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<http://www.ierek.com/press>
ARChive Online ISSN: 2537-0162



International Journal on: **The Academic Research Community Publication**

The International Conference : Cities' Identity Through Architecture and Arts (CITAA)

The City and I: The Impact of the Community on the City Identity A Digital Printmaking Approach (An Analytical Critical Study)

DOI: 10.21625/archive.v1i1.123

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Keywords

Community – Identity –
Digital Print – Mixed
Media

Abstract

The research explores the impact and influence the community has on the identity of a city. The construction of the city follows certain standards acquired by the nation with respect to its ideologies and ambitions while the essence of the city is shaped and formed by the communities. The community is based on a mix of tradition, culture and habits, creating the identity of the group. The individual, as part of the larger group, shapes the identity of his/her city. The essence of the city reflects the identity of its community. The norm of a certain community along with its irregularities constructs the identity of their surrounding, hence the city. Therefore, one can assume that the identity of a citizen is equal to the identity of the city. In a visual art project consisting of a series of digital prints (mixed media), the researcher explores the relation between man and his surrounding atmosphere; between man and his home; between man and his city. This visual project delves in presenting how the surrounding atmosphere is affected by the human identity living within it. The community paints the city with its color, thus the city reflects its community.

The City and the Visual Arts

1. Art as a Tool of Change and Advancement in Communities:

Artists and intellectuals have always been forward looking and critical towards their community. Modern Art has solemnly found a purpose in depicting the future and causing fundamental social advancements that act as a refinement tool for society in a time when innovative practices by pioneers of cognitive and technical approaches are apparent. Indeed, art in the broader sense always had a deep significance and influence on humanity and is a vital tool for social and cultural change as well as community evolution.

3. Social Responsibility

Avant-garde artists at the turn of the last century sprung boldly in an unprecedented manner to create change. Indeed, they had all the rights as the world was going through crucial change. Surrounded by the technological upheaval, introduced to the machine and affected by the disasters of the great war, humanity was definitely on the verge of a new beginning.

Using all means of visual communication and experiments, young artists rose to change the world. Movements sprung confronting societies with shocking ideas, manifestos, visual outcomes and design. Change was in the air and new visual languages were created. What was once shocking to the norm became familiar with time, precision and dedication. These young pioneers grew with their dreams and lived its manifestation. From defying war, death and the declining social and human condition proper visual expression executed by the German expressionists came about. That included bold paint strokes depicting diverse themes in an utterly liberated manner to celebrate the new age of speed, machines and technical advancement as manifested by the Italian

futurists throughout their literature, visual works, typographical experiments and design; indeed change was happening.

Russian constructivists were extreme when naming the fine artist a constructor, to achieve the purpose of social reform throughout visual means in an attempt to follow their utopian dream of achieving a better society in the new Soviet Union. This occurred while the young Dadaist had a nihilistic approach formulated in irrational, contradictory actions, recitations and visual expressions as a reaction to the social and political upheavals. Therefore, without doubt, since the beginning of the 20th century visual expression became a crucial factor and tool for social and cultural change.

2. Community and the City

Visual Arts, whether directly or indirectly, play a crucial role in reflecting and anticipating social advancement within communities. They help shape the mass identity of the community. The community, on the other hand, reflects on the city it belongs to, where the city is the vessel that encompasses their lives with all their traditions, habits and cultural awareness and ethical values. As the city absorbs the essence of its inhabitants reflecting their identity, visual arts then have direct influences and cultural effects on cities.

3. Visual Arts Relationship with the City

Aside from the important role art plays in affecting social and cultural aspects of communities leading to direct effects on cities, visual arts directly relate to cities through two major paths; public art in the city and city and community depiction in visual arts.

A. Public Art in the City

It's almost impossible to find a city without public art. Public art reflects the cities nationalistic tendencies and is usually commissioned by the state to reflect the city's cultural entity to the world as well as to its habitants. Under commissioned site-specific works, mostly in public spaces in different media, public art is accomplished by specifically selected artists (whether natives or not) through curators, organizers and the state itself. Usually, the work reflects the essence and identity of the city where the approach is an amalgam of subjectivity and objectivity; Subjective in representing the artists' own perception, experience and approach towards the project and objective in the sense of reflecting the identity of the city.

