

Arabic Calligraphy and Public Space in Contemporary Contexts before and After 2011 Egyptian Revolution

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Abstract

In 2011, the Egyptian society witnessed a strong shift in the aftermath of 25th January Revolution. Major political, social, cultural and economic challenges have occurred together with other unprecedented overlaps in art scene. A remarkable change has dominated the public space of Egyptian cities; Mural paintings that implemented Arabic calligraphy were considered constant reminders for passers-by of the drastic changes the ‘Arab spring’ brought to the region.

In this regard, setting a comparative framework of the relationship between Arabic calligraphy and public space before and after 2011 Revolution is a necessity. Not only because a clear transformation in the freedom of art practice has emerged, but also to shed a light on the role Arabic Calligraphy has played in documenting different political and social discourses.

KEYWORDS

Arabic Calligraphy; Public Space; 2011 Egyptian Revolution

1. INTRODUCTION

The Egyptians never stopped expressing themselves by artistic means since the prehistoric eras, through skillful calligraphy and colorful paintings, which appeared in ancient tombs and temples. Coptic churches and walls of Muslim village homes also witnessed that sort of art. In 1990s and 2000s before 2011 Revolution, graffiti or any kind of calligraphy was rarely to be seen on the Egyptian streets as a sort of art;

Under the role of President Hosni Mubarak, public spaces were circumscribed and strictly controlled, and it is even more often to be decorated by posters and pamphlets endorsing the government and its leader. The ban came from the possibility of any anti-politics indications, social or economic criticism implied within the work of graffiti or calligraphy in public spaces of Egypt. But we can find several examples of graffiti, which were used as a commercial means as it is common to hire an artist to write and create a commercial slogan directly on the wall, and many of them still exist.

In visual arts, before 2011 Revolution, we can find few examples of murals in which a combination of Arabic calligraphy and visual art are used. In this regard, Arabic calligraphy was used as a sort of decoration within the work of murals. After 2011 Revolution, the synergy between “Imagetext” (image and text) or the so-called “calligraffiti” (calligraphy and graffiti) alongside other performance arts using Arabic Calligraphy were the most outstanding features dominating the public space. (More resources can be found in the additional references including Image and Text & Word Play).

2- EARLY ARTISTIC EXPLORATION OF ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY IN PUBLIC SPACE BEFORE 2011 REVOLUTION

As mentioned before, Arabic calligraphy was used to complement some murals as a kind of decoration. Moreover, Egyptians couldn't write or paint anything on public surfaces without permission. In visual arts, before 2011 Revolution, we can find few examples of murals in which a combination of Arabic calligraphy and visual arts are used. The works of Second line subway by Egyptian artist Sami Rafei (1932-2019), and the “Dialogue on Track project” by Sameh Ismaiel (1974-) will be mentioned in the following pages as examples.

2.1 SAMI RAFEI: MURALS OF THE SECOND LINE SUBWAY IN CAIRO 1995-2001

One cannot ignore the great effort of the artist Sami Rafei in designing the mural paintings of the second line subway in Cairo (1995-2001). As Rafei managed to cover the murals of 19 stations, with a total area of nearly 3250 meters. These murals are one of the early examples of depicting Arabic calligraphy in public spaces before 2011 Revolution. Some of these Murals were decorated with Arabic calligraphy in geometrical designs like the murals of “Shoubra Al-kheima” station in Cairo (figure 1). The whole mural is covered with colored ceramic and the name of the station “Shoubra Al-kheima” is written in large font bright colors. Another example from the murals of the second line subway by Rafei is Muhammad Naguib Station in Cairo; the mural is designed geometrically and based on depicting kufic scripts which are derived from Islamic sayings (figure 2).



