

CONCEPTUAL FOLKLORIC METAPHORS OF EGYPTIAN PROVERBS IN ILLUSTRATION THROUGH (AN ARTIST BOOK)

الاستعارات الفولكلورية المفاهيمية للأمثال المصرية في الرسوم التوضيحية من خلال (كتاب فنان)

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ABSTRACT

The oral heritage of Egyptian folklore represents a rich cultural treasure trove, encompassing folk tales, songs, biographies, and legends passed down through generations. This heritage constitutes an important resource for artists and graphic designers, as it is employed to highlight cultural identity and visually convey wisdom and popular heritage. Popular proverbs constitute an essential part of any culture, especially oral heritage, as they embody wisdom, humor, and shared values. In Egypt, popular proverbs constitute a rich part of the cultural landscape, often deeply intertwined with the country's history, social norms, and worldview. These popular proverbs are not merely expressions; they are replete with metaphors, figures, and symbols drawn from daily life, nature, and folklore. This research examines the conceptual metaphor embedded in Egyptian proverbs and explores their visual representation through an artistic experiment with contemporary illustrations (an artist's book) of these popular proverbs to enhance understanding of these metaphorical expressions and examine how to effectively illustrate them to enhance their meaning and appeal. This is done through analyzing selected popular proverbs and their metaphorical structure. It also discusses the role of visual narrative in preserving and revitalizing popular expressions for contemporary audiences.

KEYWORDS

conceptual metaphor; proverbs; illustrations.

الملخص

إن التراث الشفهي في التراث الشعبي المصري يمثل كنزًا ثقافيًا غنيًا يتضمن القصص الشعبية، الأغاني، السير، والأساطير المتوارثة عبر الأجيال. فهذا التراث يشكل مصدرًا هامًا للفنانين والمصممين في مجال الرسوم التوضيحية، حيث يتم توظيفه في إبراز الهوية الثقافية ونقل الحكمة والموروث الشعبي بصريًا، فتشكل الأمثال الشعبية جزءًا أساسيًا من أي ثقافة وخاصة التراث الشفهي، فهي تجسد الحكمة والفكاهة والقيم المشتركة. وفي مصر، تشكل الأمثال الشعبية جزءًا غنيًا من المشهد الثقافي، وغالبًا ما تكون متشابكة بشكل عميق مع تاريخ البلاد، والمعايير الاجتماعية، ونظرة العالم، وهذه الأمثلة الشعبية ليست مجرد تعبيرات، بل هي مليئة بالاستعارات والمجازات والرموز المستمدة من الحياة اليومية والطبيعة والفولكلور. فيتناول البحث الاستعارة المفاهيمية المضمنة في الأمثال الشعبية المصرية ويستكشف تمثيلها البصري من خلال تجربة فنية لرسوم توضيحية معاصرة (كتاب فنان) لهذه الأمثال الشعبية لتعزيز فهم هذه التعبيرات المجازية، وفحص كيفية توضيحها بشكل فعال لتعزيز معناها وجاذبيتها. وذلك من خلال تحليل الأمثال الشعبية المختارة وبنيتها المجازية، كما يناقش دور السرد البصري في الحفاظ على التعبيرات الشعبية وتنشيطها للجمهور المعاصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية

استعارة مفاهيمية؛ أمثال شعبية؛ رسوم توضيحية

1. INTRODUCTION:

The oral heritage of Egyptian folklore represents a rich cultural treasure trove, encompassing folk tales, songs, biographies, and legends passed down through generations. This heritage constitutes an important resource for artists and graphic designers, as it is employed to highlight cultural identity and visually convey wisdom and popular heritage. Among its most prominent elements are proverbs and metaphors, which serve as linguistic tools for conveying wisdom and reinforcing societal norms. Conceptual metaphors, as philosophers George Lakoff and Mark Johanson (1980) argue, provide cognitive frameworks that organize human thought, while proverbs serve as concise expressions of collective understanding. This is evident in their groundbreaking book, *Metaphors We Live By*, a study that clearly demonstrates that metaphors are an integral part of language and everyday thought. They express this by saying, “Our understanding of metaphor goes against tradition. We see metaphor as essential to human understanding, and we consider it a mechanism for generating new meanings and new truths in our lives. This research examines how these elements work interactively, particularly through visual representations, to support and develop Egyptian cultural identity.” (Liljana B., 2022). Throughout human history, folk tales have provided lessons on how to live. These stories have been summarized in proverbs and sayings that have often been depicted in art. This is common in Dutch art in the 16th and 17th centuries, when artists combined moral guidance with realistic depictions of everyday life. For example, the famous Dutch Book of Proverbs by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (1528–1569) contains illustrations of more than 100 proverbs (Mele M. 2013). Because visual memory is the primary and most accessible resource for recalling concepts, the practical experience in the field of illustrations, which falls under one of the forms of book art, the "artist's book," came through digital drawing techniques, on several separate pages depicting popular proverbs. The artistic experience included collecting proverbs and visually illustrating them to create a better understanding of them and adding realistic, surreal elements that complement their true meaning. Through these symbols and connotations, the researcher expressed her ideas about popular proverbs, from being texts to becoming a conceptual visual vision. This is what the research and its problems revolve around, through an artistic experience that carries symbolic and conceptual projections about popular proverbs and serves to revive, record, and appreciate an important part of true Egyptian culture.

1.1 The Problem Statement

The research raises several questions and issues regarding ideas and cultural legacies of oral heritage in Egyptian society through popular proverbs and their influence on the arts, particularly the arts of writing. It also addresses the possibility of presenting these proverbs in a visual form rather than simply as words. These proverbs were inspired by these proverbs as an introduction to presenting a parallel creative vision for conveying these proverbs in contemporary illustrations through "Artist's Book," a branch of the discipline. Therefore, the problem revolves around the following question:

- How can an artistic experience in the field of "Artist's Book" capture a visual vision with an intellectual content characterized by the features and sayings of Egyptian society in a contemporary visual form?

- To what extent does the visual modernization of popular proverbs influence the public's perception of oral heritage?

