

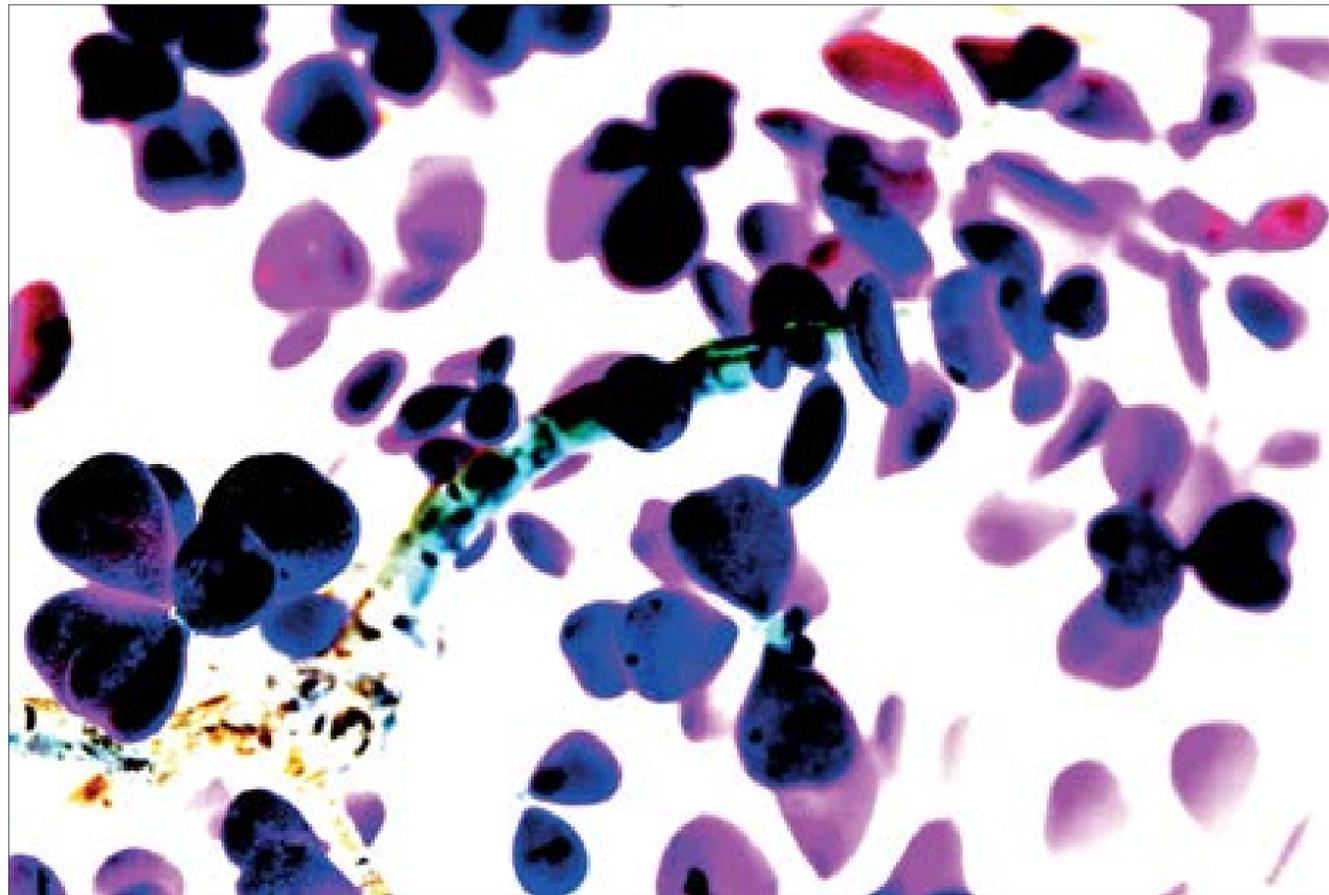
OMAR ZEIDAN: BETWEEN POP ART, DIGITAL PAINTING AND ARAB ABSTRACTION

By: Dr. Sara Tröster Klemm

Blurring yellow, a radiant, fresh green or a strong pink. On first sight, the viewer of Omar Zeidan's "Songs of the Soul No" is not able to name the subject of the image. Neither on second sight reminding the beholder on the motives from a microscope. But the image is not arising from a conventional scientific research method, but from the persistent research on the field of the arts: Zeidan (born 1983) has been proceeding from simple stones, actually from pavement, like it is seen in everyday life by every walking person all the time but never has pavement been seen as by him. Powerful and ambitious, nevertheless, in person seems as shy as sensible, a loner in a positive sense. He does not like many words, but is solely speaking with his art, bundling his energy into enigmatic images hence leading to intense times of absolute focusing on his art. In these long phases, he is not leaving his room nor talking to anybody, after all, only the result counts. And the

time comes, that the artworks are ready to leave the artist's studio, more and more often in the recent months.

