

Drawing inspiration from the magic of the unconscious in the Surrealist school, in the works of Jamil Jamoudi and the works of Aminollah Rezaei: A comparative study

Bashar Jawad Noumi*

Al-Qasim Green University,
Al Qasim, Babylon Governorate, Iraq

*Corresponding author, email: bashar.nomy@uoqasim.edu.iq

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Abstract

This paper provides a comparative analysis of the embryonic Surrealism of two well-known figures of the era: Jamil Hamoudi, an Iraqi surrealist artist, and Aminollah Rezaei, an Iranian surrealist artist. The results found that Surrealism in Iraq associated itself with cultural identity and sacred symbolism, unveiling Hamoudi as the merger of geometry, calligraphy, and warm colours, towards reshaping the collective unconscious and reformulating Eastern spirituality in a modernist fashion. While Surrealism itself was an American import, Surrealism in Iran was contained within a frame of clinical satire, with Rezaei using hybrid bodies and anatomical distortions within realism and fantasy to articulate individual identity crises and psychiatric trauma, as well as to journey into socially and politically critical territory. It argues that these artists crystallised their work based on their socio-political contexts, resulting in the emergence of two different Surrealisms in the two countries — sacred Surrealism in Iraq as opposed to critical, satirical Surrealism in Iran — and by tracing the differences — aesthetic, conceptual, and technical — between the two artists, the study concludes that it is these differences in cultural, political and psychological contexts that were most responsible for the divergent paths of Surrealism in the two countries.

1. Introduction

Art functions not only as an aesthetic practice but also as a cultural medium through which societies express memory, belief, and emotional experience. While painting was once closely associated with the imitation of visible reality, modern art gradually shifted toward representing inner states, imagination, and symbolic thought. This transformation became particularly evident in Surrealism, an artistic movement that challenged conventional realism by emphasizing dreams, the unconscious, and irrational associations. Rather than depicting the world as it appears, Surrealist artists sought to reveal deeper psychological and spiritual realities hidden beneath the surface of ordinary experience (Breton, 1936; Freud, 1924).

The study of Surrealism is particularly important in non-European contexts because the movement did not develop uniformly across regions. When Surrealism reached the Middle East, it was not reproduced as a simple imitation of Western models; instead, artists adapted its visual language to local intellectual traditions, religious symbolism, and socio-political conditions. This issue is especially relevant in Iraq and Iran, where Surrealism developed along different trajectories. In Iraq, it became closely associated with calligraphy, spirituality, and cultural memory, whereas in Iran it often intersected with satire, psychological tension, and social criticism. The present study therefore addresses the following problem: how did Surrealism emerge and become localized in Iraqi and Iranian art, and how are these different trajectories reflected in the works of Jamil Hamoudi and Aminollah Rezaei? By comparing the aesthetic,

conceptual, and technical features of their paintings, this study seeks to clarify the similarities and differences that shaped sacred and satirical Surrealism in the two cultural contexts.

This study contributes to the comparative history of modern Middle Eastern art by examining two influential artists whose works demonstrate different adaptations of Surrealism. It also clarifies how an international avant-garde movement was translated into local visual languages in Iraq and Iran, thereby enriching discussions of identity, spirituality, psychological expression, and modernity in regional art history.

The main objective of this study is to identify and interpret the similarities and differences between the works of Jamil Hamoudi and Aminullah Rezaei, with particular attention to visual language, symbolism, compositional methods, and the cultural meanings embedded in their respective forms of Surrealism. The study is limited to selected paintings by these two artists. Spatially, it focuses on Iraq and Iran, while temporally it examines the early development of Surrealist tendencies in both countries and the formative period during which the two artists established their distinctive artistic approaches.

Surrealism is widely regarded as one of the most influential artistic movements of the twentieth century. Emerging from the decline of the Dada movement under the leadership of André Breton, it proposed a radical reorientation of art and literature toward what Breton described as a reality beyond ordinary reality, or “surreality” (Breton, 1936). Instead of privileging rational order, Surrealism valued dream logic, free association, chance, and psychic automatism. Its leading figures—including Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Max Ernst, Joan Miró, Man Ray, and Yves Tanguy—employed different visual strategies, yet they were united by a common interest in revealing what lies beneath conscious perception (Biggsby, 1996; Lucy-Smith, 2005).

