

# al-raida

BEIRUT UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

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# Woman Artist

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## Women and Art, in past and present

*In Arab history, we have abundant information about the arts of dancing and singing performed by women slaves who unlike free women, were allowed to appear in public unveiled. These women were bought and trained in the arts in early childhood. Those who excelled were sold for fabulous sums to caliphs and rulers in whose courts they enjoyed great influence. Besides dancing and singing, they could recite or improvise poetry and many of them played the lute. Others sang and played music in public places.*

*Women are still trained in dancing and singing in oriental countries like Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines etc. In the Arab East, we find professional women singers and dancers in cabarets and other public places. Dancing is taught in many art schools in the form of rhythmic gymnastics, ballet, dabkeh, the belly dance and other solo and folk dances.*

*If women have been able to excel in the above mentioned arts, they should be able to excel in other arts to which they had little or no access, like acting, painting, sculpture and so on.*

*In ancient Greece, home of the dramatic art, men actors performed the roles of women who were not allowed to appear on the stage. Yet the Muses who inspired artists were women.*

*In Europe, women actresses have given new life to the theatre since the 17th century. Béjart, Sarah Bernhardt, Rachel, are only a few of the stars that illuminated the Western stage. The cinema and television have given*

*new impetus to women actors. It would be useless to try to mention all the marvelous stars who have won international fame in cinema and television. They are legion...*

*Women painters did appear in Europe during the Renaissance and later on but their names were ignored by historians, except for very few of them like Mme Vigée Lebrun<sup>(1)</sup> who was patronized by Marie Antoinette (18th Century).*

*In the field of music, there is a lot of creative work to occupy amateurs and professionals: collecting local folk songs, adapting them to the modern taste, teaching them to the young, using them as a source of inspiration for new songs. The same type of work may be done in the field of folk dances. The theater offers an almost virgin soil with small beginnings created by our elders who left us the task of developing them.*

*The increasing number of women engaged in art activities in Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and, more recently, in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, reveals a general desire among the womenfolk of these countries, to cultivate their artistic talents through contact with their local heritage and a systematic study of Western Culture. The Muses were according to mythology, supreme women or goddesses who inspired women artists in their present period of revival.*

Rose Ghurayyib



(1) Marie Anne Elisabeth, 1755-1842, French Painter.



## Three Generations of Graduates

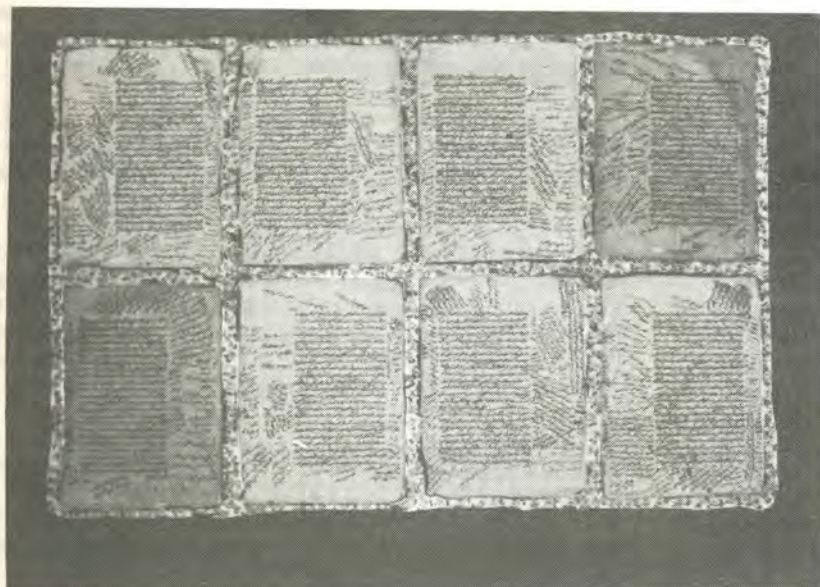
Great painters are distinguished from ordinary ones by their inner vision, originality and innovation; they achieve this by years of strenuous work and experiments in the different media: charcoal, oil, water color, gouache, acrylic and others. One may be born with a talent but it is not enough, hence the importance of art education on the college level: to widen the scope of students, sharpen their inner vision and give them the opportunity to venture into the exciting and unfamiliar territory in the realm of the art. This important role is played by the Department of Fine Arts at Beirut University College.

**Three Generations of Graduates** was the theme of the art exhibit presented by the Alumni Association of Beirut University College in collaboration with the Department of Fine Arts, thanks to Mrs. Naziha Hamza Knio, President of the Alumni Association and Miss Mehranguise Irani, the dedicated Chairman of the Department of Fine Arts and others who worked very hard for the success of this artistic event.

The art exhibit was held at Sheikh Zayed Hall on April 26 to May 3, 1988. Dean Raja Hajjar gave a short speech at the opening ceremony, thanking all those who contributed and helped to bring about the exhibit and show the importance of art education through fifty years at B.U.C.

According to Miss Irani the idea behind the exhibit is threefold: 1) to show that Lebanon continues to live and hope for a better future; 2) to display the result of fifty years of art education at B.U.C.; and 3) to be a nucleus for a larger moving exhibit throughout the Arab World.

1



2



1. Joumana Husseini Bayazid  
2. Elsie Houry





Miss Mehranquise Irani

Were the works of only fifteen artists enough to cover three generations of artists who graduated from B.U.C.?

“Certainly not”, said Miss Irani, “but many difficulties were involved in obtaining a greater representation due to the absence of the artists. Consequently very few of their works could be found in Beirut. We exhibited what was available. Another obstacle we faced is the limited place at B.U.C. The Hall is not large enough to exhibit the works of more than fifteen artists. We hope in future to arrange for bigger exhibits that would really cover the works of three generations of graduate artists whose number is certainly much more than fifteen”.

Miss Irani even expressed her wish for the publication of a book about artists, especially those who are becoming internationally known such as: Dana Hammoud, Doris Mukabaa, Ginan Bashou, Wisam Beydoun, and Ghada Kaddumi, among others, who specialized in Islamic art and works in Kuwait.

Miss Irani was asked if she had other wishes or goals for the future. “Yes”, said Miss Irani, “I dream of a museum of modern art in Lebanon. Although this is not the right time to dream due to the present situation in Lebanon, but one cannot but hope for a better future in which some of our dreams can be realized”.

The art exhibit included the works of older and younger artists. Among the older graduates were: Salwa Rawda Shukair (one sculpture and three oil paintings); Jumana Huseini, Malika Afnan, Samia Osseiran, Suha Tukan, Naziha Hamza Knio and Elsie Hourri. These artists have been fully written about in the book “Women Artists in Lebanon” by Helen Khal, published by the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World, at B.U.C. and available at the Institute (see p.19 book review)

What interested me most at the exhibit were the works of the younger generation of artists — the future artists, as I may call them. Although some of them are still working on their M.F.A. in the United States like Ginan Bashou (some of her etchings were exhibited), and Ghada Jamal, whose sensitive work was represented by water colour and gouaches (self-portraits, still life and landscape). May Hamaoui, who teaches at the Hamaoui Art Center paints the female body showing the beauty and elegance of its curves. Lulu Baasiri is presently preparing her third individual exhibition in Beirut. She stresses mainly on the liberation of the female body as in “Birth of a Dream” and “Call of a Mirror.”

Nazik Mikati teaches at the Hariri Secondary School and plans for her M.F.A. in the United States next year. She shows a sure conventional brush. Her work includes gouaches, monotypes and collage.

Hibat Balaa Bawab is also an art teacher at B.U.C. and winner of the first prize for the design of Lebanese currency. The two oil paintings exhibited portrays the Lebanese war namely: “Cry for Liberty” and “Arise”.

