

Aesthetic value, creation and emotion

Rachida Triki*

Université de Tunis

Whether it is an occasion of a specific aesthetic judgment, or it refers to the idea of beauty, the aesthetic experience is at first revealed through an emotion. It is through the physiological experience requiring a feeling of pleasure that we need to discuss its nature. Therefore, the proper of an aesthetic experience is a sort of impartiality that allows a connection to the object or the event, establishing in us a pure emotion, a movement or a difficult experience that has an influence on our emotions. This experience is immediate, and it places us in a pure sensible relationship with what affects us. In this case, it is a kind of receptivity that does not consider either the nature, or the concept of its object.

For this reason, it was first thought by the philosophers of aesthetics, by referring to the original meaning of *aesthesis*, which means sensation. Sensualists, as well as philosophers of enlightenment, valued this role of sensation in the emerging process of subjectivity. This enables one to judge aesthetically and lays the foundation of an empathetic communion between man and the world beside intersubjectivity aesthetically established.

Shaftesbury has explained clearly in his treatise of *Characteristics* (1711) that the virtue of impartiality is indeed to allow, through a self-surpassing, the contemplation as a harmony with things and others. This is based on mutual capacity of being freed from selfishness. This kind of emotional empathy, prior to every seize of beauty, will be as we know expressed rationally by Kant in his analysis of "common sense" as communicable things in the judgment of taste without mediation. We need to affirm that intersubjectivity and universality, before being founded on the free action of faculties, are based on aesthetic satisfaction, stirred by the emotion that can seize sensibility.

* rachida@triki.org

Emotional dimension of aesthetic experience does not seem harmful to an intersubjective and rationalistic approach of the aesthetic object in general, and the art in particular. On the contrary, it would be its condition.

In my opinion, in aesthetic theory as well as in artistic practice, the purpose of founding rationally the judgment of taste and the artistic representation requires the presence of emotional dimension prior to the agreeing with the aesthetic dimension of artworks. This idea is usually interpreted in the practice of arts according to the proper status of the artist, consisting of the confrontation of the world in its raw presence, disconcerting as it is. For the creator, it is about a style of being in the world, beneath the instituted representations, as well as the cultural criterions.

Therefore, the question will be as follows: how to create, in respect to the primarily emotion, a real connection of the sense, founder of the value of a work?

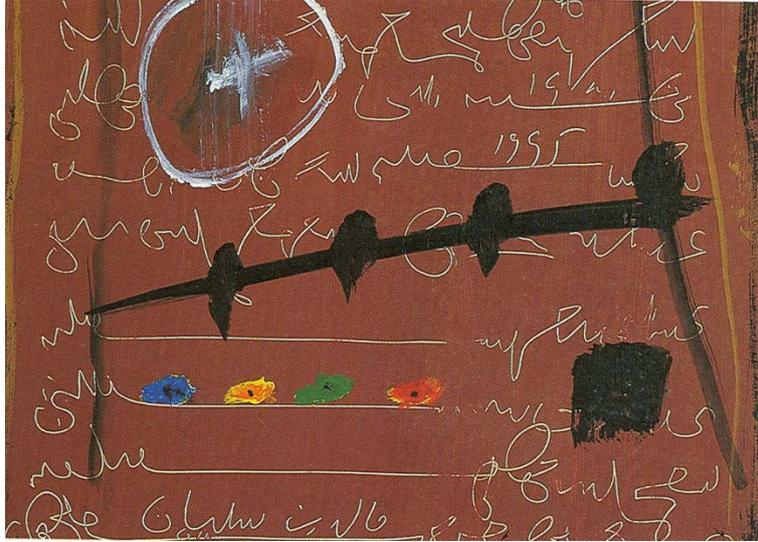
Kierkegaard studied the position of the artist in his confrontation of anguish towards nothingness (Kierkegaard, *Le concept de l'angoisse*, NRF, Paris 1976, Chap. I). For him, the artist is the one who confronts the abyss of the virgin seized in the upstream of the work. The anguish consists, in its psychological dimension, of the existential situation where a "qualitative rising" can take place and allow the artist to be a creator through his work. This is expressed in Paul Klee's thoughts more than Paul Cézanne, when he faces chaos, through which the confrontation between the cosmic and the organic takes place. The world for these creators cannot become sensible unless it is freed from the stable forms of nature in order to allow the seizing of its appearances. Cézanne could see this in the emotion of what it could become a revelation when he declares that: "an aerial and coloured logic suddenly replaces the dark and the hard geometry...as I can see. It is by the stain. The geological stand, the preparatory work, the world of design becomes deeper; it is collapsed as if it is a catastrophe. It is carried out and regenerated by a disaster. A new period is seen. It is the true one!...." (J. Gasquet, *Cézanne*, Bernheim-Jeune, 1921, pp. 136 & 137). The artist himself is considered in sensibility as he lives alongside with the genesis of his work, meeting with the visible in its diversity. Therefore, the art work can be grasped as an event for "the one who exists in the midst of its becoming" (Henry Maldiney, *Art et existence*, Klincksieck, Paris 2003, p. 211), in occurrence to the painter who engages himself in its existence. Being engaged to creativity and faithful to all the sensations that can become visible, means being confronted to the surprising character of the world and to the interior necessity of action; captured by the art work, in order to be in the same time in emotion and truth of seeking creation.