Within painting, Surrealism developed through at least two major tendencies. The first employed highly realistic techniques to depict impossible scenes, disturbing juxtapositions, and dreamlike objects, as seen in the works of Dalí and Magritte. The second tendency moved toward abstraction, automatism, and the spontaneous arrangement of forms, as observed in artists such as Miró and Masson. Both approaches rejected the simple reproduction of visible reality and instead treated art as a means of accessing hidden dimensions of thought and experience.

The conceptual foundations of Surrealism were strongly influenced by psychoanalysis, particularly Freud’s model of the conscious, preconscious, and unconscious mind. Freud argued that the unconscious stores repressed desires, fears, impulses, and memories that continue to influence human behavior, often appearing indirectly through dreams, symbols, and displaced imagery (Freud, 1924). These ideas greatly appealed to Surrealist artists and writers, who viewed artistic creation as a process of bringing latent mental content into visible form.

From this perspective, Surrealism can be understood as both an artistic method and an epistemological position. It treats imagination, dream imagery, and irrational associations not as deviations from truth but as alternative paths to deeper forms of understanding concealed beneath everyday logic. For Breton, dream and reality were not opposites but complementary states that could converge into a higher form of perception. This perspective explains why Surrealist artworks frequently employ dislocated spaces, uncanny objects, hybrid figures, symbolic distortions, and temporal instability. The aim is not to represent the external world faithfully but to reveal psychological, spiritual, or existential realities that cannot be accessed through conventional realism alone (Halimi, 2004; Seyyed Hosseini, 1974).

Although Surrealism was formally articulated in the 1920s, earlier artists had already anticipated its visual and philosophical concerns. Giorgio de Chirico is often cited as one of the most important precursors of Surrealism because his enigmatic cityscapes, elongated shadows, and psychologically charged empty spaces introduced an atmosphere of metaphysical strangeness later embraced by Surrealist artists. Works such as *The Reward of the Soothsayer* demonstrate how Surrealist imagination emerged not only from theoretical writings but also from earlier experiments with symbolic ambiguity, silence, memory, and dreamlike spatial arrangements (Lucy-Smith, 2005).

Surrealism entered the Iranian art scene gradually from the 1930s onward and became more visible during the 1940s and 1950s, when Iranian artists increasingly engaged with European modernism while searching for new visual languages capable of expressing modern experience (Tohidtabar, 2013). Iranian Surrealism did not simply replicate European models; instead, artists adapted its dreamlike and symbolic strategies to local intellectual, spiritual, and social concerns. In several cases, Surrealist expression was combined with Sufi thought and broader Eastern philosophical traditions, giving Iranian modern art a distinctive symbolic and introspective character (Saif, 1995).

Among the artists associated with this trajectory, Aminullah Rezaei occupies a particularly significant position. Working across painting, caricature, and graphic art, he developed a style in which technical realism coexists with distortion, satire, and psychological tension. His hybrid figures, symbolic transformations, and critical imagery demonstrate how Surrealism in Iran became a means of reflecting on alienation, identity, and the contradictions of modern life rather than merely imitating European dream imagery.

The development of Surrealism in Iraq is commonly associated with Jamil Hamoudi, one of the pioneers of modern Iraqi and Arab art. Iraqi artists did not adopt Surrealism as a purely imported style; rather, they reinterpreted it through local cultural and religious forms. In Hamoudi's work, this reinterpretation was closely connected to Arabic calligraphy and the broader visual culture of Islam. By transforming letters into symbolic and pictorial forms, he created a visual language that connected modern abstraction with spirituality, cultural memory, and Arab identity (Flood & Necipoglu, 2017).

This local reinterpretation of Surrealism also overlaps with the broader Hurufiyya movement, which treated Arabic letters not only as units of writing but also as visual signs charged with metaphysical meaning. Emerging in the context of postcolonial modernity, Hurufiyya reflected the search for a visual identity capable of reconciling artistic experimentation with cultural heritage. By placing calligraphy at the center of modern painting, the movement offered a powerful strategy for redefining cultural identity within contemporary artistic discourse (Issa et al., 2016; Mavrakis, 2015).

Hamoudi's work occupies a central position within this development because it demonstrates how Surrealism could be redirected toward sacred symbolism and contemplative abstraction rather than toward grotesque distortion or irony. His paintings combine geometric order, luminous color, and calligraphic transformation to create a visual environment in which the sacred is experienced through form, rhythm, and spatial harmony.

