

## Strong Egyptianess in Doroub's group exhibit



Abdel Aal Hassan's work.



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By **Mariam Hamdy / Special to Daily News Egypt** **August 6, 2009, 2:00 am**

The Doroub Gallery in Garden City is one of the most prestigious art spaces in Cairo, celebrated for its unique curating approach and the country's marquee artists it hosts. Doroub is currently holding its annual summer group exhibit that showcases the best pieces they've presented throughout the year so far. The guest of honor at the current show is painter Abdel Wahab Morsi.

The untitled show hosts an array of accomplished artists experimenting with different mediums that ranges from oil painting to calligraphy and sculpture.

Of the numerous exhibited artworks, the works by the guest of honor along with those of a number of other artists exhibited in the same space are worth a special mention.

Abdel Wahab Morsi began to exhibit his works in 1957. His paintings have a tribal approach in their simplicity and tackling of lines, while his colors are vibrant and full of life. Of the two pieces exhibited here, one markedly stands out. A portrait of what appears to be an Egyptian woman - a more geometric prototype of the infamous icon of Nahdet Masr riddled with straight lines. The portrait's features are minimal yet expressive while the colors are grainy and strong.

Even more striking are the exceptional portraits of Sabry Ragheb. Having passed away in 2000, Ragheb left behind 80 years of awe-inspiring paintings, two small portraits of which are currently exhibited at Doroub.

Most of the artist's works are portraiture, and one cannot overlook the mastery of his skill illustrated in his brushstrokes and his ability to accurately capture facial expressions. His portraits are distinctively Egyptian, yet with a decidedly Italian aesthetic.

This Egyptian essence is also strongly visible in Abdel Aal Hassan's portraits of women, be it from the textured approach to the application of paint or the regal take on the depicted women. Despite the fact that his basic, over-exposed subjects of the quintessential Egyptian fallaha can feel tiresome to the viewers, Hassan's portraits are authentic and far from cliché.

Doroub's curators made an excellent decision by placing the portraits of younger artist Mervat Refaat next to Hassan's. Her work features the same subjects of Hassan's, albeit younger in look.

Mervat's paintings look decidedly tighter in composition and less vague.

Rather than depicting a character as Hassan's portraits attempt to do, Mervat's tell an intricate story replete with plenty of details. Moving from Hassan's portraits that show grandeur existing in a distant time to Mervat's modern paintings is like a person watching a blurry vision before putting on glasses for a clearer one.

Moving from portraiture to sculptors, Doroub features the works of five artists. Of those, two stand out: Halim Yacoub and Ammar Shiha. Yacoub's forms are simply exquisite. There is fluidity to his sculpting that negates their rather small size. His pieces resemble the shapes produced by cigarette smoke, making the sculptures look light and ephemeral, despite the heavy bronze that they are made out of. Yacoub's pieces are solemn, allowing for further contemplation of sorts.

Equally accomplished but completely different are Shiha's sculptures that are made out of scrap metal. An approach to

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medium that has been used endlessly, using scrap materials can either be immensely impressive or simply continues to remain junk. Shiha treads a very thin line on that front, but manages to win over the viewers with his sense of humor. His chosen subject matter shows a sense of observation of a comedian, with attention to detail that is both aesthetically imposing, as it is amusing.

There are several other works of diverse art-forms hosted in Doroub's summer exhibition, including calligraphy, jewelry design and an even more exciting array of paintings. Whether it is for art collectors or just for those who have a passion for solid, Egyptian artwork, this show is certainly worth a visit.



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