

oil - 1998

50X35cm

زیت - ۱۹۹۸



oil - 1998

70X50cm

زیت - ۱۹۹۸



oil - 1998

35X25cm

زیت - ۱۹۹۸



oil - 1998

40X30cm

زیت - ۱۹۹۸



oil - 1999

50X35cm

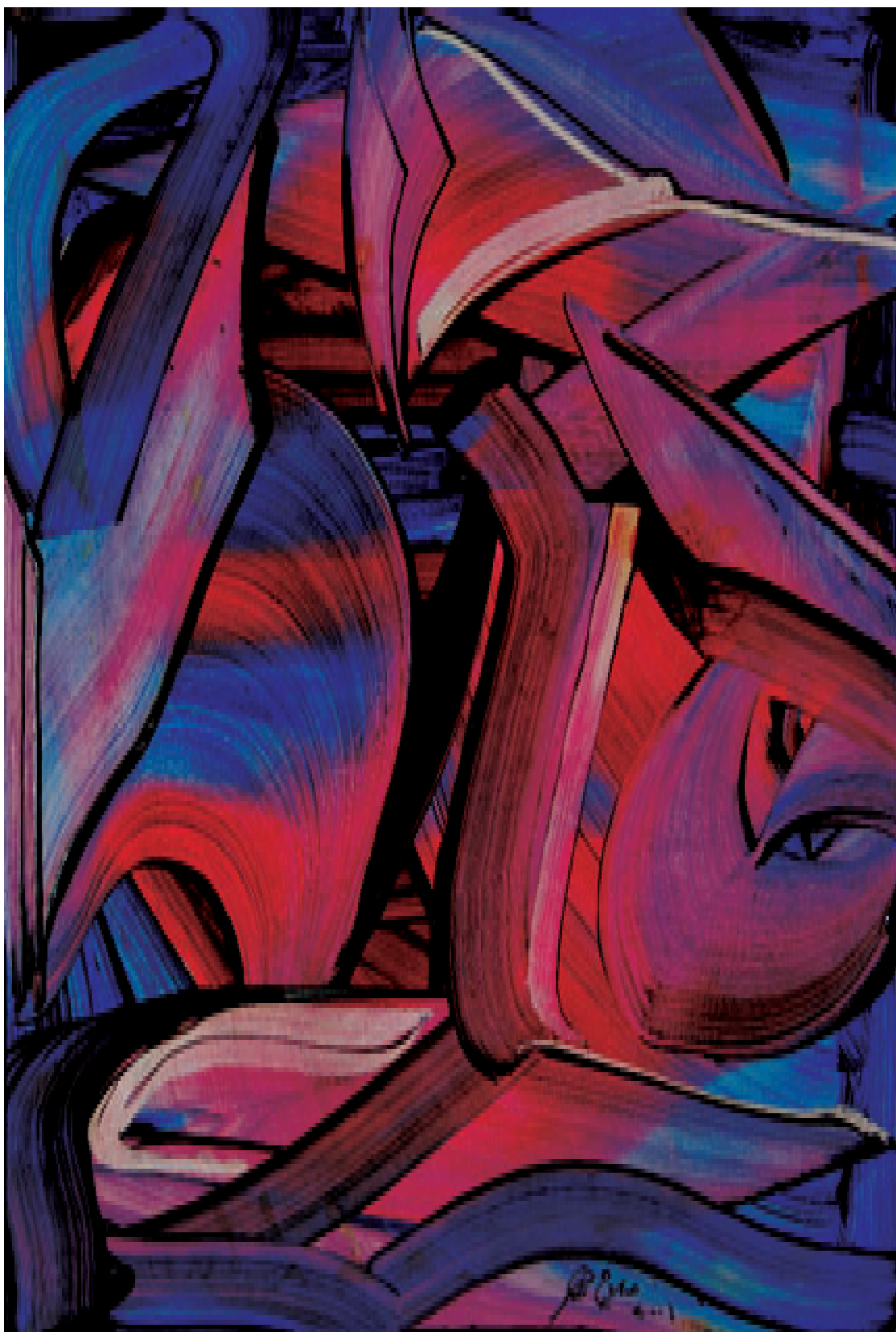
زیت - ۱۹۹۹



oil - 2000

35X50cm

زیت - ۲۰۰۰



oil - 2001

32X47cm

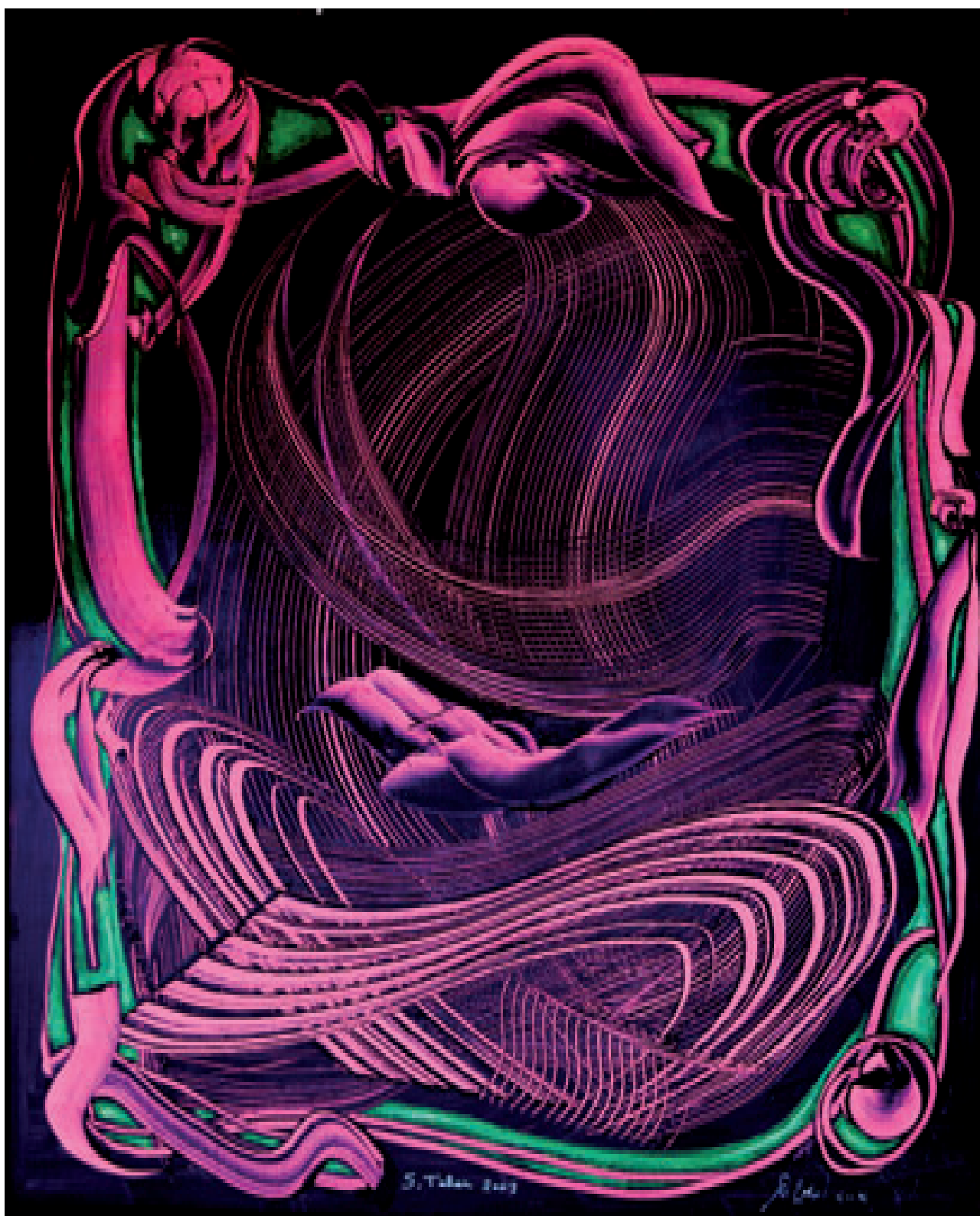
زیت - ۲۰۰۱



oil - 2002

120X89cm

زیت - ۲۰۰۲



oil - 2003

76X61cm

زیت - ۲۰۰۳



oil - 2003

40X30cm

زیت - ۲۰۰۳



oil - 2004

146X48cm

زیت - ۲۰۰۴



oil - 2006

80X60cm

زیت - ۲۰۰۶



oil

زیت



oil - 2007

80X60cm

زیت - ۲۰۰۷



Mohsen Shaalan & Mostafa El-Razaz during visiting Salah Taher in his house



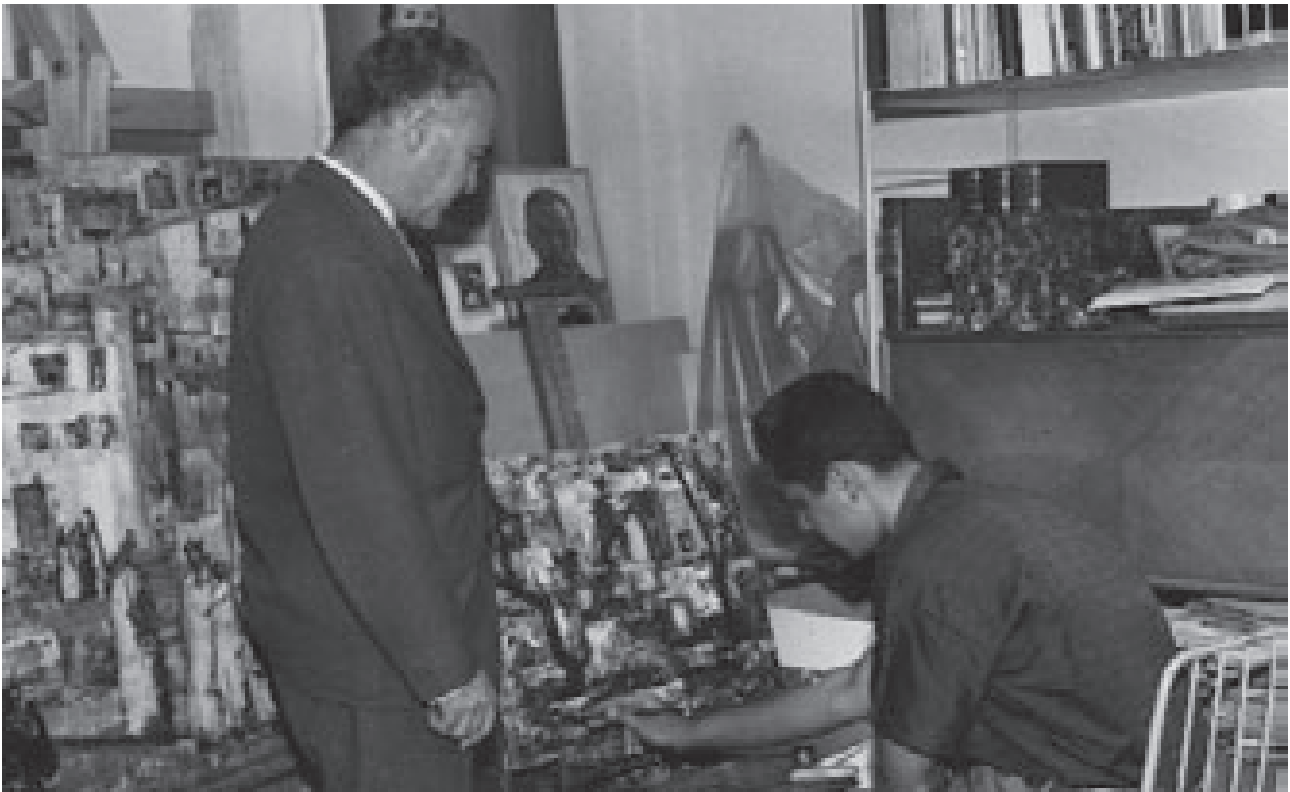
Salah Taher receives his prize from Mohsen Shaalan



Salah Taher talking with Adam Henien



Salah Taher & Twfek El-Hakeem



Salah Taher with his son in his studio



Salah Taher in his house in Giiza



Salah Taher & his son in Alex



Salah Taher



Salah Taher & Adam Henein



Salah Taher & Tharwat Okasha



Salah Taher, his wife & his son with Tharwat Okasha

Salah Taher 1911-2007



Oil - 35x25 - 1960

The painting showed his excellent understanding of the anatomical proportions of the human body and the sculptural rules. Intersected, curvy, straight, vertical and horizontal lines created dynamic architectural composition in the surface. Dynamism in the work was also produced by cold grey and blue in the face of hot red and yellow. In his 'Tribal Communities' Taher lyrically and majestically combined the human features with the atmosphere in the surface, which also gave the feel of the movement and the direction of his brushstrokes. Taher's elaborate and elegant forms were influenced by arabesque and the heritage of Islamic art. He repeatedly emphasised: "Islamic art is the fountain of European abstract." There is hardly any doubt, the social and human values Salah Taher sought in his art will be more popular in society if batik and book cover are decorated in his themes. This ambition will also be fulfilled if Taher's themes are recorded on CDs.

Dr. Sobhy El-Sharony
October 2008

Human dimension

Being a boxing champion, Salah Taher practiced art as if he was taking part in a swimming or tennis competition. The painter said: “Man becomes true to himself during the moments, in which he practices games, which are the prime features of civilisations throughout history. The talented painter is a clever athlete. Painters, who do not practise any sport, will not have the potentials to perfect their art.”