Previous studies have explored Surrealism in Iranian and Arab art from various perspectives, yet few have conducted a direct comparative analysis of Iraqi and Iranian developments through the works of representative artists. Tohidtabar (2013) examined Surrealist tendencies in Iranian painting and highlighted how the movement was localized

within Iranian artistic culture. Abd Muhammad et al. (2020) analyzed the influence of artistic schools on modern Iraqi art, demonstrating how Iraqi artists developed new visual languages in response to social and intellectual change. Kherdeen (2022) surveyed Surrealism across the Arab world, while Mohammadzadeh and Talebi (2022) investigated the relationship between Surrealist expression and political trauma in Syrian painting. Building upon these studies, the present research addresses a comparative gap by examining how Surrealism was differently configured in Iraq and Iran through the works of Hamoudi and Rezaei.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative descriptive–analytical approach with a comparative art-historical orientation. The purpose of this research design is not to produce statistical generalizations but to interpret the visual, symbolic, and contextual meanings embedded in selected works by two artists who are widely recognized as formative figures in the development of Surrealism in Iraq and Iran. Qualitative approaches are commonly used in art-historical and visual culture studies because they allow researchers to analyze aesthetic structures, symbolic meanings, and cultural contexts in depth (Creswell, 2014; Rose, 2016). A comparative analytical framework is particularly appropriate for this study since it seeks to identify both similarities and differences in aesthetic strategies, symbolic expressions, and cultural functions within the works of Jamil Hamoudi and Aminullah Rezaei.

The data used in this research consist of both visual and textual sources. The visual data include selected paintings by Jamil Hamoudi and Aminullah Rezaei that demonstrate the emergence of Surrealist tendencies within the artistic contexts of Iraq and Iran. These works were examined as visual documents that reflect the artists' aesthetic strategies, symbolic vocabularies, and conceptual orientations. In addition, textual data were collected from books, scholarly articles, exhibition catalogues, biographies, academic theses, and historical documentation written in Arabic, Persian, and English. These materials were used to reconstruct the historical background of Surrealism, trace the artistic trajectories of the two artists, and contextualize their works within broader intellectual and cultural environments (Lucy-Smith, 2005; Issa et al., 2016).

The sample of artworks was selected purposively rather than randomly. Purposive sampling is commonly applied in qualitative research when the objective is to examine representative cases that illustrate key conceptual or visual characteristics (Patton, 2002). The selected paintings were considered representative because they display the principal visual and conceptual features examined in this study, including calligraphic abstraction, symbolic distortion, hybrid human–animal imagery, spiritual symbolism, and satirical transformation. In addition, the works were selected based on their availability in reliable visual documentation, their relevance to the research questions, and their suitability for detailed visual analysis.

The analytical framework integrates three complementary approaches: formal visual analysis, symbolic interpretation, and contextual comparison. First, each artwork was examined through formal analysis focusing on compositional structure, color, line, spatial organization, figuration, and visual balance. This stage allowed the researcher to identify stylistic features and visual patterns within each painting. Second, recurring motifs and symbolic elements were interpreted in relation to psychoanalytic, cultural, and spiritual frameworks discussed in the literature on Surrealism and Middle Eastern art. Finally, the findings were compared across the two artists in order to identify broader differences between sacred and satirical interpretations of Surrealism. Through this process, the study connects visual evidence with broader issues such

as identity formation, spirituality, psychological expression, and socio-political critique in modern Middle Eastern art.

Table 1. Research Design and Analytical Procedures

Research Component	Description
Research Approach	Qualitative descriptive-analytical research with a comparative art-historical perspective
Research Objects	Selected paintings by Jamil Hamoudi (Iraq) and Aminullah Rezaei (Iran)
Data Types	Visual data (paintings) and textual data (books, articles, exhibition catalogues, biographies, theses)
Sampling Method	Purposive sampling based on representativeness, relevance, and availability of artworks
Analytical Methods	Formal visual analysis, symbolic interpretation, and comparative contextual analysis
Research Focus	Aesthetic structures, symbolic meanings, cultural identity, and socio-political context in Surrealist artworks

3. Results

3.1. Visual Analysis of Aminullah Rezaei's Works



Figure 1. Painting by the artist Aminullah Rezaei

Surrealist paintings with a critical view, such as this one by Aminullah Rezaei. This character is ultimately a mixture of human and animal to reflect modern man's mental and societal state. Not only that, but it is also wearing human clothes and sunglasses in a culturally and contemporarily appropriate way: In this image, the creature holds its head up, and its face resembles that of an animal. First, its face is what we should see in animals, for instance, a bull's or a pig's head. Such an obvious distinction between animality and civilisation could well shed light on the dual critique of society and human nature.