B. City and Community Depiction in Visual Arts

The second relationship between the visual arts and the city is the city and community depiction in visual arts production which is the broader and more subjective part. The city has always had its share in the visual arts production, whether when being used as a background or foreground in art production, or being the subject itself as well as sometimes being a symbol of the community.

The art works depicting the city reflect the subjective perception, the personal concern as well as the technical and visual approach of the artist.

Diverse depictions have been portrayed by infamous artists like Piet Mondrian's *Broadway Boogie Woogie*, 1942-43 and Edward Hopper's *Nighthawks*, 1942.

This second path is what is covered here in this art project where one tends to directly link the human condition with the city in a contemporary approach.

The Experiment

1. Background

Expression through Faces (Broad Artistic Experiment)

My life art project mainly focuses on the human condition, its evolution and contradictions. Throughout the years, this broad issue has been my main concern and apparently it repeatedly clears out in my various art practices despite the minor details I am working on in each phase.

The Human face never ceases to appear in my visual production – rarely extending to part or the entire human figure – in an expressionistic manner directly related to my status of being and my ideas at the time of practice. My faces are usually placed on diverse cold surfaces depicting the issue being tackled then. The message to be conveyed is sometimes hidden and other times clear in the worn out, yet strong features of the human face placed in a contradictory, alienated or compatible manner over the different surfaces from plain to mechanically patterned surfaces.

2. Concept

A. Introduction

In this art project, one tends to capture a global sense concerned with the human condition as a whole proving that humans shape the identity of their cities as well as raising the question of the effect of globalization in blurring the lines between diverse identities, and tackling the subject of global identity vs. individual identity. So in this series of digital prints, the subjective part is apparent in human faces, which directly relates to my approach and visual experiment. The features of the faces are satellite maps of diverse cities with clear individual identities raising the question, to what extent have identities been blurred and smudged in the global digital age we live in.

B. Man and Woman

The choice behind selecting the two genders in representing each of the chosen cities is to present humanity as a whole without specific reference to a certain gender, stereotype or norm. Men and women are the origins of life on this planet and are the reason for the continuity of the human race.

C. Satellite Maps

Choosing satellite maps of each city to be digitally juxtaposed as the texture of the human face has a direct significance proving that the city and the humans living within it are both sides of one coin. An indirect significance is when the satellite maps from far away appear visually similar and start clearing out and become identifiable when zoomed in, symbolizing that even though communities appear similar under the broader cloud of globalization, diversity and identity still exist and appear timidly with a proper zoom in. In addition to that, satellite maps portray the technological advancement of the digital age.

D. Cities of Choice

The cities of choice are Beijing, Cairo, New York, Sarajevo and Vienna.

The 2 main reasons behind the choice of these specific cities to be presented in this visual experiment lies behind the diversity of social, political and cultural factors shaping the identity of each of the cities. The privilege of personally visiting and observing the 4 cities - other than Cairo (hometown) - thriftilly and strongly capturing the essence, cultural, social and habitual backgrounds of their people throughout a broad spectrum of communication is also a reason.

6. Technical Approach

Each of the chosen cities has been represented by two portraits representing MAN & WOMAN (origins of life) executed in the form of a digital print accomplished throughout mixed media techniques; drawing, collage, ink textures and digital collage. The sizes of the prints of the whole project are standard where the work size is 70x50cm.

The Works

Each two prints, of Man & Woman representing a city are displayed below under the title of the city they present.

