



The Pattern of Proximity Among Artistic Groups in the Contemporary Iraqi Painting Movement

Lect. Dr. Adnan Abdul-Abbas Eidan Al-Mufarriji

Department of Plastic Arts, College of Fine Arts, University of Baghdad
adnan.abd@cofarts.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract

This study aims to examine the phenomenon of *generational convergence*, that is, the intersection of artistic generations around a specific artistic experience that constitutes a stylistic turning point. Within such moments, two generations converge through an experimental spirit grounded in questions of identity and artistic style. Through this convergence, each artistic direction and generational cohort articulates its position in relation to that formative experience. In this context, generational convergence is understood as a visual dialogue between two generations: one preceding the experience and another emerging in its aftermath.

The theoretical framework of the study focuses on the unity of experimental dynamism within the stylistic reference that underpins technical development, the formation of artistic collectives, and their foundational discourses at the level of artistic practice. Through these processes, artists contributed to consolidating the identity of cultural heritage while simultaneously expanding the experiential horizon toward renewed vitality and sustained influence across generations. This dynamic has remained operative within Iraqi artistic practices since the mid-twentieth century, particularly within the broader trajectories of modern art.

The study further analyzes the stylistic foundations that informed most generational configurations embodied in the experiences of Iraqi artists. Adopting a descriptive-analytical methodology, the research is structured into four chapters: Chapter One outlines the methodological framework; Chapter Two comprises two sections, (1) the concept of generational convergence and (2) Iraqi painting: a documentary study of its movement; Chapter Three presents the analysis of selected artistic models; and Chapter Four includes the findings, conclusions, references, recommendations, and proposed directions for further research.

Keywords: Iraqi Modern Art, Generational Theory in Art, Artistic Collectives, Arabic Letter Abstraction, Modern Middle Eastern Painting

Introduction

Contemporary Iraqi painting has been characterized by sustained stylistic transformation and experimental dynamism shaped by complex interactions between identity, heritage, and modernist aesthetics. Within this context, generational configuration emerges as a critical conceptual framework through which the continuity and renewal of artistic discourse may be examined. Rather than understanding artistic production as confined within rigid chronological divisions, this study conceptualizes generational configuration as a visual and epistemic relationship linking pioneering artists with successive cohorts through shared stylistic references, technical experimentation, and evolving cultural identities.

The formative phase of Iraqi modern art was deeply invested in consolidating cultural identity and reactivating heritage as aesthetic capital. These foundational efforts generated a visual and conceptual pressure that influenced subsequent generations, who both inherited and reinterpreted earlier artistic paradigms. As a result, stylistic tendencies in Iraqi painting evolved not merely through temporal succession but through dialogical continuity, whereby artists across age groups participated in an ongoing experimental movement. This dynamic interaction facilitated stylistic renewal while maintaining



referential continuity, thereby producing what may be described as a generational visual system.

Research Problem and Rationale

Although Iraqi art history has frequently been organized through chronological classification, such as the generation of pioneers, the 1960s generation, and the 1970s generation, such divisions may obscure the deeper structural continuity of stylistic experimentation across generations. The concept of generational configuration offers an alternative analytical lens that emphasizes relational continuity rather than temporal segmentation.

The epistemological significance of generational configuration lies in its capacity to explain how artistic styles, technical approaches, and aesthetic orientations persist, transform, and reactivate across different historical moments. Iraqi painting demonstrates an experimental openness that transcends strict chronological boundaries, integrating technical innovation and conceptual reformulation in dialogue with global modernist developments.

Accordingly, this study addresses a theoretical gap concerning the conceptualization of generational dynamics in Iraqi painting. It investigates how stylistic trajectories are sustained, reformulated, and transmitted through intergenerational artistic engagement within specific historical contexts. By reframing generational discourse beyond chronological determinism, the study seeks to contribute to contemporary debates in visual culture and art education concerning stylistic continuity, identity formation, and artistic agency.

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. Can generational configuration be theorized as a conceptual framework within the visual field of Iraqi painting?
2. Is it possible to reinterpret historical periods and generational identity through alternative analytical formulations in Iraqi art?
3. Which stylistic orientations and artistic tendencies in Iraqi painters' practices reflect the interrelation between artist, style, and generation?

Research Objective

The study aims to theorize and analyze the concept of generational configuration within contemporary Iraqi painting by examining its stylistic, technical, and cultural dimensions.

Research Boundaries

This study is delimited as follows:

Subject Boundary: The concept of generational configuration in Iraqi painting.

Temporal Boundary: From the mid-1950s of the twentieth century to the present period.

Spatial Boundary: Iraq, with a focus on stylistic orientations and artistic movements within Iraqi painting.

Significance of the Study

The present study seeks to examine the stylistic and conceptual diversity of Iraqi painting through a re-evaluation of generational discourse. Rather than treating artistic generations as chronologically fixed entities, the study reconceptualizes generational configuration as a dynamic interaction between artistic experiences across time.

Its significance lies in foregrounding intergenerational convergence through experimental continuity, thereby challenging rigid temporal categorizations that traditionally divide Iraqi art into discrete generational segments. By proposing a model of temporal interpenetration, where artistic styles and technical approaches transcend strict chronological succession,



the study contributes an archival and analytical framework that may benefit scholars in art education, visual culture, and contemporary art history.

