



## Huda Lutfi: Still Representations of a Dynamic Voice

**Date:** 01 Dec 2012     An intellect, an artist, an innovator, it's impossible and possibly counterintuitive to try and categorize the dynamism that is the Egyptian artist, Huda Lutfi.

**Credit:** admin

**Tags:** artist

**Comment:** 0

Huda's academic pursuits have seen her obtain a PHD in Islamic Culture and History in Montreal. Her continued commitment and passion led her to pursue a career as a distinguished Associate Professor, teaching Islamic Culture and History. Despite never having any formal training as an artist, her extensive knowledge in her specialised academic area has manifested into an array of visual masterpieces.

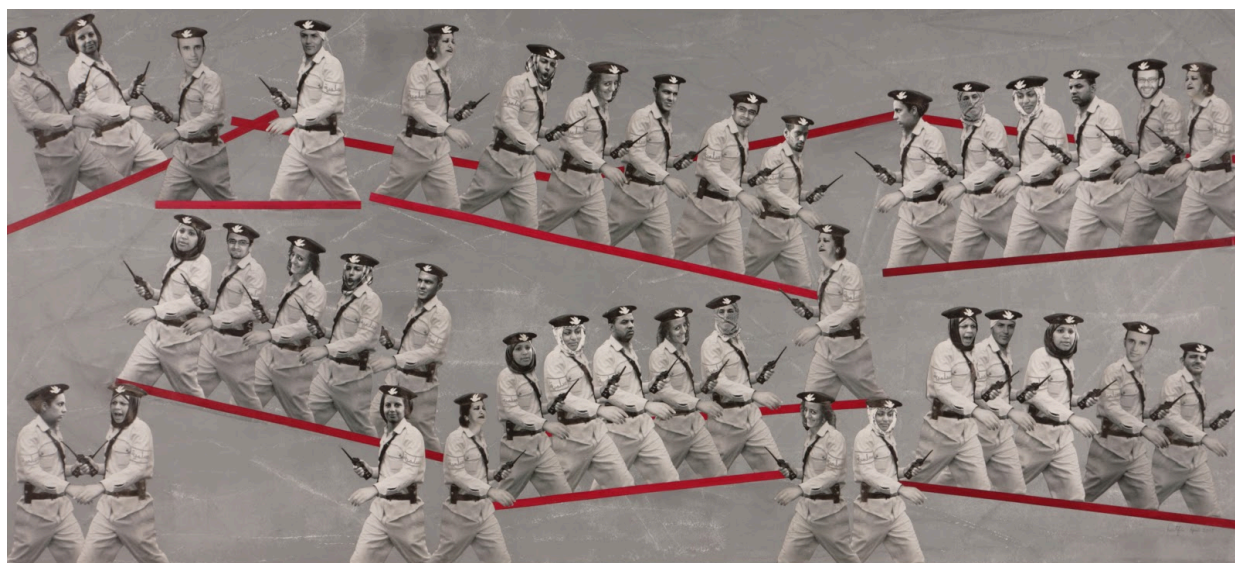
Mai Serhan 2012 observes that:

*'Indeed, much, if not all, her artistic work has been a visual translation of her historical interests in the city (Cairo). '[1]*

Huda's artworks simultaneously present a socio-political and aesthetic challenge. With regard to the former, Huda has become famous for her strong feminist themes that resonate in much of her work. She provides a distinctly feminine angle in her works that is both relevant and in some respects revolutionary. The feminist tones stem from her observation of the lack of female presence in the historical documentation of Islamic culture that she has studied for so long. She ensures a more wholesome perspective of Egyptian events whilst providing a form of protest by 'making women the mouthpieces of the city'[2].

*She is proactive in advocating female emancipation and as a historian; she recognises the fundamental importance of documenting the journey to emancipation.*

Her piece entitled 'Crossing the Red Line' (2011) documents an important move in the female struggle. An image of soldiers has been manipulated to represent a truth; that women played an integral part in the revolution. She uses photographs of female faces and applies them on to what appears to be male bodies. These women are portrayed as powerful and liberated, with their assertive stances, 'walkie talkies' in hand and heads held high.



Crossing the Red Line: Courtesy of The Artist and The Third Line

One can't help but feel a degree of sensitivity to the fact that these women are quite literally 'wearing the trousers'. Which seems to be a paradoxical representation from a feminist point of view; if trousers were viewed in the traditional masculine sense. However, it is a definite example of Huda's perceptions of 'imposed identities'. She believes identities such as gender identity is an imposed construct and is in no way definitive or fixed. Thus, we are traditionally it is accepted that trousers are a masculine garment and so is correlational with a masculine identity, Huda seems to want to break this.

