

## Established and up-and-coming artists meet in new exhibit



Painting by Omar El Nagdi.

By **Mariam Hamdy** / Special to Daily News Egypt **July 13, 2009, 2:00 am**

AlMasar Gallery is currently hosting its second group show titled "Contemporary Views II featuring an array of Egyptian contemporary artists, from the more established ones to the young talents beginning to make their mark.

The majority of the works are a joy to look at, accomplished by painters with a mastery of skill that shows through years of experience.

The first piece to catch the eye is an acrylic painting by Omar El Nagdi, whose work is always suspended in organized chaos. Depicting two young women chatting on the edge of a bed, the painting is a cozy portrayal of an intimate friendship. What's particularly intriguing about it is the confrontational look of the woman while telling a story: it seems as though she has stopped in the middle to catch the eye of the viewer who walked into her secret. The vibrancy of El Nagdi's colors and his signature use of orange grabs the attention almost immediately.

Placed suitably next to it is a huge painting by George Bahgoury of a number of peaches. The choice of color, style and subject matter is reminiscent of post-impressionist French painter Paul Cézanne, yet Bahgoury's use of line cannot be missed.

Notable pieces in the show include Gihan Suleiman's "Jars, a series of paintings of abstracted, almost iconic images of jars. Suleiman blocks her colors in a fashion that makes her pieces look as though they've been printed with a vibrant red background that contrast with the dull grays of the jar.

Less bright in color but equally strong is Hazem Taha Hussein's "The Family. The canvas shows a blurred image of a father, mother and child, painted in washed pastel colors. The interesting part of the painting is the netting-like motif that covers it entirely and makes it even more difficult to decipher. There is a radical contrast between the geometric patterns. The overall effect of the painting though is subtle, yet heavy with connotation.

Khaled Hafez, whose work is a staple of AlMasar's exhibitions, is participating with four pieces, two of which have been exhibited before in the same gallery. The piece that stands out is "Souma in heaven I which shows icons of Um Kolthoum singing set against a backdrop of deep blue sky. The painting looks whimsical as though drawn by a child whose idea of heaven is an expanse of space and bright colors. Sadly, the piece is displayed uncomfortably close to the ceiling in a distant corner of the gallery.

Peppered throughout the gallery are small, black granite sculptures by Mahmoud El Dowaihy which provide a much needed break from the two-dimensional representations of the walls of the space. The sculptures are mostly splendid abstracted forms of animals. El Dowaihy has broken down the form of a bird or goose for example, into their most basic lines. Despite the simplicity of the work, each piece is packed with ideas and emotions.

The sculptures provide an excellent grounding effect to the entire exhibition.

Standing as a final note of the exhibit is a towering oil painting by Karim El-Qureity. The painting consists of three dark structures, two figures and a chair, composed across a white canvas. The piece is not only astounding in its sheer size but



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the fundamental composition is simply flawless.

The painting provides a noteworthy conclusion to the show. By virtue of its dark, almost black structures against the white background, El-Qureity's work reminds the viewer of the gallery's several other structures that one may have overlooked.

There are a few other artists whose works are equally remarkable such as Laila Ezzat, Ayman El-Semary, Hamdy Attia, Mahmoud Abdallah and Taha Hussein to name a few. However, and despite the fact that the placement of the paintings in the excellent gallery space is tasteful for the most part, the exhibition lacks a unified theme.

The show is sub-titled "Masters from the 3rd and 5th generation and young talents today, a broad and illogical grouping proposal that doesn't resonate with most of the gallery's visitors.

The function of the show is obviously to sell, which isn't a bad thing, yet packaging it within a retrospective façade appears to be naïve.

If anything, the show is a first-rate example for curation and marketing of artwork, an aspect we find lacking in the local art scene in general.



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