Figure 1, The mural paintings of the second line subway, by Sami Rafei, Shoubra Al-kheima Station, Cairo 1997



Figure 2, The mural paintings of the second line subway, by Sami Rafei, Muhammad Naguib Station, Cairo 1997

2.2 SAMEH ISMAIEL: DIALOGUE ON TRACK PROJECT 2008

Arabic calligraphy is a substantial inspiration source for Sameh Ismael's artworks. He tries to represent his identity as an Arab artist, who lives and works in Egypt, a country that has hosted and developed a great Islamic heritage. As he severely mentioned: "Arabic alphabet has always intrigued me and shaped my painting practice: the form of the letter, the symbol, the meaning, and the phonetic" (The catalogue of Sameh Ismael's Exhibition. 2011). The artist's main focus seems to be modernizing Arabic calligraphy, and a trial to combine politics with art. His works could be described as modern abstract. Thus, most of his artworks are of Arabic art imbued with a post-modernist approach, together with some old traditional influences (De Groot, Anne. 2011). He approached Arabic calligraphy from a geometrical point of view, attempting to rediscover, and revive the basic elements of Islamic artworks' compositions. Like Mohamed Taha Hussein (1932-2018), Ismael used thick lines, colors, and forms in his geometrical compositions. Moreover, he has been inspired by the techniques of Jackson Pollock (1912-1956), and Willem de Kooning (1904-1997) in their abstract expressionist style and drip paintings.

Combining modern and traditional techniques, Ismael's elegant calligraphy led to something of a much more "street-culture" nature. In 2008 he has participated in 'Smear Campaign', in a project called "Dialogue on Track" with the Austrian graffiti artist "Thomas Mock" (1977-). It was a spectacular calligraphy-graffiti art project of the Austrian Cultural Forum in Cairo that was implemented by Sameh Ismail and Thomas Mock, in cooperation with the Egyptian Ministry of Transport and Egyptian Railways (The project was under the auspices of Egypt's Minister of Transport at that time Loutfy Mansour)

The project is considered a blend between “Calligraphy”, the art of writing in the Arab world, and “Graffiti”, part of the Austro-European culture. The title 'smear campaign' stands for the prejudice that still exists regarding graffiti as 'smearing' and in general for the prejudice against foreign, and thus unknown, art and culture (Press Release of the Austrian Cultural Forum. 2008). Together the two artists bedecked wagons of the Egyptian Railways Association with coats of colorful graffiti, melding East and West in calligraphic folk lyrics and famous sayings in artistic swirls. They tried to release their ideas on the wagons, depicting their personal dialogue from different perspectives (figures 3, 4 & 5). According to Ismael: “As I work in the field of Arabic calligraphy, I tend to search for new trends and techniques in art, I also mix Arabic calligraphy with these new artistic techniques. Graffiti is one of the most important techniques, because it is a western artistic trend that has spread so easily. I decided to enter this realm and launch Arab contemporary calligraphy issues, apart from my other artistic work in painting”. (The artist’s official website)



Figure 3, Dialogue on Track Project, by Sameh Ismael and Thomas Mock, Cairo and Aswan 2008



Figure 4, Dialogue on Track Project, by Sameh Ismael and Thomas Mock, Cairo and Aswan 2008



Figure 5, Dialogue on Track Project, by Sameh Ismael and Thomas Mock, Cairo and Aswan 2008

The choice of a public transport train was a conscious endeavor. As a firm believer in the need to ‘rehabilitate’ the populace on street art, Ismael felt that a train would be one of the best ways to share the new and exciting techniques he was following. He confirmed that rehabilitation wouldn’t be realized unless art goes out to the streets and the everyday life of people in a tangible manner.

Used by a large portion of the tourism sector, the Train to Upper Egypt was a perfect choice for Ismael, with its trips between the country’s capital and such ancient sites as Aswan and Luxor. The decorated carriage travelled about 800 km between Cairo and Aswan. Ismael commented saying: “The train is a large mobile artistic space, which carries ideas, inspiration and enjoyment for everyone to see. It can be used to support the dialogue of cultures on the artistic level”.