Salah Taher reached the height of his career when he masterfully controlled the composition, breathing sophisticated thoughts and ideas into it

Human dimension was given a central role in Taher's works in 1963, the year, in which, together with a group of artists, he was invited by the Ministry of Culture to travel to Aswan and record their impressions on the construction of the High Dam. The invitees were also requested to tour the Nubian villages threatened by the Nile water.

Taher painted workers slouching along the road under the heavy weight of large-size wooden beams. His human figures included women villagers working on the farm and collecting crops. Another painting paid tribute to Man—the Master of the Universe. To stress his idea, Taher defiantly depicted man very small compared to the vast and chaotic Universe.



Oil - 1983

Man's overpowering rule over the Universe was also underlined by the powerful and elegant colour.

Taher released his love to people in paintings he named 'tribal communities'. The paintings depicted compact human figures wearing traditional dresses.

Painting with joy

As long as portraits are concerned, Salah Taher distinguished himself by his faithfulness to unalloyed classic technique, in which he confidently displayed his masterful control of the Nature. Taher also preferred portraits in a certain stage of his artistic career to explore the lanes of the sitter's soul and reveal the real person concealed behind the external features. Taking into consideration the identities and profession of his sitters, Taher's portraits earned him a social prestige in society.

Concerning his abstract works, they were no less than an ideal world representing the painter's delighted mood and optimism. He used his innovative technique to reorganize the existence, rescuing it from chaos and disorder.



Oil - 24x9 - 1980

His non-representational paintings are appealing mental exercises intense with aesthetic values represented by eloquently-planned relationship of lines, areas and tones of colour. Like a student, who leap into air with joy when he solves a difficult mathematical problem, the viewer would be in ecstasy of tracing illusive shapes and forms, which came into existence before they quickly disappear.