1.2 Importance of Research

The research, in its importance, is based on preserving cultural identity and contributing to the preservation of authentic Egyptian customs and proverbs. It also conveys moral and societal lessons across generations, documents and analyzes the relationship between Egyptian folklore and contemporary illustrations, and enriches visual studies with oral heritage. This is achieved through a visual artistic experience presented by the researcher, based on a contemporary perception of popular proverbs in illustrations, using a contemporary technique: digital drawing. The topics of Egyptian oral heritage are an intellectual trend that the researcher is interested in in her artistic project in general, and in the precise specialization - book and printed arts - in which the researcher employs her artistic works to provide references for researchers and artists interested in combining visual arts and oral heritage.

1.3 Objectives

The research directly aims to preserve the Egyptian identity by studying the elements of Egyptian oral heritage and classifying it according to its different types. It also aims to transform popular proverbs from mere words spoken into a visual image that supports those words. It also aims to present contemporary artistic treatments in the field of illustration art through (An Artist's Book), and to present proposals for methods of employing oral heritage in illustrations in a way that preserves its authenticity and attracts a modern audience. It also aims to study the extent to which contemporary illustrations influence the cultural awareness of recipients regarding oral heritage (popular proverbs).

1.4 Research Hypotheses

- the research is primarily based on the assumption that Egyptian oral heritage can be preserved through the possibility of countering Western cultural invasion through art in general and book illustrations in particular—the field of research—and the consequent transmission of this heritage to future generations in a contemporary and accessible manner.
- the research also assumes that integrating folklore with modern digital arts may help present popular oral heritage in a more attractive way to the younger generation, while visually reimagining stories and proverbs to create modern visual content through book arts and illustrations.
- the research assumes the possibility of reviving some of the artistic values in Arabic book illustrations and design through contemporary artistic and symbolic formulations in illustrations that can influence public perception and increase their cultural awareness.

1.5 Methodology

The research is based on the historical descriptive analytical approach and is also based on a contemporary applied artistic experience, through which the criticism and analysis of oral heritage (popular proverbs) are launched, and its roots are studied across different eras and the extent of its

influence on popular culture and the arts. Through it, the visual content of contemporary illustrations is analyzed and how to interpret them visually in modern contexts.

1.6 Research Limitations

The scope of the research revolves around Egypt, as it deals with Egyptian popular culture.

1.7 Literature Review

Illustration is an old human art and activity that has been practiced through history, that's why many research and scholars worldwide have made their research and studies on different kinds of illustrations. However, the researcher couldn't find any former research that studied proverbs and oral heritage through illustrations. Many studies have addressed the topic of Egyptian popular oral heritage from more than one angle and point of view. These studies, relied on examining the topic from a historical perspective, and from an artistic perspective, between influence and being influenced, and their repercussions on the contemporary audience. However, there are some previous studies that approached the content of this presented research and interacted with it at a pivotal point, namely: oral heritage and its impact on the arts. On the other hand, some researchers have worked lately on related topics such as metaphors and proverbs, for example, the research of (El Mustapha L., 2017) that explores how conceptual metaphors contribute to the multiple meanings (polysemy) of proverbs. While provides a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the semantic flexibility of proverbs through conceptual metaphors. Other researcher (Neal R. N., 1985) has worked on the semantics of English proverbs, analysing their literal and figurative meanings, their usage in various contexts, and their role in communication. He emphasizes the importance of understanding proverbs not just as fixed expressions but as dynamic elements of language that convey cultural and social values. And on the research of (Margaret S., 1991) she delves into Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1559 painting *Netherlandish Proverbs*, analyzing how visual art encapsulates the proverbial wisdom and social commentary of 16th-century Northern Europe. She explores the interplay between visual representation and audience reception. Moreover, the thesis of (El-Tanany, A. N. 2025) made a study that focuses exclusively on Egyptian proverbs, delving into the unique cultural and historical contexts that shape their meanings, provide an in-depth analysis of Egyptian proverbs through the lens of conceptual metaphors, grounded in their specific cultural and historical contexts. Also Enhance understanding of how visual elements (Illustrations) can be used to represent and interpret the meanings of proverbs. Offer empirical data on the use and variation of proverbs in Egyptian Arabic, contributing to the broader field of cognitive linguistics and folklore studies. examining proverbs as elements of folklore, the research considers their roles in oral traditions, communal identity, and cultural heritage. Therefore, the gap concluded from the literature review includes the absence of study of illustrations used in illustrating the proverbs and Egyptian oral heritage. The incorporation of illustrations to represent the conceptual metaphors in Egyptian proverbs adds a multimodal dimension, bridging linguistic analysis with visual representation.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE CONCEPT OF ORAL HERITAGE

The word heritage is derived from the root of the verb (to inherit), which means to pass on an inheritance, our heritage, and our legacy. In language, heritage means the transfer of something from one person to another. Folk heritage derives its meaning from the cultural heritage it refers to. The term oral heritage describes the narrative transmission and legacy of historical, social, and religious information in the form of stories, tales, and myths. It plays an important role in all cultures. Oral heritage is characterized by active listening and communication, honesty, fascination, suspense, imagination, creativity, a connection between the past and the present, and the ability to influence and preserve heritage. It reflects the characteristics and culture of society with artistic diversity and is linked to myths and history. It is part of the folk arts and has expressive symbolism. Mythology plays a significant role in rooting these stories, transmitted orally and artistically (Ismail O., 2023). Proverbs are a form of verbal art or oral tradition, along with poetry, songs, riddles, myths, and jokes. They are typically a form of unwritten communication. They differ stylistically from ordinary speech and are often metaphorical or symbolic in nature. Speakers can use proverbs to impart knowledge, offer advice, teach, reinforce morals, establish arguments, ease personal tensions, aid understanding, console, or inspire others. They express a shared truth that has stood the test of time; they are timeless pieces of wisdom passed down from generation to generation, providing traditional insight through humor, irony, and guidance. They are essentially an accumulation of people's experiences that can be traced back to the ancient Egyptians. Translating proverbs requires a deep understanding of the culture. Proverbs are not merely linguistic constructions; they carry cultural and cognitive dimensions that may not be present in another language in the same way. The research proposes a cognitive-pragmatic approach to translating proverbs through illustrations. With today's technological advancements and factors such as globalization, mass media, and other Western influences, we are exposed to everything around us. As a result, current generations have become less connected to their culture and language, to the point where they often choose to use English proverbs instead of those from their mother tongue. Egyptian proverbs are an oral tradition that embodies collective wisdom, experience, and cultural values. As an essential part of everyday communication, these proverbs use figurative language, especially metaphors, to express complex ideas succinctly. For this reason, proverbs needed technical analysis according to various methodological approaches that would prove the scientific value of Egyptian popular proverbs. (Maalej Z. 2009)

3. CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS OF POPULAR PROVERBS FROM VERBAL TO VISUAL THROUGH ILLUSTRATIONS:

Conceptual metaphors fulfill the artist's purpose. Since the pioneering study by philosopher George Lakoff and Mark Johanson, "The Metaphors We Live By," in 1980, metaphors have generally been considered a fundamental feature of our minds. Metaphor is not just a matter of language, but primarily a matter of thought. Conceptual metaphor theory is an important analytical tool in studying the development of meaning and the multiplicity of connotations at different linguistic levels. It focuses on the relationship between the primary, immediate meanings of a given linguistic unit and its metaphorical and figurative meanings, as well as the ability of these units to be used in unfamiliar contexts. Conceptual metaphors fulfill the artist's purpose, as

evidenced by the American philosopher Morris Weitz's (1916–1981) concept of art as reconsidering ancient theories considering modern technological changes. The symbol played an important role in art in ancient times, appearing as a tangible representation of facts, with the artist re-creating reality to symbolize it. Thus, the artwork was an innovation created to reflect it according to its own terms and in accordance with its uniqueness, the results showed that conceptual metaphors play a major role in how we understand and interpret proverbs. The study also revealed that mental representations of proverbs are influenced by cultural context, as the same proverb can have different connotations in different cultures (Ahmed N., 2019). And if conceptual metaphor is not limited to the world of language alone, it must also manifest through other (non-verbal) communication methods, such as illustrations and music. Figurative metaphors share one fundamental feature with conceptual metaphors: they are conceptual in nature. As with traditional metaphors, the locus of a figurative metaphor lies not in the medium (verbal or otherwise), but in the way we perceive a mental image from the perspective of another image. Thus, figurative metaphors are conceptual as well as figurative (Lakoff and Turner 1989).

There are several linguistic theories of metaphor that can be applied to proverbs and sayings, including:

- First: Emotional theories of metaphor: These theories deny any cognitive content to metaphor, focusing solely on its emotional nature, and considering it a mere deviation from linguistic form without any meaning.
- Second: Metaphor as a substitute theory: This theory assumes that any metaphorical expression can be replaced with an equivalent literal expression. For example, in the Egyptian proverb (Turn the pot upside down, and the girl looks up to her mother), it can be replaced with the literal expression, that a girl and her mother are alike. The substitute theory grants metaphor the status of a verbal decoration only, as it is preferable to use metaphor instead of literal expression for stylistic purposes.

Visual representations of proverbs date back to the 16th century in various countries across Europe. However, the artist Giuseppe Maria Mitelli's (1634–1718) book version of Italian proverbs particularly represents the intention of the Counter-Reformation in Italy. The characters are often playful and caricature-like, a genre for which the artist was also famous. Some of the book's interior scenes are settings for commentary on gender roles within the home and an attempt to use comic illustration to depict misogyny. This proverb illustrates: "Unhappy is the house where the hen crows and the rooster are silent." Another proverb reads: "The big fish eats the little fish" (**Figure 2**). Based on an ancient Latin proverb, the illustration refers to a world where the strong prey on the weak. (The Ringling Art Library, 2023)



(Figure 1) A collection of illustrations of Italian proverbs in the book “Proverbi figurate” by the Italian artist Giuseppe Maria Mitelli (1634-1718) in 1718. The prints in this book, made from modern marble slabs with a calfskin spine and corners, depict the 48 numbered plates (Met Museum 1944).

(Source:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/354104>)

(Figure 2) Illustration based on the Latin proverb: “The big fish eats the small fish” - book by the Italian artist “Giuseppe Maria Mitelli” – 1718

(Source:

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/354104>)

Pictorial proverbs are a fitting example of this media switching. As Japanese novelist “Yoko Mori” writes, the early modern period, particularly the sixteenth century, was “the age of the visual promotion of proverbs,” where these expressions were used to entertain and preach about human eccentricities, transgressions, and moral corruption. In their combination of words and images, pictorial proverbs were a multimedia product, like visual stories, requiring an active role from viewers. This meant that viewers were required to recognize the original proverbs and interpret the symbolic and metaphorical concepts embedded in the illustrations. They would then be able to appreciate the message of the expressions resulting from the combination of text and visuals and implement moral improvements in their own behavior. Mixed media represents a form of cultural and societal representation of the “taste for imagery, knowledge, and allusion” of the early modern period. (Praz M. 2003) It is worth noting that the Italian Renaissance scholar and icon designer Cesare Ripa, in his book “The New Iconology” in 1618, argued that allegorical painting should always be accompanied by a short-written description that would ensure the clarity and wide reception of its symbolic elements. To achieve this goal, pictorial parables adhered to a structure that allowed for the maximum realization of their meaning. This accessible and digestible structure was essential to produce meaning even in sources that were not originally generated as symbols but still combined “the syntactic and semantic aspects of both words and images.” (Ripa C. 1618) Within these practices of mutual influence, artists of pictorial parables drew from a vast array of textual and visual sources to inculcate moral lessons. The choice of which expressions to depict was not a casual process; Rather, it was deliberate. Artists sought expressions that had either narrative intensity or visual potential because they could be easily translated into a visual message. Illustrations ensured a more direct experience of the parables, because viewers could immediately identify the cultural and social aspects that appealed to their senses. The images captured their imagination and spoke not only to their minds but also to their eyes. The middle classes, who were not well-educated, were not fond of classical and mythological references. Rather, they were

drawn to artistic productions that showed the moral and ethical aspects of human existence relevant to their daily lives. (Bruni F. 1990)

