

## A compact display of modern Egyptian sculpture



Saleh Reda.

By **Mariam Hamdy** / Special to Daily News Egypt      **October 20, 2009, 2:00 am**

The Zamalek Art Gallery is currently hosting yet another successful retrospective titled "Panorama of Egyptian Sculpture. Egyptian sculptors have an exquisitely rich heritage from which they drew their inspiration and this exhibition shows the fruits of their labor.

Through the works of more than 30 sculptors, "Panorama showcases the history of modern sculpture in Egypt, ranging from figural representations to modernist abstract works. It took a significant amount of time to assemble all these pieces together, as some of them had to be acquired from private collections of previous buyers or from the families of late artists. Each of the pieces on display has a particular connotation to their artist's body of work and signature style.

Of the 30 + beautiful pieces, there are a few that are exceptionally inspiring. On entering the gallery space, the first piece to be seen is Saleh Reda's sculpture. An abstract female figure, Reda's piece looks like an ancient Egyptian icon. The figure is tinted with a shade of turquoise blue contrasted with decorative spots of red. The color adds a playful, naïve-like feature to

the otherwise alien and perhaps sinister looking sculpture. The most alluring feature of the sculpture is its eyes: large, wide and typically ancient Egyptian in shape. It captivates you with a solid and unapologetic stare, providing the simple structure with an authoritative feel.

Another female figure whose beauty lies in its contrasting features is Mohamed El-Fayoumi's seated sculpture. Overweight, cross-armed, barefoot and surprisingly bald, El-Fayoumi's sculpture is inescapably feminine despite its unflattering features. The feet look real enough that one is almost expecting the figure to wriggle its toes, so much so that even the toenails are impeccably outlined.

The roundness of the sculpture makes it look approachable though the cross-armed posture gives a rather unwelcome feel. This contrasting appeal of the sculpture makes one almost gloss over the fact that this woman is in fact bald. Due to the pre-disposed notion that this woman - a fallaha (villager) - usually has her hair covered with a scarf of sorts, one doesn't register that without it, she looks quite normal. El-Fayoumi is excellent at capturing such obvious details in his figures that are entrenched in Egyptian culture.

The female figures seem to have captured my attention the most. The next piece I found to be very striking was Ahmed Abdel Wahab's "Goddess. What appears to be an ancient Egyptian queen stands tall among all the other sculptures in the show with its larger-than-life size. Her elongated hands, neck and features, along with her rounded, voluptuous stomach, are typical of ancient Egyptian figures.

Yet there's something decidedly contemporary about her stance. The straight lines which Abdel Wahab has imposed on the edges of the sculpture cement its ancient Egyptian quotation as well as establishing a place for it in the avant-garde of modern Egyptian sculpture. The regal stand of the Goddess demands the attention of viewers, and wins it.

The last and most stirring non-figural representation of the show is the moving sculpture by Abdel Hadi Weshahi. Set in front of large white wall space, the sculpture looks like a large, black brushstroke on a white canvas. One can almost detect the movement of an artist slashing wet paint across the wall despite the fact that sculpture is a heavy mass meticulously sculpted in granite. The balance with which such a seemingly haphazard shape was conceived is a mark of a master sculptor at work.



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The same can be said of all the sculptors involved in this exquisite show. The level of craftsmanship and experience involved in the creation of all the pieces on display is a compact course in modern Egyptian sculpture. A show deeply rooted in Egyptian heritage, "Panorama of Egyptian Sculpture is a definitive winner.



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