



Painter in Poetry / Poet in Painting: The Language of Images in Experimental Poetry and
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مللا قزر جىلءء ماسرلا

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Painter in Poetry / Poet in Painting : The Language of Images in Experimental Poetry and in Adly Rizkallah's Watercolors*

Maggie Awadalla

The interrelationship of the sister arts, "poetry and painting", in modern Egyptian art is a relatively new phenomenon. The allegiance between these two art forms is embodied in some of the experimental 'poetry of the seventies' and the paintings of Adly Rizkallah. There are three main experimental poets who wrote poems directly addressed to Adly Rizkallah, namely Abdul Mun^Cim Ramadan, Walid Munir and Amgad Rayan. These three poets belong to the main experimental movement in poetry. Walid Munir and Amgad Rayan belong to the group named *Illumination*, while Abdul Mun^Cim Ramadan belongs to the group named *Voices*.¹ Adly Rizkallah, on the other hand, is a contemporary painter who is well known for his unique use of watercolors and his innovative work in that respect.² The synthesizing of the qualities of poetry and painting in both milieus forms a distinctive characteristic. These characteristics bring together a "language of images" that would usually be considered unrelated. Consequently, we find that the relationship between the poetry of Abdul Mun^Cim Ramadan, Walid Munir and Amgad Rayan and the paintings of Adly Rizkallah, does not derive from their subjects nor from sequences in their signs. Rather, the relationship is established by their common interest in creating images regarded as a language -- a language that incorporates the semantic and syntactic communicative power, where images are used to encode messages, tell stories, express ideas and emotions as well as raise questions.³ This "language of images" forms an aesthetic medium that is expressive rather than interpretive or representative.

* Translations of poems mentioned in this article are in appendix I as well as a selection of the artist's paintings in the illustration section : pp. 175 -184.

In the case of the three poems written with reference to (and inspired by) Adly Rizkallah's paintings, poetry and painting can be unified -- not through subject and sign -- but rather as an expression of the imagination. In both cases art is transmitted through the effort of portraying the synthesizing power of the imagination . This expressive form of art reconstructs reality by decomposing it, then recomposing it once again.⁴ In this specific case we find that these poets, by writing about a painting (or a painter), have moved two steps away from " reality"; where they write about an image which has been recreated and detached from the place and time in which it was first conceived. The prominent novelist Edwar al-Kharrat, who has written both critical and creative essays on Adly Riakallah's work, voices this notion in two prose poems addressed to the painter entitled :*First Interpretation* and *Second Interpretation*.⁵ As noted, the emphasis of the title is on the concept of interpretation; where the titles in themselves both raise and resolve the question of reconstructing reality. Al-Kharrat is stating from the beginning that what he has written is a product of his imagination: an interpretation rather than a replica of reality and art . One of the poets, Walid Munir, also explains this phenomenon as follows:

Even though Adly Rizkallah is not in any way a metaphysical artist, he is capable of transmitting us into the presence of God, the artist premier, who sketched the universe with water and light, then sat alone to watch his creation. And when he longed to have friends, He created us to rejoice with Him and imitate Him. And when we rejoiced with Him and imitated Him, we composed a hymn and sang to Him what is both worthy of Him and of us.⁶

Walid Munir's "artist premier" is, as in the case of Adly Rizkallah, a composer of watercolor , blending "water and light". Adly Rizkallah's role here is that of a "transmitter" who introduces the poet to yet another exquisite painting. Hence one element in the poets' experimentation with poetry is the expanding of its associations: where the paintings of Adly Rizkallah become a *source* of experience rather than a *record* of it . The poet, then, reacts to this *source* by "compos[ing] a hymn

and sing[ing]". In doing so, the poem , creates a dual image where the pictorial work of art is rendered "poetic", while the poem enters the realm of "painting".

