

The dazzling bedazzled: Hassan Sharif We play a game on society

By: Maryam Abdullah

The artist from the UAE, Hassan Sharif, sees that art has a political aspect:

“We must consider the politics of art. There is a politics of politics, a politics of religion, a politics of sports, *a politics of art*. The politics of art is to play the paintings... you and your thought... you must come out with a language that addresses your audience, the people you have played, that’s a way of display, a particular policy that requires a particular ambience. This policy you learn through your education about art and the history of art. It is a game you can win or lose...”

Hassan Sharif held an exhibition displaying some of his pieces in the headquarters of the United Arab Emirates Fine Arts Society in early October. The guests were shocked beyond belief by the display; some even considered it a mockery of art. Hassan Sharif’s displayed pieces were not the traditional “paintings”, they were handicrafts, through which he wanted to explore certain denotations in his distinctive pattern of thought.

What did this artist try to say in his non-art art?

Different pieces:

Let us first go through the paintings, or rather the handicrafts of Hassan Sharif.

- One of the pieces is basically newspapers rolled up like pipes and tied with white thread. Each paper is 33 by 23 inches in size. There are more than a thousand of those “newspaper-pipes”.
- Another piece is a cardboard box 14 by 13 by 11 inches in volume filled with white pieces of paper rolled up as funnels.
- A third piece is a white cloth 36 by 4 inches in size with buttons stitched on it.
- The last piece is composed of seventeen wooden pillars each standing 48 inches tall carefully wrapped with white cotton thread.

These works aroused many questions and public discontent; some even considered them human trash created with no artistic sense and having no aesthetic value. Commenting on such views, Hassan Sharif comically asked if they also smelled bad or stunk?

Some people simply described Hassan Sharif as an empty human being with no real message that stops him from this nonsense, otherwise he wouldn’t have wasted his time on meaningless pieces that in fact mock art and lower its credibility.

Why the sticks and pipes?

Psychologists analyzed Hassan Sharif, those who know him personally. He is a lonely person with plenty of spare time, thus he spends his precious time sewing pieces of cloth and

wrapping sticks with high quality cotton thread. They add that his use of elongated shapes (sticks, funnels, pipes) shows- as the psychologists claim- a need for a romantic life that he lacks.

Some gave Hassan Sharif his due, saying that his art should indeed rouse suspicion. Common people don't have the artistic background to understand such art.

Hassan Sharif didn't comment when the questions piled up about his pieces, but was content to listen to what was said. Finally he spoke explaining his vision on art, and why his display was as it was.

Hassan Sharif says:

“ There is a buried potential that has its origin in childhood, and that creates awareness. Some it leads to a material “game” that benefits them, and puts them at a financial advantage; another it pushes towards a material “game” too but it forces them away from what is “human” in them, it turns them into criminals. The artist hides and buries this potential. He seeks a game that is “pure”, that sucks out all his potential (!). At the same time it glows in the dazzling bedazzled. A game that compromises all that is in you and deprives you of all the secrecy you are always trying to preserve.”

But who are you playing it on? On society. And with who? With other artists. With their thoughts, with his thoughts. And let there be failure, nothing lasts forever. The idiot runs behind a mirage, but he is never actually chasing the mirage, he is aware of what he wants and this awareness is what is important. Better not to be aware of what you are chasing to chase it, better not to ever catch it, the important thing is to run...

Internal war:

Hassan Sharif sees that war goes on in the inside more than the outside; the outside concerns him but not artistically.

“The artist is fighting a monster within, he reveals himself and there is always someone else inside him. Inside an artist there is good and evil and his strange actions are an attempt to achieve internal balance.”

This balance is what concerns Hassan Sharif, what he really means is to reach the destructive self then the outside will become clear (society and social relationships) and Hassan Sharif doesn't disregard the importance of art:

“ I think that painting, logically, implies a need to be understood by someone, knowing who that someone is might be very difficult, but he is there, they are...”

Add to that Hassan Sharif's amazement by the huge disparity between the high sensitivity of an artist and a common person, the artist is always searching for something deeper and more meaningful. This gap between the artist and the common person leads to miscommunication.

Hassan Sharif also thinks that he can utilize simple objects to carry meaning, detail and symbolism:

“We can explain anything that is very simple in great detail. This green cloth we assume is before us on the table, we can start writing a novel about it. Just ask, who washed it today? Perhaps we can ask the clerk at the hotel how old the employee who washed it is, whether they were male or female. We ask where he is from, when he came to the country. About his family and how he lives and what he feels, what he says? And like this we write a novel that is thousands of pages long about these simple things, why not create art?”

Did Hassan Sharif respond to the suggestion that his latest works were no more than human waste?

Art, painting, doesn't come easy. It is the accumulation of relentless pain in the artist's soul... “A fool is soothed by finding pleasure in all that is around him, all that is superficial and available and material... it is his animalistic tranquility... but pain has its eminence from a sacred internal pleasure... The artist willingly chooses suffering”

Did Hassan Sharif really find himself as an artist?

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