In October 2014 Omar last solo exhibition, this shows the broadening interest in this young emerging Lebanese artist, who has been born in Abu Dhabi and raised both in Lebanon and the UAE. Under the title Transformations it showed recent works with this symbolically speaking title, the exhibition focused on digital art and mixed media. It convinced by a vast selection of formats and diverse, sometimes appealing, sometimes quite provocative colors. Blessed with some kind of stubbornness and ignorance, Zeidan explains, not to recur on other artists. His main source is his very soul, combined with a highly developed sensibility towards the human perception - and the possibilities of digital image processing. His images though function as amalgam between historic Arab traditions of imaging and modern Western



Untitled, 2014, digital print, 70x100cm. Courtesy of the artist.



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developments. All these stars of the American Pop Art, these floral prints by Warhol, and then the invention of the multiple. As we know, the concept of the multiple developed from the very idea, that everybody should be surrounded by art and own a piece of art. Jean Tinguely, Alexander Calder, Marcel Duchamp and others created from the 1960s on in Europe and the United States three-dimensional artworks and produced them in quantity. Through mass production art should become affordable. It was exactly the movements as the "Print Revival and Pop Art's interest in the mass-produced object made the idea seem especially promising." Now, Omar Zeidan is an anti-commercial and commercial artist at the same time, he has been very conscious in deciding to not necessarily limit the edition of his prints. He takes the liberty to multiply them as often as he likes. There will be certain prints by him, which are existing in various formats and editions. If he feels, that the world needs another copy of a certain print, he will create it. Zeidan is not willing to artificially limit the supply, if there is no real need and thereby undermines and criticizes the rules of the current art market. Omar Zeidan is the son of Salwa Zeidan, a well established sculptor and

painter by herself and the founder and director of the leading art gallery of Abu Dhabi, too. It can be said that Omar has been born as an artist. As a proud teacher of him, his mother remarks, that "Omar has embarked on a long path of artistic search, and his exhibition Transformation has been designed to bear a testimony to that journey". With this background it is no wonder, that Omar discovered his passion for art already at an extremely young age. He started with painting and soon expanded his artistic language towards other genres. He tested his skills as a sculptor by the age of 12 years. Later he focused on electronic music and began composing. The influence of musical currents and composing still can be found in nearly every digital print by Omar Zeidan, with series called Songs of the Soul not without reason. Today his artworks can be found in private and public collections in the UAE and Lebanon.

The art historian Hussein Keshani writes on the subject of the movement towards the digitization of Islamic art and art history, that the "cultural turn is being superseded by the digital turn." A very important and influential person in the analysis and production of digital art is Marqot Lovejoy, an art

historian, writer and digital artist, too. Nevertheless, Zeidan has always been reluctant in being compared with other artists, it is his first and foremost goal, to develop his own, unique artistic language. Interestingly, when creating an artwork, he begins very conservatively: with examining everyday life, his environment. He will take simple photographs. While working on these previously captured images, he begins to alter them through visual processing. He changes colors and shapes, sometimes dramatically. In his working process he mixes the contemporary achievements of digital image processing with the Islamic and Arab tradition of floral ornament and abstraction. We therefore have to thoroughly observe the artistic development of this young emerging artist where he is creating a bridge between the visual worlds of East and West, bridging cultures and seemingly disparate visual worlds. We need more people like him: People without blinkers, bringing harmony and unity to this universe. Through his extremely sensitive perception and his know-how of small interventions and the art of cutting out a specific detail from its context, Zeidan fuels his artworks with substance. They become meaningful, controversial and provoke the

viewer of thinking by himself. What he sees, are not mere bricks or flowers anymore, but powerful yet mysterious Songs of the Soul.

