

The Lebanese Artist Gebran Tarazi as Chronicled

by Lebanese Press (1993-2017)

الفنان اللبناني جبران طرزي كما عرفتته الصحافة اللبنانية (1993-2017)

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تاريخ القبول: 2026-6-15

تاريخ الإرسال: 2026-6-3

Summary

This research study examines the career of Lebanese artist Gebran Tarazi (1944-2010-) who was born into a prominent Damascene family that mastered traditional oriental and Levantine craftsmanship. Tarazi immersed himself in such craft, developed and refined it while preserving its authenticity and anchoring the Levantine and Arab identity. At the same time, he articulated a philosophical vision of art that calls for independence from Western artistic currents. Rather than refuting them, he kept up with them, appropriating elements that could be meaningfully integrated into Levantine and Arab art. **The research problem addressed in this study stems from the fact that,** although Tarazi is widely recognized as a pioneer of geometric abstraction, little scholarly attention has been devoted to examining how the Lebanese cultural press documented, interpreted, and contributed to shaping his artistic legacy.

In a systematic **qualitative historical-analytical methodology**, this research study **seeks to address that gap** by reconstructing a journalistic record of his career and highlighting the value of newspaper archives as a primary source for art-historical research drawing open archival newspapers, magazines, interviews, and exhibition reviews. It offers an extensive review of how Tarazi was chronicled in the Lebanese press archive over the period from 1993 to 2017. The press presented and documented him with notable admiration for his innovative artistic

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شاعر وناقد فني عراقي. عمل في سلك الصحافة والإعلام المرئي والمقروء محرراً. عمل مديراً لبرامج تلفزيونية. في جعبته كثير من الإصدارات في الفن التشكيلي.

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مترجمة لبنانية كندية متعددة اللغات، محررة، روائية، وكاتبة إعلانات ومقالات. لها أكثر من 26 سنة من الخبرة في مجالها.

achievements and forward-looking vision. The study further lists the press's coverage of Tarazi's career's milestones beginning with his first solo exhibition in 1993. At the time, critics hailed him as the "madman of geometric abstraction" and its "earnest representative", a man who managed to tame the square, transforming it into a visual *Maqam* that pulses with life. The press described him as an artist of "intellectual awakening" who "could paint with masterful geometry with his eyes closed" producing works that give the viewer the impression of "standing before the architectural blueprint of an ancient Roman city".

The study then traces the progression of his second solo exhibition which established his artistic orientation. Additionally, the research explores the artist's literary contributions specifically his novel "The Olive Press" which reveals another dimension of his creativity, presenting him as a writer engaged with existential questions, advocating for peaceful coexistence.

The study also tracks the efforts of the Tarazi family to honor and preserve his legacy, sustaining his presence within the art world after his passing and commemorating his work through retrospective exhibitions. It highlights both local and international interest

in his works and writings, many of which have been digitized to serve as a documentary resource for historians and art enthusiasts. The research further documents the global reach of the artist's paintings and their acquisition by prestigious institutions and major art museums such as Guggenheim Abu Dhabi and Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern art in Qatar, as well including his unique experience in postgraduate curricula at the Lebanese University. The study concludes that Tarazi was not merely an adventurous craftsman or a conventional visual artist, but was a brilliant mind who successfully reconciled tradition with modernism, which positioned him among the foremost pioneering Arab innovator artists and established him as one of the most enduring and influential artistic figures in the contemporary culture and memory and in Lebanese and Arab press. This research study serves as the first part of a comprehensive research project dedicated to examining Tarazi's presence in the Lebanese Arab press, reaffirming his status as an admirable, valuable, foundational figure in geometric abstraction and visual fine arts. **This shows** that the Lebanese cultural press functioned as a dynamic intellectual space that contributed to preserving, contextualizing and promoting Tarazi's legacy.

Keywords: Gebran Tarazi, geometric abstraction, visual art, archive, Lebanese press, documentation, art discourse, ornamentation, Levantine identity, Arab identity, artistic experimentation,

modernism, authenticity, heritage, legacy, artistic philosophy, visual memory, aesthetic taste, journalistic dialogs, first solo exhibition, second solo exhibition, retrospective exhibition.

