

Hassan Sharif

The Merchant of Fake Jewelry

By: Yousif Abu Louz

The artist Hassan Sharif has stepped out of the painting, and he rebelled against color and all that is conventional of the tools of plastic art to enter into the work of art, or *the new art* as they always say, armed with recognition, as they also always say. But this departure was not random or temperamental, rather he had passed through different stages till he reached this seemingly shocking and strange artistic conviction... And as much shock and wonder as Hassan Sharif saw in the questioning eyes of the people who saw his work in exhibitions, as much as he himself got stranger, or counter-shocked them, if I can say so.

He left the coffee shop at 3 PM to go to “Satwa”, Dubai after he came back from the city of smog, “London”, in 1982; he quickly got a cup of black coffee because the night is slow.

He looked around, the look of a stranger, and he saw no one but himself there, then he started building his nest in the bark of a tree, like a woodpecker, and he also built his private single life in the air and the sea and the sand. He told strangers: I am an artist. They didn't believe him, and he accepted that disbelief because he knew that he who believes an artist must suffer from the craze of philosophy, or poetry.

The artist stepped out of the painting and stepped into life.

He stepped out, then, from the square and the rectangle and chose emptiness. He knows that emptiness is fullness, or that emptiness is a huge circle as big as passion, so he filled his house with ropes and boxes and music and friends and books, and he was always happy with this (emptiness-fullness).

His tools are very simple, like his morning routine, and his subjects are many, like in spinning wool, or cleaning windows, or even washing dead bodies.

All these are crafts, and art is a craft too. It is a handicraft as Hassan Sharif says, and any normal person can be an artist, if he was, before that, human.

Hassan Sharif is “full” or “pregnant” with very little, tiny, dull furniture, and he is a man between many women who beat on his eardrum with dough... and in spite of that he listened...

He follows sound in his work, he follows scent and rhythm and movement, but color for him is utterly white, and who can color whiteness?

Nevertheless he did not completely step out of color, for he still tracks its movement in the works of contemporaries and disciples... and he is the one who refuses to have disciples, or even teachers.

Hassan Sharif gets older, his sophism increases, and grows more different, more desolate and more strange, moving away in his own cognition, where he finds his kin in the faces that he instantly recognizes, and in the books that he memorizes and saves because they are his refuge and sanctuary.

He finds color in the skin of a long-necked woman who was out in a stormy night, standing in the wind like a naked flower in a naked garden, he stepped out of the woman too to go back to a grave motherhood, and jubilantly reminisce on his childhood and adolescence, then he gets sick with adolescent love, a sickness that has no cure.

Silent at times, and at times rowdy, butchered like a chicken by bored peasants who enjoy the sight of blood, and he is also in the battlefield that “Lorca” talks about in one of his gypsy poems, the adoration of the reader to the read.

Closer to a poet than to a plastic artist... No he is the poet who is scared, hesitant, aggrieved, a loser (a winner), imprisoned, enraptured, lonely and in love (in passion).

He reads with two tongues, and three, and knows where to hold the river's neck from so that the water doesn't continue its flowing silver chatter...

In his artistic work, as in his life, he does not chatter, elucidate or take away, he does not like composition or rhetoric, or exaggeration.

On his sea, he composes his water.

With his needle, he knits his fur for summer before winter... And as he gets older, and calmer, and retreats from his sleep depriving dreams, and puts up a garden with two barking dogs, one for the night and one for the day... he gets deeper into his project and into its sand and water like a blind man with no guide but his stick.

But what if the stick itself becomes blind?

For Hassan Sharif “the artist's blind stick” is like “the blind owl” and a blind bird that breaks its egg and comes out to life in one of “Herman Hesse”'s novels...and this blindness is itself “the black lamb in a white flock”... the real and very *large* blind people are those who swim on the fake dawn as Hassan Sharif always says.

The artist is in his late forties and he is withering away and melting like a black candle with black light that has more light, more than any other, he even has his eyes wide open to see, unlike poets who close their eyes so they can see.

That is why Hassan Sharif throws his art on the floor, as are the thoughts of “Al-Jahez”, and he doesn't need an exhibition, he uses the ground, he uses the rooftops and the ceilings... he even uses the roads and pavements.

...And children, alone, are his audience and people. The people to him are the children. And the true return to hearty laughter must start from the atmosphere of kids and their rituals. Therefore Hassan Sharif sets up an artistic festivity containing a number of his hard worked installations for a child, an observer who is still young and inexperienced in the ways of life.

The intellectual and poet and dramatist and plastic artist and musician (if they have already matured) are beyond the interest are of Hassan Sharif, and outside of his question and ever-going dialogue.

Those have all matured through attempts, practice and experience. His work is primarily intended for those who do not possess any experience at all.

He goes for that whiteness in human beings, and lives in that early rawness in the soul, as if he mocks knowledge, or as if he mocks philosophy.

Hassan Sharif is a big cynic... but without jabber or a long tongue... he is actually close to having a short tongue. So his artistic sentence is short, concise and dense in content... these earthly used every-day things, necessary every day.

An artist of cloth, wires, nails, threads, wood, carton, ropes, old papers, sticks, glue and pins. Similar to that "merchant" I used to see when I was a little kid... selling mirrors, needles, rubber bands and fake jewelry...

Similar to my childhood, and your childhood, Hassan Sharif, for what he is are all those old correlations reincarnated in a life that drowns into forgetfulness.

Hassan Sharif, and his object art, is very faithful to his father's art in making "cakes", selling them to folks and kids around the roads and alleys of Dubai.

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Translated by: Mohamed Aydabi