

From the Corner of Someone's Eye¹

Ala Younis



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An artist decides to draw the eyes of a creature looking out of the frame. Almost hidden by the eyelids, the eyes look at a subject undisclosed to the viewer. A bird with a crown of feathers seems to be looking at the Seated Musician², while the musician's own dog is looking attentively at something situated in front of the painting, at a corner. The man's musical instrument has bent its end to be in the picture.

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To see someone/something out of (or from) the corner of one's eye is to see someone or something at the edge of one's field of vision.



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A relaxed dog corners a group of women consoling a weeping man. He seems to be crying as he hides his head between his arm and that of another woman.³ I haven't paid attention to figures that turned their back to picture makers before.

¹ This is a chapter of fragmented notes, part of ongoing observations on art practices related to the Arab World.

² Samir Rafi, *The Musician*, 1963

³ Samir Rafi, *Group of Figures in a Village*, 1966

⁴ Yto Barrada, *Rue de la Liberté, Tangier, 2000, and Homme au Tableau - Tetouan / Le détroit*, 1999



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We only see the back of one of the two men embracing on Rue de la Liberté, Tangier from Yto Barrada's Strait Project series.⁴ One man seems to be consoling the other, but we do not really know. In the same series, a young man walks down an alley carrying several big frames painted in gold, the first of which holds an image of a flower field and trunks of scattered trees. The young man stops for a moment, to better lift the heavy stack, and probably for the photo to be taken. His eyes are fixed on someone outside the frame. The tiles on this walkway in Tetouan are similar to those on "Rue de la Liberté" in Tangiers, but not identical.

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I was overtaking a truck on the Autobahn; it was very hot and it was an old lorry without air-conditioning. There were two men in the cab, and the driver had opened the door and was dangling his leg out in order to cool off. This image, seen from the corner of my eye when driving past, impressed me. I happened to stop at a motorway cafe where the lorry also stopped. I went up the bar where the two men from the lorry were standing. Not a word passed between them; it was as though they had absolutely nothing in common. You got the impression they were strangers. I asked myself what do these two men see, how do they see[?]⁵

⁵ Wim Wenders, *The Logic of Images, Essays and Conversations*. London: faber and faber, p 57



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In 1962, Saadi Al Kaabi painted a worker, with a dark turquoise mustache. It almost touches his sculpted cheekbones, borrowing its tints from the shadows of his traditional white head-dress. He is posing with his shovel, a tool used to move earth from one place to another with the force of a man's hand. The late 1950s and early 1960s in the Arab World were marked by a sharp shift of land ownership from the elite to the people.

In the 1980s, Al Kaabi torched his personal archive of press clippings covering his career as a way of expunging the suggestion of his success to start anew.⁶

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Human Models:

Movement from the exterior to the interior. (Actors: movement from the interior to the exterior.) The thing that matters is not what they show me but what they hide from me and, above all, what they do not suspect is in them. Between them and me: telepathic exchanges, divination.⁷

⁶ Re: Orient, *Investigating Modernism in the Arab World 1950s-'70s*, catalog published by Art Advisory Associates Ltd, Sharjah, 2013. p 545

⁷ Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, New York: Urizen Books. p 2



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Ibrahim Ismael is painting a model in a studio or a sitting room.⁸ Three rays of light illuminate the two figures in this work: one falls from a window on the model leaning on a couch. The sun illuminates part of the table but not the part on which we see the vase. Two lamps shed light from the ceiling, one on the model, looking at the artist from the corner of her eyes, and one on the painter's face and his armchair. The painter painted this image onto his canvas. There is a great similarity between the model and her depiction, but they are not identical. The cursor could give you a close up on the painter's face⁹; working in his traditional white clothing, he seems stressed.

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No actors. (No directing of actors.) No parts. (No learning of parts.) No staging. But the use of working models, taken from life. BEING (models) instead of SEEMING (actors).¹⁰

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Thanks to the elements of shadow, light and perspective, some paintings give us the uncanny feeling of being watched.

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90% of Abdel Hadi Al Gazzar's Portrait, produced in 1950 using brush and media ink on paper, is a face made solely of shades of grey. His eyes are darkened in multiple projections of shade and shadow, but he is watching from behind these deep spots. He is smiling. The lines around his face are like those gazed at in coffee cups; at the left edge of the work is clearly a portrayal of two characters - one of a man looking at the portrayed man, and another of a boy who has stuck his face in the picture.



¹⁰ Robert Bresson, Notes on Cinematography, New York: Urizen Books. p 1

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In this critical time, came your exhibition.¹¹ My words cannot express the fabulous paintings I am seeing in front of me.¹²

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A real smile has "laughter lines" at the outer corner of the eyes where the skin crinkles up. The muscles involved cannot be easily controlled consciously and usually activate only with a real smile. These muscles also affect the eyelids and cause them to tense up with a real smile.¹³



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Seif Wanly signed *Portrait of a Couple*¹⁴ twice, in English in the left corner, and in Arabic in the right. The old couple's big and blue eyes are looking are something outside the corner of the frame. The branch she carries has three light pink blossoms while his has only two. The hand gestures in this painting could be paintings on their own. The top part of the women's dress is as fine as the man's lined white moustache. The painting is admired for its bright blues.