الملخص

ويُسهب البحث في استعراض ما جاء عن الفنان جبران طرزي في أرشيف الصحافة اللبنانية التي دُهِشت لمنجزه الإبداعي الفني التجديدي ورؤاه التقدمية على مرّ الأعوام 1993 إلى 2017 فعمدت إلى توثيقه. كما يفتد مواكبة الصحافة اللبنانية لمحطات إنجازاته الأساسية بدءًا من معرضه الفردي الأول في العام 1993 الذي بشّر بولادة "مجنون الهندسة التجريدية والممثل الجدي" لها الذي استطاع ترويض المربع وتحويله إلى مقامات بصرية تنبض روحًا وحياءً، ووصفته بأنه "فنان الیقظة العقلية" الذي "قد يغمض عينيه ليرسم بهندسة متمكّنة" لدرجة يخال معها المشاهد أنّه "أمام بناء هندسي لمدينة رومانية قديمة"، وصولاً إلى معرضه الفردي الثاني الذي كرس توجّهه الفني. كما يأتي البحث على ذكر نتاجه الأدبي وتحديدًا رواية "معصرة زيتون" التي كشفت وجهًا إبداعيًا آخر للفنان، كأديب يتأمل في القضايا الوجودية ويدعو إلى التعايش بسلام. ويتتبع البحث جهود أسرة جبران طرزي في صون الأمانة، وتمكين حضوره

يتناول هذا البحث تجربة الفنان اللبناني جبران طرزي 1944 - 2010 الذي وُلد في كنف بيت دمشقي عريق امتنّ الحرف المشرقية، فتشبع منها وطورها مُحافظًا على أصالتها مُرسّخًا الهوية المشرقية والعربية، ومقدّمًا رؤية فلسفية للفن ترفض التبعية لتيارات الفن الغربي والدّوبان فيها، من دون صدها بل مواكبتها وأخذ ما يُناسب الفن المشرقي والعربي منها.

تكمّن إشكالية هذا البحث في شخّ الاهتمام الأكاديمي بمعاينة متون الصحافة اللبنانية من حيث توثيقها الإرث الفني الذي خلفه الفنان جبران طرزي وتأويله وتأطيره، على الرغم من الاعتراف الواسع بريادة هذا الفنان في مجال التجريد الهندسي.

يسعى البحث إلى سدّ هذه الفجوة مُعتمدًا منهجية نوعية تحليلية - تاريخية بإرساء سجلّ يفضّل مسيرة جبران طرزي ويُبرز قيمة الأرشيف الصحفي كمصدر رئيسي للبحث في الفن وتاريخه بالاستناد إلى أرشيف الصحف والمجلات، وإلى المقابلات والمعارض ومراجعاتها.

الذاكرة الثقافية المعاصرة والصحافة اللبنانية والعربية. ويشير البحث إلى كونه القسم الأول من مشروع بحثي متكامل يهدف لاستعراض حضور جبران طرزي في الصحافة اللبنانية العربية تأكيداً على كونه قيمة فنية راسخة في التجريد الهندسي والفن التشكيلي يُعْتَزُّ بها. ويظهر ذلك كيف شكّلت الصحافة اللبنانية حيّزاً فكرياً حيويّاً أسهم في صون إرث جبران طرزي الفني ورسم سياقه وعزّز مكانته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: جبران طرزي، تجريد هندسي، فن تشكيلي، أرشيف، صحافة لبنانية، توثيق، خطاب فني، زخرفة عربية، حرفة، هوية مشرقية، هوية عربية، تجريب فني، حداثة، أصالة، تراث، إرث، فلسفة فنية، ذاكرة بصرية، ذائقة جمالية، حوارات صحفية، معرض فردي أول، معرض فردي ثان، معرض استعادي.

Introduction

The idea of exploring the archives of the Lebanese press as a future area of research, had never occurred to me until a particular quotation stopped me in my tracks and prompted me to investigate everything that had ever been written about the Lebanese artist Gebran Tarazi. Speaking with sincere regret, he said: **“I feel that I have wasted a great deal of time, and I want to make up for it, because Man**

في الفضاء الفني بعد رحيله وإحياء ذكره عبر معارض استعادية، وكذلك يسلّط البحث على الاهتمام المحلي والعالمي بأعمال جبران طرزي، ومؤلفاته التي حوّلت من شكلها الورقي إلى شكل رقمي توثيقي متوافر للمؤرخين والمهتمين بالفن. كما يوثق البحث وصول لوحاته إلى العالمية واقتناء المتاحف العربية لها مثل غوغنهايم أبوظبي، والمتحف العربي للفن الحديث في قطر إضافة إلى إدراج تجربته الفريدة في مناهج الدراسات العليا في الجامعة اللبنانية. ويخلص البحث إلى أنّ طرزي لم يكن مجرد حرفي مغامر، أو فنان تشكيلي عادي بل كان عقلاً فذاً تمكّن من مزاجية التقليد، والحداثة مما وضعه في مصاف الفنانين المجدّدين العرب الأوائل، وأحد أكثر الوجوه الفنية حضوراً وتأثيراً في

is defined by what they do, and not by who they are.”

