

A disappointing showcase of Egyptian caricature at Sawy



A cartoon signed by Makhlof (L) and by Abdallah (R).

By **Mariam Hamdy** / Special to Daily News Egypt **July 8, 2009, 2:00 am**

Currently showing at Sawy Culture Wheel's Word Hall is a new exhibit titled "Humorous Talking: Caricature, a collective show of the works of four caricaturists: Amr Selim, Makhlof Abdallah, Doaa El Adl and Mostafa Salem.

Despite Sawy Culture Wheel being an adequate setting for young performers to showcase their works, as well as an alternative venue for the more established artists; it has almost always fallen behind when it comes to visual arts. The presentation and curation of the shows almost always fails the artists involved regardless of the content of the exhibited work.

"Caricature, which explores recent and current affairs of 2009, is comprised of photocopies of the original drawings on A4 pieces of printer paper, unkindly stapled unto larger black paper that acts as a frame. The overall effect of the sea of black drawings and handwritten text on white paper is both dizzying and redundant, making the viewer instantly disgruntled at the prospect of going through the entire work.

Having thoroughly examined the entire works, I must admit that the experience was not quite pleasant. The caricatures are haphazardly chosen, not presented in either aesthetic or a logical chronological order. The most dominant theme of the artworks is the economic recession and hike in prices. Other subjects discussed include the sorry state of the press and the April 6 protest, in addition to particular dated events such as the sinking of the Al-Salam ferry.

The first batch of work that meets the viewer is signed "Abdallah, who, unless there is a name missing on the exhibition's description, is presumably Makhlof Abdallah. The reason behind the suspicion is that there are other pieces of work signed "Makhlof which's confusing to both fans of the famous artist as well as the regular viewers.

Interestingly, the batch of caricatures signed "Abdallah employ simple lines and iconic characters. The drawings are calculated and precise, as is the commentary that the content provides, which is always mildly amusing.

There are minimal to almost no detail in the work, which is a stark contrast to the drawing styles of the other artists in the show.

On the other hand, most of the pieces in the later batch of work signed "Makhlof are sketchy and imprecise. The caricatures are crowded with excessive and unnecessary amount of lines that serve no aesthetic purpose and confuse the eye. The second set is decidedly different and less accomplished from the other batch, that's why it was imperative to find out that the two sets belonged to the same artist. However, no one at the Culture Wheel seemed to be aware of the existence or the location of the show in its entirety, so the names of the artists involved seemed somewhat impossible to find.

On a more positive note, Doaa El-Adl's work is entertaining as usual. Having seen her in a previous, much better exhibition of caricatures also held at the Culture Wheel two years ago, I immediately recognized her drawings.

Both witty and comical in her choice of line, El-Adl's characters are highly comical, appearing almost always with a red nose and a dumbfounded look on their faces. One is guaranteed to break a smile either for her sly content or the child-like awkwardness that appears in her characters' movements.



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The work of Mostafa Salem has the same appeal. The facial expressions of his characters are pure gold, guaranteed to put a smile on your face regardless of the content. His caricatures show great attention to detail without the use of a great deal of lines; a feature of good caricature. His work is comical without being forced.

The work of Amr Selim is simple and quite familiar. His style and drawing technique are reminiscent of Ramses', the famous caricaturist of Rosa El Yousef and Sabah El Khier magazines. His art is mildly witty and straightforward.

Overall though, the exhibit, as a whole, is pretty prosaic and the works are mostly forgettable. Artistry aside, the themes all four artists expound are essentially the same, and, most importantly, the accompanying commentary lacks intelligence, originality or subtlety.

In a country that thrives on the art of caricature, with giants such as Salah Jahin and Mostafa Hussein setting impeccable standards of wit, taste, aesthetics and originality, one would think that the outcome would be at least worth a visit. Sadly, it's not.



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