Najah Taher is another artist of the new generation. Her water colors “Bride I” and “Bride II” show emotions such as anxiety and the nervousness a bride feels before the marriage ceremony.

Unfortunately the works of Dana Hammoud — who taught art at B.U.C. and A.U.B. in 1986-87, now living and working in California — were not available except for one acrylic painting that shows her arabesque style which reflects the atmosphere of the orient with its warm colors and beautiful arcades.

I would like to conclude by extending my congratulations and best wishes to the Alumni Association and the Department of Fine Arts at Beirut University College. May all their aspirations and dreams materialize when Beirut regains its role as the art center of the Middle East.

Nuha Tabbara Hammoud



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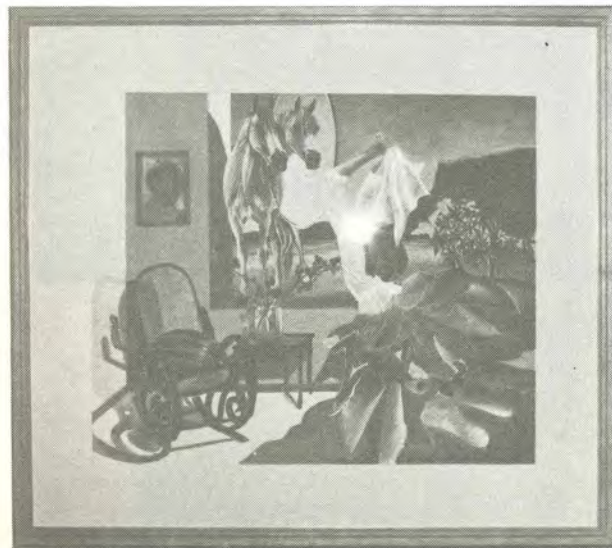


- 3. Hibat Bala Bawab
- 4. Naziha Knio
- 5. Lulu Baasiri
- 6. May Hamaoui

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## Women Artists in Arab Countries

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed in the Arab World a limited number of artists most of whom were men; but the period between the fifties and eighties marked the birth of many women artists, especially in Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq and other countries — some of them with important affiliations, others with none — but they all had one thing in common: self-assertion and the struggle for more social and economic independence, after a long period of imposed absence. Some of them have liberated themselves from traditional dictates of their societies, others are still striving to achieve recognition.

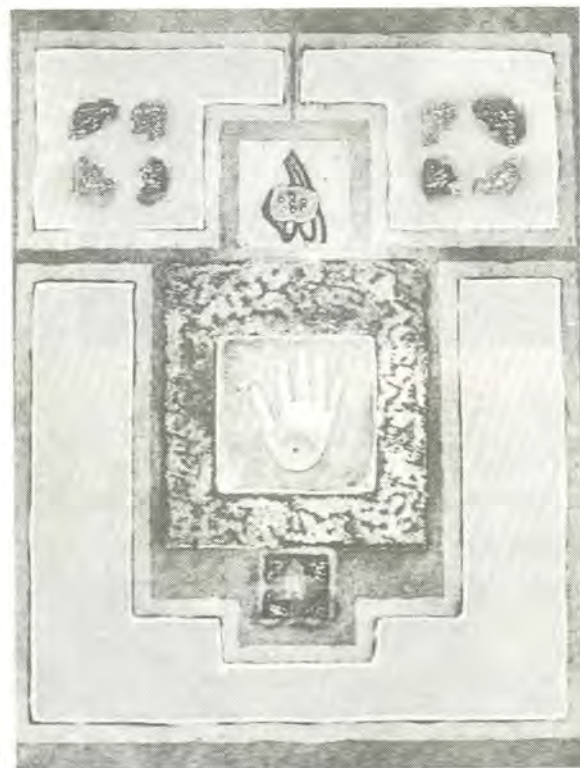
In Egypt many women painters distinguished themselves such as: Jazbia Sirri, Anji Aflaton, Watfa Midani, Zeinab Sachini and others. Among the pioneers is Anji Aflaton whose work dates back to the forties and early fifties when Egypt was struggling for its independence. Anji conveyed a real image of the socio-political situation in her country by painting the hard working farmers and public demonstrations of women against the occupation. She was a real advocate of human rights, freedom and equality, which led her to be imprisoned for four and a half years. Thus she was the first female political prisoner in the region. In prison, Anji missed nature very much and that led her to substitute nature for personages in most of her paintings.

Iraqi women play an important role in the art life of their country, not only in painting, but also in other fields of plastic arts such as: sculpture, ceramics, calligraphy, graphics, ornamentation, and others. Among those are Suad al-Attar, Leila al-Attar, Maheen al-Sarraf, Widad al-Hakim, Siham al-Saudi, Ishtar Jamil, Abla al-Azzawi, Najah al-Jader and others.

Suad al-Attar, a prominent painter conveys the mystery and charm of the orient through canvases, reminding us of the dreamy legends of childhood. Suad is strongly influenced by the ancient Assyrian art, regarded by many as the background of the Iraqi civilization. She held exhibits in Baghdad, Beirut, London and other Arab capitals.

Among the Kuwaiti artists are: Munira al-Kazi, Suad Issa al-Yusuf. In Saudi Arabia: Safia Ben Zaqr, Najah Naji Mufti, Mona Munajed, Noura al-Hamdan, Fatima Bayazid and others.

Najah Naji Mufti studied art in London. She paints everyday life in Saudi Arabia such as wedding ceremonies. Najah designs book covers and cards. Mona Munajed paints on silk the warm colors of the orient.



1. Suad Issa al-Yusuf (KUWAIT)
2. Suad al-Attar (IRAQ)
3. Fatima Bayazid (KUWAIT)





2



ظفره بايزيد

3



In 1987 the Saudi Arabian Embassy sponsored an exhibition in Washington consisting of thirty-six paintings executed by thirty-six Saudi women artists. The aim of this exhibit was to introduce to the West the Saudi women's involvement in the social, educational and cultural development of their country through their art. Most of the paintings were done in 1986, eight of them in 1985 and only one in 1984. The themes depict Saudi Arabian culture and traditions. The colors used are warm and bright. An outstanding characteristic of the paintings is the use of ornaments and Arabic calligraphy.

Among the Syrian artists are: Aysha Mansouri, Shalabia Ibrahim, Leila Nseir and Asma Fayoumi. Asma Fayoumi was born in Damascus in 1943, she studied in the "Fine Arts College in Damascus". Her work shows great interest in women and landscapes.

Shalabia Ibrahim, born in Damascus in 1944, studied art privately. Her work shows a romantic relation between women, birds and flowers.

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4. Asma Fayoumi (SYRIA)  
5. Shalabia Ibrahim (SYRIA)

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Leila Nseir, born in Lattaquieh in 1941 studied art in Cairo. Leila paints human emotions and sufferings.

The Tunisian Government encourages artists both morally and financially. Consequently many women artists have distinguished themselves. Among them is Saïda Ja'far who specialized in Japanese art. She paints on silk and exhibited in Tunisia and Tokyo.

Jordan has many women artists, some of them are Palestinians who acquired the Jordanian citizenship after the exodus of 1948. Among the Jordanians are Fahrelnissa Zeid, Princess Wijdan Ali, Suha Noursi, Mona Saudi, Samia Zaru, Afaf Arafat, Najah Khayat, Da'ad et-Tal, Nelly Costandy. Among the Palestinians are Samia Halaby, Jumana Huseini and many others.