Research Study Importance, Statement, and Objective

This succinct insight transcending our understanding of time and temporal value, urging the human and creative spirit toward renewal, was the spark that pushed me to investigate the Lebanese press. I felt a compelling need to probe the artist’s mind, to relive

his captivating adventures, to decipher his artistic metaphors and to trace his creative journey of experimentation and development that spans the artistic, literary, and theoretical dimensions of Arab artistic identity. Hence, I cannot help but affirm that this prominent artist must be indelibly etched in our collective memory and visual culture. While Tarazi is acknowledged as a pioneer of geometric abstraction, there remains a conspicuous absence of systematic scholarly investigation on how the Lebanese and Arab press documented his evolution from traditional craftsmanship to modern art of high cultural significance. **It is within this gap that the core research problem resides. This study thereby seeks to** reconstruct a journalistic record to prevent an essential cultural narrative from fading into historical oblivion while documenting the relationship between media and artistic reputation. It also underscores the value of newspapers' archives as a resource for art-historical research, urging future scholars to explore them more frequently as primary documents. **Its main objective is to** investigate how the Lebanese press documented, interpreted and promoted Tarazi's artistic and intellectual legacy. Specifically, it aims to: identify the major newspapers and magazines

that covered his career; to analyze journalistic discourse surrounding his exhibitions and publications; to examine press representations of his artistic philosophy and commitment to Arab identity; to assess the press's role in preserving his legacy, and to trace the evolution of media interest in Tarazi before and after his death.

Research Hypothesis

Despite the absence of systematic scholarly inquiry into the endeavors of the Lebanese and Arab cultural print press, **this study assumes** that this medium in fact played a key role in chronicling Gebran Tarazi's artistic and literary legacy. It functioned as a dynamic intellectual space that contributed to disseminating and preserving the discourse around modern Arab artistic identity. Through its sustained engagement with Tarazi's work, the press dubbed his oeuvre as a defender of cultural authenticity against Western artistic hegemony and as a conduit bridging heritage and modernism.

Research Study Inquiry and Methodology

The core inquiry of this study centers on the artist's assertion: **"I do not chase- like many other artists- after Western schools whose**

primary objective is to invade our authentic heritage and destroy it.”¹. He thus merits enduring recognition not only because of the unwavering position of his artistic presence marked by a defined path, a clear methodology and intellectual weight, but also for the visionary insight he had and with which he redefined the very rules of art. By merging artistic pedagogy with lived experience, his stylistic commitment became standard.

Alongside Tarazi, there are other artists whose works have left a mark on the public’s memory and their aesthetic taste. Within the schools of Arab art, a revolutionary innovative generation of Iraqi and Arab artists was born, pushing art historians and critics to revisit certain chapters of their careers and revive their artistic legacies. Tarazi was central to this endeavor, earning widespread critical and journalistic acclaim given that his work revolutionized geometric abstraction, coupled with his manifesto of the world and his commitment to culture and heritage that made his artistic repertoire flourish. To systematically explore this historical dialogue, **this study adopts a qualitative, historical-analytical methodology**, drawing upon diverse primary and secondary sources. First, archival data collection involves Lebanese newspapers and

magazines, published interviews with Tarazi, and articles reviewing his exhibitions and novels. Second, **thematic content analysis** sorts out collected media into themes. Third, **chronological mapping** divides the study into coverage of the artists active exhibition years (1993-2010-) and retrospective reception following his passing (2011 to 2017).

Although Tarazi’s career has been the subject of **several previous research studies**, this study draws on materials accessible through press archives. The most relevant include Samir Al Sayegh’s essay on Tarazi’s geometric compositions (1993), and Tarazi’s own theoretical texts, *Geometric Variations* (2007) and the *Twelve Seasons* (2017) which document his artistic methodologies and shifts.

The main research questions of this study are: Who is Gebran Tarazi? What was his standing within the print press? Why was the press so consumed with chronicling the finest details of his exhibitions? What drove the press to dedicate so much space to dialogue with this towering figure?

Gebran Tarazi the Artist

Evidently, the drive to recall the icons of Arab art and to highlight the influential figures in that era of

visual arts movement is no longer a bet on an ephemeral admiration, but rather a necessity. It rigorously demands engaging with the legacies of contemporary artists, ones who dedicated themselves to reviving Arab identity in art and nurtured it as a cultural standard, asserting its role within the trajectory of contemporary history. The best testament of Tarazi's foresight lies in his declaration to *Al Kifah Al-Arabi*² newspaper, **"We suffer from a huge cultural and educational neglect, and this will lead us and our civilization to extinction."** Against such a backdrop, honoring this artist becomes a duty. The archives of his published individual interviews, articles about him, and news coverage that reference him and recall his methods of experimentation are a source of pride, not merely because he was an art innovator, but because he possessed a discerning intellect that remained rooted in his identity, his origins and the sources of Arab heritage. Lebanese journalists are entirely justified in frequently invoking Tarazi with eloquence. Reviewing Tarazi's retrospective exhibition in the Lebanese newspaper *Al-Akhbar*³, Nicole Younes titled her article with this evocative phrase **"Gebran Tarazi Weaves the Mirrors of the Soul"**. Tarazi truly wove the oriental spirit into aesthetic frameworks that elevate

Levantine and Arab identity, pulling the eye into an imaginative landscape of dozens of geometric abstraction paintings. In doing so, he insisted on constructing exceptional artistic units that reveal an enchanting Arab identity, one that uniquely belongs to this region.

