

A place true art can call home



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By **Mariam Hamdy** / Special to Daily News Egypt **September 3, 2009, 2:00 am**

The Zamalek Art Gallery is unlike most art spaces in Cairo. Almost 10 years old, its discreet and subtle existence negates the profound impact it has had on the art scene in Cairo.

Everything about the gallery exudes an inviting air of calmness. As a classic white cube format, the gallery space was founded in 1999 in a natural progression of events rather than a conscious decision to get into the "art business."

Naheda Khoury and Noha Khoury, first and foremost lovers and supporters of art, were asked to simultaneously organize an art festival for the Millennium and the 100th anniversary of the Cataract Hotel, both held in Aswan. The concept behind the festival was to introduce the relationship, or more precisely, the continuation, of Pharaonic art, to contemporary Egyptian art.

Having been so involved with helping artists exhibit at various venues all over Cairo, along with the success of the Aswan experience, the ladies decided to open up their own gallery in the capital. By owning their own premises, they could further insure an impeccable attention to detail regarding lighting, curation and the best possible presentation of their artists' work, one of the many aspects that render the Zamalek Art Gallery particularly enjoyable for viewing art.

From that day, the Zamalek Art Gallery has become not only an exhibition space, but also a reliable friend to all artists who need some guidance into the art scene. Consultancy as such was not only limited to the young artists who need a sturdy opinion on their work or master painters who need a fresh opinion, but extends to more established organizations such as the Four Seasons Nile Plaza Hotel and the Sharm El-Sheikh Congress Hall, among others.

The Zamalek Art Gallery did not seek these projects but were approached by art consultants who had surveyed the market and rightfully chose the Zamalek Gallery space to help them fulfil their vision.

In fact, the Zamalek Art Gallery does not seek projects nor artists to represent at all. The impressive list of artists the gallery represents, were all friends of the owners prior to the existence of the gallery space. It was through this friendship and the ultimate love of art that a more professional relationship was built, allowing the Gallery to become the ultimate reference to some of the most prolific names in contemporary art today: Gazbia Sirry, Zeinab Al Sageny, Rabab Nemr, Abdel Rahman El Nachar, Farghali Abdel Hafiz, Hamed Owaiss, Mohamed Abla and Mostafa Abdel Moity, to name a few.

The general belief that the gallery runs on business transactions and an icy professional rapport to maintain its success does not seem to affect the gallery affiliates. It's quite apparent, from the moment you walk into the spotless space and meeting its manager Hany Yassin, that there is a warm and welcoming atmosphere that is absent from many exhibition spaces in the city.

Asked whom of the gallery spaces they consider worthy peers, a disdainful Yassin told Daily News Egypt, "The more galleries, the better. There are too many talented artists in the country and since we can't represent them all, our hope is that more galleries exist to exhibit for all of them."

The guiding principle at the gallery is that what makes any exhibition space a respected one is the seriousness with which it presents the artists and their exhibitions, not the size of the space, the popularity of artists involved or how much profit it ultimately makes.

Seriousness seems to be the backbone of the Zamalek Art Gallery, a word that was constantly uttered by Yassin in

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reference to the loyalty of the artists to their profession, the genuineness of the gallery to its shows, and the ultimate love of the arts. These values, despite seeming as the obvious purpose behind any gallery, have unfortunately become rare - both locally and globally. Ironically, the profits made by art nowadays far surpass the pleasure it provides.

If nothing else, the Zamalek Art Gallery is a space that demands regular scrutiny. The place promises a steady stream of excellent work in the coming few months, with a few surprises yet to be disclosed. Whether you are addicted to art or still testing its waters, this is the gallery to keep your calendars marked to.



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