6. Afaf Arafat (JORDAN)

Princess Wijdan Ali was born in Baghdad, graduated from Beirut University College. Founder and President of the «Royal Society for Fine Arts», she has been exhibiting since 1960 in both Arab and Western countries, revealing the vastness, tranquillity and the brilliant colors of the desert. (See Al-Raida Vol.VII Nos. 27-28)

Suha Noursi, born in Amman in 1942, studied at "Corcoran School of Fine Arts" in the United States. She paints in acrylic on big canvases. Her abstracts are derived from nature and she has a vibrant colorful technique.

Mona Saudi, born in Amman in 1945, graduated from the "Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts" in Paris in sculpture, then she went to Rome for further training. Mona lived in Beirut and Amman. She exhibited her drawings and sculptures in Beirut, Paris, Moscow, Berlin, Warsaw and Oslo.

Samia Zaru, born in Nablus in 1938 and graduated from the American University of Beirut, continued her studies at Corcoran Art Gallery and at the American University of Washington, D.C. in painting and sculpture. She held exhibits in major Arab capitals, Europe and in the United States as well. Her work includes metal sculptures, figurative images on canvases and textile collages.

Afaf Arafat, born in Nablus, got her art diploma in England. She had her M.Sc.Fine Art in the U.S.A. in 1966. She was elected as a member of the "American Art Society." Afaf's work includes paintings and ceramics.

Although the number of women artists in the Gulf is not large, yet they are taking big steps to follow their fellow artists in other Arab countries. In most Gulf countries, the State offers help to the artists without any discrimination.

Some women artists in the Arab World have already taken their place in the international art movement while others are still working to assert themselves on the local scene. Arab countries through the Arab League are requested to play a bigger role in presenting Arab Art to the world. The "Alif" gallery in Washington D.C. was a major step in that domain but unfortunately it was closed due to lack of funds. We sincerely hope that it will be reopened to regain its role as the door through which our culture passes to the Western world.

Another important event was the foundation of the "Institut du Monde Arabe" in Paris, which is a museum of Arab-Islamic Civilization and Art, with a special department for Arab contemporary art.

Will the future years witness the birth of Arab Women Artists who will leave an outstanding mark on the art movement in the world?

Nuha Tabbara Hammoud.

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## Modern Movement: Art Design and Architecture(1)

Miss Leila Musfy (Lebanese) who is presently Assistant Professor, Advisor and Coordinator to the Graphic and Advertising Program at Beirut University College is one of the better known Graphic Designers in Lebanon. She spent one year at Beirut University College studying Fine Arts and Mass Communications before graduating in 1978 from the Kansas City Art Institute with a BFA in Design. Miss Musfy obtained her MFA in Design from the Cranbrook Academy of Art in 1981. The topic of her thesis was "The Meeting Point between Western and Middle Eastern Art: how can design be legible to both cultures?"

Her professional activities have included, besides teaching, freelance design for numerous companies and institutions. She has been a guest lecturer at universities locally and internationally and has participated in various exhibits in Europe and the United States. Her work appeared in *Case Currents* (Council for the Advancement & Support of Education) magazine, Washington D.C. "Riding the New Wave", February 1982; *Novum Magazine*, Germany, January/February 1982 and *Graphic Design Education* book ABC Editions, Zurich, 1981.

Her private activities in design and painting include interpretation of poems, events and Eastern and Western symbols and images in the form of miniature oriental carpets. Miss Musfy gives Al-Raida a brief update on *The Modern Movement: Art Design and Architecture*.

### THE MODERN MOVEMENT: ART, DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE.

All Art movements, including Modernism, can be divided into three distinct phases:

— the Archaic phase is the birth of ideas. It is usually represented by the "ISMS" (Constructivism, Cubism, Dadaism, Surrealism, Futurism). It is also represented by De Stijl and the beginning of the Bauhaus.

— the Classical phase is the application of the distillation of ideas. It is illustrated by the "BAUHAUS".

— the late Decadent phase is the questioning period and the mannerism. Some artists call this phase "POST MODERNISM".

### THE ISMS:

The first decade of the 20th century which is marked by the Industrial Revolution and the introduction of the machine, gave birth to new movements referred to as the ISMS. These movements questioned the Renaissance tradition and its use of figurative signs, rather than abstract signs, as metaphors of expression. They also questioned the theoretical representation of nature.

In France, Cubism introduced faceted volumes, figurative signs, ambiguity of space, word fragments etc... These terms involve the thinking as much as the seeing.

In Holland, De Stijl conveyed the rhythm of the 20th century life to the point where the sense of order ceases to exist. De Stijl introduced a new type of building interlocking cubes with bright coloured outside walls and a new type of furniture, the Rietveld chair.

In Germany, Kandinsky and Klee moved toward a revolutionary new expressions.

In Russia, Suprematism represented the expression of feelings inspired by the modern world: wireless telegraphy, metallic sounds, movement and resistance etc... These are the sense of universal space.

Also in Russia, Constructivism gave a new foundation to sculpture based on materials, volume and construction. Typographic contributions came from El Lissitzky who revealed to the Western world the existence of a Russian avant garde. (See picture 1)

In Zurich, Dadaism, which was not exactly an art movement, aimed to free the minds and establish a constant questioning of the conventions of art as well as of life.

In France Surrealism painting provided a new function, the emptying of the self.

### THE BAUHAUS:

In 1919 the opening of a new educational institution in Weimar was intended to attract future architects, sculptors and painters. It was called the Bauhaus.

A History of Graphic Design. Meggf, Philip. Van Nostrand Reinhold, England 1983. Discussions with Catherine McCoy, Chairperson Cranbrook Academy of Art, Michigan, USA, 1981.





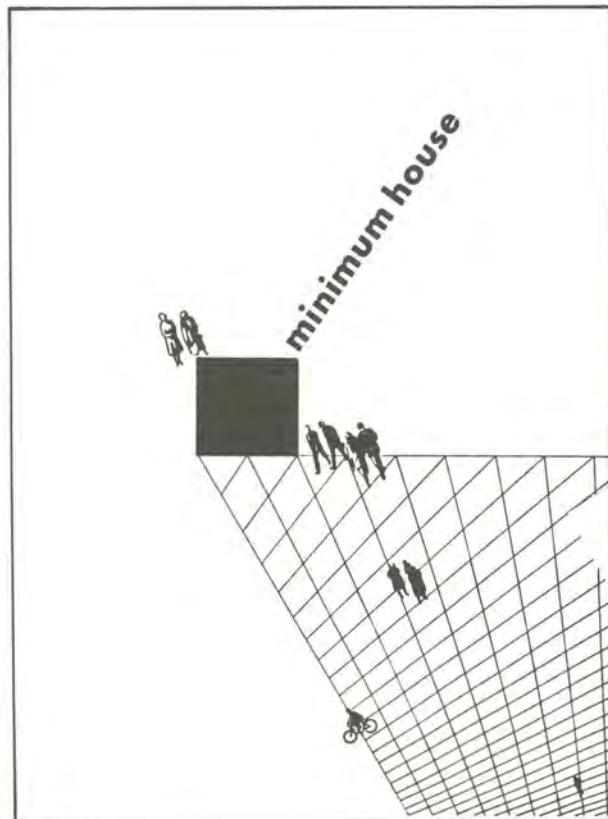
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Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus said: "Let us create a new guild of craftsmen, without the class distinctions that raise an arrogant barrier between craftsmen and artists... Together let us desire, conceive and create the new structure of the future which will embrace architecture, sculpture and painting in one unity and which will one day rise toward heaven from the hands of a million workers like the crystal symbol of a new faith."

Gropius's conceptions were broad and visionary if not Utopian. These called for standardization, simplification and new applications of given materials.