Conceptual Definitions

Generation (Linguistic Definition)

The term *generation* refers to a group of people belonging to the same period or category. It may denote a century or a segment of time and is often used to describe those who share historical or cultural experiences (Marashi, 1974, p. 174).

Generational Configuration (Theoretical Context)

Within historical and philosophical discourse, generational analysis has been linked to broader conceptualizations of historical development. Hegel's philosophy of history posits that each historical stage embodies a distinct manifestation of the world spirit within a particular collective will (Al-Jamīl, 2018, p. 78).

Similarly, intergenerational interaction in artistic fields has been theorized as a dynamic process enabling the discovery of complex identities through shared creative engagement (Adam, 2020, p. 75).

Operational Definition of Generational Configuration

In this study, generational configuration refers to the synchronic and sequential convergence of artists across different historical moments through shared stylistic orientations and experimental frameworks. It diverges from strictly chronological classification and instead emphasizes continuity driven by aesthetic pressure, conceptual frameworks, and technical evolution within Iraqi painting.

Theoretical Framework

First Section: The Concept of Generational Configuration in the Visual Field

Transformations in generational formation within Iraqi painting may be understood not merely as chronological succession but as a process of conceptual and technical substitution across artistic styles and orientations. Since the emergence of Iraqi modern painting in the mid-twentieth century, generational classification has often been framed through temporal segmentation (e.g., pioneers, 1960s, 1970s). However, such classifications remain insufficient to account for the complexity and continuity of stylistic experimentation that transcends strict chronological boundaries.

Art historical precedents demonstrate similar complexities. In the Roman Empire, for example, the widespread replication and adaptation of earlier Greek artistic models rendered strict chronological attribution difficult, as artistic production operated through reinterpretation and stylistic transmission rather than linear progression (Miltz & Nasir, 2025, p. 49). These historical parallels underscore the difficulty of confining artistic movements to rigid generational categories.

Within the Iraqi context, successive political, cultural, and social transformations throughout the twentieth century generated overlapping artistic responses. These historical conditions produced not only stylistic diversification but also moments of ideological alignment between art and sociopolitical discourse. As Inik (2011) argues, the relationship between art and politics frequently reveals the subordination of aesthetic autonomy to external ideological frameworks (p. 187). Periods marked by war and national upheaval, for instance, generated artistic tendencies aligned with directed or politically engaged art. Accordingly, this study proposes that "period" functions as a more analytically productive category than "generation" when examining Iraqi painting. A period is defined not simply by chronological duration but by the convergence of technical practices, aesthetic concerns, and cultural conditions. In this sense, artistic production within a given period may unite artists from different biological generations who share common experimental frameworks. The concept of cultural generationality further extends beyond visual art to encompass literature, philosophy, and scientific transformation. The integration of scientific and



technological advancements into artistic production illustrates how generational shifts may emerge through epistemic change. Bertrand Russell (n.d.) observed that modern artists increasingly sought to reconcile scientific development with artistic form, generating new aesthetic systems (p. 20). Such transformations demonstrate that generational convergence may occur through shared engagement with new media, technologies, or conceptual paradigms rather than age-based affiliation.

In Iraqi painting, generational configuration thus emerges through multiple intersecting conditions:

1. Expansion of artistic institutions and academies.
2. Development of new materials and technical methodologies.
3. Cultural negotiation between heritage and modernity.
4. Experimental tendencies that exceed archival generational labels.

This perspective allows for alternative classifications of Iraqi artistic production, including cultural periods, technical periods, abstract periods, subjective periods, religious-symbolic periods, and experimental periods. Each period functions as a conceptual container in which artists converge around shared visual strategies, regardless of chronological birth cohort.

Furthermore, generational convergence is not unique to Iraq. In France, early twentieth-century painters engaged with the legacy of Paul Cézanne, adapting his structural approach to form and color as a shared methodological reference (George, 1985, p. 113). Such examples demonstrate how stylistic affinity, rather than biological generation, can constitute the basis for collective artistic identity.

The period, therefore, operates as a host structure for styles and orientations. It disrupts rigid temporal demarcations and enables intergenerational dialogue through shared experimentation. Artists may thus participate simultaneously in historical continuity and aesthetic rupture. As Ernst Fischer (1980) emphasizes, art inherently embodies tension and contradiction; it arises from lived reality but requires formal synthesis and technical mastery (p. 17). Artistic innovation consequently depends upon both experiential urgency and disciplined material control.

Moments of generational rupture may also emerge from institutional and social conflict. In Germany, for example, art historian Martin Warnke documented tensions between guild-affiliated urban artists and court painters, revealing how structural power relations shape artistic identity and generational positioning (Inik, 2011, p. 77). Such cases illustrate that generational formation may arise from cultural negotiation, institutional transformation, or ideological struggle.

In light of these considerations, generational configuration in Iraqi painting should be understood as a dynamic interplay between continuity and rupture, technique and ideology, heritage and experimentation. Rather than viewing generations as fixed chronological segments, this study conceptualizes them as relational formations emerging within specific cultural periods. These periods facilitate aesthetic convergence, sustain experimental momentum, and enable artistic discourse to transcend the archival limitations of age-based classification.

