

## النسق الثقافي والأصالة التعبيرية للطبعة الفنية

عند الفنان حسين الجبالي

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## النسق الثقافي والأصالة التعبيرية للطبعة الفنية عند الفنان حسين الجبالي

### الملخص

يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على العلاقة بين النسق الثقافي والأصالة التعبيرية في أعمال الفنان المصري حسين الجبالي، أحد أبرز رواد فن الطباعة في مصر والعالم العربي. يهدف البحث إلى تحليل كيفية تفاعل الفنان مع عناصر الهوية الثقافية المحلية، مثل الخط العربي، الزخرفة الإسلامية، والرموز المستمدة من الفن الفرعوني، وكيفية دمجها مع التيارات الفنية العالمية كالتجريد، والتكعيب، والسريالية، وذلك في سياق تحولات اجتماعية وسياسية معاصرة.

يعتمد البحث على المنهج الوصفي التحليلي والمنهج التاريخي، من خلال دراسة مراحل تطور الجبالي الفنية، وربطها بالسياقات الثقافية والسياسية التي شكّلت رؤيته الإبداعية. وتؤكد النتائج أن الجبالي استطاع صياغة خطاب بصري أصيل، نابع من بيئته الثقافية، دون أن يفقد انفتاحه على التجريب والأساليب الحديثة. كما أن أعماله تعكس رؤى نقدية للواقع المصري والعربي، وتتضمن إشارات رمزية لقضايا مثل النكسة، والانقسام العربي، والتحول الاجتماعي.

وتبرز الدراسة أهمية فن الطباعة كأداة تعبيرية ذات طاقة رمزية عالية في نقل مفاهيم الهوية والانتماء. وتوصي بأهمية توثيق التجارب الفنية العربية في هذا المجال، ودمج مفاهيم الهوية الثقافية في التعليم الفني. وتجعل تجربة حسين الجبالي من هذا البحث نموذجاً لفهم آليات التعبير الثقافي في الفن المعاصر في ظل التحديات العالمية.

### كلمات مفتاحية:

النسق الثقافي، الأصالة التعبيرية، الهوية الثقافية، الطباعة الفنية

## The Cultural Context and Expressive Authenticity in “Hussein El Gebaly”’s Printmaking Art

### Abstract:

This study examines the relationship between cultural context and expressive authenticity in the artworks of Egyptian artist “Hussein El Gebaly”, one of the most prominent figures in Arab printmaking. The research analyzes how El Gebaly integrated elements of local cultural identity—such as Arabic calligraphy, Islamic ornamentation, and Pharaonic symbolism—with global artistic movements like abstraction, Cubism, and Surrealism, within the framework of social and political transformations.

Using descriptive and historical analytical methods, the study traces the evolution of El Gebaly’s visual language across different phases of his career. The findings confirm that El Gebaly developed an authentic visual discourse rooted in cultural consciousness, while remaining open to modern techniques and experimentation. His artworks offer critical reflections on Egyptian and Arab realities, symbolically referencing issues such as the 1967 defeat, Arab disunity, and societal change.

The study highlights the expressive power of printmaking as a medium capable of conveying identity and cultural meaning. It recommends further documentation of Arab printmaking practices and the integration of cultural identity concepts into art education. Ultimately, El Gebaly’s artistic experience serves as a valuable case for understanding how heritage and modernity can coexist in contemporary visual expression in the age of globalization.

**Keywords:** The Cultural Context ، Expressive Authenticity ، cultural identity، printmaking Art.

## **Introduction:**

In the context of contemporary artistic practice, the interaction between local cultural heritage and global artistic trends has become increasingly complex. With the advent of globalization, mass media, and digital communication, the boundaries between cultures have become blurred, giving rise to a new paradigm where artists often operate at the intersection of multiple cultural narratives. This phenomenon has intensified the challenge for contemporary artists to maintain expressive authenticity while navigating diverse aesthetic and ideological frameworks.

Egypt, with its deeply rooted artistic traditions, offers a fertile ground for examining this cultural interplay. The country's visual heritage—ranging from Ancient Egyptian symbols and Islamic ornamentation to vernacular motifs—continues to inspire artists seeking to assert a culturally grounded identity in a globalized art world. In this context, the field of printmaking has emerged as a dynamic medium through which artists articulate their cultural consciousness and personal expression.

“Hussein El Gebaly” (1934–2014), a pioneering Egyptian printmaker, stands out as a profound case study for understanding the relationship between cultural context and artistic expression. His body of work reflects a continuous dialogue between historical memory and modern sensibility, integrating traditional calligraphy, abstract forms, and socio-political commentary. El Gebaly's practice not only encapsulates the aesthetic dimensions of his heritage but also reveals the tensions and synergies between the local and the universal.