With extremely positive reaction, Ismael has been encouraged to continue his graffiti projects. He hopes to target the heart, mind and soul of the ordinary public. The talented artist concludes: “Arab calligraphy is extremely rich, enchanting and interactive. Life is short and spending it in the creative routes of this line is well worth it” (The artist’s official website).

Throughout his research in Arabic calligraphy, Ismael's works have been assimilated, and appreciated as contemporary artworks. His creations and techniques have represented his multilayered cultural personality: Arab, Islamic, Mediterranean, and African cultures. All these cultures, with their writings and paintings were paramount tools for several renaissances throughout history, and have deeply inspired Ismael's artworks.

3. RESEARCH APPROACH

This research retraces the interaction between Arabic calligraphy and public space within particular cultural dynamics in Egypt before and after 25th January of Egyptian Revolution. This in turn contributes in remapping the contours of public culture and public space (public spaces include streets, big murals in central places, parks, etc. Public spaces play a vital role in the social life of communities. They act as a 'self-organizing public service', a shared resource in which experiences and value are created.). Therefore, some questions will be raised in this article, and the researcher will discuss and try to answer them through an analytical, comparative, and historical approach:

- Could Arabic calligraphy be an affective tool of expression in an interaction mode with cultural dynamics in Egypt before and after 2011 Revolution?
- To what extent did the calligraphy artists adopt modern artistic trends based on the inspiration of calligraphy and Arabic writing?
- Have the works of Arabic calligraphy succeeded in bringing change in the cultural dynamics prevailing in Egypt after 2011 Revolution?
- What is the role of state cultural policy in Egypt and its impact on Calligraphy's art creation?

That's why dismantling the visual capabilities of Arabic calligraphy helps to reveal the word's capacity as a carrier of certain meanings in particular times and or in specific cultural contexts, in a way that enables embedded scripts to gain an affective mode or power(s).

Moreover, the aforementioned knitted cluster of visual capabilities of Arabic calligraphy contributes in unfolding the backdrop of the research's argument. Although several studies and researches have been done to analyze the Arabic calligraphy in the Middle East in general and in Egypt in particular, but none of them have stressed the affective role of calligraphy and its multifunctional power(s). Therefore, this qualitative study is set to achieve a critical argument of construing the artworks of Arabic calligraphy during that period; a combination of formal and contextual analysis tools is implemented. Also, a group of methods is used to identify and analyze the information applied to unfold the research question that the researcher will discuss later in details.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this part, I specifically explore the theoretical framework that scrutinize the affective role of Arabic calligraphy embedded in different modes of visual arts that resulted from an interaction with the cultural dynamics before and after 2011 Revolution in Egypt. For that reason, the researcher will rely on the relationship between the "Message" and the "Medium" as described by Marshal McLuhan in his book *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1964 in media theory (McLuhan, Marshall, 1967). McLuhan has coined the famous statement "The Medium is the Message" to indicate that the form of a medium embeds itself in any message it would transmit or convey, creating a symbiotic relationship by which the medium influences how the message is perceived.

The focal point of this theory is leading us to ask, regarding each and every particular medium, what is the message that it conveys? And what is the effect it produces? As Ray Gozzi (1999) puts it, the medium is the message severs as an invitation to contemplation". According to McLuhan's statement: The medium is the message contains a multitude of meanings packed tightly together into one memorable package.

The process of unpacking or unfolding of those meanings embodied within the medium is the challenge that will help to develop his theory especially in the field of visual arts.

5. DISCUSSION

Since the 1960s and hitherto, Egyptian artists were aware of the special power(s) of Arabic calligraphy. It is striking that the political circumstances and the social transformation took place during 1950s till 1980s that in turn made a change in the cultural dynamics, has created an ideal atmosphere for the artists to exploit the capabilities of Arabic calligraphy. “The Monument to the Unknown Solider” by Sami Rafei is a good example recording the socio-political situation in Egypt in 1974 (figures 6 & 7). Nearly 72 martyrs’ names of 1973 October victory have been harmonically distributed in Kufic script on eight faces of the pyramidal memorial (Salem, Rabab. 2004). The artist took the responsibility by his sheer size memorial to reflect a sense of loss for the Martyrs and unfold word’s capacity and its powers as a carrier of certain meanings.