This "poetic" quality of Adly Rizkallah's paintings, combined with a deep affinity for mystery and -- to borrow Nemerov's words -- " the esoteric .. for the secret which is also sacred "7, is what evokes these poets' imagination. The poems *speaks* of the *silence* of the painting. In this relationship the poem will also become an illuminated shape that attempts to reach towards a silence within the language / light that shines from within, where the tyranny of the word is overcome by creating an "image" or a "language of images". It is not surprising then that the two groups of poets, from which these poems have been chosen, named their journals *Illumination (Idaa)* and *Voices (Aswat)*, thus enhancing the interrelationship of both the concepts of voice and light . It is also interesting to note that the two groups always include various drawings and paintings of contemporary artists in their journals.

Therefore, this task of forming from "the language *about* images" an "image regarded *as* language" 8 is expressed by both the poets and by Adly Rizkallah the painter. The poets convey this in terms of challenging the traditional meter at times and breaking down their sentences. They also attempt to communicate this "image" in their experimental usage of language and in their insistence on breaking away from duplicating "reality" as the only means of expressing art. Adly Rizkallah's vision, on the other hand, is expressed visually in his water colors through the combination of opposites : transparency and depth, movement and stillness, passion and death, birth and rebirth. The desire to attain this image/vision could be represented as a form of utopia or what the poets label "a dream". This "dream" is voiced in the first editorial introduction to the journal *Illumination* 77 (*Idaa*) as follows:

We are aware that the distance between ambitions and actions is vast.... . [But] we are not ashamed of the dream. For dreaming is a noble element in revolution.⁹

This impossible/possible task is also dramatized by Abdul Mun^cim Ramadan's following verses which were inspired by Adly Rizkallah 's paintings:

And like you, I lie abandoned at the door
awaiting the womb as clear as the earth
awaiting my entry under its sign
my horses pant
behind the children's swings.¹⁰

Since this poem is addressed to Adly Rizkallah, we may assume that "like you" is a direct reference to the painter's equally hard task. Both the painter and poet are united in waiting at the door to be blessed by "entering under its sign". But even as they "await" , they are not in a static condition, for they "pant" as:

This body overflowing with unseen bodies
slips into my pages
reminds them of the water source
wets the stump
wets that region between the shoulders
and touching the heart, becomes
a butterfly
white
full
of hunger,
reaching the mossy threshold
stops
grows lax
continues the sorrowing
transfigured: an icon
that awaits an international anthem. ¹¹

These lines evoke a Promethian mood: for the body (impregnated with other invisible bodies or possibilities) once it "touch[es] the heart", metamorphoses into a butterfly full of yet another hunger. When it flies toward the doorstep, or threshold, it stops and awaits (another) song. If we take a close look at these verses we find that the work of art undergoes several changes. For this body -- which could be interpreted either as

being one of Rizkallah's paintings or the poet's /painter's psyche -- when " overflowing with unseen bodies" 1) *finds* its way into the poet's pages and 2) *reminds* it of the source and 3) *wets* "the stump" and 4) *becomes* --when it touches the heart -- a butterfly full with hunger. The artistic form then metamorphoses several times through the following steps: infusion (as it permeates his paper) , then memory, then a vision that "becomes". This vision, that starts out as being cocoon-like in its essence, suddenly lets go of the beautiful butterfly that carries within itself two opposites: fullness and hunger. These two opposites embody what the poet feels: the tantalizing duality of both the impossible / possible , that which cannot /can be attained. The vision or image thus reaches the door and "continues the sorrowing", since once again the image is thrown at the door awaiting the once butterfly that is now an icon --which in its turn waits for yet another anthem or hymn. In other words, one can interpret the preceding lines as follows : the vision when it touches the heart becomes the living art (butterfly) that once it is put down on paper becomes -- in a way -- established and framed (icon) thus in a certain sense, dead. Therefore the sorrow is renewed and the waiting continues.

Ramadan in his poem has successfully put his finger on the core of Adly Rizkallah's work. This cocoon/butterfly/icon image is also conveyed in Rizkallah's own vision of art, for in his manifesto he expresses this idea as follows:

Whenever I look back I find that I have accomplished
very little
The shore looms in front of the eye, as if I had never
left it
The sea never ends
I desire the deep, my heart does not relent, and the
longing is never quenched.
Then
I see wild beauty. I see it with my heart ...and my
body
I confide in her:
"I can see what the fragile human heart cannot
withhold if I pace a step I will never come back."

