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'The Mirage II' by Hazem Taha Hussein at Al Masar Gallery

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Al Masar Gallery
Cairo, Egypt

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Al Masar Gallery: 'The Mirage II' by Hazem Taha Hussein

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Still until very recently fearing oppression and censorship, Cairo's arts and culture scene is more vibrant than ever. Known for his vivid imagination, talented artist, Hazem Taha Hussein, presents his latest body of works, 'The Mirage II' at Al Masar Gallery; going beyond the idea of mirage as an optical illusion, the artwork builds on a previous series.

Aiming to bring together Western and Islamic cultures, Hussein uses iconic images, overlapped and blended into one another. Each painting has multiple layers; the main background image is added to and built on with an array of different media, patterns, stencils and calligraphy, resulting in blurred, mirage-like imagery. Incorporating politics, social, cultural and mythical practices and beliefs, the exhibition displays depth, theoretically as well as visually.

At the forefront of every piece, the circular, overlapping pattern is one regularly found in Mosques. The purpose of this overlapping pattern is to shift the audience's focus to create an illusion; as it distracts from the images behind it, each layer must to be focused on individually in order to view it as whole.

One of the most colourful and busiest pieces is titled 'Othman Al Gabbar: Return of the Hero', which carries notions particularly relevant to contemporary Egypt. Using a rainbow of bright, cheerful yellows, reds, oranges, greens and blues, it was difficult to distinguish the separate layers. However, one prominent, smartly dressed figure is surrounded by symbols of the military; numerous eagles,

Islamic symbols and stencils and sketches of Gamal Abd El Nasser all blend into one another.

Several pieces incorporate images of cherub-like angels. A set of four paintings titled 'Egyptian Angel' (I-IV), begin with a defined drawing of an angel holding a lute which remains the same, but appears to become more blurred as the set continues. 'June's Angel I' and 'June's Angel II' feature a similar angelic figure, but appear to use bolder colours, with many more overlapping layers to evaluate.

Numerous other pieces show portraits of abstract, unknown faces, mostly using dark colours, with the features completely blurred out; other than being visually intriguing, they seemed to lack the depth of an explicit meaning like some of the other pieces.

Contrasting with the culturally relevant pieces, one of the most moving paintings was one that is clearly inspired by Charles Levy's iconic photo of the Nagasaki bombing in 1945, though it's labelled as 'Hiroshima'.

Hazem Taha Hussein's artistic technique is both unique and thought-provoking. Although little information is offered for each piece, 'The Mirage II' is a diverse exhibition, incorporating iconic images, patterns and theory relevant to numerous societal issues in Egypt today.

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