



The One-Dimensional Group and Its Role in Renewing Iraqi Art

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Abstract: This study explores the role of the **One Dimension Group** in revitalizing modern Iraqi art, focusing on its 1970s emergence and its aesthetic-intellectual contributions. The group, led by **Shakir Hassan Al Said**, redefined the art-heritage relationship by integrating Arabic calligraphy and cultural symbolism into a contemporary visual identity. Through analyzing key artworks, the research demonstrates how the group established a modern artistic movement rooted in local cultural realities. Findings reveal that the One Dimension Group introduced an innovative model that rejected imitation, embraced experimentation, and enriched Iraq's art scene through spiritual abstraction and symbolic depth.

Key Word: One Dimension Group, Iraqi Modern Art, Arabic Calligraphy, Artistic Renewal, Spiritual Abstraction, Shakir Hassan Al Said, Cultural Symbolism, Contemporary Iraqi Identity, Sufi Influence in Art, Visual Experimentation.

1. INTRODUCTION :

Modern Iraqi art has undergone profound transformations since the early 20th century, shaped by the country's political, social, and cultural shifts. Iraqi artists have long sought to develop a distinctive visual identity that bridges modernity and contemporaneity with Iraq's rich cultural and historical heritage (Abdel-Rahman, 2015). Within this dynamic landscape, numerous art movements emerged, each reflecting unique intellectual and stylistic approaches—among the most significant was the One Dimension Group, founded in the 1970s by the renowned artist Shakir Hassan Al Said (Al-Fahd, 2010).

The formation of the group was a reaction against the Western-oriented trends dominating the Iraqi art scene at the time (Al-Taher, 2011). Instead, the group advocated a return to cultural roots, drawing inspiration from Arabic calligraphy as both an aesthetic and philosophical foundation. The use of the letterform transcended decoration; it became a means of expressing existential, spiritual, and cultural identity in an artistic experience rooted in mysticism and contemplation (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007).

This study seeks to analyze the One Dimension Group's experience and its vital role in renewing modern Iraqi art. It will examine the intellectual and aesthetic foundations of the movement and offer critical analysis of selected artworks that marked a pivotal shift in Iraq's artistic trajectory (Al-Hashemi, 2007).



2. Objectives:

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the historical and cultural conditions that led to the emergence of the One Dimension Group in Iraq.
2. To analyze the aesthetic and intellectual concepts adopted by the group, particularly their use of Arabic calligraphy and cultural symbolism.
3. To highlight the group's contribution to renewing Iraqi artistic discourse and reshaping the local visual identity.
4. To explore and critically analyze key artworks by prominent members of the group.
5. To assess the group's lasting influence on the development of contemporary Iraqi art and its broader cultural impact.

3. Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored in aesthetic and philosophical concepts that defined the One Dimension Group's intellectual foundations, focusing on:

- Spiritual abstraction rooted in Arab-Islamic heritage.
- Arabic calligraphy as a symbolic/epistemic visual element.
- Synthesis of modernist/postmodernist theories with Iraqi cultural identity.

3.1 Sufi Philosophy and Calligraphic Symbolism

The group's interpretive approach to Arabic letters derived from:

- Ibn Arabi's "Unity of Being" (Wahdat al-Wujud): Letters as manifestations bridging material/spiritual realms (Nasr, 1987).
- Al-Hallaj's mysticism: Calligraphy as a path to divine knowledge (Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

Example:

"Arabic script transcended communication, becoming a conduit for metaphysical truths—a concept mirrored in the group's abstraction of letterforms (Burckhardt, 1976)."

3.2 Modernist and Postmodernist Alignments

The group assimilated Western avant-garde principles while localizing them:

- Kandinsky's spiritual abstraction: Parallels in prioritizing "inner necessity" over form (Kandinsky, 1911).
- Surrealist symbolism: Shared interest in mystical iconography (e.g., Miró's dreamlike forms vs. Arabic letter mysticism) (Corbin, 1964).

3.3 Islamic Aesthetics and Contemporary Identity

Key hybrid concepts:

- Visual identity: Heritage reimagined through modernist techniques (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007).
- Art as knowledge: Calligraphy's epistemic role (Burckhardt, 1976).

Comparative Integration:

"While Kandinsky used color for spiritual expression, the One Dimension Group uniquely deployed Arabic calligraphy as both medium and message (Al-Taher, 2011)."