With Mies van der Rohe the Bauhaus moved towards what became the principles of Modern Design or the classical period of Modernism. Mies's love of quality in materials, his search for perfection and his simplicity in design form the basic foundations of modern architecture.

These are best illustrated in the Seagram Building in New York City. "Less is More" says Mies van der Rohe. Rational design makes rational societies and searches for a Utopian town. Modernist architecture and design was an answer to social crises. The very idea of modernity signified a unique fusion of romance and rationality. It sprang out from the same roots as Marxism. Technology meant precise function; a weeding out of the superfluous. Architecture can reform society. The modular grid was the face of equality. Sheet glass was the supreme utopian material.



2

Mies van der Rohe emphasized straight lines, rational thought and extreme refinement of proportion and details.

The same ideals were applied to graphic design and typography. Moholy-Nagy, Herbert Bayer and Josef Albers were the major contributors at the early stages of the Bauhaus. Picked up by the Swiss later, the formulas for the same ideals were also applied. (See picture 2)

One can therefore summarize the main ideals of the Modernists architecture and graphic design into the following points:

- No ornamentation
- Reduction of any unnecessary space
- Use of universal free flowing space without interruptions
- Establishment of the rectilinear grid
- Edges are free
- Tight tensions are towards the center
- Establishment of a universal international style not bound with cultures, climates or emotions
- Non objective



- Reduction to primary elements and colours
- Abstraction of forms as opposed to the specific and literal
- Rational
- Simplicity of line and form
- Tight spacing between the letters, words and lines
- Use of one letterstyle: Helvetica.

These were the ideals fed to the architects, designers and artists of the Modern movement. Thus if the artist or architect abides by the rules, set up by the Bauhaus Masters, then the establishing of the Ideal (the one and only solution) is possible specially if applied to city planning. However one question arises: what is the reason for the failure of the city of Brasilia? Designed by Costa and Niemeyer and built in 1960 the city of Brasilia was intended to be a true Utopia and the city of the Future. It became a true example of what is liable to happen when architects and artists:

- Design for an imagined world and its political aspirations instead of a real world with its needs and culture.
- Think in terms of abstract space and of the single instead of real place and the multiple.

It took some time to realize that artists and designers were blocking up nature. Towards the end of its phase, Modernism came to be considered as being reductive if not austere and sterile. Its purity, with its strict rigid adherence to established forms, came to be considered as puritanical.

Like democracy Modernism is being reinterpreted in terms of its insistence on forms and laws rather than freedom and liberty. Like science, Modernism seems dogmatic and brutal.

This leads us to the latest phase of the movement which some artists call "Post Modernism".

People tend to have different terms for this phase: Inclusionists, Post Constructivists, New Wave, Punk, Swiss Punk, Fad, extension of Modernism etc... The truth is that it is too early to put a tag on this phase as it is happening now.

Post Modernism started with the architect, Robert Venturi's book "Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture" which he wrote in 1965. In this book Venturi talks about the combination of found objects and the breaking of the grid. In graphic design, Wolfgang edges, different angles and tends to look explosive. ed with the application of free typography; a typography that renounces extensive design dogma and tends to look unorthodox. (See picture 3-4)

Post Modernism is what Modernism isn't. It is additive, complex, ambiguous, irrational, contradictory, a style of fragments and combinations and a dispersion of forms. It breaks the grid, uses overlapping, uses the edges different angles and tends to look explosive. There is a strong reference to the past (mixture of periods: roman columns with sheet metal), it uses different styles of letters and there is a return to the hand made quality (calligraphy), the unfinished look etc... It uses subdued colours, tints, screens, letter spacing and is emotional and personal.

The rise of Post Modernism gave designers a greater range of styles and methods to choose from.

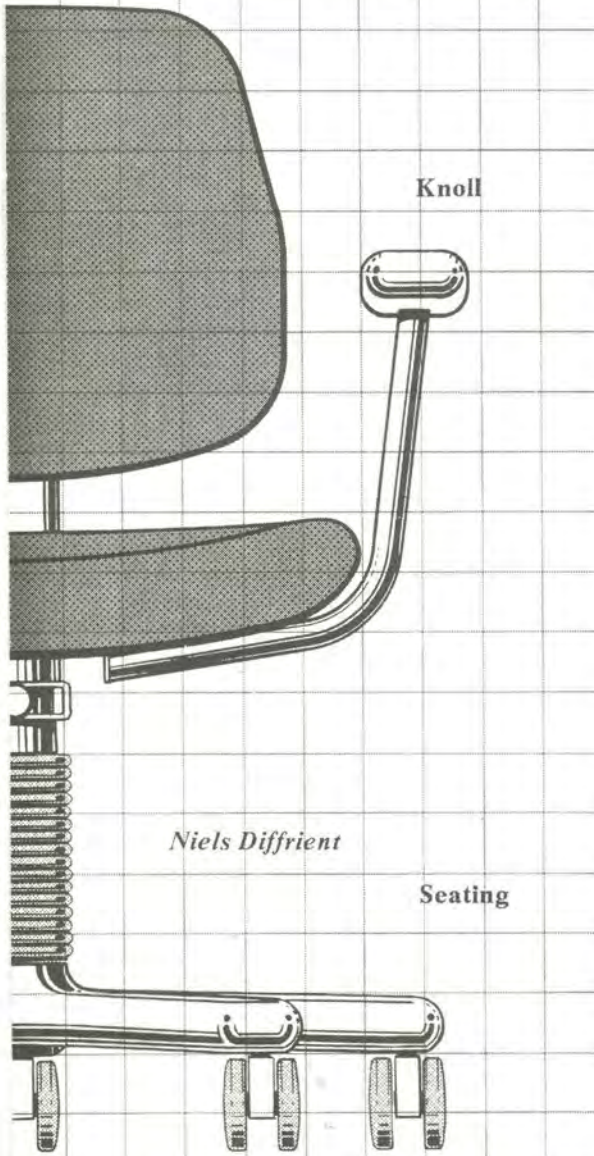
But where do you draw the line between well designed Post Modern work and slapped on gerrish design which is merely a fad?

It is probably the terminology that plays an important role. It is New Wavish or Punkish if it is a fad. There is no awareness of the historical background of design. It is easy to imitate and slap on designs. Late Modern would be a more appropriate term for Post modernism, since it is a synthesis rather than an analysis.

Whether it is a transitory period, a fad or a full fledged movement Post Modernism has barely begun. It is too early to determine whether it will open a new era in the history of Art and Design. One thing is certain though; it has provided the artists, architects and designers with a new vibrant look that was certainly lost with the application of Modernist theories. It has also provided the artists with a wide range of elements and styles to choose and use. It has certainly enabled the artists to become more personal and implement some of their personal motivations, thus providing them with enjoyment in their work. As Eero Saarinen puts it: "the creative spirit of the individual is what matters."

Leila A.Musfy  
(MFA, Cranbrook Academy of Art, USA)  
Assistant Professor  
Beirut University College





Knoll

Niels Diffrient

Seating

500 Lone Pine Road, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan

Members

SUNDAY 9 NOVEMBER 1980

6:00-9:00pm

DOWNTOWN

DETROIT

**C** <sup>the</sup> **M**useum of  
Cranbrook  
Academy of Art

Members' Preview

Sunday /

November 1979

6:00-9:00p.m.