The most notable feature of this piece is the chain that runs through the monster's nose, holding it. The chain is obviously a symbol of bondage, whether on a personal level or in all its social and political forms in the world. (And as we know, this is one of the main ideas of conceptual art) The ring, which is similar to that used to control domesticated animals, has a clear symbolism: the human man reduced to the form of a creature is a victim of several power mechanisms that transform him into a tool of external (and, allegedly, alien) forces.

Another interesting thing in the image is the sunglasses he's wearing. Through pictorial symbolism, the eye is forever an entrance to the very human personality; thus, if the eyes are covered or masked, this may denote concealment, alienation of the self, or the dissolution of identity. Which, along with the remaining pictorial tools, accentuates the idea of the contemporary human's self-denial and identitylessness.

The heavy psychological weight of the aesthetic of black and white and sharp, contrasting shading lies on the viewer. It serves to not only communicate emotions of oppression, anxiety, and violence, but also achieves a nightmarish quality that immerses the viewer in the depths of the layered unconscious, in line with Freudian psychoanalysis. Therefore, this can be described as a form of "unconscious realism," which takes you from the realm of the imaginary to the realisation of a larger truth about humanity.

Aminollah Rezaei's work is, in other words, a pictorial representation of the existence of man in the time of modern power, under the impact of psychological and social moderation; Man who wears the glass robes of civilisation outside, but inside is still in a battle with his animality, the immuring of the power structures and the alienation of self. Employing surrealist techniques that create a seemingly fictitious realm but, in essence, echo the reality of life today for the human species, Rezaei tells a story that is shocking, surreal, and also ordinary.

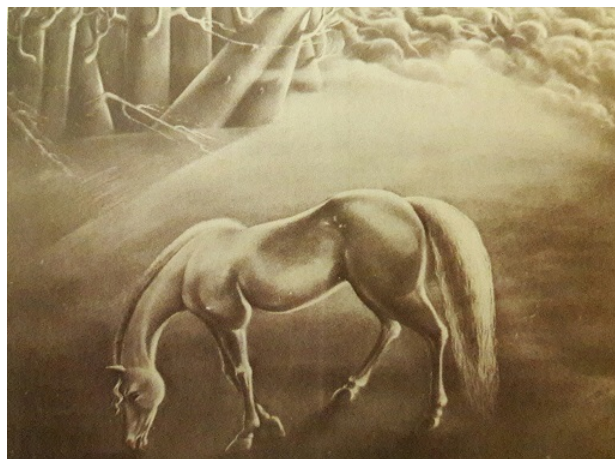


Figure 2. Painting by the artist Aminollah Rezaei

This painting is among the most important surrealist works by Aminollah Rezaei. With a backstory peppered with abstract nuances, the writer uses symbolic features, inventive cinematic techniques, and a whimsical ambience to provide a poignant commentary on modern consciousness and its parable-like nature. Upon first viewing, the viewer is presented with a tranquil photograph of a grazing horse, head bowed, in a foggy field. Underneath it all, the horse is structurally rendered in a way so unbelievably realistic that it showcases the artist's technical skill. But to make this scene transcend the earthly realm, a human face is hidden within the horse's form and figure, embodied in its curves. Looking a little more carefully, you know that the body of the horse itself is the silhouette of a hidden human face; this is all done through the combination of black lines and black light. This double-image technique is one of the trademarks of surrealist art, blending the limits of illusion and reality, of consciousness and the unconscious. Such practice encourages the viewer to rise above the initial, shallow view and enter the depths of the meaning hidden behind the visuals. The horse is a universal symbol of instinct, life, energy, and freedom in many cultures. Yet here the horse looks placid, head down, meek, as if it has been assimilated to a human visage that, too, is hiding. This work may be interpreted as a metaphor for the repression of life-force energy within modern man, whose (often cruel) demands of

civilisation have captured them & deprived them of the instinctual and natural freedom to express, etc.

