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## The Divine Truth and its Relation to Coffee-house Painting Based on Coomaraswamy Ideas

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### Abstract

The truth comes from a single source, and it has spread in all levels of the universe. The essence and divine truth are of tradition and wisdom does not deny the truth of holiness. One of the old artistic traditions that has been the product of almost eleven centuries of gradual development of Shiite's ceremonial mourning is coffee-house painting, which was found in fourteenth century.

What has given originality to these artworks is the inner feature of them according to which, the artist, in a figurative form, has revealed by code and allegory. What has been problem here, is based on the idea of an ideologist, in Ananda Coomaraswamy<sup>1</sup> the content of the definition and function of traditional art with this work, there is a ratio between the painting of a coffee-house with a divine truth or the same examples, that artist also created a virtuous activity based on rational activity.

**Aims:** This paper intends to determine the divine truth of the artwork based on Ananda Coomaraswamy's ideas and to indicate its relation to the coffee-house painting, as a traditional art.

**Research methodology:** he research methodology in this paper is of a theoretical and qualitative nature, and the data collection is done based on a documentary study. In this regard, two instances of the coffee-house painting, were randomly selected, and the concept of the divine truth and its relation to the above artworks were explained based on Coomaraswamy's point of view.

**Conclusion:** Divine Truth is the same as heavenly source whose memory conjures up of the immortal representative image. Coomaraswamy considers art as the embodiment of a pre-conceived form in material form that, firstly, perceives the stage of liberation (observing the perception of the immortal truth) and then, dedicating a physical body to the idea, seeks for the stage of captivation. Based on Coomaraswamy's ideas, the coffee-house painting is a manifestation of the Divine Truth and of those images that the artist creates based on his rational activity and also devotional activity. What makes these works authentic is their inner meaning and the truth the artist has expressed in a symbolic and allegorical manner through physical form. A coffee-house painting is not a crafting skill and art but is based on knowledge and rules whose source of inspiration, methods, and origins transcend the limits of the individual and independent human mind and the artist is merely a channel of mercy motivated by the spiritual universe.

**Keywords:** *Tradition, Traditional art, Divine Truth, Coomaraswamy's ideas, coffee-house painting.*

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## Introduction and statement of the problem

What invokes humanity is the existence of a true and spiritual truth that religions have consensus on. The belief in the existence of such an existence is a common lesson in all religions. However, they differ regarding the features and characteristics attributed to it, and the applied image and interpretation as well. In Islamic thought, the issue of monotheism is considered to be the soul of the tradition and the tendency towards God is considered as the foundation of all other principles and Quranic and Islamic epistemology. The true knowledge is rooted in divine revelation and wisdom and the way of realizing the revelation message and its principles is through art.

Since art and the tradition of Iranian art and, in particular, painting has possessed specific components in the surrounding world based on the divine tradition, one of these components has been the attention and emphasis that this art has given to the world of figures and the presence of figurative images or the Divine Truth in artworks. This attitude has long been enjoying a prestigious position and value in the Iranian culture and art, and during the centuries and with the advancement of the cultures and civilizations of the Iranian plateau, not only has its credibility not declined, but also has developed to be more structured than the past and, during the Islamic era, has accompanied Islamic messages and ideals. In the meantime, the coffee-house painting took form, in the latest Safavi period, based on the religious tradition and beliefs and the collective culture as well as artistic tradition, and expanded in the society as a benefit and a necessity to humans. This art came to exist not as one with the typical values associated with the modern art of the time, but as a means of expressing the tone of everyday life and social morality. This presence is clearly obvious in the Iranian folklore culture and artistic tradition. Similar to the divine art, this art goes beyond the artist and is dependent on the divine spirit. It is an art that, due to its divine origins, encompasses blessing and so blesses the audience as well. In coffee-house

painting works, the nature and figure are feigned and re-invented in order for a thing to be illustrated beyond the reality and, to create a situation to reveal the truth.