The brilliant selection and use of colour motivated the work to evolve into a living entity, which has a message. In this stage, Taher combined abstract and representation art. The painter created an atmosphere echoing with music produced by the colour and the line and bringing into existence an invisible world bearing signs of similarities with the real world. For example, colour and line persuaded the viewer to conveniently identify invisible seas, gardens, volcanoes, rocks, in the work. He would also obtain his elements from rural environment, industrial zones or building sites.

“Unlike modern and contemporary paintings, signs of pessimism were hardly traced in Taher’s works in this stage,” said Badr-Eddin Abu-Ghazi in Al-Hilal magazine (October, 1966).



Detailed: Oil - 67×47 -1981

In his bid to move from abstract to non-representational art Taher used the colour economically. Moreover, different tones of black and white would dominate his works for a year before watercolours attracted his attention and then he would prefer black and white in his palette, which would also include gouache, oil colours, acrylic, etc.

Taher celebrated an extraordinary stage in his artistic career when he was overwhelmed with Sufi thoughts and philosophy. The holy name of Allah, modified incessantly, became the recurring motif in more than 600 abstract paintings.

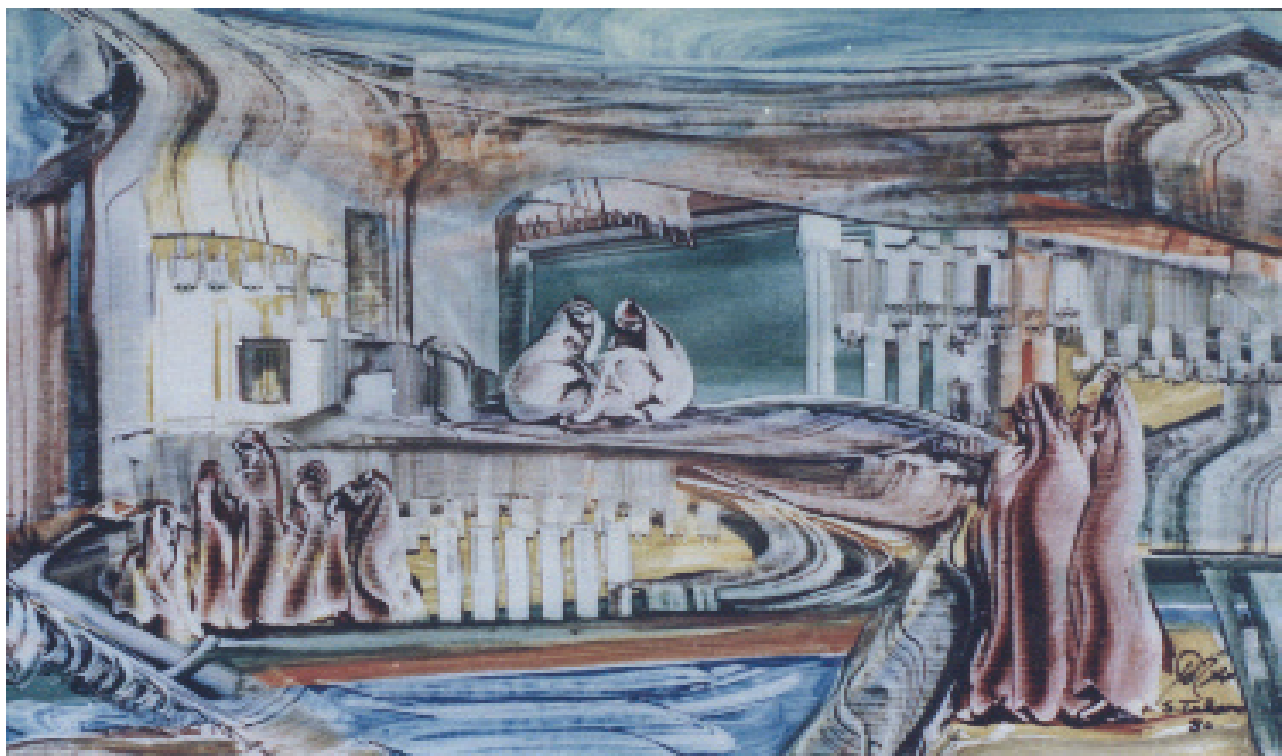


Oil

The vocabulary of the shape

Between abstract and non-representation art

Since Taher walked away from his descriptive stage in 1960 his art had been an overlap between non-representational and abstract. In his comments on his art, Taher said: "That classic art had exhausted its goals it will be out of tune to keep faithful to it (classicism) in this modern age. My abstract works are a debate about the musical values and tunes invisible in the existence. For example, the painter performs with joy when he listens to a piece of music or a lyric, or read an interesting literary work. Abstract is the interpretation of the painter's inner feelings at these moments. Lines and colours are the painter's medium to express himself, regardless of the fact viewers equipped with sophisticated knowledge and thoughts will alone communicate fruitfully with the work." Taher added: "When the 20th century's painter composes his work, he seeks the help of the vocabulary of formative language, such as the line and its qualities; the colour and its potentials; rhythm motivated by colour and line; coherence of elements; and geometric relationships and their construction." However, modified shapes obtained from the existing reality and created from Taher's brilliant brushstrokes would occasionally creep into his abstract art. For example, some of his alloyed abstract displays human communities and buildings in the Arabic architectural style, bamboo, railway lines, machines and papers. Moreover, a single element would be the recurring motif after undergoing modifications.



Oil - 1980

In his endeavours to receive global recognition as an abstract artist Taher refused to compromise his national identity. Taher's keenness to deepen his national root in his abstract was praised by art critic George Henin when he realized that his (Taher's) paintings were rich in aesthetic values he obtained from Pharaonic, Coptic and Islamic arts.

The roaring popularity of Taher the Abstract Painter should, however, be attributed to the enthusiasm, with which his new audiences received his abstract works. A shock he received during his visit to the US in 1956 also motivated his determination to have his individual hallmark in abstract community.

Commenting on his successful four-year adventure at abstract, Taher said: "It was in 1960 when I was reconciled to myself [as an abstract painter]." He made his statement after he achieved his colour-motivated expressive forms. There is hardly any doubt that Taher found abstract irresistible after he realized unrestricted freedom it offers to its creative devotees.

Taher made appealing abstract works when he consciously imported equilibrium, echoes, rhythms and coherence from his descriptive stage. Coherent and lyrical coloured areas and shapes were his medium to remind the viewer that he was painting with joy. In the meantime, he deliberately freed his abstract works from any theme, which could distract the viewer's attention away from the aesthetic values and lyrical colour forms.



