

My interest since childhood was with poetry and movies, and looking back at the dark and sometimes damp movie-houses of Beirut, I remember looking avidly at newsreels and some documentaries called, in French, "chasseur d'images". Chasing images. I wanted to be one day a "chaser of images", but I had started with poetry, and the images that words can create.

Many things mattered: to study was to search for land that poets chartered. To travel was to look for the colors of the sea, for cloud formations seen through airplanes, to discover expanses of ocean and coastlines.

I expressed myself in French, first, as French was taught exclusively in the schools of Lebanon, for the children of my generation. Then, in America, I came to love the adventurous quality of the English language and wrote in English. But something in me remained alienated and the tremendous body of writings in Arabic, throughout the centuries, remained closed to me, like a forbidden paradise.

I knocked at the door of that paradise, sometimes, rarely, in deciphering modern Arabic poetry. That endeavor corresponded to my encounter with the head of the Art Department of the Dominican College in San Rafael, where I was teaching philosophy. Ann O'Hanlon convinced me that there was no use teaching philosophy of art without knowing how works of art come into being. I was fascinated with paintings. I tried, and discovered that not only I wanted to paint but that painting, in some way, stitched together what had been torn in me: it unified my inner being, it became the coming together of all the pieces of my experience, of my identity. One day I said aloud to myself: I am painting in Arabic!

Since 1963, when I discovered the long folded Japanese "books", accordion-like papers, I decided to do also painted manuscripts. I wrote contemporary Arabic poetry (and some of my own poetry translated into Arabic), with water colors, inks, in the contemporary spirit.

My purpose is to consider these painted manuscripts as contemporary Arabic calligraphy: the very opposite of the extraordinarily and beautiful and formalized ancient calligraphies. I wanted the imperfection of my script, of my handwriting, to be a kind of visual reading of the text. The drawings which go with them, too. So that when somebody looks at these painted manuscripts, the person in question reads the text and reads also my own reading of the text, made visual. It is a way to present to the viewer the interaction of two sensitivities: the one of the poet, and the one of the painter who paints the poem.

An artist is in permanent dialogue: with his/her environment, physical as well as cultural, with his/her fellow artists, with his/her own self. Our works are the equivalences of our lives.

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