Iraqi Painting – A Documentary Study

Iraqi painting, across its diverse subjects and stylistic orientations, has played a central role in shaping cultural and social consciousness. Beyond its aesthetic function, it constitutes a documentary field through which artistic movements, manifestos, and institutional developments have been archived. These documents exhibition catalogues, manifestos, and group statements serve as primary sources that reveal how successive artistic periods were conceptualized and negotiated within Iraq's modern visual culture.



From its formative stages, Iraqi modern painting emerged through a deliberate engagement with cultural heritage as a foundational aesthetic unit. Heritage functioned not merely as subject matter but as an epistemological framework through which artists articulated a modern national identity. This dialectic between inheritance and modernity enabled Iraqi artists to establish an influential presence within the Arab art world, distinguished by its synthesis of epic, dramatic, and historically grounded visual narratives. Art, as theorized by Herbert Read (1975), has historically served social, religious, and ideological structures, often functioning as a mediator of moral and cultural values (p. 135). Iraqi painting similarly engaged with societal concerns, reflecting existential, political, and communal realities. Yet, it also sought autonomy through experimentation and formal innovation.

A pivotal documentary occurred in the late 1950s with the formation of the Baghdad-based group known as *Jamaat al-Ruwad* (The Pioneers Group). In 1958, a manifesto attributed to Jawad Saleem articulated a foundational aesthetic position: while artists must be aware of international schools and influences, authentic artistic value derives not from subject matter alone but from formal mastery. The manifesto famously referenced Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, asserting that its immortality lies in artistic execution rather than the mere historical event it depicts (Al-Azzawi, 1971, p. 187).

This statement reveals a critical principle: artistic authenticity emerges from the synthesis of vision and technique rather than thematic nobility. The document also emphasized the deep connection between Iraqi art and the land, invoking ancient Mesopotamian and Assyrian precedents as symbolic anchors of continuity.

Such documentary evidence demonstrates how Iraqi painting transitioned from academic realism and impressionistic tendencies toward a more self-conscious articulation of identity. Early representations of marshlands, rural villages, Kurdish landscapes, shanasheel architecture, and still life subjects gradually evolved into explorations of deeper symbolic relationships between land, history, and collective memory. This transformation reflects what Najeem Abd (2001) described as the experimental engagement of painting with sensory and perceptual development (p. 115).

The political transformations surrounding the 1958 Revolution further intensified artistic experimentation. Shifts in social structure and ideological discourse expanded the thematic and formal scope of Iraqi painting. Artists increasingly addressed issues of social justice, identity, and historical continuity, while simultaneously absorbing external theoretical frameworks, including socialist and Marxist interpretations of art. These influences did not erase local specificity; rather, they generated a productive tension between imported theoretical paradigms and indigenous cultural references.

Moreover, the role of documentation manifestos, exhibition records, and institutional archives proves essential for understanding generational configuration within Iraqi painting. These texts did not merely describe artistic production; they actively constructed generational identities and period classifications. They delineated aesthetic priorities, articulated theoretical commitments, and framed the dialogue between heritage and modernity.

In this sense, Iraqi painting must be read not only as visual production but also as a discursive and documentary field. Its archival traces reveal how artists negotiated the pressures of modernity, political transformation, and global artistic exchange. Through these documents, Iraqi painting demonstrates a sustained effort to reconcile technique, identity, and cultural continuity thereby establishing a dynamic visual tradition that continues to evolve across successive periods.

The Marxist approach to art, which later circulated in the Arab world through translations, books, and intellectual writings, was originally formulated by Georgi Plekhanov. Plekhanov situated art within the superstructure, determined by the economic and material conditions of the societal base (Einek, 2011, p. 47).



Figure 1. *The Wedding*, oil on canvas, by Jawad Saleem, founder of the Baghdad Group for Modern Art

This theoretical orientation significantly influenced Arab and Iraqi intellectual discourse in the mid-twentieth century, encouraging artists and critics to reconsider art as a reflection of material and social realities rather than as an autonomous aesthetic domain.

Within this intellectual climate, Iraqi painting increasingly descended, conceptually into the realm of lived human experience, examining social environments, political transformations, and material conditions. Artistic production became intertwined with experimentation in technique and medium, as previously articulated in early artistic manifestos. Stylistically, Iraqi artists engaged with various European modernist movements. Realism, expressive realism, and Impressionism were particularly influential, while academic naturalism remained dominant due to the pedagogical framework of the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad and private studios such as Studio Hafidh.