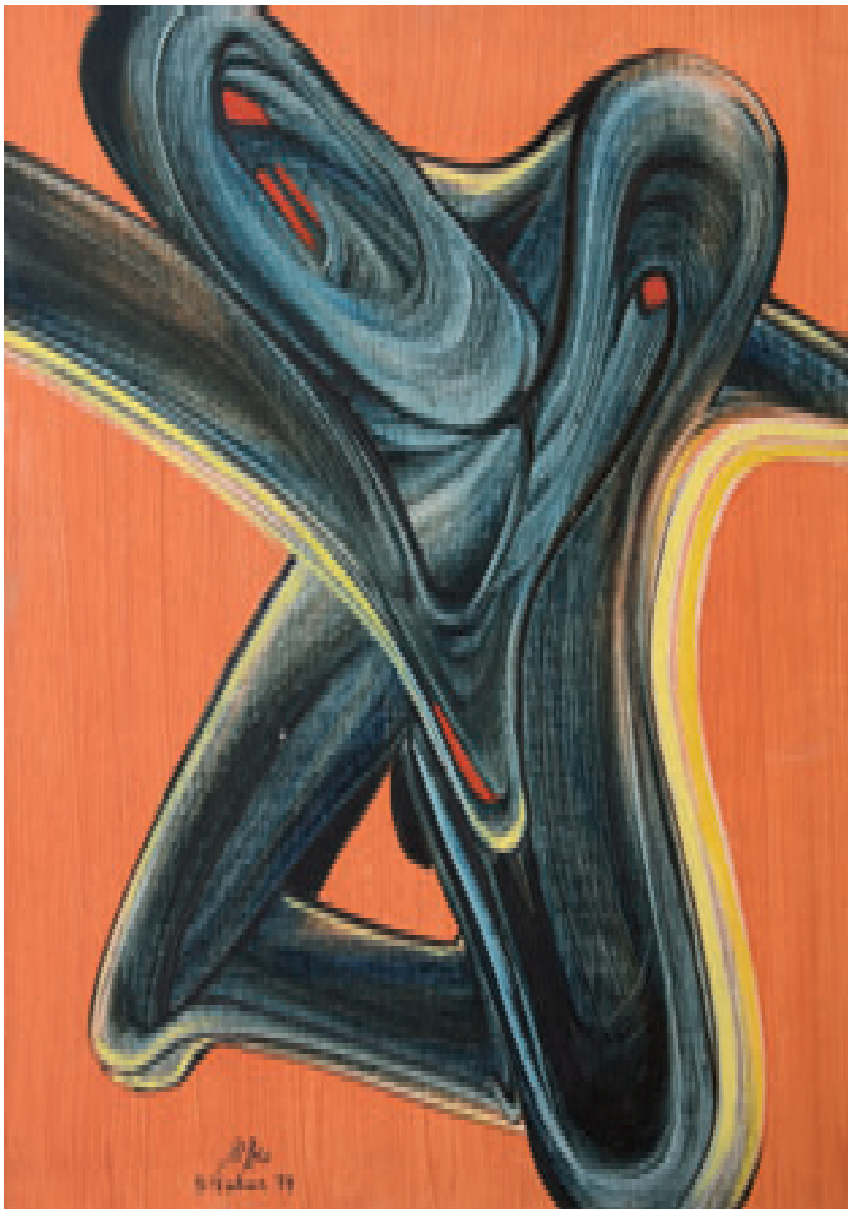
Oil - 35 × 25 - 1978

Turning-point

Taher witnessed social and political upheaval, which swept the Egyptian society in early 1950s. His vision and philosophy were disturbed, especially after certain social classes were demoted; and extraordinary ones rose strongly. The situation of literary and artistic community was not more fortunate. On the one hand, members of the Middle Class admired European culture and thoughts. On the other hand, youth artists enthusiastically celebrated modern trends and radical attitudes in their works. Taher, who was 44 years old at that time, stunned

art community in Egypt, when he applied for the membership card in the community of abstract artists. Taher's change of heart was revealed in a dramatic gesture. He was standing in the middle of his colleagues when he suddenly inquired in a defiant tone: "What is the story of these abstract artists? Do they think they are achieving the unachievable? I can rival them successfully." Since then, he had shifted to abstract.

Taher's visit to the US in 1956 was a watershed in his artistic project. His visit coincided with radical non-representational art sweeping the US art community at that time. Returning to Egypt he violently attacked such a radical and chaotic abstract.

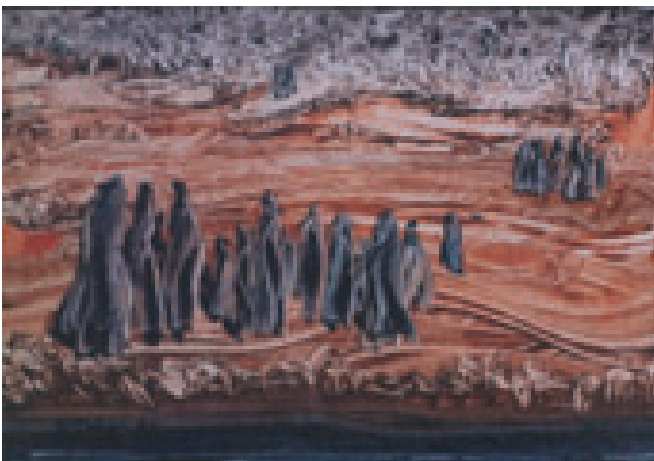


Oil - 50 × 70 - 1979

Delicate details carefully-studied anatomical proportions and features in Taher's portraits and landscapes encouraged art critics to identify as 'descriptive' the style and technique he used throughout the first 20 years of his artistic career, which began in 1934. It was also clear that he was influenced by Impressionism and expressionism. In this stage, Taher was keen to stress the beauty of nature and his human figures as well. He painted charming women villagers, and rays of the rising sun filtered through trees and throwing shade in the place. His colour created an optimistic atmosphere in the work. It must be said that Taher was not the only faithful of Impressionism, which swept the West after the end of the World War



Detailed: artist Moshira El-Hefnawy



Oil - 1988

Second. The taste of art lovers and dealers at that time prompted many Egyptian artists to tuck their heads under the 19th century's Impressionism. Moreover, the artist's popularity was associated with his success in pandering to the taste of royal members and the bourgeoisie, who were the biggest art buyers. Painting relaxing, healthy females and landscapes was thriving business.

Despite the warm welcome his portraits and landscapes received, Taher had different feelings.

He said: "I would feel bitter about accolade my classic paintings received from the audiences of my exhibitions. This is because researches I did into an individual technique and style remained unfulfilled." Tortured by his confusion in this regard, Taher, in addition to Impressionism, experimented with Cubism. However, he reluctantly admitted that his experiments helped him to perfect the geometric composition, and its unity and coherence.

Academic stage (1934-1956)

During the first stage of his artistic project, Salah Taher painted more than 500 landscapes and 400 portraits of eminent thinkers and philosophers, such as Dr. Zaki Mubarak, poet Ahmed Shawki, Dr. Taha Hussein, Tawfeek, Khalil Mutran, Mostafa Lotfi al-Manfalouti, Refaa al-Tahtawi, etc. His portraits were distinguished for their expression of the sitter's psyche. His exhibition in the Upper Egyptian city of Menia displayed works he achieved during his academic study. The influence of his teacher Ahmed Sabri was apparent in works he revealed in his second exhibition in Alexandria. Alexandria's exhibition also displayed Taher's keenness to underline delicate details of the element. It was also apparent that he observed the rules of elaborate design and equilibrium in the composition. His distribution of elements in the foreground and others in the background was strikingly elaborate. Carefully-assessed anatomical proportions of his figures led art critics to compare them to bodies of athletes. Taher's human figures would also suggest that the painter was influenced by the ancient Greek sculpture.



Salah Taher drawing portrait of playwright Twfeek El-Hakeem

Despite his successful career and immense numbers of works, Taher did not gain much profits from his art. Rather, he presented 65 paintings (some of which are 3.5x1.6 metre each) to Al-Ahram newspaper. Curators and art dealers estimated the price of these paintings at EGP50, 000.

Taher's contribution to art movement in society was not limited to his art. In collaboration with Ahmed Yussef, he translated the book "In the Shades of Art" and edited and reviewed the book "About Modern Art", which was translated by late art critic Kamal al-Malakh. He also illustrated Gobran Khalil Gobran's books "The Prophet" and "The Prophet's Garden", which were translated into Arabic by Dr. Tharwat Ukasha. Taher was also the illustrator of "Hurricane from the East" by Dr. Ukasha and "Front of the Metaphysics" by Beshr Fares.

In the meantime, book covers, postcards and wall and desk calendars were decorated in themes depicted in Taher's paintings.