4. (EGYPTIAN'S STREET) A VISUAL VISION OF EGYPTIAN FOLKLORE HERITAGE AND POPULAR PROVERBS (AN ARTIST'S BOOK):

The researcher has always sought to enhance her passion for art and her identity as an Egyptian artist who loves illustrations. Then she realized that she didn't need to build her own identity, as her culture defines her. She then began her own illustration project, which included folk tales, dances, peasant songs, proverbs, their daily lives, and the harvest season. Their daily songs included plant and human symbols in surreal illustrations, which led the researcher to reflect on several aspects, including the visual and the intellectual, especially popular proverbs and the conceptual metaphors they carry. Hence, the research aimed to present an artistic vision through drawings that represent a record of the researcher's perspective on the spirit of the Egyptian street and oral heritage, but from a contemporary artistic perspective, entitled "Egyptian Streets," which recalls Egyptian culture.

4.1 Title (Egyptian's Streets) ... Between Meaning and Terminology

Symbols played an important role in Egyptian culture. The researcher used the word "streets" to symbolize the lives of ordinary people and their daily thoughts. The word "streets" thus represented a conceptual metaphor, representing the thoughts of a people, a popular song, or fairy tales, as well as popular proverbs. The researcher chose the title "Egyptian Streets" for her book because the Egyptian street and its people are always characterized by a sense of humor, joy, and constant vitality, despite the circumstances. When she spoke of the "Egyptian street," she did not mean it only in the literal sense (i.e., roads and alleys), but rather it is often a metaphor carrying social, cultural, and political connotations. The Egyptian Street also contained many simple symbols and conceptual metaphors. There is a popular rural folk song in Egypt that farmers sang during the mandarin harvest, and which later became sung at rural weddings. From there, the mandarin became a symbol of the bride. There is also a popular proverb that says, "Give the bread to the baker," meaning, "Hire only those you trust to perform the work to the best of your ability." It also symbolizes abundant goodness and plentiful livelihood. Similarly, fish symbolize fertility. Thus, there are many wonderful Egyptian folk songs and proverbs that carry additional symbols. The researcher chose the conceptual metaphor of "the Egyptian street," which makes it more than just a physical place. It transforms it into a living entity, a representative of public opinion, a stage for events, or a social authority. These metaphors help explain and analyze the changes taking place in Egyptian society. The reason for using these metaphors is that we tend to think of abstract concepts (such as public opinion, social changes, and ideas) through things we are familiar with in our everyday lives.

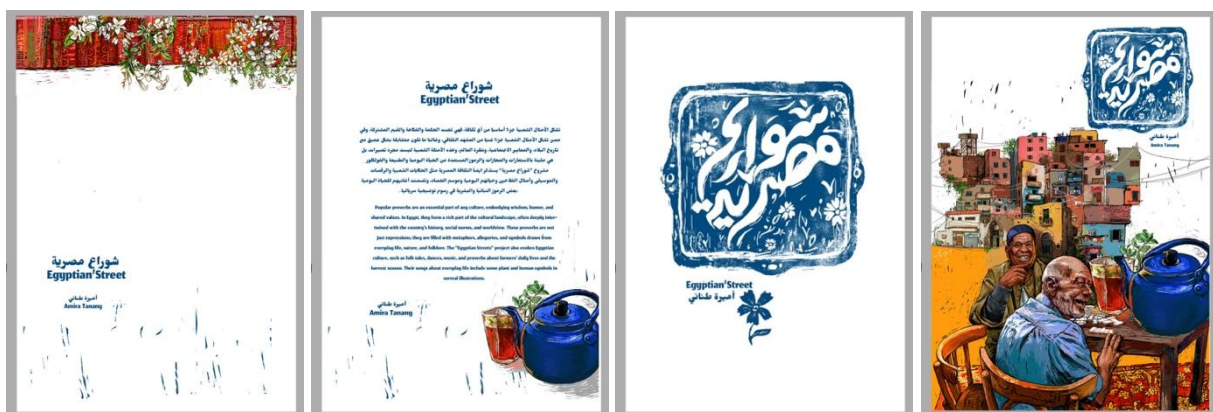
4.2 Technical Aspects of the (Egyptian Streets) Graphics Collection

- Artist: Researcher.
- Title of work: Egyptian Street.
- Number of works: 21 digital artworks, (10 of them illustrated proverbs, and the others for folkloric songs and poems).
- Exhibition location: The Great Hall, Faculty of Fine Arts
- Technique: Digital drawing using Photoshop.
- Dimensions: 42 x 29.7 cm

- Year of production: 2024 - 2025
- Work and book pages: An artist's book (42 pages), final page size (A4) - 21 x 29.5 cm.
- Font used on the cover: The researcher designed the written font to give it a popular aesthetic without resorting to a ready-made font.
- Font used inside the book: Jumhorya Font
- Cover: Hardcover, made of thick cardboard wrapped in cloth with printed paper wrapped around it.
- Number of copies of the book: 5 signed printed copies.

4.3 Using The (Egyptian'Streets) Collection as Illustrations In (Artist Book)

The researcher employed the experimental paintings as illustrations in (An Artist's Book), where Egyptian folk decorative elements were designed in most of the drawings to revive folk symbols, in addition to incorporating Arabic calligraphic values for some semantic words to symbolize a concept or idea such as: (Education, Father, Grandfather, Girl, Affinity, Country of the men... etc.). The calligraphy was designed in a contemporary manner as we see on all the walls of popular neighborhoods. The book includes (46 pages) in a digitally printed cardboard cover, and the book includes (21 pages) with illustrations in addition to the inner cover page, the introduction page in Arabic and English, and the back cover page (**Figure 3**). The graphic design of the book came through arranging the drawn and written elements in a visual order following the rules of design and its aesthetics and formulating them in combinations that are consistent and balanced with each other in line with the intellectual content of the experiment. (Shousha F. et al., 2016) The researcher chose the artist's book as a framework for the experiment because the artist's book is a flexible means of expression, close to free artistic experiments, and capable of containing many forms of artistic and technical expression simultaneously. It also carries special artistic components that differ from commercial books, as it can reach a wide audience despite its exceptional nature. Ultimately, the book emerges in an unexpected artistic form and has now become one of the internationally recognized fields of creativity. (Reese, Suzanne, and others, 1995).