Figure 6: Unknown Solider Memorial, (Photo from air), by Sami Rafei, Cairo 1975

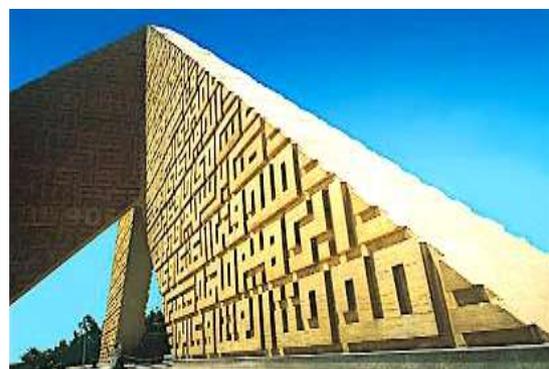


Figure 7: Unknown Solider Memorial, (detail), by Sami Rafei, Cairo 1975

In fact, the cultural dynamics of Egypt are often inconstant and are shaped most of the time according to governmental orientations (Since the 1920s till the 1950s, the visual art field was characterized by impressionistic and then expressive tendencies including the artworks of the sculptor Mahmoud Moukhtar, the painter Mohammed Nagi and others. Later, after World War II and during the period of decolonization, in Egypt

and other African countries, cultural institutions like museums and galleries, art academies and archive were established and oriented according to national aesthetics and thematic concepts and guidelines. For instance, see: Pinther, Kerstin, C. Nzewi Ugochukwu-Smooth & Fischer, Berit. 2015). In addition to that, financial support for different cultural activities and visual arts is basically coming from the state institutions and agencies. This is considered one of the main reasons that made some artists find themselves attached to the state's cultural policy (Karnouk, Liliane. 2005). But, on the other side, a challenging group of artists were working outside the mainstream and insisting to display their own insights from various and independent perspectives.

During the period between 1990s and early 2000s, the visual arts were characterized by its independent mode of expression. Under the rule of Mubarak, the government stated a group of goals including but not limited to the economy of reform and open markets, privatization and neoliberalism. Furthermore, Farouk Hosni -who was the minister of culture from 1987 to 2011- supported a policy of encouraging westernized artistic genres, and consequently this was integrated in different governmental institutions, galleries, museums, etc. Although, the official institutions have paid more attention in funding art and exhibitions that follow their agenda, a large group of independent art scenes began to emerge and created self-generated art spaces (Winegar, Jessica. 2006) Since the cultural policy of patron state targeted the youth as a medium of social and economic liberalization, the first youth salon for example was held in 1989 to encourage young artists to take part in art scene (Mikdadi, Salwa. 2004).

The work of the aforementioned generation is mainly based on challenging the public to interact with their themes. Moreover, working outside the mainstream was common between some artists who belong to the so-called Arab diaspora; Those Egyptian artists who lived and worked in Europe have represented in their calligraphic artworks a cross-cultural dialogue between Islamic and European cultures. Artists like Ahmed Maher Raef (1926-1999), Ahmed Moustafa (1943-), Ghada Amer (1963-) and others are selected examples of Arab diaspora whose works indicates how art creation has changed from being highly circumscribed into a new form of modern artistic expression. (For instance, see: Issa, Rose.2011).

From the fifties till the seventies, the production of calligraphy was simply monitoring the cultural dynamics that took place in the country, and most of calligraphy works were following the state's cultural policy and orientation. But, through various independent art approaches in the eighties till 2013, the art of calligraphy has taken another approach towards independence in expression and the ability to criticize and bring change in society specifically in the 2000s.