In 1974, Taher received official recognition when he was awarded the State Prize of Merit for Art and the Medal of Science and Arts. He was also awarded the honorary doctorate from the Academy of Art in Giza. In 1984 he was elected the chairman of the Society of Fine Art Lovers. He assumed his office until his death in 2007. He was also the chairman of Art Committee of the National Specialised Councils and the Art Committee of the Supreme Council of Culture. In 1999 Taher was the first artist, who won the Mubarak Award, which is the most prestigious state award in the country. He prepared and presented more than 180 programmes on

the Egyptian television and organised a big number of seminars. His life, art and achievements were highlighted in an encyclopedia published by Alexandria Library and authored by eminent art critics in Egypt and foreign countries.

Taher is also the first Egyptian artist, whose admirers rallied to form a society paying tribute to his art. Surrounded by his admirers Taher celebrated the birth of the Society of Admirers of Salah Taher on May 2, 1999.



Detailed- 65 paintings (al Ahram newspaper)



Salah Taher & his wife with super movie Madiha Yosry during opening of Foreign diplomatse Hall

One of these exhibits was the cover of the book “Background to Egypt”, which was published by the State Information Service in Egypt.

Back to Egypt Taher organised an exhibition in the Egyptian city of Assiut in 1966, and a year after in the cities of Tanta in Gharbiya province, Port Said, Alexandria and Damanhur. In 1968 he unveiled a new tradition by organising an exhibition in his family home. In 1969 Taher organised his Retrospective in the museum of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Alexandria and in 1971 he exhibited in the American University in Cairo. Since 1972, his annual exhibition had moved to the Egyptian Centre for International Cultural Co-operation, which is a few steps from the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Art Education in in Zamalek in Cairo.



Salah Taher & Hamed Said



Salah Taher & Ragheb Ayad



Salah Taher & Zakarya Ahmed

Introducing the English catalogue of Taher's exhibition in London on July 20, 1965, art critic Abdalla Al-Bashir said: "Like great masters of art in different ages, Salah Taher is involved in a painful struggle against the shape and the meaning. He avidly attempts to explore the unalloyed reality behind the visual world. He is confident that there is none but one reality, which is the driving force behind all changeable phenomena and that the artist's basic role is to reveal this reality. That is why Salah Taher, like many other colleagues, shifts between different techniques and styles. For example, Taher experimented with realism in portraits he made in an early stage in his artistic career. He displayed his clear-minded understanding of the potentials of the colour, paying special attention to the human shape. Then, he shifted to abstract to express his psyche and inner feelings." According to al-Bashir's analysis, Taher's sailing boat was finally anchored to the shores of post-abstract. At this stage, the shape and the artist's philosophy overlap, giving rise to illusive interpretation.

During his European journey Salah Taher met influential Western artists, thinkers and critics, such as Schneider, Michel Ragon and Blan Radira, the former chairman of World Federation of Artists. He also visited Henri Moore in his studio and had a meeting with John Russell, who was art critic of the Times newspaper.

Salah Taher organised two exhibitions in Beirut.

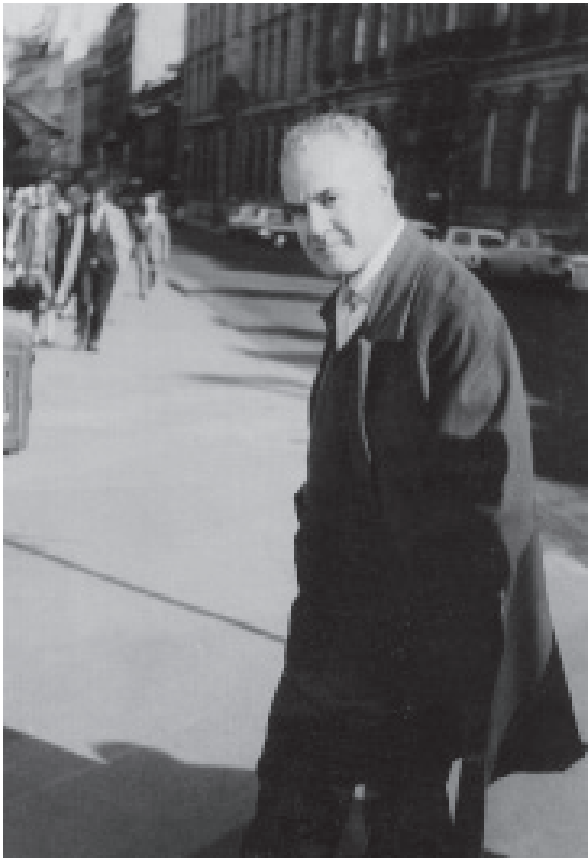
He was invited by the Qatari government to exhibit in Doha. During his stay in this Arab Gulf country members of the Qatari royal family were his sitters. Throughout his artistic career, Taher had organised more than 75 exhibitions, eight of which were organised in Western countries. He also exhibited in Hungary and the former Czechoslovakia. By tradition, after the end of his exhibitions abroad, Taher would present his paintings to the Egyptian embassies and celebrities in foreign countries.

In 1968 Salah Taher achieved a collection of large-size murals in the building of Al-Ahram newspaper at Al-Galaa Street in Cairo. He also made 35 large-size paintings, which are adorning the walls of the newspaper's buildings.

Taher exhibited in three editions of the Venice Biennale. He won the State Prize of Encouragement for oil painting in Egypt in 1959. He was also the winner of the Guggenheim Award in 1960 and the prize for painting in Alexandria Biennale for Mediterranean Countries in 1961.

Taher visited major international art museums in different European countries several times. He had a brief sojourn in Italy in 1952 and repeated his visit four times afterwards.

In 1956, he organised his retrospective in the Main Hall of the Society of Art Lovers. The exhibits traveled to Washington, New York and San Francisco. He also traveled to Switzerland and spent a month in the former Soviet Union in 1960. He organised his Retrospective in 1964 at the gallery of Cairo's Chamber of Commerce (which was occupied by a bank during the leadership of late President Anwar Sadat). Since then, he had decided to organise his annual exhibitions. He also launched the same exhibition twice in Cairo and outside Egypt to give bigger number of his admirers the opportunity to enjoy his art. He would, however, add one or two new paintings to the exhibits.



Salah Taher in paris - 1965

In 1965 he organised his annual exhibition in Akhenaton Hall in Cairo. Again, the exhibits traveled to JFK Airport in New York in collaboration with WTA airline. The exhibition lasted three months and attracted the attention of more than 420, 000 visitors. Moreover, the organisers published 50, 000 copies of the exhibition's catalogue. In the same year, he was invited by the Unesco to exchange points of views and visions with international-famed

artists and art critics. During this six-month symposium he launched solo shows in England, France and Italy. Introducing the French catalogue of Taher's exhibition in Paris (in June 1965), art critic George Henein said: "After spending a long time in painting landscapes, Taher suddenly shifted his attention to a different direction. At this moment, he realized a different reality of the existence. He compared his newly-discovered existence to a giant ship struggling desperately to survive violent seas. He formulated his individual vision, which, allied with his abstract technique, obtained his inspiration from ruins of the existing reality. His artistic identity has roots in the Egyptian soil."

Springboard

Taher left the Faculty of Fine Arts in 1954 to assume the office of the Director of the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art in Cairo. Under his chairmanship, the museum's calendar was crowded with cultural and artistic events. After four years of remarkable success in his office, he was promoted to the Director of Art Museums in 1958. In an acknowledgement of his intellectual and artistic qualifications he was appointed director of art affairs in the office of the then Minister of Culture and National Guidance. He quickened his steps upward the ladder of administrative career in 1961 after he was appointed the chief of the Ministry of Culture's Art Department and the Director of the Opera House from 1962 to 1966. He invited internationally-famed orchestra to entertain opera audiences in Cairo. He also received great musicians and composers in his office. Returning home late in the evening he would be filled with enthusiasm to reveal his feelings onto the canvas. Without shedding his evening dress, he would rush to his studio to spend long time before going to bed. "My evening dress was stained with patches of colour and paints."

