

**SOCIAL COMMENTARY INFLUENCE IN  
PRINTMAKING ARTWORKS UNDER BARJEEL  
ART FOUNDATION**

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by

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BAF	Barjeel Art Foundation
CHAASR	Canadian Hub for Applied and Social Research
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UAE	United Arab Emirates

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# **PENGARUH KOMENTARI SOSIAL DALAM KARYA SENI CETAKAN DI BAWAH YAYASAN SENI BARJEEL**

## **ABSTRAK**

Komentari sosial memainkan peranan penting dalam bidang seni. Dalam masyarakat Barat, hal ini telah menjadi kelaziman sejak sekian lama, dengan komentari sosial mempunyai kaitan yang kuat dengan seni cetakan. Pergerakan seni telah memainkan peranan penting dalam membentuk gagasan sosial yang lebih luas dan telah diterima secara meluas sebagai alat komunikasi. Walau bagaimanapun, dalam masyarakat Arab, seni komentari sosial belum begitu diiktiraf atau dikaji secara meluas. Walaupun terdapat karya seni di negara-negara Arab yang membawa mesej yang kuat, namun masih terdapat kekurangan dalam penelitian yang komprehensif dan pendedahan karya seni ini kepada orang ramai. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk meneroka pengaruh ulasan sosial dalam karya seni cetakan Arab, dengan tumpuan khusus pada koleksi Yayasan Seni Barjeel. Pendekatan kaedah penyelidikan digunakan dalam kajian ini, dengan menggunakan reka bentuk selari bertumpu untuk mengumpul dan menganalisis data kuantitatif dan kualitatif secara serentak. Kajian ini bermula dengan mengkategorikan karya seni cetakan di bawah Yayasan Seni Barjeel melalui analisa tema manuskrip berkaitan yang berkaitan dengan artis dan karya seni mereka. Tema awal kemudiannya diwujudkan dan diuji. Dalam fasa kedua, soal selidik diberikan kepada sembilan pakar Arab dalam seni, dengan tujuan mendapatkan penilaian mereka terhadap karya seni dan mengenal pasti pendekatan tema yang paling kerap digunakan dalam karya seni cetakan Arab di bawah Yayasan Seni Barjeel. Dapatan kajian, berdasarkan analisa tema dalam bidang komentari sosial, mendedahkan bahawa sebahagian besar karya seni (bermula dari 1961 hingga 2013)

meneroka tema politik, sosial dan budaya. Tambahan pula, melalui penelitian bahawa karya seni dari awal abad ke-21 kebanyakannya tertumpu pada tema politik, dengan lebih 70% persetujuan di kalangan pakar. Fasa ketiga melibatkan penerbitan soal selidik dan perbincangan kumpulan fokus untuk menilai tahap penerimaan dan pemahaman seni ulasan sosial di kalangan orang ramai. Akhir sekali, dalam fasa keempat, kajian mencadangkan garis panduan untuk kurator dan seniman untuk mengkategorikan karya seni berdasarkan tema berbeza yang berkaitan dengan ulasan sosial. Sumbangan ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kualiti pameran seni dan menyediakan rangka kerja untuk rujukan masa hadapan. Kepentingan penyelidikan ini terletak pada penyusunan koleksi komprehensif karya seni cetak ulasan sosial Arab, memperkaya dan memupuk kualiti karya seni cetakan tersebut, dan menawarkan pandangan tentang pengaruh ulasan sosial sebagai pendekatan dalam karya seminan Arab. Ia meluaskan perspektif pembaca tentang karya seni oleh seniman Arab yang menyatakan pandangan mereka tentang pelbagai isu melalui lensa seni ulasan sosial dalam seni cetak. Komentari sosial memainkan peranan penting dalam mendidik orang ramai dengan meningkatkan kesedaran, mencabar andaian, menggalakkan empati, memudahkan wacana, mencabar struktur kuasa, dan tindakan yang memberi inspirasi. Ia menggalakkan individu menjadi pemikir kritis, peserta aktif dalam masyarakat, dan menyokong perubahan positif.

