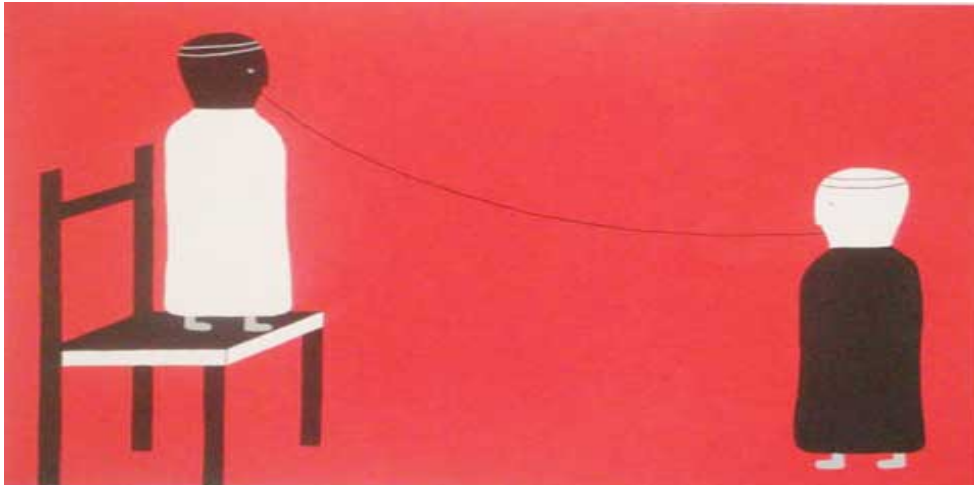


Mohamed Sharkawy's childlike world returns with 'El Kehrita'



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By **Mariam Hamdy**

May 1, 2008, 2:00 am

Following the success of his first exhibition, Mohamed Sharkawy has now applied his trademark two-dimensional drawings to the exploration of the traditional ritual of

"El Kehrita , now showing at the Townhouse Gallery.

El Kehrita is a fading practice believed to heal mental and physical ills as well as bring about fertility. The ancient mythical ritual is practiced in Upper Egypt, where the artist comes from.

The consistent, iconic imagery in his paintings depict the meaning of the chants sung during the ritual, invoking the power of the Quran and the support of Abou Asran (the spirit of a local man who was particularly pious in life). Swords and knives, refer to the aforementioned chanting and rather than reflecting violence in the ritual, represent the means used by Abou Asran to draw out the illness, enabling the sick person to make a return to full health.

His trademark style is simple and balanced. His first solo exhibition "El Daba acquired a major fan base with his smart, iconic two-dimensional approach. "El Kehrita follows in the same footsteps with a slight progression.

"El Daba featured simplified images resembling wall drawings in the suburbs; images anyone familiar with the Delta region can easily recognize.

The way he portrayed men and their livestock in his previous exhibition was an eye-catching modulation on graphic design. His work could've easily competed with Japan and China's icon-crazed art culture.

With "El Kehrita, on the other hand, he approaches his simplified subjects and universe differently. The subjects of his paintings are akin to round Lego figures - square and slightly boxy - giving them more weight than his last set of paintings where such elements appeared frailer.

It is assumed that the people who undergo the ritual of El Kehrita become more spiritually in-tune with each other, a belief Sharkawy depicts by the use of dotted lines between one individual and the other.

Sharkawy's approach is distinctively childlike, despite the spiritually profound essence of the ritual he's presenting.

This childlike quality is also infusing his choice of colors: solid blocks of bright primary and secondary colors, carefully placed to complement each other. Yet what's actually striking about his palette is his impeccable attention to fine lines. The colors drift so close to each other without ever uniting or mixing - a wise tactic to preserve the graphic design feel of the paintings.

Overall, the well-presented drawings are flawless, almost as though Sharkawy had used a programmed computer to print the images.

However, one question remains inevitable: If it weren't for the artists' thorough statement explaining what El Kehrita is and the implications behind the details that make up his paintings; would the work stand on its own?

Probably not. It's unclear whether the paintings - without explanation - have captured the spiritual core of this practice. There

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...reality that he created through his paintings - without explanation - have captured the spiritual core of the practice. There is a clear tension between Sharkawy's style, which he has been firmly established with his last popular exhibition, and the content he had wanted to portray. Sharkawy is a promising rising artist whose work has managed to strike a chord with art aficionados and become instantly recognizable. Hopefully, his work would continue to mature rather than turning into a pop tune, heard feverishly yet quickly forgotten.



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