
An Experimental Analysis of Alia Al-Farsi's Artworks

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Abstract

Depicting the human form in modern arts has changed based on the aesthetic object of a fixed point to an active field of social and cultural expression. This study aimed to analyze this change in the modern Arab art using an experimental approach of studying the works of an Omani artist Alia Al-Farsi. The study in particular focused on the influence of incorporating traditional Omani Farsi in coins and textiles into modern artistic practices and spiritual concepts of the Sufi tradition to create a multifaceted identity, femininity and historical continuity. The studio experimentation method was adopted as a qualitative and practice-based methodology. The analysis of artworks through the theoretical frameworks of Visual Discourse Theory and the principles of semiotic analysis helped to interpret images as sophisticated visual texts, whereas the practical experience in working with mixed media (gesso and acrylics) helped to perceive materiality. The results showed that Al-Farsi converted the human body into a human communicative machine, in which individual spiritual experiences are interpreted into more social discourses. This practice transformed the canvas into a cultural negotiating platform and identity creation in the global environment. In future, comparison of regional artists and how digital media can be used to further develop discourse of human body in contemporary art needs to be further investigated by future studies.

Keywords: Feminine Iconography, Omani Identity, Visual Discourse, Mixed-Media Expressionism, Modern Arab Art, Alia Al-Farsi.

1. Introduction

The image of the human body in modern art has radically changed regarding its conceptual let go of a purely aesthetic object, leaving the multidimensional locus of meaning and discourse (Al Saadi, 2024; Reade, 2000). Historically, the body was represented as a perfect thing, harmonious, balanced, and correct in terms of anatomy, which was a symbol of beauty and perfection of the classical artistic traditions. But in the modern artistic landscape, the body has become a moving medium by which artists question the identity, power formations, cultural discourses and technological forces (Al-Ajmi, 2017; Elmahi, 2001). This change is part of a bigger trend by which art has moved away towards formalism and towards critical and conceptualism, in which the body ceases to be a passive thing but instead becomes an actor in the process of meaning-making (Choudhury, 2015). Theoretical approaches which are predominantly informed by Foucault (1978/1990) place stress on the body as a site which is formed by the socio-political and institutional forces. Modern figurative practices do not distinguish the personal self and the image seen, but rather

the body functions as the object and articulates itself. The bodily aspect that presents a visceral, embodied reality to the viewers that gets between representation and lived experience (Elmahi, 2001; Feldman, 1998). Here, the body gets fluid, fragmented or reconstituted- reflecting the issues and vulnerability of the contemporary world. Instead of acting as an inert object, it is a dynamic and changing object, in accordance with the changing cultural and ideological circumstances.

This has brought a drastic change in the representation of art history. The body is no longer bound to the conventional forms of representation but is redefined as a discursive aspect embedded in social, political and cultural settings (Farhan Obed & Fauzi Sedon, 2025). The body is being used by contemporary artists to raise important questions concerning gender, race, biopolitics and technological integration and as such, its use is no longer just a visual depiction but also a way of asking questions (Feldman, 1998). Consequently, the body turns into the disputed and interpretive space, in which the identities are negotiated, the relations of power are questioned, and the historical narratives are re-evaluated.

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This study is focused on experimental research on how Al Farsi is employing the concept of feminine iconography to address the regional and global prejudice. Her characters, often characterized by meditative stares and religious quietness, are a Sufi ideal. The emphasis of visual discourse is not on the material physical appearance of a portrait, but the spiritual status. It is important because an image is powered by the discursive construction, or its relation to general social constructs like religion, gender, and nationalism (Elmahi, 2001). This can be found in the work of Alia Al Farsi, who has put the personal experience of spirituality into a large-scale visual argument.

This study is significant because it discussed the shifting role played by the human body in modern Omani art by examining the works of Alia Al-Farsi. It helped in the realization of the fact that the local cultural identity, spiritual philosophy and global artistic practices were all incorporated into one visual system. The focus of the study gave a discursive and semiotic reading of the body as a means of communication, especially in the context of gender, identity and cultural representation by passing beyond the conventional interpretation of iconography. Another critical aspect that was noted was the value of mixed media and abstract symbolism in revising artistic stories in the Arab art scene.

