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The Echo of Impressionism in the Floral Paintings of Naela Amir and Durre Waseem

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Abstract:

This research explores the characteristic techniques of Impressionism, particularly those related to the depiction of flowers, and their influence on contemporary paintings. Renowned for capturing the fleeting moments infused with emotions, Impressionists depicted flowers and natural landscapes in their compositions to convey artistic ideas and subjective feel. This study seeks to understand how the two contemporary artists, inspired by the ethos of Impressionism, incorporate this intuitive understanding of flowers into their still life and plein air paintings.

Impressionists elevated the genre beyond mere representation. They employed vibrant colors, loose brush strokes and focused on light to convey the ephemeral beauty of flowers. Their focus on atmosphere, emotional expression, personal perspective and their dynamic approach to floral representation distinguish their work from others. The delicacy, intimacy, no outline and the interplay of lights and darks are all reminiscent of the artists' emotional state and vibrant expression that adds depth to the overall composition.

Naela Amir and Durre Waseem have upheld this legacy in their paintings and depict the impressions with self-expressions while retaining atmospheric details. Their floral paintings represent a merge of their feelings with the magic of existing reality. This study illuminates the insightful and transformative impact of artistic expressions, uniting diverse eras and geographical landscapes under the universal language of art. It aims to identify the principles of Impressionism and their echo in the paintings of contemporary female artists. This research can be utilized for further exploration of Impressionism and its influence on the works of other Pakistani artists.

Keywords: Impressionism, Contemporary Artist, Fleeting Moment, Light, Capture, Style

Introduction

In the world of art, flowers have long been used as a source of inspiration. Artists from different eras and cultures have used flowers in their paintings to glorify the beauty of their land. Among the movements that embraced this essence in their paintings, Impressionism stands out for its revolutionary approach to capture this transient quality of flowers graced in their paintings.

Originated in France in the 19th century, Impressionism challenged traditional artistic conventions and focused on the change of light with every passing moment. The use of vermillion in Renoir's work and the depiction of sunlight in the water painted by Monet are all reminiscent of what the artist feels and how he executed the beauty of nature with a personal touch. The story of the term Impressionism and its beginning is an interesting one.

> "In 1874, a group of artists, including Claude Monet (1840-1926), Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) and Camille Pissarro (1830-1903), organised an exhibition on the second floor of the Boulevard des Capucines building, which until then housed the studio of photographer Félix Nadar. Around 3,500 people visited the exhibition, including art critic Louis Leroy (1812-1885), who was acidic in his comments on the works, especially Monet's painting Impression, Sunrise. Leroy wrote that any wallpaper was better finished than that

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painting, in an article called The Exhibition of the Impressionists. And so the group became – and still is – known."[1] (Muralha, 2024)

Though for the time, the style was not acceptable because it was different from the traditional style of painting realistically, but by the time, the style got famous and also led to the upcoming movements including Post-Impressionism, Expressionism and Cubism.

Impressionists juxtaposed their colors on canvases and usually used complementary colors for the shadows. This approach is also visible in the natural landscapes and floral paintings of Amir and Waseem whose impressionistic use of technique made their works look more interesting and with a peculiar feel.

This research traces the echo of Impressionism in the art of Amir and Waseem by examining the execution of flowers and exploring their significance for showcasing the artists' love and admiration for the beauty of nature. It also uncovers the continuity of artistic themes and sensibilities across different cultures and time periods.

The themes and variations will be explored in this research, highlighting the ways in which artists continue to draw inspiration from Impressionism while infusing their own cultural perspectives and experiences into their work. These paintings serve as recognizable documentation of seasonal flowers and their significance in people's lives.

Methodology

The qualitative research methodology is adopted to conduct this research. Reliability and validity of data is ensured. It involves a comprehensive overview of the selected artworks of Amir and Waseem to shed light on the enduring power of art to transcend boundaries and bridge eras. It connects the past with the present in a vibrant tapestry of creativity and expression. Amir painted the flowers that are readily available in her locale and admire the beauty with her brush and paints. Waseem also portrays the excellence of surroundings with things available alongside and merges it with subtle impressions. The cultural significance of their surroundings is defined with beauty and grace and an admiration of the aesthetically beautiful flowers is reminiscent of the positivity and optimistic approach of the artists.

