

Abla's Cairo Labyrinth as seen from afar



Related Stories

There is no related article

By **Mariam Hamdy** **November 20, 2008, 2:00 am**

I have discovered a rewarding way of looking at paintings by veteran artist Mohamed Abla, whose latest exhibition is currently being held at the Zamalek Art Gallery: Stand a meter away from them.

You could lean forward to peer at their details, but a step towards them will get you lost in their chaos, and a step further will make you feel like an outsider to their hustle and bustle. This is exactly how one should deal with the city of Cairo which, not incidentally, is the subject of Abla's show.

The exhibition is titled "Labyrinth, and it is a substantial collection of acrylic paintings. Spanning to more than 40 canvases which range from sizes of 30 cm in width to those a meter and a half wide, the collection is a mark of the artist's skill and versatility.

The work is markedly different from Abla's previous shows, but for those who follow his work, there is something indescribable that makes his brushstrokes of dusty colors particular. Unlike his previous shows, Abla has moved swiftly towards a heightened sense of abstraction, something he hasn't quite done before.

The work is personal and sincere, depicting Cairo in the organized chaos that it is. Abla is specific in his approach to painting: "I can't paint or draw anything that I haven't lived, it has to be something I've experienced or seen or felt. I make sure that if I'm to paint the Nile, I have to live near it, like on the island where I have my home. If I'm to paint the Moqattam Mountain, I'll rent a room to actually live the view from up there.

"Living is directly related to painting and painting is directly related to living; I can't go through one without the other.

This can be seen in his work, particularly in the paintings that show Cairo at night.

The largest of his night collection are two pieces: One depicts a breathtaking view of Duweiqra from the Moqattam Mountain, and another portraying a bird's eye view of Cairo from an airplane. Both paintings have this sweeping sense of romance and familiarity, yet one is convinced that he could have possibly experienced that very same view.

Typically Egyptian, Abla's work cannot be wholly understood unless the viewer has experienced Cairo: There is an element of what the quintessential Egyptian artist Gazbia Serry describes as "Egyptianity which is inescapable.

Her work overflows with it, and Abla's is so heavily charged with its essence that the work reeks of Cairene smells and taste.

This is the fourth attempt by Abla to depict Cairo, but this time he has focused on his personal relationship with the city: "I have a love/hate relationship with Cairo; it attracts and repels me equally. I love her, but she drives me crazy. She drowns me in her life and suffocates me with all her stories, but as soon as I leave her, I miss her and yearn to go back.

Both dynamic and intense, the work literally illustrates this relationship in a physical sense. Being of an impressionistic nature, the work is a noisy array of brushstrokes up close, yet it manifests into people, crowds and organized spaces from a further distance, just not too far.

That was another challenge for Abla, to create a collection of work that is both modern and classic. The paintings are typically of the impressionist era, late 1880s, yet they are on the very edge of the contemporary abstractions of today.

Most Read **Commented** **Emailed**

24 hours **3 days** **Week**

Daily News Egypt: Final words

No to a bloody future for Egypt

Abla had one final and perhaps most important reason for the creation of this show, and that is to depict Cairo in a favorable light. This is an admirable goal as many artists today, particularly the up and coming young crowd, are incessantly depressing, adamant on showing only the worst in, almost always, most pretentious ways.

Abla decided against this, which is what he has done in his previous show "Nostalgia where he depicted stable and functional Cairene families and households. He has in fact, created a collection of what he believes to be "fairly happy paintings in this show.

"Labyrinth is an excellent depiction of Cairo for the maze that it is: it confuses, seduces, repels and elicits deep thought. A show that must be seen by anyone who has tread the streets of this remarkable city.



What's This ?

 [Add Comment...](#)

[About Daily News Egypt / International Herald Tribune](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Advertising Guide](#) | [Subscribe to the International Herald Tribune / Daily News Egypt](#) | [Subscribe to DNE e-paper](#) | [E-paper](#) | [Corrections](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Sitemap](#) | [Archive](#)

[Cartoon](#) | [Blogs](#) | [Jobs](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Events](#)

© Daily News Egypt 2009, All Rights Reserved.

Technology Managed by El Motaheda Web Designs 