

## An impressive display of collages at new art space



Hassaan Ali.



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**By** [Mariam Hamdy](#)/Special to Daily News Egypt **November 29, 2011, 2:53 pm**

In Cairo, art exhibitions are opening left and right, as are gallery spaces, surprisingly. The latest on the scene in what is becoming the city's art hub Zamalek is The Gallery, where the opening exhibit is "Collage: 100 Years On," curated by Maie Yanni.

What I love most about the art scene is its resilience. Regardless of the situation, there's always a time and place where art is created, appreciated and discussed. One only has to look at the asphalt of Tahrir Square or walls of the surrounding buildings to see art expressing people's angry, frustrated or comic views.

Less obvious but equally persevering, art sales survived the 2008 recession with a vengeance (with a clear slip in sales of 26 percent by 2009, 2008 was still well above any year of the global art market's history before 2006) — as well as the endless turbulences in the Middle East this year (fairs such as Abu Dhabi Art showcased work from various Middle Eastern countries).

Operated by the same owners of Le Souk, the antique furniture store, The Gallery sits just next door. Despite a very basic branding that will most definitely need to be revised by the gallery owners, the apartment is spacious and well-lit. The walls are painted light grey, which remarkably accents the debut collection — whether the wall color will change with each exhibition is yet to be seen.

The matching of wall color to the exhibited art has been a topic of discussion in museums and galleries in London in recent years, and despite my personal affinity to basic white walls, it's always exciting to see how curators implement this technique.

The idea of "Collage: 100 Years On" in itself is excellent: A collage is an art form decidedly under-represented, particularly in Egypt.

Wrongfully regarded as a crafts cut and paste hobby, collage is almost always dismissed as being too easy or too cheap.

It is, in fact, a very difficult process since the usage of various papers that range from magazine cutouts to tissue paper can be quite challenging to employ and manipulate.

Maie Yanni decided to pay homage to this underrated art form, by presenting a collection by some of the best artists in the region. The exhibition hosts the works of Mounir Canaan, Hany Rashed, Hassaan Ali, Hisham El-Zeiny, Huda Lutfi, Mohamed Abou El-Naga, Maie Yanni herself and Mutaz El-Emam. All the works are engaging, but as is always the case in any group exhibition, there are pieces that stand out.

Chief among these is the work of the prolific Mounir Canaan, an artist with an immensely diverse body of work who has perfected the art of collage over the years. A personal favorite is a piece that has tissue paper delicately melting into the background colors of coral orange and black. The contrast of forms and mediums makes the piece a beautiful experimentation in texture, and it is rightfully placed at the entrance of the gallery, setting the tone for the remainder of the show.

Highlights of the exhibition are both entire collections and single select pieces. Of the former, the work of Hisham El-Zeiny is the most solid. Calmly textured with monotonous colors of sand and dust, his pieces vary greatly in size. Yanni does a

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wonderful job of hanging these pieces together, titting their sizes in no particular order yet titting them together like a puzzle, the collection can be seen as separate pieces or one large entity. This allows the viewers to get a comprehensive idea of the artist's approach, yet enticing them to move closer and drown in the textures and details.

El-Zeiny's approach is archeological in essence, with the dusty texture lending to a feeling of looking at relics. Composition, gradients of the monotony of color and the forms of the subject matter are so delicate that they need a minute to be seen, as though one is making out figures in a fog.

Equally successful is Hany Rashed's collection. Rashed's paintings have been popping up in numerous group exhibitions across Cairo in the last few months, but none left quite a memorable impression. With his new collection, it seems as though he has finally found his calling.

His collages are perfect: clean, simple, clever and relevant. Despite the somehow "foreign" subject matter (the artist collects international magazine cutouts and blocks out the figures using white paint), the work is a live illustration of how composition should be tackled. Rashed has vowed to continue with his collages, yet tackle more local subject matter in his next collection.

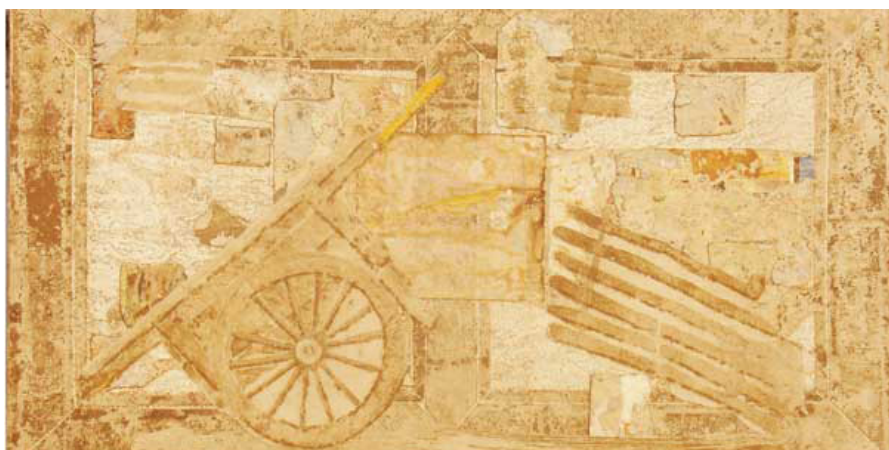
Of the more memorable pieces is Muataz El-Imam's composition of a lying figure with playing cards pasted randomly across the body. A simple composition, its beauty lies in the texture and use of cards — there is something about red hearts and black clubs floating around a vulnerable figure that appears intriguing. It is a small yet intense piece of work.

Also memorable are the infamous shoe moulds by Huda Lutfi, because of which she had several problems with critics and the police. Lutfi's shoe moulds have Sufi writings covering them, with the idea of 'steady steps' and consistency being the reason behind the use of shoe mould. Alas, this meaning flew over the heads of detractors. This time around however, the work is less provocative, simply because only two of the moulds are displayed, versus her original composition of around 20 pairs in a black-lit room at Townhouse Gallery.

A feature unique to collage is the false belief that anyone can do it with ease. The beauty of this falsity lies in the fact that it appeals to many temperaments — there is something personal about a collage that touches viewers in a way that a diary, a novel or a scent would.

This exhibition cannot be justly reviewed because it covers such a wide range of works and possibilities of personal favorites. It is most definitely worth a visit.

*"Collage: 100 Years On" is currently showing at The Gallery, 6 Salah Eldin St., Zamalek, Cairo. Tel: (02) 2736 5772. The exhibit concludes on Dec. 20.*



Hisham El-Zeiny.



Hany Rashed.



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suad Alhalwachi

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Hello Mariam, i like your article, i also love art and write about it often, check my blog on <http://suadalhalwachi.blogspot.com/2011/11/dubai-art-scene.html> we must exchange ideas on art in the city from Egypt and Dubai.

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