This research situates El Gebaly's work within the broader discourse of cultural identity and globalization, aiming to explore how cultural heritage, social dynamics, and international exposure contribute to the formation of expressive authenticity in contemporary art. By analyzing his artistic evolution and visual language, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of cultural hybridity and its implications for modern artistic production.

## **Research Questions**

1. How does cultural heritage influence the expressive authenticity of contemporary Egyptian artists, particularly in the field of printmaking?

2. In what ways does “Hussein El Gebaly” integrate local cultural elements—such as Islamic art, Ancient Egyptian symbols, and Arabic calligraphy—into his artistic practice?
3. How have global artistic movements and international exposure impacted El Gebaly’s visual language and aesthetic choices?
4. What are the social and political factors reflected in El Gebaly’s artworks, and how do they contribute to his cultural identity?
5. To what extent does El Gebaly's work represent a synthesis between cultural authenticity and global modernity in contemporary Arab art?

### **Research Hypothesis**

- It is assumed that “Hussein El Gebaly” successfully merged local cultural identity with global artistic influences, achieving Expressive Authenticity that distinguishes his work.
- The study hypothesizes that expressive authenticity in contemporary art is not achieved through literal adherence to heritage, but through its reinterpretation in contemporary forms that reflect the artist’s vision and societal concerns.
- The research proposes that engagement with social and political changes served as a catalyst in shaping El Gebaly’s expressive and philosophical direction, contributing to the development of his visual language.
- The study suggests that the fusion of global artistic styles (such as abstraction, Cubism, and Surrealism) with traditional Egyptian elements (such as calligraphy and ornamentation) enabled El Gebaly to construct a unique visual identity that exemplifies contemporary authenticity.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the role of cultural context in shaping expressive authenticity in contemporary art, with a specific focus on the work of “Hussein El Gebaly”.
2. To explore how “Hussein El Gebaly” incorporated traditional symbols and elements—such as Arabic calligraphy, Islamic ornamentation, and Ancient Egyptian motifs—into his artistic practice.
3. To examine the impact of social and political changes in Egypt on El Gebaly’s artistic production and visual language.

4. To investigate the influence of global artistic movements on El Gebaly's work, including his engagement with abstraction, Cubism, and Surrealism.
5. To identify how El Gebaly achieved a balance between local cultural identity and global artistic exposure, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between culture and creative expression in the contemporary context.

### Significance of the Study:

1. This study contributes to the academic understanding of how cultural context influences expressive authenticity, particularly within the field of contemporary printmaking.
2. It sheds light on the pioneering artistic experience of "Hussein El Gebaly", filling a critical gap in scholarly discourse on Arab printmaking.
3. The research highlights the contemporary artist's ability to balance local cultural identity with global influences, offering valuable insights into artistic expression in a globalized world.
4. It provides a framework for understanding the dynamic interaction between heritage, identity, politics, and art—one that can be applied to analyze other modern Arab artistic experiences.
5. The study offers a rich analytical resource for scholars, students, and practitioners in visual and cultural studies, enhancing the dialogue between theory and practice in art and design education.

### Research Methodology:

This study employs a **descriptive-analytical approach** by analyzing a selected sample of artworks by "Hussein El Gebaly" to explore the manifestations of cultural context and expressive authenticity in his printmaking. It also adopts a **historical approach** to trace the artistic developments in El Gebaly's career and to examine the evolution of his visual style in relation to cultural, social, and political transformations.

Additionally, the research incorporates a review of relevant theoretical literature on cultural identity, globalization, and printmaking art, drawing on critical and artistic sources to contextualize El Gebaly's work and understand how the broader cultural environment shaped his unique artistic experience.

### Scope and Limitations:

1. **Topical Scope:** The study focuses specifically on the relationship between cultural context and expressive authenticity in the works of “Hussein El Gebaly”, without extending the analysis to other artists.
2. **Temporal Scope:** The research examines the period from the early 1960s (when El Gebaly’s style began to emerge) to the late 1990s, a time in which his visual identity matured significantly.
3. **Geographical Scope:** The study primarily situates El Gebaly’s artistic experience within the Egyptian and Arab context, while acknowledging the influence of his exposure to European artistic environments (such as Italy and the Netherlands).
4. **Methodological Limitations:** The study relies on descriptive-analytical and historical approaches, without incorporating experimental or statistical analysis.

