



The aesthetics of artistic composition in the drawings of Wasmaa Al-Agha

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Abstract

The current research includes a study of the aesthetics of artistic composition in the paintings of Wasmaa Al-Agha. The research is divided into four chapters: The first chapter includes a statement of the research problem, followed by its significance and then the objective, which is to identify the aesthetics of composition in Wasmaa Al-Agha's paintings.

The second chapter includes the theoretical framework, which consists of two sections: the first deals with the aesthetics of composition in contemporary Iraqi painting, while the second focuses on miniature art as one of the trends in Iraqi painting. Through this, the researcher arrives at the most important findings of the theoretical framework as indicators for analyzing the research sample. The third chapter is dedicated to the research procedures and the analysis of the three sample paintings. The fourth chapter includes the research results, the most important of which is that women constitute the main subject in most of Wasmaa Al-Agha's paintings, as seen in all the samples

Keywords: Wasmaa Al-Agha, paintings

Introduction

The current research included a study on the aesthetics of artistic composition in the drawings of (Wasma ALAgha). The research was divided into four chapters: The first chapter included a statement of the research problem, then determining its importance, then stating the goal, which is to identify the aesthetics of composition in the drawings of (Wasma ALAgha).

The second chapter included the theoretical framework, which consisted of two topics: the first was devoted to the aesthetics of composition in contemporary Iraqi painting, while the second was devoted to the art of miniatures, as one of the trends of Iraqi painting, so that the researcher could reach through it the most important results of the theoretical framework as indicators for analyzing the research sample. The third chapter was devoted to the research procedures and the analysis of the research sample models, which amounted to (3) models. The fourth chapter included the results, the most important of which are; The woman formed the main subject in most of her paintings, and we can see that in all the samples.

Keywords: Aesthetics, Artistic Composition, Miniatures, Islamic Art, Arrangement Art

Research Problem:

Art in general, and painting in particular, is influenced by numerous events, factors, and influences surrounding the artist. This influence shapes the artist's work, imbuing it with distinctive characteristics. A student of art can observe this influence and the many styles that have emerged, impacted, and produced a specific artistic direction to which the painter has adhered.



Given Iraq's distinguished historical role in civilization, it has been a center of cultural influence, impacting many art forms across human civilizations. Undoubtedly, painting is one of these creative, beautiful, and ancient arts, through which contemporary issues and the various stages of life can be expressed. Furthermore, the multitude of themes, elements, and values involved in its creation necessitates the establishment of clear frameworks and perspectives for interpreting artworks, from which we can proceed to an aesthetic interpretation of the paintings themselves.

Contemporary Iraqi visual art is a visual and cognitive discourse that utilizes regular relationships to establish the form or structure of the artwork. This form is influenced by the artist's subjective vision and artistic experiences, which in turn define each artist's identity through their lived experience and the evocation of their rich cultural heritage. Many prominent Iraqi visual artists have emerged, including the distinguished Iraqi artist Wesmaa Al-Agha, who has sought to find a unique style in her work, particularly in miniature painting, considered one of her most important achievements. She has worked to enrich art, making it reminiscent of our cultural heritage, social relationships, and daily life. Based on the foregoing, the research problem arises in the following question: **Are there aesthetic concepts underlying the compositional mechanisms in Wesmaa Al-Agha's works?**

The Importance and Need for This Research:

Artists have excelled in creating paintings, and the relationships between the constituent elements of their compositions have diversified. Painters have focused on creating variations between the forms and elements of their subjects, employing diverse methods and techniques to achieve a specific value that elevates their work beyond the conventional, establishing a distinctive style. This diversity enhances the aesthetic appeal of the artwork, highlighting aesthetic values, including sensory, material, formal, chromatic, expressive, and kinetic aspects. Therefore, the importance of this research lies in:

1. Exploring the cognitive, aesthetic, artistic, and historical dimensions of contemporary Iraqi art, and the role of Iraqi female artists, specifically the artist Wesmaa Al-Agha.
2. This research may benefit those interested in visual arts, including art college and institute students, by providing access to its findings.
3. The need for this research stems from the collection of the vast majority of the artist's works, making it an important resource for researchers and those interested in this field.

Research Objective:

This research aims to identify the aesthetics of artistic composition in the paintings of Wasmaa Al-Agha.

Research Scope:

1. **Thematic Scope:** A study of the aesthetics of artistic composition in the paintings of the artist Wasmaa Al-Agha.
2. **Geographical Scope:** Iraq.
3. **Temporal Scope:** The paintings completed by the artist Wasmaa Al-Agha from 1969 to 2012.

