

## **Symbolic and Expressive Connotations of Selections of Graffiti of the Arab Revolution as an Approach to Experimentation in the Field of Painting Teaching**

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### **Abstract:**

*The fine arts are considered as one of the most important arts that express the political life events as one of global changes. Each stage has its intellectual product that generally reflects all kinds of arts creativity and the fine arts particularly. The Arab revolutions contemplator notices the emergence of several graffiti on some walls in Egyptian governorates.*

*Through this research, the researcher observes and analyzes selections of these graffiti that expressed the Arab revolutions in general and the 25<sup>th</sup> January Revolution in particular. The research aims to conclude their symbolic and expressive connotations and preserve their pictures after erasing some of them and employ them based on an innovative artistic vision in the Painting teaching field by using the collage style during an experiment by students at the faculty of Specific Studies, Assiut University.*

*The research aims to enrich the artistic expression in the Painting teaching field through benefiting from the symbolic and expressive connotations of selections of graffiti of the Arab revolutions. The research assumes that it is possible to find out innovated fine-art based solutions in the Painting teaching field through benefiting from graffiti of the Arab revolutions. The researcher has used the descriptive approach "survey technique" in the theoretical fieldwork; the deductive and analytical technique and the experimentation approach in carrying out the students' experiment.*

*The research findings emphasize that the symbolic and expressive connotations of graffiti of the Arab revolutions have helped produce creative pictures in the Painting teaching field in terms of the shape and the configuration. The research recommends the reformation of some graffiti of January 25 revolution by using materials that resist the erosion factors in different areas of Egyptian squares and governorates.*

### **Introduction:**

The world changes that shaped contemporary world are represented in five fundamental variables, namely (knowledge, information, culture, economics and politics) (2006:4, p. 365). All arts are considered the mirror that reflects the nations' circumstances. The fine arts are one of the most important arts that express political life events "in the 1960s the fine arts movement witnessed a flourished period, so critics have called it the fine arts golden stage. This period means the post-July Revolution period. Some believe that the relation of art with political life has not only flourished after July Revolution, but it dates back to 1919 revolution when all Egyptian people got closer for the Egypt renaissance statue by the great sculpture Mahmoud Mukhtar" (15).

There are several lessons that we benefit from the Egyptian revolution and there many messages that these revolutions sent to us. They have a positive role through what we are watching nowadays all over the Arab world such as the spread of revolution spirit against rulers, getting ride of the revolution

youths fear, overcoming the culture to subject to others, having optimistic feeling of a better Arab world where the values of freedom, dignity and social justice prevail. Those revolting youths believe that art should arise from within the soul itself with its interactions and stored unconsciousness. It is linked at the same time with the great political variables. Art is the framework that assimilates their expressive views and liberal styles.

The graffiti have spread with different shapes and sizes all over Egypt. They have initially appeared during the protests against the former president Mohamed Hosni Mubarak. Those existing graffiti on several districts walls of the Egyptian governorates call for peace and civil liberties. Artists have used many drawing styles and methods affiliated to the graffiti which combines the drawing art and direct writing over the different walls surfaces. As such it is able to express the revolution and the revolutionists as every artist expresses the revolution with a different style. This affirms that the graffiti art has creative mechanisms that first appeared during the Egyptian revolution. It confirms as well that this art transfers some expressive symbols into messages related to the Egyptian revolution documentation since its beginning. The drawings shapes have developed and adopt the graffiti in which the fine art language and colour strength are visible. However, these drawings were erased by unknown people, a matter the urges the researcher to observe and study the symbolic and expressive connotations of the graffiti accompanied the Arab revolutions in general and the January 25 revolution in particular. It is considered as a strong political variable in enriching the photographic works of the Specific education students.

### **Statement of the Problem:**

The Arab revolutions that have brought what is called as ‘Arab Spring’ have an active transformational and dynamic appearance. They have awakened from the state of intellectual, economic and social lethargy to that of alertness. As much as the disaster by which the people became victims of tyrannical regimes that stifle free voices; locked windows and doors; and widely unleash corruption, stagnancy and inactivity.