The background in the painting has a strong psychological function. You can see a dark jungle, tall trees entwined with daily life; there is a heavy energy of an atmospheric play, illusion, and a sign or symbol. Fog (which surrounds Earth and sky) looks like a shadow that has closed the curtains of the human background. Under the tenets of the nightmare-strewn atmosphere in which her subject matter rests, the line between reality and dreaming, between seeing and the subconscious, dissolves, as Freud ascribed that the hallucinations and pictorial fantasies of the subconscious — embodied in a centuries-hindsight glimpse of which the unseen, bottled-again desires of human nature truly are—serve as the true stage-set. After all, this painting is a visual manifesto of the self, revealing the human from within. As a result, the technical precision of the directing work, the philosophical envisioning of self, and the appearance of Rezaei as someone who has it all together on the outside but is a psychological prisoner to his mental constraints, buried dreams, and struggle with identity make it memorable. With his painting, he invites us to contemplate the hidden depths of the human mind and to re-evaluate what we believe to be "truth" in and of itself.

3.2. Visual Analysis of Jamil Hamoudi's Works

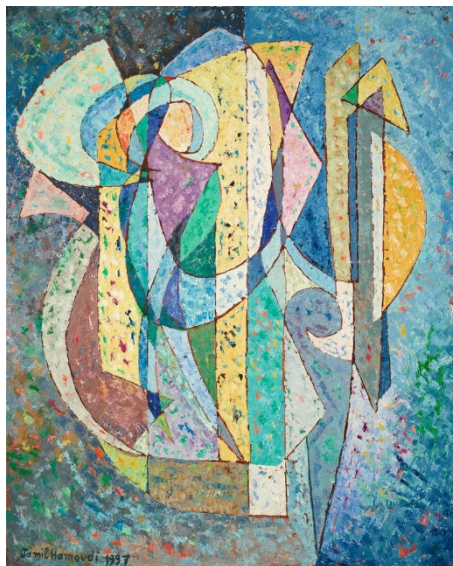


Figure 3. Painting by the artist Jamil Hamoudi

In this major painting of 1997, Jamil Hamoudi uses surrealist forms and the calligraphy tradition to express the word 'Allah' in an abstract, geometric, multilayered manner. Hamoudi defies the traditional objectives of Arabic calligraphy and endows letters with visual significance, so that at first they are hard to recognise as letters. More than just writing the words of a sacred text, this painting attempts to reproduce the experience of an intuitive and psychological confrontation with the divine name "Allah". These letters are not meant to be read but rather seen, felt, and understood in a non-linear, non-verbal way.

The fractured, angular, multidimensional structure of the composition is indicative of analytical cubism; however, it is placed in a distinctly local Middle Eastern and Islamic context. The dynamism of the shapes, the dispersion of colours, and the decentralisation of the composition offer the viewer a contemplative pause to repose and consider what life is. The use of bright colours such as green, blue, yellow, and pink, along with its decorative character, adds an emotional and intuitive aspect to the work of art. Lines are intertwined so that the mind of

the viewer no longer registers solid, tangible lines, and instead begins to transcribe an imaginary geometry that shrouds the mental-spiritual space around the eye, a space in which the word "God" does not resonate in verbal thought structure, but is sensorially felt in the visual realm.

This is where Islamic calligraphic traditions that adhere to the sacred and iconic belief in letters and words blend with the modernist visual language. In that respect, it is the influence of the calligraphic style that has inspired Hamoudi to treat the Arabic letters in his works as vessels of spiritual energy. Yet, unlike traditional calligraphy—which maintained the intelligibility of the word—here, the sacred word is subsumed into the most abstract of abstractions. In other words, the painting is not an external experience of the holy; rather, it is a subjective experience of the sacred in the mind of the painter and the beholder.

Surrealistically, this painting can be seen as an example of "visual automatic writing," which transcends the legal, legible border between image, sign, and meaning. In contrast to the Euro-colonial tradition of Surrealism, which uses dreams, fantasy, and Freudian suggestion, Jamil Hamoudi brings Surrealism into the Islamic Sufi tradition, where the unconscious is considered a vessel for channelling the divine and the Other. In this light, this work can be regarded as a kind of sacred Surrealist mythopoetics, wherein the holy word is materialised as a subject of revelation and testimony rather than recitation.