Definition of Terms:

1. **Aesthetics:** Saliba defined it as: "For idealists, it is that which pertains to satisfaction and kindness".



The Basic Arabic Dictionary states: It is "a quality observed in things that evokes pleasure or a sense of order and harmony." (Jamil Saliba, 1982) It also states that aesthetics is a derived noun, pertaining to aesthetic aspects. Aesthetic concepts differ from one era to another (Ahmed Al-Aayed and others, 1989)

The researcher defines aesthetics operationally as: (the aesthetic feeling that images impart through the combination of their elements within a specific space to form a coherent whole that reflects the spiritual concept of humanity

2. Artistic Composition: Mallins defined it as: "The process of arranging and organizing pictorial elements to create conceptual unity." (Frederick Malins, 1993)

While Muhammad defined it as: "Putting any intellectual work into a form that is understandable and perceptible, such as a literary work, a painting, or a piece of music, and this is usually subject to agreed-upon rules (Balasem Mohammed, 2012)

The researcher defines artistic composition operationally as: "The aesthetic characteristics that constitute the structure of a painting in terms of the relationships between the elements and the organizational principles within the painting, and what it conveys in terms of concepts, ideas, and values of expression."

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

Section One: The Aesthetics of Composition in Contemporary Iraqi Painting

The Concept of Composition in Artwork:

In discussing the meaning of artistic composition, it can be said that it is an element of the visual arts, represented in the drawing and embodiment of an image. It can also be defined as the design and construction of artworks, possessing the ability to express the form and state of the subject around which the artwork revolves. Artistic composition is considered one of the most important aspects of visual culture and one of the most important subjects in painting. It deals with the design and embodiment of meaning, expressing the artist's personality, aesthetic sense, and cultural background. Composition permeates all artistic endeavors and is closely related to the visual arts, given that a painting has its own specific composition, being static, having a defined area, and enclosed within a single frame (Othman Hassan Ahmed Hamri and Omar Mohamed Al-Hassan Darma, 2017)

Composition is the assemblage of elements found in nature by the artist to produce a distinctive work of art that expresses their inclinations and feelings. Therefore, there is no process of creation, but rather a process of shaping existing elements in nature into new forms. This shaping may be successful or unsuccessful depending on the agreement or harmony of these elements (Abdel Fattah Riad, 2000) There are several agreed-upon laws for creating a work of art, where "a work of art is considered a composite containing essential elements: content, material, form, and expression. These elements have been combined to achieve a form laden with intellectual concepts and expressive energies, all subjected to a specific system of interrelationships to achieve a whole, or an organized, self-contained entity. A question may arise: Can a work of art be considered composition itself?" (Ehab Ahmed Abdel Reda, 2006) Composition is "the mold that the work establishes in its entirety... It can encompass this multiplicity into the unity of the whole, and enter into its parts to make the subject of art an organized body and a set of internal connections... a complete set subject to its own laws, and self-sufficient (Jean Berthemley, 1970)".



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Even if When we consider this concept of composition in any visual artwork, we find it to be identical in meaning. It is composed of interconnected parts, based on interdependent relationships. These parts are organized according to a specific idea to create a unified whole or a structured composition, containing intricate relationships that make it an organically integrated entity. Artistic composition is nothing other than the form of the artwork that distinguishes its existence and essence. More precisely, the artwork incorporates numerous elements into a unified whole, making these elements a subject that represents a work of art through the interconnectedness of its compositional elements. The existence of the artwork depends on its artistic composition, which gives it a form that expresses the artist's ability and allows them to unleash their potential to create a work of art with a unique form, thus enabling its judgment, whether positive or negative (Ehab Ahmed Abdel Reda, 2006)

From this, we can deduce that the artistic composition, or the characteristics of a work of art and its constituent elements, determine its final form. This is in addition to the artist's concept and the influence of these elements in terms of their interaction and the pursuit of aesthetic and decorative qualities. This is especially true since all aspects of a work of art rely on these characteristics in the process of creation and individual composition. It depends on the artist's thought and formulation of their vision from a scientific perspective. Therefore, any work of art is subject to criticism to distinguish what is truly creative and what sets the artist apart. This artistic composition is linked to the ideas it carries, its relationship to the surrounding environment and events, and how these elements are utilized and interact with it. This constitutes the driving force that brings the content into existence. The feeling formed within the artist is one of the important elements in presenting the artwork in its complete and integrated form, in addition to the use of the materials and tools necessary to execute the artwork. This, in turn, determines the artistic composition and reveals the distinctive personality of the artist in any era in which they live (Faraj Abbo, 1982)