This study demonstrated that the works of Al Farsi can be considered dynamic, examined her portfolio through an experimental approach (Foucault, 1990). The specifics of scale, between the smallest pieces of a palm size and gigantic works painted on the walls, make Al Farsi a key element of an art narrative of the modern Omani world, turned into a significant part of the art history of the world (Feldman, 1998). To determine the meaning of the Al Farsi visual choices as a discursive practice and influence on the viewer regarding the contemporary Arabic identity, this study adopted an experiment on her portfolio. In short, Visual Discourse Theory is the most appropriate tool that I can use in my research because it does not consider the art created by Alia Al Farsi to be a decoration but a discourse (Foucault, 2019).

The gap addressed in this study was the limited academic interest in experimental and non-descriptive studies of modern Omani artists, specifically the conceptual application of the human body. Earlier research tended to focus on aesthetic or cultural representations in massive amounts without paying attention to the body as a point of active discourse (Choudhury, 2015; Elmahi, 2001; Foucault, 2019; Hussein, 2020). Also, there was a

disconnect in the knowledge of how such artists as Al-Farsi used interdisciplinary strategies and blended the use of tradition and modernity (Al-Ajmi, 2017; Albers, 2013). This study fulfilled these gaps by focusing on how Al Farsi works rendered the body into a dynamic, interpretive, and culturally encoded process.

The objective of this study was to experimentally analyze the Alia Al-Farsi's artworks to determine how the human body functions as a medium of visual discourse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Alia Al-Farsi's Style as a Model*

The Alia Al-Farsi works used within the framework of this demonstration are a strong example of how one can study the collision of tradition and modern artistic discourse (Kelehear, 2008). The artistic practice of al-Farsi can serve as an example of the combination of both the local cultural heritage and the global artistic approaches, and the development of a specific artistic language that answers no standard questions. Her work took a step beyond what is offered by representation and indulged in richer philosophical and spiritual realms, especially due to the impact of Sufi philosophy, as well as abstract expressionism (Messersmith, 2018). Using varying elements of materials like Omani artefacts, fabrics and literary elements, she creates layers of compositions that can be interpreted both physically and aesthetically. The role played by the body in art is redefined by al-Farsi as a symbolic and emotional body instead of a physical body. Her characters tend to be reflective, strong, and profound in character, as well as capture the multiplicities of identity in the modern Omani society (Peak et al., 2023). With her mixed media and abstract symbolism, she reconstructs the body into a culture of dialogue, with a junction of personal and group histories as shown in Figure 01. This work of art is applied in relation to modern theorizing views of the body as a means of communication, and not as a rigid image.

Moreover, the work by Al-Farsi is opposing to the conventional iconographic interpretations, where the focus was on non-descriptive and interpretive modes of reading. The compositions she has done provoke the audience to have a metaphorical psychological journey that goes beyond the superficial aesthetics of the piece of art to search deeper meaning within it (Reade, 2000). The given experimental aspect makes her practice especially interesting in terms of academic studies because it touches



Figure 1. Alia Al-Farsi's Artworks; Source, (Alarabi, 2026)

upon the distance between local artistic traditions and the world of the contemporary art practices (Subramaniam et al., 2016). What makes the study of the Alia Al-Farsi artwork significant here is that the classic portraiture is more than the depiction of the figure itself, and it uses this figure as a tool of cultural and spiritual projection. In this study, the authors discussed how the mixed media and the Sufi-inspired movement utilized by Al-Farsi render the presented body discursive in bringing to reality the complexities of the modern Omani woman's experience via a non-descriptive reading approach (Venable, 1998). The main subject of deconstruction of the human body into spiritual archetypes is her experimental works that are dedicated to such problems as women, identity, Sufism, etc. The inversion of conventional painting by Al-Farsi involves the integration of weird things, such as French

poetry, Omani antiques, and Cambodian fabrics as also shown in Figure 2 (Yang, 1998). In order to demonstrate that the Al-Farsi technical innovation belongs to a bigger narrative of identity and transformation in the Sultanate, one of the brightest examples is analyzed against the backdrop of the current work, which is viewed as the dynamic image of people placed in the context of the architectural domain (Armstrong, 2000). This is an abstract artwork. The glaring Omani designs in the windows and doors will be in addition to the various ornamentation that has historical continuity. In order to strengthen identity of Omanis across generations, various generations of representatives across different ages between grandparents and their parents and finally, children have also been publicized (Martinez et al., 2002).