### Definition of Terms:

1. **Cultural** **Context:**  
Refers to the set of values, beliefs, customs, and symbols that shape the reference framework of an individual or society and influence artistic expression and the formation of an artist’s visual identity.
2. **Expressive** **Authenticity:**  
The artist’s ability to convey personal and cultural identity through a unique and sincere artistic style, avoiding imitation or literal reproduction of traditional forms.
3. **Cultural** **Identity:**  
A sense of belonging to a specific culture or community, expressed through shared beliefs, customs, language, and visual symbols. It plays a central role in shaping an artist’s vision and expression.
4. **Printmaking** **Art:**  
A branch of the visual arts that involves techniques such as engraving, woodcut, and screen printing to create reproducible artworks that carry the personal imprint of the artist through various materials such as wood, copper, lithograph stone, used as plates.
5. **Contemporary** **Art:**  
Art produced from the mid-20th century to the present, often

characterized by its engagement with current social, political, and cultural issues, and its openness to diverse styles and materials.

### **Discussion:**

It was only natural that the cultural context of the contemporary artist differed from that of the earlier. The artist's status in the era of media, mass media and space networks is quite different from the era before. The world has become a small village, no longer barriers, borders, or cultural divides between the local and the global culture, with the same clarity and crystallization as before. The artist's work is no longer confined to the exhibition or the gallery or books and specialised studies or in its printed copies hanging on the walls, but it was launched on the airwaves through networks that covered all over the world, with the opinions of critics and their studies and analyses (Belting, 2013).

Therefore, the concept of the cultural context of the contemporary artist is divided into two basic elements: a local heritage element (which all includes aesthetic and historical backgrounds crystallized and preserved through successive eras of history), and a global contemporary element the same time (includes absorbing aesthetic and cultural currents that characterize the era, in the fields of contemporary art. Politics, economics, sociology, philosophy or other human sciences. this requires the awareness of artists in practicing contemporary art.

Hence the confusion that befell the contemporary artist, which divided the international human cultural context, so that the artist has only his cultural context, which must be preserved, developed, and renewed as much as possible. Thus, the cultural context of the contemporary artist was divided into two main elements: The cultural dimension of contemporary artists naturally differs from that of their predecessors due to the advent of media, mass media, and global networks. The contemporary artist's status is distinct from earlier periods due to the world's reduction of barriers, borders, and cultural divides, which has made local and global cultures indistinguishable.

The artist's work is no longer limited to exhibitions, galleries, books, or printed copies, but is instead disseminated globally through networked channels that encompass the views of critics and their



analyses. Consequently, the cultural context of the contemporary artist comprises two essential elements: a local heritage component that embodies historical and aesthetic backgrounds crystallized and preserved over successive eras and a global contemporary element that assimilates aesthetic and cultural currents characteristic of the present era across fields such as contemporary art, politics, economics, sociology, philosophy, and other human sciences (Marie Ruiz, 15 Jun 2021).

To practice contemporary art, artists must possess an awareness of these currents, resulting in the confusion that has befallen contemporary artists in the face of this international human-cultural dichotomy. As a result, the contemporary artist must maintain, develop, and renew their cultural context as much as possible, leading to a division of the cultural context of the contemporary artist into two main elements. First element: Cultural Identity, Second element: Global Culture

### **First element: Cultural Identity**

Cultural identity is a multifaceted concept characterized by a pattern of criteria that defines an individual or a group (Hall, 1990) This pattern comprises a range of features that allow for external identification through recognition (Fearon, 1999) Identity is not static but dynamic, evolving due to various social, cultural, and educational factors, with the potential for distortion embedded within its logic

Moreover, identity is a complex system of ideas, feelings, and customs reflecting an individual's personality and group affiliations (Schwartz, et al., 2012). This system can take forms like religious beliefs, moral values, national traditions, opinions, and intellectual trends). The concept describes the subjective feelings and shared experiences of individuals with common cultural characteristics, customs, thoughts, and beliefs (wahba2008 )

The concept of identity encompasses three fundamental elements reflecting a group's shared experiences: cultural characteristics, customs, and religion, constituting the subjective feelings and values that define the group's identity (Phinney et al., 2001). These elements are shaped by social, cultural, and educational factors (Schwartz, et al., 2012)).

1. A sense of continuity exists between the experiences of successive generations, reflecting human unity. (wahba2008 ).

2. Shared memories of events and characters represent turning points in collective history (wahba, 2008)
3. A sense of destiny unity is formed by shared feelings and values, relating to continuity through shared memories and bringing people together in shared cultural experiences and characteristics (wahba, 2008)

#### 1 - Heritage

Heritage is a concept that refers to the legacy of the past, which has enduring effects on the present. As noted by (Bahnasi, 1997) heritage is not a static and unchanging entity, but rather a dynamic and evolving construct that continues to shape our lives. Although the past is over, the legacy it has left behind is not merely an issue for the study of the ancient past, but also an essential part of the present reality and its cultural components.

