

## Early works of Egyptian masters uncovered in new exhibition



Hamed Owaiss' work

By **Mariam Hamdy** July 24, 2008, 2:00 am

The Zamalek Art Gallery is hosting its "Masterpieces exhibition this week.

The title is certainly an understatement: The artwork on display is a rare collection of paintings, some of which have never been exhibited before.

The exhibition boasts the works of Egypt's greatest painters, including Hamed Owaiss, Zeinab El Sageny, Abdel Rahman El Nachar, Gazbia Sirry, Mostafa Abdel Moity, Rabab Nimr and Farghali Abdel Hafeez. Most of these names have exhibited extensively all over the world. What makes this particular show quite exceptional though is that these paintings represent the earliest efforts of the masters' works.

One of the major attractions of show is the works of Hamed Owaiss, an artist who rarely exhibits his paintings nowadays. Retired now, Owaiss' pieces are highly coveted by anyone with the slightest knowledge of modern Egyptian art, and the pieces exhibited in the show are no exception.

His characters have a doll-like quality that lands them a hair width short of real. His contrast between two and three dimensionality is exceptional, so much so that the paintings are almost difficult to look at but impossible to avoid.

Equally dazzling are the works of Farghali Abdel Hafeez and Rabab Nimr.

The former has a wonderful collection of his three dimensional paintings produced between 1975 and 1980. Abdel Hafeez's rich body of work is widely regarded being a key point in the evolution of modern art in Egypt.

Nimr, on the other hand, is an artist known for her impeccably detailed ink drawings. Not only is it fascinating for her fans alike to trace how her distinct style transferred across the different mediums, but it also functions as an educational illustration for academics and art students.

In the case of Zeinab El Sageny, a staple artist of the Zamalek Art Gallery, a collection of her later works is on display. El Sageny has a very particular style, one that is known as quintessentially Egyptian and ultimately recognizable at a glance. There are, however, two particular pieces from an earlier era, taken from her BA graduation project in 1956.

Both pieces are small in size; the first a mosaic, while the other is a seemingly two-dimensional piece reminiscent of an ancient Egyptian relief.

It's quite surprising to know El Sageny was reluctant to have both pieces displayed for public viewing since they're both, in fact, terrific paintings on par with her later great works.

Equally reluctant to exhibit his early work is Mohamed Abla, an internationally acclaimed artist participating in the exhibition with a beautiful figural painting he accomplished during his sophomore year at college.

The paintings are priceless - literally. Most of the pieces are not for sale.



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Being one of the most successful art spaces in Cairo, Zamalek Art gallery has had its share of sold out shows, but the current exhibition has absolutely no commercial purpose. The primary intention of the gallery is purely educational, hoping that students and art enthusiasts could study the origins of the greats and contemplate the basic themes developed and refined in their later works.

The exhibition is heart bracing collection of exquisite works bound to humble any up and coming artist.



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