

Lost in an open 'Transit'



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By **Mariam Hamdy**

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Townhouse Gallery is hosting "Transit 1, the first of a series of exhibitions that pair Neopolitan artists with their counterparts in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, allowing each one to express their impressions of the other's homeland.

"Transit 1 is a group show featuring artists Sherif El-Azma, Nermine El-Ansari and Domenico Antonio Mancini.

El-Azma and El-Ansari created a model of the Sao Paolo football stadium, which was architecturally based on Pompeii's ancient amphitheater. In 1971, British rock group Pink Floyd held a concert to Sao Paolo's empty stadium as a tribute to the victims of Pompeii's Mount Vesuvius eruption in the first century.

On the right wall of the model, texts transcribing comments from viewers on YouTube who have watched the concert are seen. Behind it is a projection of an architectural animation of the stadium from different angles accompanied by sounds of an invisible audience.

Mancini presents a rather simplistic work that comments on the Italian-Egyptian program Debt for Development, which aims to omit a portion of Egypt's foreign debt in exchange for investment in designated projects.

What can be seen on the wall of the gallery are six icons, each standing for various policy areas targeted in Egypt with specific numbers underneath them.

On the wall right next to these icons is a huge wooden sculpture of the eagle of the Egyptian flag, but with the Italian flag in its center. The comment Mancini is making concerns the alteration of the power relations caused by economic policy.

Despite the wooden structure being well executed and admirable in both detail and size, it aesthetically bears no connection to the icons placed next to it. The materials used on both walls and the three dimensionality of the structure versus the flatness of the icons are slightly disturbing contrast. The pieces unrelated; the only connection is their vicinity to each other.

The interesting aspect of El-Azma and El-Ansari's pieces is the architectural animation incorporated inside their work. The monstrously, see-through large and empty stadium surrounded by ambient sounds is real treat. It's safe to say that if the animation was presented on its own without the model or the transcribed text, it would've been more of a success than the current form.

The text is somewhat useless, adding nothing to the concept, while the model feels like an unneeded repetition of the idea expressed in the animation. The inclusion of too many factors took away from the piece rather than adding to it.

One has to admire the amount of intellectualism and awareness that these artists have employed in their work, as well as the level of depth in subject matter. Yet, had the viewers not read the artist statement and the detailed description of the work, the message of these pieces wouldn't have been conveyed.

It feels as though the openness of art has become so unlimited that it sometimes bears risk of denying communication altogether. "Transit 1 is a perfect example. Artists should consider every once in a while taking a step back to look at their work through the eyes of their viewers, to see if they present themselves in a way that is both creative as well as clear.

Despite the beauty of the incorporation of such intellect and discernment in such art, one increasingly longs for plain good

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