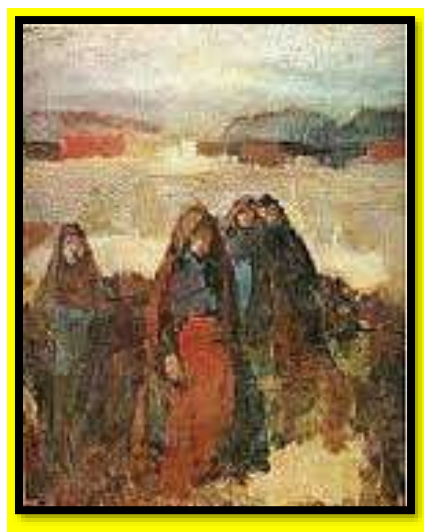


Figure 2. Faiq Hassan

Prominent figures of the pioneering generation included Faiq Hassan (Figure 2), Jawad Saleem (Figure 1), Hafidh al-Droubi, Atta Sabri, Najeeb Younes, Nazeeha Salim, Lorna

Selim, and Fadhil Abbas, among others. Collectively, the pioneers sought to construct a coherent creative and cultural system that would articulate a distinct Iraqi artistic identity. This endeavor paved the way for the emergence of new artistic formations, most notably the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, established in 1951. The group's manifesto delivered by Jawad Saleem and signed by figures including Jabra Ibrahim Jabra and Shakir Hassan Al Said declared a renewed commitment to reviving the interrupted lineage of Iraqi art dating back to the thirteenth-century School of Yahya ibn Mahmoud al-Wasiti. The statement articulated an ambition to establish a new school of painting rooted in local heritage yet engaged with global civilization (Al-Sarraf, 1972, p. 124).

This declaration marked a decisive intellectual shift. Iraqi painting entered a phase of critical inquiry that sought alignment with international modernist movements while preserving cultural specificity. The tension between Eastern and Western aesthetic paradigms was widely debated. Thinkers such as Gaston Richard emphasized the profound structural differences between Eastern and Western artistic traditions (Al-Said, 1994, p. 37). However, Iraqi modernists rejected binary opposition in favor of synthesis asserting that Eastern identity could engage productively with global modernism.

Post-World War II European transformations, including abstraction and expanded exhibition practices, deeply affected Iraqi artists. As articulated by Wassily Kandinsky, each cultural epoch generates its own unique artistic language that cannot be replicated (Al-Said, 1983, p. 154). Iraqi artists internalized this principle, striving to articulate a visual language appropriate to their historical moment.

Within the Arab world, Iraq sought a leading role in modernist innovation, supported by institutional structures such as the British Council's cultural initiatives and continuous exhibition programs. Yet, as critics have noted (Nafl, 2009, p. 180), despite its pioneering position, Iraqi art had not yet consolidated itself into a fully codified "Baghdad School" with fixed stylistic traditions.

The Baghdad Group for Modern Art distinguished itself through intellectual engagement and theoretical orientation. Jawad Saleem's engagement with Cubism, particularly the influence of Pablo Picasso and Mahmoud Sabri's development of "Quantum Realism" exemplified attempts to reconcile scientific and philosophical thought with artistic form. According to Jabra Ibrahim Jabra, Iraqi artists of the period sought to move beyond Impressionism toward more forceful modes of expression, influenced by existentialist philosophy and political ideologies that called for art's integration into public life.

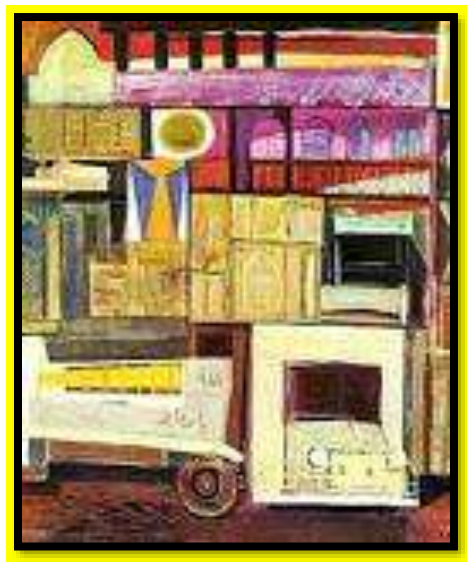


Figure 3. Oil painting by Jawad Saleem. Collection of the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art.



Jawad Saleem himself acknowledged the complexity of establishing a modern Iraqi school of art, emphasizing that such a school must reflect the totality of lived experience rather than merely stylistic innovation (Al-Sarraf, 1972, p. 83). This dual emphasis on sensory practice and intellectual inquiry was later summarized by critics as representing two complementary trajectories: the Pioneers emphasizing perceptual and formal experimentation, and the Baghdad Group foregrounding theoretical and conceptual frameworks (Al-Said, 1983, p. 143).

These developments collectively demonstrate that Iraqi modern painting evolved through a dialectical process between technique and thought, heritage and modernity, sensory experience and intellectual reflection. The generational succession of artistic groups was not merely chronological but epistemological each formation redefining the relationship between identity, experimentation, and global artistic discourse. From these foundational artistic movements emerged subsequent generations whose practices were shaped both by engagement with international modernist artists and by sustained dialogue among Iraqi painters themselves. Their diverse experimental trajectories gradually evolved into intellectual readings, critical discourses, and philosophical inquiries. Even preparatory sketches and paper studies reflected these theoretical orientations.

One illustrative example is *Children Playing* by Jawad Saleem, which was later examined through a psychological interpretive framework. The painting has been described as one of the most compelling visual representations of childhood joy, synthesizing geometric structure, technical precision, inherited cultural spirit, and thematic authenticity (Saleh, 1990, p. 164). Such analyses demonstrate how Iraqi modern painting increasingly transcended formal experimentation to engage with interdisciplinary critical methodologies, including psychology and aesthetics.

