Living Between Two Worlds: Conflict, Investigation And The Change

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LIVING BETWEEN TWO WORLDS:
CONFLICT, INVESTIGATION AND THE CHANGE

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the School of Visual Arts and Design in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

Spring Term 2013
ABSTRACT

Beginning with my exploration of art as an aesthetic object, this paper shows the growth of my work and concept. Through my practice, I have been able to understand the contradictions in my traditional society and western modernity. It has helped me grapple with my own beliefs, and begin to confront those I don't agree with.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I owe thanks to a great many people in my life who helped, supported, and stood by me while I have worked on my Master of Fine Arts Degree.

My deepest thanks goes to my professors, Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, Mark Price and Carla Poindexter and every other professor who taught and guided me during my artistic journey. They have had the patience to support my artistic endeavors step by step.

I am also sincerely thankful to my wonderful family and to all my friends who have supported me. Without them beside me, I could not have made it.

I also want to thank my other MFA graduate friends and peers for their help in editing this thesis, in particular Emily Finney and Shelly Bradon.
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I am a person who’s mind and heart are captured by Islam, art and family. Art making is not new for me; I come from a home full of creative people. Growing up with a passion for Art, inspired more understanding of it.

Personally, I call the period of life before I moved to the United States the Cocoon. I was raised to be a good girl and follow her family's rules and Saudi customs. Therefore, my life as a Saudi girl is restricted to getting married and having my own family; a typical housewife who relies on a man, putting limitations on every dream I seek, having them approved by my family and
society before actualizing them. However, I was happy with that period of life because I felt that there was nothing that I couldn't have and all my needs would be met as long as my family was satisfied with me - until the passion of art and the desire for more understanding of it moved me. That is when I decided to go to the United States to continue my studies and here my real artistic and personal journey began.
INFLUENCES

My Culture

I come from a country whose culture has flourished in accordance with the doctrine of Islam (sharia law). In the Islamic religion, Saudi Arabia is considered one of the most sacred regions of the earth because it has the cities of Mecca and Medina, which are the sources of the religion. The Saudi society is a tribally based society, which means that its people live in groups. All aspects of life are shared with the family, including decision-making and living under the same roof.

Islam is taught in school from a young age. Reading the holy Quran and praying continues to be a part of everyday life. Yet, I didn’t witness much of what we learned in my society's practice! I saw things such as not following all the rules of Islam; the society convinced us that many things are prohibited, but after searching I found that they are only customs that have been over emphasized until we believe they are ordinances from Allah! I am naturally non-conformist; but I choose to obey Allah and the faith I believe in. When it comes to secular rules I don't adhere to them unless they suit me; if they are imposed upon me, I start to resist it no matter what the consequences. However, we have been trained to follow society's and the Mofti'es rules without questioning whether it is from Allah or not. Living in a multicultural society, with many new freedoms, I began expressing my thoughts and opinions through my art.

As a Saudi and a Muslim woman, I am expected to present Islam traditions and Saudi customs in an idealized manner. It is difficult! Not everyone is perfect, but I seek perfection! I
also want to express my individuality, so amid these conflicting impulses, I became confused as to whether I could satisfy my own, as well as everyone else's, expectations of me.

**Illuminated Manuscripts**

Islamic Art is known for a unique style of art that uses only geometric shapes and botanic motifs. This is due to the Islamic prohibition against figurative imagery. Therefore, I grew up making art that avoided the depiction of living things. Instead, the love of motifs informed my art. I have absorbed the beautiful pages of the Holy Qur'an since I started school at the age of five. In school and at home, I was fascinated by its content when it appeared in different motifs. Each has its own style such as the Persian, Mughal and Ottoman manuscripts.

**Artists and Art Schools**

*Symbolism*

"Symbolism: an artistic and poetic movement or style using symbolic images and indirect suggestion to express mystical ideas, emotions, and states of mind. It originated in late 19th-century France and Belgium, with important figures including Mallarmé, Maeterlinck, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Redon." (oxforddictionaries)

Symbolism plays a huge role in my work. I deliberately choose every element in my work to communicate with my viewers to deliver messages and, hopefully, to teach a little bit about my culture. (Figure 2)
I created a painting of myself wearing a sleeveless shirt, wearing headphones in a prayer pose on my actual prayer rug symbolizing both Islamic and western culture. This self-portrait is a response to my culture's restrictions on public photos of Saudi women. This restriction is not imposed on Saudi men.