500 Lone Pine Road  
Bloomfield Hills, MI

T W E N T Y  
O N E

A R T I S T S

*Artists*

- |            |         |
|------------|---------|
| DAVID      | ELLEN   |
| BARRR      | PHELAN  |
| GLENN      | JOHN    |
| BOOTH      | PIET    |
| DIANE      | MELVIN  |
| CARRR      | ROSAS   |
| JAMES      | PAUL    |
| CHATELAIN  | SCHWARZ |
| NAOMI      | ROBERT  |
| DICKERSON  | SESTOK  |
| JOHN       | JOHN    |
| EGNER      | SLICK   |
| STEVE      | LOIS    |
| FOUST      | TEICHER |
| ARIS       | ADAM    |
| KOUTROULIS | THOMAS  |
| MICHAEL    | PAUL    |
| LUCHS      | WEBSTER |
| CHARLES    | ROBERT  |
| MCGEE      | WILBERT |
| GORDON     |         |
| NEWTON     |         |



## Tribute to a Music Educator Mrs. Sona Aharonian

Mrs. Sona Aharonian is a well-known music educator in Lebanon whose career over the past 50 years has been marked by genuine love and dedication to the aesthetic and musical development of the succeeding generations of youth in Lebanon. Some of her students have already won international fame like Raffi Ourganjian, who is a world famous organist living in France. Cynthia Khatchadourian is a graduate of the famous Julliard School of Music and is a renowned concert pianist in New York. Tim Fuller is also a famous concert pianist; Walid Hourani's early training was with Mrs. Aharonian, Norayr Artinian is a professor of piano at McGill University in Montreal.

Mrs. Aharonian acknowledges the role of her father, the late Dr. Vartabedian, in her musical career with a deep sense of gratitude and appreciation. She reminisces with a feeling of nostalgia the open concerts at their house in Jemeyze, East Beirut, that lasted for about 25 years from the 1920's until 1945. Dr. Vartabedian was a well-known physician practising in Beirut, who had a passion for music and organized free concerts every Sunday afternoon at his house. He invited foreign and local musicians and paid for their performances which were attended by friends and music lovers in the community. During those days Dr. Vartabedian's concerts were a landmark in the country's cultural life. It was his ambition to encourage one of his children to become a professional musician. He himself played the flute, although he did not have any musical training, being an orphan stranded from his homeland in Turkey during the Armenian massacres in 1915. It fell upon his daughter Sona to pursue her father's unfulfilled ambition in music.

Young Sona's inclinations at school were towards journalism. She loved to write but she also loved music for which she had her early training at home with her mother and father. After completing her secondary studies at the Armenian Nun's School Hripsimiantz and College Protestant, she was admitted to the music department of the American University of Beirut where she received her B.A. degree in 1939. Right after her graduation she won a scholarship, to specialize further in music, but lost it, as the Second World War broke out the same year.

Dr. Vartabedian encouraged his daughter to go to the United States for graduate studies through his own personal funds. Sona was a shy young woman and did not have the courage to travel alone and to live away from

her family. The public opinion also blamed the Vartabedians for such a daring step because a young woman lost all chances of a future marriage if she took the adventure of traveling alone. No one could convince the father to change his mind so Sona had to obey and went to do graduate studies at Yale University. She happened to be the only student from the Middle East at Yale. The University community knew her as the young woman from Khalil Jibran's country Lebanon, who was at the same time the compatriot of the world famous Armenian composer Aram Khatchadourian.

After completing her graduate studies in music at Yale University with a Master's Degree, she attended the famous Julliard School of Music in New York. This is where she specialized in the most avant garde methodology in music education-psychopedagogy which was considered an artistic revolution in the 20th Century. The method which is also called "La Methode Vivante de Piano" is based on the concept of psychology, sociology and aesthetics. It is a method that tries to bring out the personality of the child by enriching it through the cultivation of his inner, feelings through aesthetics. It also trains the child to relate to people and society in love and harmony. This new approach to music education aims to train and develop the soul and the body at the same time by directing the visual and auditory sensations. It is founded primarily on the serenity of the soul, the inner resources of warmth and humanity, and a fascinating penetration into the spiritual realm of the individual.

Mrs. Aharonian returned to Lebanon after completing her training in this avant garde methodology in music education. She started her pioneering work in this field in Beirut and founded her own school of music. She continued her work after her marriage in 1953 to the late Kersam Aharonian, a prominent journalist, community leader and intellectual who encouraged his wife to pursue her career unhindered and showed real appreciation for her achievements in the field of music. However, combining career and family was not an easy way of life for Mrs. Aharonian. Therefore she decided to limit her music school to elementary training in the piano only. Students ages 7 to 16 had seven years of regular instruction after which they received a diploma. The program included the piano, music instruction and history of music.





Mrs. Sona Aharonian

As her background and training demanded a new concept in teaching the piano, Mrs. Aharonian did not stress the technique of the instrument — the piano alone. She gave great importance to the inner feelings, the joy, the vibrations of the notes, the sensations arising from the enjoyment of the melodies and not merely to the mechanical exactness of playing the right notes. In her conception of the field of piano music the instrument was transformed into a human entity and stopped being merely a machine.

In order to achieve these aesthetic and musical goals, Mrs. Aharonian has tried throughout her career to create an atmosphere in which young people enjoy music and feel free to express themselves and to cultivate their inner resources. She tells them fascinating stories about musicians and artists and recreates an environment of imaginary and legendary worlds where children freely associate with characters and communicate their innermost feelings. Her main goal being to direct the young people to attain refinement of the soul through self realization; to establish healthy relationships with their social environment and to live lives with high moral standards. She believes all of these developments together constitute the happiness of the individual.

However edifying and constructive these ideals are to prepare generations with a high cultural level, Mrs. Aharonian admits that talented pianists everywhere in the world refrain from specializing in piano teaching. They prefer to become concert pianists or accompanists free from the responsibilities that music education demands from them. With the aim of preparing Piano teachers for the Lebanese community, Mrs. Aharonian ventured into the big project of starting a training program for teachers just before the war (1975). She intended to pass on to the new generation of teachers her rich experiences and knowledge in the new methodology that had proved to be so effective in the lives of her students. As in the case of many other constructive projects, the war hindered its continuation. It would be most commendable for organizations to pursue this goal and establish a workshop or a seminar to prepare qualified piano teachers for the community. The best way to fight the ravages of the Lebanese war would be to create centers where music and the arts regain their importance in the lives of young people.

According to Mrs. Aharonian the Lebanese women were remarkable in their appreciation of music during the war. Under heavy shelling and impossible conditions the mothers brought their children to the piano lessons. More and more families had music as part of their daily life and activities during this time. It was a special way to fight the war and to secure the survival of spiritual and cultural values for which the Lebanese women should be highly praised. She told a wartime story to prove this point:

In 1976 West Beirut had no water except for those buildings that had a well and Mrs. Aharonian was not one of the fortunate people during those hard times. A neighbour who had a well came to her with a perfect bargain: to teach her children the piano in exchange for plenty of water. She was overjoyed with the idea and taught the children free of charge.

With gratitude and deep appreciation we greet Mrs. Aharonian's 50 years of service to the artistic and musical development of generations of youth in Lebanon. Undoubtedly, great has been her contribution to the cultural life of Lebanon.

We are inspired by her unyielding zeal, relentless efforts and persistent drive to train the youth in Lebanon for a deeper sense of humanity on the aesthetic, spiritual and social levels. We are proud to acknowledge her pioneering achievements in the field of music education as a Lebanese Woman Artist.

Azadouhi Simonian (Kaladjian)



## INTERVIEWS WITH PIONEER ARTISTS

The word art is immediately associated in our minds with an art object... a painting, sculpture... the fine arts. An artist is the executor of these objects.

An **artiste** is explained in the dictionary as a skilled performer: musical or theatrical: an entertainer.

We rarely call a singer, dancer, writer, actress "an artist." The word however is used as an adjective to indicate skill in performance.