A. Beijing



Figure 1 Tamer Assem – Beijing Man – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)



Figure 2 Tamer Assem – Beijing Man – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

B. Cairo



Figure 3 Tamer Assem – Cairo Man – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

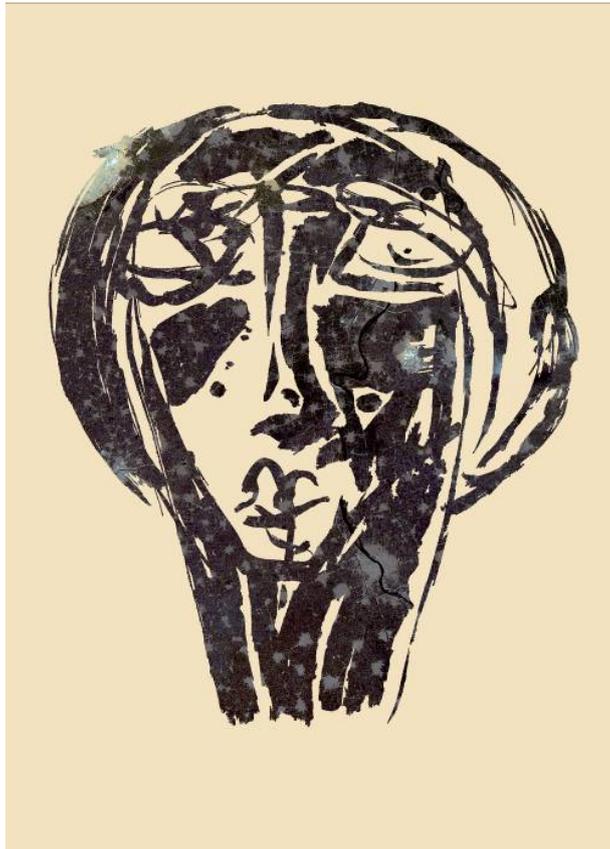


Figure 4 Tamer Assem – Cairo Man – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

C. New York

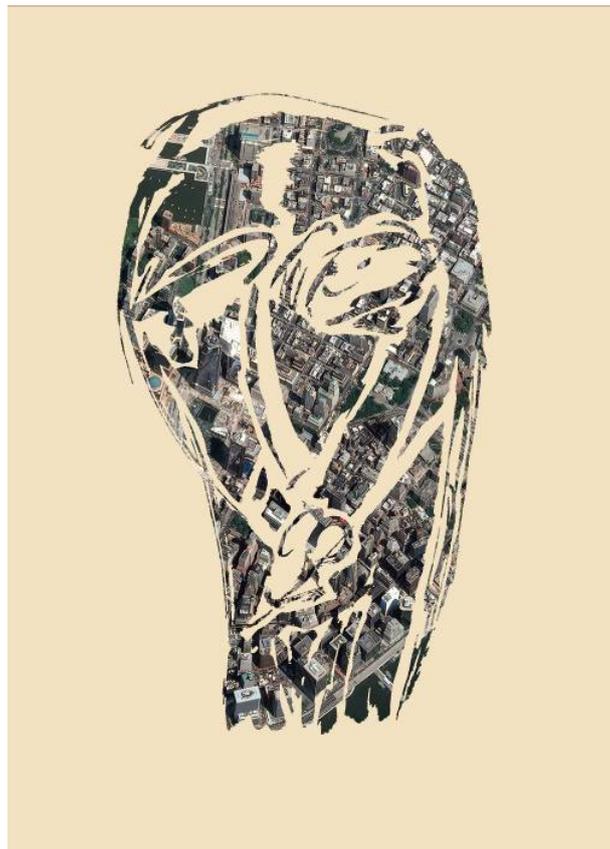


Figure 5 Tamer Assem – New York Man – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