# **SOCIAL COMMENTARY INFLUENCE IN PRINTMAKING ARTWORKS UNDER BARJEEL ART FOUNDATION**

## **ABSTRACT**

Social commentary plays a crucial role in the field of art. In Western societies, this has been prevalent for a long time, with social commentary having a strong connection to printmaking. However, in Arab societies, social commentary art has not been as widely recognized or studied. Although there are artworks in Arab countries that carry powerful messages, it is unclear how social commentaries relate to Arab printmaking as kind of art. This study aims to explore social commentary influence in Arab printmaking artworks, with a specific focus on the collection of Barjeel Art Foundation. A convergent parallel design method to collect and analyze both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. The study begins by categorizing printmaking artworks under Barjeel Art Foundation through thematic analysis of relevant manuscripts related to the artists and their artworks. Initial themes are then established and tested. In the second phase, a questionnaire is administered to Arab art experts, seeking their judgments on the artworks. The third phase involves conducting questionnaires and focus group discussions to gauge the level of acceptance and understanding of social commentary art among the public. The significance of this research lies in compiling a comprehensive collection of Arab social commentary printmaking artworks, and offering insights into the influence of social commentary as an approach in Arab artists' works. It broadens readers' perspectives on artworks by Arab artists who express their views on various issues through the lens of social commentary art in printmaking.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents and discusses the importance of art in people's lives, in general, and in society, in particular. The chapter also presents the background of this study and the problem statement, the research questions, and the objectives of the present study. The chapter provides an overview of social commentary art in Arab countries and the significance of the study. Moreover, the scope and limitations, as well as the definitions of key terms are provided in this chapter. The chapter ends with the thesis structure.

### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Have you ever imagined what life might be like without art? Art is an essential component, and art can be found in our daily practices and activities because it is the tool that we need to express our feelings and implement our ideas. Art reflects the people's lifestyles and civilizations throughout consecutive ages and centuries. Moreover, by using art, we can build bridges between nations and mix and melt different cultures into one melting pot to create an international language called "art". Art has a relationship with history and civilization, with identity and reality, with existence and society in all its apparent and complex details. According to Almusaly (2017), artists, who merge their souls to "characterize themselves", frequently consider their lives as a mirror of a broader picture they usually paint.

Artworks have increasingly contributed to recording what happened in the past with some details, in order to help us in remembering and recalling real-time feelings and emotions, such as happiness, despair, and joy. The Saudi artist Safeya Binzagr, for example, is one of the pioneers of female visual arts, who has documented most of the Saudi traditions and their daily life activities, especially in her hometown through her artistic gift. By doing so, she preserved old, rich memories to be remembered. Also, she is a well-known artist, who adopts a more traditional and cultural form of paintings, directly confronting social issues regarding historical culture through her artwork (Al-Senan, 2015).



Figure 1.1 Safeya Binzagr, Al Midwan-1985-oil on canvas 61×91cm  
Source: Darat Safeya Binzagr Gallery (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://daratsb.com/>.

Artists create a truthful mirror of society through their artworks, including “graphics, realistic or abstract drawings”, and paintings, as well as sculptures, in which they express their views and perceptions on specific topics and relate them in their exhibits (Onoja, 2016).

Arts touch humanity, which is essentially transformed into virtual reality. This, in turn, simulates human issues in the experiences of artists, who lived facts and political events and wars or even worked in societies that have practiced dictatorship, as demonstrated in one of the most well-known artworks of social commentary in history, which is Guernica. It exhibits Picasso’s comment on what art can truthfully contribute to the self-assertion that liberates and protects every human being from forces, such as political crimes, wars, and deaths. Guernica’s power directs the world’s attention towards the inhumanity and dangers of fascism and illustrates the suffering of both people and animals wrenched by violence and chaos. According to Robert Hughes, an Australian critic, Guernica is the final great history painting and the last great modern artwork that is regarded as a political painting to influence the attitudes of people around the globe (Alobaidi, 2017; Saul, 2018; Weisberg, 2004).



Figure 1.2 Pablo Picasso, Guernica, Oil on Canvas, 1937, 138"x308"  
Source:(*Guernica, 1937 by Pablo Picasso*, 2009).

Art has a significant impact on our everyday lives, and its recognition of the significance of social commentary has been well established. Artists have been able to identify important social problems and communicate them to the public through their creative works. As a result, art serves a social purpose by influencing and informing people. When people observe artworks, they can be profoundly affected, as these pieces can convey messages and alter individuals' perspectives on various matters. Artists have the ability to expose the truth behind specific issues and educate the broader population about the prevailing social conditions in society. Moreover, art has the power to transform people's thinking and challenge firmly held beliefs (Chinoy, 2017).

