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'Impulsive Expressionism II' by Omar El Nagdi at Al Masar Gallery

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Al Masar Gallery: 'Impulsive Expressionism II' by Omar El Nagdi

Published On: 18/03/2013

Born in 1931, Omar El Nagdi is one of the most well-known Egyptian artists of our time. Defined as an artist, philosopher, musician and even director, El Nagdi has exhibited in several countries around the

Best Bit

world and obtained numerous awards, including the Alexandria Biennale, which he has won on three different occasions. Currently exhibiting at Al Masar Gallery in Zamalek, 'Impulsive Expressionism II' is the perfect collection to get to know the artist.

The high ceilinged gallery is a good fit for El Nagdi's poised pieces. Filling every turn and corner, the collection has work that dates as far back as 1960, leading up to 2013. There is no chronological order to the paintings; rather, the old and the new are set to be juxtaposed in varying degrees for comparison. An example of this is 'Standing Figures' (2008), which is far more abstract than his later work – which usually utilises a strong use of lines and gold leaf in their palette – and instead has blurred subjects and uses primary colours. This piece hangs next to 'Compositions I' and 'Abstract Family', and while they look like they are part of the same collection, the latter two were in fact painted this year.

'The Harem' (2012) and 'The Knight & the Bride' (2010) are typical of the aforementioned style that predominantly uses gold leaf, but the most exquisite example of this is offered in 'Chess' (2013). The scene shows women standing, one is leaning out of a window with a bird in her hand; the cleanliness of lines, the intricate detailing in the border of the window and the stark black and white tiled flooring, are all mesmerising. The almost 3D quality to it is simply stunning.

2011 pieces 'Nubian Boy', 'Al Fallaha' and 'A Pharaoh' reflect the sculptor in El Nagdi; they are created in relief, on wood, and have what seems like gravel and sand on their surfaces. Rawer in the use colours, as well as in the subjects themselves, it's difficult not to reach out and touch the textured surface.

Towards the back of the gallery, a different side of his abilities and tastes are in evidence. Work from 2009 is much simpler and the canvas is left emptier than in other pieces. 'El Fanous I' is essentially a watercolour sketch, significantly smaller in size, yet equally engaging.

One consistent element, however, is El Nagdi's uses of Egyptian culture in his art; the imagery is very traditional and relatable, though whimsical at the same time. While the essence is consistent throughout his work, and within this collection, there are also variables and tangents that are immediately noticeable. But whether through the use of either watercolour or mixed media, working on wood or linen, using a regal gold or preferring soothing earth colours; his manipulation of tools is a sight to marvel.

'Impulsive Expressionism II' doesn't offer anything new; the artist has not diverted greatly from work produced in 2009 for example. However, the collection goes far back enough to allow us to see his progression in retrospect. One thing is certain, though; regardless of the size of the painting, the subject, or the technique, the invitation to absorb the details of every piece is undeniable.

More Photos



It's a good overview of the artist's body of work.

Worst Bit

It won't offer anything particularly new.

360 Tip

Back in 1959, Omar El Nagdi was awarded a one-year scholarship to study ceramics in the former Soviet Union.

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