This article aims to examine the Divine Truth of the artwork or the figurative images and its relation to coffee-house painting, based on the ideas proposed by Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy who was a thinker pursuing the school of traditionalism. Coomaraswamy is one of the great philosophers who has intensively discussed the topic of folklore art, and has also studied the Iranian art. Since Coomaraswamy's view of the definition and mechanism of art, and in particular, traditional art is close to what is prevalent in Islamic art as well as Iranian art, specially coffee-house painting, among the traditionalists it is the most appropriate approach to the study of coffee-house painting. One of the most important aspects of this relationship is the concept of art based on the divine tradition. Coomaraswamy conceives art as the words of God, in a way that he writes: The words of God are as same as the ideals and principles that art—either through words or through figures— is able to express. Thus, the words of God are beyond the words and exteriors carrying meanings and concepts, and it is through this perspective that we can contend that the words and images created by the artist are not only concerned with our senses but carry with themselves different meanings (Coomaraswamy, 1955: 33). The questions that this paper tries to answer include:

1. How is the Divine Truth of the artwork explained in terms of Coomaraswamy's beliefs?
2. What is the Divine Truth and its relation to the coffee-house painting based on Coomaraswamy's ideas?

## Theoretical background

The theoretical framework in this paper is based on the ideas of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, a philosopher pursuing the traditionalism school of thought, regarding the definition and conceptualization of traditional art, and determining the figurative image or the Divine Truth. According

to this variable, coffee-house painting is analyzed and its relation to the aforementioned theoretical views is delineated. According to Coomaraswamy, art is “the materialization of the pre-conceived form in the material form”. He assigns a dual role to the artist; a rational or free activity, and a physical and devotional activity. Coomaraswamy conceptualizes the Divine Truth or the figurative image as being as same as the heavenly origin whose memory conjures up the representative immortal image.

### Research method

The research method in this article is theoretical and based on qualitative analysis, and the data is collected through studying documents and using library sources. In this regard, two instances of coffee-house painting, -one being “Moslem Ibn Aqil’s departure to Kufa” by Mohammad Modaber, and the other being Darvishi screen of the “battle scene of Hazrat Abolfazl al-Abbas against Marred Ibn Sodaif” by Mohammad Farahani- are randomly selected.

### Literature review

In surveying the background to this study, the author, by reviewing the available written sources, noticed that there has been no research on this topic prior to the present paper, and the artistic and mental approach followed in this paper has not been implemented so far. It is noteworthy, however, that a number of books, papers, and also student theses exist on the topic of imaginative painting which have mostly pursued narrative, reviewing, historical, and at times symbol analysis styles that can be perceived as starting points to the present study.

Seif (1990), in a book titled coffee-house painting, published by Reza Abbasi, presents detailed explanations on the general features and issues pertaining to this style and the approach followed in these artworks. This book is considered as an important resource in introducing and studying coffee-house painting in general.

Bulouk Bashi (1996), in a book titled coffee-houses in Iran, published by Cultural Research Office,

presents a comprehensive survey of café institution in the past and its functions as well as brief sketches on painting architecture, painting, narrating, and coffee-house painting which are not comprehensive. Chalipa and Esmaeilzadeh (2007), in a study titled Hasan Esmaeilzadeh: painter in a coffee-house, published by Nazar publications, introduces the coffee-house works of Esmaeilzadeh and their features, and also presents brief descriptions of coffee-house painting.

Chalipa (2011), in his Ph.D. dissertation titled “the effect of native and religious art and literature on imaginative painting” at the faculty of art of Shahed University, examines the tendency of imaginative painters to the written and oral forms of epic literary texts and religious issues.

Regarding the studies conducted on Coomaraswamy’s ideas, according to the researcher’s surveys, except for the translation of some books into Persian language [which have been so useful in writing this paper and are presented in the References] and also some papers, there has not been a comprehensive research on the topic. In a paper titled “a survey and critique of beauty and completeness from the viewpoint of Ananda Coomaraswamy” (Saeed Binaiee Motlaq, 2009) and also the translated English paper “Ananda Coomaraswamy: Scholar of the Spirit” (Brian Keeble, translated by M. Hedayati, 2006) some of Coomaraswamy’s ideas are discussed. It is also noteworthy to refer to the paper written by Zekrgou (2009), titled “Nature in the Eastern art” and published in the collection of the conference papers in nature in the Eastern art. In that paper, Zekrgou discusses some of Coomaraswamy’s ideas on the nature in the Eastern art, and states that the nature in Eastern lexicon is associated with the essence not with the outward.

### The Divine Truth

The Divine Truth lies at the heart of the sacred, and it is as same as the figurative image depicted in the reality of human art and speaks through the code, allusion, and the parable. The divine affair is the

immediate manifestation of the supreme essence in the mortal matter and its understanding is intrinsic to the tradition.

