



Distortion and Its Representations in Contemporary Iraqi Visual Formation

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to identify distortion and its representations in contemporary Iraqi visual formation. The research sample consisted of three paintings by the plastic artist Alaa Bashir and the plastic artist Zahraa Al-Baghdadi. Among the most important findings: Distortion refers to a changed perspective in the visual arts, in which artworks appear distorted or stretched in a way that appears as if they were drawn by someone looking at them through a mirror or a curved lens. Perspective distortion uses distorted perspective to create the illusion of a different size, using the same size for each object or a single object much more significant than all the other objects in the image.

In art, this can be used to create images that are taller or wider than they appear or to distort objects and make them appear larger or smaller. Some forms of distortion rely on unusual structural characteristics, such as deviating from correct anatomical proportions, distorting and distorting shapes, adopting perspective below the level of sight, relying on cold and neutral colors, and using straight, horizontal, slanted, and broken lines, among the most essential proposals: the necessity of conducting studies and research on modern Iraqi artistic production, its pessimistic and psychological suffering, the reasons for the emergence of these effects on it, and what is expressed in representations of distortion.

Keywords: distortion, optical modulation, visual arts, visual formation, Zahraa Al-Baghdadi.



Introduction and research problem:

Visual distortion is any human-made act that causes confusion to the recipient when viewed and is unnatural and discordant with other surrounding elements. Visual distortion usually comes from neglect, misuse, poor planning, or social and economic misconduct. Therefore, the issue of sight has become an issue of concern. It is essential to researchers, as visual pollution causes visual fatigue, and some consider it a disease of our time.

This issue is still absent from the minds of some despite its importance and negative repercussions, especially when it invades the artistic arena. The aesthetics of visual formation falls within the framework of cognitive, semantic, artistic, and scientific research into the elements and foundations of design in general and the formations of the conceptual (intellectual) structure in particular so that art becomes a base upon which modern beauty theses are based, which conflict through various sources, including philosophical thought (which It puts intense pressure on the foundations and nature of art and its production processes while specifying the visual and aesthetic characteristics, as the visual coexistence of a person plays a significant role in directing his daily behavior, and the artistic work interacts effectively with its environmental surroundings, with the various relationships and interactions that that surroundings contain, and the absorption and analysis of its vocabulary, And presenting it in new expressive aesthetic forms.

Research importance:

The importance of research is embodied in the following:

- 1- It identifies aspects of visual distortion and their representations in some contemporary Iraqi visual artworks.
- 2- The research sheds light on distortion and its representations in a critical topic, temporary Iraqi visual formation, which is very important for specialists.

Research goal:

The research aimed to identify distortion and its representations in contemporary Iraqi visual formation.

Search concepts and terms:

1- Distortion:

Linguistically, distortion (noun), source of distorted, distorted: (verb), distorted, distorted, distorted, so it is distorted, and the object is distorted, distorting facial features: corrupting and making them ugly, distorting the truth: distorting it, Changing it (Maalouf, 410).

Technically, distortion in art means formal changes in regular geometric harmony with geometric forms of existence or proportions presented by the natural world. It is an imbalance in the mass of the artwork, which results in a change in the visual scene (Al-Mashhadani, 2003).

2- Representations:

Linguistically, Ibn Manzur defined it as someone who resembles a thing or depicts it as if one is looking at it. It depicted an example and likened a thing to a



thing: changed and likened it, and made its likeness and likeness to it (Ibn Manzur, 23).

The word “representation” appears in the surrounding dictionary in the sense of representing a thing: making it an example, resembling it by opening it, and representing it by breaking it: the image and its likeness to it, a representation made of it so that it is as if he is looking at it, and its conformity is its perception (Al-Fayrouzabadi, 49).