Each stage has its intellectual product that reflects itself on the creativity in all types of arts in general and the fine arts in particular. The contemplator in the Arab revolutions variables can notice n accompanied emerging wave in culture, art, poetry, novel and drawing. Throughout this research, the researcher observes and analyzes those graffiti selections that expressed the Arab revolutions in general and the January 25 revolution in particular. The research aims to conclude their symbolic and expressive connotations and preserve their pictures after erasing some of them and employ them based on a fine-art invented vision in the Painting teaching field by using the collage style through an experiment by the students at the Faculty of Specific Studies, Assiut . Therefore, the research problem can be determined in the following question: How can the study of the symbolic and expressive connotations of the selections of graffiti of the Arab revolutions be used to enrich the photographic works of Specific Education students in Assiut ?

### **Significance of the Research:**

Observing modals whose spread has generally accompanied the Arab revolution and particularly January 25 revolution. The study also indicates their development stages in order to maintain the revolution values within the Egyptian conscience. Revealing the contribution extent of Arab spring revolution in enriching the creative thinking of the Specific education students in the Painting art field.

Developing the cultural awareness of the public and art students of the symbolic and expressive connotations of the graffiti accompanied the Arab revolutions through contemporary aesthetic configurations in the Painting field.

Revealing some varied artistic features of the graffiti and their reflection on the Painting art to emphasize the experimentation importance in the art field and open new horizons for those interested in the field.

**Research Objectives:**

Study and analyze graffiti selections accompanied the Arab revolutions in order to extract their symbolic and expressive connotations after being exposed to damage. Enrich the artistic expression in the Painting teaching field through benefiting from the symbolic and expressive connotations of Arab revolutions accompanied graffiti selections.

**Research Hypotheses:**

Observing and extracting the symbolic and expressive connotations of selections of the Arab revolutions accompanied graffiti through studying and analyzing some of their selections. Creative fine Art solutions can be concluded in the Painting teaching field through benefiting from the symbolic and expressive connotations of graffiti of the Arab revolutions selections.

**Research Method:**

The researcher used the descriptive approach "fieldwork survey technique" and the deductive analysis in order to observe and analyze the Arab revolution accompanied graffiti selections and extract their symbolic and expressive connotations and the experimentation approach in carrying out the students' experiment.

**Limitations of the Study:**

Temporal limitations: the research handles graffiti of the Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Libya, Yemen, and Syria. The study is mainly concerned with the 25<sup>th</sup> January Revolution in Egypt till April 2013.

Spatial limitations: Cairo and some Upper Egypt governorates. Technological limitations: The use of symbolic and expressive connotations of graffiti selections of the Arab revolutions as a basis for carrying out the students' experiment on an intended sample of fourth-year students. The sample consists of 23 students at the faculty of Specific Education, Assiut . The study has used the Bastille materials in handling the photographs expressing the revolution events in creative configurations by the collage Painting technique.

**First: Concepts: The Revolution:**

"Revolution" is one of the terms that accompanied the emergence of the state and the political life since the pre-history. Although the revolution concept that prevailed over other concepts is the people's revolution against colonialism or against the tyrannical regimes, the word "revolution" is a language which is not only restricted to this side only but includes every action that leads to the radical situations changes whether they are political, economic or social. The origin of the word in the Arabic language does not imply political connotation but means radical change that occurs to the thing; it came to mean "heart of the earth" (16).

**Arab Revolutions:**

The West has termed the events occurred in the Arab region starting from Tunisia in the early 2011, then Egypt, and followed in Libya, Bahrain, Yemen and Syria, as the Arab spring. These revolutions attempt to do radical revolutionary changes in the regime structure. The British daily Independent newspaper was the first to use this term which may be related to the revolutions,

which are also known as the European Spring, over the history of the West.

### **Symbolic Connotations:**

Connotation means linguistically a term which is concerned with the issue of meaning in any language (formal, verbal, gesture). It expresses the symbolic communication systems, while the symbol is the relationship that refers to the referred thing (1968:8, P252). It is also gesture or alternative expression of a certain idea moves from a sender to an addressee over a creative production. Then, connotations are understood as coded messages in specific meaningful meanings formed by the creator by using construction words and sent to the addressee who recognizes and deals with it based on common concepts.

