

Cairo facades mingle with seashore scenery in Kunst exhibit



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By **Mariam Hamdy** / Special to Daily News Egypt **August 12, 2009, 2:00 am**

Currently showing at Kunst Gallery downtown is a show titled "El-Makan (The Place) by artists Reham Mostafa and Ahmed El-Karim Khaled. The show hosts a collection of photography, both in black and white as well as color.

Primarily composed of images of still life, the exhibited pieces can be grouped into three categories: historical facades, sea images and a few random pieces connected by no particular theme.

The photos are not titled, making it impossible to identify which photographer is responsible for which creation. This is a dire mistake. Despite the fact that all the pieces stand relatively on the same plane in terms of subject matter and style, it's unfortunate that in this review, the photographer responsible for the notable works will simply be referred to as such: the photographer.

Upon entering the gallery café, photos of old buildings and historical facades, primarily mosques, meet the viewer. At first glance, the photographs seem familiar; simply another photo collection inspired by the gracious facades of old Cairo and the beautiful yet dusty lanterns of Khan El-Khalili.

Although this clichéd subject matter is currently the dominant rite of passage for any photographer, the images manages to escape convention trappings. An appreciation of the works' aesthetics requires a thorough eye; the images fool at hasty inspection. Particular pieces show meticulously studied compositions. Some photographs display an excellent play of light and shade, along with a well-studied balance of forms within the frame.

A grave generalization would be to assume that the process of photographing facades is an easy feat; it is not. Unless the architecture is strikingly different in its own right, most buildings in Cairo can be dismissed as lackluster and characterless.

It requires a heightened sense of observation, curiosity and diligence in order to allow a photograph to express the essence and soul of what otherwise would be an old, tired building. Some of the displayed photographs in Kunst's exhibit have admirably managed to reach this end.

Among the highlights of the exhibit is a photograph taken from under what appears to be the wooden panels of a roof-like structure through which the sky can be seen. The contrast between the silhouette of the panels and the deep blue color of the sky is perfect. The resulting effect is akin to an abstract painting, full of light and texture and barely recognizable.

I hoped that more similar works of such compositions were exhibited as they would've further showed the photographers' skills in cropping and balance.

The sea images are not as exciting. Some of them show the seascape projected against the sunset rays: an exhausted subject matter most professional artists are finally learning to avoid.

The remaining pieces depict the motion of waves crashing unto the shore. These are slightly more exciting, once again primarily due to the photographer's studied approach to composition. The way the images are cropped draw the viewer's attention to the shapes of the waves as they collide in face of still ground. Overall though, the second category photos are just short of memorable.

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Of the remaining photographs, a particular piece stands out: a view from a car's windshield that shows a road drenched in rain. The beauty of the piece lies in the sense of warmth and nostalgia it provides. This piece is arguably the sole truly spontaneous image in the exhibition, and one of the most successful.

"The Place is a mildly pleasing show yet not as worthwhile as it could have been, considering the photographers' undeniable talent. One would hope they continue to hone their skills and venture into less safe waters. And next time, better place some labels.



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