People usually write diaries of their daily actions; however, other people would keep their special events by drawing a painting. Many artists used art to communicate their feelings and sentiments in response to a horrific deed. Artists were extremely cautious in their search for the war's actors, separating real victims from their offenders. By collaborating with governments and various organizations, or political leaders, artists can help highlight a misfortune in society and raise adequate awareness about it (Almusaly, 2017). The artwork that artist produce when nobody can direct him/her exactly to the way he/she do it. Art mainly involves shouldering the responsibility and “challenging the status quo” to change people around you (Godin, 2010). Artists are, therefore, responsible actors in conveying and communicating invaluable messages through artwork.

Drawing was once a means of communication, and people would sketch on the walls of old caves since they lacked an appropriate language (Yaacob, 2015). As an example of the first cave paintings, these were found in Spain in Altamira, which were created around 16,000 BC. Most of the discovered paintings were animals and a few

paintings only displayed human figures. During prehistoric eras, humans could not use writing as a means of communication. They communicated visually through paintings in the caves; that was one of the major reasons why they painted and decorated their caves to help hunters and document their hunting activities (Staff, 2007).



Figure 1.3 Paleolithic Cave Painting

Source: Griggs, M. B. (2014, February 27). *For the first time in twelve years, Spain's Prehistoric Cave Paintings are now open to the general public*. Retrieved from <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/prehistoric-cave-paintings-open-again-just-today-180949922/>

Besides, many of Mexico's 19th-century printmakers were part of a group of radical dissidents. Rather than verbally criticizing the government's political actions, they gave visual images of corrupt leaders, who lost interest in the nation's well-being (Clark, 1997; Pickett, 2009). During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), the printmaker Jose Posada (1852-1913) was one of the most important illustrators, who used his art as a weapon against government injustice and public apathy (Pickett, 2009).





Figure 1.4 Jose Posada, Gran calavera eléctrica (Grand electric calavera), relief etching; 21.4 x 34 cm

Source: Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, P. & Posada, J. G. (1907) from <https://www.loc.gov/item/99615924/>.

Posada's prints have become an inspiration for contemporary printmaking and modern art all over the world because of their distinct theme. Posada's impact on future artists stems from his outspoken criticism of governmental corruption and social repression (Pickett, 2009).

Globally, there are so many artists and art movements that were part of bigger social ideas and helped form them. Artworks, which were specially produced at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one emphasized that many artists were directly involved with social, environmental, and political issues. Artwork, for example, can be employed in political tensions for propaganda with the aim of serving one political party in the government over another group. According to Belfiore and Bennett (2008), art has a long history as propaganda. These artists revealed the potential of art to catalog the cultural and historical struggle inherent in the human condition (Almusaly, 2017). An artist's completed artwork represents his thoughts and feelings about a particular phenomenon, including political, social, and cultural

experiences. We can call artists key mediators of social issues, reflectors, or even translators.

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, this study aims to provide valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the artists' artworks, who have used printmaking as a medium of communication to create influential social commentary artwork. This study focuses on the contemporary, rather than classical printmaking artworks, created by Arab artists, which particularly focus on Arab society, cultural customs, social lifestyle, and issues that Arab artists' concern as well as general public. In a historical context, printmaking has had very specific purposes. Gradually, printing and printmaking played an important role in a social sense at various points in history. Accordingly, this study aims to provide examples of artworks by Arab artists, which have effectively utilized printing as a medium of expression. The study primarily focuses on describing and analyzing social commentary artworks under Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

### **1.3 Overview of Social Commentary Art in Arab Countries**

The potential of the artwork to convey effective communication between different communities, cultures, and individuals makes it a useful complementary tool for conflict conciliation (Almusaly, 2017).

Artists' attitudes and perspectives in society are very important. Although these artists are not the ones, who initiate such an awakening, they are an outward manifestation of it and, therefore, they may contribute to societal change by expressing their profound views, thoughts, and desires by using art. To achieve peace, "we need to dream of it" in the first place and one of the effective ways of "realizing our dream is art"(Afshar & Terwiel, 2019).

In the context of the Arabian Peninsula and thousands of years ago, there were rock paintings, which were considered the earliest human artworks. These paintings about animals and humans were very important because they provided symbolic meanings linked to the beliefs of the time (Al-Senan, 2015).