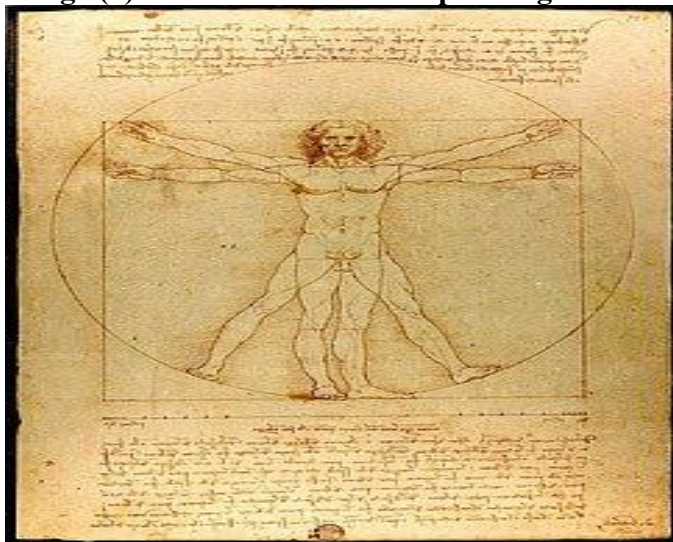
Technically, representation is defined as (resembling a thing with another thing) by changing it, resembling it, and making it like it. Representation is depiction and simile, and the difference between it and simile is that every representation is a simile, and not every simile is a representation, and representing a thing is imagining its likeness, including imitation (Shaabeth & Al-Yassin, 2018).

Theoretical framework:

First: Distortion in art:

It is a term used to describe the distortion of invisible images when viewed in their natural form. In other words, image distortion is a type of perspective distortion, and the concept was first introduced into art by the Italian Renaissance artist Piero della Francesca, who is considered the founder of this art style. It is an optical illusion that can be used to create a perception of space in art. It is a distorted image that appears to be stretched or compressed. Leonardo da Vinci first used distortion in his painting "Vitruvian Man," which shows an apple-shaped man with an elongated face and short limbs (Al-Tabbar, 2019, p. 161).

Image (1): Leonardo da Vinci's painting The Vitruvian Man



Source:

[https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%84_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A_%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A_\(%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88_%D8%AF%D8%A7_%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%8A\)#/media/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:Da_Vinci_Vitruve_Luc_Viatour.jpg](https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B1%D8%AC%D9%84_%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%81%D9%8A_%D8%AA%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A_(%D9%84%D9%8A%D9%88%D9%86%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AF%D9%88_%D8%AF%D8%A7_%D9%81%D9%8A%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%8A)#/media/%D9%85%D9%84%D9%81:Da_Vinci_Vitruve_Luc_Viatour.jpg)



Distortion refers to an altered perspective in the visual arts, in this case, a perspective in which artworks appear distorted or stretched in such a way that they appear to have been drawn by someone looking at them through a mirror or curved lens (Al-Hassan, 2018, p. 39).

Perspective distortion in painting and art is a technique that uses distorted perspective to create the illusion of a different size. This can be done using the same size for each object or a single object that is much more significant than all the other objects in the image. In art, this can be used to create images that are taller or wider than they appear or to distort objects and make them appear larger or smaller. The human eye naturally tends to focus on objects in the center of a scene, so optical distortion can create the illusion of depth by distorting objects closer or farther away from the viewer (Chatti, 2017, p. 89).

In art, distortion is a way to overcome the perspective problem by creating the illusion of three-dimensional space. The artist distorts the image plane using a grid or other geometric shape, making it appear that your eyes are seeing from a different point of view. Distortion can be challenging to achieve with accurate results due to the need to be able to see something on one side of the head while looking at something on the other side and then have them line up correctly when looking at them simultaneously (Shaabeth & Al-Yassin, 2018, p. 547).

It is also called perspective distortion because the process is based on the idea that there are two images: one that we see and one that is hidden. When placed side by side, they create the illusion of depth, can be manipulated to create many different shapes, and have been used in ancient Greek and Roman art and medieval art. Distortion was used in art as a means of creating unusual effects and illusions (Al-Tabball, 2019, p. 159).

Distortion can be used in various forms, such as paintings, drawings, and sculptures, and the most common use of distortion is in drawing. Images are usually depicted in anamorphic form through distorted perspective or through distortion of space itself. For example, if you look at a painting from the right angle, you will see that it appears on a flat plane. However, when viewed from another angle, it appears to be on a whole other plane with its unique perspective and curvature, making it appear curved or curved in only one direction (in the same way In which a folded piece of paper appears if you raise it to your ear) (Al-Taie & Al-Himyari, 2019, p. 535).

Distortion can be caused by an artist's perspective, lighting, or color and is used in painting, sculpture, and printmaking. It was first used in art by Leonardo da Vinci in 1514. He created these distortions using two parallel lines converging at an angle on a flat surface. This technique was also later used by other artists, such as William Blake, who created his version of this technique called distorted perspective, which he published in his book *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789) (Chaty, 2017, p. 91).