On the Internet we only see the couple and their bright blues, it remains undisclosed to us what they are looking at. We also do not see the back of the painting on which Wanly made a "description in felt pen" that read "Best wishes & regards to our dearest friends", and he wrote their names, signed his name, dated the work, and mentioned that it was produced in Alexandria. This piece was in a German private collection, offered for sale on November 30, 2013, at an auction house in Berlin on the street of Kurfürstendamm.

¹¹ Azmi Rezaq on Gazzar's show, note written on 23/12/1951.

¹² Sayed Abdel Rasoul note on Gazzar's work, 1971.

¹³ http://learnbodylanguage.org/mona_lisa_smile.html

¹⁴ Seif Wanly, Portrait of a couple, 1978

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I tried to find something interesting about Kurfürstendamm, or a link between Wanly and Berlin, but it seems that I need to look further. However, here is what I found:



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\$ 24,467 USD
€ 18,000 EUR
£ 14,944 GBP

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A person's eyes will move to the right, when he thinks about questions of sound to be sonically remembered.

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In Seif Wanly's Self Portrait (Artist in Studio), a skull sits on a stack of thick books, probably portfolios. Undated. The artist bends on his drawing board, engaging his two hands. His face is red. I tried to read what was on the board before he painted on it:

Colour-twenty /contact with pupil's work movement / continues

Handle / work / Paint

Wanly is wearing Khakis, just like that labourer from Al Kaabi's piece.

⁸ Ibrahim Ismael, Untitled, 1965

⁹ On Barjeel Art Foundation's website visitors can browse the collection. The zoom function allows work to be viewed in detail.



Bruno Barbey
View profile
EGYPT, Cairo. Egyptian painter Inji AFLATOUN. She was also activist in the women's movement. She was a "leading spokesman for the Marxist-progressive-nationalist-feminist spokeswoman in the late 1940s and 1950s", as well as a "pioneer of modern Egyptian art" and "one of the important Egyptian visual artists".

Image Reference
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Add to lightbox: 'My First Lightbox'
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Original story
Arab intellectuals.

Keywords:
Art ... Artist's studio ... Cairo ...
Egyptian (nationality) ... Face ...
Female personality ... Human being ...
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Proper name in caption ... Ring ...
Woman (all ages)

In 2011, a museum of Inji Eflatoun's works was opened in Prince Taz Palace in Cairo. In addition to 60 artworks donated by her family to the state, the museum included her personal objects such as her easel, palettes, and what remained of her colour medium. In an online review, a journalist complained that the curator does not show up to the museum, causing disruptions to its operation. She also wrote: "you cannot bypass the paintings, they would often stop you, or force you to recall them often. They are reflections on Egypt's history, specially 'Will not Forget' – a painting which depicts martyrs among the 'fedayeen' in the Suez battles".

Inji Eflatoun is spelled differently in Latin every time she's written on. I use the cursor to find the way she writes her name on her works. On Magnum Photos website, three photos of her among images of other "Arab Intellectuals" are taken by Bruno Barbey.¹⁵ Aflatoun (as spelled on this website) is standing at the corner of a painting that would need a moment to decipher. The painting depicts meticulous, wavy seas of masked men in cameo patterns holding dark blue rifles. Two women are among the waves of camouflaged 'fedayeen', and there are probably 27 barrels and muzzles.

¹⁵ <http://www.magnumphotos.com/image/PAR409903.html>



Three hands come out of the body of "The Husband" in Marwan's work. One with a stick extended over a table painted in olive green, one resting on his heart on his brick pullover, while the third is pulling his further eye down a bit. His face is almost a geographic map, of wavering topographies that can tell of stress perhaps, or disgust, or indifference. Looking down and to the left, would be the direction the eyes moved in while thinking about questions that required recalling a smell, feeling, or taste.

Only the corner of the olive green table is showing in a photo posted online by Sultan upon his visit to Marwan's studio in Berlin. There, six paintings called for attention: Munif Al Razzaz leaning on a column and giving an ear, the middle boy of the three 'fedayeen'¹⁶ in their olive green khakis appearing from behind the visitor's elbow, and two small drawings resting on two small paintings above the tilting children.

Cor-ner /kôrnr/ verb
(often be cornered) force (a person or animal) into a place or situation from which it is hard to escape.

OR
detain (someone) in conversation, typically against their will.

OR
control (a market) by dominating the supply of a particular commodity.

OR
(of a vehicle or driver) go around a bend in a road.



"Here, one must trust the work of the artist rather than any texts representing it."¹⁷

¹⁶ Plural for Fedai, freedom fighter, a term widely associated to Palestinian militants in the 20th century.

¹⁷ Statement that appears in a text I wrote parallel to this one.