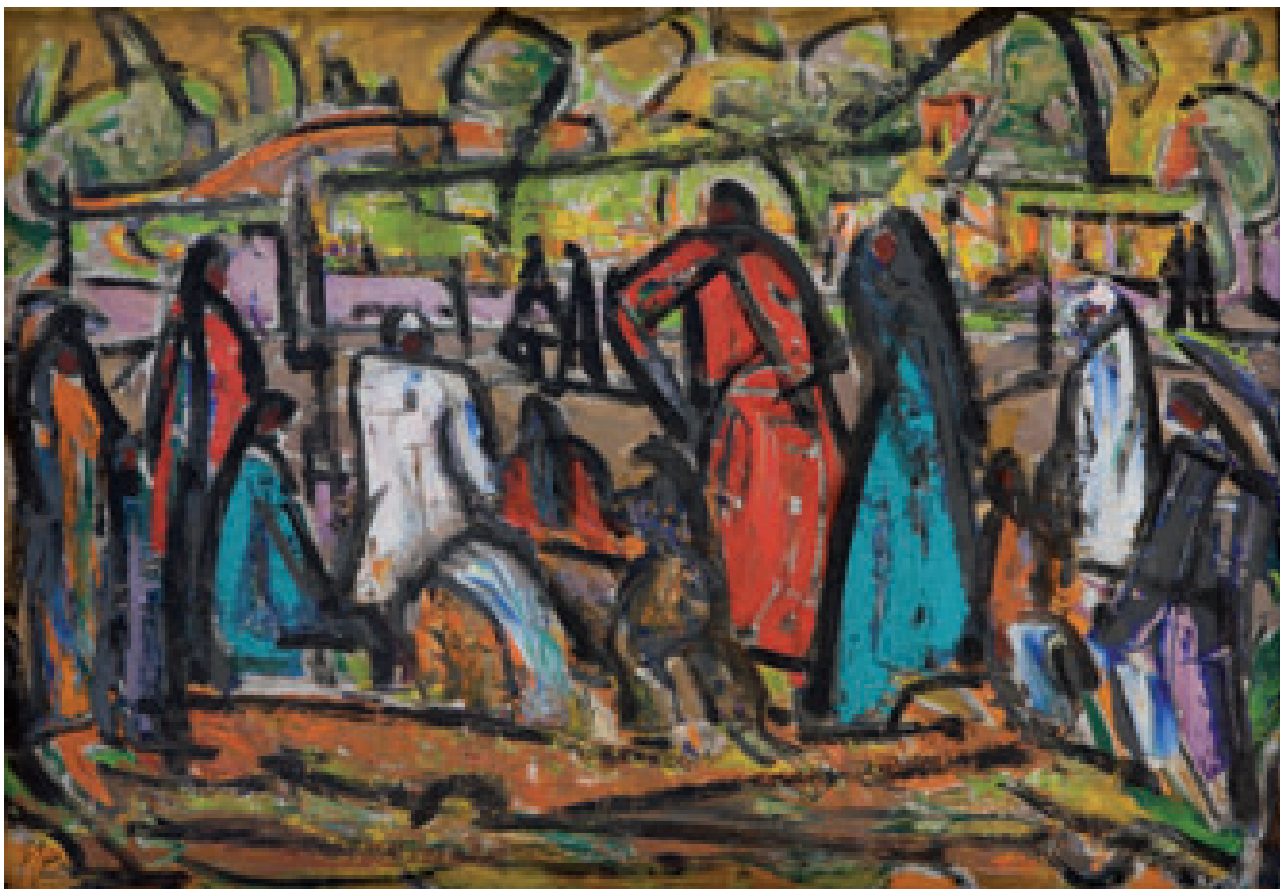


Taher with Hussein Fawzy and Tawfik El-Hakeem



Salah Taher with Nadia Lotfy & Madiha Yosri

From 1961 to 1965 he was an emeritus professor in the Institute of Cinema. He increased his students' curiosity about the history and the philosophy of art. He also taught the institute's students the post-graduate students 'psychology of creativity' and 'artistic taste and judgment'. Taher also spent four years ending in 1972 teaching these two interesting fields of knowledge to post-graduate students in the Faculty of Mass Media and the Faculty of Antiquity. When he was appointed art adviser (until he passed away) to Al-Ahram newspaper in 1966 he came across a galaxy of eminent artists and writers, who included novelist Naguib Mahfouz, playwright Tawfeek al-Hakim, literary critic and thinker Prof. Louis Awad, novelist Ihsan Abdel-Kodus, Dr. Hussein Fawzy, who provided the Arabic library with the best travelogues and most interesting books about worlds' musical classics; poet Salah Abdel-Sabour, writer Lotfi al-Khuli, short story writer Yussef Edris, lyricist and cartoonist Salah Jahin, painter Yussef Francis; and painter and art critic Makram Henein.



Oil - 60x40 - 1960

During the summer holiday, he would travel to the Delta's villages or coastal areas across the nation to increase his visual memory. Although he was faithful to academic school, Taher showed much interest in modern and contemporary art trends and associated developments. He also experimented with lyrical impressionism and Fauvism.

In one of his interviews, Taher said: "I am a besotted lover of the Nature. Man is also one of my prime concerns. During my first years of my artistic career, I made dozens of paintings illustrating landscapes in rural areas, the desert, mountains, peasants, animals, etc. I was also deeply interested in the legacy of the ancient Egyptian civilisation. Luxor was my hermitage. I spent my time there, from 1945 to 1954, in reading and meditation. When you find yourself alone in the desert, you have nothing to do but painting. During my nine-year stay in Luxor my achievements outnumbered works made collectively by my students. I used to paint landscapes from dawn to the sunset. I would spend the night reading in the light of the oil lamp. All these situations are embedded deeply in my memory and soul."

Taher's third solo show (1953) was a parade of his achievements in Luxor. The exhibition organised in the Cultural Club in Cairo was a watershed in his artistic career.



Oil - 48 x 67 - 1965

Life pregnant with cultural and artistic activities

After his graduation from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Taher, influenced by Impressionism, painted landscapes in rural areas. His studio was also crowded with sitters.

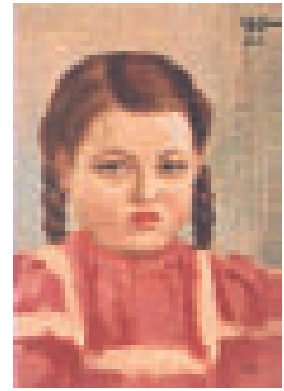
His teaching career included two years in the Meniya Primary School in the Upper Egyptian city of Meniya. The province also celebrated his first solo show in 1935. He also worked as an art teacher in the Abassiya Secondary School in Alexandria, in which he opened his second solo show in 1939. In 1941 Taher moved to Cairo to join the teaching staff in the King Farouk I Secondary School. A year after Taher confidently stepped into the limelight in art community in the country. He had the opportunity in this respect after he was appointed teacher of oil painting in the Faculty of Fine Arts in Cairo.

In 1943, he was assigned to supervise Luxor Studio (faculty of fine arts), which offered its students the opportunity to obtain post-graduate diploma in art. Top students from different departments in the Faculty of Fine Arts were alone granted two- or three-year scholarship to Luxor. According to the rules in this respect, the students spent the winter season in Luxor to study landmarks of ancient Egyptian civilisation in Thebe on the one hand and landscapes in this Upper Egyptian city on the other hand. They return to Cairo in summer to record Islamic and Arabic architecture designs and simple life in the old district of Ghuriya.