Distortion is an optical illusion that relies on the viewer's mind to trick them into seeing something unreal. This type of art was prevalent in the early 20th century. It uses distorted perspective and optical illusions to create a feeling of disorientation, which can be used to make the viewer question their perception. This makes it an excellent tool for creating art that addresses issues of perception, such as the way we process information about ourselves, others, and the world around us (Al-Dhafiri, 2001, p. 77).

Second: A historical overview of the plastic movement in Iraq:

During the era of the Ottoman Empire, the artistic movement began with paintings entering Iraq across the border through the Ottomans. At the beginning of the twentieth century, some Iraqi painting enthusiasts in the Ottoman army, such as Abdul Qadir Al-Rassam, Asim Hafez, Haj Salim, and Hassan Sami, had gone to teach drawing in schools. Then, in 1931 A.D., the artist Akram Shukri was sent to European capitals, followed by the artist Faiq Hassan, Atta Sabri, Hafez Al-Droubi, and Jawad Salim (1920 - 1961). After their return, they established solid foundations. They formed artistic groups, including establishing the art of drawing at the Institute of Fine Arts at the hands of the artist Faiq. Hassan, and the sculpture branch at the hands of the artist Jawad Salim, and then the establishment of the Friends of Art Association in 1941 A.D., then the establishment of the Free Studio in 1942 A.D. at the hands of the artist Hafez Al-Droubi, and in 1945 A.D. the Modern Thought magazine was published under the supervision of the artist Jamil Hamoudi. After that, a group was founded under the leadership of Faiq. Hassan called it "the pioneers," then Jawad Salim separated from them to found the Baghdad Modern Art Group in 1951 A.D. The period of the fifties and sixties was characterized by the founding of the Academy of Fine Arts in 1962 A.D., the opening of the National Museum of Modern Art in this same period, and the emergence of groups of artists with different skills. The most important use and diversity of unusual materials are the Innovators Group 1965 A.D. and the New Vision 1969 A.D.

In 1971 A.D., the founding of the One Dimension Group was announced, which revealed the features of Arab civilizations. After that, new intellectual treatments appeared among Iraqi artists, including Alaa Hussein. Bashir, the artist and surgeon who joined the Impressionists group in 1958 - 1968, was founded on the initiative of the artist Hafez Al-Droubi. This group chose the Impressionist method of drawing subjects as the logic of artistic expression in the beginning, and then after that, each one of them chose his style of expression. Among the most prominent members of this group are: (Hafez et al.). These artists depicted the depths of man between reality and the self (the human spirit) that suffers from Concerns and suffering with a new spirituality and the psychological symptoms and connotations it contains, as his works take you to deep secrets that are evident in the reality of man, his crises, and his misery. Man forms a strong presence in his products. He was once asked about his style, saying: (I have been painting



since the fifties without planning my style, and my paintings are my style, and my works are my identity). He is in direct contact with different situations and emotions due to his experience in medicine and surgery. He draws reality and the human spirit together because they express this. This is related to dual existence because the soul carries within it many meanings, so these emotions express them in more sublime meanings (Ramadan, 2021, p. 244).

Practical section:

First: Research methodology:

The researcher used the descriptive analytical method in analyzing the samples, which is an accurate description and analytical method of the phenomenon or problem to be investigated through a scientific methodology and its objective interpretation to achieve the research objectives.

Second: Research population and sample:

The research community includes oil paintings by contemporary Iraqi visual artists, available in art halls, books, academic and university dissertations, on the Internet, and on social media.

The plastic artists Alaa Bashir and Zahraa Al-Baghdadi chose three paintings as the research sample.

Third: Sample analysis:

Distorting the shapes around us is one thing, and distorting the corners and components of the composition in the artwork is another thing. The common denominator between them is the word, the actual content of which differs.

Using a few colors, the academic Iraqi visual artist Zahraa al-Baghdadi is trying to reconstruct the distorted image of the ideal face of humanity by collecting pieces and features of Iraqi society, which humanity has come to realize through its national civilization and national experience. When, in the emptiness of her studio, the eras of turmoil, political death, and the politics of death in Iraq, since the middle of the last century became independent, are revealed in succession and succession, bathed in a flow of complimentary colors, on the geographical borders and historical specificity of Mesopotamia, to include the features and epics of humanity as a whole, since its time immemorial, in its quest for emancipation, from the mill of its differences and the sins of exploiting its differences, and its cultural, intellectual and civilizational pluralism. The shadow, the differentiating element in visual expression, with the derivatives of its pale color, angry at the crimes of humans, just as the angels protested in the metaphysical dialogue, in their refusal to be honored with the reconstruction of the earth, gives Al-Baghdadi's paintings the unique advantage of possessing the ability to interrogate tragic comedy, with much philosophical objectivity. Moreover, through the smartest crossing from formal intuition to plastic dazzle, the artistic aesthetic is immersed in suggestion and artistic questioning.



