REINTERPRETING YOUNG OMANI WOMEN LIFESTYLE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF MODERNIZATION THROUGH PAINTING

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ABSTRACT

This research project investigated the significant transformations of young Omani women's lifestyle within the context of modernization in the contemporary era. The research project aims to identify the influence and changes in the lifestyle of young Omani women and their evolving daily practices in response to modernization. The main artists in this research are Anwar Sonia, Hush, and Alia Al Farsi. Reference works of art addressed women's image in several aspects, such as culture, lifestyle and tradition. The theory of Multiple Modernity was used to contextualize the research project. This research project used studio practice research through critical self-reflection and studio experimentation approaches. This research project revealed that the changes that have occurred due to the modernity of culture and lifestyle have greatly affected the personality of young Omani women. This research project had a great impact on modernity and understanding of the developments and transformations that have taken a large part in the culture of contemporary Omani women. This led to a new and in-depth understanding of the artistic representation of modern Omani women and their role in the contemporary era, which contributes to enriching cultural and artistic dialogue and promoting diversity in the development of Omani society.

I. INTRODUCTION

When the great changes of modernity took place, the social lifestyle required the Omani woman to leave her isolation, restore her rights, and become an essential partner in the development of the nation in all sectors. This phenomenon also encouraged rural communities to move to developed cities to get better job opportunities and improve their lifestyle (Rasim, 2020). As stated in the annual report of The Arab Women's Foundation (2018), the Sultanate of Oman ranked first in empowering women to practice their rights in various economic, educational, social, cultural, scientific, and political fields.

Modernization has established a new culture and provided opportunities for young Omani women to open up to choose their way of lifestyle and various fashion styles. Modernity also opened the opportunity for Omani women to receive an excellent education, and thus job opportunities became available in various fields and disciplines, and also receive easy access to social media and communication technology (Alwahaibi, 2020).

Figure 1. Omani women participating in various fields

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This contributed to changing the culture in general and influenced young Omani women to create and wear modern fashion, it has become a necessity to be compatible with daily activities. The changes that have occurred due to the modernity of the culture and lifestyle have greatly affected the mindset of the young Omani woman, as she has become very practical and follows up on world development daily and is aware of the requirements of modern life, which is necessitated a major change in her choice of the outfits that she wears due to the variety of daily activities that she performs. (Muhamed, 2020).

Modernization has a significant impact on Omani culture as it exposes young Omani women to new ideas, such as the idea that it is not necessary to follow only one culture. On the contrary, adopting the idea of cultural diversity and an open-minded society, at the same time, helps to preserve cultural heritage as a result of increased working opportunities. It also improves the education system and provides greater access to information through the widespread availability of the Internet and social media platforms.

Culture reflects a community's social lifestyle, it gradually changes according to the modification and transition of the lifestyle. With the changes that have occurred in the young Omani woman's social lifestyle, there have also been changes in the culture of the individual to suit the general transformed social lifestyle. According to Andreeva et al. (2017), the changes in social lifestyle are in line with the community's culture and cumulative experience and development.

Figure 2. Examples of young Omani women's modern attire

This study aimed to investigate the culture and lifestyle changes of young Omani women and their daily practices concerning modernization and also highlights the way they dealt with this phenomenon according to the requirements of the newly developed life through the creation of paintings that address the culture issue from three aspects, education, the work environment, and communications.

II. PROJECT OUTLINE

This research project will be created and constructed through three mixed media paintings that, explore and interpret the modernization phenomenon influences on young Omani women's lifestyle. The artworks to be produced will reflect the transformation and changes of the culture

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in Omani society towards modernity. This research project will be a collective of new cultural and social representations that express the significance of the transformation, development, and interaction in the society.

The expressionism will be the style used in the paintings. The figurative element and Omani motifs which are basically a repetition of squares and triangles in one form, different types of lines, dots, flowers, and some of the common Islamic motifs that have influenced the Omani culture will be the dominant elements within the artworks.