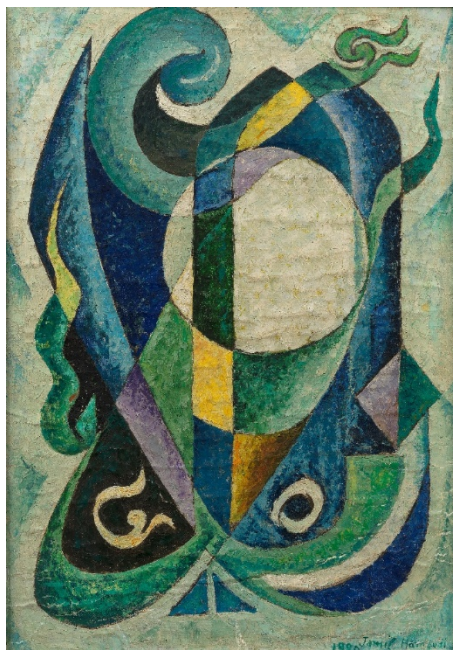


Figure 4. Painting by the artist Jamil Hamoudi

While this painting uses a more surrealist arrangement of letterforms and abstractions in a way that a natural language cannot occupy space, the referring term "light" (noor) from the corpus is horizontally central, not through it being read literally, but because of its colour contrast that centralises it visually within the corpus. We simply do not see a regular symmetry in the arrangement of the letters and the lines surrounding them — it is deliberately asymmetric, dynamic. Such a disconnected creation is reminiscent of the automatic efforts employed in Surrealism to liberate the mind from the limits of self-aware reasoning.

In this canvas, Hamoudi shies away from the "light" with its traditional religious significance and instead forges it as a multidimensional symbol. The colour radiation, or aura, that is diffuse around the world can mean mystical light on one hand and the light of the

unconscious on the other. The warm colours bring a deeper emotional tone to this work, with the dark background shadows showing a component of the conscious and the subconscious. That duality is central to the philosophical idea underpinning the work. Letters cease to be conventional symbols and become meaningful visual objects in their own right in this work. The letterforms, modified to look like curves or broken parts of geometric shapes, are intended to be viewed, rather than read. The novel makes this shift by moving the letter tradition out of its solely devotional domain into a more contemporary, experimental horizon. Similarly, the ambient arc of twists and kinetic tating up of the lines evokes a bright, lively motion-effect-like interaction, paired with the light as an active, efficient mechanism.

This is work that fits in with some of the artistic movements of the 1980s, part of the way of integrating text with image. Contemporary influences of Arabic calligraphy can be seen alongside European Surrealism, and while Hamoudi interprets these influences in a local cultural language, he is building a uniquely personal artistic idiom. Since the title is named after him, it could also be seen as a nod to self-referentiality, one of the aspects of the artist, an intermediary between reality and the subconscious. This painting dissolves the boundaries between writing and image, creating a transdisciplinary space where "light" becomes a physical experience as much as an abstract concept. Hamoudi, in creating an artwork tastefully fusing Eastern and Western symbols and culture, produces a piece that references its heritage while also serving as a global participant and interlocutor in contemporary visual art discourse. This distance from traditional frameworks and reliance on informal epistemology situated this work as an early example of what we can call grounded Surrealism in modern Arab art.

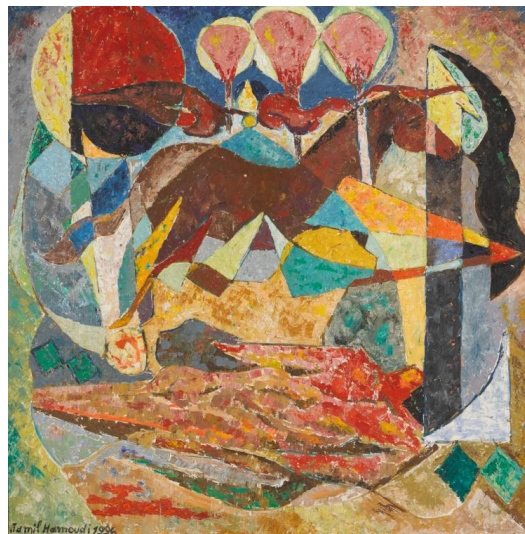


Figure 5. Painting by the artist Jamil Hamoudi

The visual framework of this painting is based on a surrealist style, using pictorial and lettering elements in a fragmented, chaotic world of dreams. There is no focal point within the visual field with the riderless horse, prostrate body, and woman with wild hair spread in a disjointed, dysphonic array. The phrases "Husseini" and "God is Great" appear illegible, but more as abstract, fractured formations sewn into the canvas in an almost collage fashion. Such deliberate chaos creates an atmosphere of disintegration and insecurity, which is an inherent aspect of the tragic nature of Ashura.