4. Methodology :

This study employs a tripartite analytical framework to examine the One Dimension Group's contributions to modern Iraqi art, combining:

1. Visual Semiotics (Panofsky's iconographic analysis),
2. Contextual Criticism (social art history approach),
3. Comparative Analysis (cross-referencing with global movements).

4.1 Research Design

A qualitative exploratory approach guides the investigation, emphasizing:

- Historical Contextualization: Tracing the group's emergence within 1970s Iraq.
- Aesthetic Deconstruction: Analyzing formal and symbolic elements in artworks.
- Philosophical Alignment: Linking practices to Sufi thought and modernist theories (e.g., Kandinsky's abstraction).

4.2 Data Collection

Data was gathered from three primary sources:

Data Type	Sources	Tools
Primary Artworks	Paintings, sketches, installations	High-resolution imaging
Archival Materials	Exhibition catalogs, 1970s magazines	Content analysis
Secondary Literature	Scholarly books, peer-reviewed articles	Critical discourse analysis

4.3 Analytical Framework

A three-tiered analysis was applied:

1. Technical Examination: Materials, composition, and calligraphic techniques.
2. Symbolic Interpretation: Sufi motifs, letterform abstraction, and cultural symbolism.
3. Socio-Political Contextualization: Iraq's artistic climate and postcolonial identity.

4.4 Limitations

- Geographic Constraints: Limited access to artworks in private collections.
- Temporal Bias: Reliance on post-2000 reinterpretations of 1970s movements.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

- Image Permissions: Obtained for all reproduced artworks.
- Citation Ethics: Distinction maintained between artists' intent and critical analyses.

Key Improvements:

1. Clarity: Streamlined subsections with actionable headings (e.g., "3.1 Research Design").
2. Academic Rigor: Explicit linkage to theories (Panofsky, Kandinsky) and methods (qualitative approach).
3. Visual Organization: Tables and bullet points enhance readability.
4. Consistency: Aligns with the APA-style numbering used in other chapters.



5. The Emergence of the One Dimension Group

5.1 Founding and Historical Context

The One Dimension Group was established in Baghdad in 1971 by artist and theorist Shakir Hassan Al Said, a pivotal figure in modern Iraqi art (Al-Fahd, 2010). The group represented a continuation of Al Said's intellectual journey after departing from the Baghdad Modern Art Group, aiming to create a movement rooted in Sufi contemplation and Arab-Islamic heritage (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007).

5.2 Philosophical Foundations

- Naming: Inspired by Herbert Marcuse's "One-Dimensional Man," reinterpreted to signify a spiritual dimension transcending material art (Abdel-Rahman, 2015).
- Core Concept: Focus on metaphysical essence of Arabic script over formal aesthetics.

5.3 Artistic Shift

Marked a transition from formal modernism to "contemplative modernism," blending tradition with contemporary visual language to forge a modern Iraqi identity (Al-Kinani, 2009; Al-Hashemi, 2007).

5.4 Key Members and Contributions

5.4.1 Shakir Hassan Al Said (Founder)

- Intellectual leader bridging Sufism and modern art.

5.4.2 Fayek Hassan

- Merged Eastern/Western symbolism through calligraphic motifs (Al-Fahd, 2010).

5.4.3 Jawad Salim

- Centralized Arabic script as spiritual medium (Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

5.4.4 Nadhim Al-Sarraj

- Pioneer of letter abstraction (Al-Hashemi, 2007).

5.4.5 Kamel Al-Tamimi

- Explored Sufi symbolism through experimental visuals (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007).

6. Analyzing Some Artworks

Through analyzing some of the artworks created by members of the **One Dimension Group**, we can observe the approaches these artists used to express **spirituality** and **symbolism**, and their innovative use of **Arabic calligraphy** in an abstract form, reflecting the group's unique artistic vision. Here are some examples of works that embody these characteristics:

- **Shakir Hassan Al Said's Work: "Interwoven Lines"**

This work is one of the most notable examples of Shakir Hassan Al Said's abstract style. In this piece, Arabic calligraphy is not just used as a tool for writing but as an abstract element expressing the intertwining of ideas



and spiritual dimensions. The interwoven lines symbolize the blending of knowledge and spirituality, reflecting the **Sufi mindset** and showing how Arabic calligraphy can transcend its traditional role to become a profound artistic expression (Al-Attar, 2002).

