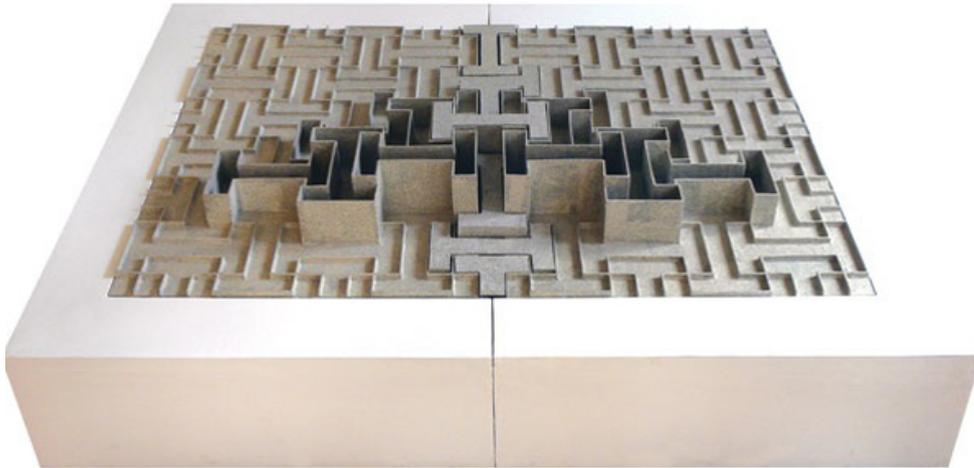


Egyptian artist El-Mestikawy vies for Jameel Prize



The V&A in London, known for its Islamic art collection, is the world's largest museum of arts and design, featuring a permanent collection comprised of 4.5 million pieces.

By **Mariam Hamdy/ Special to Daily News Egypt** July 20, 2011, 5:22 pm

Ten out of 200 artists, including from Egypt, Algerian and Iran, were chosen for this year's Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition to compete for the £25, 000 biannual Jameel Prize for Islamic-inspired contemporary art.

"The nominations were from a much wider span than those of the 2009 prize, stretching from North America to France, Algeria, Egypt, Spain, Pakistan, Nigeria, Iraq and Iran," the V&A's Middle East curator of contemporary art, Saima Tuqan, told Daily News Egypt.

The V&A in London, known for its Islamic art collection, is the world's largest museum of arts and design, featuring a permanent collection comprised of 4.5 million pieces. A magnificent structure covering 12.5 acres, the museum houses 145 galleries with work spanning 5000 years of art ranging from the ancient to contemporary in virtually every imaginable medium.

Having begun collecting Islamic work in the 1850s, the V&A was the first institution in the world to collect Islamic art in a systematic fashion. Having always shown genuine interest in contemporary practice in the Middle East, the V&A introduced the £25, 000 biannual Jameel Prize in 2009 for contemporary artists and designers inspired by Islamic traditions of craft and design.

The prize proved to be a worthy endeavor from the Abdul Latif Jameel Community Initiatives (ALJCI), a Saudi project committed to promoting opportunities for thousands of young Saudi men and women each year through its job creation initiative, Bab Rizq Jameel (BRJ). The Jameel Prize tour is one of its growing numbers of international initiatives in the Middle East and North Africa.

This year's curators, Tuqan and the senior curator of the V&A's Middle Eastern collection, Tim Stanley, as well as a panel of judges chaired by the V&A director Sir Mark Jones, chose the 10 artists for the final exhibition.

The 2011 shortlist is composed of the following artists: Noor Ali Chagani (Pakistan), Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (Iran), Bita Ghezelayagh (Iran), Babak Golkar (USA), Hayv Kahraman (Iraq), Aisha Khalid (Pakistan), Rachid Koraïchi (Algeria), Hadieh Shafie (Iran), Soody Sharifi (Iran) and Hazem El-Mestikawy (Egypt).

The inclusion of an Egyptian in the shortlist came as a pleasant surprise, particularly when surrounded by such a strong caliber of contemporary artists. In light of all the explosive uprisings in Egypt and the entire region, it was satisfying to see our art being communicated as loudly as the strikes and revolts.

Another Egyptian involved with the event is Dina Bakhoun, Conservation Program Manager at the Aga Khan Trust for Culture in Egypt and one of the judges chosen for the short-listing of the Jameel Prize.

Tuqan said she has always felt "that contemporary art from the Arab region has consistently shown huge promise, sensitivity and creativity." However in relation to the latest events, she believed that "it will take some time for thought-provoking work of quality directly inspired by the Arab Spring to emerge, and I look forward to seeing this."

El-Mestikawy has, in a way, always been involved with the avant-garde of sculpture and installation, using recycled cardboard, newspapers and glue to create work of outwardly substantial density. Appearing as concrete structures, his



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sculptures are in reality lightweight constructions representing heavy-weight philosophies.

His chosen piece for the Jameel prize shortlist is titled "Bridge," a geometrical maze-like structure of seven movable units, constructed of the shape of a capital "I." The units have elevated sections that can be arranged to form bridges. Painfully neat in its execution, the entire detachable cardboard structure is covered in equal extracts of Arabic and English newspaper, engulfing the maze in small text from the east to the west of the globe. The beauty of the piece, as with most El-Mestikawy's work, lies in both the simplicity of its look and the complexity of the socio-political ideas it explores.

On what caught Tuqan and the judges' attention in the work of El Mestikawy, she said: "The judges felt that El-Mestikawy's work incorporated multiple intriguing layers: the alphabet (the word, which is key to Islam), as well as architectural forms creating illusions of labyrinths and the use of geometric patterns in a modern and technical way."

An excellent interpretation of the work, it places El-Mestikawy's 'Bridge' as an inspiration for the dawn of the Arab Spring that Tuqan, as well as all of us, are so anxiously looking forward to. The winner of The Jameel Prize 2011 will be announced at the Victoria and Albert museum on Sept. 12, so root for El-Mestikawy, and enjoy the outstanding artwork by the other shortlisted artists.



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