(Figure 3) Researcher - Cover, inside title page, opening, and last page of the book (Egyptian's street) - Artist's book - Digital design - Size 21 x 29.5 cm – 2025 \2024 (Source:author).

5. THE PLASTIC AND SYMBOLIC APPROACH IN THE ARTIST'S WORK (EGYPTIAN'S STREET):

The researcher presented the "Egyptian Streets" collection through digital drawing treatments using sharp and spontaneous lines on white or brightly colored spaces, incorporating symbolic connotations that carry many projections. Most of the works included a space to emphasize the strength and momentum of the lines in the workspace. Each painting was executed independently in content without sequence, but they all revolve around the same content, which is popular proverbs and Egyptian popular oral heritage within a new framework that rejects the stereotypical form to which they are accustomed, and presenting them in a contemporary way that works to enable modern generations to recognize their heritage and popular proverbs in a contemporary surreal style, as we can delve much deeper than that to evoke the hidden meanings of Egyptian street life and its ideas, and this is what the researcher will present in the research.

5.1 Symbolic connotations in the artistic experience

The Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) defined art as a form of unconscious liberation of instincts by means of the "symbol." Symbols are suitable for expressing mysterious and unknown truths. No human civilization has been devoid of symbols in the fabric of its arts. The work of creating symbols requires delicacy and rationality, as the artist is sometimes not satisfied with common traditional symbols. However, this does not negate the necessity for symbols to touch a common chord in humanity, especially if they emanate from the soul in a state of primitive instinct. The artist can penetrate the subject from the framework of his own self to the external space in the form of that symbol (Tarek Selim, et al.; 2010). The artist cannot express any subject without first stirring it emotionally and creating. Many artists have lived in the shadow of a single artistic issue or subject, at each moment discovering new aspects of it to express the same subject, but in different formulations and new creative suffering. Egyptian folk heritage, especially popular proverbs, as a moral entity in the shadow of treatments A diverse visual and formal approach preoccupies the researcher's works, carrying psychological, spiritual, social and intellectual connotations reflected in the form, which is always promoted by popular proverbs and the thoughts of the Egyptian street. The researcher found what she was looking for in many symbolic projections charged with a new and added energy for disclosure and expression. Symbolism carries many meanings; it may mean expressing certain ideas with distinctive signs, such as bread as a symbol of livelihood, fish as a symbol of fertility, oranges as a symbol of the bride, and birds as a symbol of freedom, among others. Therefore, the researcher used symbols and connotations, some of which are familiar, such as flowers, fruits and bread, and others with personal significance, perhaps linked to concepts specific to her, such as the association of memory with certain objects, signs and symbols that evoke a situation or a certain story throughout life, such as the clothesline, popular neighborhoods, loud colors and a cup of tea. A symbol, in its connotations, does not reach its strength and expressive impact unless it is laden with long experience from the past; otherwise, the symbol comes out superficial and empty. Whether the symbol is just a circle, a line, or a human face, the significance lies in the power of expression radiating from the circle or face. It points to many experiences that a person goes through, exploding with meanings that the artist places before the recipient to imagine what he wants. Expression is extinguished, just as symbolism is extinguished if the face is just features without strong expression. The significance of symbolism is loading the form with the content of experience, no matter how simple or complex. (El-Bassyouni M. et al.; 2006)

5.2 The Symbolism of Oral Heritage in the Works of Helmi El Toni (1934-2024)

Helmy El-Tuni drew inspiration from Egypt's rich heritage, gathering symbols from historical records, jewelry, tattoos, and engravings. Immersed in folk art, he spent years researching and collecting visual elements, creating his own distinctive symbols while staying connected to tradition. Like Renaissance artists who revived Roman art, El-Tuni sought a return to origins, evolving his style without repetition. His work often highlights women as central figures, celebrating them alongside symbolic elements like fish, representing fertility, and candles, symbolizing love and enlightenment. His unique artistic vision set him apart, consistently captivating audiences with fresh, evocative expressions. "Eltony's" pictorial imagination complemented the imagination of the text that accompanied it, so the story was a necessary part of life for him. He would reformulate these motifs and texts with simple, frank, strong lines and bright, warm colors, such as red and green. Red is often associated with seductive or flamboyant femininity, while green is associated with comfort, goodness, and motherhood. As in some of his works, such as **(Figure 4)**, the texts or folk songs were accompanied by illustrations to express and add more expression. As for **(Figure 5)**, he drew an illustration of a popular saying, "O envious people, what do you have to do with people?" He drew a loving couple circling roses in an embrace." Eltony" always worked to translate popular sayings and folk songs through illustrations.



(Figure 4) A collection of works by the artist Helmi El Toni 1934-2024)- "The Singer, the Life of the Soul" Exhibition -2015 (source: <https://www.instagram.com/designsbyhelmi/>)

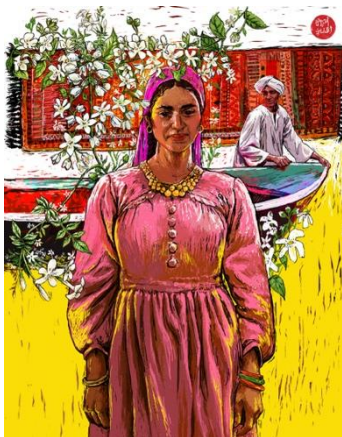


(Figure 5) Artwork by the artist Helmi El Toni (1934-2024) - Title of the work: "O envious people, what do you have to do with the people?" – 2020- (source: <https://www.cairo360.com/ar/article/-فن-وثقافة/صالون-القاهرة-في-دوره-ال-٦٠-١٠٠-سنة-من-الف>)

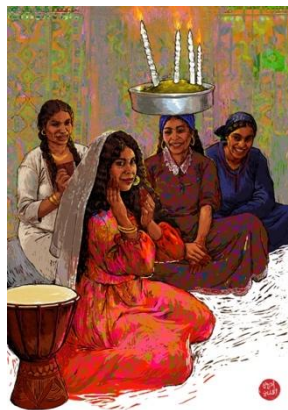
Among the works in the book "**Egyptian'Streets**", the researcher presented a new artistic vision for popular proverbs and folk songs, in which she drew on and imitated the artistic concepts of the simplicity of popular life and people's thoughts, which were aroused by the works of "Helmy El-Tony." She used popular motifs and bright, shiny colors such as red, yellow, and green, and focused on drawing Egyptian women to connect them with femininity, motherhood, and family. She worked on combining texts and illustrations, as "El-Tony" did in his works, with some differences in lines, backgrounds, artistic treatment, and color solutions, presenting them in a new and contemporary form for the artwork.