In (figure 3) I selected two pages from the Quran, enlarging them and displaying them beside each other, just as when we open the Quran to read. I then erased the text, and painted over some parts and left other parts intact. It is a metaphor about our action of choosing what fits our needs from our religion and leaving out what does not fit us. I also always use technology to symbolize western cultural influences in my work. I do this in both the presentation of it in the actual work and sometimes in the process itself. See (figures 2)
Figure 3, No Name, 2012
Artists

Multimedia Influences:

During my artistic journey I have been influenced by many artists from a variety of periods such as those who created Islamic manuscripts for their beauty, Van Gogh's paintings for their color and Robert Rauschenberg's 'Combines' for their unique use of materials. For now I will discuss some of the artists whose work has inspired me because of their emphasis on Muslim women in political, social and psychological levels.

*Hend Almansour's work is highly charged with social commentary about the freedom of speech and other issues concerning women in our Saudi Islamic culture. "I am a Saudi woman artist. I use the beautiful language of art for the sake of social change towards justice, equality, and freedom of expression. My work explores religious and social belief systems, especially those dealing with women, sexuality and understanding the other." (Almansour)*

I admire her honesty, fearlessness and commitment to the truth. Her usage of nude figures with text from the Holy Quran or old poetry from Muslim's icons.
In Almsour's performance and installation piece *Habiba* (figure 4 and 5) she talks about a Saudi girl who is very religious and spiritual and loves Allah. In contrast, she likes to "play around." This behavior is common in our society but they cover their "bad actions" with Islamic façade, and then judge others for the same behavior. Religion is exploited for their personal benefits casting a negative light on Islam. Confronting society with artwork such as *Almnsour's,* especially because it deals with women in an unidealistic way, is very courageous and rebellious.

![Figure 6, Al Bader, 2007](image)

Lalla Essaydi is a Moroccan artist who lives in the U.S who's work investigates living between two worlds. Her work also explores her impressions of Arabic women and the condition of their lives. "We are very strong, we're human beings and we have a personality of our own. We want
to be seen like that. We don't want this projection of the Western world or Islamic culture on us from both sides. We just want to be seen as human beings.” (Essaydi).

http://lallaessaydi.com/work/Harem/Harem_15.jpg , Harem #15

Almansour, Essaydi and I, intersect by the usage of self-portraiture in our work. In addition, we could not have rebellious expressions in our work without distancing ourselves from our homes. Visually, our work has similarities in the use of the figures of women combined with text and Islamic and oriental patterns.

Almansour's and my work concurs in the rebellious social statement about women in religion and the Men's society. On the other hand, we differentiate in the use of the text of the Quran placement in the nude imagery and the Old poetry and novels from early Islamic centuries, which I have never used.

Figure 7, Face Book, 2011
Photography Influence:

The most influential photographer for me is the Persian photographer Shirin Nashat. I find her work mysterious and controversial. I try to understand her work from a Muslim woman's point of view, it always makes me feel sad when I recognize the reality of a Muslim woman's life, the Man's world that she has to live in; what is expected in Sharia law and what is practiced are very different, and unjust. However, her work also frightens me. Perhaps it is the violence that is implied by showing guns in some pictures, or it could be the facial expressions of the models, and also the sad situations. I am very interested in her deliberate choices of the severe colors and the arrangement of the shapes, the placement of the figures and text and placing these women into strange situations in her work. Nashat's background as a Muslim woman and her personal experiences plays a big role in creating a strong statement about injustice against woman. Despite the reason, I think it is successful to have my emotions so moved and feel this way towards the work.

http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-
caZJLZ_noTQ/TkAzeaY_NSI/AAAAAAAAAV0/nJBTXxF31xA/s1600/shirin5.jpg

Manal Al Dowayan is one of the artists whose work I hated to see and I was very upset by her work when I went to one of her shows, "The Choice," in 2007 at the French Embassy in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. However, the work stayed in my mind until this day. My response at that time was affected by the fact that I was living a peaceful and easy life in Saudi Arabia. I thought it was bad of her to make a social statement on women's driving restrictions in Saudi Arabia in her art! We lived in ease, why would she make our life look bad? In Saudi it is illegal for women to drive,
so it is required to have a male driver. The most important thing to me about art, at that time, was how it signified beauty and peacefulness. When I moved to the U.S, I had the chance to drive my own car and do things without relying on someone else to do it for me. It was a huge change for me, from one way of thinking to another. I gave myself the chance to re-examine her work with more understanding and maturity. I completely got it, loved it, and understood "the choice" she is talking about in her work as a woman who wants to live her life as she chooses and feels like living it, not as a dependant person in the society of men.