Following the Baghdad Group for Modern Art, additional artistic collectives emerged, among them the One Dimension Group (Jama'at al-Bu'd al-Wahid). This group marked a decisive shift in Iraqi visual culture by advancing a specific aesthetic orientation centered on the literal and conceptual presence of the Arabic letter within the pictorial field. The dominant stylistic tendencies during this phase were abstraction and symbolism, articulated through a renewed investigation of calligraphic form.

In a seminal document known as the "Contemplative Manifesto," Shakir Hassan Al Said called upon artists to pursue metaphysical depth within artistic practice. He argued that, at a historical moment when global civilization was redefining its scientific and human destiny, art must strive toward a truth that transcends material and personal reality (Al-Azzawi, 1971, p. 188). For Al Said, the Iraqi artist's task was not merely stylistic innovation but the authentic revelation of existential presence within contemporary civilization.

The One Dimension Group was formally consolidated around 1970, initially presenting itself as a collective before crystallizing around Al Said's intellectual vision. Its central objective was the aesthetic and philosophical activation of the Arabic letter as both visual form and metaphysical signifier. Among the artists associated with the group were Jamil Hamoudi, Mohammed Ghani Hikmat, Abdulrahman Al-Kilani, Rafa Nasiri, and Dia Azzawi.

The group's project represented an aesthetic enrichment rooted in heritage yet articulated through modern abstraction. Its theoretical foundation drew significantly from Sufi philosophy, particularly regarding the ontological and symbolic dimensions of the letter. As Al Said later explained, the One Dimension initiative was conceived as a natural extension of the Baghdad Group's earlier engagement with heritage but reformulated within a new artistic manifesto aimed at subjecting artistic thought to rigorous stylistic realization (Al Said, 1983, p. 100). (Figure 4 and 5)



Figure 4



Figure 5

Through this movement, Iraqi painting entered a phase in which generational succession was no longer confined to chronological continuity but became conceptual and epistemological. The Arabic letter functioned as a site of convergence between tradition and abstraction, spirituality and modernity, individual expression and collective cultural memory. Thus, the emergence of the One Dimension Group exemplifies how Iraqi artistic generations were shaped not merely by temporal succession but by evolving intellectual and aesthetic paradigms.

The formal and technical characteristics articulated in the manifesto of the One Dimension Group were grounded in both cultural and methodological premises. The group sought to revitalize Iraqi visual identity through a conceptual and aesthetic engagement with heritage, particularly the Arabic letter as a visual and metaphysical entity. The "one dimension" was conceived not merely as a formal reduction but as a unifying spiritual axis that merges intellect and imagination, generating an illusionistic continuity through the fluidity of the letterform. In this sense, the artwork becomes a site where the visible and invisible intersect, transforming the letter into a vehicle of contemplative depth and cultural affirmation. As Herbert Read observed, "the artist is capable of giving visible form to invisible mental images and possesses the power to move our emotions profoundly" (Read, 1975, p. 135). The group's aesthetic orientation thus aligned expressive abstraction with a culturally embedded symbolism rooted in Islamic and Sufi thought.

Prior to the emergence of the One Dimension Group, another significant collective formation appeared within the Iraqi art scene: the Impressionists Group, initiated by Hafidh al-Droubi. Founded in 1963, the group reflected a generational inclination toward reaffirming painterly confidence through perceptual immediacy and personal vision. According to Saadi Al-Kaabi, one of the organizers, the group functioned primarily as a flexible association rather than a doctrinaire movement, allowing broad freedom in stylistic interpretation and artistic vision (Al-Said, 1983, p. 182). This openness facilitated diverse engagements with light, color, and urban subject matter, while maintaining a shared commitment to painterly exploration. The group continued exhibiting until 1968 and included artists such as Dia Azzawi, Jamil Hafidh, Alaa Bashir, Yasin Shakir, Mundhir Jamil Hafidh, and Hayat Jamil Hafidh. Their activities contributed to the diversification of modern Iraqi painting by reinforcing the legitimacy of stylistic plurality within a shared cultural framework. Collectively, these artistic formations underscore the dynamic interplay between generational continuity and aesthetic transformation within contemporary Iraqi art. (Figure 6 and 7)



Figure 6



Figure 7

The defining features of this phase were predominantly objective, centering on the representation of nature. Stylistic characteristics, however, remained diverse, reflecting each artist's pursuit of a distinctive expressive approach through painting as a transformative medium within their evolving artistic practice. During this period, questions emerged regarding the continuity or discontinuity of Impressionism within Iraqi painting. This uncertainty stemmed from the fact that Impressionist experiences largely remained individual endeavors, lacking the consolidation of an institutionalized artistic discourse. Rather, Impressionism functioned primarily as an academic technique in color construction within art education, particularly in students' early experimentation and their exploratory engagement with various styles and artistic directions.