Everything in this artwork is symbolic: A riderless horse conveys loss and absence, the prostrate body symbolises martyrdom, and the bearded woman is a vessel for collective sorrow and mourning. Black and dark red colours are used, reinforcing the sense of sunset, bloodshed,

and death, giving the scene a tragic character. The sacred words, however, were not for reading, for visual orientation of sacredness in the midst of violence and death.

Here, Hamoudi goes beyond the usual symbolic framework of calligraphic art, which keeps letters operating within a trance of linguistic functionality, making them a raw visual and plastic matter. Here, "Hussein" and "God is Great" are represented as distorted and broken, addressing the recipient visually rather than linguistically. This method denies a linear reading of the text and prompts the reader to a sensory-perceptual encounter. The intertwining visual symbolism of letter forms, layered with multiple meanings that tie text and sound, facilitates the Ashura ritual with contemporary visual vocabulary.

Employing surrealist methods (dreamscapes, free association, abstract compositions, and symbols), the painting does not depict Ashura as a simple event in the past or a procession of historical events, but as a reliving of a dark collective trauma embedded in the Shiite collective psyche. Stranger images evoke a more surrealist sensibility — the riderless horse, the woman with hair askew — and call to mind the work of Salvador Dalí. Even so, in this case, they are brought together and used to represent a religious-historical tragedy. Utilising Surrealism, Hamoudi represents the sacred within the framework of a specific cultural and identity context.

Grounded in that calligraphic heritage, this painting translates the event of Ashura into an image of surrealist expressionism, disconnected from the traditional narrative to become an experience of abstraction in this image, as the narrative itself. In contrast to a linear representation, Hamoudi uses modern art techniques to convey religious and spiritual ideas. Thus, what happened becomes a supra-historical reality that exists in the Shiite unconscious. In light of this, it embodies modern Arab art's unique model of the point of intersection between contemporary art and religious heritage, all of which invite the kinds of symbolic and dimensional openings that transcend time and space.

4. Discussion

4.1. Comparative Interpretation of Sacred and Satirical Surrealism

4.1.1. Symbolic Abstraction versus Satirical Formalism

Jamil Hamoudi is widely recognized as one of the most influential pioneers of modern Iraqi art. His artistic practice integrates elements of Surrealism with Islamic calligraphic traditions, producing what may be described as *sacred Surrealism*. Through the use of Arabic letters arranged in complex geometric compositions, Hamoudi transforms calligraphy into a visual structure that merges spiritual symbolism with modern abstraction. The letters function not merely as linguistic signs, but as symbolic carriers of cultural memory and religious identity. His works frequently employ vibrant colours and balanced compositions, reflecting a synthesis between Islamic artistic heritage and modernist experimentation (Flood & Necipoglu, 2017; Lucy-Smith, 2005).

In contrast, Aminullah Rezaei—considered a pioneer of Surrealist painting in Iran—adopts a markedly different approach. He employs detailed realism and traditional painting techniques to construct surreal, often disturbing imagery. His works frequently depict hybrid human-animal figures or exaggerated anatomical forms, creating distorted representations of the human body. Although technically precise, these images convey a satirical tone that reflects psychological anxiety, social contradictions, and political tensions in modern Iranian society (Tohidtabar, 2013; Mohammadzadeh & Talebi, 2022).

4.1.2. Conceptual Dimension

From a conceptual perspective, Hamoudi’s artistic vision is closely linked to cultural memory and the collective unconscious. Arabic letters in his works transcend decorative function, becoming symbolic vehicles of spirituality, identity, and historical continuity. By incorporating calligraphy into surreal compositions, Hamoudi reinterprets Islamic heritage within a modern artistic discourse (Issa et al., 2016; Mavrakis, 2015).

