

Optical Unconscious in the Siyah-Mashgh Scripts of Mirza Gholam Reza Esfahani

Abstract

This is a general opinion that art can be a universal communication medium. But what should not be ignored are the diversity of visual experiences around the world and the different artistic practices of artists of dissimilar cultures. The analysis of the processes of viewing and perception and the emphasis laid upon on the unconscious functions, as matters of importance in psychological and psychoanalytic approaches, are among the most substantial factors which attracted the attention of scholars of the fields to understand such complicated visual experiences. According to these intricate interactions, both the artist and the artwork, as well as the spectator of that artwork and above all the process of its creativity are key subjects for analysis.

It was based on such elements that Rosalind Krauss, as an art critic and theorist, used the term 'optical unconsciousness' as an incisive objection against the history of modern art and also against the critical tradition that attempted to define modern art according to certain broadly recognized dictum and self-fulfilling truth. Krauss arguments that the artist is not a professional in control of the process of creating and viewing, but is rather a force who releases unconscious drives and desires in the process of creating a piece of art. Moreover, through formal qualities such as rhythm, harmony, transformation and repetition, the artwork prompts unconscious visualizations in viewers.

Based on this assumption, this paper aims to examine whether this concept of 'optical unconscious' could be attributed to Siyah-mashgh form of script written by Mirza Gholamreza Esfahani who was one of the most famous and outstanding Persian Nastaliq and Shekaste-Nastaliq script calligraphers living during the reign of Qajar dynasty.

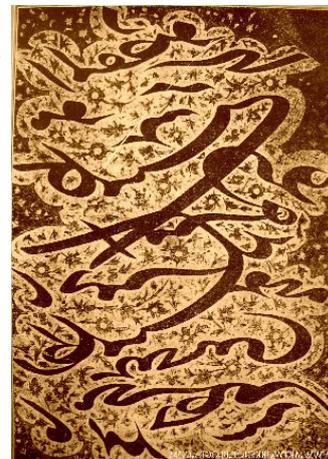
The general objective of the study is to determine the relationship between unconscious and the creativity as well as the diachronic process of calligraphy. Thus, it is important to understand how much the creation of calligraphic forms, separately and in compositions, is influenced by the unconscious. In the process of conducting this research, a number of published researches and books related to the subject were studied which indicated that in the majority of cases, only the biography of Persian calligraphers as well as the chronological trends of calligraphy styles were taken into consideration. Moreover, most of the researches were carried out regardless of a defined historiography of Siyah-mashgh, its innovator or any reference to the oldest sample of this art style available. In general, it was observed that the researchers have not paid adequate attention to different forms of calligraphy including Siyah-mashgh, which was artistically practiced by Mirza Gholamreza and some of the other calligraphers. Meanwhile, the lack of focus on critical approaches towards modern art history which are rooted in critical theories has turned such researches into redundant studies. To avoid such redundancy, this paper has used a descriptive-analytic approach and employed psychological and psychoanalytic approaches to recognize the

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role of unconscious factors in the creativity and perception of Siyah-mashgh script. Data have been collected through desk studies of library resources and processed by qualitative method. The main questions to be answered are: Did Mirza Gholamreza's Siyah-mashgh popped up from his unconscious impulses? What materials the artist has used in this unconscious process?

The research mainly comes to this understanding that Mirza Gholamreza created his Siyah-mashgh form of scripture not only by adding elements to them, but also by removing undesirable ones from his unique form of script. We might say that he devised a subtractive concurrently with an additive process, and the main materials and elements forming such course were evidently words and letters.

In order to better explain this process through the use of Nastaliq calligraphy, we can say that the additive process includes the repetition of Keshideh or longed words and the arrangement of other identical and analogical words and letters. On the other hand, the marginalizing process of the artist's unconscious is realized through forgetting the disciplined manner of linear calligraphy and omission of less desirable or less artistic words and letters. Certainly such a process takes place diachronically and not synchronically. For example in the course of time, the calligrapher comes to know that he cannot use three or four Keshideh or longed words on one line; so he performs it in Siyah-mashgh. Or he finds out that some words shall look more pleasant if attached, and so he attaches them together but not in a disciplined linear script because it is only Siyah-mashgh that allows him to do so.

Such analytic approaches could pave the way towards the development of theoretical frameworks for studies on the art of calligraphy and help to fill the analytic-based studies' gap in the field. Although this paper exclusively elucidates on the process involved in creating Siyah-mashgh form of Nastaliq calligraphy; however, the feasibility of this approach can be generalized to other forms of Persian calligraphy, particularly Shekaste Nastaliq and Naqqashi Khat.

Keywords: Optical unconscious, The Siyah-Mashgh Scripts of Mirza Gholam Reza Esfahani, Persian calligraphy

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