Concurrently—and in temporal proximity to the One Dimension Group—another collective emerged, distinguished by a purely experimental inclination. This group sought to interrogate progressive and revolutionary conceptions of human reality, aspiring to reassess prevailing cultural frameworks and sociocultural assumptions. Known as the Innovators Group, it was initiated by Kazim Haider. The group's manifesto articulated an artistic vision grounded in production and sociocultural transformation. It stated:

"...With the fragmentation of political movements and the reassessment of positions, concepts, and other matters, we began to recognize—through our direct engagement with everyday reality and the prevailing social conditions of that time—the urgent necessity of change: a transformation of all values and concepts dominant at the social level, and the presentation of a new image to the public—an image of a better social reality as we envisioned it, yet within the limits of our capacities as artists" (Al-Sa'īd, 1983, p. 140).

Thus, the Innovators Group represented a conscious shift toward ideological and cultural critique through artistic practice, situating painting within a broader framework of social awareness and reformist aspiration.



Figure 8. Work by Hafidh al-Droubi, Collection of the Iraqi Museum of Modern Art.

The Innovators were also the product of an advanced phase in both visual art criticism and literary discourse. The generation of the 1960s critically challenged the premises of the 1950s generation through new conceptual and ideological propositions. This shift is reflected in the statements of Mahmoud Sabri, who argued that economic, social, and intellectual transformations in Iraq had generated new themes and conditions, leading to the emergence of new concepts, philosophies, and attitudes among people, including artists. Consequently, such circumstances necessitated a transformation of earlier artistic forms that were no longer adequate or relevant (Al-Saaid, 1994, p. 140).

The defining feature of this phase in the twentieth century was the positioning of painting as an intellectual and revolutionary praxis aligned with contemporary ideological and philosophical movements. As Ernst Fischer observed, art has the capacity to elevate the human being from fragmentation toward unity and contemplation; it enables the artist not merely to endure reality but to understand it and to strive toward rendering it more coherent and worthy of human existence (Fischer, 1980, p. 75). Within this framework, painting became a field of cultural engagement that linked human experience with technological, social, and intellectual developments. Artistic practices integrated multiple media and expressive strategies, often adopting epic and narrative dimensions that foregrounded the relationship between human beings and the land.

The Revolution of 1968 further reshaped the cultural landscape, encouraging artistic production that aligned with national concerns, including the Palestinian cause and broader anti-Zionist positions. This period generated works characterized by nationalist and socialist sensibilities, reflecting a desire for ideological alignment with the broader Arab context. Art increasingly assumed a communicative and declarative function, embedding political and social values within modernist aesthetic frameworks. Through the appropriation of local and Islamic motifs, painting became centered on the human condition and collective causes, particularly during the 1970s.

In the years following the revolution, a new current emerged, known as the New Vision Group (also referred to as the numerical groups). In their 1969 manifesto, signed by Hashim Samarchi, Mohammed Mehr al-Din, Rafea al-Nasiri, Dia al-Azzawi, Saleh al-Jumai'i, and Ismail Fattah, the group articulated a conception of art as a necessary outcome of humanity's prior discoveries and transcendence of external reality. The manifesto emphasized that authentic existence could only be realized through dynamic movement that rejects any final or static goal; rather, the continuous presence and transformation of the artwork constitute an ongoing process of inquiry inseparable from conscious human awareness.

The group's exhibitions sought to present an art that resisted imitation and superficial borrowing from global artistic cultures. Instead, they advocated a practice grounded in critical awareness of society, history, and civilization. Their works varied technically and



conceptually: some artists engaged with heritage and poetry as visual sources, while others addressed political themes such as the Palestinian cause or explored the relationship between art and society. Collectively, these practices reinforced the understanding of Iraqi painting as a dynamic field in which generational dialogue, ideological transformation, and stylistic experimentation intersect within broader cultural and historical frameworks.

Indicators Derived from the Theoretical Framework

1. Generational contemporaneity encompasses groups of artists whose practices are dialogically linked to those who preceded them. Through artistic and cultural manifestos, these artists articulated identity-driven positions that defined the stylistic and directional orientations characteristic of specific historical periods. In this sense, each epoch generated conceptual frameworks through which the "generation" was understood as an expression of artistic development and as a contemporary aesthetic achievement.
2. Generationality operates as a connective continuum that sustains successive cohorts of artists and their technical practices. Within this continuum, historically demarcated periods dissolve into an integrated temporal field in which artistic experimentation is announced as a coherent aesthetic vision. This vision is grounded in diverse stylistic and directional tendencies that coexist and evolve through sustained intergenerational dialogue.
3. Artistic styles and movements correspond to the overarching conceptual climate of each historical phase. During such periods, artists' viewpoints and practices often converge around shared aesthetic objectives, fostering the continuation and transformation of technical experimentation. Through this cumulative process, new stylistic formations emerge, shaped by the multiplicity of artists affiliated with each generational moment.
4. Artists' manifestos and critical reflections function as epistemic disclosures of emerging thematic and conceptual concerns. These articulations reflect the evolution of artistic, critical, and cultural consciousness, while simultaneously engaging with global artistic developments. In this regard, Iraqi artistic discourse demonstrates both a dialogical alignment with international modernism and a pioneering role within the broader Arab art context.

Research Procedures

Research Population

The research population consists of visual samples collected from artists' catalogues, exhibition guides, specialized art publications, academic theses and dissertations, critical studies addressing Iraqi art, and selected digital archival sources. These materials collectively document stylistic developments and generational intersections within modern and contemporary Iraqi painting.