In the Arab world, where most individuals are not used to visiting museums and galleries, there is no kind of connection exists between artists and the public(Hassan et al., 2008). Arab countries were isolated culturally, while modernity developed in Europe and North America, and in the early times, education was unavailable to a huge number of people and was very limited among other sections of high-class people who live in cities, and gradually the meaning of arts began to be realized among people (Al-Senan, 2015). For example, in Saudi Arabia, despite the fact that these beginnings were disconnected, they motivated artists to practice more and participate in exhibitions held throughout the country (Al-Senan, 2015). For these artists, a demonstration or protest against their government is often hazardous and intimidating, but the artists' freedom in their visual art, can be an advantage for them to produce artworks without restrictions. In the Middle East, where free criticism of both government and cultural standards can be deemed as heresy, the “fusion of art and socio-political commentary” usually thrives (Khadraoui, 2017).

Arab artists used to address issues associated with their concerns and problems and related to neighboring Arab states as well. Arab Artists displayed their feelings, situations, or issues in the context of social commentary art. For instance, Ahmad Zuhair is a Saudi artist, who used his brush and colors to express his sadness toward the passing of the late King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz. “This is how I was able to mourn; I drew from the heart” (Radwan, 2015). That mural has provided proof as an example of visual communication, which has existed then by some Arab artists.



Figure 1.5 Zuhair Art

Source: Radwan, R. (2015, February 4). *The mural that stole the nation's hearts*. Retrieved from <https://www.arabnews.com/art-culture/news/699131>.

Another artist, Ahmad Mater from Saudi Arabia, his works directly confronted several issues and criticized the government within his safe zone. Mater's artworks confronted the human rights issues, wealth disparity, corruption, and unfair distribution of wealth. He is a Saudi youth, who adopted a more contemporary form of artwork. Mater's artworks also tackled serious issues regarding the expansion of development (Khadraoui, 2017). The words from a classic Gene Autry song, detailing the cowboy's attributes and morals, are used in a very large, wall-based installation.



Figure 1.6 Ahmed Mater, The Cowboy Code. 2011, 3000 plastic cap gun discs, 312 x 600 cm

Source: Ahmed Mater: Cowboy Code. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.ahmedmater.com/cowboy-code>.

Two street artists, JR and Marco, stage the largest exhibition of illegal photography worldwide back in 2007 as part of the “Face 2 Face” campaign. Portraits of Palestinians and Israelis; were posted face-to-face in big formats on the streets of several cities in Palestine and Israel by the artists. While looking at a succession of laughing persons separated only by their religious and domestic backgrounds, but unified in humanity, this unique endeavor provided unavoidable identification and humor in two contrasting areas (Kosel, 2018).



Figure 1.7 28 Millimeters, Face2Face-Separation Wall, Palestinian Side in Bethlehem, March 2007

Source: Face 2 Face. (1970, January 1). Retrieved from <https://www.jr-art.net/projects/face-2-face>.

Therefore, a key aspect might be explained here, i.e., what makes art an appropriate tool for social commentary is its ability to transform and communicate messages across different individuals, cultures, and communities. A number of authors referred to art as a great communication tool because of its potential to transcend all kinds of barriers across distinct nations. Regarding the artist's creative process, it often encompasses certain influences at different levels, including social, ideological, and political impacts. This connects with artists and distinguishes them as social beings, who can reflect on social conditions (Almusaly, 2017; Hawes, 2007).

social commentary plays a vital role in education by raising awareness, challenging assumptions, promoting empathy, facilitating discourse, challenging power structures, and inspiring action. It encourages critical thinking, active engagement, and the pursuit of positive societal transformations. Consequently, there is a dire need for familiarizing societies with Arab art (Lutfi, 2019), and providing a

deeper understanding of how social commentary upholds Arab arts and a broader space to introduce this foundation. Within their space, artists can, therefore, share unique experiences of events by using artworks and developing social commentary contributions within Arab societies.

#### **1.4 Arab Art Foundations**

In the 1990s, new and mainly private initiatives were undertaken to create art centers to promote communication and develop an exchange of views and attitudes between Arab artists and their audiences. In several Arab countries, museums, art collections, and art galleries have been established; however, people do not have adequate knowledge and they are not interested in the development of arts because they do not appreciate art and/or artworks (Lutfi, 2019; Zuhur, 1998). Nonetheless, many art galleries and museums are growing increasingly popular. An art venue like the Khalid Shoman Collection (Lit., Darat Al Funun), is the first collection, among others, of contemporary Arab artworks, which was founded in the 1980s. Rooksana Omar, the CEO of Iziko, highlights the significance of printmaking as an aspect of visual art that is often misunderstood. Through exhibitions like the one at Iziko, print artists are provided with a platform to express their views and connect with a wider audience. This gives visitors the chance to engage with and contemplate the artwork, as well as share their experiences with others. By offering these spaces for social commentary and cohesion, Iziko is contributing to the cultural enrichment and development of the community (Kleinsmith, 2014).