In (Figure 6) the first work from the book “Egyptian Streets” entitled “**Pamper Me with Jasmine Paper**” which occupied the upper space of the painting, we may find a similarity between the vision of “Eltony” and “The Researcher” as she worked on an illustration of a popular folk song. Despite this, the woman in “The Researcher’s” painting comes with a great desire to escape from this framework, which she symbolized with the spaces of emptiness and dimensions in the background with the presence of another character there. She departed from the idea of the decorative framework that “Eltony” was accustomed to placing in his works and dealt with the composition with greater freedom and without inserting any texts in the background.

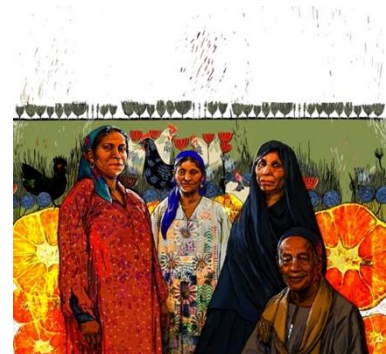
Through the book “**Egyptian Streets**”, the researcher addressed many folk songs again through illustrations, but with a formative vision that carries several symbolic projections through which she expresses the inner thoughts and feelings of Egyptian women (Figure 7) and (Figure 8). Each time, she tried to raise an issue or touch on a specific phenomenon, which is more important than beauty from her point of view, which is freedom. She believes that women are more vulnerable to oppression, repression and deprivation of freedom than men, and this is an important aspect that must be talked about and highlighted, especially in the face of these reactionary voices and ideas that degrade women and their status in our environment. Despite this, the researcher worked to show the feminine state through hot and bright color tones to always symbolize the extent of women’s warmth.



(Figure 6) Researcher - Work title: “**Pamper Me on Jasmine Paper**” - From the book “**Egyptian Streets**” - Artist book - Digital drawing - 120 x 80 cm – 2025 - (source: author)



(Figure 7) Researcher – Work title: “**Extend your hands, bride, and bend**” – from the book “**Egyptian Streets**” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 120 x 80 cm – 2025- (source: author).



(Figure 8) Researcher – Work title: “**How sweet you are, Esta-fendi, cousin of the oranges**” – from the book “**Egyptian Street**” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 70 x 70 cm – 2025-(source: author)

5.3 Popular Proverbs and Visual Symbols in the Book “Egyptian’s street”

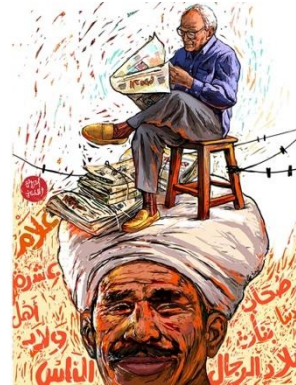
We previously mentioned that the researcher used symbols and connotations, some of which are familiar, such as flowers, fruits, and bread, and others with personal significance that may be linked to concepts specific to her, such as the association of memory with certain objects, signs, and symbols that evoke a situation or a certain story throughout life, such as the clothesline, popular neighborhoods, loud colors, and a cup of tea. The researcher relied on the use of conceptual metaphors clearly in her works, in terms of using different positions for human bodies and using the method of exaggerating the mass of bodies or unrealistic elements. In (Figure 9), The work takes up a pyramidal space combining a broad lower base and a pyramidal peak, based on the

famous popular proverb "**Give the bread to the baker.**" The illustration is distinguished by an expressive plastic style that combines realism and surrealism, as it relies on bright colors and sharp lines to highlight the details of the scene. The painting, "Give the Bread to the Baker," depicts an elderly woman sewing a loaf of bread, a symbolic reference to craftsmanship and expertise. In the lower scene, a peasant milks a buffalo, reinforcing the idea of specialization in different professions. The overall composition reflects the contrast in size between the two figures. The woman appears massive, symbolizing her status and expertise, while the peasant appears smaller, creating a visual balance that expresses the hierarchy of knowledge and skill. The background is filled with random brushstrokes that enhance the sense of movement and vitality, while the repetition of the loaf shapes emphasizes the central theme of mastery.

In (Figure 10) The work takes up the lower space of the painting, and expressed, in a surreal, expressive artistic style, the Egyptian popular proverb "**Knowledge is in the head, not in the notebook**", This proverb indicates that understanding and life experience do not depend only on learning from books, but also on innate intelligence and knowledge gained from experience. A larger peasant figure contrasts with a smaller educated figure reading a newspaper, symbolizing wisdom gained from experience over formal education. Exaggerated forms and hidden symbols invite viewer interpretation. She also worked to solve the background with some words included from the tongues of people in the Egyptian street, such as: (friends, mark, girls, country of men, sons of people, family, ...etc.). In both works, the researcher found a strong significance in the use of threads inserted from the elements, one of which is bread, and the other is tied to a chair. This symbolic aspect of the threads worked to connect the blocks and elements to express the connection between the Egyptian street through its ideas.