Research Sample

The research sample comprises selected works by Iraqi visual artists whose production reflects affiliation with specific aesthetic orientations and stylistic lineages. These artists are approached as representatives of generational formations linked by shared conceptual, technical, or ideological frameworks.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology, enabling systematic examination of stylistic characteristics, technical strategies, and conceptual dimensions within the selected artworks, while situating them within their historical and cultural contexts.

Rationale for Sample Selection

The selected models were chosen to position Iraqi visual artists within a comparative framework that juxtaposes pioneering figures, whose experiments established foundational stylistic trajectories, with contemporaneous and successive artists who engaged,

transformed, or extended these trajectories across different historical periods. This selection allows for the examination of generational continuity as a dynamic aesthetic and cultural process.

No.	Artist	Type of Work	Technique & Year	Artistic Style
1	Shakir Hassan Al Said	Painting	Watercolor, 1959	Calligraphic Abstraction
2	Jamil Hamoudi	Painting	Oil on canvas, 1975	Cubist Formation
3	Adnan Abbas	Painting	Mixed media, 2024	Legible Script-Based Style

This analytical model examines the evolution of calligraphic abstraction within Iraqi painting as a generational phenomenon, tracing its transformation from early modernist experimentation to contemporary script-based visual structures.



Figure 9: Shakir Hassan Al Said. (n.d.). *Untitled* [Watercolor]. Private collection/archival source.



Figure 10: Jamil Hamoudi. (1985). *Untitled* [Painting]. National Museum of Modern Art, Baghdad. Reproduced from *Artist Catalogue* (1985).

The phenomenon of aesthetically inspired calligraphic abstraction among Arab artists, including Iraqi painters, is grounded in the intrinsic beauty, fluidity, and structural flexibility of the Arabic letterform. The Arabic script, by virtue of its rhythmic linearity and capacity for elongation, compression, and transformation, offers fertile analytical and experimental possibilities within the artist's creative laboratory. It thus becomes not merely a linguistic signifier but a visual and plastic unit capable of formal reconfiguration and stylistic innovation.

Within the Iraqi context, Shakir Hassan Al Said was among the earliest pioneers to theorize and institutionalize this approach. His articulation of the One-Dimension Group (Jamaat al-Bud al-Wahid) established a conceptual and aesthetic framework through which the Arabic letter was reinterpreted as a metaphysical and plastic element within modern painting. This foundational moment generated a sustained inquiry into authenticity, identity, and heritage among successive generations of Iraqi artists.

Accordingly, the selected models, (1) Shakir Hassan Al Said, (2) Jamil Hamoudi, and (3) Adnan Abba, span the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, extending conceptually into the early twenty-first century. In particular, Adnan Abbas continues to reinforce stylistic and formal characteristics of readable calligraphic abstraction within contemporary Iraqi painting, demonstrating how generational continuity sustains conceptual transformation. This intergenerational dialogue contributes to the conceptual mapping of Iraqi visual culture; wherein technical strategies of execution transcend mere stylistic repetition despite a shared reliance on the Arabic letter as a thematic and structural unit.

The following table presents additional representative models within Iraqi modern painting that reflect diverse abstract, expressive, and material approaches:



Figure 11

Artist	Medium and Materials	Artistic Content/Orientation	Year
Mohammed Mehr al-Din	Oil and mixed media	Abstraction	2004
Salim Al-Dabbagh	Mixed materials and dual-tone palette	Static abstraction	2000
Shaddad Abdul Qahar	Acrylic and mixed media	Abstract symbolism	2005
Karim Rasan	Mixed media on wood	Abstract expressionism	2004



Model : Oil painting from the private collection of the artist Adnan Abbas, photographed by the researcher.

Model : Mohammed Mehr al-Din, image retrieved from the artist's official website, documentation from an exhibition of the Iraqi Plastic Artists Association.



Model: Salim Al-Dabbagh, reproduced from the Al-Brahimi Collection (Ibrahimicollection.com).

Model: Shaddad Abdul Qahar, Al-Brahimi Collection.

Technical generational succession (*al-mujāyala al-taqniyya*) was not merely the result of experimental transmission among local artistic practices or their engagement with inherited traditions; rather, it emerged from the innovative sensibility that characterized artists of that formative period. Through their foundational manifestos, these artists advocated for the circulation of artistic experiences, openness to the international milieu, and active engagement with contemporary global art. Consequently, stylistic tendencies marked by strangeness, abstraction, and abstract expressionism became prominent, accompanied by experimental diversity and the incorporation of heterogeneous materials in the construction of new artistic forms.

The rapid dissemination of these practices within the Iraqi visual and plastic arts sphere can be attributed to several factors. Among the most significant were Iraqi artists' intercultural relationships, extensive travel, and participation in diaspora exhibitions, which facilitated the reception and adaptation of foreign artistic ideas. These dynamics contributed to the emergence of a new artistic culture in Iraq during the 1960s, reaching maturity by the late 1980s.

This generational formation encompassed numerous artists whose collective contributions exceed the scope of the present study and require comprehensive conceptual documentation. It was characterized by experimental vitality, engagement with global artistic discourse, diversification of exhibition methods—including the presentation of artistic notebooks—and renewed thematic cartographies. Heritage was rearticulated within Iraqi modern painting through innovative frameworks aligned with international artistic research. The proliferation of print media and critical writings further enriched Iraqi art criticism, consolidating this period as a pivotal phase in modern and contemporary Iraqi plastic arts.