Taher's nine-year stay in Luxor offered him a rare opportunity to intensify his achievements. He used to rise at 5.00 a.m to go for a jog and painting landscapes and monuments before the sun rises in the sky. He would escort his students in the evening to visit monuments and return to the studio to discuss their impressions. During his years-long stay in Luxor Taher had the opportunity to increase his knowledge of the history of art and philosophy. More than 1000 books about different subjects occupied his library in Cairo. His music library had world's classics and symphonies composed by great composers.

Portraits

Salah Taher was famed for remarkably achieving a reconciliation with his self and his classic descriptive representational art. There is hardly any doubt that Nature, rich in colour and shapes, and aesthetic values and rules, is the prime source of inspiration sought by artists. My debate with Taher in 1968 should represent the fruitful dialectical relationship between the artist and the art critic. The debate was unavoidable after I published the article Salah Taher Between Nature and Abstract in the Moaser Fikr (contemporary thought) magazine, in which I criticised his academic descriptive technique to make portraits. After our discussions he painted portraits illustrating women villagers before he achieved bigger number of abstract paintings illustrating tribal communities and architectural compositions.



1950-Oil - 40×38

From generation to generation

Salah Taher's relationship with his son Ayman was the perfect example of a story of success passed to young generation. The great painter was enthusiastic to exchange point of views with his son, who was considered the spokesman of young and rebellious generation. Accordingly, it came as a little surprise that the father's art had never been accused of exhausting its time. On the other hand, the rebellious son keenly studied the father's achievements before revealing his own vision and message in his art. Taher's annual exhibitions were also platform for an uninterrupted communication with new generations of artists and art lovers as well.



Salah Taher & his brother Diaa
1913



Salah Taher & his son
Ayman in Alex



Taher, his wife and his son
in Hamed Said's house

Interactive dialogue

I had a heated debate with Salah Taher in 1968 over the widely differed and contradicting techniques he used in his work. On the one hand, he used crude abstract in works he displayed in exhibitions. The viewer could hardly identify the message or the idea in his abstract works, which were overwhelmed with overlapping and intersected areas of colours. I also noted that art critics and art lovers alone would find his abstract appealing. On the other hand, he was faithful to academic rules and impressionism when he was making portraits and landscapes. In his defence, Taher explained that he would consciously abandon his abstract technique and skills when he was making portraits, otherwise he would distort the image of the sitter. Our discussions ended when he agreed to use his powerful brushstrokes to make my portrait. The extraordinary conclusion was revealed in his exhibition organised in Akhenaton Hall. Some of his exhibits displayed Taher's abstract, which evolved into subdued

constructionism, in which he came up with appealing geometric relationships, decorative elements and overlapping coloured areas.

Other exhibits, including my portrait, represented the painter's achievements in abstracted Islamic architecture and tribal communities, which unfold on different levels to stress depth, intersection and the third dimension. Taher's modified abstract and composition persuade the viewer's eye to intently consider the details, the shape and the aesthetic values created by the line and the colour. It must be said that Taher's portraits in his exhibition in Akhenaton Hall should not mean that he had found it too difficult to divorce his academic and classic style forever. His portraits in this particular exhibition were the conclusion (the third stage in his career) of two successful experiments he had made independently.



Detail-Dr. Sobhy El-Sharony Oil - 64×50 - 1968

After more than 20 years of big successes Taher surprised his colleagues and admirers by declaring he was divorcing academic art to take up abstract.

Taher began to make portraits of his sitters in 1934 after he graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts. He came under the spell of abstract in 1956. Since then, he decided to receive no more commissions from celebrities and friends. Over 22 years he had achieved 500 landscapes and about 400 portraits.

Taher was also the first artist, who used two opposite styles in his oil painting. In addition to his use of his early technique to make portraits of his friends and celebrities in society, he successfully rivaled painters, who compared their works to musical composition. He had the point to persuade scowling art critics to relax.



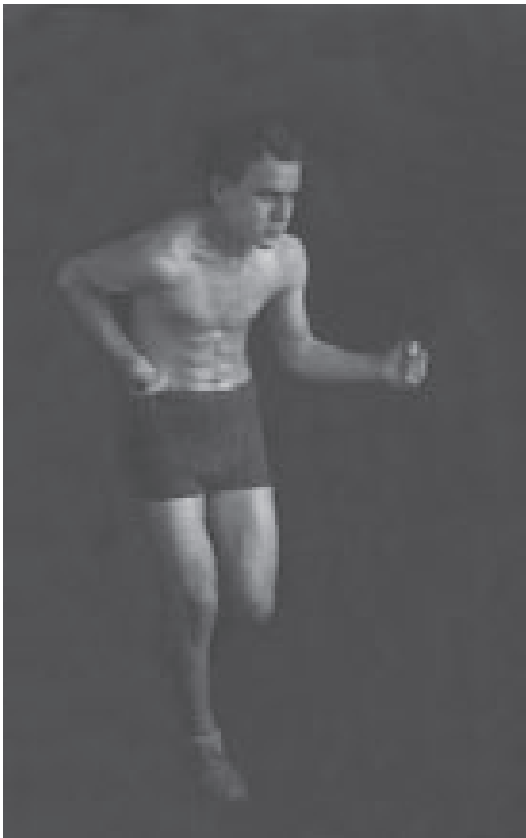
Salah Taher & Om Kolthoum



Abbas El-Akkad - 1936

Taher belonged to the second generation of trailblazing artists. It must be said that his European teachers in the School of Fine Arts deserved credit for broadening his knowledge of European art and its classic schools and trends. Taher continued his study in the class of Egyptian teachers, who returned to Egypt after studying art in European academies. These teachers included pioneering artist Yussef Kamel and his colleague Ahmed Sabri, who was one of the most influential member of the first generation of Egyptian artists. Taher admired most Ahmed Sabri, who was a great portraitist. Sabri also established himself as the master of academic style and technique. Faithfully walking in the footsteps of his master Taher achieved such a big stride in portraiture that he outpaced his contemporaries.

From boxing to art



Salah Taher 1926

Taher was a celebrity in art movement in Egypt and foreign countries as well. The prolific painter was also widely praised for his admirably rich art. He was a towering genius of the community of Arab abstract and non-representational artists. His success reverberated so strongly throughout his 75-year artistic career that he outshone movie stars and football strikers.

Taher had a big influence on youth talents in the Faculty of Fine Arts. He opened his heart and arms to encourage them to stand next to him during the opening ceremony of his exhibitions. The great master and his young admirers would spend hours discussing his art, his philosophy and vision of life.

(Born in Cairo on 12 May 1912 and died in 2007)

Art movement in Egypt in the first half of the 20th century was steered by European artists alone. However, an initiative made by Prince Yussef Kamal, who belonged to the 150-years old royal family in Egypt, substantiated hopes entertained by Egyptian pioneering artists to slow down the influence of their foreign colleagues. Prince Yussef Kamal revealed his historical step when he decided to open the School of Fine Arts, the first of its kind in Egypt and Arab countries at that time. Moreover, the school caused a sensation in society after its graduates in 1925 were granted scholarship to art academies in Europe. The school's growing success encouraged the Egyptian government to take charge of it in 1928.

Salah Taher entered the School of Fine Arts a year after its door was flung open to receive Egyptian students wishing to study art. It was not Taher's artistic talent alone, which attracted the attention of his teachers and colleagues. He distinguished himself by his well-toned body and his achievements in boxing. No one would expect that a strong arm,

which knocked out many rivals in the ring, would produce gentle and subtle brushstrokes in the canvas. Taher was also known as a voracious reader of philosophy, literature and sociology, faith and music, which he would declare the mother of all genres of arts and literature. Taher's insatiable curiosity to explore the labyrinth of philosophy and literature prompted him to meet great Egyptian thinker Abbas Mahmoud al-Akkad in early 1930s. Since then, they had strong relationship.