Performance Art influence:

Wanda Raimundi-Ortiz, is the artist who introduced performance art to me, through her amazing work that talks about 'otherness' in the United States, and in general. Her work investigates “…notions of otherness as a Latina in the US. Starting from personal experiences, I set out to dissect aspects of my heritage from varying points of entry - from within my own family, home, neighborhood, intersecting Latino cultures." (Raimundi-Ortiz) I didn’t think that other people in the United State experienced 'otherness' as Muslims and Saudis do, especially after the events of 9/11, being identified as a threat, stereotyped as a terrorist by other people and being judged by our appearance. Living in a multicultural country is helpful because it forces you to respect others from different religions, faiths, and ethnicities. Many topics appearing in her work are similar to our Arabic society, especially the performance art dealing with women and submission. For example, her video performance Until It... (Quenched/Breaks), (figure 8) reflects similarities in my work and the relationship between men and women, how much we can
endure with no reaction to help ourselves to be independent and live the life without relying on a man. The awkward relationship between men and women when each one of them suffers, the man needs to prove his masculinity and control, while the woman remains in need of him, despite the humiliation she agrees to take. Although her personal experience being a Latina in the U.S. and being between two worlds has a huge impact on her work, most of her performances are universal; it explores women's life in the community, and issues of identity in the world.

Figure 8, Until it… (Quenced/Breaks), 2008
"Out of sight out of mind." Being far away from the people who share my beliefs, interests, and cultural background has led me to question the things I have always believed and practiced. However, living far from home after 26 years has made my strongest and steadiest beliefs firm; everything else fades away. For example, I used to hear the voices of the prayer five times a day coming from all the mosques in my neighborhood so that I would be reminded to pray. In contrast, in the United States there are no prayer calls, so I must remember prayer times by making them a priority in my daily life.

The sudden change in my living circumstances has caused in my mind turmoil. I have had to reconsider many things I always took for granted. I have questioned almost everything, but living three years in a multicultural environment in the United States has helped me respect people who have different beliefs from my own and who practice religions other than Islam.

When I came to the United States I was shocked to see other Muslims from different parts of the world who are not like us in Saudi Arabia, either in their clothing or in their practice of Islam. For example, during our Eid celebration which is the break after Ramadan in Saudi Arabia I used to see women and men in separate buildings. Women were not revealing their beauty in front of men. In contrast, during the same celebration in the United States I saw women and men interacting and praying at the same place. Men were in front, women were behind them.
Figure 9, Picture of women in Eid celebration in Saudi Arabia, 2012

Figure 10, Picture of women in Eid celebration in Orlando, FL 2012
I was also shocked by seeing my friends from Saudi Arabia not wearing their Abayah in the U.S. It was weird at the beginning but I got used to it. Most Saudis consider the women who do not wear the Hijab and cover as a misrepresentation of Muslim practice. I used to think that too. But I began questioning myself. Is Islam all about the appearance of people or is it something deeper? Of course it is deep; it is the relationship between you the subject, and Allah. It is how much you love Allah and follow what he loves, not just how you look or how much you satisfy other Muslims. (Figures 11, 12)

Figure 11, A photo of my friend Dana taken in Saudi Arabia
Figure 12, A picture of my friend Dana taken in Melbourne, Florida
OLD WORK

Because I learned to create artwork for school assignments before coming to the United States, I did not consider it as a way to deliver personal or social messages. I thought my only responsibility was to create beautiful pieces for other people to enjoy.

Praise from my family, friends, and teachers was enough. Still, somehow I knew that art could help people and change the world, but I was not yet courageous enough to follow a path so much at odds with my background. In the collage Noura figure 9, I was asked to make a self-portrait. It was the first time that I did an artwork that imitated my personality. When my teacher asked me why did I pick these colors and those shapes, I didn’t know what to say. I started thinking about the pieces as something more than a decorative work.