Analysis of the Impressionist Generational Formation

Artist	Type of Work	Subject Matter	Location	Year of Completion
Hafidh Al-Droubi	Oil painting	Iraqi landscape	Amman	1972
Khalid Al-Jader	Oil painting	Iraqi landscape	Artist's diaspora collection	Unknown
Raed Ameer	Acrylic	Landscape from Babylon	Artist's collection in Iraq	2025

From an educational and fine arts perspective, this Impressionist-oriented generational continuity reflects the persistence of landscape painting as a vehicle for articulating national identity while simultaneously adapting modern techniques and materials. It further demonstrates how Iraqi artists negotiated between local subject matter and broader stylistic currents within twentieth- and twenty-first-century art discourse.



Hafidh Al-Droubi, from a photographic archive.

Khalid Al-Jader.

Raed Ameer

Impressionism emerged as a visual artistic identity possessing its own aesthetic roots intrinsically connected to place. It is not confined to a singular homeland, as it manifests through the chromatic spectrum of natural sunlight. When the Iraqi Impressionist group arose, under the initiative of artists such as Hafidh Al-Droubi, its call embodied the spirit and essence of the land and soil of Iraq. A review of the transitional phase in Iraqi Impressionist painting toward modern art reveals that many Iraqi experiences entered modernity through the gateway of contemporary Impressionism, as exemplified in the works of Khalid Al-Jader, Faiq Hassan, and Mohammed Sabri, among others.

Within this generational continuum, a growing experimental dynamism can be observed in the sustained intergenerational dialogue toward a distinctly Iraqi Impressionism—recognizable through the “scent of the earth,” and the depiction of palm trees, orchards, rivers, and waterways, rendered with chromatic vitality and technical refinement. Iraqi artists embedded within this formation an implicit structural system that foregrounded the expressive power of representing the pristine Mesopotamian environment. Foreign experimental interference remained limited, thereby allowing Iraqi artists to cultivate their own localized Impressionist discourse.



This generational formation continues to thrive through diverse exhibition platforms. Notably, during the spring season each year, landscape painting exhibitions are widely organized across Iraqi provinces, where artists engage directly with nature through plein-air practice. Unlike the calligraphic or technical generational formations, the Impressionist formation carries the imprint of established art schools while simultaneously integrating contemporary modes of presentation, particularly among younger artists. Its presence has expanded even within the art market.

This formation asserts its singularity through enduring stylistic characteristics shared across pioneering, parallel, and younger generations. It remains active within the globalized image culture of the present era, continuing to leave its mark on Iraqi art by maintaining a profound connection to Iraq's natural environment. Moreover, it constitutes a fertile ground for stylistic innovation, preserving authenticity and rootedness while allowing diverse approaches unified by the spirit of Iraqi art.

Research Findings

1. Generational formation (al-mujayala) constitutes a conceptual reading of intergenerational artistic movement in relation to artistic experience, styles, and orientations. Despite the passage of time and stylistic evolution within Iraqi visual arts, a unifying stylistic structure often prevails, dissolving generational disparities within a shared artistic culture.
2. Modern and contemporary artistic styles and trends in Iraqi plastic arts have established an effective continuity that unites artists' capacities across painting and sculpture. This influence persists in the engagement of contemporary artists with modernist stylistic excavations and visual formations. Generational formations—whether abstract, technical, or calligraphic—demonstrate continuity from the generation of Jamil Hammoudi to that of Hamed Al-Shawi, representing an extension of Shakir Hassan Al Said and his stylistic movement in reinforcing the Arabic letter within Iraqi plastic art, as evidenced in Models (1), (2), and (3).
3. Generational formation within modern Iraqi painting remains largely situated within the framework of established art schools. Iraqi artists continue to engage explicitly or implicitly with modern artistic movements. Nevertheless, Iraqi visual formation has localized global artistic experiences through adaptation and practice, thereby entering the contemporary sphere of global art with its diverse styles and orientations.

Conclusions

1. Contemporary Iraqi plastic art demonstrates instances of stylistic repetition, resulting from the sustained adherence to previously achieved artistic approaches. This has occasionally led to delayed manifestations of foreign artistic experimentation within Iraqi exhibition spaces. Many young artists, in particular, have reiterated contemporary art school models rather than advancing distinct experimental trajectories.
2. Generational formation has, at times, circumscribed artists' conceptual frameworks by fusing temporal layers into a singular experiential continuity. Consequently, Iraqi art criticism has remained encircled by recurrent conceptual paradigms, often articulated through a modernist discourse that precedes the more fluid dynamics of global contemporary visual culture.

Recommendations and Proposals

1. The researcher recommends intensifying scholarly readings and analytical studies of the Iraqi plastic arts movement and its various generations in order to deepen understanding of their artistic experiences, stylistic developments, and aesthetic orientations.
2. The researcher proposes the current title:



"The Generational Structure in Iraqi Plastic Arts: A Study of the Succession of Pioneers and Their Followers."

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