Primary data were collected through interviews with the artists. Naela Amir was interviewed in her office at UCAD on March 6, 2024, and again on May 12, 2024, and Durre Waseem was interviewed on May 2, 2024. Images of the artworks were obtained from the artists, their Instagram accounts and other online sources, as listed in the figure notes.

Results and Discussion

Artists employ multiple techniques in their works to portray their expressions and feelings in visual form. Most of the times, it is not a deliberate effort from their side to use any particular technique but their works have the qualities that allow the viewer to find the connection between different cultural ethos. The admiration for beauty is one aspect in their art works and their personal and emotional interpretation of floral subjects is another. They are not aiming for a strict realistic image but their own feelings and understandings of the objects are involved in capturing the essence of flowers. These perceptions and the individual styles result in a more expressive interpretation of flowers and natural landscapes. These artists employ loose brushwork and vibrant palettes to capture the essence of floral subjects.

Impressionists focused on the accurate depiction of light with its changing qualities with the passage of time. Claude Monet was a key figure in Impressionism. He depicted the landscape and different activities happening in Paris and the Normandy coast. He was raised in Normandy and was introduced to the Plein Air painting by Eugene Boudin. At the age of 22, Monet joined the Paris studio of the academic history painter Charles Gleyre where Auguste Renoir[2] was his classmate. After the rejection of most of his works, he joined Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet, Camille Pissarro,

[1] Fátima Muralha, "Impressionism | Discover the 6 Main Characteristics of the Movement That Made a Revolution in Art," *Citaliarestauro* (blog), March 20, 2024, https://en.citaliarestauro.com/impressionism-main-features/.

[2] French artist and leading painter of the Impressionist movement.

Renoir, and others in establishing an independent exhibition in 1874.[3] He exhibited the *Impression, Sunrise* (Figure 1) there, which was the same painting that led to the famous name for the movement as Impressionism. Monet main interest was not to capture the details of the scenes but to capture the light and moment with his brush.

> "*Impression, Sunrise* is a slight sketch, almost certainly completed on the spot in a single sitting, depicting the harbour at Le Havre as the sun rises over the cranes, derricks and masts of the anchored ships. It was actually painted in one sitting by Monet, standing at a window overlooking the harbour at sunrise. The only evidence of life is the lazy action of the oarsman in the most sharply defined part of the composition."[4]



Figure 1 Claude Monet, Impression, Sunrise, 1872, Oil on Canvas, 18.9 in × 24.8 in. accessed May 13th 2024, source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Impression,_Sunrise

He painted several compositions with flowers during his life time. His *Bouquet of Sunflowers* (Figure 2) has the same sketchy feeling of covering the transitory time in a single moment. The Impressionists' use of complementary colors that manages the weight in their compositions is also evident in this still life painting where blue is painted against the orange of sunflowers and green against the yellow. The colors are mixing on the canvas in short strokes and the energy of sun is reflected in the color and brightness of the sunflowers. The strokes are used overall in the composition including the vase, flowers, ornamental atop and the background. The feel of the painting is of fresh and living flowers that will be changed with the passage of time.

[3] Laura Auricchio, "Claude Monet (1840–1926)," The Met's Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, January 1, 1AD, https://metmuseum.org/toah/hd/cmon/hd_cmon.htm.

[4] "Impression Sunrise, Claude Monet: Analysis," n.d., http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/paintings-analysis/impression-sunrise.htm#:~:text=Impression%2C%20Sunrise%20is%20a%20slight,overlooking%20the%20harbour%20at%20sunrise.