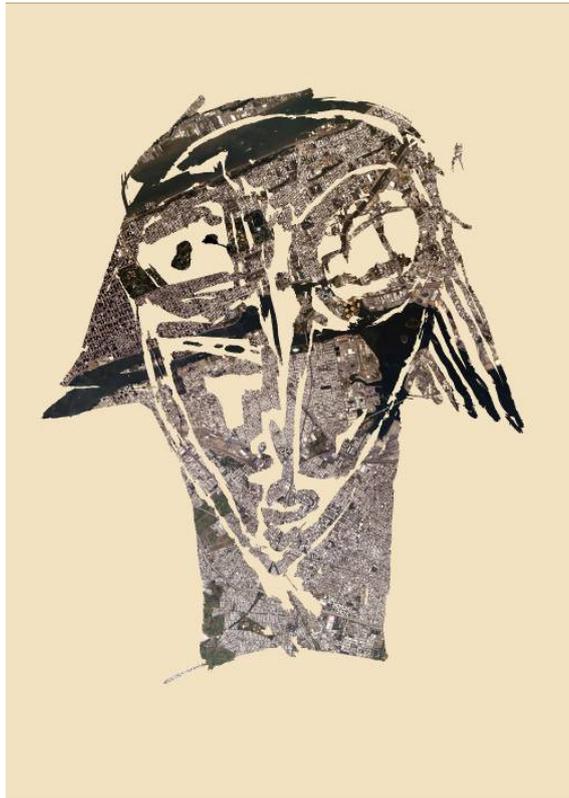


Figure 6 Tamer Assem – New York Woman – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

D. Sarajevo

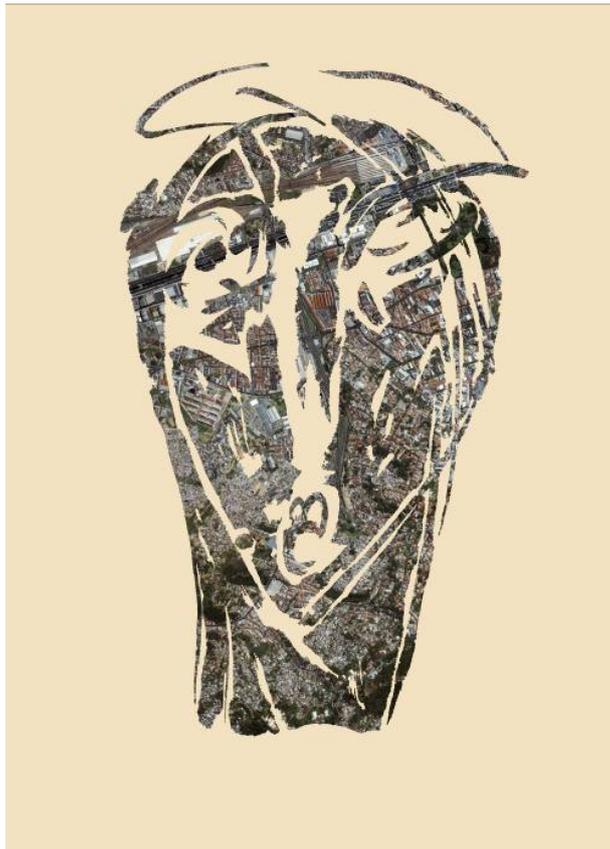


Figure 7 Tamer Assem – Sarajevo Man – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

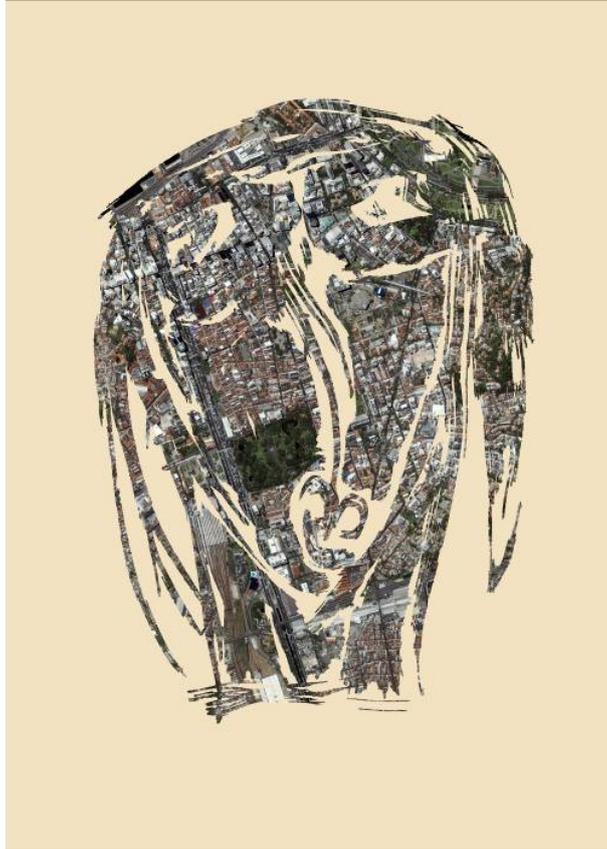


Figure 8 Tamer Assem – Sarajevo Woman – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

