

Sensory Equations, by Jack Aswad

Pure Visual Art According to Saloua Raouda Choucair

Dedicated to Jana and Noor[\[1\]](#)

From the beginning, that is (as far as Saloua Raouda Choucair can recall of the young school-girl she was in the 1920s), from her very first contact with the age-old reigning concepts about two- and three-dimensional representation, it seemed that the uphill road to an art which increases one's isolation the more one persists in it, was a road already carved out for her...as if all that was required of this young girl, who had never in her life glimpsed anything like "that" towards which she was striving with her tranquil obstinacy, was simply to hold on to that which pulled her towards it, seeking only to elucidate its obscurity.

Learning in Choucair's time was a privilege, especially when it came to girls. The girls of her generation who were so privileged were subjected to an educational program whose orientation -- apparently natural given the prevailing male chauvinism of the period -- was towards skills complimenting girls' future roles as respectable mothers and wives, and occasionally as socialites whose hobbies would decorate their parlors and soirées.

The art of painting, one such hobby, was a veritable nightmare for Saloua the schoolgirl, who refused her teacher's technique based, primarily, on copying a given picture with tracing paper and then coloring in the lines. So it was, year after year, that the young girl Saloua spent her drawing lessons at the doorway, banished for her disobedience.

Saloua was not already refusing reality or Nature, but rather, the dependency upon them imposed by her first teacher's method of using tracing paper. Turning later in her youth to consider the masterful skill at copying reality attained by her predecessors and the mentors of her generation (Omar Onsi and Moustapha Farroukh among others), or that which she would herself acquire by drawing portraits in Lebanon and live models later in a Parisian atelier[\[2\]](#), she finds in this skill nothing but an illusory independence. It is as if her intuition was telling her what the experience of ages had told modern art: the artist is not he who knows how to draw or sculpt or so on, but he who knows how to see.

Even the verb "to know" in this context is problematic: he who "knows" how to see is he who sees apart from all preformed knowledge, in other words, who is not guided by a given picture, real or ideal. For vision is a road one journeys (odos), not a method of journeying (methodos).

But let us not jump ahead of ourselves!

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- 1 The translator would like to thank Samah Idriss for his insightful assistance and, also, the author for his many useful comments.
 - 2 In the Académie de la Grande Chaumière
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