The mediums used in the painting are acrylic paint, inks and charcoal on canvas by using brushes, colour knife, rollers with the use of different techniques such as layering, cutting and glazing. The personal photographs from fieldwork and life observation are the main source of images like at several higher education institutions in addition from printed material and the visual references collected from the National Museum publication, the Ministry of Culture and Heritage and the Omani society of Fine Arts. All the photographs will be subject to quality and resolution improvement and reformulation of composition, colour and texture adjustment as needed through the use of digital software such as Adobe Photoshop.

III. RELATED THEORETICAL IDEAS

Multiple Modernities theory was proposed by Shmuel Eisenstadt in the year 2000, is chosen for this study because the concept and aspects of this theory are relevant to this research, as Multiple Modernities theory indicates a fundamental concept of the modern era characteristics and represents an essential transformation in the way the contemporary world and modernity is viewed.

Multiple modernization theory is characterized by a cultural evolution and a modern social structure that tendency to the structural differentiation in economic, scientific, political, religious, and society educational systems, it is a process that runs parallel with urbanization, a strong individual lifestyle, and special communication channels with large-scale global transformations. As Eisenstadt (2000, p.8) described "…social change is not a natural event but by the "interweaving" of the cultural and social structural dimensions in concrete situations…"

Multiple modernities theory argues that every modernisation must be based on historical context because the effect of modernity around the world is always has been conditioned on the history, traditional and cultural backgrounds of societies, its institutional manifestations and ideological are restricted to vary greatly. However, the multiple modernities theory indicates that historical backgrounds and cultural aspects lead different civilizations to gain different interpretations of these features, as to result in different and various modernities. (Eisenstadt, 2000).

The main inspiration source of multiple modernities concept is the compatibility of the societies culture and social lifestyle with the contemporary developments of the global economy, technological openness, the influences of the modern era achievements on the social

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behaviour and how society coexists, adapts and interacts with all contemporary developments which have direct impact on the individual lifestyle and daily activities. Eisenstadt (2000, p. 9) wrote that, "…multiple modernities denotes a certain view of the contemporary world—indeed of the history and characteristics of the modern era…".

Therefore, whenever there were evolutionary revolutions, there was improvement, development, and modernization in the people`s lives, as there is no specific and ideal structure of one nation in defining the general modernity concept as is commonly believed in the classical theories. Every society has its own identity for its members. Eisenstadt (2000, p.8) "…comparative investigations on contemporary societies show that modernity and Westernization are to be distinguished because there is no single version of modernity. It is not to expect that Western modernization will happen again…"

IV.   RELATED ART PRACTICES

Anwar Sonia

Figure 3. Omani women in the Market (2016), Acrylic on Canvas, 150cmx130cm.

Anwar Sonia is an Omani artist. The major element in Sonia`s art concept is the heritage and the traditional Omani women costume which distinguished by its bright colors, patterns, delicate embroidery and beautiful gesture of traditional jewelry. Sonia`s color structure more analytical than constructive as the colors are between a warm group of colors contract with the upper and lower parts of the painting. The colored dots and lines in the ladies `s dresses create a tonal harmonious relationship in the artwork with vartical balanced compostion.

The purpose of this structure in this painting is to look for a creative aesthetic image that is smoother, more formed, and color enhanced and which does not look like the same monotonous variable. This artwork structure illustrating full figures demonstrates a change in the color composition and reminds us about the movement of human bodies, and the theme reappears towards the depiction of heritage events and traditions. As Akram (2006, p. 57) mentioned, "…Sonia uses his personal experience and knowledge to illustrate heritage in his paintings, portraying an artistic technique of realism and expressionism."

Hush

Figure 4. Seductress (2017), Mixed Media on Canvas, 60cmx40cm.