I put forth my foot, hands, heart and soul.
Alone I find myself in what the human soul cannot
endure
Wild beauty. Wild sirens. Each one more beautiful
than the other
I have to steal what they have without their drowning
me in their seductive seas
Seduction is always possible

.....
When I awake from the ecstasy of completing a
collection [of paintings]
I feel that I have successfully penetrated a row of
sirens
Only to find others more beautiful and luring

.....
Row after row
Each infinitely more beautiful than the other
The Queen is fortified there
I cannot see her
But I know that she is there
The certainty of my heart guides me.

Will I see you before the body rests in death?
Will my limbs touch your body?
Will you hold me one day between your hands?
Will you grant me life/ death?
Hence eternal peace.¹²

For Adly Rizkallah, the "eternal peace" he craves for is only reached through a continuous and constantly moving wave-like metaphor. Here, again as in Ramadan's poem, this movement has a Prometheus quality to it: where "rows succeed rows" only to find yet other more beautiful ones. For him, art is like Jacob's ladder, "it never ends and it never reaches the sky. It is infinite."¹³ Amgad Rayan, in his poem addressed to Adly Rizkallah, echoes this movement that has a ladder-like quality. Here "Jacob's ladder" is materialized visually on paper as well as sensed inherently in its meanings. For, as the poet, Amgad Rayan "rolls between [Rizkallah's] metaphor's", where the voice becomes "a flash of light"

that spreads

on
your
entwined
stairway,
The subtle perspective ascends
While you throw open with your lofty gestures
Your grieving exposures.¹⁴

As is apparent in these lines, the visual construction of the poem is that of an "entwined" staircase which moves downwards as we read line after line. However the context creates another opposite and upward movement. For the image of the poet is "the subtle perspective" (of the paintings), being described as "moving upwards" and "throwing open". The poet Amgad Rayan, furthermore, enhances the entwining or spiral quality of the painter's "metaphors" by playing on the concept of the voice becoming light and an image becoming a metaphor. Movement then takes on another facet; it is a movement between poetry and painting where each takes on the qualities of the other. The poem then, in a way, mirrors the dialectical approach inherent in Adly Rizkallah's work, where stasis and movement coexist simultaneously.

By infusing movement into the static, Adly Rizkallah, assimilates some of literature's temporal development -- which is inherently a spatial, non-progressive art -- into painting. Edwar al-Kharrat, in a critical essay written on Rizkallah's work, expresses this quality as follows:

The painting (or statue) in its essence is a work embedded "in place"; as its spatial boundaries are its primary characteristic. You see it - in that space - at one go, which is not the case with the novel, story or musical score. There is no avoiding its being received "in time": the first line or the prelude first, then comes the bulk of the work, elongated temporally. You read it in hours or days - or you hear it in minutes or hours.

...First, I claim here, that Adly Rizkallah's works of

art (as is the case with other artists too) moves " in time". Even if one cannot see it all in one glimpse, as one might see a static spatial scene, its dramatic qualities, force you to experience it "in time", not as a piece hanging on the wall. That is, you experience its perpetual movement approaching you step after step. Each movement constructs consecutive and successive movements...

...And despite the sequential artistic cognition -- in respect to the visual arts (that is for the single work of art) -- its being stripped off from place makes it timeless, existing beyond time, and not bound by it. This is also true in the case of verbal, written and musical arts, not because they challenge "place", but because they challenge, question, break and change sequentiality that is forced upon them through concentrating it in a "moment" so that " the moment" becomes "a space" in "place", thus the bonds of "temporality" and " place" are both eliminated.¹⁵

According, then, to Edwar al-Kharrat's theory, what brings Adly Rizkallah's paintings close to that of the other arts is its ability to transcend "temporality" and "place" through three basic methods: first through *condensation*, which then leads to a *metamorphosis* of the moment. This metamorphosis then reaches a final level where art *transcends* both time and place.