His Artistic and Literary Biography

The Lebanese artist Gebran Tarazi was born in Damascus in 1944 into a family steeped in tradition, a lineage that had practiced Levantine crafts for over 160 years. Renowned for its Arabesque forms and embossed botanical motifs- its artistic signature- this family of artisanal craftsmen adorned grand palaces of the Levant and masterfully crafted oriental brass artifacts inlaid with silver, which found their way to Damascus, Beirut, Alexandria and Jerusalem. Tarazi spent a brief period of his life in Morocco. There, he deeply absorbed Moroccan arts and visual crafts that refined his artistic command. From a young age, he was passionate about reading, holding a particular affinity for French literature. Following his family's return to Beirut in 1959, he kept pace with Arab artistic artisanship as he pursued his secondary studies in Literature and Humanities/Philosophy and later his university studies, earning a law degree. His novel "The Olive

Press” was published in Paris in 1996. His creative works earned prestigious placement in local and international museums: A comprehensive collection was acquired by Mathaf Arab Museum of Modern Art in Qatar in 2015. The following year, in 2016, his paintings were exhibited in Paris alongside the international artist Victor Vasarely, in recognition of Tarazi’s contribution to modern Arab art and his Lebanese authenticity. In 2024, Tarazi’s creative experience was formally incorporated into the graduate curriculum at the Lebanese University, honoring his monumental creative and artistic role. His lifelong creative journey has been documented in two illustrated books focused on his artistic career. The first, *Geometric Variations*, published in 2007 by Dar Al-Funun Al-Jamila, Lebanon, features Tarazi’s philosophical and artistic manifesto *The Need for the Orient*. The second, *The Twelve Seasons*, was published in France in 2017 by Zaman Book.

Death claimed Gebran Tarazi in 2010. The day of his passing weighed heavily upon his family and fans.

His Artistic Experience and Press Reception

The Lebanese press devoted extraordinary attention to this innovative artist, consistently

maintaining that his artistic legacy merited recognition, dissemination and praise. The press’s interest stemmed from Tarazi’s experimental trajectory, his vision for both Arab and global arts, and his call for a return to cultural roots, all while upholding authenticity without rejecting or boycotting European modernist discourse.

In keeping with the professional and ethical responsibility of tracking and reviewing what has been written about this artist, I do not claim to have achieved total comprehensiveness regarding all Lebanese or Arab press coverage of his journey. Rather, I have relied upon accessible journalistic material, including a series of separate interviews with the artist and news reports on his solo exhibitions. I have also consulted journalistic and critical readings focused on his work. To accomplish this task, I found it necessary to divide my research into two parts. The first, presented here, covers what the Lebanese press documented about Gebran Tarazi. The second, currently in preparation, will address the coverage of the Arab press as part of my efforts in the near future.

Tarazi’s First Solo Exhibition as Documented by the Lebanese Press

In 1993, Beirut witnessed an artistic event worthy of its cultural

stature. The Lebanese artist Gebran Tarazi held his first solo exhibition at Galerie L'amateur d'art. This event announced the emergence of an artist whose experience was passed down by a family that had practiced the craft of oriental furniture-making for four generations, as previously noted. Tarazi preserved and honored his family's heritage while forging a path that combined refined craftsmanship with creative art. The exhibition embodied his aspirations and dreams of an Arab artistic presence capable of expanding the scope of oriental identity.

At the time, the Lebanese press regarded his experience as striking. Tarazi demonstrated a great mastery and knowledge of craftsmanship, ornamentation and decorative art, which he subsequently developed and expanded into the realm of geometric abstraction, presenting works with an experimental stylistic orientation and an aesthetic exploration of form. Anyone who followed that exhibition would recognize that Samir Al Sayegh's catalogue essay did full justice to Tarazi's artistic endeavor. In his introduction, Al Sayegh pointed to Tarazi's perceptiveness and situated the reader in the artist's world: **"Tarazi remains true to the artistic principle established by the arts of this land, for he comes from a distinguished**

family that is deeply versed in these arts and their philosophy."

Al Sayegh confidently affirmed that this sincere description heralded an artist committed to combining craftsmanship and art.