Figure 2 Claude Monet, Bouquet of Sunflowers, 1881, Oil on Canvas, 39 3/4 x 32 in. accessed June 7th 2024, Source: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/437112

Naela Amir (b.1966)

Amir, contemporary Pakistani painter, employs loose brush strokes akin to those of the Impressionists. She adeptly captures the ephemeral interplay of changing light and color, reminiscent of the Impressionist principles. By skillfully incorporating these elements into her work, Amir not only pays homage to Impressionism but also offers a sublime perspective on the beauty of her surroundings. Her floral paintings, landscapes, and depictions of everyday scenes featuring trees like *Amaltas* exhibit a captivating vibrancy that draws the viewer's attention.

Amir completed her Masters in 1989 and started teaching in 1996. She completed her PhD in 2018 and wrote several research articles covering the themes related to history of arts, Pakistani artist and other contemporary related studies. She is fond of painting nature. Her passion towards paintings is well seen in her landscapes and floral paintings.

Most of the flowers in her paintings are brought from a family farmhouse at *Barki*. "We got absolutely fresh flowers from there on weekends. I have great affiliation with them as they are beautiful and they belong to us."[5]

She portrays both fresh and dried flowers, as well as trees and flowers amidst varied backgrounds, occasionally incorporating incidental elements. Impressionists also painted their surroundings depicting scenes infused with the gradations of changing light and contemporary life. Notably, she employs contrasting colors, both in shadows and throughout her compositions, imbuing her works with dynamic vitality reminiscent of the Impressionist style. "In nature, there are complex things also with the beautiful things and that contrast attracts me, for example, there are thorns and dry stems with flowers. I also painted black crows with *Yellow Amaltas* as a contrast. This contrast is sometimes revealed in the paintings and sometimes it's hidden." [6]

The traditional style of Edgar Degas[7] (Figure 3) and Camille Pissarro[8] (Figure 4) are evident in the works of Amir, including, most particularly the capturing of light and letting the eye do the mixing rather than soothing the

[5] Interview with Amir in her office, UCAD, March 6th, 2024

[6] Ibid.

[7] French Impressionist artist

[8] Danish-French Impressionist and Neo-Impressionist artist

colors beforehand. "In my works, brush strokes are looser than the academic style but not as loose as Manet who use loose brush strokes in small paintings. But the similarity would be in capturing the light."[9]



Figure 3 Edgar Degas, A Woman Seated beside a Vase of Flowers, 1865, Oil on Canvas, 29 x 36 1/2 in. accessed June 8th 2024, Source: https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436121



Figure 4 Camille Pissarro, Bouquet of Flowers, 1873, Oil on Canvas, approx. 23 x 18 in. accessed June 8th 2024. Source: https://www.wikiart.org/en/camille-pissarro/bouquet-of-flowers-1873

[9] Interview with Amir in her office, UCAD, March 6th, 2024

The textures in her paintings are created with brush strokes and the ephemeral moment and light are captured with rapid strokes while portraying the true essence of admiration painted with a unique approach close to her heart.

With the yellow and white daisies, *Sunbeam Mayhem* (Figure 5), Amir welcomes the spring and its blossoming. The flowers are arranged randomly yet in a systematic way. Like other paintings by the artist, the sketchy feeling is dominant and the contrasting colors are obvious. "I really don't have a formula, it's more about observation."[10] The dark background allows the flowers to look more vibrant and glowing. The vase plays the role of a supporting element in the painting and the rapid brushstrokes remind us of the works of Impressionists. The light and color of the objects and their surroundings with the atmospheric effects is captured on canvas through strokes. Her understanding of light and its changing ability with time has moved her to capture the moment on canvas. "For me, the flowers are the symbol of nature and beauty. These are very transient. They have little life and I also painted the dried flowers to capture the essence of the time and moment."[11]



Figure 5 Naela Amir, Sunbeam Mayhem, Oil on Canvas, 24"x30", 2001. Source: https://www.instagram.com/naelaaamir/, accessed May 2nd, 2024

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

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Amir has painted the locally available flowers in her paintings. The strokes, light, moment, atmospheric quality, contrasting colors, elements, composition and the painting of fresh and dried flowers are the main components of her works and allows the viewer to find the essence of Impressionistic qualities from many angles.



