

body line

by Gabriele Tinti

There is more sagacity in thy body than in thy best wisdom.

F. Nietzsche, "Thus Spake Zarathustra".

Jasad. Body. The original space for communication.

"Man is obsessed by the necessity to act in relation to his neighbour, obsessed by the necessity to prove himself in order to exist" (Lea Vergine).

Jasad. Body. The place for developing that subtle form of communication, that profound inclination towards something or someone (*"To love is to possess the other's transcendence and at any rate his body"* said Sartre). **The Place of Love.**

"I have no other way to know the human body except to experience it, that is, take onto myself the quandary that pulses through me" (Maurice Merleau-Ponty). This is a difficult path to walk, especially if you must undertake such a search in the Middle East where it is forbidden – a taboo. And even more so in a world where being an artist – a true artist – also (mostly) means desiring to go beyond society morals, political institutions, and beyond a tradition that suffocates and conforms. Some intellectuals in that part of the world – among which the creator of the magazine *Joumana Haddad* – courageously take the part of the opposition. They interpret the human body as a privileged place of expression and strive to discover self-aware spontaneous behaviour as an antidote for the rigid artifice of social convention. The artists who have gathered around the magazine throughout the years have courageously worked in solitude, inhabiting a space that is outside current social norms, to step forward fearlessly, leaving themselves – and naturally their bodies – vulnerable. Unveiling their bodies. Experiencing them fully. Exposing them. Because body is vision and transgression, the place of individuality and diversity – of freedom. It is out of a necessity of information that the magazine exhibits the artists who use themselves to expose collective archetypes and the ritual of the ordinary, in order to meditate on today's society, especially that of the Arab countries. Essential in the Middle East more so for those of us in the West who look towards that reality.

Ninar Esber and **Sama Alshaibi** are two of the best Middle Eastern contemporary artists. Their work has been featured on the cover of Jasad magazine, and as they are complementary, now they are featured together. It is an invitation to the two to converse, provoking profound thought, a rare occurrence as the two attempt a common comment on each others' work.

For example, through the photography **Ninar Esber** creates acted out scenes (as in “NMM#1” and “NMM#2”), focused on the absence of the beloved body and the pop idol of Marilyn Monroe. In the “Pin Up” series, the artist got inspired by the universe of seduction set up by Hollywood in the years 30-50’, playing today her suggestive and stereotypical poses. As she says: “I create some hybrid and staggered images, that have to be seen as a derisory and a criticism of sex, and the American and Arabic Puritanism”. In the “Arlesienne” series, instead, Ninar presents herself in different costumes and hairstyle asking to the spectators about the true identity and the true origin of the woman portrayed. This with the intent of focusing the attention on important themes like nationalism and racism. She moves along the various levels of complexity and with a horizontal view that describes her subjects - through photography - and especially performance and video installation.

In any expressive language she chooses to use, the artist proves her ability to speak with extreme delicacy and sophistication, but at the same time with decisiveness and efficacy (take for example her version of Marilyn Monroe’s “I wanna be Loved By You” translated into Arabic and sang by the artist from the top of Cairo’s favelas - as if she was a contemporary muezzin) – about sexuality, love, willing of freedom and femininity to the conservative and fundamentalist part of the world.

Sama Alshaibi, on the other hand, uses her own body as object and pretext– although not exclusive – of her photographic and video investigation. “Birthright” and “Between two rivers” are splendid examples of the way through which the artist expresses her existential and political dilemma of being the daughter of a tormented land that knows no peace. In her photographs, Alshaibi shows remarkable knowledge of photographic technique, and she sometimes creates perfect images (as in the “After Iraq” and “Warhead” series, marvellously classical and at the same time dramatic. In the first she narrates the slow progress after the war, and in the second she describes the arms used in that war as if they were still-lives). At other times we see her manipulating the photographs and complicating them in compositions (like in “Ammani Primer”), using textures to give form to memory (like in “Zaman: I remember”) and, in the “In this Garden” series, she completes their meaning with writings.

Her video work follows an analogous narrative style. “Goodbye to the weapon” – a perfect example and starting point for all of the artist’s work – describes her mother’s last hours before escaping from Iraq immediately after the war. Within it lies all the hope, joy of life, and melancholy of a people escaping from a world that they wish were different.



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