Image (2): Fate's painting by artist Zahraa Al-Baghdadi



Reference

<https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%B4%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%82%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B8%D9%84-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A5%D9%86%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%86%D9%8A-%D9%81%D9%8A-%D9%84%D9%88%D8%AD%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B9%D8%B1%D8%A7>

Existence is extinguished in the painting "Destiny," leaving the recipient's taste transformed into the forms of magnificent shadows, to the rhythm of the black and white feather dance, where the form of the renaissance of humanity and the state of human confusion is broken. The unknown comes, and the present crop is reflected, and the aura of the painting's frame is full of echoes of monochromatic shadows and the state of strange shapes. It was refracted in poetic semiology, blending the strangeness of these forms into a positive, systematic artistic dissonance that gave the work an aesthetic that goes beyond abstract taste to a profound philosophical question.

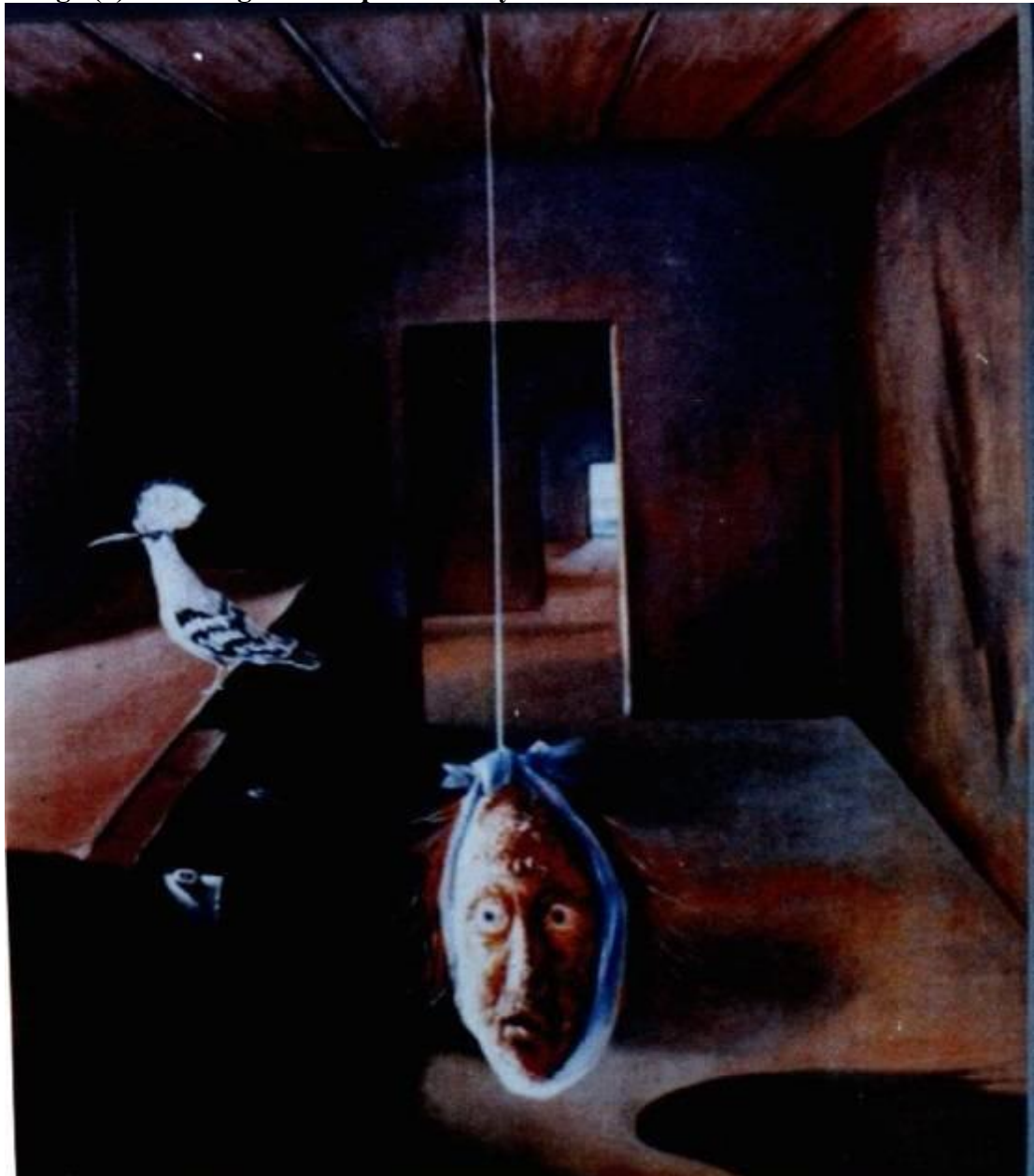
Despite the wounds of the nation's body that inhabit its psyche, as they are from the soil of the two rivers, the Iraqi visual artist Zahraa Al-Baghdadi confirms that the manifestations of political violence that accompanied her country's history are only one chapter of her country's history. It is the black comedy of humanity, which hides self-will and personal arrogance. As long as the tool of art, especially visual art, is universal in its system of discourse, avoiding the restrictions of



