

Kareem Alqurity: Expressions of Freedom

Sara Elkamel, Thursday 3 Mar 2011

Alqurity has been unveiling the struggles of Egyptians through his bold artwork. Like his homeland, he has been undergoing constant transformation, yet one constant prevails: he (and Egypt alike) is a store of undeniable talent



Hidden behind a façade of colour and grace, somewhat safe from the scrutiny of political censorship, contemporary Egyptian artists, including Abdel Hady El Gazzar, Mohamed Abla, and Kareem Alqurity painted to expose the agony and inspire change in Egypt.

Armed with paintbrushes, many prominent modern artists resorted to art as a form of expression in the years leading up to the 25 January uprising.

Political, social, as well as environmental issues were challenged on canvas, as artists crafted messages that screamed for attention and reform.

Kareem Alqurity, a young contemporary artist, has long been overwhelmed by the utter sadness that emanates from the streets of Cairo. He often painted Egyptians through the windows of public buses, crammed into a life of misery and resignation.

The artist finds endless inspiration on the streets of Cairo. "Walking through the crowds, the human body entices me in its different shapes and forms," he explains.

Accustomed to scrutinising the surrounding scenes, Alqurity now senses a palpable change in the faces and voices of the people he sees every day. "Since the revolution, I can see freedom, and I can hear it too."

Alqurity, who has been artfully handling volatile and sensitive issues, such as the relationships between citizens and the constitution that governs their livelihoods, finds that his freedom as an artist is rarely restricted.

“I have been free to comment, to criticise, because my voice was mute anyway,” says Alqurity. The artist’s freedom was restricted to canvas, and due to the limited scope of influence of the visual arts in Egypt in recent years, Alqurity, and other contemporary artists, did not pose much of a threat.

“Art is not blunt - much of its message lies behind the scenes, requiring sophisticated decoding,” he maintains. Political commentary did appear on canvases all over the country, yet it was never explicit. And for that, visual artists are left to be; their messages perceived as harmless shapes and colours.

Over the past few years, Kareem Alqurity has been fascinated by people and their relationship with the constitution, observing, sketching, and filming crowds as they walked all over the city. Throughout, the artist’s vision shifted and matured. He delved into the levels of people’s state of mind and emotion, breaching preconceptions and unearthing their diverse and fickle moods.

The artist attempts to identify the multiple facets of the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. Along the way, he stumbled upon the unwritten codes that people independently develop as a “safe haven”.

Alqurity’s compositions are snapshots that capture powerful emotions. Astonishingly-textured portraits painted in a mixed media, appear in the foreground, against a backdrop of plain, yet dramatic colour. The young artist creates massive paintings that draw you in and challenge you to deliberate; is the man defeated or will he strike back?

Represented by the Al Masar Gallery in Zamalek, Kareem Alqurity took part in the gallery’s latest collective exhibition, Edge Sentiments.

Alqurity’s latest artistic endeavour, “People and the Constitution” was recently exhibited at the Cairo International Biennale XII 2011.

The artist exhibited three paintings in his Biennale debut, mixed media pieces of flesh-coloured figures floating in a deep blue background. The central piece is of man’s constricted visage, bowed down, his body nonexistent, yet his hands curled upwards in prayer- hopeful.

Alqurity was twice awarded the Youth Art Salon in Cairo prize, and his artwork was showcased in the Biennale of Young Creators of Europe and the Mediterranean, in 2009, and in 2010 the Peking Biennale.

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