This attitude is not proper to modern thinkers; we shall find it with the contemporary artists, if we take the example of artists of Maghreb, the practices of contemporary art represent an unquestionable tool for their emancipation. The use of new media, multimedia as well as the practice of installation art is, for them, an ideal way to construct brand new situations and stories that will make us reflect upon the present.

Unlike what was allowed by the limited scope of Fine Arts, these new approaches broaden the field of creation to include the space of life. They are also ways of thinking, expressing and raising questions about their environment, their identity as artists and citizens, or simply about their singularity. Above all, they are a process of creation without borders. On the one hand, they release them from the pressure of belonging to the practice of the plastic arts, especially abstractionist and modern painting, as it has been instituted in the cultural field of Maghreb over the last few decades. On the other hand, they allow them to escape from a kind of exogenous recognition that defines them as belonging to a particular culture, a particular civilization manifested by the signs and symbols that would be considered characteristic.

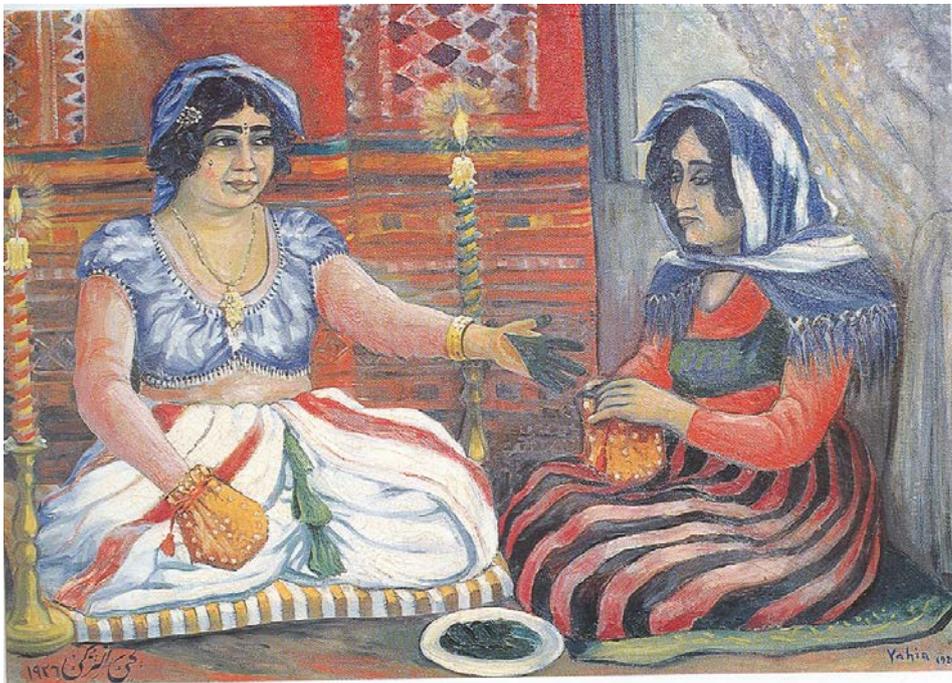
The preoccupation with this artistic process of creating between two spaces - the endogenous and the exogenous- has been expressed particularly among the young generation of artists who want to be bound neither by the history of local art, nor by the image formed of them by the West. It is not a question here of there being a rupture with their cultural sphere or with globalised art. It is a question of creating in a different way, with a sense of self-constancy that respects their singularity and their commitment to the present – to be contemporary would be ahead of one's time and to be able to create art out of situations or objects that touch everything in their world. Moreover, this is what gives their works a special coherence and powerful presence. In this sense, it's just that they have, in general, gone beyond the problematic question of aesthetic criteria in current plastic arts. Wasn't Natalie Heinich (*Le triple jeu de l'art contemporain*, Paris 1998), who has conducted an in-depth analysis of this question, who remarked that for the contemporary arts "authenticity" is an outstanding value? Of course, it is necessary to understand authenticity not as a way of adapting to a tradition but as being true to oneself. She indicates the way in which today's artists have a commitment to create differently, faithful to their sensations, daring to use methods in keeping with their dream to seek out the truth in their desire for art. Moreover, is it not a coincidence that in the aims of artists we often find the notions of truth, sincerity and even the need to express creation as a commitment?

This way of creating without borders, free of the weight of tradition, free of the current norms and the demands of a globalised market, has, for several years now allowed Maghrebin artists to stake out the difference from a sense of "déjà vu» through their new works. They are fully aware of the exhausted state of certain aesthetic categories linked to a plastic approach that artists had previously claimed as a way of including the Tunisian heritage and even more so, that of Arab decorative and visual arts.