Furthermore, heritage reflects the spirit of the times, the composition of the generation, and the stage of historical development (Smith, 2006), heritage is a set of interpretations that each generation gives based on its requirements and perceptions of the world. It is not a collection of established theoretical beliefs and permanent realities that remain unchanged, but rather the sum of the investigations of this theory in each circumstance, in a specific historical position, and in a special group.

As a result, heritage is a living and evolving force that must be linked and employed in the present to guide our lives and rebuild the reality towards which it aims to evolve. It continues to influence the ideas, perceptions, and ideals of the present generation, as well as their daily behaviours and actions (Niki Black, 2020). In this sense, heritage is not a dead entity, but a force that guides our present behaviours and actions, rather than a mere museum of ideas that we admire from a distance.

#### 2-Social and political variables

Cultural identity is a multifaceted construct that is shaped by various factors such as education, socialization, and cultural experiences. According to (Hall, 1990), cultural identity enables individuals to define themselves and applies to the identity of communities, societies, and cultures. It is a dynamic and evolving construct that is constantly influenced by various internal and external factors. Identity comprises a system of ideas, feelings, and customs that

reflect an individual's personality and the group or groups to which they belong.

One of the integral aspects of cultural identity is heritage. Heritage reflects the spirit of the times, the composition of the generation, and the stage of historical development (Bamberg M, 2021). It is not a fixed set of established theoretical beliefs and permanent realities that do not change. Instead, it is a sum of investigations of this theory in each circumstance, in a specific historical position, and in a special group that shapes its vision and perceptions of the world.

The societal and political context is another significant variable that influences cultural identity. The conditions of society affect art, and social and political variables are closely linked to artistic expression (Langer, 2003). Although the artwork is an individual work, the artist's roots must extend deep into society for it to have value. Society has played an influential role in art throughout history, and art has been a reflection of the society of the time (Arnheim, 2023). Philosophers, such as Lev Tolstoy, have addressed the relationship between art and social changes and their impact on artistic creativity. Tolstoy emphasized the need for art to be associated with the photography of reality and for the artist to express society in all their works.

The original treatment of topics derived from social life helps the artist to express their individuality and simultaneously depict the new processes taking place within the community. The artist's authenticity and sincerity are reflected in the extent to which they can highlight the human features of the reality of their contemporary society, reveal its new realities, and depict the authenticity of their work.

### **Second element: Global Culture or Universal Culture**

The concept of a universal culture has been widely debated by scholars, who argue that we are now living in a cosmic civilization that is characterized by a thin crust, which conceals the rich diversity of cultures, people, historical traditions, and trends that have developed over time. According to (Palecek, 2020), "we are now living in one cosmic civilization and that it is nothing more than a thin crust, which is a crust that is folded or hides the great diversity of cultures, and people, in the world, in historical traditions, and trends that have been formed throughout history and all of which are somehow under that crust" as cited in (Delanty, 2011). High culture has emerged through

the overlap of different local cultures and the development of cultures that transcend specific geographical regions (Hall, 1990).

Subcultures within the larger whole can be better understood in the context of their cultural environments rather than in isolation. As Schlesinger (1992) notes, "there are subcultures within the larger whole that can be better understood in the context of their cultural environments than isolated" (p. 54). The creation of a global diversity of people has occurred through various means, both global and local. However, universality is a narrower concept that encompasses a position on diversity itself and involves the coexistence of cultures in individual experiences (Schlesinger, 1992)

An authentic global tendency is primarily directed towards sharing the others and represents an aesthetic position that embraces a variety of cultural experiences while searching for global contradictions (Giddens, 1990) Efficiency is also an important consideration, with both general and specialized types being significant (Mowlana, 1997) The readiness and personal ability to access other cultures through hearing, consideration, limitation, contemplation, and interest in others are essential in transforming global issues into matters of variation and level (NYE, 2002)

A selective, cosmic, and timeless global culture can be established as the last link in a series of human installations in the era of human liberation and domination of nature. This era is commonly referred to as global culture, and it generally entails human convergence and mutual acceptance of shared values, attitudes, practices, and institutions by the peoples of the world.