Hush is a British artist, this artwork is influenced by the traditions of Japanese culture specifically the Japanese woman costume, it is a refined mixed media of painting, drawing, print, graffiti, and collage. This painting delves into the theme of Japanese culture and Japanese women's traditional fashion and femininity, this artwork merges the European and Asian styles. Illusion and layering are the main key techniques and components used in this painting. beautiful realistic of women`s images with a variety of lines and geometric shapes, a lot of colors contrasted with each other to create movements and exude energy and yet bring the elements of the traditional Japanese Geisha to reality.

Hush relies on strong and bold colors in the traditional costumes worn by the female characters in his artworks to reflect the dramatic spirit and personality of the women with cultural identity in contemporary settings. Jonathan (2018, p.1) "I'm British, but we borrow off American culture all the time,"

Alia Al Farsi

Figure 5. Omani Family Gathering (2018), Acrylic On Canvas, 160cmx320cm.

The creator of Alia Gallery in Muscat, the Omani woman, is the main subject of her artwork, which uses various movements and textures. Her artwork focuses on the diversity of design and style in traditional Omani costumes and lifestyle through an expression way of presentation.

The horizontal composition characterises this artwork, and the diversity of figures of men and women who wear Omani costumes with various designs from different Omani states as one family, as is evident in the presence of men, women, and children. Some women are illustrated wearing simple traditional headscarves. The artist focused on the simplicity of Omani women's costumes with the diversity of their design and cut, the number of pieces worn by women, the costume colors, and the brightness of their embroidery. This is apparent in the female characters, and this contrasts with the monochromatic background where the artist wanted to emphasise the major elements of the artwork.

Alia Al Farsi is considered one of the most critical contemporary Omani artists due to her style and technique in displaying Omani women's traditional costumes in a contemporary artistic style. This reflects the aesthetic of traditional Omani as a part of Omani identity and social lifestyle (Akram, 2006).

V. THE STUDIO INVESTIGATION

Culture reflects a community's social lifestyle, and it gradually changes according to the modification and transition of the lifestyle. With the changes that have occurred in the young Omani woman's social lifestyle, there have also been changes in the culture of the individual to suit the general transformed social lifestyle. Studio investigation aims to explore three aspects that influenced young Omani women's culture: education, working environment, and communication.

The education environment significantly impacts the culture and lifestyle of Omani students. Socialization with foreign students and staff as a positive education environment can expose Omani students to diverse perspectives, cultures, and lifestyles. This can broaden their understanding of the world and foster empathy and respect for different cultures. According to the statistical report released by the Oman Ministry of Higher Education (2020-2021) stated that the percentage of female registered students in 2020-2021 in government and private higher education institutions is 71.44%, which is higher than male students.

HEAC admission stages	👥	🔒	🧍	مراحل عملية القبول الموحد
Applicants	41452	20967	20485	المسجلون
Applicants with preferences	39758	20713	19045	المتقدمون
Applicants with preferences who passed exam	36841	19984	16857	المتقدمون الناجحون
Applicants who got offers	26267	14814	11453	الحاصلون على عروض
Applicants who accepted offers	25599	14451	11148	المعتمدون
Enrolled students	25316	14276	11040	المقبولون
Enrolled Students as percentage of all applicants with preferences who passed exam	68.72%	71.44%	65.49%	نسبة المقبولين من المتقدمين الناجحين

Omani applicants according to HEAC admission stages and gender

Figure. 6. Higher Education Admission Statistics Report 2020/2021

This statistical report reflects the demand for education for young Omani women. Due to the sustainability of Oman's economy, politics, and lifestyle, there are 2,041,275 expats in the Sultanate of Oman, which is 43.7% of the total population (Muhamed, 2021). Hence, multiculturalism and foreigners in Oman are some of the factors that influence fashion.

Many expatriate families from different countries and cultural backgrounds in the Sultanate of Oman have sons and daughters who attend Omani educational institutions in all public and private sectors and 31 international schools. In 2019, the Ministry of Education in Oman indicated that there were 20,932 female foreign students in government educational institutions and 2,563 female foreign students in private institutions (Educational Planning and Human Resources Development, 2019).