About the Writer

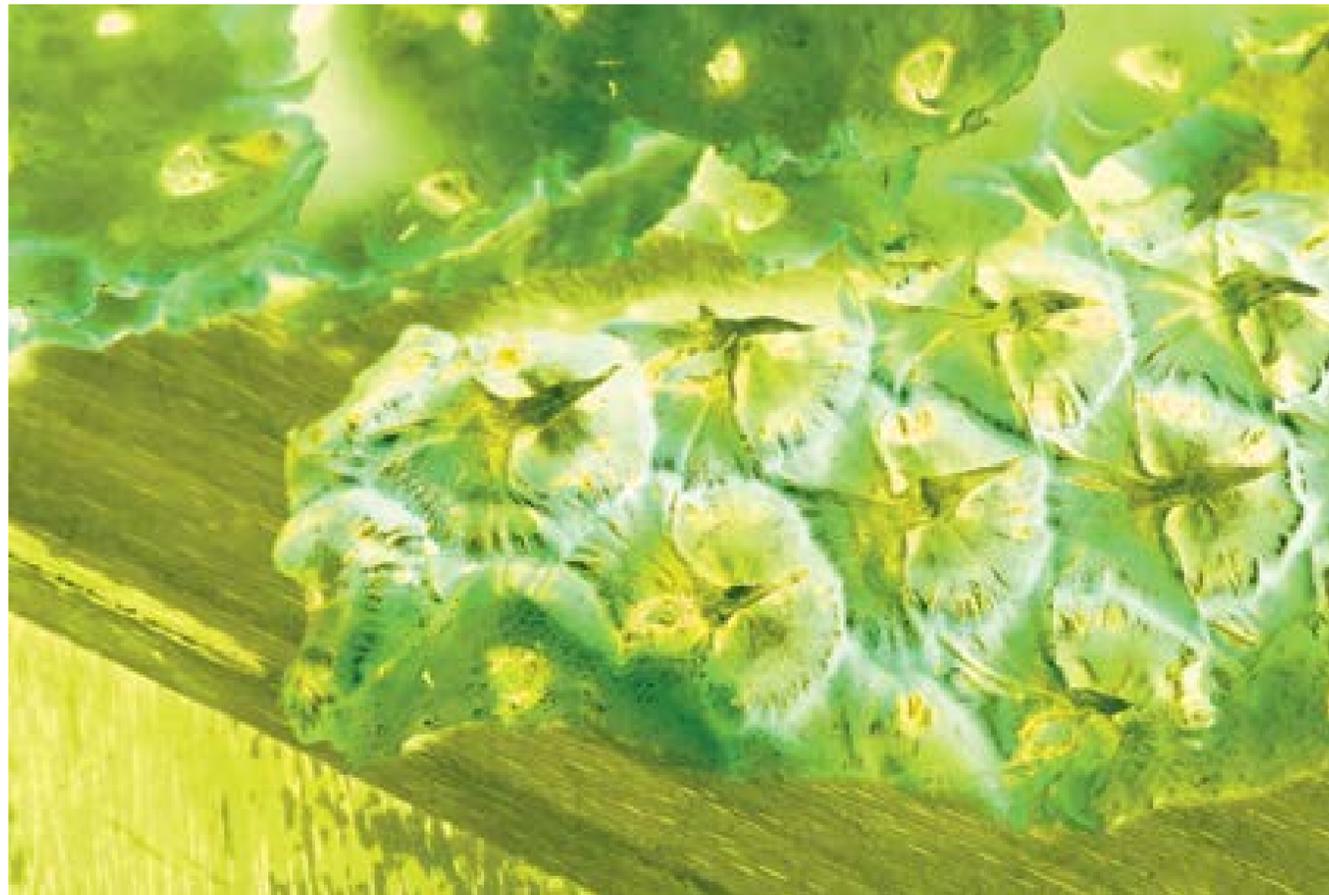
Dr. Sara Tröster Klemm is an award-winning Swiss art historian. Born 1980 in Basel, she studied at European universities in Berlin, Paris and Dresden earning her PhD in 2014. Recently, her book *Das investigative Bild* (The Investigative Image) on Tim Eitel and contemporary painting has been published.