Shapes, colors and spaces have their symbolic connotations each which vary according to their different construction and the method in which they are formed. In this concern, Shaker believes that the symbolic analysis of any system should be based on the meanings, connotations and symbols that are connected in the construction characteristics (2001:9, P 383). Ademy also asserts the necessity of symbol existence to express the construction of ideas and meanings which man has and the existence of a content which the symbol expresses (1990:2, P234).

Man may use symbol to express his causes and opinions whether through words or drawing against political principles or though oppression.

As the Irish poet William Pet Yeats "We need a symbol that is the only expression of the conclusion of the invisible truth." (2012:10, P82).

### **Expressive and Symbolic Connotations of the Linear Elements of the Graffiti:**

The linear elements acquire their importance through their contained forms; as the straightforward line refers to strength, loftiness, diversity, and continuity. The upward line refers to joyfulness and ambition while the downward line refers to sadness, refraction. The horizontal line refers to laziness and the vertical refers to balance while the oblique refers to movement, rush and resistance. The broken line refers to sharpness and acceptance. The curved line gives a feeling of tenderness and vitality. This is clarified in figure 1 which depicts a graffiti in the Mansoura governorate which represents one of the revolutionists in the Tahrir Square in front of the Department Complex Building.



Figure (1)

### **Chromatography in Graffiti and Symbolic and Expressive Connotations:**

Colors are one of the important elements that are used to highlight the aesthetic values of the graffiti as they add to them an important role in the visual perception process. They provide signals through which the figure can be understood and its connotations can be interpreted. They also bear symbolic values such as warmth, coldness, heaviness and lightness, quietness and noisy, resentment and closeness, forwardness and backwardness in addition to contrastive colors that provides the opportunity of eye catching, spilt surfaces and rhyme. This is clarified in figure 2 that represents a graffiti accompanying the revolution in Al-Minya Governorate in Egypt.



Figure (2)

### Symbolic and Expressive Connotations used in the Graffiti:

Graffiti contain a set of shapes such as the shape of the Crescent embracing the cross to indicate national unity; an expression of intimacy and love as shown in figure 6. In addition, a fist is a symbol of power and an expression of not surrendering. Sometimes, it expresses oppression as shown in Figure 4 which shows the image the former Libyan leader knocked out, while raising the index and middle expresses victory. The balance figure is used as a symbol of justice as in figure 5. The dove as a symbol of peace and an expression of the pure martyrs' spirit as shown in figure 3 which represents a graffiti in Al- Azhar Square in Assiut governorate. The revolutionary artists have used the features of pharaonic shapes as symbols of the great Egyptian civilization. The have used the ladder element as a symbol for construction and renaissance as shown in figure 7. The beauty of Egypt is symbolized by a deer having a woman's face with pharaonic features and wearing an attire with the events of the Egyptian Revolution drawn on and it is chased by ghost of tyranny, injustice and oppression symbolized by a black animal as shown in figure 8.



Figure (3)



Figure (4)



Figure (5)



Figure (6)



Figure (7)



Figure (8)

### The Aesthetic Values of the Graffiti Associated with the Arab Revolutions:

#### 1 - Simplicity:

Simplicity means that the design elements are characterized by some visual characteristics which facilitate the viewer's identification of them and distinguishing them. Man's mind and nature obey the simplicity law and the outer shape of natural objects is simple as allowed by the existing circumstances; the figure simplification leads to division of vision (1984:14:P 74). The artist may tend to the attempts of modification, deletion and addition, in order to achieve the simplest artistic methods, to avoid the elements accumulation and details fullness which may distort the picture. Therefore, it confuses the realization process to the extent of relying on the abstract style as shown in figure 9. It represents the graffiti exists in Mohamed Mahmoud Street. In a linear treatment, the human elements seem through those linear challenges of the martyrs' faces that appeared in the shape of quite thick black lines. This doubledichotomies treatment help make these

elements prominent at the work forefront and its independence from the white background, although the spread of long-wave red colored areas represents the Egyptian flag. The artist has tended to form the three faces in appropriateness of the white areas position to indicate the loss of sight.