Coomaraswamy defines the tradition as follows: “the tradition implies everything that has a divine source and includes all manifestations that are crystallized at the level of mankind” (Zekrgou, 1999: 70). Therefore, “since every tradition is also associated with the divine affair, it follows that the divine art lies at the heart of traditional art and similar to religion, it corresponds to both truth and presence. (Nasr, 2000: 76).

Following the definition and the interpretation of the divine affair in relation to this world, the divine affair would be the consideration of the uncreated in the creature, of the timeless in time, the indeterminate in the place, the suprafacial in the superficial. The divine thing is the same mysterious entrance of a presence in an order of being (Rahmati, 2015: 108). Concerning the divine thing, Rene Guenon states that “the divine thing is the activity of the traditional human being which is joint to the sacred quality. This is because in the traditional civilizations such as Islam or Hindu, religion is, by no means, limited and isolated to occupy a separate place in the acts of the Muslim or Hindu person. In the traditional life, religion is present and contagious in all aspects of human life, and in fact, forms the whole of life (Guenon, 1986: 65). “In fact, this world is the universe in which the divine has already manifested itself. In other words, all the universe is the manifestation of the divine and a consequence of the sacred. Therefore, sanctity is not a stage in the history of human mind but an element of the structure of the traditional human mind (Eliadeh, 1996: 27). So, the divine essence and truth is the starting point of the tradition, and the tradition is not disconnected from the divine essence and truth. Understanding and interpreting the Divine Truth is only possible for the traditional human, and the one who does not perceive the sacred essence is unable to understand the tradition.

“The traditional art is based not on the imaginary but on the real. Everyone who understands the meaning

and concept of the traditional art knows that the origin of this art is a supra-individual one and is as same as the consistent realm of the essences or the realm of reign which is also the source of traditional thought and knowledge (Akrami, 2004: 63). The world of figures “encapsulates the divine form of the entities of the physical world, and also is the only degree of the order of the divine existence of life in which the images of beings and the truth take the figurative form, by the permission of God” (Motahari Elhami, 2001: 10). Thus, the Divine Truth of the artworks or of the figurative images is as same as the divine figure whose memory conjures up the immortal representative image.

### **The Divine Truth of an artwork from Coomaraswamy’s perspective**

One of the important topics in the fields of aesthetics in Coomaraswamy’s thought is the concept of exemplary images or the Divine Truth of the artworks. In the definitions and conceptualizations of art presented by him, he theorizes on the basis of this important key concept. This key concept is extensively employed in his discussions and papers and the analysis of the artistic work of the Christian era, the medieval era and also the traditional art of the east.

The definition that Coomaraswamy presents of art is “the materialization of the pre-conceived form in the material form”. He assigns a dual role to the artist; a rational activity and a devotional activity. In Coomaraswamy’s opinion, art is the reign of the artist and is the knowledge and skill he possesses. “This knowledge and skill is not about what he wants to create but [at the first level] is the ability of imagining the (final) form of the object which is going to be created, [and at the second level] is seeking a way to materialize the imagined form, using the most appropriate materials, until finally, the created product will be useable” (Coomaraswamy, 2014: 115). “As Eckhart says, any object must come from within, that is through its true form, in order to achieve its deserving expressive form” (Ibid, 15).

Coomaraswamy believed that true art is essentially an act based on the reason and intellect. Through this main idea, he envisioned the main aim of the artist as the presentation of the uniform principle in a variety of formats. According to Coomaraswamy, what is created by the artist is not only pertinent to our senses but carries with it different meanings. He describes the artist's efforts in the creation of the work and the action that the artist presents through art as "bright and incredible": "Sometimes, it seems that the artist has gone to the divine reign and has seen images of the angles or the works of architecture to create new things on Earth" (Coomaraswamy, 2012: 21). Therefore, in Coomaraswamy's view, first, the artist's internal perception of the Divine Truth has to take place, and then, to come to senses in the domain of imagination and materialization; otherwise, what is imagined and created by the artist, will be a completely valueless product lacking artistic credibility. However, in the process of meaning reception, also the spirit and the soul of the artist come to play a role, but again, the purposeful divine inspirations are dominant and decisive: "The direct receipt (observation) of an imitable image and its presentation in a tangible form is a rational conception created by the artist; just as the perpetual minds are offshoots of the immortal divine intellect. The image that takes form in the artist's imagination naturally stems from his spirit and this does not occur through aimless inspirations but is a purposeful and lively act, [in other words, the spring of this creative, purposeful, and lively process] is a word whose potential lies in the mind" (Coomaraswamy, 2014: 62). Thus, Coomaraswamy considers the Divine Truth as same as the heavenly origin whose memory conjures up the immortal figurative image.