End Notes

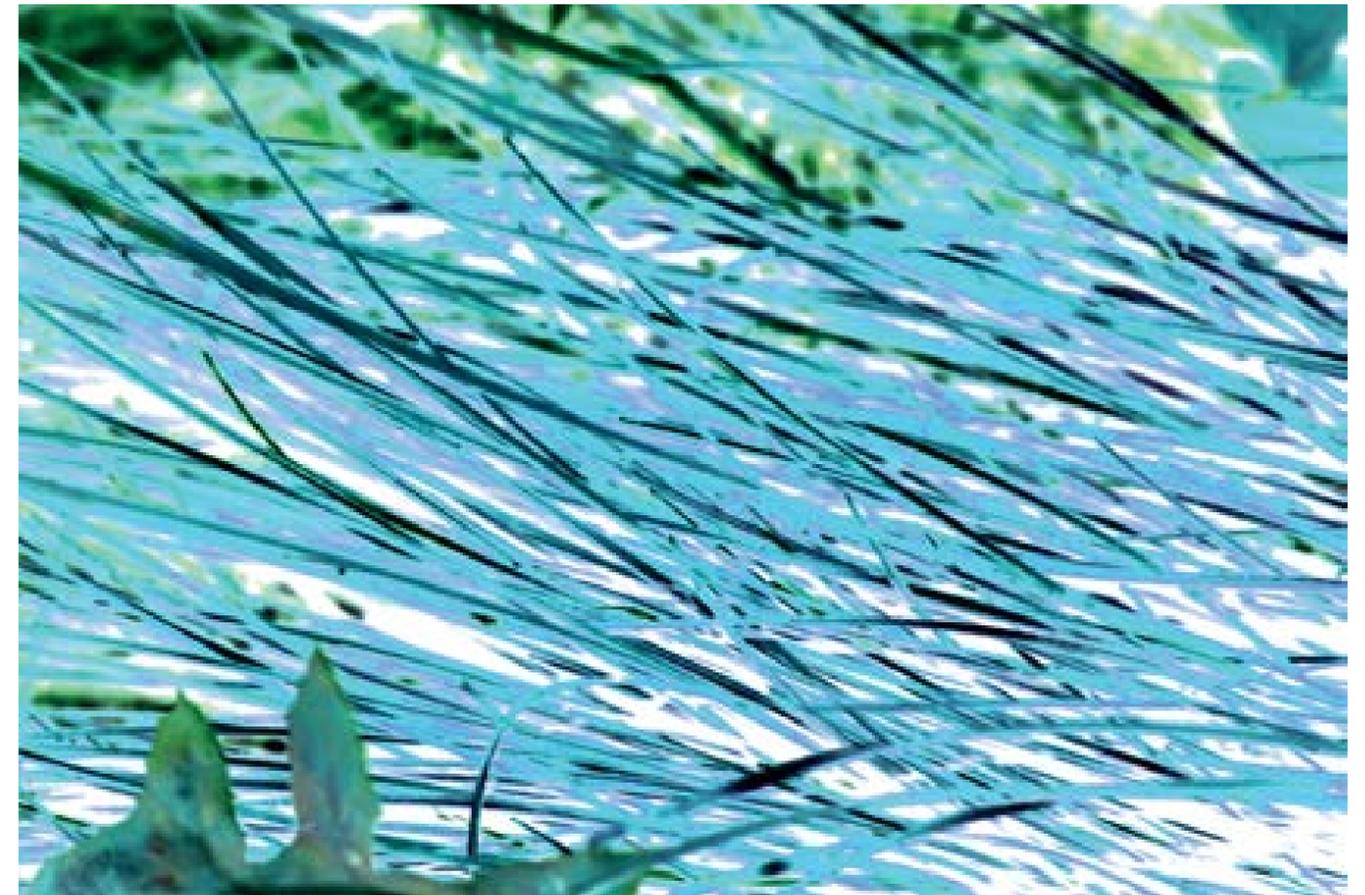
¹¹ Atkins, Robert. *ArtSpeak. A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords, 1945 to the Present*. New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers 1997 (2nd edition), p. 122-124.

¹² Keshani, Hussein. Towards digital Islamic art history, in: *Journal of Art Historiography*, United Kingdom University of Birmingham, 2012. Online: arthistoriography.files.wordpress.com/2012/05/keshani.pdf, p. 3.

¹³ Lovejoy, Marqot. *Context Providers: Conditions of Meaning in Media Arts*. Bristol: Intellect, 2010 and: *Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age*, 3rd ed. New York: Routledge, 2004.



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