Figure (9)

## 2. Freedom of Expression and Formation:

Since the early days of the Egyptian revolution, the revolutionists have adopted their ancestors' method to document their glorious days through graffiti on the Tahrir Square located in the middle of Cairo. These graffiti are mostly characterized by freedom of expression and expression of freedom as shown in figure 10. We can see an Egyptian flag-colored eagle soaring in the blue sky above Cairo's landmarks as a symbol of freedom. In figure 11 located on the walls of the water purification plant, we can see a blue area with an orange area in the middle where the word freedom is written and divided by a hand as a symbol of youths' strength and vigor, their hope of change and desire of freedom. Figure 12 represents the Tunisian revolution martyrs riding motorbikes struggling to catch the procession. The paintings of people and their moves bear the strong expressive connotations of the youths' dream of freedom. Owing to the Greek philosopher Socrates (339-470 BC) who established the philosophy and discipline of freedom of expression which he made a right that transcends the right to survive. He was contended to lose his life in order to uphold that right in redemption of that freedom that transcends over everything (1985:11: P64). Graffiti are developed in the existence of the intellect and expression freedom as the Arab communities enjoyed the free bold thinking which maximizes the use of symbol with its political and expressive connotations. He artist using his all weapons and tools resentfully attacks the bad situations using the graffiti causing an effective impact that has a positive role in the society's development at all levels and fronts. This is what happened after the January 25 revolution with its expressive kick-starts that refer to freedom of expression.



Figure (10)



Figure (11)



Figure (12)

## 3. Diversity of Surfaces and Materials:

The nature of graffiti surfaces differ according to the type of building, design and function. The one surface may have diverse levels or there is an exit of columns out of the wall surface or a stonebuilt wall which achieves the rhyme, diversity and discrepancy as shown in figure 13.

There are different types of walls: brick, cement, lime, wood, or metal, as in figure 14. The diversity of wall leads to various touches "which affect our reactions to the figure; contrasted touch surfaces have the ability

to stimulate the aesthetic response in terms of attraction and repulsion” (1963:13, p121). This entails the use of more drawing technologies such as spraying, coloring, painting, pasting, drilling or print mimeographed as shown in Figure 15. It represents graffiti from Tunisia which contains Latin letters writing calling for the departure of the former President where the artist has used a group of different colors through the spraying method on the wall. The figure depicts one of the revolutionists appears as a black area where he kicks a picture of the former President.

As for materials, every artist chooses the appropriate material and tool to accomplish his graffiti drawings on the wall as some of them use manual spray as shown in figure 16. There are certain covers to control the area of spry and the shape of the spry spot. Others use graffiti markers. Some use tins full of doco colors or plastic that have a strong spongy called Graffiti Mop as shown in figure 16.



Figure (13)



Figure (14)



Figure (15)



Figure (16)

### Functions and Character of the Graffiti:

The graffiti are associated in the old ages with drawing and carving on walls by using sharp tools, charcoal or chalks. Since the primitive man could carve on the caves walls and rocks, this was but an expression of the beliefs of his society, traditions and rituals. That expression was a signal of identity and nationality (2008:7:P35). At the renaissance age, the work started to design palaces, halls with huge drawings and graffiti “the wall Painting art is considered one of the arts that help an individual to be associated to the group to which he affiliated and to the society without being isolated from the outside world. He is a main part of the material environment surrounding the society members through which there is a continued communication among the members of that environment and the artistic work itself. This is what makes the graffiti one of the most prominent arts that are used as a means of concepts and ideas transfer and contribute to elevate the artistic and cultural level of the audience. In addition, the ability of wall Painting can register

events whether political, social, cultural, artistic or military. The artist can transfer through the graffiti the culture, behaviour, content and philosophy that express the environment and its surrounding society (1980:6, P22).

The characteristics of the graffiti are determined through the cultural background of the artist's society. It arises from its civilization, social, political and religious circumstances. They reflect these circumstances through the work content which acquires its artistic formulations related to the environment reality. These works are done based on the society culture and at the same time are oriented to it and addressed to it so as the cultural communication process can be carried out which is the main essence of the creative process without which it will not be complete. It will not be complete without three pillars. First the culture of the creative artist, followed by the culture of the work per se on the one hand and the culture of the spectator on the other hand (2008:12, P45).