There is no doubt that labeling writing an 'affective' tool is widely discussed among philosophers, scholars and art historians, who put text-based artworks in a higher place rather than its passive or even reflective nature of representation. In the following pages, the researcher will explain by considering in more detail how variable sorts of visual arts could be well mixed with Arabic calligraphy. This synergy and interplay between calligraphy and variable sorts of visual arts may reflect a kind of 'instrumentality' which is often reflected in African writings referring to "the power to effect change in people's lives." (Nooter Roberts, Mary. 2007). It must be noted here that the distinction of sacred relation between Islam and Arabic calligraphy poses such kind of instrumentality; As in Islam, people believe Arabic writing is the word of God and depicting it brings blessing or Baraka which in turn confirms its multi factored power(s).

5.1. CALLIGRAFFITI OF POST-REVOLUTIONARY YEARS ON URBAN SPACES: A DECOUMENTATION OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL DISCOURSES

An active graffiti movement marked the four years that followed the Egyptian 25th of January 2011 Revolution; Many walls are still covered with graffiti artworks, and illustrated topics are constant reminders for passers-by of the drastic changes the Arab spring brought to the region. That's how Egyptian Revolution gave rise to a wave of popular political and social expression in that form of art (Gröndahl, Mia. 2012).

Graffiti is one of the cultural practices greatly influenced by the revolutionary context, to the extent that it has come to be regarded as the art of the revolution, a most revealing and trustworthy medium of artistic expression and political participation. The study of Egyptian graffiti emerged as a result of the media frenzy accompanying the Arab uprisings since its beginning in Tunisia, at the end of 2010, with news agencies, websites and blogs popularizing what was perceived as an insightful, grassroots, and authentically revolutionary means of expression (Nicoarea, Georgiana. 2014). "The visual and performative remained critical sites for thinking and acting trajectories of change, articulating imaginaries for the future, and exploring facades of past and present social realities that defied easy translation into words and written texts" (Sabea, Hana & Westmoreland Mark R. 2008).

Thus, the synergy between "Imagetext" (image and text) or "calligraffiti" (calligraphy and graffiti) is considered one of the easiest and most efficient ways for individuals and activists to record current political issues, social mobility, propagate anti-system ideas, and establishing an alternative collective memory. This collective memory could be easily described as a matter of how minds work together in society, how their operations are structured by social arrangements.

As the Egyptian revolution took the world by surprise, equally unexpected was the outbreak of writings on the walls that ran parallel with the revolution.

In addition, graffiti became an efficient and spontaneous way of expressing a new sense of freedom shared by a large number of Egyptians. Artists began expressing their feelings, thoughts with simplest ideas, which have been shared by people “face to face” and moment-by-moment. This is how people relate to graffiti, and how graffiti become a living memory (Elregaily, Salsabil. 2013).

Worth to realize the difference between mobile posters and text-based graffiti works on walls, which is the main concern of this section. Graffiti is not an epiphenomenon, but it has been spread like wildfire in the streets all over Egypt, during revolution. All of that evoked plenty of “graffitists”, who have immediately interpreted every happening incident in Egypt into graffiti. So, it was not a passing phenomenon (Basma, Hamdy & Karl, Don. 2014).

Artists like Alaa Awad (1981-), Ammar Abu Bakr (1980-), El-Teneen, Omar Picaso, Ganzeer (1982-), Hanna El-Degham (1977-) and others have had the power to interpret every daily events or happenings in Egypt, into graffiti. During that era, most of graffiti artists shared the belief that visual commentary could be an effective call to action, i.e. a way to provoke a public debate about how to hold the government accountable, resist army rule, and creatively develop new strategies to resolve persistent political and social problems in Egypt. So, no one could ignore that the January 25th revolution spurred a well-documented wave of graffiti and street Art. Beginning with scrawled slogans and demands on downtown walls in Cairo, the breaking of fear in public space prompted several artists to develop complex murals (For instance, see: Coletu, Ebony. 2012).