The term global culture also refers to the process of cultural integration and dismantling, which occurs not only at the inter-state level but also at the community level, both within and across states. This process is facilitated by the exchange and flow of people, goods, information, knowledge, and images, which leads to independent global communications (Costells, 2000)

In conclusion, the concept of global culture is complex, and its manifestation varies depending on context, level, and scope. However, the increasing interconnectivity of the world through globalization has led to the emergence of a universal culture that is constantly evolving and adapting to new circumstances.

According to some scholars, cultures can benefit from one another when they abandon their emphasis on uniqueness, which fosters respect for other cultures. They argue that there is no absolute global culture, but rather a multiplicity of cultures that can coexist (Hofstede, 2001). As a result, any global dialogue should be based on the preservation of each culture's originality. A global culture, if it were to exist, would need to be selective and operate on multiple levels simultaneously, encompassing both the distinctive qualities of each nation and a set of generalized human values and interests. It would also require a unified scientific discourse and a reciprocal sense of communication, which would underpin all other elements and levels (Appiah, 2006).

While the idea of a global culture is not new, previous cultural imperialisms were also selective and uniform in nature (Anderson, 1983). For instance, the spread of Hellenism across the ancient Lower East was dependent on various local customs, which were subsequently expressed in Greek-Macedonian forms of theatre, councils, markets, and sports. Similarly, Roman iconography across the Mediterranean was characterized by recognising and emulating various symbols and superstitions (Beard, 2016). However, these pre-modern cultural imperialisms were limited in scope and reflective of their specific contexts.

In contrast, the emerging global culture of today is not constrained by time or place but is a veritable amalgamation of elements drawn from every corner of the globe, and loaded onto the vehicles of modern communication systems (Costells, 2000). This global culture is timeless, in that it is divorced from any sense of history and represents a constant quest for an imaginary present or fictional future (Bauman, 2000). Consequently, it lacks a defined context and is an amalgam of cosmic mixtures (Jameson, 1992).

The need for a global culture is based on the technical nature of its language, which offers solutions to technical problems. It is characterized by a spirit of abstract fun and neutral cosmic culture, which reflects the basis of technology consisting of many overlapping patterns of communication linked by a common language of speech and style. This intellectual and artistic class, based on the culture of the language of its critical discourse, replaces social criticism as it was previously understood in human society (Bourdieu, 1991).

Furthermore, this global culture is seen as a product of modern technology and communication systems, which have allowed for the rapid and widespread dissemination of cultural elements across national boundaries (Giddens, 1990). As such, it has been argued that this emerging global culture is a reflection of the "globalization" (Anon., 2024) of contemporary society, which the growth of global markets, the increasing importance of transnational corporations, and the proliferation of media technologies (Tomlinson, 1991).

However, while some see this emerging global culture as a positive development that can help to bridge cultural divides and promote mutual understanding, others are more sceptical. Critics argue that the homogenization of culture that is associated with globalization and the emergence of a global culture represents a form of cultural imperialism (Schiller, 1992). They argue that this process can result in the domination of local cultures by more powerful global forces, which can undermine the cultural diversity that is essential for human flourishing. In conclusion, the emergence of a global culture is a complex and contested phenomenon. While modern technology and communication systems have enabled the rapid dissemination of cultural elements across national boundaries, the implications of this trend are far from clear. Some see the emerging global culture as a positive development that can help to promote mutual understanding and cultural exchange, while others view it as a form of cultural imperialism that threatens the diversity of human cultures. Ultimately, the future of the global culture will depend on the actions of individuals and institutions around the world, who must decide whether to embrace or resist this trend towards cultural homogenization.

Gamal Hamda highlights the unique nature of cultural interaction in Egypt in the context of modern civilization and global transportation. Unlike other regions of the world, the cultural interaction in Egypt did not involve a process of replacement or melting or the ingestion of foreign cultures. Rather, it was a process of civilized exchange and transculturation or cross-acculturation interference. This involved an electoral mixing process that allowed for the emergence of a strong and vibrant Egyptian personality, which retained its original strength while being influenced by other cultures (Hamdan, 1994).

This process of transculturation is consistent with the idea that cultural interaction can lead to the emergence of a new and dynamic culture



that combines elements from different cultural traditions (Pieterse, 1994). It also reflects the view that cultural exchange can promote mutual understanding and respect between different cultures while preserving the unique identity of each culture (Richardson, 2001)

In conclusion, the cultural interaction in Egypt is a testament to the potential of transculturation to create a new and vibrant culture that is enriched by the diversity of human experience. It highlights the importance of cultural exchange as a means of promoting mutual understanding and respect while preserving the unique identity of each culture.

