

Name: Muhammad Schieber

Art 2200 Assignment #2

Formal and Cultural Analysis

The Arab Spring will go down as a significant event in Middle Eastern, and perhaps, world history. It began when Mohamed Bouazizi, a Tunisian Street vendor, set himself on fire in protest of police corruption. The ensuing popular protests that rose up after Bouazizi's death toppled the Tunisian government. Subsequent protests toppled governments in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and resulted in an on going and bloody civil war in Syria. Concurrent with the Arab Spring has been

ElSeed is a contemporary street/graffiti artist who is of Tunisian ancestry, was born in France and currently resides in Montreal. His work is a mix of contemporary street graffiti and Arabic calligraphy.

From his blog:

eL Seed perceives Arabic Calligraphy as a tangible expression of his search for identity. Throughout his work, myriad paths intersect and mirror the multiple sources of inspiration which nourish his art. Emanating from this confusion is an amalgam of harmony and balance. His art is a mixture of street art and Arabic Calligraphy.
(<http://elseedart.wordpress.com/author/elseedart/page/2/>, 9:40 pm 21 Apr 12)

His work follows the aniconic style of classical Arabic and Islamic art in that it the strict prohibition of images depicting animate beings. While his work utilizes a classical style, it adopts modern materials (i.e. Spray Paint) and addresses contemporary issues like the Arab Spring.

By incorporating traditional Arabic calligraphy into his work eL Seed, anchors the contemporary style and the contemporary ideas expressed in his work solidly in the past. By doing so he appeals to a sense of time among Arabs and

Muslims that predates the colonial era and harkens to an age where Arabs and Muslims were the trailblazers in scientific and technological innovation in the world.

One such work is the wall the artist entitled “balance.” Featured on this wall is a pair of hands holding a traditional “Qalam” or pen used in traditional Arabic calligraphy. Flowing out of the pair hands in traditional written in Arabic calligraphy is the word “Tawazun” or “balance” in Arabic. This particular graffiti mural was painted in 2008 and pre-dates the Arab Spring by a couple of years, but the epithet at the top of the mural in French “meme immobile, j’reste en mouvement...” or “even when immobile, I keep moving” which I think could be paraphrased as “Even when I am restrained, I carry on.” This sentiment reflects, or at least points to, the attitude that blossomed in the Arab Spring. It expresses the idea that, after centuries of colonial rule, and decades of oppressive dictatorships, the Arab youth were preparing to produce a more balanced, just and harmonious existence that flowed out of their own hands.

