluctant to accept them? Is it a duality in character or a subconscious desire for a retreat or you just thought of money?

- Duality exists, and it is good to have with the artist or man enabling him to resist till he reaches a shore and undo with the other one. As for money it is no shame for me to like money but to paint for the sake of money I doubt that...If I am to be rewarded for it I don't mind it, And as for doing a special work for the sake of money... it is only if I was forced to do it.

* Some people consider your works to be non-sensical, to the other pure madness!

- They needn't use such a superficial look to judge my works... Those who don't appreciate them positively must consider them profoundly. I don't think that my works are related in any way to madness. I don't know what is madness; I have not yet reached it.

* Does this mean that you can reach it?

- No, I don't like to reach such a stage of madness, although it is a very refined stage and I don't have an explanation before hand why it is so refined?

* Shakir Hassan Al Saeed states; caring for substance more than shape makes any experience richer, how do you judge this statement?

- He makes the difference between substance and shape and I am in quite agreement with him, I can understand his point and its implications, caring for substance actually means respecting it. When I present cotton made threads or a nylon robe cut and tied with a metal wire I do respect substance. I allow it to reveal itself... give it its own identity: and this is very significant to me, as I do not rely on shape in my works.

* In a press interview you declared that you have met with your totem in your last works, then you came over on your declaration at a later stage?

- When someone emits a view and then renounces to it at a later stage; this is to some extent healthy, as in many a case one "launches" statements under certain conditions...As for the totem, I said that I am looking for a totem and may be I am still doing so...I say this now; and I cancel it in the end...this has no link with preconceived philosophical ideas.

* Do you consider your art as popular?

- My art is very popular: it is beautiful and exciting at the same time. I am well confident if any piece of my work is displayed not just in an exhibition hall, the passers-by shall raise a number of valuable questions:

What is this? Who produced it? And why? And why is it exposed here?

* You mean being popular in the sense it gives rise to many questions or interrogations?

- Yes, and this is an essential part of any judgment to be pronounced on a work of art...I mean interrogation, possibly the viewer is a taxi-driver or sea-man or ship builder...or house builder (architect)...or any man of limited culture he is supposed to enquire...

* You mentioned lots of artisans, but you have forgotten the nails maker all in spite of his archaic status to you?

- It is because I already searched for him, possibly he has his weight and it is possibly one of them...Finally I left Hassan carrying with me many new interrogations about new ideas he has introduced... Also I hope that there is no contradiction in my statements before reaching the print!!

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