privacy and the consequences of subjectivity, it is a fortiori that the artistic work, in its particularity, includes the generality of the subject and the human scene, while of course preserving the advantage of pluralism and difference in visions.

It is evident in the painting "Destiny," where Zahraa Al-Baghdadi separates the shadow from itself, and the meaning disappears between the signifier and the signified. Some of it becomes searching for another or turns into some shadow for another in a question about the legitimacy of the self. However, rather than its absence or the extent of its presence, Zahraa Al-Baghdadi tries To integrate man's alienation from himself and his reality based on the experience of the violence of difference and disagreement that characterize the human process.

Moving on to the paintings of the artist Alaa Bashir, which represent pessimism with a kind of distortion in drawing, the painting "Head and Hoopoe," which he produced in 1984, is one of the important paintings by the artist Alaa Bashir in 1980s, represents the highest type of pessimism between pessimistic life and eternal death; It depicts three rooms overlapping each other, and the view is below eye level as if in a continuous maze, and the first room there is a human head and a hoopoe. The texture here is rough and sometimes a mixture between rough and soft, and the bulging eyes almost speak in a state of constant terror and pain because the person here is decapitated, meaning he has no freedom or thought and is restricted from all needs. Therefore, he cannot escape the pain and pessimism inside him. As for his use of the hoopoe bird, he wants to change the bitter reality and eliminate the darkness. Faded colors surround the painting, and its shapes are distorted. As for the lines, some are broken, slanted, and intermittent, and some are geometric, expressing strength to get rid of the constant struggle from fear resulting from a head loaded with terror.