Coomaraswamy quotes, with some modifications, from Eckhart on the subject of "interpretation and reception of the example which is difficult" as follows: "In order for an object to be correctly [to its completeness] presented, it must be spilled out from within, and has to be elicited from its own image" [equal to the Greek Eidos] or as Augustin puts it "it is

through the instances of objects that we decide which ones to select" (Rahmati, 2015: 241). Therefore, the Eastern traditional art is taken as an idealistic and exemplar art.

### **The coffee-house painting tradition**

Many art researchers and scholars have somewhat given a superficial overview on the analysis of Iranian folklore painting, and have not taken into consideration the internal and philosophical aspects of these paintings; therefore, compared to the official and royal art of the late Safavi until contemporary era, they consider the Iranian folklore painting, which is the product of the reflection of people's social and cultural life and the artist's inner cognition of religion and beliefs and their manner of expression as a media, as a simple and unsophisticated art that is dependent on the people's taste, and take this folklore art as being devoid of artistic thought and as a sole means of surface-level expressions of literary subjects and the like.

On coffee-house painting, Pakbaz writes: "coffee-house painting is created, following the constitutional movement based on folklore and religious art traditions and affected by the customary naturalism of the time, by the illiterate artists, and manifests its most striking representations in Pahlavi era. Researchers trace the folklore and religious painting in Iran back to Safavid era –when Shitte substantially spread through the country" (Pakbaz, 2000: 201).

It is definitely true that, during the last centuries, various styles of painting inspired by the folklore and primitive culture –simultaneous with the official and royal art- have grown; however, the so-called coffee-house painting is a different and recent issue. "This type of painting reflected the national ideals and desires, religious beliefs, and the spirit of the specific culture of the medium class of the urban community, and was a newer phenomenon than the other formats of folklore painting (such as screen painting, wall painting of the holy shrines, glass painting with religious theme, etc.). The core themes of these paintings include the stories of Ferdowsi's



Shahname and Nezami's Khamse, Karbala events, Quran anecdotes, and folklore tales. The painter painted these themes based on the narratives he heard from the story teller, mourn teller, panegyrist, and in the same way that these are represented in the collective consciousness of the ordinary people" (Ibid: 201).

Based on the concept and definition of tradition and traditional arts given by the traditionalist philosophers, the Iranian folklore painting, and in particular the coffee-house painting, is categorized in this type of art. Accordingly, many of Coomaraswamy's ideas are in line with the Iranian artistic tradition, coffee-house painting included. In both the Islamic tradition and Coomaraswamy's perspective, the purpose of human life is known to be beyond the material and worldly pleasure, and the artist's mission in the creation of the artwork is described in terms of human's spiritual and rational dimensions.

Considering the features of Iranian painting and the artistic tradition of this country, the rejection of the artist's individuality, the presence of the imagination and the different view of the world, the manifestation of figurative images, and arriving at the meaning, etc. are emphasized in the continuation of the tradition, and in addition, the consequences of the governmental, political, and social changes and progression patterns have placed the Iranian folklore painting in the continuation of the painting tradition. Although in the paintings in the past, the behavior, situation and conditions of creation, and the goal behind the paintings have been different from the imaginative painting, which has not been unaffected by the social and political thought and the presence of the Western technology and industry in Iran, what is of importance and gives this school of thought a traditionalist and purposeful orientation is the divine essence and truth of the artwork and also the internal aspects of it that the artist exposes, in addition to the material and tools of the time, in a physical format.

These paintings "indicate an era of the infinite

cycle of inward-appearance that was born, years before, in the Iranian Manichean, and then led to the spiritual mentality and the illumination of its time and reflected the Iranian glory, and then was the time of the formation of a new reading of it" (Khatami, 2014: 227).