The condensation of metaphors and imagery is a noticeable aspect in all three poems referring to Adly Rizkallah's paintings where words replace sentences and letters words. This phenomenon is exemplified in the following section quoted from Abdul Mun^cim Ramadan's poem addressed to the painter:

N	نون
A	ألف
R	راء
I	ألف
M	ميم
A	ألف
N 16	نون

As is apparent, these letters, when grouped together, form

the title of Abdul Mun^cim Ramadan's poem: *Nariman* . In this poem, Nariman, the word, becomes a symbol, condensing (in the reader's mind) all that Adly Rizkallah's paintings stand for within the poem. Nariman, in this state of condensation, becomes a life-giving force. For, when the poet loses the flower "that heals from the illnesses of death", he wanders through the garden, searches his memory and " Nariman surfaces", renewing his energy.

Condensation is also apparent in Walid Munir's poem *Watercolors of Adly Rizkallah* . Here nearly each verse of the poem ends with a chain of words that replaces an image:

Making the universe a flower
A woman
And water ¹⁷

Short and sometimes incomplete sentences, phrases and words are the main characteristics of this poem. Description, so to speak, is put in a nutshell to the extent where the flower, woman, water, etc...are only representative in relation to Adly Rizkallah's paintings. Thus, a reader who has never seen the paintings would not be able to visualize the imagery referred to by the poet. Like Nariman, the flower and the woman are condensed cores which only permeate in association within the visual context. Thus, the flower Walid Munir forms cannot be visualized unless we actually see the flower Adly Rizkallah has painted. Yet it can be grasped as the essence of femininity from the poetic context. Although the poem is inspired by the painting and is removed twice from the feminine model presented by the artist, it joins the Idea of the Feminine in a convergence through distancing. This is akin to Plotinus' philosophy of art and his reinterpretation of Plato's views, where he argued that the artistic is closer to the Idea than the actual is.

Poetic forms of condensation are complemented in the works of Adly Rizkallah, both through his use of color and form. Each unit of Adly Rizkallah's painting is a manifestation of a dialectic between condensation on the one hand and form on the other. To quote Edwar al-Kharrat once again:

..and from here comes the dramatization of the painting and its dynamism.

Once again you will not find an oppressive stasis in this artist's painting.

On the whole it contains both an affective and circular movement, where the painting is not a still scene (or dead in the French expression) but has a dynamic formation: concordance and discordance between the core and the circumference [which is formed through] that "intermarrying--dialectic" between the units of the painting, and that "violence -- discord" between the passion of color and transparency, between its thickness and tranquility; then that "discordance--concordance" between the initial substance of form in the painting itself : between " the lightness" [characteristic] of watercolor which assumes purity, light and pale delicateness [on the one hand], and "the paste" of the rich and thick color, that of oil and acrylic, which the artist comes close to -- and exceeds it sometimes.¹⁸

The dialectical or "dynamic" approach referred to by Edwar al-Kharrat is not only represented in the painter's use of colors but is also manifested in the forms within the paintings. For as is noticed in Rizkallah's *Crystals 89* , for example, there are two orbits hanging as if in mid air, in an apparently impossible harmony between complete stasis and complete movement. This dialectical formation is also extended to the individual unit, as well as in respect to the whole. The core here functions as *the source* of movement towards the outside whole and also towards the inward core : from condensation to transparency and vice versa. It is this quality of movement that creates a metamorphosis in art, what Edwar al-Kharrat describes as the ability of the concentrated "moment" to break away from the bonds of time and place to create art. Once again we find this notion echoed in the cocoon/butterfly metaphor, created by Abdul Mun^cim Ramadan and also in the spiral imagery inherent in Amgad Rayan's poem.

In a prose poem written by Edwar al-Kharrat, entitled

Second Interpretation to Adly Rizkallah Once Again, this very same theory can be read between the lines:

Stern Romanticism

Rude castles of the idols beseech the human within us, within them: they are dumb gods: they appear in no Place

Dolmens implanted in no Time

A white dull or brilliant, revealed in flesh cleaved open: liver florid and choleric, pecked to shreds by the eagles of raised and tender thighs

And the darkness a twilight dawn in a lasting limpid eve: the world's serenity therein, a translucent grey

The rock has breasts, the nipples turgid, trickling the pent milk of Bliss: brimming fruit of dates, canted columns charged with sap of luxury upstanding, joy's vermilion seed