In other words, we can notice how Calligraffiti of Tahrir Square has turned from a visual marker to a performative Art practice. Egyptians considered “Mohamed Mahmoud Street” (near Tahrir Square in Cairo) as a battleground, especially after the violent clashes that followed Port Said massacre. When Egypt witnessed on 2 February 2012 a football match that turned to a mess, during which 74 young men killed (Wikipedia). Immediately the Egyptian artists “Ammar Abu Bakr” (1980-) and “Alaa Awad” (1981-), together with a number of other artists have created a thirty-meter-long graffiti on the walls of the American University in Cairo. A written text has been added during the last days along the thirty-meter long martyrs' wall. The text says something satiric like “Get over it (the martyrs and the revolution) and move on to the election”. On the background there was a fabulous painting by Alaa Awad, inspired by an ancient Egyptian tomb mural, showing the mourning of the martyrs (figures 8, 9, 10 &11). The works of two artists gave a sense of transforming the wall into a “Metaphorical Tomb” documented by many photographers and scholars (Gibbon, Laura & others. 2015. Further information by Thöne, Eva. 2015).



Figure 8, The memorial wall for the Port Said martyrs (Detail), by Ammar Abu Bakr, Alaa Awad and others, Cairo 2012



Figure 9, The memorial wall for the Port Said martyrs (Detail), by Ammar Abu Bakr, Alaa Awad and others, Cairo 2012



Figure 10, The memorial, wall for the Port Said martyrs (Detail), by Ammar Abu Bakr, Alaa Awad and others, Cairo 2012



Figure 11, The memorial wall for the Port Said martyrs (Detail), by Ammar Abu Bakr, Alaa Awad and others, Cairo 2012

5.2 CALLIGRAFFITI CREATES A SPACE FOR FEMALE VOICES

Graffiti gave a kind of support for female voices to talk about their issues and problems in Egypt. A great number of graffiti works were created as a criticism of many social problems affecting women and the difficulties they face. The Egyptian artists believe that Calligraffiti has deep impact and great role in affecting the public and changing the stereotypes of suppressed women. For example, a remarkable graffiti in Qasr El-Nil Street (Downtown Cairo) in 2011, showed two acts of courage and rebellion: “Aliaa El-Mahdy” (appears on the left) challenged taboos of the female body by posting nude pictures of herself on her blog. While “Samira Ibrahim” (appears on the right) took her case to court after military doctors subjected her to a “virginity test” (figure 12).

The text on the Left reads: “Samira Ibrahim, 25 years old, was forcibly stripped and tested for virginity in front of army officers and soldiers, but she refused to give up her dignity, and brought a case before the Egyptian judiciary: no interest, no crowds, no media, nobody listened. Aliaa Elmahdy, 20 years old, stripped and revealed her body willingly. Crowds and media swarmed her: around 3 million seeing her pictures, and not less than fifty articles and numerous television programs were produced”. While the text on the right reads: “Greetings of affection, esteem, and support to Samira Ibrahim, daughter of Upper Egypt” (Naeem, Hani. 2013).



Figure 12, Graffiti in Qasr El-Nil Street (Downtown Cairo), 2011

Another example showing how could Calligraffiti create a space for female voices is the Kasr El Nil St. mural in Cairo. Ismael has created the Arabic calligraphy of that graffiti in collaboration with the Egyptian graffiti artist “Ammar Abo Bakr” (1980-) (figures 13&14). Ismael has always believed that graffiti is a democratic medium for expression due to its ease, and lack of need for formal training, which made it accessible to all: to do, and to comprehend the message (Ismail, Sameh. 2010). This graffiti is combining between painting and Arabic calligraphy as an attempt to give a space for the silent Egyptian woman. In this work, we found a big female painting is dominating the scene together with the written calligraphy made by Ismael and inspired form Ahmed Aboul-Hassan’s Poetry. The whole text is generally supporting women issues especially the Egyptians who were born and immersed in the country’s history and traditions.