### **The Divine Truth and its relation to coffee-house painting**

Art in the traditional thought and what is called great art is particularly related to the truth, and in the works of coffee-house painting that very truth is realized. When the truth is realized, art is revealed. Certainly, every artwork is created by tools and materials, and these works as well appeared among people with the materials and tools taken from the Western art which was the consequence of the political, social, and cultural changes in the government. Following that, all factors and elements are considered as tools for the revealing of truth through the artist's imagination and the spiritual and divine interpretation; when they are employed for the formation and creation of the image of the artwork, they express the purpose and goal of the artwork and the artist's world. Entering this domain is the encounter with truth and the expression of the truth. Therefore, the artwork is where the truth is manifested, and this manifestation leads to the formation of art. In general, in this artistic tradition, the truth is dependent on the reason, but the reason is not all, existence does also exist.

Analyzing the works of coffee-house painting, it is revealed that through the presence inherent in these works between the icons and other elements, a meaning beyond the picture is presented, and this leads the audience to the path of truth and the real world. All elements are in an effort to reveal a religious presence and to advance the audience as well as the artist himself nearer towards interpreting the spiritual and Divine Truth. Here, the artwork is nothing but the expression of truth. The artist acts as a mystic for whom the veil is removed and a universe appears. This concept is not only true in

religious themes but also in epic and festive themes. On the basis of Coomaraswamy's ideas, our problem in the encounter of the traditionalist artist with the artwork and the quality of the image and the pattern he creates is stated as the fact that the artist must have a dual performance, i.e. first, from a rational activity whereby the circumstantial figure is imagined, that is, to have a rational activity; second, his performance must be an imitation of this figure in the format of the chosen material. This means that he must have a physical and devotional activity. It could be pointed out that "the secret of art" is concealed in another place. The artist imagines, in an imitable format, the exemplar of the object towards which his intention is tended. He must expose what he imagines and transfer it to its inside to be only potential. The artist starts to create valuable works "without having any arrogance inside".

Coomaraswamy believes that in the traditional arts the principle is one and is constant. "Art must lead us to the principle and must conjure up in us the bewilderment suffering so that we decide to turn back to the principle and to know that this world is not our resort but a pathway" (Hemati, 2007: 155). The artist's imaginative figure deals with the reaching and visiting, and the picture of the beloved's face unveils for him, and what this artist develops at this stage are the mimesis and allegory of the splendid image. "The immediate and momentary illumination of the traditional artists can lead mankind to the divine universe, but this significant enterprise requires an Abrahamic effort which is gained through sacrificing the self" (Madadpour, 2009: 26).

In coffee-house painting works, the artist is not of substantial importance, and is a container who gets doomed in the process of formation and appearance of the artwork. In other words, until the artist ceases to exist, the art does not develop and the great art is not created. It is noteworthy to quote this sentence from Heidegger, a Western philosopher: "The great art is an art in which the artist has a smaller share" (Rikhtegaran, 2008: 112). His majesty, Molana

states that: Do not assume that I compose poetry on my own, that until I am conscious and awake, I do not say anything. His majesty, Molana is referring to the point that when he is not conscious and is to be doomed is the time of the formation of art. Therefore, the artwork has been disconnected from other elements and even from the artist. "The artist is sacrificed in the great art and is only a container for the work of art to be born" (Ibid, 112). In the fiction painting work, the truth manifests itself behind that image; in other words, coffee-house painting is itself a true image, such that that very truth is beyond the image of the artwork. These works are exhibitions that depict the truth of religion with their appearance. Thus, these are not amateur crafting and art; but are formed based on knowledge and rules whose source of inspiration, methods, and origins transcend the limits of the individual and independent human mind and, in this art, the artist is merely a channel of mercy motivated by the spiritual universe.

In the Eastern tradition, "the art without the knowledge is none" and the artist is a scientist whose creative act is based on the reason. His art is the manifestation of the image that has landed on his mind, and corresponds to the transcendental or figurative image. Due to the necessity of art in the tradition as the route of spiritual images and its significant role in human's mental discovery and spiritual development, every creation that takes place on the basis of the perception of figurative images based on the receptive mind is an art (Dadashi, 2010: 55).

In any case, to clarify the subject it is useful to point to two coffee-house painting works. The first is Moslem Ibn Aqil's departure to Kufa" by Mohammad Modaber (Fig. 1 and 2). This picture is painted by the skillful coffee-house painter, Mohammad Modaber, with the dimensions of 204\*253 centimeters and via the technique of oil painting. The exact date of this work is not determined but its probable date of creation is approximated to be from the twentieth to thirtieth AHS decade.