The aesthetic value in the composition increases and expands with the unity of the forms, so that it becomes more beautiful until it reaches the recipient smoothly. This process cannot be done except through certain characteristics that must be available in the artworks, as the process of falling into the aesthetic trap of the composition is not a random process, or that it happens suddenly, but rather there are stages that the human eye goes through to reach that aesthetic perception in the composition (Jamal al-Din Mahjoub Jibril and Abdul Wahab Tariq Abdeen Ibrahi, 2014)

Achieving beauty and visual pleasure is not a simple process. It requires understanding the details of the artwork after perceiving its form. In other words, understanding the subject matter follows the initial visual appeal. Furthermore, to attract the eye and evoke pleasure through composition, it must possess simple and easily understandable characteristics. It must have artistic formulations and forms with connotations that contribute to the aesthetic appeal of the artwork. This is achieved through the simplicity of the artistic structures used in the artwork. Not every artistic formation or composition has a visual perspective that facilitates understanding. On the contrary, we find that some complex compositions make it difficult for the viewer to comprehend the artwork. Thus, we find that "the pleasure in a work of art is achieved through savoring the aesthetic experience, which is the product of communication between the artwork and the viewer. Examining the factors that lead to the aesthetic experience can cultivate an understanding of this matter and provide us with the evidence to discover the path to pleasure when contemplating artworks that previously stirred little within us." (Nathan Knobler, 1987)



Elements and Characteristics of Composition

The means of composition in a painting do not function as separate, independent elements. Rather, composition in the visual arts consists of a set of elements and characteristics, as well as the symbolic meanings of lines and spaces. The simplest elements of composition are points, lines, and spaces in two-dimensional works, and masses in three-dimensional works. Other elements include space, color, light, shadow, and the type and texture of materials. The characteristics of composition include a unity of form that appears cohesive, with variations that combine all or some elements while maintaining their unity. Space must be dominant in every artwork to serve as a focal point. We can say that the best artistic composition is one that does not overwhelm the viewer through the use of elements and the strength of their interrelationships within the overall composition. It also depends on the method of distributing colors and their shades in the artwork, so that the elements are linked together, (Maysa Ghaleb Nahi, 2004), and meanings are derived from the composition. The foundations of artistic composition are divided into two main categories: 1- Aesthetic and artistic values under which these elements fall: (unity, rhythm, balance). 2- Structural relationships within composition encompass these elements: (contrast, harmony, proportion, dominance), (Ronak Aboud Jaber and Najlaa Mohammed Kazem, 2019)

Painting Trends in Iraq:

"The art of painting throughout history is the culmination of a human experience undertaken by the individual (the artist) in their interaction with nature, both in its specific and general (absolute) senses. Examining this experience in light of perceptions, reflections, and personal experiences leads to an investigation of both objective (the tangible world) and subjective (the imagined world) conditions". (Wsamaa Al-Agha, 2000)

The beginnings of Iraqi art in the 20th century were as a contemporary art form inspired by European art. The features of contemporary Iraqi visual art (painting and sculpture) became clear after World War I. Iraqi art was characterized by two main phases: first, the general imitation of European art, and second, an attempt to discover elements of renewal and modernity, drawing inspiration from local, Mesopotamian, and Arab cultural heritage, thus leading to what could be called the contemporary Arab school in Iraqi art. (Shaker Hassan Al Saeed, 1983) Many Iraqi painters contributed to the development of contemporary Iraqi art, adapting their materials and tools to create works distinguished by originality and aesthetics.

In modern times, we see that Iraqi artists, many of whom possess extensive knowledge of the history of art in other nations, have striven from the outset to forge an artistic vision that they can call Iraqi. This is why they have turned to Sumerian and Assyrian art, miniatures, ancient manuscripts, folk motifs in handicrafts, rural rugs and carpets, and local themes. Their artistic style is a product of this fusion of heritage and modernity as we understand it today. Only through this lens can we truly understand the works of these artists and the leading figures of modern Iraqi art. Regardless of the originality of each artist's work, it is connected in one way or another to the roots of the society in which they live, even if this connection is not always readily apparent. Most Iraqi painters are deeply concerned with the issues and problems of 20th-century humanity, as much as with their relationship to their era, and they consider their work fundamentally part of the struggle of the Arab nation as a whole. (Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, 1986)

Second Topic: The Art of Miniatures, a Trend in Iraqi Painting



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The art of miniatures is defined as the decoration of manuscripts and historical and scientific books with illustrative images. The term "miniature" is broad in its connotations: it refers to small-scale artistic productions characterized by the precision of drawing and coloring. It is commonly applied to colored works and other written documents decorated with images, calligraphy, or decorative margins on wood, ivory, bone, leather, cardboard, paper, metal, and other materials. Miniatures are small drawings associated with the art of Islamic manuscript production, used to decorate and clarify historical and scientific stories and texts. (Nadia Qajal, 2015)