The Arab revolution accompanied graffiti (graffiti art) which accompanied the January 25 revolution events. It is considered as one of the most important mass media note and as a historic, Figure (15) Figure (16) cultural and artistic documentation along with the eruption of the Arab Spring revolutions. "In the European languages, the word graffiti refers to any drawing or carving on the walls which range from a simple carving and a complex artist painting". The name becomes common in the Arabic language to refer to the graffiti, then it is termed as painting mural (1979:5: P 226).

### **The Art of Graffiti: its Identity and Origin: (2013:1, pp 97-103):**

It is known as the art which combines drawing and writing since the oldest historic ages. At the civilizations of the pre-history age drawings on the rock surfaces and the herbal huts when the old primitive man drew directly on them in themes expressed his hopes, ambitions and fears. Those drawings contained some symbols which have intellectual and belief connotations. In doing them, he used the direct drilling method that was known as the rock drawings or the Sumerian inscriptions in the country of Mesopotamia. The art combined drawing and writing on the architect surface developed in different civilizations arts. The existence of formed symbols of some clauses has great importance equal to that of elements which come together. The best evidence is the pharaonic art that brought graffiti which have natural elements exist in the daily life as they are or concise transformation combined together to give an expression of some texts and different contexts.

In Islamic art writing initially outperformed the drawing because of the thought of belief and the prohibition of drawing objects. It, then, outweighs the art of painting on the letter formation in the art of manuscripts, and shrines. The graffiti on the people houses rooftops on the occasion of the pilgrimage are considered as extension of this art, which blended the art of drawing and writing. In our art collection of modern and contemporary expressions between Fine drawing and writing in many mural works, and the form of the many different kinds of known and creative calligraphy are some of the elements of the objects and some aspects of the nature of the mural paintings on the roofs of interfaces for some official and private establishments.

The word "graffiti" is derived from the Italian word "gerafiato." It consists of two syllables (graph) which means drawing and this kind of art is closely linked to architecture. It impressively spread all over the world after its early emergence was due to its known style in Paris in the mid of the last century. From there it spread to Germany, Spain, then, North and South Americas. New York City is considered as one of the most important centers for graffiti art in the world. It has become as one of the most important fine arts. For which various competition and studies are held and some museums are allocated for it such as the Five Points.

**Students' Experiment:**

Through the previous display which indicates the symbolic and expressive connotations implicit in the graffiti of the Arab revolutions in general and the January 25 revolution in particular, the researcher has adopted the following approaches to benefit from the early-mentioned review:

- Using photographs and employing the collage technique on the surface works of some students' artistic works. In which there is an employment of the symbolic connotation of the hand victory sign as shown in the figures no. 17 and 18. He has used as well the revolutionists' face cry to indicated challenge and resistance as shown in the figure 19. The sample individuals have used the fortlage technology to make different effects on the work surface. The sides of some newspapers and pictures are burnt to express the truthfulness and content of the revolution current events as shown in figure 20.

- Some works have expressed the national unity by employing the symbolic connotation of the cross and the crescent that gather one spirit and one country. This asserts the symbolic connotation of the color that expressed the glorious Egyptian flag as shown in the figures 21, 22 and 23.



Figure (17)



Figure (18)



Figure (19)



Figure (20)



Figure (21)

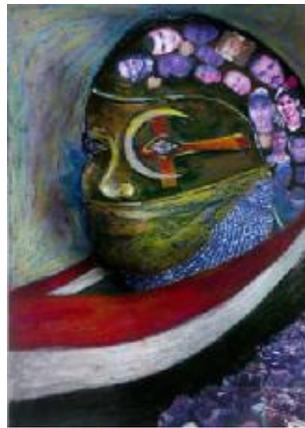


Figure (22)



Figure (23)