Reviewing the history of Lebanese and Arab journalism reveals that Tarazi repeatedly clarified this point. Among the examples I cite here, is his interview with As-Safir⁴ newspaper following his first solo exhibition, in which he openly and responsibly stated, **"Since childhood, squares fascinated me. As I grew older, I began wondering: What have we, the Greek Orthodox Christians, contributed to Arab civilization?"**

Such a realistic, responsible reflection places us before an artist of a different natural disposition- an artist of high caliber- one who raises the dilemma of understanding art, the placement of Arab philosophy, and the individual's relationship to their identity. How much more so for an artist that emerges from the core of Arab history?!

It was likely the potential of this artistic mindset that drove the press at the time to closely follow his artistic activities. On May 4, 1993, the newspaper Ad-Diyar⁵ published a lengthy article about the exhibition held that same year under the broad title **"Critical Readings of**

Exhibitions by Assad Araby, Gebran Tarazi, Mimosa Al Aarrawi, and Hassan Akl". The article highlighted Tarazi's experimental approach, the development of his artistic plastic practice and visual art methods, his high stylistic command in handling the square form and the organization of the piece's boundaries. The press stated that **"Tarazi uses a system of mathematical correspondences, taking the square as the core of his work, from which endless visual manifestations unfold."**

Anyone keeping up with the cultural press of that period will soon realize that only two days after the publication of that article, the artist himself stepped forward to articulate his vision in an interview published on May 6, 1993, in the Visual Arts section of the Lebanese newspaper *As-Safir*⁶. There he stated, **"I initially wanted, from a formal viewpoint, to break free from this static balance, this symmetry, typical of classical Islamic art. I was searching for movement, for a new expressivity."**

This statement shows that Tarazi sought to push abstract art into new experimental territory through rigorously structured visual logic capable of generating diversity in composition and formal identity, while breaking free from repetition

and imitation. Yet, even in his pursuit of innovation, he remained deeply rooted in the aesthetic and expressive traditions that informed his work. He drew simultaneously on his affirmed cultural orientation and his extensive experience in craftsmanship, which he gradually elevated into an autonomous artistic language governed by its own structural principles and formal vocabulary. The Lebanese press, meanwhile, did not merely stop at announcing Gebran Tarazi's first solo exhibition; critical engagement with his work continued to grow. Two days after that interview, *Al-Hayat*⁷ newspaper published an article on May 7, 1993, by Maha Sultan in which she observed that **"this kind of art derives its legitimacy from the power of possibilities and probabilities, latent within form itself as a geometric unit through repetition, symmetry, inversion and exchange."** Indeed, one of Tarazi's ambitions was to produce different forms governed by their own aesthetic logic and referential approaches. This makes complete sense since art for Tarazi was both an intellectual preoccupation and an aesthetic calling. It is hardly surprising as well to encounter such high self-confidence and ambition in the way the artist spoke about art. In an interview with *Jamaluki*⁸ magazine, he

described himself as “**an adventurous craftsman**”. He reaffirmed his artistic interests when he declared to that same magazine: “**I do not claim to combine the two completely, nor can I. When I engage in craftsmanship, I feel at ease, but when it comes to art, you must enter a state of total alertness.**”

By expressing such views so openly in the Lebanese press, Tarazi revealed not only his commitment to artistic integrity and cultural rootedness, but also his acute awareness of the distinction between being a skilled artisan and being an artist. It was precisely this awareness that led An-Nahar⁹ newspaper to enthusiastically follow Tarazi’s first solo exhibition. In its cultural supplement no. 61, published on Saturday, May 8, 1993, the newspaper devoted a series of articles to the exhibition under the title “**Gebran Tarazi’s Exhibition: Rounding the Square.**” Jacques Al-Aswad wrote in a strikingly memorable line, “**One cannot ignore this madman of geometry, this engineer of delirium, for he is- from a local perspective- an earnest representative of geometric abstraction.**” With that description, the Lebanese press effectively closed its coverage of Tarazi’s first solo exhibition by consecrating him as one of the most compelling voices of geometric abstraction. The years

that followed, however, would reveal another dimension of his creative path: The novelist and the man of letters whose new literary title would also be celebrated by the cultural press.

An-Nahar Newspaper Follows the Launch of *The Olive Press*

While revisiting the details of Gebran Tarazi’s first exhibition and his artistic activities as covered by the print press during those years, I found it necessary to turn briefly to his literary achievement in fiction. In 1996, the French publishing house Editions L’Harmattan, as part of its Arab Writings series, published his novel *The Olive Press*. The novel is a deeply contemplative work as described by the cultural supplement of An-Nahar¹⁰, which introduced it under the headline “**Two Arabic books in French: Gebran Tarazi and Rasha Salah.**” Those who read the novel soon gathered that it explores the spiritual and existential journey of its protagonist Saint Simeon Stylites. The newspaper article noted that Tarazi’s narrative text “**reveals the affectionate relationship between the writer and his community.**” The cultural press continued to engage with the novel, releasing further critical reviews and informative reports. On Monday, November 11,

1996, An-Nahar newspaper covered the book signing event that was attended by Tarazi's fans and during which the artist-author was asked about the central idea of the novel, **"the only true revolution is the one that takes place within oneself and that is what I sought to capture in *The Olive Press*."** Tarazi answered. Critics, therefore, came to regard the novel as contemplative meditation on contemporary reality, one in which Tarazi advocates coexistence grounded in genuine humanity and universal peace.