Therefore, miniatures are illustrative images used to decorate important books and often clarify the meanings of the topics covered. It is an art form in which the Muslim artist excelled, demonstrating his creative brilliance in combining calligraphy and imagery in a relationship that evokes a pleasurable feeling of enjoyment towards both the depicted and the abstract simultaneously. In our present era, no textbook used in science colleges is without illustrations to simplify and explain science to students. It is truly astonishing that Muslims were the first in history to invent illustrations, a technique later adopted by Europe in its modern civilization. This art was unknown to the Greeks. In Islamic medical texts and ancient manuscripts, we find numerous illustrations that clarify the concepts being taught to students. These illustrations encompass all living beings, whether human, animal, or bird. There are illustrations depicting the doctor, the patient, the medical examination room, and the methods of examining patients, or what is known as clinical examination, which Muslim physicians pioneered and taught Europe the latest methods for diagnosing illness and assessing the patient's condition. Some of these manuscripts date back to the third and fourth centuries AH, the era of flourishing Islamic sciences, demonstrating that Muslims, having moved beyond the pre-Islamic era, began to utilize the art of illustration to develop their civilization. Among the most famous ancient miniatures are al-Wasiti's illustrations on al-Hariri's Maqamat. These illustrations demonstrate the self-modification that the Muslim artist undertook of the Byzantine origin of this art. He moved away from depicting sacred halos on figures, transforming them into colorful borders and groups of people arranged in a circle, their garments appearing as if in a joyful dance of colors. Attention was also paid to the distinctive details of each figure, in terms of movement and gestures, and to the appropriate selection and use of colors as a form of artistic expression. Many Islamic miniatures have survived, depicting literary, mythological, scientific, and personal subjects, all reflecting, in the fields of illustration and decoration, the artistic schools that flourished in successive Islamic eras. (Mahoud Ahmed, 2020)

The Role of Miniatures in Highlighting Aesthetic Values in Islamic Art:

Miniature paintings are distinguished by their dramatic element, unity of composition, and coherence. They possess a deeper meaning than their outward forms. In Islamic art, the function of painting was not merely to convey the visible, but to transform it according to the artist's vision, avoiding likening objects to themselves or to God's creation. The third dimension was not typically depicted because it represents the spiritual essence of things, as evidenced by the exploration of the concept of the spiritual dimension. The Muslim artist, in miniature paintings, recorded visual reality as an aspect of the external environment, portraying reality as perceived by the mind, not as it exists in reality. This is what distinguished the Muslim artist from his contemporaries. Miniatures express diverse systems of intellectual, social, cultural, and cognitive expression, reflecting the ideological thought of Muslim society. They depict the philosophical content of



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Islamic civilization, with its intellectual and aesthetic dimensions, giving figurative paintings a unique artistic character that distinguishes them from others. This aesthetic fulfillment stems from the spiritual meaning of the paintings, not merely their physical form (Abdul Karim Abdul Hussein Al-Dabbaj, 2013)

"Realism established an independent method of artistic creation, linking the facts of life with the forms and content generated by reality. Consequently, it influenced social life in all its historical phases, and worked to highlight the conditions of each era and create its intellectual and social phenomena, after understanding its goals, aspirations, and all the prevailing trends. However, the establishment of the independent method of realism did not depend on depicting things directly from reality, but rather transcended them as ephemeral forms, penetrating the surface and depicting it to reveal its secrets and issues and give it an interpretation as well. Its method also expressed what was obscure and emerging in society and the era "(Wsamaa Al-Agha, 2000) .

To understand the role of representational art in promoting the intellectual ideology of the aesthetic values of Islamic art, it is worth noting that the subjects of the drawings were not a mirror of the visible world, but rather constituted their own world of forms and colors, arranged with a purely mathematical organization that combined the functional and technical aspects to highlight the idea inherent in the Muslim artist's thought. This idea addressed the universe and religion from a cognitive perspective that combined the material and spiritual concepts in aesthetic composition, in order to achieve the goal and purpose of the drawings, (Novel by Abdel Moneim Abbas, 2013)

Biography of the artist (Wismaa Al-Agha)

Dr. Wasmaaa Al-Agha was born in Baghdad in 1954 to a family that loved the visual arts. Her talent for drawing emerged at an early age through her participation in school exhibitions, and she gained the appreciation of her teachers throughout all stages of her education. Her first artistic participation was in an exhibition at the National Museum of Modern Art in Baghdad in 1976, with the painting "The Tragedy of Tel al-Zaatar." She subsequently participated in numerous art exhibitions both within Iraq and abroad. She also authored several art books that were adopted as curricula in art institutes and colleges. She has published numerous research papers and participated in many scientific conferences both in Iraq and internationally. She worked as a set designer and illustrator for Baghdad Television from 1976 to 1980, while simultaneously being a student at the College of Fine Arts in Baghdad, (Sobhi Sabri, 2013).

