

## Daheshism and Nudity in Art

I have written about the position of Daheshism with respect to naturism (nudity) in a previous essay. Does this mean that nudity in art is counter to Daheshist teachings? The answer is absolutely not. There is a major distinction between human nudity and nudity in most art. Dahesh, our Beloved and Guiding Prophet, was an art lover and in his collection there are many paintings and sculptures with nude figures. He also commissioned many paintings with nude figures as well. This essay will address the distinction between human nudity and nudity in art from the Daheshist perspective with information derived from a column published in *Dahesh Voice* issue 1, Summer 2002, by Dr. Ghazi Brax.

What makes an artist an artist? The common human explanation is talent. But what is talent? In Daheshism, talent is a manifestation of a certain Sayyal (Spiritual Fluid) that extends to a specific individual on earth a specific skill derived from a lofty world of Paradise. Dr. Dahesh was very interested in scientists, philosophers, and literary and visual artists from all periods, because according to him, they are the builders of civilization and responsible for its modernization. In essence, they are special envoys to extend a certain aspect of scientific knowledge and artistic creativity to earth in a specific period. Every talented individual is endowed with a lofty Sayyal that descended to earth from a specific World of Paradise in order to perform a task. This task could be an important scientific discovery as in the works of Newton, Einstein, and others; music composition as in the works of Beethoven, Mozart, and others; literary masterpieces as in the works of Shakespeare, Blake, and others; masterful sculptures as in the works of Michael Angelo, Rodin, and others; Beautiful paintings as in the works of David, Renoir, and others; and great philosophical arguments as in the works of Socrates, Plato, and others. The list continues on to include architecture, design, mathematics, craftsmanship, and just about any discipline you can imagine. It is virtually impossible for an individual to reach this level of creativity simply through education. Education can refine the talents but not create them.

Does it mean that an individual will continue to have this Sayyal throughout life? There are no guarantees. An individual may retain this Sayyal throughout life—as in the case with Beethoven or Mozart, while another person may lose this Sayyal for a variety of reasons; such as: the task or mission for this Sayyal on earth has been accomplished and as a result it is withdrawn and it no longer “inspires” the individual; The individual’s behavior was improper thus degrading his Sayyals and as consequence, the lofty Sayyal that extends this individual with the talent is withdrawn. Does it mean that you have to be born with this Sayyal? Not at all! The person may, through proper behavior, elevate his Sayyals and as a consequence merit receiving a lofty Sayyal that extends him with a talent of a certain kind. Some may start writing, painting, or making scientific discovery at a later period in their life. When the Beloved Prophet lived in our midst, certain Daheshists received specific lofty Sayyals by means of Divine intervention, so that their newly acquired talents could help the Daheshist Mission in a specific way. This could also happen at any time if the Divine Power willed it to be. For the most part it is a matter

of merit for both, the individual possessing this Sayyal and for its beneficiaries, the human race.

The great masters of creativity and invention—with Sayyals derived from lofty worlds in order to extend enlightenment and scientific advancement to the human race—need to remain dedicated to their mission and avoid corruption by the various temptations and mortal glories of life on earth. Such corruption caused the fall of many writers, poets, and artists after they have reached a certain level of fame. They need to realize the importance of their mission and act accordingly to preserve the influence of good in their creativity. According to our Beloved Prophet, their creativity does not only influence their spiritual elevation or degradation while they are alive, but rather continues after their death as long as individuals are influenced by it. After death, those who use their creativity in a proper way will continue to elevate spiritually, while those who use it in an improper way will continue to decline spiritually.

Our Beloved Prophet appreciated Realism and Impressionism in art, but never the Abstract or the Surrealism. He said: “I declare with my loud voice that the true art is Realism.” He labeled Surrealism as “worthless” and his judgment was not influenced by the fame of writers and artists and the extent of his love to their works. He loved the poetry of Tagore, yet he criticized his Surrealistic paintings and said “I wish Tagore constrained himself to his excellent and creative literary work, for his paintings are worthless and mean nothing at all.” Despite his love for Kahlil Gibran, he said: “The paintings and illustrations of Kahlil Gibran are far less important than his literary work and they are not as good as the paintings and illustrations of William Blake.”

In Daheshism, the ideal image in art and literature is not complete without the unity of Truth, Good, and Beauty, because in the idealistic form that the Absolute Divine Truth is represented. Dahesh is adamant that writers and artists should always have “themes that encourage good and refrain from evil.” In art, he refuses to label paintings that evoke animal instincts as true art. Any painting or sculpture whose execution evokes sexual desires is unacceptable to Dahesh and Daheshism. More than once, he returned paintings of this genre to the artist that he had commissioned, because their execution promoted the feeling of immorality instead of righteousness. Since the creative Sayyal is from a lofty world of Paradise, it cannot inspire nudity with sexual overtones because sexuality—the way we understand it—does not exist in the worlds of Paradise. Even Adam and Eve did not know what sexuality is in their Earthly Paradise until their fall. For the artist to produce a creation that evokes sexual desires, his lower Sayyals must have dominated and triumphed over the lofty Sayyals of creativity and as a result, the final work is unacceptable. However, our Beloved Prophet does not directly correlate the object of art with morality and many of the paintings in his collection contain artistic nudity and the individual contemplating the paintings cannot help but feel exalted due its artistic beauty that is derived from the elevated Sayyals that created it. Dahesh, after visiting the Louvre, in Paris and the National Gallery of Art, in Washington, DC, commented on the paintings that include a significant amount of artistic nudity by saying: “These great paintings are a heritage to humanity and are passed on from one generation to another so that we can see the extent of evolution in art and the many historical incidents that we can revisit in a

lively manner that is pleasurable, beautiful, and truthful of an existence in a mortal world.”