##### **1.4.1 Barjeel Art Foundation**

Barjeel Art Foundation (BAF) was established in 2010 in the United Arab Emirates by Emirati Sultan Sooud Al Qassemi to maintain and display his own art collection. Nowadays, Barjeel is one of the most popular art foundations in the Arab region. This foundation exhibits modern and contemporary Arab art, including private collections to foster open-ended debate and research into quite a long Arab history and current issues that affect Arabs beyond the boundaries of civilizations (Lutfi, 2019). It is a non-profit organization situated in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which shoulders the responsibility of managing, preserving, and exhibiting a large collection of modern Arab art. Barjeel aspires to a variety of goals, the most important of which is to contribute to the intellectual development of the Arab art scene by creating leading, widely accessible art collections in the region Table 1.1. Barjeel also aims to develop a distinctively shared platform to encourage critical discussion about modern art practices, emphasizing the role of Arab artists with Arabian heritage worldwide. Furthermore, this Arabian art foundation strives to generate an open-ended query, which responds to and expresses several nuances that are inherent in the Arab history beyond cultural and geographical boundaries. This foundation aims to create an enlightening database for Arab artists and provide effective informative resources for modern Arab art locally and globally. In the future, Barjeel looks forward to creating ample opportunities to nurture wider public awareness of the value of art/artworks by Arab audiences (*Barjeel Art Foundation*, 2010).

In 2023, as reported by Smithsonian Magazine, the Barjeel Art Foundation has gained recognition for its contributions to humanity and its commitment to serving the local community. However, their impact extends far beyond their immediate vicinity as they utilize art to benefit humanity at a global scale. Up-and-coming artists regard the foundation as exemplary figures in the art industry due to their notable



accomplishments and dedication. The foundation actively engages in social causes and is well-documented in print media, making it feasible to study their origins and historical significance.

Barjeel currently has a collection of social commentary Arab artists' artworks. In the context of this study, Arab artworks are used in relation to an emphasis on social commentary art in the Arab world and to what extent social commentary influences the artists in making their artworks. The study also aims to investigate how Arab artists' conveyance of key messages is performed through their artworks, which represent important social issues in the form of printmaking. The study, therefore, aims to analyze the selected Arab artworks to unveil whether their art reveals the hidden thoughts and comments of the artists by using the art of printmaking. More importantly, this study aims to provide valuable insights and a deeper understanding of the artists' artworks, who have used printmaking as a medium of effective communication to produce influential social commentary artwork.

Table 1.1 Artists Nationalities

<b>Artists Nationalities</b>			
1	Bahrain	7	Palestine
2	Iraq	8	Jordan
3	Saudi	9	Lebanon
4	Syria	10	UAE
5	Kuwait	11	Egypt
6	Sudan	12	Yemen

Source: Barjeel Art Foundation (2023)

## **1.5 Problem Statement**

In the world of art today, social commentary is a popular approach. This method of expression surfaced in Western countries a long time ago, and social commentary has a long, historical relationship with printmaking. According to Kumail Almusaly (2017), the potential of art in the Arab arena to convey influential messages across diverse cultures, societies, and individuals makes it an effective complementary instrument for social criticism.

For quite a long time, some people believed that art is only for hanging pictures on walls, watching them, and decorating their places with artworks; however, art could speak louder than words. For ages now, art has been primarily employed to transmit vital cultural themes, starting from the first paintings in caves, which stated, “We are here!” by using wartime publicity that encouraged support for wars (Furniss, 2018).

According to Almusaly (2017), specialty appeals to artists because of their knowledge of social concerns, wishes, and desires, which are not necessarily associated with the artist’s work, but rather because of his/her ability to apply artistic skills in servicing themes and issues. This indicates that art can be used as a powerful and persuasive tool, one of the primary reasons for doing art is to communicate with the public and convey messages about certain issues to draw attention to important events in society.