Taher's library greatly influenced his artistic career in its different stages. Increasingly curious about the visual existence, he did not limit his artistic periscope to revealing details. Rather, he was deeply concerned with the gestalt (the universe in its entirety). Nor did Taher narrow his magnifying glass to touch the surface of things and no more. He was on an odyssey, which took him to the deepest depth of the visual world and the spirit.



charcoal - 1932



Salah Taher (1911-2007)

He graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Cairo in 1934 and taught in primary and secondary schools in Meniya, Alexandria and Cairo until 1944. He did not allow his teaching responsibilities to distract his attention away from his art. In 1954 Taher was appointed Director of the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art. He was promoted the Director of Art Museums in 1958, the Director of the Office of the then Minister of Culture and National Guidance in 1959 and the General Director of Cairo Opera in 1962. In 1966, Taher was appointed the artistic adviser to Al-Ahram newspaper.

Salah Taher launched his first solo exhibition in the Upper Egyptian city of Meniya in 1935. Since then, he was known for being a prolific painter. He also fruitfully participated in art events taking place at home and abroad. He took part in three editions of Venice Biennale and was represented in Egypt's Today Exhibition in the US.

In addition to his art, Salah Taher translated several books, such as "In the Shade of Art", in collaboration with Ahmed Yussef.

He won, nationally and internationally, several prizes and awards, such as Guggenheim Award in 1960 and the prize of Alexandria Biennale in 1961.

Salah Taher was a music lover and voracious reader of philosophy and sociology. He was also a boxing champion.

Taher first took up academic art in 1930s. He sincerely recorded landscapes. His portraits are a brilliant rendering of human feelings and emotions.

After a brief sojourn in the US he returned to Egypt to abandon the classic and academic rules and defiantly taking up abstract.

Taher first experienced with academic-influenced realism. In the 1940s he shifted to classicism before celebrating expressive representational art in the 1950s. In late 1950s he experimented with the 'representational scene', in which he painted compact tribal groups in an atmosphere intense with inner dynamism excitement and romantic monologue. In the 1960s Taher's brush made the big surprise by producing sophisticated abstract. However, he refused to abandon his colour and light effect.

Salah Taher

There is little doubt that Egyptian modern art is the fulfillment of creative, intellectual and cultural ambitions, which were embraced by pioneering artists. Throughout their research into values of freedom, originality and Contemporaneity, these pioneers came up with innovative techniques, styles and future visions. Artist Salah Taher is one of these sparkling stars, who put their hallmarks in the Egyptian art movement. Taher distinguished himself by his artistic adventures and fruitful role in cultural and intellectual activities. The late painter first arrested the attention of art community in society in his academic and impressionism stages. Taher's success reverberates more loudly when he defiantly experimented with abstract. He displayed a brilliant understanding of the Egyptian environment. His art celebrated a new stage when he freed himself from the spell of visual reality and Nature, setting out on the discovery of unknown areas of his self and soul. He revealed new aesthetic values freed from the influence of nature. He composed a unique artistic language. His vocabulary mainly included the line, rhythm, texture and colour. His paintings synchronized with the rhythms of his age and new trends at home and abroad. Taher's cleverly-assessed construction in the surface stresses the purity of the shape and the clarity of compositions pulsating with tunes and coherent rhythms.

There is hardly any doubt that Taher was the pulse of the 20th century at home. His impressionism and abstract take roots in the Egyptian soil. He also obtained much of his inspiration from religious and cultural heritage, with which he combined contemporary developments. Taher's art displays a panoramic view of Egypt's countryside, majestic Islamic architecture and spectacular Arabic calligraphy. He produced a fascinating hybrid of native heritage and contemporary aspects, eventually revealing his innovative and integrated vision of aesthetics. Taher was the trailblazer in art community in Egypt. His art encouraged generations of Egyptian artists to modernize their artistic visions. This Retrospective is a sequel to the task initiated by Horizon One to sincerely document the role of pioneering Egyptian artists. Taher's retrospective throws much light on such a great painter, who passed away two years ago.

Director of Horizon One
artist Ehab El-Labban

Philosophy of Salah Taher's exhibition

I first thought organising Salah Taher's exhibition would be an easy task, being limited to preparing and framing the paintings and no more. I realized how difficult this task would be when I started to select exhibits. I was confused: should the exhibits include paintings, which had not been on display before? Should we give priority to works, which chronicle Taher's career, starting in the 1930s? There was a suggestion recommending that Taher's exhibition in Horizon One should display his masterpieces alone. Eventually, I concluded that the exhibition should be the fulfillment of all these suggestions and ideas. My son offered me a good help to accomplish this difficult task. We first started with photographing the paintings and recording their measurements. Keeping faithful to Salah Taher's philosophy, we deliberately decided to keep the works unnamed. Taher would always compare artwork to a piece of music, the name of which would not be touching likewise. Taher said that naming the artwork was a suggestion made by art dealers to attract the attention of buyers.

I also had to introduce a collection of small-size paintings, which are considered road signs in Taher's artistic experiment. Some of these works were exhibited before. Others include Taher's last works. Shortly before his death, Taher said: "The person dies the moment his activities are no more."

I hope this exhibition successfully highlights the development of Taher's art school, including his style and technique.

Ayman Salah Taher

The Star Painter of Art Community

Equipped with special qualifications some artists will have the opportunity to rank high among sparkling stars in art community. Others, who are publicity-shy or not having charisma, would die in obscurity, regardless of their outstanding achievements in their lifetime. The unsung heroes in art community include Zakaria al-Zeini, Mamduh Ammar, Sayed Abdel-Rasoul, Mostafa al-Arna'outi, Yussef Sidah, Abdalla Guhar and Kamel Mostafal. Among those, who basked in the limelight were Hamed Nada, Hassan Soliman, Salah Abdel-Karim, Sif Wanley, Gamal al-Segini, Hosni al-Banani, Hussein Bikar, Gazibia Serri, Tahia Halim and Hamed Abdalla. As long as late Salah Taher is concerned, he remains the sparkling star in art community in the country. Unlike celebrated colleagues and unsung heroes, Taher distinguished himself by his intellectually sophisticated mind and his strong connection with celebrities of cultural community, singing legends and movie stars. His close friends included singing legend Om Kalthoum, singer and composer Mohamed Abdel-Wahab and celebrated playwright Tawfeek al-Hakim Egypt. Taher was also regular visitor to an intellectual salon led by great thinker and philosopher Mahmoud Abbas al-Akkad. He also had strong connections with politicians and scientists.

Salah Taher was also widely known in Egypt and the Arab world for his intelligent and entertaining talk. He was smart and good looking.

I had the opportunity to meet him before his death. Together with artists Ahmed Fouad Selim, Mostafa al-Razaz and Helmi al-Tuni, I visited him at home to present him with the Golden Brush (the logo of the Museum of Egyptian Modern Art). A broad smile spread over his face when we informed him that he had been selected the honorary co-president, together with Petrovsky, director of Armitage Museum, of the 10th edition of Cairo Biennale. Despite his old age and his worrying health conditions, he was beaming with enthusiasm and optimism. He urged us to help organise his annual cultural salon at his home. We had not hear from him since then. He passed away.

Mohsen Shaalan
Head of the Sector of Fine Arts

Salah Taher is one of the sparkling stars of contemporary art community. His art was admired by many people in different classes in society. Pioneering artists will always be at the centre of the nation's interest. We still have the greatest respect for Taher and his achievements.

Minister of culture
Farouk Hosni

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Salah Taher

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