Figure 2. Alia Al-Farsi's Artworks; Source, (Alarabi, 2026)

The technical performance in the work considered employs a multi-layered technique of Mixed-Media Expressionism to start with intentionally applied Gesso

in an attempt to create a topography in high-relief (Virgi, 2017). The cultural motives, which Ali Al-Farsi applies, use faded textures that are being supplemented with the

structural background of the picture, which provides actual past (Virgi, 2017). Depending on the desired rich impasto effect and depth, various rollers, brushes and palette knives are then used to apply details onto the acrylic paints applied. It is under this experimental method that Omani identity can be more explored in a contemporary and abstract view (Venable, 1998). The finished piece implies an association between the materiality of paint and scientific knowledge of an artist.

3. Methodology

3.1 Study Design

This study adopted the studio practice research (SPR) approach through a qualitative, practice-based research design (Morgner, 2016). The study design incorporated a threefold structure comprised of critical self-reflection, studio experimentation, and contextual review that was insufficient to guarantee comprehensive study of the visual, cultural and symbolic aspects.

3.2 Data Collection

The data was gathered by the use of combined sources such as visual analysis of the selected objects (artwork), practical work in the studio where mixed media were involved (textiles, found objects, and symbolic material), and documented responses to the criticism sessions with supervisors, lecturers, and colleagues (Sjöholm, 2013). These sources were also informative both in terms of primary (studio outputs and observations) and secondary (artworks and literature) data.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data was conducted by applying the art criticism for analysis, interpretation, and judgment integration to figure out the symbols, material meanings, and cultural narratives in the works of arts with the use of the visual discourse and the semiotic analysis. Also, the critical evaluation of the creative process of the researcher was done based on reflective practise and repetitive feedback about interpretations were made through contextual reviews. Such a combined approach to the methodology allowed having a systematic and experimental perception of the Al-Farsi work as a multi-dimensional visual discourse.

3.4 Studio-Based Experimental Workflow

The Studio-Based Experimental Workflow, as depicted in Figure 3, is a systematic and iterative

methodology for practice-led research in the analysis of Alia Al-Farsi's artworks. The Figure illustrates the structured process of an experimental approach to creating an artistic piece through the use of a studio-based process for creating the conceptual piece of digital art. The process commences with Stage 1: Cropping, where the elements are separated from the images through motion, location, and color with the help of Adobe Photoshop. The elements are then arranged to create a comprehensive digital draft related to the concepts of identity and society in Stage 2: Final Digital Composition. Stage 3: Color & Composition Testing involves the use of acrylic paint and ink on canvas to test the composition, colors, and techniques used in the piece. In Stage 4: Sketches & Feedback, the composition is refined according to the sketches made. Stage 5: Material Development involves the application of gesso to create texture on the canvas, followed by the application of colors. Stage 6: Final Execution involves the integration of texture and colors through the use of mixed media to create the final piece, measuring 100 x 120 cm.

4. Results and Discussion

4.0 Visual Discourse and Semiotic Analysis of Alia Al-Farsi's Artworks

It is a strong communicational tool, the painting by Alia Al-Farsi is a canvas serving as a communicational space that is not confined to artistic expression only. Examine each work as a visual text with social repercussions to evaluate her work experimentally. According to Albers (2013), visual discourse analysis is an approach that analyzes the creation of the world-views of images and therefore uses them as effective practical tools to help their social and cultural progress (Albers, 2013). This concept is reflected in the work of Al Farsi in the Semiotic Layering; her use of the traditional Omani motives and textures can be taken as a set of symbols to articulate an imbued history. It is important to note that the gaze is subjective; rendering people (primarily the women) in meditative or spiritual poses, she wants the observer of the image to pay attention to the inner dialogue of the subject, but not its exterior appearance. The Storytelling of Materiality: The tactile discourse that she explores in her practice defies the nexus of modernity and tradition and employs mixed media, such as textile and found objects (Armstrong, 2000). The creative process of Al Farsi is a so called multimodal discourse. Her work is an experimental combination of various media such as French poetry, Sufi-related portraits, Cambodian cloths, and old Omanis coins as shown in