Therefore, art can be employed as an alternative method of the various media means and conveys critical messages with the expectation to change peoples’ attitudes and points of view toward a particular social issue (Yaacob et al., 2013b). However, the idea of using art has not been effectively substantiated among Arab people in Arab countries, whereby artists do not use their artworks as an influential tool of

communication just like the case in the Western context. Moreover, art has long been endorsed as an effective communication tool regarding the huge, concerted efforts of the artists and people worldwide. On the contrary, research has shown that not many studies were conducted to acknowledge artists' efforts and the impact of their artworks in the Arab region (Almusaly, 2017). Consequently, there is a lack of documentation and academic resources about Arab social commentary artwork. Furthermore, there is a dire need for a better understanding of how social commentary upholds Arab arts, and how Arab artists use the social commentary language to convey powerful messages through their valuable artworks.

The statement of the problem in this study has, therefore, been substantiated by the fact that it is unclear how social commentaries relate to Arab printmaking as a kind of art. Also, there are countless printmaking artworks in the context of social commentary, which carries powerful messages, but they have not been documented, classified, or exposed to the Arab public so far.

## **1.6 Research Aims**

After reviewing the available literature related to this study, and since the social commentary art has not been thoroughly studied and analyzed, there is a new motivation for conducting this study, which aims to understand social commentary art through printmaking and how social commentary expresses the attitudes of people and reflects artists' understanding of social and/or political subjects in the Arab context. Therefore, this study will highlight the relationship between printmaking and social commentary, in addition to the effective role that it plays in addressing key issues in society. Based on the above-mentioned problem, which is the absence of documentation and classification of many Arab artworks, this study aims to establish

a richer, more nuanced historical account of the emergence and development of socially engaged Arab printmaking and reflect the public understanding. Finally, to redress what is currently a fragmented and incomplete image, this study aims to integrate relevant studies, which highlighted many key contributions of unique Arab artists through their printmaking artworks and narrative composed solely of selected social commentary printmaking artworks from Barjeel Art Foundation exclusively exceptional art collection.

### **1.7 Research Objectives**

The main research objectives of this study are demonstrated below as follows:

- i) To identify the social commentary artworks by Arab artists and document the relationship between social commentary art and printmaking at Barjeel Art Foundation.
- ii) To analyze social commentary artworks by conducting a thematic analysis within the scope of Arab artworks' themes, including social, political, and cultural themes.
- iii) To investigate the level of awareness and acceptance of social commentary art among the public.

### **1.8 Research Questions**

Based on the above research objectives, this study mainly aims to address the following research questions:

- i) How is the social commentary influence printmaking artworks by Arab artists? What is the relationship between social commentary and printmaking at Barjeel Art Foundation ?
- ii) How are social commentary artworks thematically analyzed within the scope of Arab artworks' themes, including social, cultural and political themes.
- iii) How is the level of awareness and acceptance of social commentary art among the public.

### **1.9 Significance of the Study**

Today, social commentary is an essential means of expression and criticism in art. In the West, this took place a long time ago, whereby social commentary and printmaking are inseparable. Many studies were conducted about social commentary in the Western context and people are aware of what is social commentary artwork. However, Arab people are not fully aware of this concept in many studies about social commentary and printmaking. In the Arab world, art is rarely critiqued in detail but rather offered to audiences as “general surveys” (Lutfi, 2019).

The essential education and societal awareness help train the population to think more consciously and be more aware of the viewers' appreciation of abstracts, symbols, and pictures found in artworks. Many ways of knowing about other nations and making decisions for positive actions are shaped by learning to find “the moral good” (Goldblatt, 2006). Therefore, this study is a significant research attempt because it aims to extract themes concerning the social commentary that influences the selected Arab artists' artworks. This will expand the perspective of the readers of

works of Arab artists, who have spoken about issues using their means to present and emphasize the role of social commentary art through printmaking.

This study also aims to identify a very important connection between social commentary art and printmaking in the Arab region and find out whether the implemented social commentary art in many Arab countries has been understood, embraced, and accepted similar to Western societies. Being aware of social commentary helps the public avoid being blind consumers of precious artworks; rather they can become habitual analytical thinkers (Fuller, 2011). This, in turn, makes printmaking social commentary more accessible and easier to understand. Therefore, this study aims to promote the appreciation among the Arab public toward social commentary art and achieve more effective local and international distribution of Arab artists' works.

Finally, because of the development, which has been witnessed by Arab countries in different areas, as well as in art, this study aims to introduce Arab social commentary printmaking for future reference by other researchers in the same field and will help researchers in the field of history, anthropology, art, and other academic fields conduct further studies about Arab Arts. More importantly, this study also aims to propose a guideline for curators/galleries to contribute to promoting the level of art exhibitions in the context of social commentary printmaking in the Arab region.