Marmoreal and tender planes, rounded sinuosities, topaz yellow, red as clay: and the topaz a pure, a longing yellow, clear and sullied

Love's seductions speak to the woman-world in colours: they are without end

Falcon - phoenix - colossal thigh, sundered and welded column of the world: a hidden blue, an iron, terra-cotta blue: or else flesh transparent, flourishing, ferocious, suppressed

Hymn of the cosmos to Rama the monumental, the woman in perfection, priestess of carnal desire

Hymn of colour and form to 'Aisha the butterfly, hovering on solid wings

Hymn to colour and cosmos, a music a tempest incarnate: a spirit in gnosis consumed by fire: a song lifted to the woman beloved: the feverish incense of a rite of the body: savage colouration, dough in ferment, bathed in deliberation's light: conception architectural: coming to be in no Place. In no Time.¹⁹

If there is one main theme that brings together all these poets and writers, it would be their attraction to the idea of metamorphosis; even if their approaches differ as to the consequences of this phenomenon. In fact the poem written by Walid Munir, *Adly Rizkallah's Water Colors*, can be read solely

in terms of his fascination with the painter's ability to metamorphose -- not in terms of place and time as with Edwar al-Kharrat -- but in terms of subject:

How can you interpret such a treasure ?
How can you encircle my soul in shades
that do not end at the borders of color ?
Where the bird escapes between my fingers
Then it returns without my seeing it to the stones
Oh woman who enters the flesh of fire

Cubes in the autumn of light
A cleaved oyster
a pitcher
a stone
velvet
and dawn

As if liquid, in a whim, becomes a vision
And pain turns into clay
And clay becomes a star ²⁰

Walid Munir is less metaphysical in his view than Edwar al-Kharrat. For the metamorphosis expressed in his poem is more inclined towards a birth/rebirth cycle, rather than an existence in one timeless moment. In the case of Walid Munir "the bird escapes" and then returns -- not in another form of a bird -- but rather in the form of a stone, woman, oyster, or pitcher. "As if liquid, in a whim, becomes a vision" and "pain turns into clay" and then a star. Thus in contrast if we compare a single image used by the various poets, say the bird, to demonstrate the differences between their reactions to Adly Rizkallah's paintings, we will find subtle yet significant differences. For example, Edwar al-Kharrat's phoenix, through metamorphosis, changes into the idea of "bird". Abdul Munim Ramadan's butterfly also undergoes a phoenix-like transformation: where "body enters body" and the cocoon becomes butterfly and so on. Walid Munir's movement, on the other hand, is that of mutation where the bird becomes a completely different thing. That is, with Walid Munir,

transformation replaces transcendentalism.

In an exhibition entitled *Life Giving Flowers* by Adly Rizkallah this form of transformation is apparent. For the stone-like base (which is cubic in shape) gives birth to *and* encompasses a floral delicate-like form. The stone then does not give way to the idea of a stone but rather gives birth to and receives another form :the flower. This birth/rebirth theme that incorporates both pain and joy is labelled by Walid Munir as " the secret that is asleep in the garden of existence." In an essay written by Walid Munir on Rizkallah's *Life Giving Flowers* , the poet expresses his fascination with this theme as follows:

And if the warmth of the flower means a kind of touch, it also means from the start an affinity towards the scent and smell. And since it is impossible that it should enclose on nothingness -- even in its depth -- in the seed of its opposite (as the lesson of dialectic suggests),the pain that flows within the core of cheerful colors -- or [the pain] that hides behind it -- is not an ordinary pain. That is because it is a pain that is connected with pleasure and is in contact with the exposed organs in the act of a close permeation. Once again the thorns of the flower that give birth to life, [here] give birth to "the spirituality of the senses" and these [very] thorns consider it a pleasure to be the wound's merit.²¹

Thus through the marriage of opposites: pain and joy, birth and rebirth, the thorns of the flower that kill also give birth to life. The notion of birth/rebirth/birth ceases then to be two different things, and finally transformation becomes a formation. What was once still, moves and the spiritual becomes sensual. This characteristic in Adly Rizkallah's *Life Giving Flowers* leads to a circular quality in the paintings that eventually brings us to a state of stasis. This is true both on the level of the single painting and on the level of the whole group of paintings where:

