

An impressive display of abstract Cairo scenery



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By **Mariam Hamdy** / Special to Daily News Egypt **September 17, 2009, 2:00 am**

Currently showing at Mashrabia Gallery in Downtown Cairo is Deena Fadel's debut solo exhibit titled "When two ends meet." The show consists of a substantial number of mixed media paintings that employ fabric.

The first feature that grabs the eye is the color palette. Fadel states that her source of inspiration was 'the streets of Egypt' and this inspiration is evident in most of the paintings on display. Yet the one element all the pieces share in common is the dark shades of pastels that dominate the color patterns of most of these pieces. The entire collection of paintings feel hazy, as though they're covered by a layer of dust that needed to be wiped before the actual canvas was to be revealed. This is the winning attraction of the show: it quotes Cairo's dusty streets and less-than-clear skies while providing a subdued feeling.

The paintings mainly show abstract scenery of what appear to be the streets of Cairo. Nothing can be pinned down as particularly recognizable except for a few barely visible figural representations in some of the paintings. Those are in fact the least successful parts of the show. The reason why they don't fare as well as the rest of the pieces is due to the way the lines are employed to portray the figures. Occasionally, the use of line is precise and well-defined; in other moments, the clutter of lines is used haphazardly. In either case, the figures look too contrived and messy, devaluing overall the piece.

Another factor that treads a thin line between brilliance and sheer confusion is the use of fabric. The fabric used is unobtrusive: a beige colored fabric with a foliage motif. In some cases, the fabric lends a much needed hand to the success of a painting, adding depth and a sense of richness. The key to that success is how Fadel reworks the fabric to make it fit into the theme of the painting, rather than have it simply glued unto it as she has done in other pieces.

The best paintings are ones that are almost completely abstracted, which is a rare statement to make about the work of an artist so young. Abstraction is an art-form that heavily relies on a heightened sense of consciousness in understanding rather than recognition; a form that is usually honed in later stages of an artist's career. Experience ferments the ability to abstract, meaning that certain depths are difficult to attain at a young age. Fadel's work proves an exception to this rule.

Two pieces in particular are quite exquisite. First and foremost among them is a painting titled "Amusing Chaos; a rectangular canvas that stands tall among the rest. The use of lines and paint drips form a medley of controlled and whimsical dark brown strokes on a washed sandy colored background. Hints of dark blue and reds pepper the piece to further intrigue the viewers to inspect the painting more thoroughly. Its profundity is somewhat alarming, evident in the amount of time most viewers took to mull over that particular painting versus every other piece in the show.

Hanging next to it is "Human Forest, another rectangular canvas with a significantly more sinister feel to it than the first. Lines here are a lot more controlled, showing what appears to be a dense forest that, at a closer look, appears to be made up of human outlines. The piece is simply outstanding, once again thanks to the fact that figural representation is barely hinted at, allowing for more mystery in the piece.

Deena Fadel's body of work is impressive. The amount of accomplished work is indicative of the dedication and perseverance of an artist determined to have her voice heard. Despite the fact that the theme that dominates her work is one that has been endlessly channeled in numerous debut shows, Deena's approach is more solid than most.

A particular painting that both welcomes and bids you farewell at the entrance of the gallery space sets the tone for the show. Aptly titled "together, this piece is both vibrant and heartfelt, and proves that Fadel is a true abstract artist in the making.

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