

Global pop culture meets Turkish heritage in cartoons



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One of the most underrated art spaces in Cairo is El Hanager Arts Center at the Cairo Opera House. Not only does it enjoy a fantastic location that's both central to the capital's art scene and easily accessible with abundant parking space - a rarity that needs to be pointed out - but the large exhibition area itself is a dream playground for any artist.

A rectangular garage-type structure with concrete floors and enough wall space to house any collection of artwork, El Hanager provides an exceptional empty canvas for any artist to present their work in the best possible light.

The latest artist fortune to take advantage of the Hanager space is Turkey's famed cartoonist Nezir Danyal. Cartoonist, as a matter of fact, is an understatement. Danyal is the president of the Federation of European Cartoonists Organization (FECO) and his celebrated works have won awards in Italy, Holland and several other nations.

Sponsored by the Turkish Embassy in Cairo, Danyal's cartoon collections are neatly lined down the center of the gallery's walls. Although a substantial amount of Danyal's work is on display, the pieces are only a fraction of the Turkish maverick's productions.

The show is named "Globanatolization, a mouthful of a title combining the words 'Globalization' and 'Anatolia.' The two words basically sum up the essence of the show. By combining elements of global culture with Turkey's own - inherited and present one - in his sketches, Danyal's work ultimately emerges as some kind of a social commentary. The final outcome is a collection of caricatures ranging from the mildly entertaining to the downright amusing.

The work includes computer generated images (CGI) as well as hand-drawn ones. The former mainly focus on the infamous Goha and his trusty donkey, a character of Turkish origins whose stories are set in the marketplaces and teahouses of the 13th century. Goha is known as an anti-hero, both a foolish and wise man whose stories cover a wide spectrum of children's jokes and religious meditations to acts of rebellion and moral parables.

These pieces aren't particularly entertaining, mainly because of their flat, printed quality. The cartoons also feel like stills ripped off a bigger, funnier comic strip, giving the impression of an unfinished work.

The hand-drawn cartoons on the other hand, strategically placed at the end of the space, are the curator's "leave the best for last touch.

The pictures are studied compositions with excellent attention to line and detail. The subject matter of these pieces is endlessly entertaining. Danyal cleverly merges traditional Turkish culture with global pop culture to draw a big picture of a unique universe that, to a great extent, reflects the contradictions of modern Turkey.

A few splendid examples include a cartoon of a carpet-maker weaving a portrait of the Mona Lisa who, incidentally, is posing for his carpet; a Moulid (carnival) type playground where famous Peanuts cartoon character Snoopy and his friends are entertained; and - a personal favorite - dervishes swirling towards the sun as Superman stares up at them on the ground.

These pieces are the highlight of the show, and they are a true testament to the boundless imagination and creativity of the artist. "Globanatolization has already been exhibited in Berlin, Rotterdam, Paris, Tehran, Japan, Croatia and Poland. This is

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