In addition to her work as an illustrator and set designer for Iraqi Television, she continued her studies at the Academy of Fine Arts. She obtained a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Painting) in 1980-1981 and pursued a Master's degree in Islamic Art in 1987. She then studied for a PhD in the Philosophy of Contemporary Art History in 1996. After receiving her Master's and then her PhD, she taught the history of Islamic and modern art at the Colleges of Fine Arts at the Universities of Baghdad and later Salahaddin, (Wismaa Al-Agham 2000)

The artist held two exhibitions: the first at the Orfali Gallery in Baghdad in 2002, titled "From Baghdad to Baghdad: Visual Visions," and the second at the Broadway Gallery in the Jordanian capital in 2007, titled "Oases of Ecstasy." In the same year, she published her book "Abstract Realism in Art," which explores the philosophy of art history. She had previously published "Composition and its Formative and Aesthetic Elements in al-Wasiti's Miniatures" in 2000. She then worked on her third book, co-authored with her husband, the visual artist Mahoud Ahmed,



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titled "Critical Readings in Visual Art." (Iraqi critic) And the book "The Compositional Structure in al-Wasiti's Maqamat Miniatures" was published in 2012, (Mahoud Ahmed, 2016)

Her paintings were distinguished by a creatively abstract style that highlighted the beauty of women and the allure of their bodies, especially their full figures, prominent hips, round faces, kohl-rimmed eyes, small mouths, henna-dyed hair adorned with roses, and their colorful mountain attire. This was particularly true of the Kurdish women, who look to the future with a transparent spirit, transcending time and place, finding joy in movement, especially in the dabke or folk dances characteristic of the people of Kurdistan. These women and men are in harmony with their environment—its mountains, plains, and breathtaking green pastures—which embody happiness and joy by highlighting the emotional connection between the environment and heritage. (Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, 1986) Wasmaa Al-Agha was not the only artist who focused on depicting women. Several artists, such as Ismail Al-Sheikhli, spent many years observing and portraying women visiting mosques and shrines of saints. He linked the subject of women to a religious aspect, employing sketching, abstraction, and sometimes reduction in his depictions, alongside sharp, clear brushstrokes of color. The artist Suad Al-Attar also produced decorative paintings and miniatures, with women comprising the majority of her subjects. On the other hand, the artist Naziha Salim depicted women in her paintings engaged in their daily tasks, drinking tea, and dancing at weddings. However, Wasmaa Al-Agha's paintings were distinguished by the fact that her women formed the central element of the artwork. She was also influenced by the stories of "One Thousand and One Nights," which is clearly evident in her paintings. (Samah Adel, 2018)

The artist Wasmaa Al-Agha was also distinguished by her collage technique. Or the art of arrangement, which she employed in her paintings, particularly in the clothing worn by women in Kurdistan. These garments are multicolored, drawing inspiration from the northern Iraqi landscape, the colors of the plains, flowers, trees, and other natural elements. The artist explored all artistic schools, adopting new and diverse styles, yet imbued with an authentic Eastern spirit. Her paintings are distinguished by their powerful, striking, and balanced compositions, reminiscent of Islamic miniature art, rendered in a sophisticated and modern style. The figures in her paintings are characterized by their vibrant clothing, intricately decorated and colored with a spirit that is both traditional and contemporary. The forms themselves evolve in their concept and execution, influencing their dimensions, movement, and composition on the surface, especially in design, drawing, coloring, and architectural planning. The artist's paintings are also distinguished by their realism, manifested through the structure of their artistic compositions as an aesthetic concept within a renewed artistic form. She attempts to merge the past and present, blending space and time in her works, thus establishing a contemporary artistic school characterized by modernity and innovation, (Samah Adel , 2018)

Dr. Wasmaa Al-Agha distinguished herself with her creative touches in visual poems characterized by emotion, love, national belonging, and a return to roots. These poems were featured in her exhibition with artists Mahoud Ahmed and Mohammed Aref at Salahaddin University, amidst the springtime atmosphere of Kurdistan. The exhibition revealed the purity of humanity and the artist's love for their land and homeland through the artistic elements of these paintings. Furthermore, the paintings' realistic depictions of nature, the environment, and heritage established her own contemporary national art school, distinguished by modernity and innovation,



intellectual richness, and creativity—a visual anthology of the nature and beauty of Iraqi Kurdistan (Mu'taz Anad Ghazwan, 2007)

The researcher noted that artist Wasmaa Al-Agha has many similar works, created at different times. Sometimes, she repeats a single artwork with slight variations; for example, her painting "Women's Cunning" is a recurring theme, presented in several similar versions.