The exhibition forms a circular whole of watercolors enclosed upon itself; where the flower with all its variations forms a basic way of viewing the world.²²

The complete circle, "enclosed upon itself", is furthermore dramatized in Walid Munir's poem. This poem is enclosed between two identical verses which open and close the poem with the following verse:

Blue permeated within me
The air expanded
Around me the universal body thinned
Making the universe a flower
A woman
And water ²³

By this verse the transformation within the poem is complete and order takes over. The flower is caught still in motion. The "moment" is bound and encircled by the poet between the opening and closing identical verse.

Once again this movement can be contrasted to the extended spiral metaphor adopted by Amgad Rayan, where Adly Rizkallah's flower is portrayed as "raising" then "flexing" as the following verse suggests:

A flashing line sets up order,
Your flower exists by the
refraction of the heavens,
The leavening of the kneaded rocks.
It rises through folklore
Starting the dense utterance
Leaning towards the well of childhood
And in the crisis of song. ²⁴

Thus, with respect to form, we find that there are several levels of movement: that of Walid Munir's enclosed circularity, on the one hand, and the spiral movement of Amgad Rayan's poem on the other. In the case of Amgad Rayan's entwining staircase metaphor, the metamorphosis it depicts is closer in its essence to that expressed by Edwar al-Kharrat and Abdul Mun^cim Ramadan.

However, all the poets deal with one common thing which is the metamorphosis of the erotic theme in the works of Adly Rizkallah. The woman/female/goddess is one of the major concerns of this painter, a theme that the poets have dealt with on two levels. The first is through direct reference to the erotic themes in Adly Rizkallah's paintings as is apparent in the following verses written by Amgad Rayan:

When the woman surfaced
on your deep canvas
You ripped open her entire side
Carved out for her a verse of sadness
And in the repetition of her openings
Our sadness ascended
You maneuvered her with light
And unified her with form.²⁵

And by Abdul Mun'im Ramadan in his *Nariman* :

This mysterious body
disintegrates if you address it
passes by you when you cross its path
and when you besiege it with class theories,
weaves itself in wicker helmet
and some peasant women bent over the foot of the
river ²⁶

At this elementary level of reference, we find that their verses are close to a unanimous statement, where the main issue is to break away from society's taboos on sexuality on the whole. These poets in their vision of themselves stand apart and defy the ultimate in Eastern society. By doing that, "experimentation"-- in these poets' work -- takes on a new dimension: that of breaking away from the norm not only on the level of form but also within its subject matter. In a way, their experimentation on that level is fulfilled.

On the second level of reference, however, eroticism is raised to the level of religious sacrament. The critic, Ghalia Kabany, expresses this phenomenon as follows:

She is *Ashtar* or *Enana* , as the Japanese name her...
And she is called *Isis* in Egypt, and *Aphrodite* in
Rome..and *Venus* in Ancient Greece.. She is the
goddess of life and abundance. At night she is the
lover and during the day the fighter..... She is the
light and her sign is that of eternity; and she [also]
embodies the dusk, darkness and the secretive; the
goddess of wisdom and the mistresss of insanity.
She brings together the opposites and reconciles
them.....

The watercolors of Adly Rizkallah rotate around the
spirit of *Ashtar*. For the woman in his paintings is a
continuation of the Bedouin woman, she is the
protecting spirit that encircles the place. ²⁷

In yet another group of paintings, entitled *The Woman
Temple* , this notion of combining the opposites is even more
apparent. Edwar al-Kharrat -- who is known for his championing
of all that is new and daring -- is quick to pick up this dialectic
inherent in Adly Rizkallah's work. The two opposites in the
paintings combined, the bareness of sexuality and its sacredness,
are celebrated in al-Kharrat's prose/poem named *First
Interpretation to Adly Rizkallah* :

And within, the inmost stove of the womb,
splendor of the crystal interior

Bones delinquescence into lava: an uprush of yellow,
of pale cinnamon in the heart of the dim marbled blue:
bars and pipes and rails, shattered across an angry
sky: cactus spines: the tenderness of an ever-finished
kiss

The ape is ancient and god-like, a turquoise
amulet, sapient in the tempest's heart

Passage of white-hot sky over brilliant glass into
body's flesh: a stab of light, a stab of flesh, a
gemstone shattered in talons: and this itself the velvet
of rose-petals!

