

As the century comes to a close, Arab artists have generally taken the same routes as that of their colleagues in other post-colonial cultures.

The lack of a national art market, the absence of specialists in art criticism and the local public's near-incomprehension of the work, combined with the need to approach the West's art system, have spurred major migrations of Arab artists towards the West.

This phenomenon brings with it a sense of disconnectedness, of mutilation and of uprootedness. In addition to enrichment, the meeting of these cultures generates a process of multiplicity of identities, multi-culturalism and fusions. All this coexists with neo-colonial situations, such as the fierce racism towards Arabs in the West. The result is a pluralistic culture marked by hybridization and contrast.

Current Arab art has incorporated international art via various routes and in various directions, depending on the space that has been opened in the Western world.

Within this highly diverse process, there is a distinct group of artists who aim to maintain close links to their origins. These artists operate under the assumption of maintaining a clear idea of who they are and where they come from.

Such is the case of Ali Omar Ermes, a Libyan artist based in London, who via his work and his obsession with traditional calligraphy pays homage to Arab calligraphy.

Ermes bases his artistic objectives on his linguistic interests, joining them to literature and philosophy in general and to poetry in particular. Here one can read the texts and receive the ideas and knowledge of Islam, of history and of literature, as well as of the various branches of science to which writing was closely related.

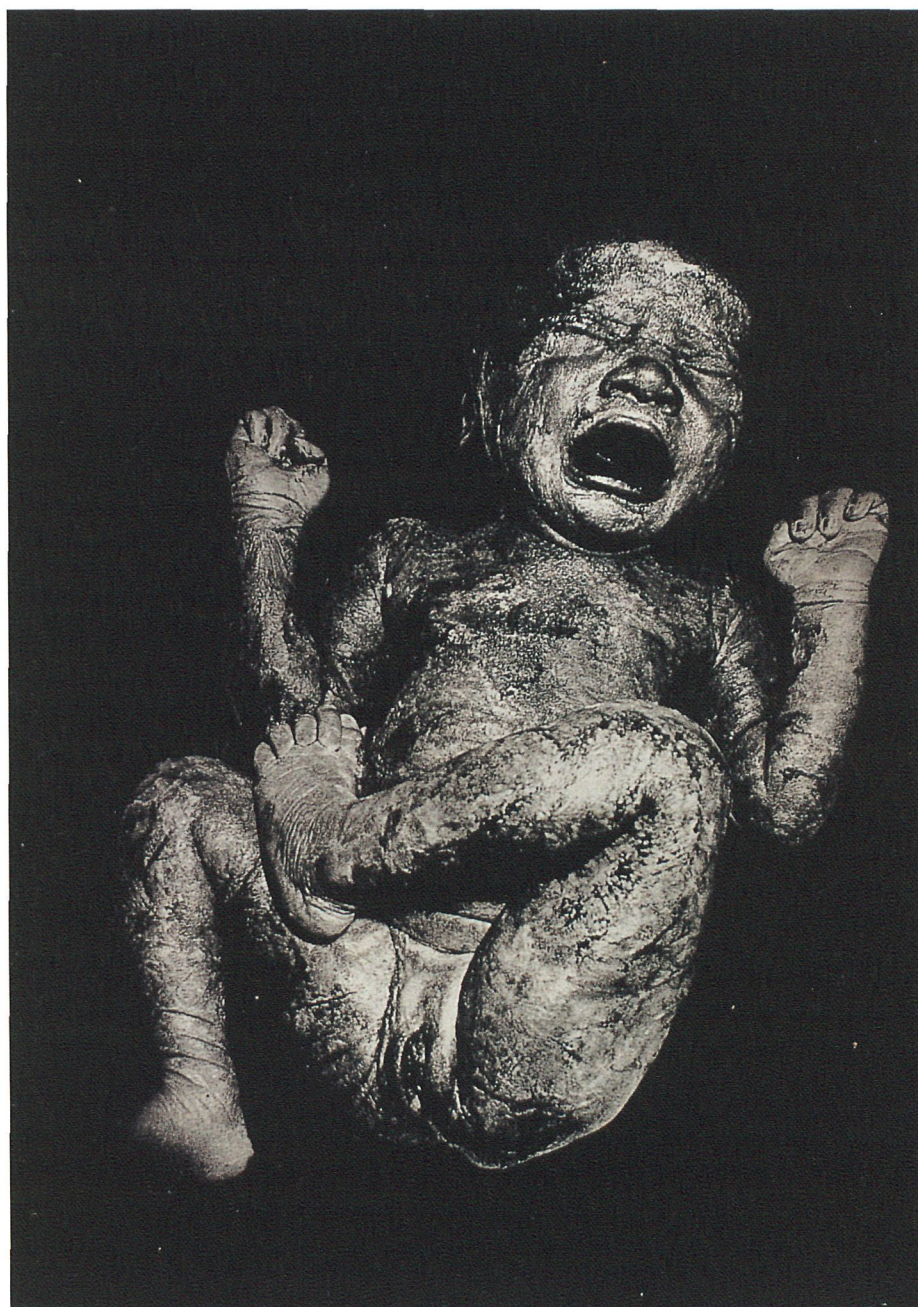
A SPACE IN TODAY'S
CULTURE

ARAB ART

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Rachid Koraichi has taken the same route. Koraichi is Algerian by birth and a resident of Tunisia and Paris. In his work, he incorporates lines and signs inspired by the Arab alphabet, as well as ideograms and features of Mesopotamian cuneiform writing. Koraichi thus appropriates elements that coexist in various cultures, and he utilizes calligraphic memory in order to suffuse his work with the atmosphere of his world; it is a place where the worldly



Touhami Ennadre.

meets the other-worldly on equal footing.

Other artists, unconcerned about being considered in debt to the West, have freed themselves from the fear of being accused of forsaking their roots. Their premise is to cease considering Arab culture as immutable and frozen in time in order to humor distant observers with its ancient charms and history. They respond by involving themselves in a process that is closer to art in its widest sense.

Mona Hatoum is a Palestinian artist based in Europe. Her work is based on a concern with content; she is private, and works with an exclusionary attitude toward local values; she focuses on interests of a more general nature yet without relinquishing the essential.

Her work ranges from installations that toy with architectonic structures repeated to the point of fatigue (yet not to the point of exhaustion), all the way to the incorporation of her own body; everything is dealt with from a metaphorical perspective. Her visual scenarios are permeated by memory and recollections, and contain a powerful expressive force that is intense and dramatic. Mona Hatoum shifts fluidly from photography to video, from installations to performance. She establishes a space given over to ambiguity that is produced by the use of elements as various as birth and death, oppression, resistance and torture, dreams and reality: these are the recurring categories in her work, above and beyond the chosen format.

Touhami Ennadre, a Moroccan artist who emigrated to France, is a philosopher. What is most important is his capacity to penetrate deeply into the universally human.

His black and white photographs reveal his interest in the subject of death



Rachid Koraichi.

– death that forms a part of life, life that is born, its mysteries and revelations – via images that are intense and exquisite at one and the same time. The use of black, the deformations and the absence of color combine to imbue his work with a distinctive sense of suffering, violence and surrender; they are evocative, not anecdotal.

In general, these Arab artists have found a point where a sense of conservation coexists parallel to an innovating tendency. Finding a balance between these two points offers them the possibility of creating a space that extends beyond the historical, geographic and social setting; the issue here is to find a space in today's culture.