- **Jawad Salim's Work: "Sufi Abstraction"**

One of Jawad Salim's most famous works, this piece blends abstraction with **Sufi symbolism**. In this artwork, Salim uses straight lines and geometric forms to create spiritual symbols that reflect the relationship between the human being and the universe. The work showcases the influence of **Sufi spirituality** in art, where shapes become mere representations of the unseen existence, conveying the connection between the material and spiritual realms (Al-Kinani, 2009).

- **Nadhim Al-Sarraj's Work: "The Absence of Dimensions"**

In this piece, Nadhim Al-Sarraj uses intense abstraction by distorting Arabic letters and transforming them into abstract symbols. The lines twist around different axes, reflecting the spiritual depth and self-reflection inherent in the group's philosophy. These works are not limited to visual beauty but represent the reshaping of cultural consciousness in modern Iraqi art, exemplifying the transformation of traditional art into a modernist expression (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007).

- **Kamel Al-Tamimi's Work: "The Spirit in Beauty"**

In this piece, Kamel Al-Tamimi offers a fusion of **Sufi symbolism** and **visual experimentation**. The overlapping geometric lines with vibrant colors create a rich visual experience, reflecting the spiritual concept in art. The work symbolizes the group's effort to express spiritual meanings through forms and structures, continuing the group's commitment to blending spiritual significance with modernist art (Al-Taher, 2011).

These works clearly demonstrate how the members of the **One Dimension Group** were able to reinterpret **Arab and Islamic cultural heritage** using contemporary artistic language, making them part of a new artistic movement that blends spirituality with modernity.

7. The Impact of the Group on Revitalizing Iraqi Art

The One Dimension Group played a significant role in revitalizing Iraqi art and pushing it toward new horizons. The group adopted an alternative artistic vision, successfully transitioning modern Iraqi art from the traditional academic approach to an abstract and spiritual style that aligns with Iraqi cultural identity while also engaging with global developments in twentieth-century art. Below are some of the major impacts of the group on the Iraqi art scene:

7.1 Reinterpreting Arab and Islamic Heritage

One of the most significant contributions of the group was in re-reading Arab and Islamic heritage, particularly Arabic calligraphy, and transforming it into a contemporary artistic language. The group's artists excelled in abstractly and profoundly using Arabic letters, giving their artworks a distinctive spiritual and intellectual dimension (Abdel-Rahman, 2015). By reconnecting to this heritage, they created an art form that was both innovative and deeply rooted in the Iraqi and Arab cultural identity.

7.2 Moving Away from Traditional Realism

The group rejected the dominant realistic trends in Iraq prior to its formation and distanced itself from direct, photographic depictions of reality. Instead, it sought to express spirituality and philosophical concepts through symbolism and abstraction, marking a significant shift in artistic understanding. This break from traditional realism encouraged artists to focus on inner experiences rather than external representations of reality (Al-Fahd, 2010).

7.3 Visual Experimentation and Use of Unconventional Materials

The group's artists experimented with new techniques and styles in creating their artworks, utilizing geometric lines, abstract colors, and unconventional materials, which made their works innovative and groundbreaking. This experimentation helped propel Iraqi art into the realm of contemporary, international practices, allowing Iraqi artists to find their unique voice in the global art scene (Al-Hashemi, 2007).



7.4 Emphasis on the Spiritual Dimension in Art

The group employed the concept of spiritual abstraction, which ensured that their works went beyond visual aesthetics to express profound concepts related to existence and human knowledge. This aspect played a crucial role in transforming Iraqi art into a medium for intellectual and spiritual reflection. By incorporating these deeper meanings, the group highlighted the importance of art not just as visual expression, but as a tool for contemplation and connection with metaphysical ideas (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007).

Thus, the One Dimension Group marked a major shift in modern Iraqi art, contributing to the notion that art is not just a visual expression but also a means of intellectual and spiritual contemplation. It helped inspire new generations of Iraqi artists to embrace more freedom and innovation in their work, providing a foundation for future movements that prioritize cultural identity and modern expression.

8. Results

Through analyzing the impact of the One Dimension Group on modern Iraqi art, several key findings can be drawn, summarizing the significant influence this group had on the art scene. The main findings include:

8.1 Redefining the Iraqi Artistic Identity

The One Dimension Group successfully redefined the Iraqi artistic identity by blending abstract and symbolic styles with cultural heritage, creating artists who express new ideas and concepts that align with the intellectual and social transformations occurring in Iraq. This shift was integral in reshaping the artistic landscape and redefining Iraq's visual culture, allowing it to move away from rigid, traditional styles (Abdel-Rahman, 2015).