Generally, both artists understood the importance of visual expressionism during the January 25th Revolution in registering different political, social, and cultural issues taking place in Egypt, which have also represented a sort of collective memory for all Egyptians; As Ismael explained "People would write messages, or do graffiti and then police or military would cover it up. While one party would write a message and the other would paint or write over it, resulting in walls that look like the mess and chaos we are actually living...".

Each layer or color is added to the piece with a different temperament -some powdery soft, some jaggedly irritated and others thrown unto the piece in rage, mirroring a society confronting a variety of confused and antagonistic beliefs (Hamdy, Mariam. 2011).



Figure 13, “Kasr El-Nil St” Mural, by Sameh Ismael and Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo 2013



Figure 14, “Kasr El-Nil St” Mural, by Sameh Ismael and Ammar Abo Bakr, Cairo 2013

5.3 WRITING IN SPACE: A PERFORMANCE ART WITH ARABIC CALLIGRAPHY

Writing in space or “Light Calligraphy” is a sort of “Light Painting” technique. The first trial of light painting was in 1914 by Frank Gibreth “1868-1924” and his wife Lilian Moller “1878-1972”, and then it developed in 1935 by Man Ray’s “1890-1976” series “Space Writing” to be the first known art photographer to use this technique (Wikipedia). As for “light Calligraphy”, the French Pioneer Julien Breton (1979-) has unprecedented achievements in that trend, and that what makes the Egyptian artist Khadiga El-Ghawas (1992-) deeply inspired by him. Breton has shed new light on the visual aesthetic of the Arabic calligraphy by rendering its characters in 3D light calligraphy, captured via long-exposure photography against stunning nighttime backdrops from as far afield as India, Morocco, France and New York. He has also freely drawn Arabic-inspired abstract calligraphy via full-body gestures and the use of a light painting LED bar.

Khadiga is considered a pioneer of “light calligraphy” in Egypt and the first woman mastering this art along with six men around the world. In her eyes, light calligraphy is a combination of meditation and old calligraphy secrets, plus intense physical actions (Elregaily, Salsabil. 2016). This art is similar to light painting, but with different lights and techniques. Her procedure starts with a physical practice for writing the word, using her whole body for about 20 minutes to absorb the whole process. Then, she performs the writing process in front of the camera with lights for about 30 seconds, taking into consideration the geometrical aspects of the letters (length, width, space apart, etc.). It is worth mentioning that the control of line thickness and elegance depends mainly on how to control hand, and therefore, one has to write a reverse position to be shown properly through the camera. For example, Arabic language is written from right to left, but she writes from left to right which is not easy at all.

El-Ghawas says: “... The basics of my techniques are to adopt traditional penmanship, particularly “Sunbulic Letters”, which could be said that it is an extension of Kufic script, with particular flow of the letters form” (Elregaily, Salsabil. 2018). In order to attain such flowing ability of the letters, the performer should have compatible body suppleness (ideally in a mystic contemplation). Sometimes, El-Ghawas uses Al-Dewani, Al-Thuluth, or Req’aa styles together with the Sunbulic letters for the sake of attaining a compatible text (figures 15&16).



Figure 15, Alwan or Colors Light Calligraphy, by Khadiga El-Ghawas, Alexandria 2013



Figure 16, Passion Light Calligraphy, by Khadiga El-Ghawas, Alexandria 2013

In order to achieve the writing of letters in a right position in space, the artist should perform the following steps:

1. First, training and control the writing of letters i.e., the correct use of pen, knowing in certain where the lines are thick or thin, and where the curves are elegant and streamlined.
2. Training to recognize the right shape of the character, and assuring that this can't be achieved except with certain movements of the body.
3. In order to master the body movements, El-Ghawas has found it necessary to practice a mixture of yoga exercises, and Chinese meditations like T'ai Chi (T'ai Chi, often shortened to "t'ai chi", "taiji" or "tai chi" in English usage. It is an internal Chinese martial art practiced for both its defense training and its health benefits. It is also practiced for a variety of other personal reasons: competitive wrestling in the format of pushing hands, demonstration competitions, and achieving greater longevity. As a result, a multitude of training forms exist, both traditional and modern, which correspond to those aims with differing emphasis. Today, Tai chi has spread worldwide), where the energy is the focus of thoughtful efforts, together with other deep-meditation exercises in order to perfect the movements she needs to create her ethereal light calligraphy images.