As obvious in the title of the artwork, this is a narrative with a religious theme and content that immediately take us to the Karbala events and the innocence of the champion of martyrs, Imam Hossein. This narrative is designed in 30 frames with a spiral and frame-like structure and in each frame the local scenes and sights are displayed and numbered level by level.

Regarding this artwork, we encounter some elements: "The frame-like plates and the type of spiral structure throughout the work –which is a feature of the Iranian painting and its continuation and also fiction and traditional paintings-; encountering the theme of the work that has been presented through narrative style and numbering of each frame; performing the narrative based on its divine concepts and values on the basis of which it starts from the center of the picture as the central layer and the core of the picture, and reaches the median and outer layers, respectively. Ultimately, we encounter the essential and internal meanings and contents of the picture.

The story of Moslem Ibn Aqil's strangeness and his being left alone in Kufa is a bitter and sad event which Modaber displays in 30 continuous frames. All parts have been numbered respectively, and the order is specified concerning the narration of the narrative and the destiny of Moslem and his two children. Nevertheless, the design of the surface and frame of each narrative and picture is not painted based on the continuity of numbers but with a spiral structure affected by the Iranian painting. The center (middle) of the artwork specifically pertains to the main scene, i.e. the war of Moslem against the enemies, and in the surroundings of this focal point, the events of the narrative are painted. The order and sequencing of the scenes is indicative of the painter's (Modaber) command and precision concerning the history of the event. As the painter himself states, the source of inspiration for him has been the mourning ceremony of the martyrdom of Moslem and his two children when the painter, in his childhood, has played the role of

one of Moslem's children. "I was only seven years old when I became an orphan and played the role of the children in the mourning of "takie dolat". I strangely shouted like an orphan. If I would not be the painter of Ashura, If I do not pour the blood of men on the canvas, then who will care for innocents like me...while painting Ashura and doomsday, he held the painting brush in one hand and a napkin full of tears in another" (Seif, 1990: 13).

In this work of art, the step-by-step accompaniment of the artist (Modaber) with Moslem on the way to Kufa could be perceived. Modaber goes along with Moslem and amorously walks in the path of love. The manifestation of the Divine Truth of religion is obvious throughout the artwork and the artist's treatment of it. It seems that their inner sight and truthful mind flow through their brush and intellect. The artist gets ablution to prepare for the work; his mind, brush, and words are prayer and worshipping. The paintings in this picture are assigned from right to left which is an allegoric symbol conjuring a move towards back in time; Seemingly, time has regressed and, in other words, we have invited history to the present, and this is like the regression of time. In traditional religious arts, this regression is a kind of prayer and reminder (recall).

Imam Hossein's fellows and, in general, all the good and beauty are painted on top of the picture, and the amiss and the evil and, in general, the bad and obscenity on the bottom of the work. Faces of the fellows are designed to be beautiful and allegoric, such that the artist has stepped inside the domain of God reign through inspiration and imagination, and has observed (internally perceived) the fellows, and following from that, has made them tangible and manifested. The work of artist is the fruit of his mind. The picture is so expressive and all the story is painted in one screen that the audience do not need to read the narrative. The artist has been doomed in the stages of the formation of the artwork, and knows himself as nonexistent, this freedom from self is his will. He has only been a container for the appearance of the work and has written on



the bottom of the picture: “the act of the least of Mohammad’s servants, Modaber”. Coomaraswamy emphasizes that traditional artists rarely thought of signing their works unless necessary circumstances occurred such as identification of the work. It is in these conditions that the real lively arts take form; the arts which are in complete contradiction with something are called, by Plato, flattery art.

In another artwork, Darvishi screen of the “battle scene of Hazrat Abolfazl al-Abbas against Marred Ibn Sodaif” by Mohammad Farahani is presented (Fig. 3). This picture has been painted via the technique of oil painting and the theme of its screen and its images have been performed in a similar tradition by other artists prior to Farahani. In fact, this work has been repeated several times by coffee-house painters. Each has located the true perspective in the work following their feature and perfection.