### **1.10 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on printmaking as artistic methods or techniques that involve transferring pictures from a matrix to a different surface like fabric or paper. This study primarily aims to investigate two major artistic mediums of printmaking, including photography and graffiti as a comparative measure because such artistic

mediums cross/penetrate disciplinary boundaries. Photography tends to trigger more vicious responses to social and political ideas and/or concerns and art introduces somewhat special issues and different time frames (Yaacob et al., 2013a). Graffiti refers to the unauthorized act of writing, painting, or drawing on public surfaces, such as walls, with the intention of being seen without official permission. Its purpose is to either remain inconspicuous or convey a specific message to the public. Like other art forms, graffiti serves as a medium for storytelling and self-expression. It grants artists the freedom to express themselves, even if their methods are not widely accepted by society. Consequently, photography and graffiti can be viewed as rhetorical tools employed by artists to provide commentary on social or political issues within a community. This particular study focuses on the realm of social commentary printmaking, specifically created by numerous Arab artists and exhibited at the Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates.

This study only focuses on printmaking artworks, which are exhibited at the Barjeel Art Foundation in UAE, where a large collection of Modern-Contemporary Arab Art is preserved. The scope of the study also includes the printmaking pieces of Arab artists from different Arab countries like Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Algeria, Bahrain, and Lebanon at this art foundation. Moreover, the scope of this study is limited to printmaking artwork as an artistic technique used by Arab artists to enact or encourage change by alerting the broader public about an issue and enticing people's common sense of fair treatment and justice.

### **1.11 Definition of Key Terms**

**Social Commentary Artwork:** Social commentary is the practice of using rhetorical techniques to make observations and critiques about societal matters. Its

purpose is often to raise awareness and inspire change by bringing attention to a particular issue and appealing to people's inherent sense of equity and justice. These issues can encompass a wide range of societal concerns, such as political conflicts, gun violence, bullying, internet privacy, or problems associated with social media. By employing social commentary, artists and commentators seek to provoke thoughtful reflection and promote meaningful dialogue around these pressing topics.

**Arab Public:** People who speak Arabic and who come from the Arabian Peninsula, the Middle East and parts of North Africa. Arab means belonging or relating to Arabs or to their countries or customs.

**Fine Arts:** Visual art whose products are to be admired primarily for their aesthetic, imaginative, or intellectual value and/or content is referred to as creative art.

**Printmaking Artwork:** Printmaking is a creative method wherein images are transferred from a matrix onto various surfaces, commonly fabric or paper. Traditional printmaking techniques encompass woodcut, engraving, etching, and lithography. However, contemporary artists have expanded the range of techniques to include screen-printing. Through printmaking, artists have the opportunity to generate multiple distinct artworks. Typically, the artist utilizes a matrix composed of materials like wood, stone, metal, or other substances to produce an image. This process allows for the creation of multiple reproductions of the artwork, each with its own unique qualities.

**Barjeel Art Foundation:** The Barjeel Art Foundation is a non-profit organization located in the United Arab Emirates, dedicated to the management, preservation, and exhibition of a vast collection of Modern-Contemporary Arab Art. The foundation has several goals it aims to accomplish, one of which is to actively



contribute to the intellectual growth and advancement of the Arab art scene within the Arab region. By fostering the development of artistic discourse and supporting artists, the foundation strives to enrich the cultural landscape and promote a deeper understanding of Arab art.