### Salwa Aoun el-Khatib Ballet Dancer

- Q. How did you choose to be a Ballet Dancer. What inspired you and who encouraged you?
- A. The urge and love to dance made me choose this career. I was inspired by a film I saw as a child.
- Q. What difficulties, if any, did you face as a dancer?
- A. Many! When I started taking ballet classes in 1950 people regarded dance pejoratively. My parents also did not appreciate this type of art. I had no encouragement from anyone.
- Q. As a woman artist how do you view the status of dancing as an art in the Arab world at present?
- A. It is gradually gaining prestige but not as it deserves.
- Q. What was the effect of war on the art and your career?
- A. War influenced art negatively. Many talented people left the country. The instability caused students to become less disciplined.
- Q. What — in your opinion — have women artists contributed to this specific field?
- A. Grace and beauty and some measure of self-discipline.
- Q. Narate an anecdote or interesting experience related to your career.
- A. As I was waiting to get a visa to France, I chatted with an unknown lady who mentioned that her daughter was studying ballet with a "famous teacher". That famous teacher turned out to be me. I then introduced myself and we both had a good laugh!

Only recently, in the Middle East and elsewhere in the world, have performers been called artists, thanks to the pioneer women artists who braved the frontiers to have the performing arts become more than just a form of entertainment but an art in itself.

Today Lebanon boasts of a number of artists in the different fields of art. The following interviewees are an example of pioneer women artists in the field of dancing acting.

- Q. What advise or message would you like to pass on to aspiring dancers?
- A. As a message, I would like to say that the dance, aside from its aesthetic value can be the best therapeutic means to combat tension. In a country like ours, dance provides a fantastic emotional release from tension, hence one feels much happier after having danced. Also it could be used clinically i.e. corrective: especially for flat feet and back problems.  
A last word, let us hope that dance like all the other arts will bring some sunshine into our hearts.



Students at rehearsal



## Nuha el-Khatib Saadeh

### Actress

Q. How did you get into the field of acting and who encouraged you?

A. It happened with the emergence of the Lebanese Television Station. I had been accepted as an announcer after testing in front of a jury. Nobody really encouraged me. A strong feeling of capacity and love for this career helped me succeed.

Q. What difficulties, if any, did you face as an actress?

A. As an artist in this field the only difficulty that I faced was that I had to be patient and when the time came, take a chance in entering this field and moving from the task of announcer to that of actress — which was, at that time, a new kind of art in Lebanon.

Q. As an artist how do you view the status of the art of acting in the Arab world at present? When did women start in this field?

A. I am sorry to say that at present acting is still not regarded as an honored profession — except for classic theatre — in all the Arab world. Frankly, I do not know when women started in this field in the Arab world, but I am sure those acting at present are serious about their work, particularly in Egypt where it is practiced by highly educated women.

Q. What was the effect of war on the art and your career?

A. The effects of war were many both on the art and on my career in Lebanon. The negative ones are many such as taking into consideration only appearances without a feeling of responsibility or seriousness, good behaviour or even trying to have a feeling for this strange and dangerous little thing which is the screen or the microphone. But, in my opinion, my career as an announcer or an artist — acting in TV serials — is a sacred thing to which I have a deep feeling of familiarity and love. It is a relationship with the people I respect and like. On the positive side is also the fact that there have appeared many new faces and voices in the past few years which indicates that this art is developing in Lebanon.

Q. What — in your opinion — have women contributed to this specific field?

A. In my opinion women have contributed beauty and a fine capacity for acting with beautiful results.

Q. Relate an anecdote or interesting experience related to your career as an artist.

A. Many amusing incidents occurred to me during my career. I would like to relate the following: I was acting a scene from a play entitled "Until we meet" whereby my fellow actor, Joseph Nanou, who was playing the role of my husband was supposed to slap me. The Director, Elie Saadeh asked Joseph not to slap me too hard in order not to hurt me. But Joseph and I decided between us that the slap should be strong so that the sound could be picked up by the microphone. After rehearsing the scene according to the Director's instructions we prepared for the final scene and I braced myself to receive the slap agreed upon by Joseph and me. Joseph really slapped me and cut my lip. Since this was the last scene we were happy the Director did not comment from his observation booth, so we thought that everything had gone off very well. No one noticed that the slap was really strong — they thought it had been faked. But, it was so realistic that they said "bravo Nuha". After all the trouble Joseph and I went through, the sound of the slap was not picked up by the microphone and all our efforts at reality went in vain.



Nuha el-Khatib Saadeh in T.V Station



## “The Woman Artist in Lebanon”(1)

By Helen Khal

The author is a painter and art critic who, in 1976, was requested by the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World to undertake research on women artists in Lebanon. Mrs. Khal up-dated the manuscript in 1987 and it was published by the Institute in 1988.

The present book, through which the research project came into existence, handles an unexplored field of study in a volume of 200 large sized pages, provided with illustrations and photographs. It opens with an introduction of 20 pages analyzing the status of the

Lebanese woman as woman and as artist, followed by interviews with a selected group of 12 women pioneers in the plastic arts which include painting, sculpture and ceramics. In selecting this group, the author relied on the recommendations of well-known Lebanese and foreign art critics from both sexes. Later on, she added to the group of twelve, 24 other women artists who had achieved distinction in their field but, in dealing with this second group, she limited her criticism to an analysis of one specimen of the work of each, to which she added statements given by these women regarding their art and the influences that directed their development. Finally, the book contains 10 pages of biographical data collected from special interviews with the 39 artists included in the study and a preview of women artists in other Arab countries.

### Aim of the Book

Students of the contemporary artistic movement in Lebanon noticed the flourishing of the plastic arts in this country during the second half of the 20th century and the growing participation of women in these arts. The initial purpose of the research upon which the book was based was “to trace the development and document the present role of women artists in Lebanon with special reference to those artists who had achieved prominence in their careers”.

Investigation regarding the conditions and incentives of women's artistic activity encouraged the execution of the project and brought out the following facts:

**First**, during the seventies of this century there existed in Lebanon the largest number of women artists to be found in any one country of the Arab world.

**Second**, in proportion to the total number of artists in Lebanon, the percentage of women professionally active in the field was higher than in any other country, not only in the Arab world, but in the West as well. Almost 25 percent of the members of the Lebanese Association of Painters and Sculptors were women.

**Third**, in listing the twelve leading artists in Lebanon, it was found that one third of them were women.



(1) Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World, 1987. Design: Leila Musfy, Camera ready art: Bettina Mahfoud and Maha Hasouna. Calligraphy: Zeina Skaff. Printing and typesetting: Catholic Press, Araya, Lebanon, 1988.



Here it might be argued, says the author, that the initial choice of the 12 leading artists depended more on general appreciation than on a thorough study of their works. But the agreement of critics on including at least 4 women in the list of prominent Lebanese artists of both sexes, proves that proportion is true and that artistic success and not only public recognition directed the choice.

How do we explain this phenomenon?

Helen Khal gives the following answers which she based on experience and investigation:

**First**, most of these women belong to cultured and well-to-do families whose daughters are not obliged to start working for a living early in life.

**Second**, teaching art is obligatory in Lebanese schools. It reaches a high level in some of them and forms a good background for an early discovery of talents.

**Third**, painting and other plastic arts may be studied at home and meet no opposition from parents and family.

**Fourth**, the study of art does not require a long period as, for example, music or medicine.

In addition, we must remember that the Lebanese woman has always enjoyed more freedom of choice than her other Arab sisters. Since painting is a new art in our country, particularly for women, it was natural for her to be attracted to it as a substitute for *croché* and needle work, which absorbed our mothers' and grandmothers' time during the 19th and the early part of the 20th century.