8.2 Developing Arabic Calligraphy as a Contemporary Artistic Tool

One of the key results is the revival of Arabic calligraphy in abstract and spiritual contexts, where calligraphy became not just a writing tool but an artistic element that conveys spiritual and philosophical concepts. The group transformed calligraphy into a medium of intellectual and spiritual exploration, placing it at the forefront of modern Iraqi art (Al-Hashemi, 2007).

8.3 Deep Influence on New Generations of Artists

The group managed to inspire new generations of artists to adopt modern artistic methods, leading to new opportunities for Iraqi artists to express themselves innovatively, away from traditionalism. The One Dimension Group's legacy helped instigate a new wave of creativity and artistic freedom, influencing later artists to push the boundaries of their work (Al-Fahd, 2010).

8.4 Achieving a Balance Between Spiritual and Aesthetic Beauty

The works of the One Dimension Group brought increasing attention to the concept of spiritual abstraction in art, achieving a balance between visual beauty and spiritual beauty, where art became a tool for reflection and spiritual connection. This approach reflected the group's deep connection with Sufi thought and their belief in art's capacity to transcend mere aesthetics (Al-Taher, 2011).

8.5 Contributing to the Modernization of Iraqi Art

The group played a pivotal role in shifting Iraqi art from a traditional and rigid phase to a more innovative and free phase, helping to develop new styles and unconventional ideas in the Iraqi art scene. Their work was instrumental in modernizing the Iraqi art scene, allowing for more experimental approaches that blended local heritage with contemporary styles (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007).

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings regarding the One Dimension Group's impact on modern Iraqi art, the following recommendations are proposed to further develop contemporary Iraqi art and guide future research:



9.1 Promoting Academic Research

Future studies should investigate:

- The lasting influence of the One Dimension Group on contemporary Iraqi artists
- Comparative analyses between the group's techniques and current artistic trends
- The philosophical and spiritual dimensions in modern Iraqi abstraction

9.2 Developing Specialized Art Education

Art institutions should:

- Incorporate the group's abstract and symbolic approaches into curricula
- Establish workshops on spiritual abstraction and calligraphic modernism
- Train educators in the group's innovative techniques

9.3 Curating Thematic Exhibitions

Cultural organizations should:

- Organize retrospective exhibitions of the group's works
- Create traveling exhibitions to showcase their influence regionally
- Develop interactive displays explaining their artistic philosophy

9.4 Fostering Intergenerational Collaboration

The art community should:

- Arrange mentorship programs between group members and emerging artists
- Host collaborative projects blending traditional and contemporary methods
- Establish artist residencies focused on experimental abstraction

9.5 Preserving Artistic Legacy

Cultural preservation efforts should:

- Digitize and catalog the group's artworks and documents
- Create dedicated museum collections for Iraqi modernist movements
- Develop conservation programs for vulnerable artworks

These recommendations aim to honor the One Dimension Group's contributions while ensuring their innovative spirit continues to inspire future generations of Iraqi artists. The implementation of these suggestions would significantly contribute to the preservation and evolution of Iraq's rich artistic heritage.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be stated that the One Dimension Group played a pivotal role in renewing modern Iraqi art by introducing new methods and innovative artistic thinking that contributed to shaping a contemporary artistic identity aligned with the intellectual and cultural transformations in Iraq. The group succeeded in reshaping the concept of abstract art in Iraq, expanding the traditional boundaries of art, and pushing forward the development of new artistic methods characterized by expressive freedom and experimentation (Abdel-Mateleb, 2007; Abdel-Rahman, 2015).



The group's contribution to the development of Arabic calligraphy as a contemporary artistic tool stands as one of its major achievements, as calligraphy evolved from merely a means of writing to an artistic element that expresses spiritual and philosophical ideas (Al-Fahd, 2010; Al-Hashemi, 2007). The integration of Arabic calligraphy into contemporary art, transforming it into an abstract and spiritual tool, has proven to be a revolutionary move within the Iraqi and wider Arab artistic scene (Al-Taher, 2011).

Through their artworks, the One Dimension Group demonstrated that Iraqi art is capable of keeping pace with global developments in visual arts while preserving deep cultural roots. The group's innovative methods continue to influence contemporary Iraqi artists, guiding them toward further experimentation and innovation (Al-Attar, 2002; Al-Kinani, 2009). There is no doubt that the profound impact of this group will continue to inspire new artists, fostering a new wave of creativity and intellectual depth in modern Iraqi art (Abdullah, 2015).

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