

thedailynewsegypt.com

beta

[Home](#) | [Politics](#) | [Business](#) | [Society](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyle](#) | [Culture](#) | [Sport](#) | [Multimedia](#)

[Culture](#) [Art](#) | [Film](#) | [Music](#) | [Theater](#) | [Opera](#) | [Dance](#) | [Radio&TV](#) | [Archaeology](#) | [Books](#) | [Movie Listings](#) | [Museums](#) | [Art Galleries](#)
[Cultural Centers](#)

Innocence re-imagined

By **Mariam Hamdy** January 17, 2008, 2:00 am

It is important every now and then to be reminded of the basic gifts of life, the things we have taken for granted.

Cherif Sobhi's latest exhibit at the Safar Khan Gallery was a much-needed wake-up call. A resident of La Baraccia Gallery in Rome, Cherif Sobhi has toured with his works all over the world since 1960.

The pieces displayed in his current exhibit are mainly still-life oil paintings of flower vases and landscapes, with a few others of animals.

At first glance the paintings seem too familiar, a "been there, done that" collection of works that would make a fine accent hung atop an art-lover's living room couch. They are admittedly, in relation to the contemporary artwork scene, outdated and repeated pieces of work.

However, at a second, less dismissive glance, the paintings are both unique and deliciously layered.

Sobhi's work is composed of thickly applied paint and dripping brushstrokes to create recognizable objects. The paintings are heavily glazed and varnished, so much so that they appear to be behind glass.

The approach to the still flower vases and the landscape is an old painting technique pioneered by Van Gogh, where the subject of the painting is flattened out, using sharp edges and thick, unapologetic brushstrokes. The work looks childlike and two-dimensional with a bright and playful color palette.

"Childlike doesn't mean naïve though; a word uttered by many of the exhibit's visitors. Nothing about Sobhi's approach could be labeled naïve.

His work is intentionally designed to give this simplistic impression, but it has a clear, singular perspective and a studied approach to light. The details in his still life were staggering, despite the fact that they seem haphazard.

A particularly contemporary element in Sobhi's paintings is the square wood panels on which his work is constructed. Square compositions are rare, since creating a successful one on a square support is an extremely difficult task to master because having equal edges demands that the elements in the artwork be carefully laid out. Rectangular supports, on the other hand, lend themselves to the easier landscape format. Sobhi manages to create perfectly balanced pieces that were neither too crowded nor too empty.

Another contemporary element in his paintings is the relentless use of black.

Any negative space in his paintings is covered in thick, jet black paint. This not only gives his pieces the duality of being both infinitely deep and deliberately flat, but also gives his work a very somber and sad undertone.

On realizing the unwavering existence of blackness in the background, the young subjects of his paintings suddenly age too rapidly, like a devastating awakening for an innocent child.

What is most interesting about the exhibit is the fact that the paintings aren't openly conceptual, nor are they weighed down by ideology or complex meanings. There is no external point of reference: the subjects depicted are plain and clear. This is not to say that they're boring or predictable. On the contrary, the aforementioned layers and color choices aren't always easy to digest.

However, the intriguing quality of the exhibit lies in the direct experience it provides viewers. Sobhi reminds us that painting is essentially about the engagement inhabiting the space between the maker and viewer.

The show is untitled. There is no artist statement explaining its content, and no philosophy behind the artists' views; just a poster on the door of the gallery advertising the show.

For the viewer, painting is a noun, the finished object of what we see. For the artist, it's a verb, the activity in which they are engaged. When a painter succeeds in evoking painting as a verb, he offers a splendid experience. Cherif Sobhi has managed to do just that.

For more information on Cherif Sobhi's exhibition, please check the culture agenda.



[What's This ?](#)

[Add Comment...](#)



Related Stories

There is no related article

[Most Read](#) [Commented](#) [Emailed](#)

24 hours **3 days** **Week**

[Daily News Egypt: Final words](#)

[No to a bloody future for Egypt](#)