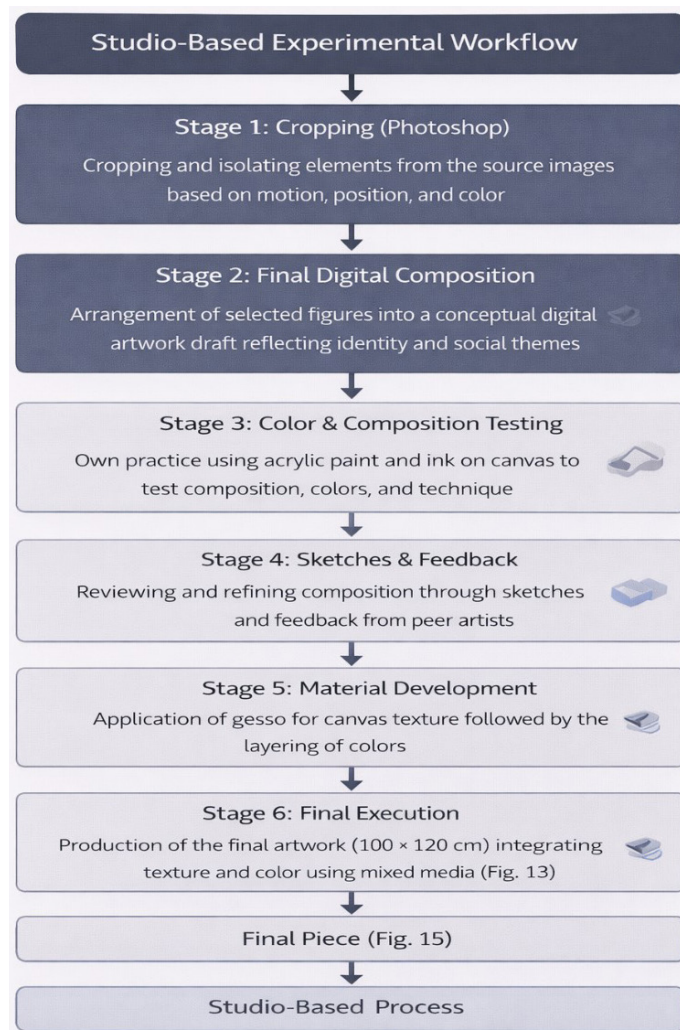


Figure 3: Studio-based Experimental Workflow

Figure 4. This eclecticism is in line with the principles of Semiotic Resources, with which every material selection acts as a signifier. In her attempts to integrate a 100-year-

old textile into a modern image, Al Farsi is involved in a discussion about the issue of preserving the Omani identity in the globalization era (Al-Ajmi, 2017).



Figure 4. Sachin Sagare, Radiances of Rituals, 80cm x 80cm, 2024, Acrylic on Canvas; Source, (Artfute, 2026)

In her work, a modern Indian artist, Sachin Sagare, pays attention to the power, beauty, and versatility of the Indian women of the rural population (Kelehear, 2008). Having been born in 1981 in a Maharashtra village of Pandharpur, the artistic perspective of Sagare was largely impacted by the hardworking women he saw at a tender age, who he believes are the foundation of the morals and culture of the society (Farhan Obed & Fauzi Sedon, 2025). To make a kind of tactile discourse on canvas, he usually applies the palette knife instead of painting on fine lines, amassing, and thick layers with earthlike colors such as reds, bright yellows, and dark blues. Such methods are the distinguishing ones in his works (Messersmith, 2018). Sagare manages to bring his subjects out of the realm of beautiful objects into spiritual archetypes that bring the gap between the old legacy and the new expressive methods by consistently portraying female forms in flower motifs to indicate the natural beauty and fertility.