Previous Studies:

The researcher reviewed several previous studies and selected those directly relevant to the current study:

1. The study by (Rashid - 2016)* entitled: (The Aesthetics of Artistic Composition in the Paintings of Rafi al-Nasiri)

This study was conducted at the University of Babylon, College of Fine Arts, and aimed to identify the aesthetics of artistic composition in the paintings of Rafi al-Nasiri. The theoretical framework comprised three sections. The first section dealt with the study of (Aesthetics: A Historical Introduction), the second section (Artistic Composition: Between Elements and Design Principles), and the third section (Design Data in Contemporary Iraqi Painting). The researcher used the descriptive-analytical method to analyze the research sample, which was selected purposively and consisted of (7) paintings. The researcher used an analysis form to analyze the research samples and concluded that: the reliance on color harmony in most of the paintings as an aesthetic value, representing a primary and fundamental element in conveying intellectual concepts, as well as the aesthetics of artistic composition through color contrast in all the paintings. (Salam Hamid Rashid, 2016)

2. A study by Al-Dulaimi (2018) entitled: "Formal Reduction in the Paintings of Wasmaa Al-Agha"

This study was conducted at Al-Qadisiyah University and aimed to uncover the influences and mechanisms through which formal reduction occurs in the works of the artist Wasmaa Al-Agha. The theoretical framework included four sections: the first section dealt with "An Introduction to Form," the second with "Characteristics of Islamic Art," the third with "The Distinctiveness of Iraqi Painting," and the fourth with "The References of the Artist Wasmaa Al-Agha." The researcher adopted the descriptive-analytical method and intentionally selected four paintings from the artist's works in accordance with the research objective. The study relied on form and content as a tool for analyzing artworks. The researcher concluded that the artist's use of form is achieved through specific mechanisms and a unique feminine structure. The artist employs an Eastern style of painting, relying on the distinctiveness of formal reduction through flat color fields, adding elements that lend it a generality in form and a particularity in execution. (Fatima Kanawi Hantoush Al-Dulaimi, 2018).

3. A study by Saeed (2019) entitled: "Islamic Miniatures in Contemporary Iraqi Painting: Samaa Al-Agha as a Model"

This study aimed to reveal the reality of contemporary miniatures in Iraq. The theoretical framework comprised three axes. In the first axis, the researcher discussed "Manuscripts and Islamic Painting," in the second axis, "Miniatures in the Schools of Islamic Painting," and in the third axis, "Islamic Miniatures in Contemporary Iraqi Painting." The researcher used the descriptive-analytical method and randomly selected (5) examples of the artist Wasmaa Al-Agha's works as a sample for his research, representing 25% of the research population. The researcher



designed a form for analyzing the content of the artworks, which consisted of (9) axes. Through this form, he arrived at the following results: 1- The miniatures are devoid of three-dimensionality, and a flat, flat style is predominant in them. 2- Some of the drawings were modified with a new modernity and broad imagination. (Tariq Habib Saeed, 2019).

Discussion of Previous Studies:

The current study differs from all previous studies in its objective.

However, in terms of its theoretical framework, the current study shares some similarities with the studies of Rashid, Al-Dulaimi, and Saeed. The theoretical framework of this study comprises two sections: the first focuses on the aesthetics of composition in contemporary Iraqi painting, and the second on miniature art, a trend in Iraqi painting.

Regarding the sample, the current study differs in its size. The researcher selected three works as a sample, while Rashid's study used seven paintings, Al-Dulaimi's four, and Saeed's five.

The current study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology, similar to all previous studies.