The Second Solo Exhibition and the Press Coverage

Four years after his first exhibition, Gebran Tarazi returned with renewed artistic energy and evoked vision, presenting his second solo exhibition in 1997 at Gallery 50 x 70. In this exhibition, he reaffirmed the constants of his geometric abstraction experience while placing particular emphasis on conscious planning and interest in innovating artistic methods. His artistic name now rested on a mature foundation shaped by refined expertise and expressive language, liberated from the restraints of the past and fully reconciled with the idea of modernism. This second exhibition unfolded according to a rigorous discipline

that sought to reconcile heritage and modernism within a coherent visual relationship. This, in turn, prompted the Lebanese press to take a particular interest in this art event that took place in Beirut in 1997. Among the earliest to cover the event was Al-Liwaa¹¹ newspaper which featured a May 16, 1997 article by journalist Zuhair Ghanem under this title: **"The Geometry of the Soul: Arabesque and Music Maqamat"**. Ghanem highlighted both the importance of the exhibition and Tarazi's geometric practice and abilities: **"Expressive language must summon all its courage to read such an audacious, brave, adventurous visual text- one unfolding across a city that seeks to redeem its soul, to rise from its own ashes and inevitably redefine itself in the image of modernism,"** he remarked. This assessment unveils a significant detail: Tarazi did not simply merge heritage with Western innovation. Instead, he employed a deliberate reduction guided by a highly controlled expressive process born from stylistic principles of his own aesthetic vision and understanding of his foundational experience.

I believe that the conceptual diversity embodied in his principle of the "Vertical-Horizontal" (Qayem - Nayem) pattern- as elaborated in

his book *Geometric Variations*- is bound to command ongoing attention from critics and journalists alike. His concept emerged from years of sustained study, during which Tarazi's engagement further experimented with materials such as wood and tin. He also integrated additional shades of colors which, as he noted in an interview with Jamaluki magazine, held a distinctive value and sensitivity: **"I rely on fixed geometric forms that I animate and set in motion through an infinitely subtle play of colors. I blend colors until they become vibrant and breathing life into one another."**

I find Tarazi unique among many of his peers in his understanding of art, possessing patience and clarity of vision that enabled him to pursue and ultimately realize a long-term artistic project. Having closely studied European art, he became aware of the differences between Western technical styles and color techniques on one hand, and oriental aesthetic sensibilities on the other. Seeking to produce works capable of captivating the viewer, he remarked in the same interview: **"In the West, artists use raw colors and focus on the individualism of both the artist and the human being. In the East, however, colors become an expression of the power of the whole and the feebleness of individualism."**

This is how Gebran Tarazi grasped the practice of art that defined his trajectory and to which he dedicated his full energy. What truly sets him apart is the advanced artistic consciousness that elevated him into the ranks of major artists. This explains why Al-Kifah Al-Arabi¹² newspaper, in its issue of May 20, 1997, sought him out for an interview, only days after the opening of his second solo exhibition. At the beginning of her article, writer Roula Abdallah observed: **"Gebran Tarazi's works are marked by geometric abstraction. Anyone who contemplates them, feels as though they are standing before the architectural blueprint of an ancient Roman city."** Her observation was remarkably perceptive. Tarazi, a seasoned artist, carried within him the legacy of his family's artistic heritage and, as previously noted, moved among several Arab countries- from Syria to Morocco- imbuing his vision and memory with oriental ornamentation. This immersion enabled him to create a flawless art, free from the influence of Western schools. To understand why his second exhibition was met with such success, one must revisit what he told As-Safir¹³ newspaper on May 6, 1993, after his first exhibition. When asked about his future ambitions, he replied: **"I do not want to be limited**

to a painting purchased for private homes and seen by only a few. I aspire to collaborate with architects so that I may execute my work on the exterior of buildings for everyone to see them, ensuring that art belongs to all and becomes a means to develop their aesthetic taste". Such were the dreams of an artist haunted by the Orient. His ambition was to make art available to all and foster a collective aesthetic sensibility toward the creative legacy he left behind- one that garnered dozens of articles in the Lebanese press, and one that his family has vowed to preserve as they continue honoring his creative calling.