Figure 6 Naela Amir, The Treasure Chest, Oil on Canvas, 24"x24", 2022. Source: Image provided by the artist on May12th, 2024.

In a still life with vase and flowers along with a wooden box, *The Treasure Chest* (Figure 6), Amir has painted fresh Chrysanthemums, Dahlias and a twig of Larkspur which, again, represents the celebration of spring. The Impressionistic style is evident in the petals and foreground. The contrasting shadow adds weight to the painting. The hazy effect of flowers, blurry corners and no outline state the glimpse of impressionistic techniques in her painting. The wooden box symbolizes some hidden treasure and the flowers represent the jewels of the soil speaking of the artist's affiliation with both of the objects. "It's the old wooden chest which is part of my family. It holds old family photographs now. For me flowers are nature at its glorious manifestation, where ever placed, the vase of flowers becomes the focal point for me- and hence its relationship with the still life objects in my home."[12]

Similarly, in *Hangover* (Figure 7), Amir painted the dried sunflowers with roses. When flowers are drying, they are sometimes just thrown out or put aside collectively with other flowers. Amir gives it the title of Hangover and enjoys the beauty of the scene along with the importance of its aesthetic presence. The symbolic title suggests the condition of people after the party or something overdone and similarly the flowers, after the event, are dried and scattered on the floor suggesting the hangover. Sunflowers have been a subject for many Impressionist and Post-Impressionist artists. Monet (Figure 8) and Van Gogh have also painted the sunflowers in their own stylistic manner.

[12] Interview with Naela Amir, May 12th 2024



Figure 7 Naela Amir, Hangover, Oil on Canvas, 12"x18", c.a. 2000. Source: https://www.instagram.com/naelaaamir/, accessed May 2nd, 2024.



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Figure 8 Claude Monet, Sunflowers, 1881. Source: https://www.claude-monet.com/sunflowers.jsp#google_vignette.

The light and moment are captured in both paintings (Fig. 7 & 8), one showing drying flowers by Amir and the other showing fresh flowers by Monet.

Durre Waseem (b. 1964):

Durre Waseem has completed her Masters in Fine Arts from University of the Punjab[13] and did another Masters in Humanities from Cal State. In 2001, she was moved to United States and practiced her passion in form of painting. She has participated in many National and International exhibitions and received awards including 2nd Place Award in LPAPA's 14th Annual "Best of Plein Air", juried art show in 2018.[14] Waseem and her two sisters, Hamama tul Bushra and Nausheen Saeed, are all painters. While asked about them, she said: "Yes they are- We used to spend time drawing or in other creativity which was very common activity even in our extended family."[15] Their painting styles are different and their passions are revealed in different forms. Waseem's work has the glimpses of Impressionistic approach, evident in form of capturing the light and moment.

In her choice of subject, she is not only painting one thing but enjoys and paints the surroundings of it, too. "I like painting my surroundings. I'm drawn towards painting more complex scenes with figures-But it's always the last minute inspiration that is unplanned and spontaneous."[16]

Impressionists painted on the spot and captured the essence of the scene in their works. Waseem has also painted several on spot scenes including the coast scenes which again remind us of the works of Impressionists.

> "Now a full-time painter, Waseem has been enjoying the challenge of portraying the western coastline. 'The more I paint it, the more I enjoy it,' she says. 'I love painting people anywhere, so that helps me with the beach scenes'."[17](Southwest Art, 2018).

Sunflowers for Peace (Figure 9) is painted on location.