E. Vienna

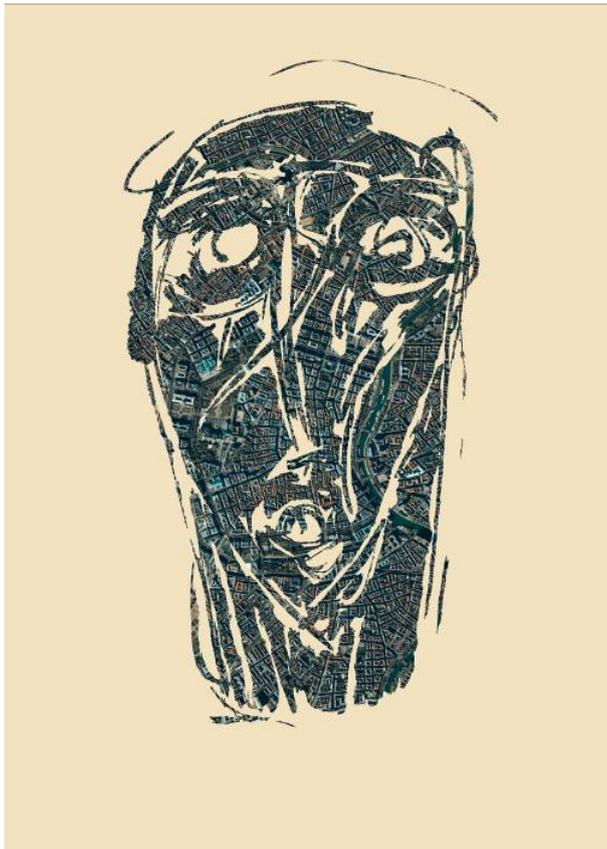


Figure 9 Tamer Assem – Vienna Man – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

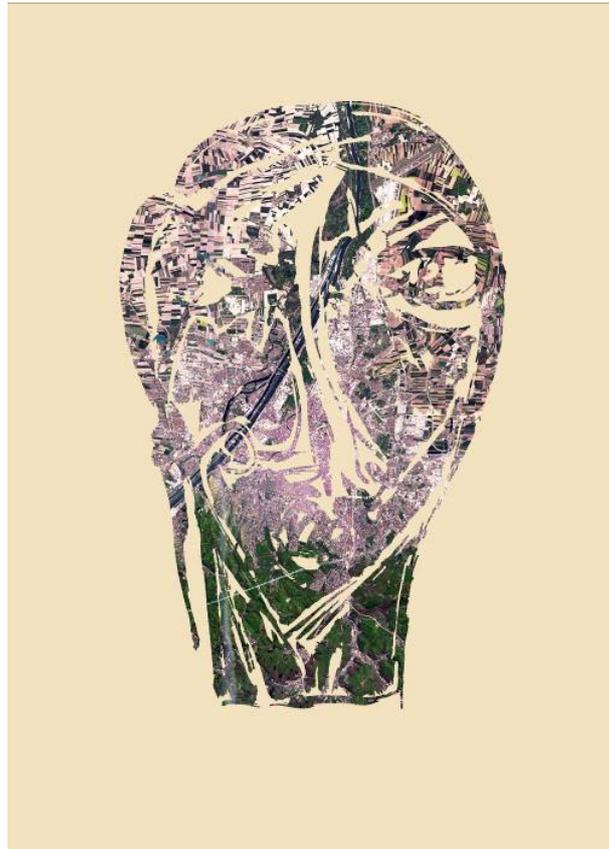


Figure 10 Tamer Assem – Vienna Woman – Digital Print – 70x50cm – (2017)

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