Conversely, Rezaei focuses on the psychological and existential dimensions of human experience. His hybrid figures symbolize alienation, fragmentation, and internal conflict. These distortions serve as metaphors for individuals navigating restrictive social and political environments. In this sense, Surrealism becomes a critical tool to reveal trauma, anxiety, and instability in modern identity (Freud, 1924; Tohidtabar, 2013).

4.1.3. Political and Cultural Context

Hamoudi’s work must be understood within the cultural transformations of mid-twentieth-century Iraq. During this period, artists sought to reconcile modern artistic movements with local traditions. Hamoudi contributed to this effort by integrating Islamic aesthetics and Arabic calligraphy into modern painting, positioning his work as a form of cultural resistance that reaffirms Arab identity while engaging global modernism (Bocco et al., 2012; Flood & Necipoglu, 2017).

In Iran, however, the socio-political environment produced a different response. Rezaei used Surrealism as a means of social critique within a context of ideological constraint. Through satire and symbolic distortion, his work challenges dominant narratives and addresses issues of identity, authority, and societal tension (Tohidtabar, 2013; Mohammadzadeh & Talebi, 2022).

4.1.4. Visual Methods and Composition

Hamoudi’s visual language is characterized by geometric abstraction and compositional structures reminiscent of Cubism. Arabic letters function simultaneously as visual and symbolic elements, contributing to layered compositions that emphasize harmony, balance, and spiritual contemplation. His work is also closely associated with the Hurufiyya movement, which repositions Arabic script as a core element of modern Arab artistic identity (Issa et al., 2016; Mavrakis, 2015).

In contrast, Rezaei demonstrates mastery of classical realism and anatomical precision. His figures are often rendered realistically before undergoing distortion or hybridization, creating a transition from realism to surrealism. Through dramatic contrasts and psychologically charged imagery, he constructs compositions that convey satire and critique of modern social conditions.

4.2. Comparative Synthesis

To clarify the differences and similarities between the two artists, the following table summarizes the key comparative aspects:

Table 2. Comparative Analysis of Sacred and Satirical Surrealism in the Works of Jamil Hamoudi and Aminullah Rezaei

Aspect	Jamil Hamoudi	Aminullah Rezaei
Artistic Orientation	Sacred Surrealism	Satirical Surrealism
Visual Approach	Abstract, geometric, calligraphic	Realistic, anatomical, distorted
Main Elements	Arabic letters, symbolism	Hybrid human-animal figures

Aspect	Jamil Hamoudi	Aminullah Rezaei
Conceptual Focus	Cultural memory, spirituality, identity	Psychology, alienation, existential tension
Tone	Contemplative, harmonious	Critical, satirical, unsettling
Cultural Context	Post-war Iraqi identity formation	Iranian socio-political critique
Artistic Influence	Islamic art, Hurufiyya, Cubism	Classical realism, psychoanalysis
Function of Surrealism	Reinterpretation of tradition	Social and psychological critique

5. Conclusion

The comparison between the works of Jamil Hamoudi and Aminullah Rezaei reveals two distinct yet complementary approaches to Surrealism in the Middle East. Hamoudi's artistic practice connects Surrealism with sacred symbolism and cultural identity through the integration of Arabic calligraphy, geometric abstraction, and vibrant colours. His works emphasize collective memory, spirituality, and cultural heritage, presenting Surrealism as a means of reformulating Arab cultural identity within the context of modernity and postcolonial transformation. In contrast, Aminullah Rezaei employs Surrealism as a critical visual language that combines realism with distortion and hybrid human-animal forms. Through this approach, his artworks explore themes of individual identity, psychological tension, and social critique, reflecting the anxieties and contradictions of contemporary society.

Overall, the comparison demonstrates that Surrealism in Iraq and Iran developed along different conceptual and aesthetic trajectories shaped by their respective cultural and socio-political contexts. While Hamoudi's works represent a form of sacred Surrealism rooted in cultural memory and spiritual symbolism, Rezaei's works embody a satirical and critical Surrealism that addresses psychological and social conflicts. These differences highlight how Surrealism in the Middle East was not merely an imitation of Western artistic models but was reinterpreted and localized according to the intellectual, cultural, and historical conditions of each society.

Future research should focus on translating and critically analysing foreign sources related to Surrealist art in order to deepen the understanding of its theoretical foundations and intellectual development within different cultural contexts.

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