

Different mechanics of same woman



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By **Mariam Hamdy** /Special to Daily News Egypt **May 6, 2010, 2:54 pm**

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There seems to be a growing interest in art these days, so much so that "studio spaces" have opened up in the least expected locations. It's both comforting as it is respectful that these spaces do not call themselves "galleries" but rather "studios" since they function upon the logic that they provide a public studio space for artists to showcase their work to a wider public, not a formal managing and art dealing venue.

The newest of these spaces is Studio14, a small room in the latest boutique to open in Zamalek's "Ghazl El Banat." Studio 14 is a tiny space for paintings, but the current show there fits surprisingly well.

Dalia Sabet, a senior Performing and Visual Arts major at the American University in Cairo, is currently holding a show titled: "Mechanics of a Woman." Despite my eagerness to offer a stern criticism to artists-to-be in an attempt to prepare them for the tough reception they and their work are about to meet upon graduation, the quality of the work on display dispels this notion.

The exhibition is comprised of around nine pieces that are best described as 3D paintings. Sabet collects random junk material such as cans, metal pieces, bottle caps, screws and other materials to incorporate in her work by literally fastening them unto her support. The rest of her pieces are created with acrylic paint and markers.

The pieces are essentially portraits of women, with faces outlined in marker pen and painted with acrylic. Each face appears to be a concoction of many faces, with the end results appearing familiar — like women you've seen before. Despite being generic, more attention should be given to the features in the faces that remain to be the focal point of each piece. Each woman is adorned with something decidedly "girly": flowing hair, colorful turbans or flowers on her head.

The bodies of the women, on the other hand, are made up of junk material — the best two portraits show bodies comprised of cans and metal pieces.

The pieces carry an interesting mixture of contrasts on several levels. On the aesthetic level, the shiny or dull metal junk against the bright red, turquoise and fuchsia backgrounds are fascinating for the eye. The textures in the headpieces are also a welcome addition and although the pieces appear noisy at first, on a more attentive look, the paintings in fact induce a balanced and relaxed sensation.

The artist's aim to "depict women from all angles: both in a delicate as well as industrialized form" is clearly visible.

The paintings give the impression of complicated, messy compositions from afar, but upon a closer look, the materials appear to be far simpler and more organized than first perceived.

Although such effect suggests an adverse interpretation, implying that the "mechanics of a woman" are in fact not complicated but rather plain and scrap, the paintings do not come off as amateurish. They do offer images of the generic females taking part in what makes her feminine while at the same time involving herself in a workforce of sorts.



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The concept behind the work is straightforward and simple — one could argue that it needs more depth and texture to make the pieces thought provoking. Yet what is welcome here is that they look good; a refreshing change from the myriad of concept-heavy artwork cramming Egyptian art spaces. The paintings contain distant allusions to Adel El Siwi's infamous portraits while borrowing some of Huda Lutfi's techniques, an impressive accomplishment for an art student who may not have met the works of either artist.

Most startling of all though is that Sabet is an undergraduate who is producing work and showing it — she has managed to find enough time to create a theme, a collection of paintings and exhibit them. She has yet to start her graduation project this semester: Fingers-crossed she delivers as well as she has done in this show.

"Mechanics of a Woman" closes on May 13. Studio 14: 14 Montazah st. ground fl. apt. 1, Zamalek, Cairo.



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