

## **The Golden Calf looks into pressing socio-political and religious issues**

Sara Elkamel, Wednesday 18 Apr 2012

*Currently displayed at Al-Masar Gallery in Zamalek is young artist Karim El-Qurity's latest collection — larger than life multimedia pieces, themed The Golden Calf*



Karim El-Qurity's multimedia pieces carry complex socio-political and religious undertones. He uses depth and unorthodox composition to tell stories through his subjects' postures, revealing their relationships to the world around them.

El-Qurity, 30, is a contemporary Egyptian artist who excels in mixed media. His artwork has been inspired by the streets of Cairo, and like the bustling multi-layered city, his paintings are bold and intriguing. While bustling streets stimulate El-Qurity's artistic imagination, his works often appear as close-up images that isolate figures from the palpable world, given them a chance to speak for themselves. El-Qurity manipulates composition and body language skillfully, giving a voice to the silent, unorthodox-looking figures he presents.

El-Qurity states that the daily lives of Egyptians have become bombarded with discussions that revolve around a myriad of socio-political and religious concepts, as allegations and assumptions are tossed around, culminating in a haze of words that do not reveal adequate meaning.

"We have entered a state of confusion and lack of understanding," El-Qurity comments to Ahram Online.

In his exhibition, *The Golden Calf*, El-Qurity attempts to expose the collision of conflicting ideas and visions running through contemporary Egyptian society. Inspired by Apis, an ancient Egyptian god otherwise known as "the golden calf" in monotheistic religions, El-Qurity's

collection probes the relationship between the divine and the worldly, disparities of faith and different meanings of truth in today's world.

El-Qurity is one of those artists that deliberately embed meanings within their artworks — conceptual layers underlie the young artist's paintings. Making his way through Cairo's eclectic crowds, El-Qurity is enticed by the profound emotions reflected on people's faces and in their postures.

One of the pieces on display depicts a veiled woman, immersed fully in shades of a deep blue, her expression utterly static, caught in a defiant stare. This painting is reminiscent of Pablo Picasso's "blue period" (1901-1904) in which the master painted largely monochromatic pieces dominated by blues and washes of greens. But El-Qurity introduces a dash of daring: egg yolk color that would not have appeared in an early 20th century Picasso. It is that element of surprise that makes El-Qurity's work fresh and alluring.

El-Qurity's figures and portraits emanate strong characters and emerge as players in a storyline that weaves throughout the collection. El-Qurity paints a community of polarised human beings. Their textured skins denote internal conflicts brought about by societal change. At times, you fear the large creatures walking through the canvases; at others you sympathise with them for being trapped within the compositions, their agony plain to see.

The oversized canvases showcased are at times overwhelming, but that renders the implications all the more apparent. In one sizeable mixed media piece, El-Qurity displays almost nude figures, their skins equally murky. In the centre is a policeman, to his left is a bearded man. They are surrounded by three other robust figures. This is when the artist crosses the line between art and social commentary, recreating the dynamics of Egypt's current predicaments over power, religion and society.

El-Qurity 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. El-Qurity's previous artistic endeavour, "People and the Constitution," was recently exhibited at the Cairo International Biennale XII of 2011.

The exhibition runs through 5 May.

Al-Masar Gallery, Baehler's Mansion  
157b, 26 July Street,  
Zamalek

Open Saturday through Thursday, 11am to 9pm

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