Her work tries to evoke the restrictions that human beings face in their lives, be it restrictions on thinking, restrictions on the body. She believes there is a way out of getting too attached to our 'imposed' identities.[3]

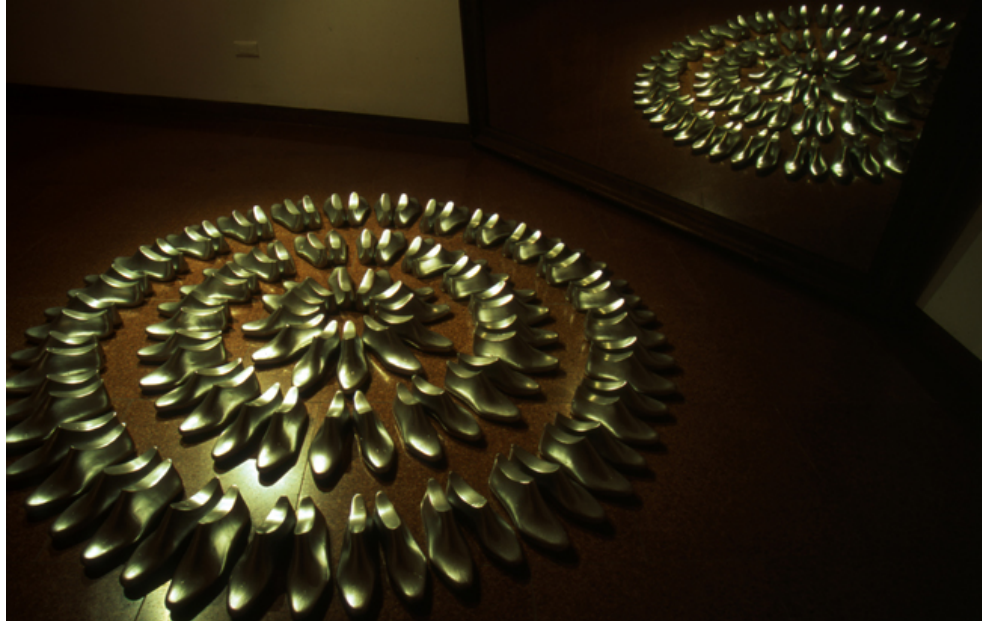
The art work shows both men and women crossing a red line, which is symbolic in two ways': crossing the line of fear that all Egyptian revolutionaries faced. As well as crossing a line towards equality; an important step for the women's liberation movement.

Aesthetically, her images are equally as bold and confrontational as the message she wishes to portray. She juxtaposes the modern and the traditional, the real and the imagined, and attempts to collaborate styles transcending cultural lines.

Repetition is a style that Huda is very fond of. On many of her pieces she repeats the Sufi text, to decorate her works. This is significant as writing is highly significant when decorating object and building in Islamic art.

*'The naturally decorative nature of Arabic script, led to the use of calligraphic decorations, which usually involved repeating geometrical patterns that expressed ideals of order and nature'[4]*

Her installation piece entitled *'Carpet of Remembrance'* (2003) is a perfect example of her vast collaborative methods, as well as her willingness to challenge the norms.



Carpet of Remembrance: Courtesy of The Artist and The Third Line

*'Carpet of Remembrance'* is a collection of a shoe maker's last (the forms used to shape a shoe), which have been painted silver and are repeatedly covered in the old Sufi adage "I am the companion of the one who remembers me." This was a highly controversial piece as it was sacrilege to write Sufi text on any kind of shoe – despite Huda writing on shoemakers last and not an actual shoe, this did cause a degree of contention.

Her pieces can be brave, honest and controversial in both the message they provide and the aesthetic image they project. She is unafraid to depict the controversial truth and attempts to instigate social change and create new truths.

Written By Kiran Sahib

[1] 'city' referring to Cairo. Mai Serhan, 2012, Jadaliyya article [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7870/huda-lutfi\\_the-artist-and-the-historical-moment](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7870/huda-lutfi_the-artist-and-the-historical-moment)

[2] Mai Serhan, 2012, Jadaliyya article [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7870/huda-lutfi\\_the-artist-and-the-historical-moment](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/7870/huda-lutfi_the-artist-and-the-historical-moment)

[3] The Daily Egypt News, January 16 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOMBtdmcnA>

[4] Islamic Art from the 6th Century <http://www.huntfor.com/arthistory/medieval/islamic.htm>

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