> "It was painted as a part of the plein air event in Washington state. I do participate in contests quite regularly- Sometimes I'm juried into them and other times I was invited. Although we artist are competing but pleasantly, none of the artist are competitive. I always enjoy the comradery of painting with other competing artists."[18]

Waseem painted these sunflowers to support the people of Ukraine. It is the National flower of Ukraine and also symbolizes the gratitude, loyalty and devotion in different cultures.[19]

> "Ukrainians view the vibrant flower as a symbol of peace and resilience. After the Chernobyl nuclear power plant disaster in 1986, Ukrainians planted sunflowers in the devastated area. The flowers not only represented

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[13] Nadeem Alam, "Portfolio: A Landscape of My Own," DAWN.COM, March 13, 2016, https://www.dawn.com/news/1244805.

[14] "Saluting Women Artists of Pakistan - News | Khaleej Times," Khaleej Times, March 22, 2020, https://www.khaleejtimes.com/article/saluting-women-artists-of-pakistan.

[15] Interview with Waseem, May 2nd 2024

[16] Ibid.

[17] Southwest Art, "Emerging Artists | Durre Waseem - Southwest Art Magazine," Southwest Art Magazine, December 14, 2018, https://www.southwestart.com/articles-interviews/emerging-artists/emerging-artists-durre-waseem.

[18] Interview with Waseem, May 2nd 2024

[19] Alex London, "The Secret Life of Flowers: What Does a Sunflower Symbolize," Flower Gifting Ideas by RussianFlora.com, July 30, 2023, https://blog.russianflora.com/flower-sending-suggestions/what-does-a-sunflower-symbolize/.

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renewal and hope, but they helped extract toxins from the soil. A decade later, Ukrainians planted a field of sunflowers to celebrate the dismantlement of a nuclear missile base in Pervomaysk, Ukraine."[20] (Drevets, 2023)

Besides being used as symbols, the sunflowers are painted with the Impressionistic qualities and represent the feelings which are depicted through the strokes. Sunflowers are heliotropic and move in the direction of the sun which is a source of warmth, essential for life. It symbolizes positive energy and liked by many artist for its color, softness, beauty and symbolic meaning.



Figure 9 Durre Waseem, Sunflowers for Peace, Oil on Canvas, 16"x12", 2023. Source: https://www.instagram.com/waseemdurre/?hl=en, accessed May 1st, 2024.

Waseem[21] has painted it with the same sketchy feeling which reminds us of the Impressionists' work. The blooming flowers and the light are captured with free style brush strokes and there is no outline of any object present in the painting. Just like her other works, it is painted on spot and captured well before the flowers are dried. Waseem said "Now I paint the moment….It's all your experience and your time in this situation". The impressions are all used to capture the dark and light and the source of light is visible enough from the frontal left of the painting.

In *The Yellow Trial* (Figure 10), Waseem painted a scene with a mountain range, trees and flowers. The blooming flowers in the foreground are painted in impressions and the light, air and time are all present in the capturing of moment. The painting is so close to the happening moment that it seems that the effect will transform in some time with the change of light and with a little gust of wind. Like her other works, there is no outline and the real scene is painted with impressions. The eye move from one objevct to the other and the flow of colors moved from one place to the other in a fluent way. "I consider my painting as a dance floor though I don't know how to dance"[22] The work also reminds us of the series of oil paintings by French artist Paul Cézanne of the French mountain Montagne Sainte-Victoire.

"Cézanne generally tried to convey the eternal, interior structure of the scene before him, more than the ephemeral surface features. While the Impressionists tried to depict nature directly as they saw it, Cézanne generally tried to convey a sense of what was beneath what the naked eye could see, though he still had a sharp eye for subtle changes in light and atmosphere. Cézanne tried to evoke emotions through his works and "find

[20] Tricia Drevets, "The Cultural Significance and Symbolism of Ukrainian Flowers," 1800 *Flowers Petal Talk* (blog), March 21, 2023, https://www.1800flowers.com/blog/flower-facts/flowers-of-ukraine-symbolism/#:~:text=Sunflowers%20are%20prominently%20displayed%20in,sunflowers%20in%20the%20devastated%20area.

[21] Discussion during the Artist's Talk at the Studio E.A.R.T.H. on 20th November 2026.