Figure 13, Noura, Photo by Author, 2009
FIRST YEAR WORK

When I started the program here in the United States, I was asked to do work. I was very confused. What subject should I make work about? I started thinking about what interested me. People have always asked me about oil. I faced the same thing every time I traveled abroad for vacation; they would ask, "Do you have an oil well in your back yard?" I knew nothing about oil so, I began researching about it. Then I began to wonder, "What would happen if we didn't have it? How does it affect us?" I started to express my thoughts and ideas visually and made a video performance. I called it "A paradox" to express our love/hate relationship with oil. (Figure 14)

![Figure 14, A Paradox, video performance, 2010](image)

I also created paintings to show my ideas about the effect of oil on our culture. (Figures 14, 15, 16)
Figure 15, Mess, 2010

Figure 16, Oil I, 2010
During my first year, I was still experimenting and trying different concepts that interested me. Therefore, in this project I drew the 99 Names of Allah in graffiti style trying to combine both the American and Saudi cultures. I made a mural and a book. (Figure 18, 19)
Figure 18, The True, 2010

Figure 19, Beauties, 2010
SECOND YEAR WORK

One day I saw my little sister pulling her prayer rug, wearing her praying gown and watching Sponge Bob. She was wearing something symbolizing prayer and spirituality, but singing and laughing at a western children's cartoon. The apparent contradiction hit me. (Figure 20)

![Figure 20, Lama, 2011](image)

The picture of my sister in my mind would not fade away, and inspired another body of work. The painting "Between Two Worlds I" (figure 21.) expresses that we, as Saudi Muslim girls, have a strong faith and have been taught Islamic roles and customs since a young age, in school and at home. Islam runs in our blood, as do our customs. In contrast none of that shows in our appearance or even our lifestyle. When I see teenagers admiring western icons, like singers or actors, and trying to copy them in their appearance and language, I start to question and wonder
where all the religion and customs have gone. It is not bad to be influenced by other cultures, to adopt a new identity while pushing your own culture aside frustrates me. I think this is a reaction to society's restrictions forcing and pushing us to do certain things or to act in a certain ways that we don’t believe inside. I believe that it is a matter of choice not force. When I do something wrong, I am not afraid of Allah's punishment; I am afraid of my family's, my society's or religious men's punishments. So when we travel abroad, we can forget these restrictions and be ourselves. When I moved to the U.S. I started to wonder if this is right or wrong.

Figure 21, Between Two Worlds, 2011
I used a page from the holy Quran. I censored what I didn’t want people to see. I removed all the text from the Quran so as not to insult Allah and only left the decorative parts. During the process, I do not read the words so as to not become emotional. The background and the colors represent my culture; the transparency in the figure symbolizes the blending and the strong Islam and customs inside us. The outfit and the headphones, the nail polish and the hair dye symbolize the western influence.

I applied the same process and concept to the works in Figures 2, 22, 23.
Based on my questions about physical appearance in relation to being a "good" or "bad" Muslim, I did the piece "Prayer Rug" (Figure 2) to state the idea that every one of us in Saudi Arabia makes mistakes but they also judge others for making them too. I was working at my desk listening to music on my headphones; it was time for prayer so I turned off my music and started to pray. When I saw my reflection on my computer screen, I immediately took a photo of myself. We live in contradiction. We love Allah but we make mistakes! And that’s fine of course no one is perfect. I chose from my Islamic belongings the things closest to me: Quran and prayers. The rug immediately came to mind. I see it everywhere in Muslim houses or even cars. Some used to use it as a schoolbook holder! When I applied the picture of me to the rug, I was afraid to show it to anyone, especially my family. I was afraid of a negative reaction which would prevent me from continuing it. I hung the rug behind my bedroom door, but my mom found it! She came to me trying to convince me kindly to stop working on it. I found the courage to say why? She
replied that it is insulting to Allah; I said that I disagree. It is just a rug. We think it is a part of Allah's precious things that we should respect, when in reality, it is just a commercial rug that has a made-up mosque design manufactured by a non-Muslim country. Holding on to things that are not important and letting fall the important ones in our religious practice is what annoys me. For instance, people's reactions when they see my rug are very emotional. Trying to "save" our Islamic symbols or practices. They wish to prevent me from being sacrilegious. The same time, rarely does anyone smile at me in the streets in Saudi! When it is one of the important ethics, that Islam encourages us to do to other people!
THIRD YEAR WORK (CURRENT WORK)

My current work is about living between two different worlds, as a Saudi person of Islamic faith in a western culture. My art addresses some of the positive and negative influences of western culture on Saudi Arabia since oil was discovered there, as well as some of what I have experienced in the United States in the past three years. On a personal level, living “between” cultures has also helped me distinguish between what is true to Islam and customs that are manmade.