4.1 The contextualization of Said Al-Alawi

The contextualization of Said Al-Alawi to

the modern art movement in Oman is that the writer of Oman evidently upholds the Omani identity by balancing between expressionism and realism as shown in Figure 5. Born in 1986 in Sur to the family of al-Alawi, the artist started to work on artistic production in 1986 and developed a sophisticated style that dwells on the Omani heritage, traditional landscape, and maritime history (Morgner, 2016). His technical diversity is spectacular as regards his use of oil and acrylic paint and very frequently on untraditional surfaces, like old wooden doors, windows and conventional chests of the Mandous type, to create an impression of continuity with the past. Being an active participant of the Omani Society of Fine Arts since 1993, Al-Alawi communicates not only with the audience nationally but also internationally, using the symbols of the culture as the ornate pieces of jewelry (so-called Huliyah) and traditional dances (Peak et al., 2023). His philosophical approach to art which enables the artist to change organic material into meaningful visual accounts is a child-like spontaneity which hides the underlying depths of analysis.



Figure. 5. Said Al-Alawi, *Omani woman*, 2025 Acrylic on Canvas; Source, (Alwatan, 2026)

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material into meaningful visual accounts is a child-like spontaneity which hides the underlying depths of analysis.

4.2 Studio-Based Material and Technique

To ensure methodological rigor in this studio-based investigation, a series of material and technique experiments were conducted to assess their implications on texture, depth of color, and overall material usage in terms of their compositional potential. Each experiment was methodologically assessed according to its visual and material outcome, which provided a platform for informed decision-making in the final artwork development process. The outcome of these experiments is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Studio-Based Material and Technique; Source (Author)

Experiment	Materials Used	Application Technique	Visual Outcome	Technical Outcome	Decision
Test 1	Acrylic paint + ink	Brush sketching on canvas	Initial compositional layout with visible figure placement	Limited texture depth and weak layering	Modified
Test 2	Digital composition (Photoshop)	Cropping and arrangement of figures	Balanced composition with clear conceptual direction	Strong structural organization	Adopted
Test 3	Gesso base layer	Random brush application	Textured surface foundation with rough density	High adhesion and durability	Adopted
Test 4	Acrylic paint layers	Brush + roller blending	Rich color transitions and tonal variation	Improved depth and visual cohesion	Adopted
Test 5	Palette knife + rollers	Scraping and rolling techniques	Dynamic texture and expressive surface quality	Strong surface consistency	Adopted
Test 6	Smudging technique	Hand blending and soft tools	Smooth transitions between forms and background	Enhanced visual continuity	Adopted
Test 7	Mixed layering (gesso + acrylic)	Multi-layer application	Integration of body and architectural elements	High durability and compositional balance	Final Method

The experimental process, as presented in Table 1, indicates a clear progression from initial compositional experiments to refined material applications. The initial experiments highlighted issues with material textures and depth, which led to a refinement in technique. The use of gesso layering, blending with acrylics, and using a palette knife resulted in a significant refinement in material stability and depth, which directly influenced the final artwork development process in terms of its conceptualization and

materialization.

4.3 Studio Investigation

The social and lifestyle change of the young Omani women has seriously altered the culture of the Sultanate of Oman (Reade, 2000). This study indicated that the art of Alia Al Farsi is an essential visual language, which registers and examines such changes. Through a case study that employs an experimental approach, the

study examined how the way Alia Al Farsi painted her capture the interaction by Omani women about their daily interactions with culture.

4.4 Visual Documentation of Studio Process

As a means of maintaining transparency and methodological accuracy, the experimentation that took

place in the studio has been systematically recorded through a visual documentation of the sequential process. The images that follow highlight some of the key aspects of the compositional development process. It has been beginning with gathering visual information as shown in Figure 6, of Omani women in order to choose the element that can be developed during the construction of the composition.



