

## Women and Art, in past and present

*In Arab history, we have abundant information about the arts of dancing and singing performed by women slaves who unlike free women, were allowed to appear in public unveiled. These women were bought and trained in the arts in early childhood. Those who excelled were sold for fabulous sums to caliphs and rulers in whose courts they enjoyed great influence. Besides dancing and singing, they could recite or improvise poetry and many of them played the lute. Others sang and played music in public places.*

*Women are still trained in dancing and singing in oriental countries like Iran, Malaysia, Indonesia, the Philippines etc. In the Arab East, we find professional women singers and dancers in cabarets and other public places. Dancing is taught in many art schools in the form of rhythmic gymnastics, ballet, dabkeh, the belly dance and other solo and folk dances.*

*If women have been able to excel in the above mentioned arts, they should be able to excel in other arts to which they had little or no access, like acting, painting, sculpture and so on.*

*In ancient Greece, home of the dramatic art, men actors performed the roles of women who were not allowed to appear on the stage. Yet the Muses who inspired artists were women.*

*In Europe, women actresses have given new life to the theatre since the 17th century. Bérta, Sarah Bernhardt, Rachel, are only a few of the stars that illuminated the Western stage. The cinema and television have given*

*new impetus to women actors. It would be useless to try to mention all the marvelous stars who have won international fame in cinema and television. They are legion...*

*Women painters did appear in Europe during the Renaissance and later on but their names were ignored by historians, except for very few of them like Mme Vigée Lebrun<sup>(1)</sup> who was patronized by Marie Antoinette (18th Century).*

*In the field of music, there is a lot of creative work to occupy amateurs and professionals: collecting local folk songs, adapting them to the modern taste, teaching them to the young, using them as a source of inspiration for new songs. The same type of work may be done in the field of folk dances. The theater offers an almost virgin soil with small beginnings created by our elders who left us the task of developing them.*

*The increasing number of women engaged in art activities in Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and, more recently, in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, reveals a general desire among the womenfolk of these countries, to cultivate their artistic talents through contact with their local heritage and a systematic study of Western Culture. The Muses were according to mythology, supreme women or goddesses who inspired women artists in their present period of revival.*

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(1) Marie Anne Elisabeth, 1755-1842, French Painter.