The body's matter liquefies: substance inspissated
Within womb within vegetal mantle a shivered
female face: a palm-tree, violent as a sunflower

The waves of the sea, freezing to a quartz sand

under the feet of a woman, a palm tree standing on a
brackish sky

Spectres -- turned to light -- embrace the tree of
agony

Flesh's aggressions -- flesh's scream in the face of
the yoke

Hymn to fertility, to all that is female, to the
revelation of the nucleus vulnerable: the ultimate
challenge

Glory be to the body: glory be to Heaven in the body 28

Finally then "the core", from which all things are generated
and to which all things return, becomes that of fertility: "the
revelation of the nucleus vulnerable: the ultimate challenge". 29
Eroticism, in its most refined form, becomes both the secret of
life and art. And the ultimate challenge for this group of artists is
the glorification of the body, "to Heaven in the body". Once again
poetry and painting are united in their affinity for "the secret that
is also the sacred".³⁰ The enchantment of this miracle is heard by
Amgad Rayan:

Throw us into the soul's deepest blossom,
Return us back to the shell,
Throw us
into the whimsical spot
And sing:
This is the vision of the innocent eye
This is the translucent dusk
This is the testimony
Violent, weightless 31

And again by Walid Munir:

How can you encircle my soul in shades
that do not end at the borders of color ?
Where the bird escapes between my fingers
Then it returns without my seeing it to the stones
Oh woman who enters the flesh of fire 32

And finally we find Abdul Mun^cim Ramadan celebrating
this notion of the life-giving womb, where:

under the armpit
 and below the pubic blossom,
 A scent that would paint a wild gazelle on land
 and in the sea a marine gazelle
 Piling pillars of sorrow in the desert.
 This is love
 And these the forgotten words
 That tarry when I see the bodies of your women,
 You narrate the agonies of colors...
 Their blossomings.
 The womb as vast as the earth
 The womb, a space where strangers cross each other
 [.....]
 Body
 Enters
 Body
 This womb as clear as the earth procreates
 Becoming yet another space where strangers cross
 each other ³³

The generating quality in Adly Rizkallah's paintings -- where layer interplays with yet other layers of visual and poetic significance -- inevitably leads to an ultimate and final triumph: a triumph over the limitations of time and space. In his paintings male and female are united and so are death and life. The silence within the language of imagery and poetry are finally achieved. The light that shines from within is seen as in a glimpse, beckoning towards yet another more far fetched and dazzling light, where infinity dwells.

NOTES :

1 For further information on these two groups refer to the article entitled *Experimentation and the Institution, The Case of Idaa 77 and Aswat* , by Samia Mehrez in this current issue. All three poets have written, on different occasions, poems on Adly Rizkallah's watercolors. The poems were either recited in a poetry reading organized during the painter's exhibition: " The Mother/The Home ", 1986, in Safaa Zaytun Hall and in Abdul Mun'cim al-Sawi Hall -- or have been published by the painter in the various pamphlets he issues for his exhibitions. Other poems, written on Adly Rizkallah, but do not belong to the experimental movement of *Idaa* and *Aswat* are :