Figure. 7. Examples of foreign students and staff in Omani educational institutions

The images above stress how fashion creates an inaccessible standard for students. Moreover, they feel more independent and accepted in the social context. If students follow a certain trend, it makes it easier for them to get to know their own personalities by meeting different people from the community with the same interests and sense of style. Wearing fashionable clothes represents the status of a person. People assume a person is more progressive if they wear fashionable clothes (Nasser, 2001).

Social media has a great effect on students' fashion at different levels of educational institutions. Young Omani women students are exposed to different fashion styles that suit their personality and their modern surroundings through various social media applications that present a wide range of social lifestyles and constantly promote fashion (Nasser, 2001).

As Malcolm mentioned, social media greatly contributes to the appearance of young Omani women students to present themselves in their social circle and use fashion as a form of communication (Barnard, 2002).

Figure.8. Omani female students browse social media at the Scientific College of Design

Creating the first artwork began by selecting the most appropriate images from the pictures collected during site visits to schools, colleges, universities, and educational institutions. It can also be achieved using a few images from internet sites by making a quick set of pencil sketches and colored sketches of the elements and composition.

Figure 9. Selected picture of two Omani students sitting with a foreign student at the Scientific College of Design

For the composition development process and to enhance the sketch above and provide more suggestions on the fashion of the women sitting on the right and on the left by incorporating Omani characteristic patterns or motifs that reflect Omani fashion identity, I chose Sadu patterns which is a traditional Omani motifs and pattern art with enormous Omani cultural value. It carries a visual language and aspirations, communicating traditional values and narratives of the Omani community.

Figure 10. Omani women using Omani Sadu patterns on their Abaya, shirts, and Shawl

The sketches in *Figure 11* represent the manipulation process of the Abaya style of the Omani women by incorporating Omani Sadu patterns on their clothes. During this process, I experimented with various positions and movements for the women on the right and left.

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Additionally, I tested different Omani Sadu patterns to find a perfect blend of the folds of their clothes.

Figure 11. Sketches of the Omani Sadu fabric and manipulation process

For the background construction development, I decided to use The Arabic and English Alphapet to represent teaching and learning tools as the official medium of instruction in the education sector in the Sultanate of Oman to strengthen the composition and the idea of the painting (The Ministry of Education - General Education document, 1995).

Including the element of Arabic language letters will be an important addition. However, it will be an abstract proposition, starting with choosing a famous statement by the legendary Arabic thinker Abdel Hamid Badis that reflects the importance of knowledge (Knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness).

Figure 12. The statement: Knowledge is light, and ignorance is darkness

Then, reconstruct the letters used in the statement and formulate them again, stripping them of their meaning and first form. The idea of overlapping Arabic letters is creating a beautiful combination of shapes and lines composition.

Figure 13. Experimental sketches- reconstruct and combine the letters of the statement- Knowledge is light and ignorance is darkness

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Figure 14. All the elements used in the final composition

Figure 15. Composition development and final colored sketch

Start working on the artwork by transferring the final sketch onto the canvas using the grid technique, then, I applied several layers using ink and charcoal to create textures and effects.
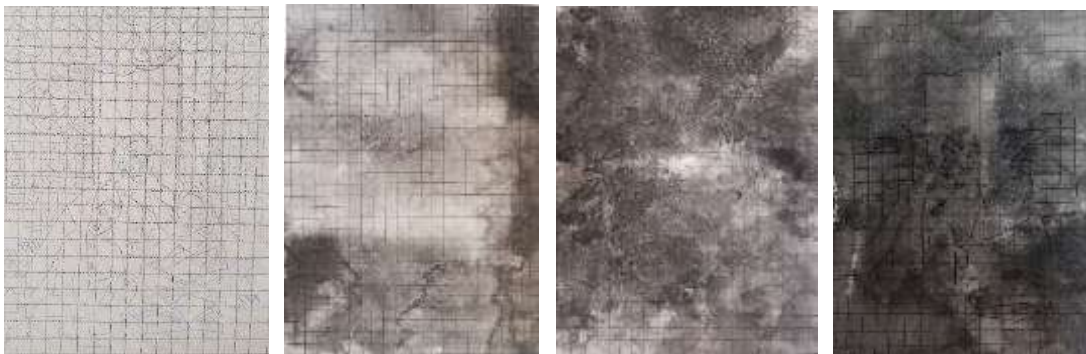