Indicators of the Theoretical Framework:

1. The paintings of Wasma'a Al-Agha have an oriental character and are part of the Iraqi cultural and civilizational heritage.
2. The artist's paintings are characterized by realism and a popular appeal, drawing their subjects from daily life, as well as from folk tales, proverbs, and stories, especially those from One Thousand and One Nights.
3. Women are the central theme in most of her paintings.
4. The artist's paintings are distinguished by a creatively abstract style that highlights the beauty of women, their physical allure, and their beautiful, multi-colored, and richly embellished clothing.
5. The artist's paintings are characterized by vibrant and pure colors, often disregarding perspective, sometimes achieved through the use of soft, muted gradations.
6. The artist employs a dual vision, giving the narrative a temporal dimension by blending past and present.
7. Color harmony is a key aesthetic element in most of her paintings, representing a fundamental aspect of conveying intellectual concepts and enhancing the artistic composition through color contrast.
8. The aesthetic value in Wasmaa Al-Agha's paintings extends beyond mere forms and subject matter, encompassing formal relationships and structural elements.

Chapter Three: Procedural Framework

Research Population:

The research population consisted of the works of the contemporary Iraqi visual artist, Wasmaa Al-Agha, created between 1969 and 2012, totaling 78 paintings. These were obtained from various sources and the internet.

Research Sample:

The research sample consisted of three paintings by the artist, Wasmaa Al-Agha. These works were selected randomly, representing 5% of the original population, in accordance with the study's objective.

Research Methodology:



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The researcher employed a descriptive-analytical approach in this study.

Research Tool:

The researcher used the indicators of the theoretical framework as criteria for analyzing the works to arrive at the research findings.

Sample Analysis:

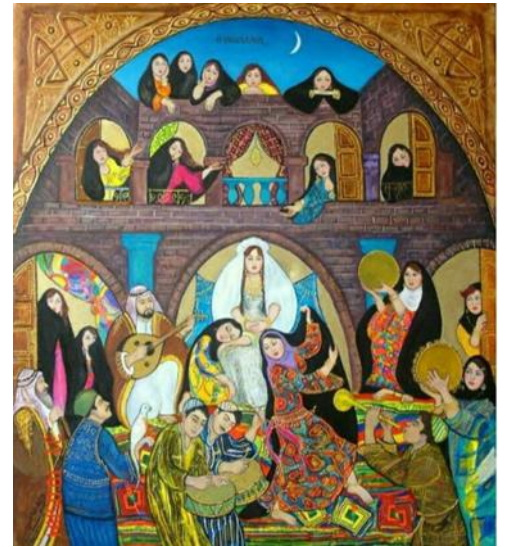
Sample (1)

Title of the painting: The Wedding

Material: Mixed materials on canvas

Year of Production: 2007

The painting's subject is a wedding celebration, and its compositional form becomes even more beautiful when we see the bride at the center, surrounded by a group of women dancing rhythmically to the sound of tambourines played by both men and women. This collective, emotional, and physical expression of joy at the wedding is further emphasized by the women seated on the upper floor of the building, dressed in bright and flamboyant attire. The central composition features three arches resembling windows. In the upper third of the miniature, we see five more windows; through some of these, we can see four women watching the celebration, while five others look down upon the wedding from the rooftop. At the very top of the painting is a single, large arch adorned with geometric patterns symmetrically on either side of the central structure. The painting is characterized by its enclosed space.



The painting's overall effect is one of enclosed space. Wasma' Al-Agha's style in this miniature is a simple style, using all kinds of straight, vertical, slanted and curved lines to clearly show the geometric decorations of the architecture, as well as the dots to decorate the walls and women's clothing. Most of the figures in the painting are women, and we see them wearing decorated and brightly colored clothes. We see the figures and shapes distributed in the painting in a balanced and symmetrical way. The painting lacks perspective and tends towards flatness.

Sample (2)

Painting Title: Spring Festival

Material: Various materials on canvas

Year of Production: 2010 AD.

The painting depicts Iraqi women dancing a traditional folk dance for Eid. The miniature portrays a women's gathering with a social theme, showing nine women in a circle performing the dance, with a seated woman in the center. The painting's artistic composition reflects authentic Iraqi folklore through the women's figures, accessories, dance moves, embellished clothing, and the henna on their feet,



which the artist clearly displays. This henna symbolizes Iraqi women and their beliefs and social customs. The artist employs soft, broken, and interwoven lines, evident in the movements of the women's hands and feet. The vibrant colors used convey joy and pleasure, particularly the contrasting colors in the clothing, which enhance the work's aesthetic appeal. The composition utilizes a circular shape and continuity, creating a sense of contemplation through this circular movement. The texture of the canvas—the background, clothing, and faces—is uniform. The painting's space is enclosed, defined by a large arch at the top. The painting tends towards flatness and lacks perspective. The artist employed numerous elements to enhance the visual impact. We also observe a harmony and contrast in the colors, a predominance of red, and a dominant presence of the dancer at the center. There is repetition in hand gestures and dance movements. The figures, the space, and all other compositions are distributed throughout the painting in a balanced and symmetrical manner. There is a symmetry between the dancers. The technical and stylistic treatment of the painting is a distorted realism imbued with a kind of expression. The artist represented reality, but without rigid adherence. She used simplification in form to create an atmosphere of simplicity, which lends an aesthetic quality to the composition. She avoided excessive realism, transforming and simplifying forms to resemble the paintings and miniatures of Islamic art.