### 1.12 Research Conceptual Framework as Applicable to the Current Study

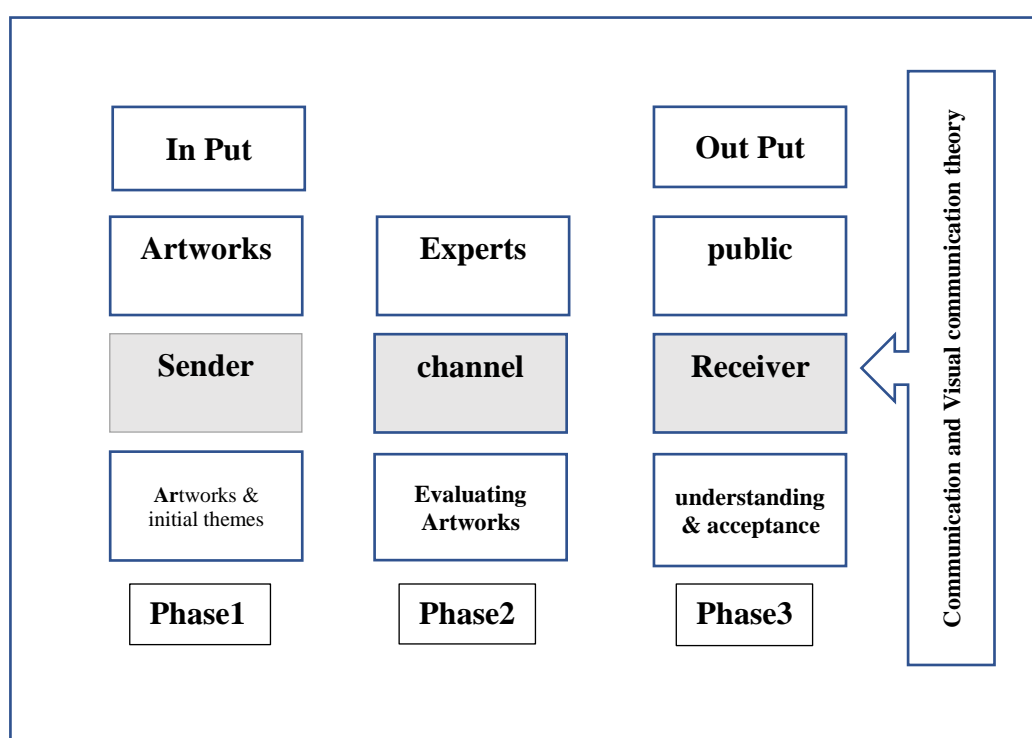


Figure 1.8 Research Conceptual Framework as Applicable to the Current Study

In essence, the present research aims to recognize printmaking pieces that convey social commentary and investigate how people interpret and respond to them. To achieve these primary goals, this study employs communication and visual communication theories, which elucidate the transmission of messages to the receiver and the receiver's perception and interaction with the conveyed messages, respectively.

Table 1.2 Communication and Visual Communication Theory

Communication Theory	Key Characteristics
Lasswell	Characteristics of the sender, audience, medium influence message impact

Shannon/Weaver	Noise distorts message
Schramm	Sender and receiver's "field of experience" impacts how a message is interpreted (encoded or decoded)
"Islamic Communication Model" Hamid Mowlana	Comprehensive puts every communicator aware of the existence of Allah SWT

The present study's theoretical framework employs the three key components of communication emphasized by communication and visual communication models, which include the sender, channel, and receiver. These elements are critical to the communication process, and their significance is highlighted in Chapter 2 of Communication. The framework utilizes these components in a specific manner and context.

#### 1.12.1 Elements of Communication Theory

**Sender:** In the current study, the dispatchers are printmaking artworks that are made by Arab artists and socially meaningful.

**Channel:** Refers to the medium that the sender uses to formulate an individual's message and transmit it through the channel with the object to deliver it to the target audience. The channel in this study is a number of experts in art, and its function is to evaluate a number of artworks categorize them then present them to the public.

**Receiver:** In this study, receiver refers to any person who sees, understands, or at least attempts to understand, interprets, attempts to clarify, responds to, or attempts to respond to artwork created by artists (Alromih, 2022). The recipient in this study is the public.

### **1.13 Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework aids in defining the connection between existential theories and the arts. Theoretical considerations play an important role in social science. The creation of theory is essential to research, and its function must be clarified. Literature is scoured in search of relevant theories, which are then selected. This helps to clarify why so many experts consider the two to be intertwined. By reading scholarly works, researchers may learn more about the prevailing paradigms in their subject. Through reading widely in the field, they become well-versed in the numerous theories that inform it and become able to recognize strong examples of the "theory being employed".

However, "numbers don't develop theory - only scholars do that," making the argument that "data speak for themselves" untenable. A collection of data's credibility as proof of anything hinges in part on the researcher's axiological, epistemological, methodological, and ontological assumptions, as well as the environment in which the data was acquired. That is to say, understanding a dataset requires theoretical views and assumptions about what qualifies as knowledge, the nature of that knowledge, and the means by which it is gained. Though theories may take numerous shapes, most academics believe that they help us make sense of the world around us. It has been shown time and time again that theory is necessary for scientific inquiry (Ngulube, 2015).

In this study the theories will form the foundation to build a strong base of understanding of how printmaking artworks is associated with the society, and how people receive and accept these artworks in the context of social commentary.