Figure 16. Gridding technique and Layering technique using charcoal and ink

I started working on the under-paint layering application process using brushes and acrylic medium. Ocher's warm color was applied to the under-paint color scheme to create harmony all over the artwork and unify the artwork elements. During the early process, illusion and depth were achieved by applying the glazing technique in three separate layers: first in the background.

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Figure 17. Early stage process – under paint layering technique

Figure 18. Inspiration to Learn

The picture above represents the final painting, sized 150 cm in height with 120 cm in width. The materials used are acrylic paint, inks, and charcoal on canvas to construct the final composition. The artwork was displayed during a group exhibition at the Scientific College of Design in Muscat. The materials used in the painting were chosen due to the effects they provided to the painting during the layering process. The presence of the figures in the painting gives it life and movement, as the scene appears more dynamic and realistic with the presence of the characters and their interaction with each other and with the surrounding environment.

The difference in figurative characters through the use of different clothing fashions reflects the reality of the education system as a result of the combination of local and foreign students and staff. This has greatly impacts Omani students' culture and fashion. Basically, the background is divided into two sections, the first and second sections presenting the languages used in the Omani education system, a major aspect of Omani cultural influence.

The woman on the left wears a dark brown Abaya and a white casual shawl with light blue patterns. The woman in the middle is wearing a modern, colourful shirt with a big white flower and no head cover, while the woman on the right is wearing a modern Abaya and shawl, both

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decorated with Omani Sadu patterns and styles. Their clothing reflects different cultures, customs, and traditional backgrounds. This indicates the most important aspect of the influence of the Omani culture, which is the mixing of Omani students with foreign students and teachers from different cultural backgrounds.

These three students who are wearing different attires and different styles is a representation of the culture of students and teenagers in general, which they are very comfortable wearing modern attire and exploring different fashion styles, with the background that uses a combination of motifs and colours are the symbolization of the structure of the education system that provides the multicultural environment. The artwork presentation in such a way is significant in portraying how societal educational systems affect and impact young Omani women in presenting themselves to society in a suitable modern fashion and this is what Eisenstadt pointed out in his Multiple Modernities Theory.

The development of the second painting was carried out by investigating the working environment factors that influenced the Omani working women's lifestyle. Oman is considered the most tolerant and flexible country in the Middle East in many aspects, including the chances for women to engage in work and social activities (Thuwayba & Tayfour, 2004).

Alroya (2023) The total number of working Omani women reached 231,745 in 2022, an increase of about 7 percent compared to the previous year, constituting 29 percent of the total number of working Omanis. Alroya (2023) added that these statistics, which are provided by the National Centre for Statistics and Information, provide insight into the qualitative advancement made by Omani women in different working field.

Hence, many companies and institutions hiring foreigner employees from different nationalities and cultures background, and deal on a daily and direct basis with Omani female employees, and this is one of the influences factors that contributed to the modernization of the Omani working woman's dress in order not to remain in cultural isolation in an environment full of multiculturalism and adapt to the work environment which is characterized by diverse backgrounds and cultures. In addition, Omani young women who work in both government and private sectors are interacting directly on a daily basis with many foreign customers and clients with diverse backgrounds and cultures, which encourages Omani employees to take an initiative in overcome the barrier of identity to be able to communicate comfortably.