Critics add that the standard of art is lower in our country than it is in the West. As a result, distinction in this field may be achieved more easily among women as among men. It is a fine art which receives appreciation from the general public, even when it is not thoroughly understood or criticized. Its study is available to many people, due to the large number of public and private art centers in Lebanon and the multiplicity of art exhibitions and galleries which arouse the interest of men and women students in improving the quality of their work.

How influential is a woman artist in her environment?

There is no doubt, says the author, that a woman artist receives appreciation from her environment for her venture into a new field.

Through her presence, she creates a certain change in public opinion regarding the capacities of women. She can convince them that a woman is able to perform other activities than traditional child-bearing, food preparation and other house-keeping chores. Art is for her a step on the road to liberation. It is a window open to her in the wall of the harem where she has been confined. Many find in art an opportunity for self-support or for increasing their income through the private lessons they give or through teaching.

Woman's production is characterized by subjectivity because she is less involved than men in social problems and abstract ideas. She is generally, not particularly, lyrical and emotional, even when her art is inspired by science or mathematics. In the future, she is expected to find more opportunity for complete dedication to art and more independence and self-reliance so that she may achieve full equality with the other sex.

Helen Khal tells us about her art experience which started with her love for reading, her force of expression in words and her dream of becoming a writer. Then she took drawing as a hobby and succeeded in drawing the house of her father in Shedra (Akkar, Lebanon) where he lived before emigrating to the States where he was established with his family. After returning to Lebanon and marrying Yusuf el-Khal, she studied art at the Lebanese Academy, exhibited her work which won appreciation. In her art, she was first attracted by form and subject then she concentrated on color. Her writing talent prepared her to practice art criticism in articles which were published by local and foreign papers and magazines, while she continued to develop her painting ability. Her critical talent shows in the analytical introduction and the study which follows about the woman artist in Lebanon. It is also evident in the effort she spent on documentation, on the choice of the illustrative materials, on the organization of interviews, and on the questionnaires she prepared. Her talent particularly shows in her profound analysis of the pictures contained in the book where she interprets the contents, analyzes the style and reveals the secrets of technique in each work.

With the keen eye of an art critic she can discover significant weight in negative spaces and interpret obscure forms, (p.130, nos, 84 & 85). She avoids sweeping statements and emotional exaggeration. All through her study, she remains faithful to the objective attitude and scientific treatment that she acquired from her experience as artist and art critic.



## Because I had to sing\*

By Ghada Samman  
Translated and abridged by Leila Fawaz

Ghada Samman is a prolific Lebanese writer who has published short stories and novels. Her realism is permeated with a romantic, extravagant tone. The articles she has published in papers and magazines contain a sharp satire of certain social evils. The following story reveals an emotional style in which the author's imagination wanders freely, unrestrained.



\* *Alnaka Kadari*. Samman Ghada, Beirut: Dar El-Adab, 1962.



I could hear the strains of a haunting melody floating faintly from the Hotel Lounge. I imagined the strings mysteriously weeping.. wailing in tune with the waves beating desperately against the rock outside my window. The sea is wailing tonight, as if carrying the voices of the island people who had suddenly woken to find the stars leaving the skies, forming a wake behind a lost sailor wandering round and round, trying to find a harbour...

I wish I could sacrifice.. but tonight is the night for which I have waited and striven all my life, with all the talent I possess..

The stage calls me where I stood for the first time a year ago, an unknown singer, her only hope the warmth in the night black eyes of a lover, her beloved.

I look down at the bed. My eyes fall on the open newspaper with the picture of a beautiful smiling woman.. I raise my eyes abruptly and see the same face reflected in the mirror, only the smile is missing..

Could not the waves be still for this one night and take pity on my torment by being silent?

I turn from the mirror to close the window, my eyes glide towards the rock.. the waves are still creeping on the shore, searching with longing for our happy footsteps, where a year ago we sat celebrating my success, my first appearance on the stage. I had been anxious and frightened that night.. when I stood on the stage, it seemed the walls were filled with eyes ready to condemn me. I wanted to flee.. I almost broke up in tears.. but, he was there, sitting in the first row, and in his deep dark eyes the warmth of the black night.. my glances fled from all others and fastened on the beautiful dark pools. They were whispering a cautious message, like a lovely breeze in the summer night.. the words flowed across.. "Your voice is beautiful.. you will triumph.. everybody will love you"..

I sang to him only.. I sang to his black eyes.. the audience vanished.. the walls receded.. the sky was brilliant.. there were only the two of us in the rosy dawn of the sky..

I woke to a storm of applause.. and soon discovered that the sound was delightful.. wonderful.. and that I was thirsty and greedy.. and I wanted more..

We went back to the Hotel with the words of praise ringing in my ears turning my triumph into arrogance.. before going to our separate rooms, we went down to the shore and sat on the rock by the sea.. my senses drunk with my success..

His tender voice mingled in the heart of the sound of the waves as he asked me: "Did you hear their praise?.. They said your voice is exquisite.. you only need some expression of emotion.. but, lets forget them.. release me. Set me at peace.. tell me. When will you marry me?"..

— "Do you always have to spoil our happiness with this talk? You know I love you, and you are not ignorant of my desire"..

— "Enough, no need to discuss the same subject over again.. I apologize for my weakness which is driven by my love.. it was my passion for you that prevented me from going away"..

The stars in his eyes looked torn with hurt as he said: "I will not return until I become the man you desire"..

The shadow of sadness mingled with my arrogance turning my face ashen as he quietly said: "Tomorrow we return to Damascus, we will decide what to do" ..

My hands buried themselves in his hair as I caressed his locks while he took me in his arms in a wild embrace..

When I woke the next day they told me he had gone.. when I followed him to Damascus they told me he had gone far away.. alone.. to bring to my nude neck, that loves pearls, a necklace of pearls..

\*\*\*\*\*

Why can't the waves be silenced for one night only?.. Why is it repeating the same refrain, the same story, since I arrived alone to the city, without him.. since I stood before the mirror adorning myself, preparing tonight for the final decision? Has not the story ended Oh savage waves"??..

The stage awaits me with its hundreds of eyes.. tonight the critics will know the truth of my fame.. and he has not yet returned to sit in the front row.. so that my frightened eyes can find refuge in the warmth of the black eyes.. he is not returning Oh sea.. will you not be silent?..

There is a knock on the door. Who is calling?.. "Yes.. I will hurry.." I return to the mirror. I put the final mechanical touches to my make-up My face is carefully painted like a white velvet portrait, what people call my bewitching eyes, I outline with a black pencil and reinforce with false lashes.. my lips.. I design with the experience of a spider weaving his web.. I needed no adornment that first time.. I arrange my hair and as I spray it I feel I bear on my head the hair of a dead woman..



I pick up a lovely necklace of pearls and imagine I will sway under its weight. I put on my skin tight dress..

My glance falls on the image of the woman reflected in the mirror.. people will say she is beautiful.. she just needs a smile.

I part my lips.. the shadow of a smile dies.. I hear the sound of the sea.. cannot you silence this eternal story for this one night only? Stop the waves from lamenting.. let them know that the bark is lost.. and that the blood of the evening glow has dyed its sails... and it has gone astray..

There is a knock on the door: "One moment my friends.. I am coming.."

Why do they stare at me with astonishment?..

Someone is saying: "Bewitching, but your beauty will not be enough tonight. I spent days composing the music for your song. You must sing it with emotions.. as if it were your song.." My tears lose their way to my eyes.. and shed inwards.. falling inside my soul where the song lives as I say "I will try.."

I feel the spot-lights of the stage on my face like the flames of hell as I step upon the marble where once his arm supported me and enfolded me with its magic.. tens of arms are extended now.. I take the one nearest to replace my lost anchor..