A Legacy Sustained and Honored

Following his passing, Gebran Tarazi's family faithfully honored his legacy and did justice to his memory. Their action was rooted in both his innovative contribution to geometric abstraction and a strong belief that lovers of Arab visual art deserved to explore tens of completed paintings he left behind. This prominent family took the initiative to revive his name and memory by hosting an art exhibition in 2011 at Villa Audi where a collection of Tarazi's abstract works was showcased. An-Nahar¹⁴ newspaper was quick to cover it. On Sunday, December 11, 2011, critic

Laure Ghorayeb penned a review article with an arresting title: "**Gebran Tarazi at Villa Audi: The Artist of Mindfulness Could Close his Eyes to Draw with Masterful Geometry**".

In her piece, Ghorayeb contextualized several of the core concepts behind the artist's mastery. Since Tarazi's artistic engagement, semantic and expressive coherence, and geometric structural design endowed his works with multi-layered aesthetic qualities, Ghorayeb could not help but ask this question: "**Are we in the presence of an excellent craftwork or an artist so masterful at using his hand to the extent that he seems to be able to draw with his eyes closed?**" This astonishment evoked by Tarazi's works among Lebanese journalists had its plausible reasons: He tapped into the art world through the gateway of Arab heritage, endured a lifetime of hardships of learning and training to build a brilliant reputation. He conditioned his mind and aesthetic taste to produce an art worthy of his family's legacy, to which his oeuvre bears witness. Nearly a year after that article, Al-Liwaa¹⁵ newspaper further honored him. On January 14, 2012, the publication ran this headline "**Geometric Variations Exhibition of the Late Artist Gebran Tarazi: Works that Summon the Eyes of**

Wonder". When looking through the dual lens of the profound acclaim for Tarazi's works and his own artistic trajectory, it becomes fitting to say that the Lebanese press closely monitored Gebran Tarazi's latest, always ensuring that his name made it to the headlines of newspapers' cultural pages.

A Retrospective Exhibition of Oriental Paintings and Mirrors

Gebran Tarazi's family did not confine his exhibitable oeuvre to a narrow selection. His works embraced wooden boxes, geometrically dimensional paintings and mirrors that he handled meticulously, blending an oriental aesthetic design with a modern flair. As every work deserved to be celebrated, favoring one over the other would have done Tarazi's collection much injustice. Consequently, a retrospective exhibition was held at the Saleh Barakat Gallery in Clemenceau, Beirut, bringing together all Tarazi's artistic legacies. The exhibition was accompanied by Tarazi's book *The Twelve Seasons*, in both English and French. Al-Hayat¹⁶ newspaper showed profound interest in the artist's legacy, covering the opening of this retrospective exhibition in its April 15, 2017 issue no. 19734. Through a featured title "**The Maqamat of the Square in Gebran Tarazi's Exhibition**

and Book", Maha Sultan introduced readers to many of the artist's concepts, especially his artistic experimentation and the diversity of artistic practice and types of medium- from mirrors to paintings. This versatility led Sultan to inform the reader of this artist's importance, saying: "**his singularity lies in exploring the intellectual aspect of his work and achieving a distinctive differentiation through his mathematical writings- texts that articulate the level of pleasure found in reaching evidence-based aesthetic solutions.**" In truth, this opinion brings to light many overlooked aspects, chiefly that Tarazi represents a source of pride for the Lebanese cultural press, and that the intellectual dimension of his work demands academic and critical study. Any examination of some of the artist's interviews confirms that journalist Maha Sultan's assessment is well-founded. For instance, in an interview conducted by Roula Abdallah with Tarazi for Al-Kifah Al-Arabi¹⁷ (issue dated May 20, 1997) Tarazi declares: "**my work is an Arab artistic struggle; when we present Arab paintings that are at the core of our oriental heritage, we cannot but call it an Arab struggle against external invasion.**" Perhaps no statement offers a shorter and clearer route for everyone to understand

Tarazi's trajectory and the intellectual and cognitive orientations that underly his work. It invites us to re-read his works through a similar discourse native to the spirit of the Orient. Given that the Lebanese press continued to track Tarazi's journey, Al-Akhbar¹⁸ newspaper offered a fresh reading in an article by Nicole Younes titled **"Gebran Tarazi Weaves the Mirrors of the Soul"** (issue no. 316764, dated Saturday, April 29, 2017). The article reveals how central the concept of the soul was for Tarazi and how his units, artwork and compositions coalesced to leave a lasting imprint on the viewer's mind. If this retrospective exhibition of Tarazi's works sought to recall, revive, honor and etch his name in history, the artist had long since ensured his own immortality by embedding his Arab identity within the fabric of his timeless art.

Although this research is fundamentally concerned with the Lebanese press writers who wrote about Gebran Tarazi, it is worth noting that his impact has moved beyond the printed page into the world of sustainable digital documentation. In 2023, the Beirut Museum of Art (BeMA)- still under construction-completed the process of converting all of Tarazi's documents and achievements into an accessible

electronic digital archive available for researchers and historians.