- Abdul Muḥy Higazy, "Verses of Color", *The Creatures of Darkness* (Cairo: Akbar al Youm, 1989), pp. 53-59.
- Samir Darwish, "Watercolors: To The Artist Adly Rizkallah" *Al Akhbar* (16 Aug. 1990), p 10.
- All the translations in the article are mine unless otherwise specified.
- 2 Adly Rizkallah is one of the most prominent contemporary artists in Egypt today. He is well known for his unique use of watercolors both on the level of form and content. He was born in Upper Egypt in 1939 and studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Cairo during the years 1955-1961. He lived in Paris during the years 1971-1980; and then finally resettled in Egypt. Adly Rizkallah has held numerous exhibitions in Paris, Lahi, Cairo, Kuwait and Oman.
- 3 Elizabeth Abel, *Redefining The Sister Arts*, ed. W.J.T.Mitchell (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 40.
- 4 Roland Barthes, "The Structuralist Activity," *European Literary Theory And Practise*, ed. Vermon W. Gras (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 158.
- 5 Edwar al-Kharrat, *Small Watercolors* (Cairo: np, 1989), pp.14-15. Translated by Francis Liardet. See the complete poem and its translation in appendix I.
- 6 Walid Munir, *A B of Joy* [Alif Baa Al Farah] (Cairo: np, 1990), pp.3-4.
- 7 Howard Nemerov, "On Poetry And Painting With a Thought of Music", ed. W.J.T.Mitchell (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 13.
- 8 W.J.T.Mitchel, ed. *The Language of Images* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p.3.
- 9 Editorial, *Idaa 77*, vol. I, (July, 1977), p. 5.
- 10 Abdul Munḥim Ramadan, "On Adly Rizkallah's *Nariman*", *Ibdaa*, vol. 4:6 (June 1986), p.119. Translated by Hala Halim. See appendix I.
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 Adly Rizkallah, *Rizkallah* (Cairo: np, 1990), pp.8-10.
- 13 Edwar al-Kharrat, "On The Life Giving Flowers", *Rizkallah*, pp. 27.
- 14 Amgad Rayan, *Stanzas To The Apparent White*, (Cairo: np., 1989). See appendix I.
- 15 Edwar al-Kharrat, *Small Watercolors* (Cairo: np, 1989), pp.9-10.
- 16 Ramadan, "On Adly Rizkallah's *Nariman*", p.120.
- 17 Walid Munir, *The Watercolors of Adly Rizkallah*, unpublished, ms. See appendix I.
- 18 al-Kharrat, *Small Watercolors*, p.8.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p.14-15. Translated by Francis Liardet. See appendix I.
- 20 Munir, *Watercolors of Adly Rizkallah*, verse 6.
- 21 Munir, *A B of Joy*, p.2.
- 22 Anwar Kamel, "Introduction", *A B of Joy* (Cairo: np, 1990), p.1.
- 23 Munir, *The Watercolors of Adly Rizkallah*, verse 1.
- 24 Rayan, *Stanzas To The Apparent White*, p.1. This spiral aspect Rayan adopts is also apparent in an earlier long poem he wrote also addressed to

Rizkallah entitled: "A Path to The Rainbow," from his anthology *The Edge of the Sun* , (Cairo: stencil copy, 1979), pp. 17-32.

25 *Ibid* .

26 Ramadan, "On Adly Rizkallah's *Nariman* ", p.118.

27 Ghalia Kabany, " She is [named] *Ashtar* ", *Al Watan Al Kuwaitiya* , 19 November 1989:5301. This article refers to a group of paintings by Adly Rizkallah called " The Bedouin".

28 al-Kharrat , " First Interpretation", *Small Watercolors* (1986; Cairo: np,1889), pp.11-12. Translated by Francis Liardet

29 Nemerov, " On Poetry And Painting With a Thought of Music ", p. 13.

30 *Ibid*.

31 Rayan, *Stanzas To The Apparent White* , p.2.

32 Munir, *The Watercolors of Adly Rizkallah* , verse 1.

33 Ramadan, "On Adly Rizkallah's *Nariman* ", p.119.



CRYSTALS 1989 32X24 cm Courtesy of Adly Rizkallah

Alif 11 (1991)

177



THE MOTHER 1988 50X40 cm Courtesy of Adly Rizkallah



AISHA 1988 50X40 cm Courtesy of Adly Rizkallah

Atif 11 (1991)

179



THE TEMPLE 1988 105X75 cm Courtesy of Adly Rizkallah



THE FLOWER 1985 32X23 cm (Amman Collection)

Alif 11 (1991)

181



THE LIFE GIVING FLOWERS 1990 24x18 cm Maligna Salama Collection



THE LIFE GIVING FLOWERS 1990 40x50cm Courtesy of Adly Rizkallah

Alif 11 (1991)

183



THE LIFE GIVING FLOWERS 1990 40x50cm Courtesy of Adly Rizkallah