The heat of the Hall surrounds me with its compliments that bore me.. so many men around.. all seeking to know me.

My hands greet them mechanically. I am a stranger without him.. lost without him.. things have lost their colour and the fire of fame burns with a brand of ice.. and I am a lonely child in a city where everybody has turned into bronze legendary statues.

I walk on the stage.. a sudden fright takes possession of me. What am I doing here?

The make-up feels heavy on my face. The weight of my false lashes seem as if they are falling off, tearing my eyes with them. I need to run away.. to a field of violets, where a little warm house exists, and a bark that has never tasted the salty water, leans against its walls, and between them a child plays with the sails..

I look for help.. searching for the eyes dark as night. I find no one..

I take the first step that leads to the stage and a knife seems to twist in my heart.. I take the second step.. the third step.. it is too late.. climb up you fool.. and I love to climb..

I stand under the blazing lights.. the applause drowns the sound of the waves. Dark eyes like the night are swallowed up by a screen of smoke.. no one is left but myself.. a butterfly.. its wings flirting with the flame, swaying to the clapping as it would to the smell of fire..

A blue mist with the scent of the sea seems to surround me as the music starts.. The critical eyes seem to fill the Hall. The old familiar fear takes hold of me.. I look to where he was in the past and I find no dark eyes like the night.. he is gone.. gone..

The music stops. I must sing.. I cannot.. I am a cardboard puppet and I have lost my voice.

The music starts again. The audience is restlessly murmuring. And he suddenly dominates my being.. I have to find him.. I have to rescue him. I will call him with my grey song. I will search for him..

I will leave on the stage my body, my dress and my head.. I will slip away.. I will not let them see me go.. I will stand amongst them and look at the body on the stage and feel how farcial it is.. how did I manage to design and paint it?

I feel my face washed clean by the stars of a virgin forest, my bare toes wiggle in the mud and I smell the fragrance of grass. I feel strangely at peace.. and I feel a malicious pain at seeing her on the stage.. a paper puppet her voice imprisoned in my body..

As for me.. I will sing.. I will die if I don't sing. I will sing my agony and my pain and call him as I vanish from the stage.

I will look behind before I leave, I will see her opening and closing her lips while my song fascinates the swaying audience..

I slam the door as I leave on my way to the sea.. to the rock in front of the Hotel as I sing my wild sorrow and I find him there.. I approach him.. I lose myself in the grey sands of his magic embrace.. I sway and he catches me and holds me close saying: "I will build you a house of seashells and in each shell there will be a pearl."

I answer murmuring "I want a necklace of pearls.."



His embrace becomes stronger and stronger.. a strange premonition grips me and a painful lazy happiness.. my sense of assurance appeases my fear of the future.. peace disperses my desire, my wish for an unborn moon.. my song is dying.. I rebel at my happiness with him.. must I be tormented so I can sing.. I am a gypsy, I will die if I cannot sing..

A crab with red lights in its eyes approaches and drops a golden dagger, its grip is like the steps of the stage.. I take the dagger and plunge it in my lover's breast in innocent simplicity. His arms tighten and press me closer and I sing with ardour the anguish of love. My voice is almost lost by the sound of mysterious applause. I search for a bark so I can save him until I can redeem myself. . I do not find the sea!.. I cry my pain. I suddenly weep with mute agony.. I carry my love in my arms.. I lift him high and wander around aimlessly on the shore.. until my tired feet dig a hole in the sand where the malicious frogs are croacking scornfully "The waves have committed suicide and the sea has dried up.."

I won't lose hope..

I keep on holding him as I weep and sing as I walk the shores.. climbing rocky mountains.. descending into green valleys.. losing myself in the branches of a vicious jungle.. and I am a repentant harbour wishing to redeem myself.. I find the sand and the shore but not the sea.. I hear the wailing of the sea rebuking me and I smell the salt of the water but I don't find the sea.

I search for the sun where it bathes every evening.. but I don't find the sea!

The shells weep in the sand as I recklessly tread on their pearls.. children cry as they stone me accusing me of killing the sea where they build castles in the sand..

I run in fear.. bewildered I try to hide my face in my lover's breast.. only to discover he has vanished.. drops of water burst from the sky screaming "You have lost him.. he has gone.."

I turn around the muddy grass, I beat, I sway, I crawl, I ache and sink in a pool of mud.. and I don't find him!

I meet a man who asks me: "Why are you singing?"

— "All I know is how to sing!"

— "Whom are you calling?"

— "I am calling my love who has become a water-lilly in an eternally dark brook or a transparent bird with strange colors sailing in an unknown sky.."

The man moks me saying: "Go to the people of the city of wax, they are waiting for you.."

At the entrance of the city I find a cave and run to one of its corners to crucify myself like a bride of cardboard.. The King of the city comes surrounded by women and I ask him: "Do you know where the sea has gone?.."

"It has departed with your lover and left you all the world's pearls.. your voice is beautiful Oh weeping woman.."

He points his finger at me and the beautiful mute women approach me and adorn me where I have crucified myself in the cave like a bride of cardboard, while the people of the city of wax applaud.. applaud.. applaud.. and as my song fades away everybody applaudes!

I wake from my trance.. and find myself on the stage under the burning lights with the sound of clamouring coming from all sides.. "Magnificent.. the song of Pandora\* is exquisite.. it expresses so well the feeling of despair." I lose myself in the sound of applause.. I almost fall off the stage.. a hand supports me as I leave.. "smile"..

I smile.. and bow my thanks.. and leave with my friends. The clamouring follows me.

There is a party in my honour. A party to celebrate my triumph! But my smiles are over tonight.. in a little while he is arriving to Damascus.. I cannot stand it.. I have to run away.. run..

I reach my Hotel room breathless.. I enter and lock the door. I want to be alone away from the world. From applause. From everything..

The crashing of the waves are like the storm raging within me. Moonlight filters through the window. The window seems to shrink.. there has never been such a small window nor so slim and cold a moon.

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\* A woman given a box by Zeus from which all human ills emerge when she opens it.



From a distance I hear the iron clock toll twelve times. I feel their sound piercing my flesh. I approach the window to close it.. I see him on the rock where we sat a year ago.. tremulous under the light of the moon!

I slam the window and fall weeping on my bed. I had been aware that at this precise hour a plane coming from a far off place would land in Damascus. Two sad men, their breath smelling of stale cigarette smoke descend from the plane carrying a wooden coffin.. a coffin containing the eyes of a poet who had roamed the earth

in search of a pearl necklace for his ambitious lover. They have returned, but those eyes dark as the night have grown cold..

I have not lost him.. It is too late the sea has dried up before I could redeem myself. I could not even meet his body since he came.. tonight.. the most important night of my life. I grit my teeth on the pillow, the strange silent tears wash away the layers of paint on my face.. my false lashes fall on the pillow and I feel them tremble under my cheek like a destructive spider with sticky legs.

## REMINDER Al-Raida Reader

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## Apology

*Due to the severe electricity cuts during the past month, we have grouped the last 2 issues of Al-Raida together. We apologize to our readers for the inconvenience it may have caused them.*

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#### LEBANON

P.O.Box 13-5053  
Beirut University College  
Beirut, Lebanon  
Cable Address: BECOGE  
Tx: BUC 23389 LE

#### U.S.A.

Beirut University College  
475 Riverside Drive,  
Room 1846  
New York, NY 10115

Director: **Julinda Abu Naar**  
Consultant: **Rose Ghurayyib**  
Guest Editor: **Rose Ghurayyib**  
Coordinator: **Lella Fawaz**  
Layout: **Rima Khalifeh**

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