In my country, I never felt deprived of experiences or opportunities; traditional women’s activities, such as shopping and socializing, were enough. When I had the chance to be away from that environment, I realized what I had been missing. I had been taught that I lived like a princess because everything I needed was provided or done for me by someone else. I was being spoiled without knowing it, and I was not as self-reliant as I thought I was. I had accepted a false paradise. If I simply obeyed and did what men permitted me to do, I would be treated well whether I wanted it that way or not.

I learned to obey and to limit my dreams. I only admitted to having hopes that were authorized by others and dreams that were safe. My life would be peaceful on the outside while I was burning on the inside! I used to accept this as the plight of all girls because of the Saudi Arabian saying, "Injusting everyone is fair enough." Then I moved to the United States. In the United States, day by day, I learned how to decide what I wanted and how to make it happen! After two years enduring the typical Saudi girl’s fear of breaking society's rules, I began to change. I began to break some rules to see what would happen! I started with the thing
that my parents warned me not to do, which was to join the Saudi students’ club. They resisted, to keep me away from being around Saudi men! I stood up for myself, and I crossed a line; I argued with my parents. I insisted on joining the organization. Surprisingly, my dad accepted my decision. However, my mother did not, and she stopped talking to me about the subject. She also refused to support me in any way. After I successfully organized a couple of events for the club, my mother changed her mind and decided to support me. Soon another battle began, this one with the strict Saudi men who were some or the members of the organization. They objected that there was a girl leading the organization. Those were some of the hardest days of my life! I felt lonely and powerless. Of course I didn’t say a word about that to my family, even though I did nothing wrong. Nevertheless, I learned from them how to be strong, how to fight, and how to differentiate between my basic rights and my imagined sins. All this has strengthened me to create the work that I always tried to avoid, and to dream the dreams that I used to suppress. I gladly mention that there were many men who stood by my side, supporting me from the beginning to the end. Their support reassured me that my society—from the country that I love—is changing, and that I should be part of the change!
CONFUSION

Being around men most of my time in the United States made me struggle with having the Hijab covering my head for many hours. The feminine environment that I used to work in back at home didn’t require the Hijab which can sometimes obstruct my movement. The reason that I didn’t take the Hijab off beside considering it as a sin, is it would affect the whole family. In our culture we represent each other, not ourselves. These pieces are very personal.

Figure 24, Untitled Mural, 2012
Figure 25, Noura 2012

Figure 26, Repetition- video stills, 2012
THE WORK

My work addresses contradictions between Saudi and western cultural traditions and contemporary expectations of modernity. I confront these contradictions through various media, mine is a personal artistic journey of transformation, achieving understanding, and an examination of how Saudi Arabian society manages change.

In my work I have begun to identify the contradictions that I face in my country. I have stopped following some of these traditions while in the U.S. because I hate pretending to have multiple personalities. For example, the segregation of men and women is the most conspicuous form of discrimination we face in Saudi Arabia. Just as bothersome is the fact that women in my country are not permitted to drive. For a Saudi woman to travel by car, she must be transported in her car by a male stranger who has been hired to do so.

I completed a series of five life-size figurative photos. My first two diptychs, "Noura with Abayah" (Figuer 27) and "Noura without Abayah," (Figuer 28) portray me in western style clothes with a bright pink rebel shirt sporting a skull image on it, and jeans. I contrast western clothes in my art with a long black formal Saudi traditional public outfit that I used to wear in Saudi Arabia.
In "Noura with Abayah" (Figure 20), I incorporated the abayah that I used to wear every day in Saudi Arabia. I received comments from my family and weird looks from strange men about the bright pink visible at the end of the sleeves, because in Saudi society it would be considered rebellious! Even though my face was covered, some Saudi men considered the "pink" flirtatious, stared at me with anger, and seemed to judge me as a bad person. As I posed, I let myself act as I feel with the long respectful Abayah. It makes me act very straight and decent even if I don’t want to. In the other photo "Noura without Abayah" I wore what I usually wear.
outside of the house here in the U.S with no limitation except the ones that I decided to follow. I felt comfortable. The image fits my personality; playful, happy and colorful.