Figure 19. Young Omani women and foreigner women working in different fields

Based on this clear context understanding, I started observing young Omani women in different working environments and fields and I collected visual references as it can be a crucial step for giving more options to compose an artwork.

Figure 20. Sketch of Foreigner and Omani staff at the Scientific College of Design

For idea development, I suggested adding support elements such as office shelves and the Ministry of Labor building in Muscat. These elements could include mood and emotion reflecting the working environment and the concept.
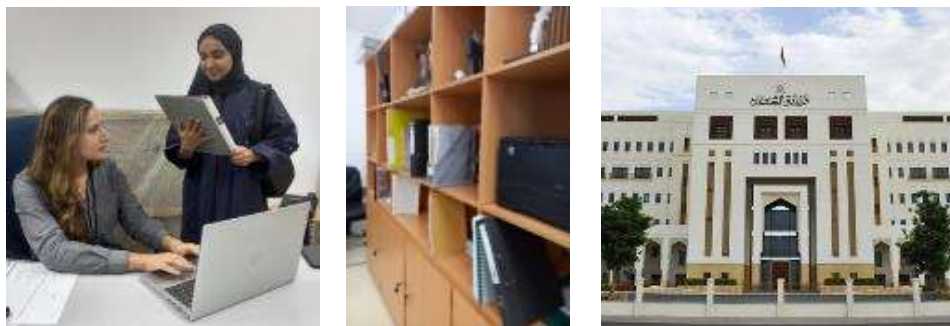

Figure 21. The selected pictures as the main elements for the final composition

The above pictures are the elements used in the final composition as I combined them in *Figure 22* to represent the issue and reflect the idea of the painting.

Figure 22. Sketch of the third final composition

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Initially, I used the grid technique to transfer the final sketch onto the canvas, then I whitewashed the canvas using ink to create some texture. I applied more layers using charcoal and ink to create effects that enhance the brightness of the colors in further stages.

Figure 23. Gridding, layering and blocking techniques

I painted directly on the canvas using the blocking technique. In this early step, the main focus was on the distribution of the elements and general colors before refining the form value, colors, and details.

Figure 25. The Magic of Working Environment

The picture above presents the final painting, size 150 cm in height and 120 cm in width. The materials used are acrylic paint, ink, and charcoal on canvas. This painting focuses on the main influence factor, which is the foreign women's interaction with Omani women in a working environment. This is what Eisenstadt proposed in the Multiple Modernities Theory is that, mixing between cultures, whether in a large or small circle, creates transformation, which leads to modernization. The foreign female staff demonstrate different cultural backgrounds, traditions, and ways of dressing in a working environment and share ideas and thoughts with Omani working women daily, which have valuable contributions to influencing Omani women's staff fashion.

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The painting calls for thinking about the influence of the environment and culture on identity and personal dress. It reflects the factors influencing the working environment of Omani women's fashion style, as the Omani woman appears modestly in the painting and wears a simple outfit that reflects the contemporary Omani identity. In contrast, the other employee represents the foreigner's culture and fashion and is wearing modern and contemporary clothes. The painting displays the prominent contrast between the fashion of an Omani woman and a foreign employee. This contrast symbolizes the difference in culture and values between traditional Omani culture and modern culture. It reflects the most fundamental element that affected Omani women's fashion in the work environment.

The painting highlights how the working environment affects fashion and personal identity. The Omani woman appears to be looking towards the foreign employee while trying to adapt to her orientation. The painting also expresses the challenges and cultural differences that Omani women can face in a multicultural work environment. It encourages understanding and respect for different cultures and highlights the importance of diversity and cultural openness.

The third painting is highlighting the influence of communication on the Omani young woman culture and social lifestyle. Communication plays important role in the development and growth of Oman society, as it is considered as the cornerstone that contributed to the transition of human beings from one developmental stage to another; This is due to people's realization of the importance of the process of communication with each other and the formation of social ties.