### **Artist “Hussein Gebaly”(1934-2014)**

“Hussein Mahmoud El Gebaly” (1934-2014) is considered one of the most important contemporary artists who practised the art of engraving and printing with its various techniques. He is one of the few who excelled in this field. Since his graduation in 1958 from the Graphic Design Department at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo and until his scholarship to Italy to study various engraving techniques, the real beginning of his artistic style appeared, especially from 1965 to 1968. It was one of the most important periods during which his artistic personality began to take shape. He then travelled to the Netherlands, which was a favourable opportunity for him to work on his most important collections in the lithographic technique (Wikipedia, n.d.).

“El Gebaly” had many solo exhibitions, including nearly fifty exhibitions in Egypt, Italy, France, Yugoslavia, and Austria. He also participated in many international biennials and local group exhibitions. His artworks are held in many countries worldwide and in several museums, including the British Museum. He received numerous international awards from important biennials around the world, such as Ljubljana, the Norway Biennial, and the Bratislava Biennial. He was also awarded the State Appreciation Award in 2000 (Wikipedia, n.d.)

### **Expressive Authenticity in Art: A Framework for Hussein ElGebaly’s Oeuvre**

#### **Defining Expressive Authenticity**

Expressive authenticity, as conceptualized by Denis Dutton, refers to an artwork’s capacity to embody the "true expression of an individual’s or a society’s values and beliefs" (Dutton, 2003). Unlike *nominal authenticity*, which concerns an artwork’s provenance

or authorship, expressive authenticity emphasizes sincerity, originality, and the artist's ability to convey genuine emotional or cultural resonance through their work. Walter Benjamin further nuances this idea by linking authenticity to an artwork's "aura," a unique presence derived from its historical and cultural context, transcending mere technical reproduction (Benjamin, 2008).

For contemporary artists like "Hussein El Gebaly", expressive authenticity manifests as a dynamic interplay between personal creativity and cultural heritage, where the artist's voice remains rooted in tradition while engaging with global artistic currents (Bhabha, 2004). This duality reflects the tension between preserving cultural identity and embracing universal themes, a hallmark of postcolonial artistic discourse (Hal Foster, 2007).

### **El Gebaly's Expressive Authenticity: A Synthesis of Heritage and Modernity**

"Hussein El Gebaly" (1934–2014), a seminal figure in Egyptian printmaking, exemplifies expressive authenticity through his integration of traditional Egyptian motifs with modernist abstraction. His oeuvre navigates two critical dimensions:

#### **1. Cultural Identity and Heritage**

El Gebaly's work draws deeply from Egypt's visual lexicon, including Islamic calligraphy, hieroglyphic symbolism, and folkloric motifs. For instance, his woodcut *Symphony of the Line* (1992) merges Kufic script with organic forms, evoking Egypt's spiritual and historical legacy (Musa, 2003). This aligns with Dutton's assertion that expressive authenticity emerges from "moral passion" and fidelity to cultural roots .

#### **2. Global Modernist Influences**

During his European sojourns (1965–1975), El Gebaly absorbed techniques like lithography and cubism, reframing them through an Egyptian lens. His abstract compositions, such as those influenced by "Piet Mondrian", reinterpret geometric harmony to reflect Sufi mysticism and socio-political critique (Kandil, 2008). This fusion underscores Benjamin's notion of "aura," where authenticity arises from the artist's ability to imbue modern forms with localized meaning (Benjamin, 2008).



### 3. Socio-Political

### Commentary

El Gebaly's later works (1991–2014) address themes like Arab unity and displacement, using symbolic motifs like the inverted pyramid to critique political instability (Kandil, 2008). Here, expressive authenticity transcends aesthetics, becoming a vehicle for moral and existential reflection—a concept echoed in debates about art's role in postcolonial identity (Hal Foster, 2007).

### Critical Perspectives and Legacy

El Gebaly's work challenges the "expressive fallacy"—Hal Foster's critique of art that claims unmediated emotional truth—by demonstrating how authenticity is negotiated through cultural hybridity (Hal Foster, 2007). His prints, while rooted in Egyptian tradition, engage with global dialogues on abstraction and expressionism, reflecting Walter Benjamin's assertion that authenticity thrives in the interplay between tradition and innovation (Benjamin, 2008).

By synthesizing heritage with modernist techniques, El Gebaly's oeuvre embodies what Dutton terms "expressive sincerity," where the artist's vision remains unapologetically personal yet universally resonant (Dutton, 2003). His legacy underscores the enduring relevance of expressive authenticity in a globalized art world, where cultural specificity and individual voice coexist.

