

Reviews

The Circle of Departure and Return: A Reading of Songs of Bridges/ Men Aghani Aljousoor, selected paintings, and poems by Rajaa Gharbi: a study by Dr. Fatma Lakhdhar, Tunisian writer and Literary critic/researcher, University of Tunis; Excerpts' translation from Arabic to English by Rajaa Gharbi Studio.

"... I do not want to forego mentioning at the end of this introduction a singular aspect that characterizes this poetry collection [paintings and translated poems], which I have seldom seen in other poets before, that is the singularity of being a poet who paints with words as well as with a brush [...] Gharbi alternates between poetry and painting. So, it was necessary to express my opinion about what she says in painting as well as what she says through the written word. I do not claim in this regard to be a specialist in the field of art, because the uniqueness, richness and beauty in Rajaa Gharbi's paintings are such that only those who specialize in art criticism can really decode them. Despite the shortcomings I feel I have in this field of criticism; I will not forego my entitlement to express the thoughts that these paintings have inspired me or the ideas that they have evoked in me and which I saw manifested in remarkable harmony with what the poet wrote.

[...] We were dazzled by the celebration of colors; fierce, shrieking, gleaming, piercing, and subtly moving from light to dark to pale. Colors of the rainbow flying open into other colors that birth more colors, regenerate and continue to vary infinitely, [...] Colors that stretch from faint calm to bright radiance, traverse the eye, the soul and emotions with force and fierceness, even with rigorousness that shakes the quietude and jolts emotions to make us experience a world of bewilderment and amazement until we reach what the Sufis call a state of 'ecstasy', as we walk with the painter through the colors to a light that she has spread out, and we scale with her paths of discovery to light, translucent lights that permeate and traverse the colors in a thrilling radiance, the radiance of the creative flame.

As to forms, in Rajaa Gharbi's paintings, the symbolic signifiers multiply as limitlessly as the colors: cosmic, psychological, personal, and mystical/Sufi. Even though she distinctly makes us believe that in each painting and every tableau she is giving us a new style, new forms, and that each painting resembles nothing but itself, we notice common denominators that recur in almost all her paintings [...] The Sufi tendency, manifested in the belief in the unity of existence, as all the elements of the universe, animal, plant, and human beings, are mixed in her paintings.

Rajaa Gharbi's paintings address the senses and the mind, then bypass them, to depict the artist's visions.

I will not review the different connotations of colors in different ancient civilizations, in religions, or in myths, as they are well known and transmitted in specialized books. Rather, I will just point out that the blue is a dominant color in Gharbi's work, suggesting meanings related to the blue of the sea, that is to water as life, and the blue of the sky in its vertical connection to the world above. Green has a special place in many paintings, as it symbolizes the time of plants, the province of beginnings, and its relationship to the

seasonal cycles and rebirth. It is the color of renewal and hope, the color of fertility... Red and its gradation of meanings and close relationship with fire and blood, that is, with the flame of life and its sap. We notice the repetition of spirals in the shape of ovals, birds, eyes, and snakes. We have noticed woman/man blending with the elements of nature, from animals and plants, and from earth and sky. We notice a frequency of the image of a woman in a striking way, we see her with wings, we see her body permeated by a bird, we see her peeking out from behind tomes.

I also do not forget the symbol of the phoenix bird emanating from its ashes with its color of fire. We find in the paintings of Rajaa Gharbi a deep symbolic use of the relationship of color to birds, as she depicted in blue, green, red, and other colors, emotional tendencies, the erotic energy that motivates material life, and the logos, that is, the intellectual life.

Gharbi has a distinct use of Arabic calligraphy that needs in-depth research in this field, as her use of it is completely different from those that have been used artistically by all others. Perhaps this is due to her abstract painting style. Her use of the written letter as an element of beauty and expression is characterized by a wit that amazes us and evokes in our memory what we read in Ibn Khaldun's *al-Muqaddimah* regarding the science of the written letter or semiotics in its relationship with other sciences....

Rajaa Gharbi's paintings address the senses and the mind, then bypass them, to depict the artist's visions, and our attention is drawn to the harmony between the meanings and symbols in her poetry and her use of the written letter as an art medium.

In her abstract paintings there is a continuity and harmony between civilizations.... for example, she has employed Arabic calligraphy to create a beauty that is in harmony with the beauty of contemporary abstract art- in dialogue with Amazigh/Berber-Carthaginian inscriptions or textiles, and revealed a deep, limpid awareness of all the things that surround her that she made speak and with which she converses with ingenuity and depth. They are personal, authentic paintings that resemble no other work but themselves. They are wild, rebellious, astonishing and bespeak a fertile and wondrous imagination that paints beauty with a boldness revealing a bountiful inner world, exuberant with artistic legacies of an ancient civilization as well as forms from contemporary art.

[...] This is Rajaa Gharbi; painter, Tunisian American poet, endowed with multiple talents. Doubtlessly, she is among those Tunisia is proud of among nations.

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