[22] Ibid

order in his sensations. The whole series embodies Cézanne's struggle to mold nature into art through geometric forms and effects of color."[23] (Mont Sainte-Victoire [Cézanne]," 2024).

He was a Post-Impressionist and his work led to the Cubism and was being a source of inspiration for Pablo Picasso. Though the composition of Waseem (Figure 10) reminds us of the series of Cezanne (Figure 11), it has the qualities of the Impressionism, more evident in her works till now.



Figure 10 Durre Waseem, The Yellow Trial, Oil on canvas, 16"x20", 2023. Source: https://www.instagram.com/waseemdurre/?hl=en, accessed 25th April 2024

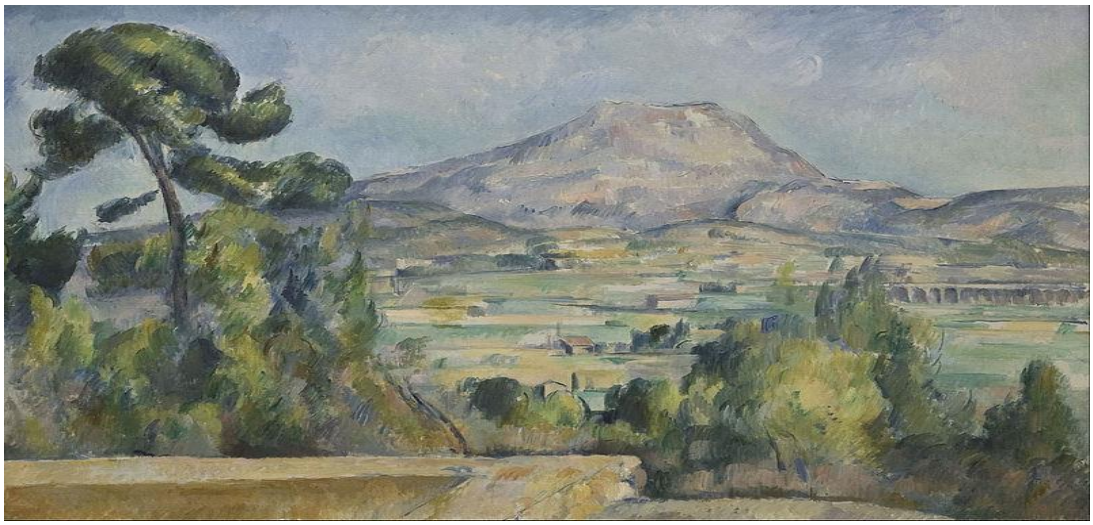

Figure 11 Paul Cezanne , Mont Sainte-Victoire, , Oil on canvas, 1904-1906. Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mont_Sainte-Victoire_%28C%C3%A9zanne%29

[23] Wikipedia contributors, "Mont Sainte-Victoire (Cézanne)," Wikipedia, February 7, 2024, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mont_Sainte-Victoire_%28C%C3%A9zanne%29.

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Conclusion

In exploring the depiction of flowers in the art of Amir and Waseem, this research delves into the profound influence of Impressionist techniques, particularly those related to their ephemeral beauty and emotional resonance. By examining the art works in detail, this study uncovers the artistic synthesis that seamlessly blends Impressionism with the understanding of cultural sensibilities and artists' personal interpretations.

Impressionism is renowned for its focus on fleeting moment infused with emotions, thus their floral paintings are beyond mere representations. With vibrant colors, loose brush strokes, emphasis on light and keen interest in the portrayal of the scenes around them, Impressionists present their intuitive understanding of flowers with a tribute to the beauty of their surroundings.

These artists are not only capturing the beauty of the flowers and landscapes but also record the history of times through their art works. The works have cultural significance in terms of preserving the record of times, weather, atmosphere, landscape and the availability of the flowers and plants in surroundings. The interpretation of the artist including their affiliation with flowers and plants and their understanding and admiration of them made this study more deep and interesting to work on. It also opens new ways for the researchers to search more about impressionistic techniques in the works of other artists of Pakistan.

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