Distinctive and valuable, Tarazi's works crossed geographical boundaries and settled in international forums, receiving global recognition. The Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, for instance, has acquired a collection of the artist's works as part of the museum's strategy to acquire artworks documenting the history of modern contemporary art in the Arab region.

In 2025, one of Tarazi's paintings was exhibited at the Nabu Museum in an exhibition titled "Our Identity and the Symbols: from Gilgamesh, Baal and Adonis to Today".

Meanwhile, the Open Walls exhibition at the American University of Beirut in its second edition in March 2025 featured a dedicated pavilion for the Gebran Tarazi Foundation (Gebran Tarazi Estate). The exhibition took place at the AUB Byblos Bank Art Gallery, Ada Dodge Hall, aiming to create a dialogue between the university's permanent collection and the collections of other artistic establishments.

Additionally, on May 6, 2025, the American University of Beirut hosted an academic lecture by Professor Morad Montazami, an art historian and museum curator, which addressed the dialectic between "Arab artisanal

craft” and “modern art”, using the works of Gebran Tarazi as a model for this fusion.

Conclusion

In this broad-ranging survey of what the Lebanese cultural press has documented regarding Tarazi’s achievements, we are presented with a rich, nuanced outcome, chiefly the press’s well-instituted and informed interest in Tarazi. This interest is driven by his theoretical and aesthetic visions for handling mathematical forms within the field of visual arts. His transition from craft to depiction of art- forged through mental and existential calculations- was tied to his belief that experimentation in art can succeed only when it is built upon expertise and employs techniques that are reaffirmed through reflection and

focus on sensory and expressive values within contemporary art discourse.

The print press closely tracked Tarazi’s artistic activities, dedicating its cultural pages to highlighting his name. As a result, he became the most frequently featured figure in the journalistic history of Lebanese art.

If 1993 marked the true beginning of the public’s recognition of Tarazi and his creative legacy, the years following his passing witnessed a continued interest in him. The Lebanese and Arab press kept reaffirming his significance and chronicling his presence in Arab and international museums and galleries through fresh readings and exhibitions of his paintings for the art public. This is the subject of the second part of this study- the fruit of an extensive and in-depth research project to be published in the near future.

Endnotes

- 1 - See Al-Kifah Al Arabi newspaper, published on May 20, 1997, under “Geometric Variations by Gebran Tarazi in (50x70) Gallery”. The paintings belong to Tarazi’s “Qay-em-Nayem” principle.
- 2 - See the previous source.
- 3 - Published in the cultural supplement of An-Nahar newspaper, issue no. 244, published on November 9, 1996.
- 4 - See the interview by Ahmad Bazzoun with the artist Gebran Tarazi for As-Safir newspaper, published on Thursday, May 6, 1993.
- 5 - See Ad-Diyar newspaper published on Tuesday, May 4, 1993.
- 6 - See As-Safir newspaper published on Thursday, May 6, 1993.
- 7 - See the Lebanese Al-Hayat newspaper, published on Friday, May 7, 1993.

- 8 - See Jamaluki magazine, one of 1999’s issues by Jana Abdel Aswad.
- 9 - See the cultural supplement of An-Nahar newspaper, issue no. 61, published on Saturday, May 8, 1993.
- 10 - See the Lebanese Al-Liwaa newspaper published on May 16, 1997.
- 11 -
- 12 - See Al-Kifah Al Arabi newspaper, published on May 20, 1997.
- 13 - See As-Safir newspaper published on Thursday, May 6, 1993.
- 14 - See An-Nahar newspaper, published on Sunday, December 11, 2011.
- 15 - See the Lebanese Al-Liwaa newspaper published on January 14, 2012.
- 16 - See the Lebanese Al-Hayat newspaper, issue no. 19734, published on Saturday, April 15, 2017.

17 - See Al-Kifah Al Arabi newspaper, published on May 20, 1997.

18 - See Al-Akhbar newspaper, issue no. 3164, published on Saturday, April 29, 2017.

References & Sources

- See Al-Kifah Al Arabi newspaper, published on May 20, 1997, under "Geometric Variations by Gebran Tarazi in (50x70) Gallery". The paintings belong to Tarazi's "Qayem-Nayem" principle.
- 2- See the interview by Ahmad Bazzoun with the artist Gebran Tarazi for As-Safir newspaper, published on Thursday, May 6, 1993.
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- 6- See Jamaluki magazine, one of 1999's issues by Jana Abdel Aswad.
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- 12- See the Lebanese Al-Liwaa newspaper published on January 14, 2012.
- 13- See the Lebanese Al-Hayat newspaper, issue no. 19734, published on Saturday, April 15, 2017.
- 14- See Al-Kifah Al Arabi newspaper, published on May 20, 1997.
- 15- See Al-Akhbar newspaper, issue no. 3164, published on Saturday, April 29, 2017.