Communication is an important factor influencing one's style in Oman and across the world. According to studies, using communication technology tools has an impact on a person's social interactions and behaviours, including how he expresses and engages with others. Young women in Oman's culture and social lifestyle have all been significantly influenced by modern communication. Omani women are now more globally connected due to social media and other digital communication tools, which have had a significant impact on their way of life and choices in clothing. (Stephanie, 2016).

Figure 26. Young Omani women using social media using mobile phones

Young Omani women use social media to interact with individuals and groups from different backgrounds and cultures, encouraging a more accepting and inclusive society. This has enabled Omani society to adopt different cultural practices, fashion trends, and ethical principles. Young Omani women demonstrate a contemporary lifestyle by promoting various cultural activities and

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modern fashions on different social media platforms. The number of followers is very large, which reflects the great interaction and acceptance of Omani society to this modern phenomenon. (Aldhaheri, 2012).

Figure 27. Examples of young Omani women's different social media platform accounts

I started collecting visual references to experiment with the composition, the picture in *Figure 28* was selected as the main element, it represents three young Omani women wearing different modern fashions, interestingly browsing the internet using their mobile phones, then I cropped out the figure in the middle of the picture using Photoshop to create the composition.

Figure 28. Manipulation process on the selected picture

I also suggested to include social media platforms icons to be distributed in an illusion technique on the clothes and faces of the two Omani women.

Figure 29. experimenting on Social media icons composition

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The picture in *Figure 30* represents the final composition, using acrylic paint and ink on canvas, taking into account some improvements and minor changes that may occur in the final composition, especially in the background in terms of dealing with social media icons that symbolize communication, which is an important part in the context of the painting.

Figure 30. Sketch of the Final composition

I began transferring the final sketch on the canvas using the grid technique to place the elements accurately, then I applied textured layers using ink and charcoal

Figure 31. Gridding technique, under paint and layering process using charcoal and ink

For the under-paint, I applied the blocking technique using acrylic paint to have a better understanding of the composition and prepare the elements for final details.

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Figure 33. Deep Communication

The picture above is the final painting, which is 150 cm in height and 120 cm in width. The materials used are acrylic paint, ink, and charcoal on canvas in the early stages as a preparation before the under-paint technique is applied to achieve texture and fine details. The main focal point in the painting is the figures expressing various feelings and emotions, which adds depth and complexity to the artwork.

The final painting emphasizes the influence of modern communication and social media platforms on young Omani women's culture and social lifestyle. It's a depiction of two Omani women interacting with social media platforms and their impact on their fashion, which is an artistic expression of how the modern era of Omani women has shaped fashion style and culture in general. Meanwhile, the two women's facial expressions and posture suggest that they are paying attention to their smartphones, which can be seen anywhere as a new culture in society.

The influence of social media platforms on the local culture and personal presentation of Omani women can be observed in the transformations of Omani women's fashion and lifestyle in line with global trends. According to the Multiple Modernities Theory, technological openness is an inspiration source for individuals towards modernity. The painting reflects modern cross-cultural communication and how technology and social media platforms can enhance cultural interaction and exchange.

III. CONCLUSION

The study explored the impact of modernization on the personalities of young Omani women. The results of this research project reveal that modern cultural elements such as education, working environment, and modern technology have contributed to changing young Omani women's mindsets, and that exposed to diverse lifestyles, cultures, and global fashion trends have transformed their personalities. Modernization has opened up the way for young Omani women to participate in the workforce, provide various lifestyle choices, and be essential partners in social activities. It has also allowed young Omani women to receive an excellent education, which in turn has provided job opportunities in various specialties and fields. Additionally, modern technology has played an important role in shaping the identities of young Omani women by promoting cultural diversity and providing easy access to explore different cultures and lifestyles. This transformation is evident in the social trends that have emerged and become integrated into the lifestyle in Oman, influencing young Omani women in how they present themselves to society in a contemporary yet culturally appropriate manner.

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