(Figure 9) Researcher – Work title: "Give the bread to the baker" – from the book "Egyptian Streets" – Artist book – Digital drawing – 120 x 80 cm – 2025-(source: author)

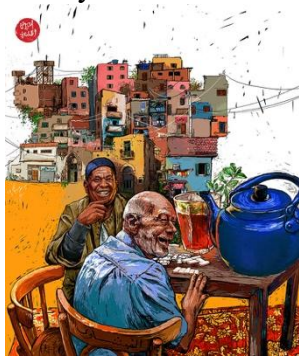


(Figure 10) Researcher – Work title: "Knowledge is in the head, not in the notebook" – from the book "Egyptian Streets" – Artist book – Digital drawing – 120 x 80 cm – 2025-(source: author)

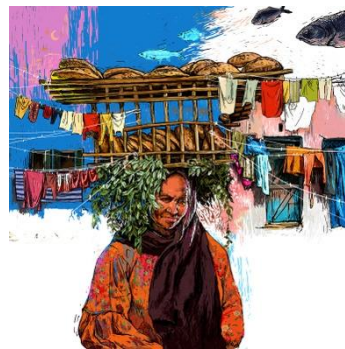
Continuing, we find in (Figure 11), which takes up the lower space of the work, the illustration symbolizing the popular proverb "**Whoever lives next to the happy will be happy.**" This work highlights the popular essence of the proverb through visual symbols and the use of an exaggerated expressive style, creating a sense of life and social warmth. The popular proverb is embodied through the relationship between the two main characters, where the positive impact of good company is evident. The two men appear happy because of their presence together. Symbols such as the huge teapot and the game of dominoes reinforce the meaning of the simple happiness that comes from good company. The popular background reflects the social reality of this proverb, where neighbors and friendships have a direct impact on happiness. The use of warm colors,

ranging from the orange in the background to the red of the teacup, creates a sense of comfort and familiarity.

In **(Figure 12)**, the work takes up the upper space of the painting, relying on symbolic composition and visual narration. The idea of the popular proverb “**A loaf for a loaf, and don’t let your neighbor go to bed hungry**” is evident in it, through the elements drawn in an overlapping manner that combines realism and abstraction. The details of the popular neighborhood in the background are in blue colors, with fish swimming in its blueness. They are used as an abstract element that adds a surreal touch to the scene, and may symbolize hope and livelihood, and the familiarity of neighbors in the ropes hanging from the clothes and their intertwining with the basket laden with fresh bread carried by an elderly woman with strong features that suggest fatigue and determination. She is wearing traditional clothes in warm colors (orange and red) that highlight her connection to the popular environment. This basket is placed above the woman’s head in a delicate balance and represents a symbol of giving and social solidarity. The symbolic and social indications in this painting come in the concept of social solidarity and participation, where the idea of sharing a loaf is evident as a symbol of generosity and giving. Also, the ropes hanging from the clothes refer to daily life and human relations in simple societies. The basket full of bread symbolizes goodness and abundance, while the element of balance appears as a sign of shared social responsibility.



(Figure 11) Researcher – Work title: “Whoever lives next to the happy will be happy” – from the book “Egyptian Streets” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 120 x 80 cm – 2025-(source: author)



(Figure 12) Researcher – Work title: “Loaf by Loaf, Don’t Let Your Neighbor Go to Sleep Hungry” – From the book “Egyptian Streets” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 80 x 80 cm – 2025-(source: author)

In **(Figure 13)**, the work appears incidental, with most of the elements located at the bottom of the canvas. The illustration for this work was inspired by the Egyptian proverb “A Boatman’s Invitation,” a proverb used to refer to a non-serious invitation. The sailor (boat owner) invites others to dine with him, but he cannot host them due to his presence on the water. In the artwork, we see a boat floating above an urban scene of traditional Egyptian homes, reflecting the idea of the unreality of the invitation. Inside the boat, two men are seated, wearing traditional Egyptian “galabiya”, one of whom waves his hand in a friendly greeting, lending a cheerful tone to the scene. In front of them are popular foods, such as fresh bread, vegetables, and tomatoes, symbolizing authentic Egyptian hospitality. Orange was used in the background, reflecting a sense of movement and vitality and enhancing the expressive nature of the scene. This work, in a satirical visual style, reflects the contradiction between a generous invitation and the impossible reality of implementing it—the essence of the popular proverb itself.

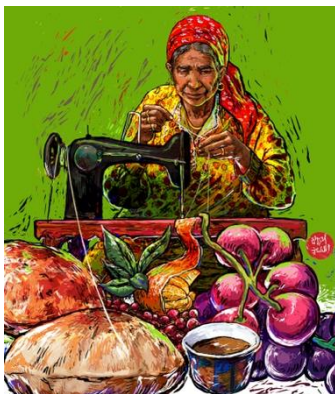


(Figure 13) Researcher – From the book “Egyptian Street” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 140 x 80 cm – 2025-(source: author)



(Figure 14) Researcher – Work title: “A Sweet Bite Is Enough for a Water” – From the book “Egyptian Street” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 120 x 80 cm – 2024-(source: author)

In continuation of the generosity of the Egyptian street, which loves invitations and generosity towards each other, we find in (Figure 14) an illustrated illustration of the famous popular proverb “**A delicious bite is enough for a hundred**” which reflects the essence of hospitality and simple generosity in the Egyptian street. The direction of the work is horizontal to include many elements and present them clearly to the audience. The scene includes happy peasant characters and a table full of simple foods such as local bread, falafel, tomatoes, grapes and traditional food utensils, which enhances the concept of simplicity and blessing in food. The chicken and eggs came in the design to give the concept of self-sufficiency and connection to rural life. Warm colors came to prevail in the design such as red, orange and yellow, which give a sense of life and warmth.



