

An overblown party with distant shades of art



The haphazard placement of the artwork distracted visitors.

By **Mariam Hamdy** August 27, 2008, 2:00 am

Heading to Townhouse Gallery's "Sawa annual party and summer exhibition last Sunday, I found myself trekking down Champilion Street behind a large group of people heading towards the inescapably loud music at its end. At first glance, the mere sight of the overcrowded gallery is instantly delightful. After all, it's quite rare to witness a gallery opening packed shoulder to shoulder like "Sawa regardless of the popularity or prominence of the artist.

The Sawa annual exhibition showcases the artwork produced during the workshops "Wekalet El Balah, and "Arousa wa Aris (Bride and Groom) held last month at the Townhouse Gallery. The latter workshop, led by artist Chadi Edib, is the follow-up to last year's Sawa workshop "Arousa (Bride/Doll).

Chadi introduced art students in last year's workshop to the art of puppet-making. This year, he decided to tackle this perishing art on a more conceptual level, hence introducing the "Aris. The workshop consisted of three days of puppet-making. Participants were then instructed to bank on the workshop title and create their own individual interpretations.

The vast majority of produced work consists of various approaches to crafting traditional bride and groom puppets, all of which inspired by the masterworks of Salah El Sakka, albeit not at all as creative or delightful.

However, Ibrahim Saad's "Project Bride stood out from the rest.

Using images of storefront mannequins, Saad created his version of the model bride. He also offered the audiences applications to put down their own versions, from which he would create the perfect bride. The idea was amusing and so were the drawings - black and white mannequin images laced with colored DNA type design. Alas, the quality of the final work was not on par with expectations.

In fact, the entire exhibition was somehow disappointing. It was haphazardly curated, if at all. There seemed to be little to no attention paid to the presentation of the work - placed on the floors, mounted on the walls and hung from the ceiling. What could have been a charming display of puppets and their related projects seemed like a disturbing explosion of rag dolls.

The disconcerting vibe could not have been stronger than in the display of the works of the second Sawa workshop, "Wekalet El Balah, led by fashion designer Mohamed Khafagy. The concept was to get various materials and fabrics from the Wekalet El Balah fabrics shopping area, and revamp them for more contemporary uses - something that wasn't evident in the displayed works.

The products of the workshop were lost among the mountains of dolls, rags and unexplained fabrics and garments thrown about the entire space. There was a general sense of chaos that seemed organized only to its creators.

I felt lost and swamped by what appeared to be a total mess. The swarm of people walking around with plates full of Sudanese food - undoubtedly delicious - increased the pervading feeling of claustrophobia during the opening.

It was disappointing not to have been able to closely inspect the produced works. The average art goers felt like intruders on a family gathering - a dinner to which we were not invited at a setting perhaps better visited at a quieter time.

Choosing another night, rather than the opening, to visit the exhibition could have been better to review the artwork, but it's doubtful that it would have saved it from the careless presentation. "Sawa exhibition is currently showing at Townhouse Gallery, 48 El Mahroug St. Downtown, Cairo. Tel: (02) 2570 0000. 10 am - 6 pm, Sun - Sat.



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