### Employment of the Aesthesis of Handwriting with the Drawings Used in the Graffiti in Innovative Ways:

The following figures show the attempt to employ the word "Egypt" in an aesthetic innovative vision. In figure 26 the Arabic letter (S) was employed to draw at the forefront of the work the shape of number 26 to indicate that Egypt has great heart that accommodates all. In addition, the finger movement symbolic connotation that refers to victory. In figure 25, the Egypt was written in the shape of the revolution martyrs pictures while it was shackled at the top of the work in a connotation of the escalation of the martyrs' spirits. At the bottom of the work's forefront, there is a drawing of a martyr whose eye is covered by the Egyptian flag. In figure 24, the letters of the word Egypt included symbols. The Arabic letter (m) stands for sadness over the martyrs in which there is a picture of a girl crying for the death of the martyr where the Egyptian flag is launched to link other letters of the word Egypt. In addition, the Arabic (s) represents the eye shape to symbolize the revolutionists' alertness and their awareness of the current events. The Arabic letter (r) was shaped as an abstract person wearing the Egyptian flag. These works indicate the research sample is affected by the revolution accompanied graffiti that contained the drawing and writing together in the shape.



Figure (24)



Figure (25)



Figure (26)

In figure 27, there are fine art solutions for the English number 25 which is formed through the Egyptian flag into the space of the artistic work. The underlying power of handwriting was used express the freedom that characterizes the revolutionary young people in different Arab countries.

- Some works expressed justice by employing the symbolic connotation in the shape of balance as shown in figure 28, where a tyrant face is used to weigh matters in one in a dialogue with another face laid in pain on the earth because of the severe injustice and suppression. It is one of the figures that express the reasons behind the eruption of Arab revolution. That is, the rulers' injustice against their people.



Figure (27)



Figure (28)



Figure (29)

### - The Employment of Place as a Symbol of the Egyptian Revolution:

Figure 29 uses Tahrir Square as symbol of the Egyptian Revolution. Therefore, the place has become a symbolic connotation of the artistic works produced by the students' experiment as a magnifying glass is used through which we can see the scene of the square that surrounds the Egyptian flag in front of which people from different countries are standing to witness the creativity of the Egyptian revolution.



Figure (30)

### - Works that Carry Expressive Connotations:

In figure (30) in one third of the work at the bottom the artist used a box from which a revolutionist comes out to express the breakthrough and penetration of the box of fear in which the Egyptian people have been indulged for the last years. At the bottom of the work, there is a scene of joy over the victory of the Egyptian revolution.

In figure (31) there are two hands embracing the scene of the victory of the Egyptian revolution. It is an expressive connotation that indicates the extent of the Egyptian people's belief of the revolution. The memory of the Egyptian people always maintains the martyr picture that is expressed through a profile face standing behind the two hands. Figure (32) asserts that the martyr soul always soars in the sky. It is symbolized by a dove which is the symbol of peace as well since peace is the martyrs' demand. The martyr is formed wearing the Egyptian flag in the middle of a circle that symbolized the Tahrir Square. Figure (33) expresses a child martyr above his head there is a banner on which the words of (freedom, justice, and security) are written. The child holds his hands over his face



Figure (31)



Figure (32)



Figure (33)

**Research Findings:**

1. Employing the symbolic and expressive connotations of the graffiti in the Painting teaching field has helped to produce creative configurations in terms of shape and design as shown in the previous figures.
2. The graffiti are considered are one of the most important requirements for intellectual renaissance and spread the revolution culture among all classes of the Egyptian people and Arab people.
3. The Arab Spring revolution with their formal and expressive characteristics to highlight the aesthetic and artistic values of the artistic works produced by the students' experiment.
4. The use of the collage and forrage techniques have in the Painting teaching field several fine art data which have considerable effect on the creative aspects in the field of artistic expression of the students under study.
5. The research sample have benefited from some expressive symbols to fine art messages that documented the Egyptian revolution events.

**Research Recommendations:**

1. Decorating the squares with the artistic woks that carry the connotation of Arab Spring revolutions, so as to keep the revolution values alive in the conscience of every Egyptian and Arab.
2. Holding domestic and international exhibitions that reflect the formal and symbolic features of the Arab Spring revolutions.
3. Organizing visits to martyrs families and an attempt to create artistic works inspired from the martyrs environment.
4. Allocate places for the art of graffiti in every governorate to give a room for free expression without damaging any of the walls of the private or public institutions of the state.
5. Reforming some graffiti of the January 25 revolution by using materials that can resist the erosion factors in different squares and governorates of Egypt.

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