The photo, "For Her Eyes Only," (Figure 22, 23) pictures me life size, not wearing a hijab scarf or long covering clothes, and it "appropriately" will be seen by women only. It will be presented as an interactive performance piece to make the audience experience the impact of segregation. I wore a dress and had my hair and makeup done to look as I would in a Saudi women-only gathering. I address the contradiction in our society, in two ways: the way I presented it in the show, guarded by a hired man allowing women to go inside but not men. This imitates the life we live there. Most of the ministries, schools and parties are segregated by the government's law. They segregate us "females and males" in public by forcing us to wear the Abaya and cover; even if it's not what we believe in or desire. On the other hand, some of these people's wives or daughters use men to do their hair and makeup or design their clothes. So as a part of this society, I cannot comprehend these contradictions. What I think would work better is to let the people of our society to choose how they want to live their lives. If you choose not to segregate, then you don’t have to. If you want to segregate, you can. I thought this picture would be confrontational for the people of my faith, but, it was not until I answered their questions; Are you going to protect it carefully? Who took the photo for you? That they would decide if it was confrontational or just an interesting idea. On the other hand, the Americans' reactions were: What will happen if a man saw it? Are you going to show your hair to everyone after the show finishes? All these questions were interesting for me to hear especially from the people I know are Muslims. I was able to observe their reactions to see every day in our country without noticing it.
Figure 29, For Her Eyes Only, 2013
One photo, "Noura with Mohammad," (Figure 31) has the image of a Saudi man beside me. I chose to be photographed with a Saudi man whom I always see in the Saudi group in my university, in part because he was the only Saudi man who agreed to be photographed with me. The feeling was very weird when I asked him to do so. The relationship between men and women in Saudi makes my request look suspicious and maybe not polite. Also, during the photo shoot, it was not easy for both of us to stand up beside each other. I was so embarrassed. In contrast, my photo titled "Noura with Gabe" (Figure 32) has the "improper" image of an
American man beside me. Gabe is one of my peers in school, and I chose him to be in the photo because he has been the non-Saudi man with whom I feel most comfortable. We wore the casual clothes that we always wear in school, and we laughed throughout the photo shoot. We just acted normal with no other thoughts.

Figure 31, Noura with Mohammad, 2013
When I went back to Saudi during Christmas break 2012/2013, one day I woke up wanting to go and have something to eat, but, unfortunately no one was there to drive me. I could not drive by myself. The house had a high fence; the windows didn’t have an interesting view, so I started crying. This was my influence for my next piece "Rawshan" (Figures 33, 34) It incorporates a feature of traditional architecture from the western province of Saudi Arabia. The word rawshan is Farsi for window. “Rawshan” is a wooden sculpture with three walls that create a small room. I simulated a rawshan because of its appearance; its decorative wood elements
always amaze me. It allows a woman to see people outside without being seen, and it permits air
and light to go through the house. In the old days women used to stay at home and obey the
society's restrictions. However, women these days are educated, tough, and do not necessarily
need to be taken care of by a man, particularly if they are widows or divorcees who need to work
outside the house. I built "Rawshan" to draw attention to women’s lifestyle expectations in Saudi
Arabia, which typically pressure females to stay at home and do housework. Since we often have
maids at home, we should be urged to do things that benefit our society. I hope “Rawshan”
encourages women to go out and interact with people through work so they can be useful in the
community.

Some people consider my opinion a violation of Allah's saying in the Holy Quran (وَقَرْنَ في بُيُوتٍكُنَّ وَلا تَبَرَّجْنَ تَبَرُّجَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ الأولَى وَأَقِمْنَ الصَّلاةَ وَاتَّبِعْنَ الرَّكَاةَ وَأَطْعُنَ اللَّهَ وَرَسُولَهُ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُبَيِّنَ عَلَيْكُمُ الرَّجُمَ
(And stay quietly in your houses, and make not a dazzling display, like that of the former Times of Ignorance; and establish regular Prayer, and give regular Charity; and obey Allah and His Messenger. And Allah only wishes to remove all abomination from you, ye members of the Family, and to make you pure and spotless.) (Holy Quran) For reasons I do not
understand, male leaders interpreted the verses to extend beyond the Prophet Mohammad's wives
to the rest of Muslim women. However, those who believe these Quran verses apply to the
Prophet Mohammad's wives also invoke the preceding verses that say: (وَبَنِيَّةٌ في بُنيَّةٍ مِنْ يَتَأْتُونَ بِفَاحْشَةٍ
(O Consorts of the Prophet! If any of you were guilty of evident unseemly conduct, the Punishment would be doubled to her, and that is easy for
Allah.) (Holy Quran) Moreover, there are many stories about women having been present in
Prophet Mohammad's gatherings in the mosque or during war. I agree with the second
interpretation, and I demonstrate it by inviting women to enter “Rawshan” in the gallery while wearing contemporary western clothes. My intention is to draw attention to contradictory interpretations of the Quran as they relate to women.