### Analysis: El Gebaly's Artistic Evolution

#### Stage 1 (1958–1965): Foundations in Heritage

The first stage was emotional, shaped by his upbringing and environment. Since childhood, he has been passionate about the calligraphy drawn and engraved on Islamic architecture, and this growth continued within him until he joined the Faculty of Fine Arts, where he studied the academic dimensions of art, saturated with studies of ancient Islamic buildings and mosques through the material of landscapes of popular neighbourhoods. He also joined a school to improve his calligraphy skills for four years (1955-1958) to study and master calligraphy rules.

#### Stage 2 (1966–1975): European Sojourn and Abstraction

The second stage marks the true beginning of using calligraphy as a shaping value and can be considered fundamental in 1965 through a series of works on the High Dam. His style began to move towards geometric cubism, where the simple Kufic calligraphy became a part of

the architecture of the painting through the body of the dam as an aesthetic value that serves the architectural surface, and it crystallized clearly in his journey to Italy but appeared in a way that is not readable as an embracing cloud dominated by abstract style.figure1.



Figure 1-Hussein Gebaly – Cairo set - etching - 70×50 cm -1975

<https://www.cooking-kings.com/2018/12/hussein-al-jabali-cairo.html>

Then, his experiments began in 1969, searching for the overall beauty of calligraphy beyond its linguistic content, starting from the aesthetics of the individual letter and its relationship with other letters. The calligraphy became clear and readable, but soon the lines intertwined, and the aim was to reveal the hidden beauty of calligraphy as a fundamental and central element in the artwork by interacting with the geometric shape within it, whether it was a square, a circle, or a triangle, in a process that depends on repetition, alternation, and geometric harmonization.

### **Stage 3 (1976–1990): Sufism and Organic Forms**

In the third stage began in 1976, the artist's style became freer and more organic, with a focus on the line and its relationship to the ground. The compositions became more complex, with collages of paper used to create new spaces, and the colours became more vibrant, reflecting the influence of the natural environment in the Netherlands, where the artist was living at the time. In this phase, El Gebaly's work was characterized by a simpler, more organic aesthetic, with more fluid geometric shapes and an emphasis on the interaction of colour and line.

The artist also experimented with new techniques, such as lithography and embossing, to further develop his style.figure2,3



Figure 2-Hussein Gebaly – Cairo set - etching - 70×50 cm -1976

<https://www.cooking-kings.com/2018/12/hussein-al-jabali-cairo.html>



Figure 3-Hussein Gebaly – Cairo set – colored etching - 70×50 cm -1976

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/477733472945962616/>

#### Stage 4 (1991–2014): Sociopolitical Critique



Figure 4-Hussein Gebaly – untitled - woodcut- 70×50 cm -1992

<https://www.fineart.gov.eg/AllPics/ArtPics/Works/high/781/781-2.jpg>



Figure 5-Hussein Gebaly – untitled - etching - 70×50 cm -1991

<https://www.bonhams.com/auction/22851/lot/749/hussein-el-gebaly-egypt-1934-2014-untitled-three-prints/>

The fourth stage in the 1990s marked the emergence of the human element in Gebaly's work, with the formulation of the human form in an abstract way that reflects his philosophy. One of his recurring motifs at this stage is the depiction of an organic being with one eye, which may see the truth with strength or weakness or may not see it at all due

to blindness or lack of attention. The power of his work also comes from the inner fabric of this abstract entity, which occupies multiple spaces with its unique character figure 4, 5.

Gebaly's work also reflects his conscious and subconscious reactions to the printing process on wood. He draws energy from the material to continue creating and exploring new ideas with a sensitivity and spontaneity that is characteristic of his style

In this period, Gebaly's work is characterized by a richness of vitality and regeneration, with infinite lines that sometimes break with violence and power, and other times flow with softness and flexibility to create geometric spaces that are both painted and in calligraphy.

**Case Study: *Symphony of the Line* (1992) figure 6**



Figure 6-Hussein Gebaly – *Symphony of the Line* - Woodcut - 70×50 cm -1992-  
<https://www.fineart.gov.eg/AllPics/ArtPics/Works/high/781/781-6.jpg>