Figure 6. Data collection of Omani women wearing traditional clothes; Source, (Pinterest, 2026)

4.4 Development of Artwork

4.4.1 Cropping (Photoshop)

The first step is to cut the objects in both the above

pictures using the Photoshop program where they are applicable to my study because of their motion, position and color. (Figure. 7).



Figure 7. Crop the selected elements from different images using Photoshop

4.4.2 Final Digital Composition

With the help of these sources, able to explore the Expressive Tactility of Sagare and the Cultural Depth of Al-Farsi. By interpreting these pictures, I managed to create the final art work that employs human body as the standpoint to the issues of identity and modern social

matters. (Figure. 8).

4.4.3 Color and composition testing

Own practice was done firstly in acrylic paint and ink on canvas to study the composition, colors and technique. (Figure 9).



Figure 8. Final digital composition



Figure 9. Experimentation with technique, composition and color studies

4.4.4 Sketches and feedback

Two artists were invited to review the final composition and figures arrangement based on the studio inquiry approach that was adopted in this study as I reached some decisions on the color scheme and the placement of the figures. I made additional sketches in order to enhance the final color studies and composition. (Figure 10).

Randomly applied the gesso to the canvas in order to make the canvas textured and dense was the first step before commencing with the colors, as shown in Figure 11 and in Figure 12 with colors.

4.4.5 Material Development

After the gesso dried, I applied layers of colors randomly as shown in Figure 13.



Figure 10. Final studies and sketches



Figure 11: First layer by gesso

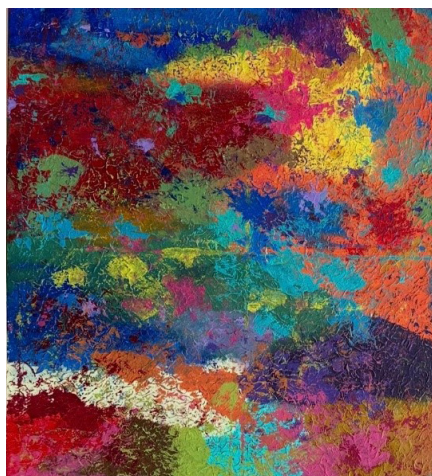


Figure 12. Layer with color

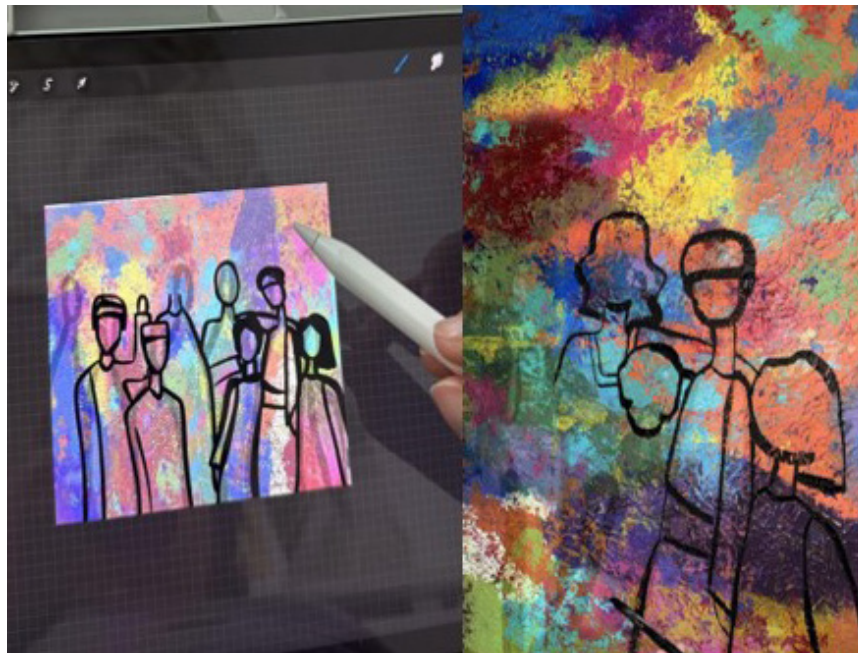


Figure 13. Character portrayal

4.4.6 Final Execution

The first option was to sketch on iPad the shapes of the things I wanted and move them to the canvas. To

generate texture, I utilized rollers of various diameters and color palette knives of various sizes as shown in Figure 14.