The artist, Wasmaa Al-Agha, excelled in blending form and content in a simplified manner, adding to the beauty of the miniature. There is a similar painting by the same artist. It appears to have changed, Some details were added to bring it to its final form, as shown in the adjacent figure.

Sample (3)

Title of the painting: The Immigrants

Material: Mixed materials on canvas

Year of production: 2011

The painting depicts a well-known old car, nicknamed "Al-Muhajiroun" (The Immigrants), carrying a number of passengers, both men and women, dressed in traditional Arab attire such as abayas or dishdashas. The car is packed, with the roof also used for seating and carrying belongings. The painting evokes the reality and daily life of a bygone era when cars were scarce and travel between provinces was rare, resulting in this overcrowding. It's reminiscent of the current traffic congestion during visits, as if

Wasmaa Al-Agha is narrating a story of travel and farewells, weaving together various aspects of Iraqi women's lives. The car's license plate (2003) also represents the year of the Ba'ath regime's fall, a period that marked the beginning of mass emigration.

The composition of the painting showcases form and its aesthetic elements and relationships. The artist skillfully employs fluid and interwoven lines, suggesting that the car was drawn on a piece of paper and then torn apart. This tearing, like a road, symbolizes the state of society during that period. The painting is dominated by warm colors, evident in the passengers' clothing and the car's color. There is a clear harmony and contrast, particularly between red and green. The overall





texture of the painting is uniform. The composition suggests continuity and is characterized by its semi-enclosed space. The painting's subject matter is social, reflecting the reality of social life and crowded public spaces. The artist's style is simple and expressive, mirroring the realities of life in Iraqi society.

Chapter Four:

Results:

Through the theoretical study, the researcher reached the following conclusions:

1. Women were the main subject in most of her paintings, as she focused on highlighting their beauty and physical charms. This is evident in all the samples.
2. Wasmaa Al-Agha's paintings lack perspective and tend towards flatness. The spaces in her paintings are closed or semi-closed. This was evident in all the samples.
3. The focal point in most of her paintings is the center of the canvas. This was evident in all the samples.
4. The figures in her paintings have clear movement, and their characters interact with each other. This was evident in all the samples.
5. The paintings of the artist (Wasmaa Al-Agha) are characterized by a clear balance, both in the distribution of figures and the symmetrical distribution of forms in space.
6. The content of her paintings is social, reflecting the reality of social life and popular places, and drawn from everyday life.
7. Her paintings are distinguished by an abundance of ornamentation, whether in buildings or women's clothing, and by pure, vibrant colors. Warm colors are predominant in her paintings.
8. The artist combined the past and present in her paintings, giving them a temporal dimension.
9. Her paintings are distinguished by their aesthetic appeal, characterized by contrasting and balanced colors, and rhythmic repetitions in figures, motifs, and all other elements of the artistic composition. This is evident in all the samples.

Conclusions:

Based on the research findings, the researcher concluded the following:

1. The presence of women in all of Wasma Al-Agha's paintings stems from her expression of her feminine self, as well as her belief that women are the source of life.
2. The majority of the artworks are characterized by the movement of figures and their coherence with other artistic elements.
3. Most of her paintings tend towards flatness, combining different eras and enclosed spaces, and abundant ornamentation, reflecting her influence from Islamic art.

The purity and vibrancy of the colors in her paintings are influenced by the Kurdistan Region, where she depicts women wearing traditional clothing in bright colors, expressing the purity of the atmosphere in northern Iraq.

Recommendations:

The researcher recommends several measures, most importantly:

1. The necessity for a cultural institution in Iraq to collect the works of artist Wessam Al-Agha, given the abundance of her works both inside and outside Iraq, and to house them in the Baghdad Center for the Arts.
2. Publishing various types of publications about the pioneers of Iraqi art.



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3. Providing the libraries of fine arts colleges and institutes with books about artists and their artwork.

Suggestions:

To further this research, the researcher suggests conducting the following studies:

1. The aesthetics of composition in the drawings of Suad Al-Attar.
2. A comparison between the drawings of artist Suad Al-Attar and artist Wessam Al-Agha.
3. Stylistic development in the paintings of Wessam Al-Agha.

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