(Figure 15) Researcher – book “Egyptian Street” 120 x 80 cm – 2024- (source: author)



(Figure 16) Researcher – book “Egyptian Street” 120 x 80 cm – 2025- (source: author)

In (Figure 15), the artwork embodies the proverb “**If your mother is alive, you will eat good bread greased with oil,**” symbolizing maternal care and familial warmth. The central figure, an elderly woman in vibrant traditional attire, sews on an old machine, reflecting dedication and sacrifice. Surrounding her, golden loaves signify sustenance, a teacup evokes comfort, and fruits balance luxury with simplicity. The composition weaves a conceptual metaphor, where the mother embodies generosity, the sewing machine symbolizes endless devotion, and interwoven threads represent unbreakable family bonds, visually narrating the blessings of maternal presence. And in (Figure 16) “the researcher” conducted another experiment about the sacrifice of the Egyptian mother for the comfort of her children, using a surreal expressionist style. The design was created in an empty space and based on the houses of a popular neighborhood. The main scene was occupied by a simple Egyptian woman, wearing an ornate blue gown and a light

veil, walking wearily and determinedly, carrying on her head a "wooden bread net" filled with various vital elements.

Also, in **(Figure 17)** The artwork appears to employ an expressive style that relies on conceptual metaphors to embody the popular proverb **"Go to the door, go to the door, and sustenance is up to the Giver."** The illustration has many symbols as follows: The seller is a symbol of struggle and striving in life, working hard selling fruit. The large-wheeled cart signifies mobility and instability, reflecting the idea that sustenance is not limited to one location but depends on planning and effort. And the two doves often symbolize peace and sustenance that comes without measure, reflecting the concept of "sustenance is up to the Giver," as sustenance sometimes comes without expectation or direct effort.



(Figure 17) Researcher – Work title: “Go to the door, go to the door, and sustenance is up to the Giver” – From the book “Egyptian Street” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 120 x 80 cm – 2024-(source: author)



(Figure 18) Researcher – Work title: “an onion from lover is like getting a sheep” – From the book “Egyptian Street” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 120 x 80 cm – 2024 -(source: author)



(Figure 19) Researcher- Typography experience for a proverb text “an onion from lover is like getting a sheep” – From the book “Egyptian Street” – Artist book – Digital drawing – 90 x 80 cm – 2025 -(source: author).



(Figure 20) Researcher -A typed typography experience for a book title “Egyptian’s street” Artist book – Digital drawing – 90 x 80 cm – 2024 - (source: author)

6. THE VISUAL AND GRAPHIC TREATMENTS IN THE ARTIST’S ILLUSTRATIONS IN “EGYPTIAN’S STREET):

The researcher relied on visual and graphic treatments in "Egyptian Streets" that can be summarized as (line, color, and symbol):

6.1 The Line:

Lines are one of the most flexible and emotional design elements. They have a special meaning in the language of art. They can eloquently form a body in a space and draw a concise impact on the body. This is what characterized the works of the researcher, between the abbreviation of lines at times and their dominance over the entire movement that fills the space at other times. The lines

that surrounded the bodies and elements in a solid black color describe, in their content, a visual body and define its area and mass in the space of the painting. (Al-Basyouni M. et al.; 2006). In the book's illustrations, the “researcher” relied on a linear plot in which she freed the lines from mechanical restrictions and the rules of balance and symmetry, to provide the work with a wide scope for representation in space, in terms of its length, thickness, path and waves, and the relationship of the lines surrounded by the elements to the painting's outer frame and the relationship of the shapes to each other. Even the space itself was charged with some dynamic movements, such as the movement of the lines influenced by the style of relief printing (wood engraving). In the researcher's experiment, the black line defined the two-dimensional visual form, not restricted by perspective. It also worked to break out of the frame and embodied several symbolic connotations, as we mentioned earlier. The line blended with the arts of writing by adding some words that indicated the content of the work within the decorative frame. Some words were written to express the content and symbolism of the ideas of the Egyptian street, so that the recipient could easily solve their ambiguity.

6.2 The Color:

The colors in the artist's book "Egyptian Streets" are characterized by a style that mimics relief printing on a “wooden” or “Lino” surface, relying on the dynamic overlapping of color layers that reflect a sense of movement and life. The following effects can be observed in the coloring: a rough, engraved texture; bright, contrasting, saturated colors such as red, yellow, blue, and green to create energy and vitality; the effects of overlapping color layers with heterogeneous touches, which creates a visual dimension similar to hand-embossed printing; the use of textile backgrounds with engravings and decorations inspired by traditional fabrics, which enhances the cultural authenticity of the works; and finally, the features of strong black lines to highlight the details and contours of the characters and elements.

6.3 The Symbol:

Symbols, including gestures, signs, and marks, serve as a bridge between internal and external understanding. Created by the conscious and subconscious mind, they enable imagination and multiple interpretations in art. Symbols transcend reality, conveying abstract ideas that rely on mental, visual, and emotional intelligence for meaning (Abdelhamid S.; 2008). In Egyptian Streets drawings, the researcher used symbolic elements like bread for goodness, fish for livelihood, flowers (especially jasmine) for Egyptian women, fruit for pleasure, and women for adornment. Focusing on symbolic expression, she conveyed deep intellectual themes, aiming to preserve oral heritage for contemporary generations through extensive study and experimentation.

7. THE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- Popular proverbs play an important role in documenting the language and thoughts of the Egyptian people, and in recording and documenting aspects of life on the Egyptian street.
- Preserving popular proverbs and oral heritage can serve as an inspirational source for artists and an influential force in producing numerous contemporary illustrations for modern generations.
- Symbols and pictorial and cultural connotations can be leveraged to become a primary source for reviving or obliterating ideas.
- The researcher's use of the relief printing technique in digital drawing in the artistic experiment helped revive the traditional relief printing style, but in a contemporary style. This was

achieved through digital technology, emphasizing the rawness and liveliness of the Egyptian street. This emphasized the formation of abstract symbolic vocabulary and connotations as a visual equivalent to the book's content.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Recommendation for the revival of Egyptian popular oral heritage, from which the West draws. We are more deserving of preserving it and presenting it to the world in the correct ideological form.
- Emphasis on the role of art in general, and book arts as a field of specialization, in transforming and refining ideas throughout the ages, just as they have played a role in consolidating them. This can be achieved through collective or individual experiences to raise awareness of the importance of Egyptian popular heritage.
- Egyptian popular proverbs hold a significant place in Egyptian society and have an influential presence that must be nurtured and preserved from loss.
- Emphasis on elevating the status of traditional performance techniques over digital technologies and treatments in the field of book arts and print.

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