That was behind her skilled practices; How to stand in a certain position, to control her balance, and to conceptualize how the letter's strokes start and end. All of this helped her to succeed in training her body to write and not her hands. El-Ghawas believes that if one adapts the body to write any letter in certain forms with specific proportions, it would never make a mistake. Generally, this process needs an elaborate training for a successive achievement of the task.

For El-Ghawas, the outdoor shooting is carried out at night. Sometimes, she manages to use stock shots as backgrounds, and try to build the whole construction at studio. She commented "...I'm usually doing my writing in space within 30 seconds.

Often, the work requires two minutes more for the camera to capture the background scenes, for example the movement of vehicles or stars in the sky, etc.” (Elregaily, Salsabil. 2016). Worth to say that these shots are realized without any intervention of computer editing programs such as Photoshop, especially when some white outlines came to shroud the letters. In 2013, El-Ghawas shared Breton a demonstration, where both created together a piece of Arabic calligraphy in Alexandria (figure 17). Finally, we can conclude that calligraphy for El-Ghawas is a sort of synthesis of her physical status, spiritual faculties (gained from Yoga and contemplation), together with Arabic calligraphy. In her own words, she explains: “...Each of the seven artists (as circulated), who are pioneering that sort of art around the world, have their own individual techniques, but what makes me unique is that, away from the free style, I am presenting my art using traditional calligraphy rules, and at the same time I am offering a postmodern scripture technique” (Elregaily, Salsabil. 2016).



Figure 17, a collaborative Light Calligraphy work, by Khadiga El-Ghawas and Julien Breton, Alexandria 2013

6. CONCLUSIONS

Through this research, the researcher concluded that the art movement in Egypt and in most Middle East countries is always in an interaction mode with the prevailing cultural dynamics. Moreover, Egypt's cultural policy has always its strength, power and influence on the fields of culture and plastic arts, which in turn affects the art of calligraphy. In recent years, not only have had the artists the freedom to express their views through the work of the Calligraphy, but also they have a role in criticizing these policies as discussed before. In the 2000s, for example, the art of Calligraphy manages to make change and to have an affect manner especially after January 2011 Revolution to the extend that the state was wiping it off the walls for fear of stirring up confusion and inciting the people to rebel against the various political and social conditions of the country.

The cultural dynamics in Egypt during 2011 Revolution have created an ideal atmosphere for the artists to exploit the capabilities of Arabic calligraphy, which in turn has its role in changing the contours of public space of Cairo and some other Egyptian cities. Based on the scope of the study, the researcher is presenting a summary of some selected reached results as follows:

- Arabic calligraphy has evolved over long centuries from an art form that acquired its sacred nature from being linked with Islam –and afterwards to Islamic art– to a versatile and complex medium for visual expression and interaction.
- Arabic calligraphy has a variety of tools and capacities that enables it to visualize different traditional and cultural issues, identity discourses, Islamic religion and its controversy, social life and collective memory, reshaping the public space, and to act as a political commentary at particular times and in specific cultural contexts.

- This synergy and interplay between calligraphy and variable sorts of visual arts reflect a kind of ‘instrumentality’ which is often reflected in African writings referring to “the power to effect change in people’s lives.
- The affective nature of the synergy between image and text or “imagetext” within the discourses of public culture arises to prove its multiple powers of Arabic calligraphy and contributes in remapping the contours of public culture and public space.
- Graffiti and Calligraffiti have played a substantial role in documenting different political and social discourses that took place in Egypt during and after 2011 Revolution.

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