This woodcut print depicts an organic-inspired form with a single eye on the left side, delineated by a black line. Adjacent to it is a shape that combines a triangle and a dome. At the top of this figure, there is a semi-dome, and the painting is characterized by varied spatial areas in texture and colour. At first glance, attention is drawn to the crescent, which appears to be hanging the word of unity "There is no God but Allah". It is as if it is declaring it on the pyramid and the Sphinx, and as if it is saying that the pyramid and the Sphinx are repeating the word of



unity with it, eternally and authentically. Additionally, the organic creature with a single eye expresses the existence of a monocular human being who cannot rely on an opinion or launch an idea of specificity. The implications of the monocular eye, such as the duality or internal conflict, suggest a barrier that affects the correct vision, attempting to deviate it from the correct path. The observer with the single eye tries to achieve and refine their vision, drawing attention to the extension of the barren scene, intertwined with the sky in a speech that explains the emotional fabric of abstractionist artist's work. The artist uses organic lines that vary in degrees, proximity, distance, and cohesion in rhythms that bring together the earth's surfaces, the sky, and the creatures swimming for God. This presents an overlap and containment between layers of organic and spiritual meanings surrounding the organic creature to envelop it with its Sufi and faithful aura. This aura is linked, at the same time, to its purity and transparency in guarding and nurturing its steps, protecting it from the impact of limited vision until its vision is restored.

### **The Cultural Dimension in the Works of the Artist “Hussein El Gebaly”**

#### **Cultural Identity:**

“Hussein El Gebaly”'s artistic works are heavily influenced by various cultural and heritage factors. The artist has been inspired by ancient Egyptian art in terms of the use of colours and the reliance on horizontal and vertical lines, as well as the appearance of the triangle as a fundamental element, which was influenced by the pyramids.

Furthermore, El Gebaly was influenced by the elements of the hieroglyphic script and Islamic art and ornamentation, where he showcased a distinctive use of paper and the embossing technique with golden colour, which impacted his artistic imprint. The artist studied Islamic calligraphy and was able to interact with its unique rhythms, inspired by the Kufic Arabic calligraphy.

#### **Social and Political Variables:**

El Gebaly's work has also been influenced by social and political variables. For example, the construction of the High Dam project impacted the artist's early works, which featured sharp construction lines representing the High Dam. Moreover, El Gebaly was affected by the Naksa, where he used the inverted triangle as a symbol for the inverted pyramid and the situations that led to defeat. He was also

influenced by the invasion of Kuwait and the war on Iraq, which expressed the tearing apart of Arab unity.

#### Global Cultural Influences:

In addition to the above cultural and heritage factors, El Gebaly's artistic works were influenced by global cultural elements. The artist was influenced by the abstract school and Mondrian's style, as well as the Sufi spirit. He also showed a connection to the Cubist school and the use of collage in some of his works. Moreover, El Gebaly was influenced by the Italian school, which draws colours from nature to reveal vibrant and luminous colours in his works, especially after he visited the Netherlands.

Finally, the artist was influenced by symbolic surrealism, particularly in his last stage, where he used a form inspired by popular dolls with a single eye which represented the loss of vision in contemporary society. These global cultural influences showcase El Gebaly's ability to integrate different artistic styles and techniques, creating a unique artistic language that reflects his identity and artistic vision.

#### Research Results:

1. **The study confirmed that cultural context plays a pivotal role in shaping expressive authenticity in contemporary art**, with artists drawing on local heritage and socio-cultural environments to create work that is both identity-rooted and responsive to the present.
2. **“Hussein El Gebaly” demonstrated exceptional ability to merge local cultural symbols with global artistic techniques and styles**, maintaining a unique visual signature and expressive message. His work serves as a model for contemporary authenticity.
3. **The research revealed that political and social events in Egypt and the Arab world, such as the construction of the High Dam, the 1967 defeat, and regional wars, had a direct impact on El Gebaly’s artistic language and thematic content**, reaffirming that art reflects societal transformation.
4. **El Gebaly’s printmaking practice proved to be a powerful expressive medium**, capable of constructing complex visual compositions that condense cultural meaning into refined aesthetic structures.

5. **The findings suggest that El Gebaly's artistic journey can offer a theoretical framework applicable to other Arab artists**, particularly those navigating the intersection of local identity and global visual culture.

#### **Research Recommendations:**

1. **Promote academic studies that examine the relationship between cultural identity and artistic expression**, particularly within the fields of visual arts and printmaking, to deepen understanding of the cultural foundations of contemporary artistic authenticity.
2. **Encourage cultural and artistic institutions to document and archive the works of Egyptian and Arab printmakers**, such as "Hussein El Gebaly", through exhibitions, catalogues, and critical publications.
3. **Integrate topics such as expressive authenticity and cultural identity into the curricula of fine arts faculties**, to train emerging artists to critically engage with heritage while remaining open to global influences.
4. **Support artistic and research projects inspired by models like El Gebaly's**, in order to emphasize the importance of balancing local culture and global trends in contemporary art.
5. **Revive and support workshops and initiatives focused on traditional printmaking techniques**, recognizing their value as expressive tools and carriers of cultural specificity.

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