**Image (3): Painting of a hoopoe head by artist Alaa Bashir**

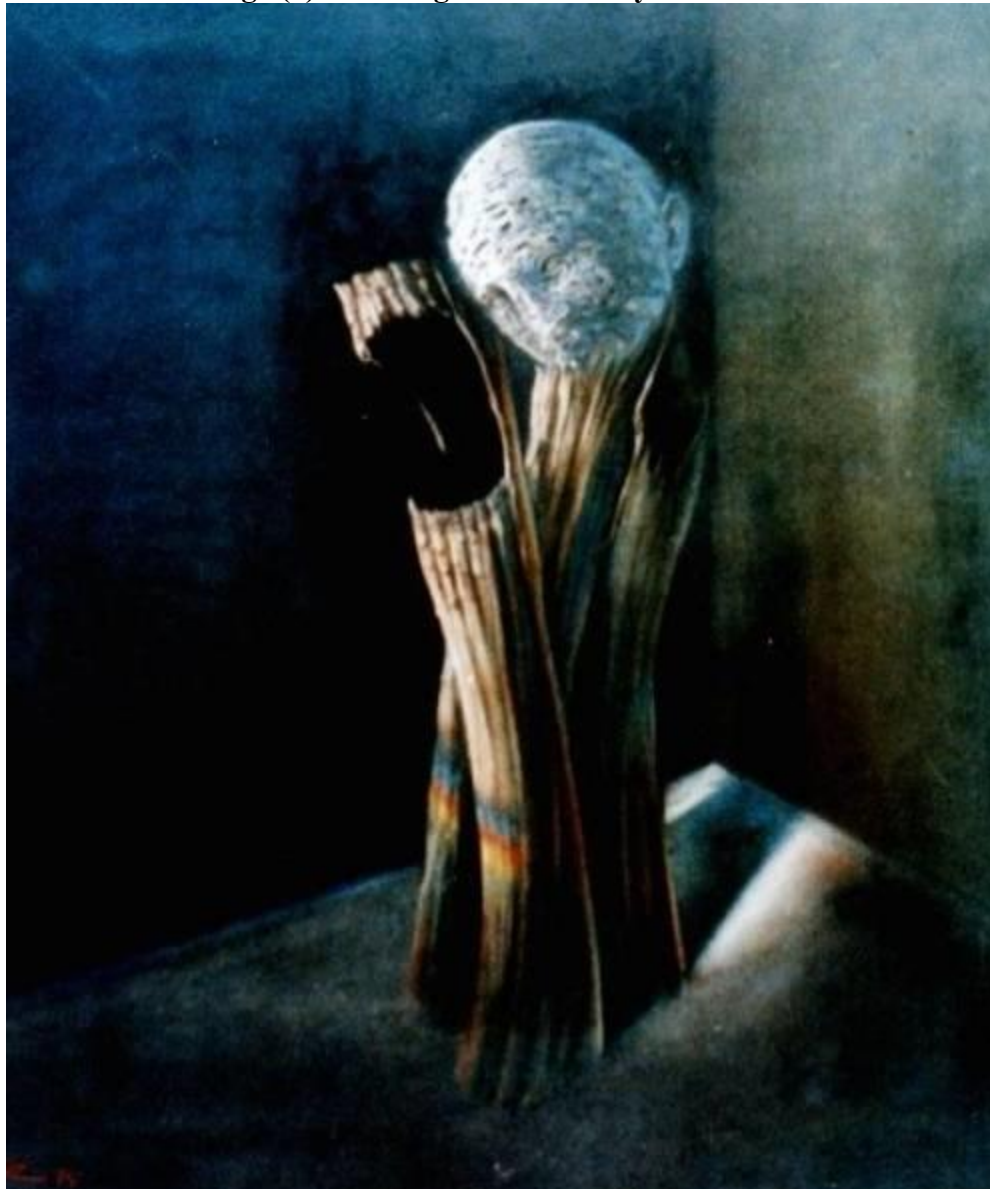
Source: Saddam Arts Center Publications

As for the other sample by the artist Al-Bashir, it is his painting "The Plight of Man 2." This painting depicts a person's psychological state and physical instincts from his birth until his death. He suffers from constant psychological pressure and is surrounded in all areas of his life and controlled by all prevailing social norms, as well as the religious and political situation. His body obscures the person's presence in this painting, and no one else is visible. His feet indicate that there is



something he wants to get out of, but he cannot because he is tied up, and the barrier prevents him from moving. As for the second person, who is in the middle of the painting at the bottom, he expresses the ominous state of misery and oppression inside him and wants to escape from these pressures. These shapes are distorted despite their realism, but they are distorted in their details, as the artist used linear perspective and the colors were limited to cold colors such as olive, blue, and red, which express the state of sadness, isolation, and despair within the characters in the painting. As Freud expressed it, this repression within the painting is to discover Inner reality and reveal repression.

Image (4): The Plight of Man 2 by Alaa Bashir



Source: From the artist's collection



Research Results:

1. Distortion refers to an altered perspective in the visual arts, in which artworks appear distorted or stretched in such a way that they appear to have been drawn by someone looking at them through a mirror or curved lens. Perspective distortion uses distorted perspective to create the illusion of a different size, using the same size for each object or using one much larger object than all the other objects in the image. In art, this can be used to create images that are taller or wider than they appear or to distort objects and make them appear larger or smaller.
- 2- Some forms of distortion rely on unusual structural characteristics, such as deviating from correct anatomical proportions, distorting and distorting shapes, adopting perspective below the level of sight, relying on cold and neutral colors, and using straight, horizontal, diagonal, and broken lines.
- 3- The idea of distortion in the structure of Alaa Bashir's drawing is represented in two aspects: psychological and expressive, which serve as a speech that expresses the effectiveness of the artistic work's solidarity context.

Recommendations:

- 1- There is a need for humanitarian studies and research institutions to pay attention to the cultural repository of Iraqi artistic works and include them within their methodological framework.
- 2- Studies and research on modern Iraqi artistic production, which is pessimistic and psychologically suffering, the reasons for these effects' appearance, and what is expressed through representations of distortion are necessary.

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