Figure 14

4.4.7 Final Piece

The final piece is infused with a visual conversation between body and site through a series of abstract figures with succinct features, woven through an architectural environment, full of colours, and textures, as shown in Figure 15 in a colorful image.

After applying one layer of the colors, I applied a second layer and blended with the assistance of a roller. I used the smudging technique also. It is practically used in this art work through the embodied visual discourse theory that perceives a human body as a dynamic instrument and visual channel of conveying cultural identity and collective memory as opposed to being a fixed aesthetic



Figure 15

form (Subramaniam et al., 2016). I attempted to portray the body in this work using the conceptual search of Alia Al-Farsi and the tactile style of Sachin Sagari by trying to make the body interact with the heritage and architecture that surrounds it. This has been done through the use of. With the help of layers of gesso and acrylic, “Tactile Discourse” transforms the surface of the work into a negotiation place of the individual self and the cultural history of Oman, and finally employs the body as a center of studies of the contemporary spiritual and societal ideals (Virgi, 2017).

The interpretation of the artworks by Al-Farsi using the Visual Discourse Theory presented them as visual texts inscribed in layers of meaning instead of creating aesthetical items (Albers, 2013). Semiotic overlay, subjective gaze, and multi-modal material, like traditional textiles and this and that antique coin, made her see how the cultural tradition could get its continuation and new interpretation in the globalized environment. Moreover, the multifaceted approach of the methodological perspective (that is, the tripartite one) with the inclusion of the critical self-reflection, the studio experimentation, and the reviews of the context allowed a broad perception of the conceptual and material aspects of her work (Armstrong,

2000). Finally, the paper determined that the work by Al-Farsi introduced the personal and spiritual experiences to the larger social discourse that made much contribution to the current art in Oman and placed it in the global artistic discourse.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown how the image of a human body has changed in modern art in the form of a motion picture, an interactive and social cultural communication tool, instead of a formal aesthetic object. The experimental example of the analysis of the works of Alia Al-Farsi allowed seeing the body as a critical location where tradition and modernity were coming into contact with each other. Her abstract trainings were frequently flowing and torn away, as they were characteristic of the shifting nature of identity, in the twenty-first century which arose with transformation and loss taking a back seat. The breaking down of boundaries between the inner and the outside world placed the body as a constructive source of meaning, in a position that could express complicated relations between spirituality and technology, as well as a relation to cultural identity.

5.1 Strengths and Limitations

One of the main advantages of this research was the fact that its structure was based on practice and in an experimental form and this approach incorporated the theoretical analysis of the study along with experiments in the studio. This made it possible to explore more deeply into the materiality and processes behind the works of Al-Farsi, and not interpret the works in a purely descriptive or iconographic manner. The combination of the Visual Discourse Theory with the semiotic analysis also enhanced the study through offering a solid framework in the interpretation of complicated visual and cultural meanings. Also, inclusion of contextual reviews in form of critique sessions has improved the credibility and reflexivity of the findings.

Nevertheless, the study also experienced some weaknesses. Visual interpretation and self-reflection could have affected the analysis and, therefore, made it less objective. The emphasis on one artist, who is Alia Al-Farsi, limited the extrapolation of the findings into the Omani or Arab art scene in general. In addition, the use of studio-based experimentation implied that the results were subject to the personal skills and viewpoint of the scientist that might not accurately recreate the initial intentions of the artist.

5.2 Future Considerations

To allow understanding of the trends and discourses of contemporary art in the region in a wider way, future studies must go beyond one case study and involve comparative studies of several contemporary examples of Omani or Arab artists. The addition of audience reception studies can also bring to the visual discourse analysis another dimension on how the viewers interpret and interact with such works. Moreover, research could be conducted in future on the role of digital media and technological integration in redefining the representations of the human body in contemporary art. Lastly, interdisciplinary methods that include art theory and sociology, anthropology, or digital humanities would further enrich the discussion on the ways cultural identity and globalization are negotiated in the arts.

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