Four important characters in the middle of the picture are presented much larger than the others and stabbing the sword by Hazrat Abolfazl on the enemy can be seen. Beside him, Imam Hossein’s picture who he is holding Hazrat Ali Akbar’s half dead body is presented allegorically, and in the surrounding, different scenes of Karbala event and the fate of the evil ones in hell are exhibited in smaller sizes so that Darvish can narrate this heart breaking narrative from the beginning to the end. In this work, the main theme has the largest share of space in the design of the screen. The allegoric figure of Hazrat Abolfazl brings with it strength, beauty, and serenity. The characters are figurative images properly perceived by the artist. Obviously, the artist’s mere skill is unable to represent this divine concept. In his domain of imagination and notions, the artist seeks for a layout to realize the subject



Fig. 1. Moslem Ibn Aqil departure to Kufa by Mohammad Modaber, with the dimensions of 204 ×253 centimeters, the technique of oil painting on canvas, pictorial. Source: Imam Ali museum.





Fig. 2: part of artwork (number 1) of Moslem Ibn Aqil ..., pictorial source: Imam Ali museum.



Fig. 3: Darvishi screen of the “battle scene of Hazrat Abolfazl al-abbas against Marred Ibn Sodaif” by Mohammad Farahani, pictorial source: Seif, 1991.

which is rooted in the observation and reception of the immortal truth and God reign in a sensible format, i.e. first, the artist devotes the domain of liberation, and second, the domain of captivity, to the work. Prior to the creation of the artwork, the artist has passed stages to be deserving for entering

these two domains. Surely, without passing the domain, the work will have a wretched and inferior feature. The icons are fiction-painted such that they are the appearance of the image concealed inside the artist and are symbolically presented. What is clear, is the specific design and order of the characters and other elements of the work such as the dignity of the colors and brushing for the sake of the internal emanation. Now, the artwork does not have the feature of the modern art and its ultimate goal is not art but seeking a way to enter the world of the spirit. The source of light is not determined and is shed through the work. The perspective and scenes are locally formed and have added to the depth of the work. By watching the screen and listening to the story teller, the audience will feel a thunder and passion inside, and empathize the characters in their thoughts. Meanwhile, there is no trace of the artist who has been doomed in the path. Coomaraswamy

believes that “the anonymity of the artist results from belonging to a culture in which liberation from self is a will and desire” (Coomaraswamy, 2014: 75).

In Mohammad Farahani’s work, like in his other works, a religious soul is dominant. No suffer and pain is felt in the faces of the fellows. The icons are saddened and thoughtful, and a deep silence is there in the atmosphere. The arrangement of the main characters in the middle of the work and other elements in the surrounding all convey his connection to the universe of spirits. In this artwork, the ethical, religious, and Shite’s aspects dominate the emotional and material aspects.

### Conclusion

Based on Coomaraswamy’s idea and according to the examples of coffee-house painting in this paper (Moslem’s departure...by Modaber and the battle scene of Hazrat Abolfazl...by Farahani), coffee-house painting has an association with the Divine Truth, and its manifestation are the figurative images that the artist creates on the basis of the rational activity as well as the devotional and physical activity. What gives originality to these works is the inner features and the truth that the artist has allegorically exhibited through a physical format. Coffee-house painting works invite their audience as well as the artist to the interpretation of the spiritual and Divine Truth. This way, the artwork is nothing but the expression of the truth. The artist acts as a mystic for whom the veil is removed and a universe appears. By analyzing these works, it is concluded that the artist is doomed on the path to the formation of the artwork, and this issue is nothing but the love of God, the holy prophet and infallible Imams, desire, will and prayer. The physical material and tools in the formation of the artwork (color, etc.) aim at expressing the internal emanation. Here, the work of art does not have the feature of the modern art but is a container for the expression of truth and the search for a path to enter the world of the spirit. When used

for the formation and creation of the artwork figure, they express the goal and target of the artwork and the artist. Entering this domain is the encounter with truth and the expression of the truth.

### Endnote

1. Andana Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), was one of the well-known figures among contemporary artists of art in the east and west. Considering his profound religious studies in the east and west, a remarkable work was done with a traditional approach based on the contemporary thinkers about the theoretical foundations of the art of the east in general, as well as the art of west especially the medieval philosophy, about traditional Christian art and it is analogous to modern art. He has always been a defender of traditional view, and throughout all his writings he has examined various aspects of this art.

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