Painting of the Tunisian artist Khaled Ben Slimane

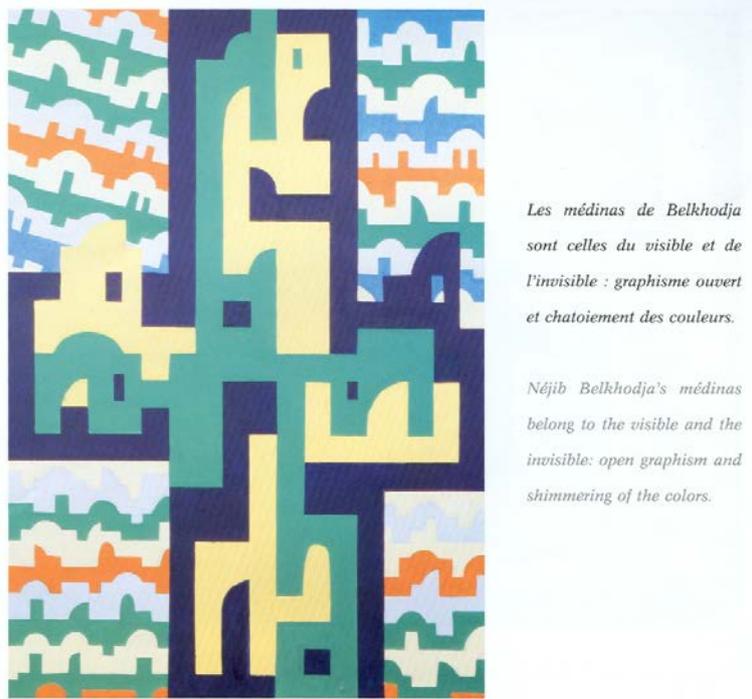
The abstractionist artistic movement, born in the 1960s, has, admittedly, given rise to a diversity of configurations where the traditional signs, which have become pictorial elements, have been rekindled aesthetically. However, the recurrence of elements that play with shapes has ended up producing a mode of representation that has certainly replaced the exotic and orientalist modes dating from the turn of the last century, but which has divided up artistic productions into new borders.



64. Yahia Turki, Henna, huile sur toile, 78x109 cm, signé et daté, en bas à gauche en arabe, "Yahia 1926", en bas à droite en français, collection privée.

Yahia Turki, Henna

These borders restrict the distribution of sensitive elements to a visual environment characterized by the signs of a recaptured land. The Berber symbols, the Arab calligraphy and the architectural lines of the medina have succeeded in fixing an identity by showing the way.



Les médinas de Belkhodja sont celles du visible et de l'invisible : graphisme ouvert et chatoiement des couleurs.

Néjib Belkhodja's médinas belong to the visible and the invisible: open graphism and shimmering of the colors.

Esthéticien de la lettre et du signe, inspiré par le modèle architectonique tunisien, Néjib Belkhodja est le digne héritier de Klee, Delaunay, Mondrian ainsi que des écoles irakienne et syrienne. À l'avant-garde des plasticiens maghrébins, il est le peintre et l'initiateur des figures essentielles de l'architecture de la médina de Tunis.

Aesthetician of the letter and the sign, inspired by the Tunisian architectonic model. Nejjib Belkhodja is the worthy heir of Klee, Delaunay, Mondrian as well as of the Iraqi and Syrian schools. In the vanguard of the Maghreb visual artists, he is the painter and the initiator of the essential figures of the Tunis medina architectonics.

Articulation. 2000

Huile sur toile, 130 x 90 cm / Oil on canvas, 52" x 36"

Painting of the Tunisian artist Nagib Belkhodja

Contemporary artists, who have been introduced to the new technologies and to the new means of communication, as well as to the circulation and cross-fertilization of images with their different representations, have broadened their creative scope. They claim both their singularity as artists –a kind of Maghrebini-Arab identity– and the status of world citizens. In this sense, they must confront a more extensive environment and, by capturing intense impressions and producing sensations that respond to their desire to create.

Creating means "to resist" to use the expression coined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* Paris 1991). It means "daring to opt for a future which is always an adventure" (Ibid.); in this, the artist is "a being in

the process of evolution who attempts an uncertain fight" because he is open to all possibilities, with the capacity to change from one technique to another, depending on the process of the creation in question. This harmony with oneself, with one's desires, with one's need to produce or to simply express oneself through the appropriate medium, is a characteristic shared today by many artists of the new generation.

Their works are ways of doing things and lines of thought that are open to the diversity of sensitivity, to events, to the environment as well as to any socio-cultural phenomena. One might say that they turn their backs to the identity problem in order to better understand the evolution of their identity -not to say their singularity.

This singularity is to be understood both as a phenomenon and in social terms. The relationship with the world has to do with exhibiting these mutations, the violence, the contradictions, or simply these brand new sensations and unusual situations that the artists turn into art to have a greater receptive impact.

Along these lines is the installation of the artist, Halim Karabibene, in the form of black humor – a parable of the dream of clandestine emigration. In his photomontage, his characters, ready to leave, haunted by the ghost of a European *Eldorado*, are prevented from reaching their objects of desire by a grille. These objects, handed out before their eyes and opposite them, are nothing more than kitschy toys, made in China, imported to Europe and sold on the black market on the sidewalks of the Maghrebin cities, to finance the passage of the north shore.