Figure 33, Rawshan, 2013
Figure 34, Rawshan, 2013
TECHNOLOGY IN MY ART

I think if you want to communicate with people, you have to use their language in order for them to understand you, and the language of the era is technology. Therefore, I reference western culture in my work in many ways. One of them is by including technology in my imagery. My iPhone is always present, whether intentionally or not. Like most people in my country, I carry it with me at all times (especially my age and younger.) I believe that technology changes us. It was a main factor in most of the Arab countries' revolutions such as the civil resistance in Egypt. Taking down the regime of President Hosni Mubarak could not have succeeded if the rebels did not have technology to use social networking sites like Facebook to communicate with millions of protestors.

I also employ technology in my process by using programs such as Photoshop to enlarge and manipulate the pages from old manuscripts to reprint them on oversized printers, that will later become part of my work.

A recent project that is still in progress is to ask my followers on Twitter to draw or send me a picture of what they think I look like, since I never put my photo upon social networks. Then I separate the pictures into two groups: pictures made by women and pictures made by men. The results are interesting. So far most of the images that I have received are influenced by the comments I make on Twitter. I use another application to check-in at Starbucks through Twitter twice or more a day. Many of the followers have sent me the logo of Starbucks as their depiction of me! It is frustrating that other pictures in the world represent me to people not in place of my own face. In order to communicate with an international audience, it is the era’s tool. It is important for me to use technology to continue my work, as an artist and as an activist.
As a continuation of my artistic and personal growth journey, I always enjoy how my work looked at the end. I worked privately at night in my room so no one could see the process of the creation because I couldn't bear for someone to see my art as ugly or incomplete. Before, until the work was "pretty", I did not show it to anyone. I wanted to please myself first and then my family and friends. In contrast, being taught by amazing artists everyday in school at UCF or through internet research and books, and being a candidate for Master of Fine Arts, taught me to enjoy the process, with courage to the possibility of making "ugly" pieces of art and show it to the people as a part of my growth as a professional artist, and discuss the possible errors and mistakes in which it was not successful. I'm no longer making "pretty" pictures, but I am questioning, challenging, and entertaining the viewers. As George Frederick Watts said "I paint ideas, not things. My intention is less to paint works that are pleasing to the eye than to suggest great thoughts which will speak to the imagination and the heart and will arouse all that is noblest and best in man." (Gibson)

So my study abroad is not the end, it is just the beginning of both my professional artistic and personal life. Being between two different worlds has given me the ability to see where I was from a far and fix it, influenced by the other world I am in now. I have been changing during these three years in the United States, as an artist and as a human, who knows her duty towards herself, her family, society and, of course, her world. The change has grown a seed of strength inside me, no fear no weakness. I am a woman and I know what I want to achieve and what I want to say, as an artist, and as a part of a society who all the sudden forgot the history of strong Muslim women who showed to the world the supportive religion towards women's rights and
their affective roles. I will take with me every word of advice and will continue the journey with confidence and strength to bring back our rights and dignity through my art.

Once the thesis exhibition closed, I went with my father to de-install my work, in which he’d never seen. He felt offended and rejected the photos I had taken with men beside me. His reaction shocked and scared me, especially since I believed that he would support my work. Without his support, I admit that I feel alone on my journey. I realized then how hard this path is going to be and that my artistic journey for change is just beginning, starting from home.
APPENDIX
COPYRIGHT APPROVAL
I give permission to Noura Shuqair to use my images for her thesis.

Hend Al-Mansour

To whom it may concerns

I agree that Noura Shuqair uses some of my pictures in her Thesis

Hend Al-Mansour
LIST OF REFERENCES


Holy Quraan. n.d.
