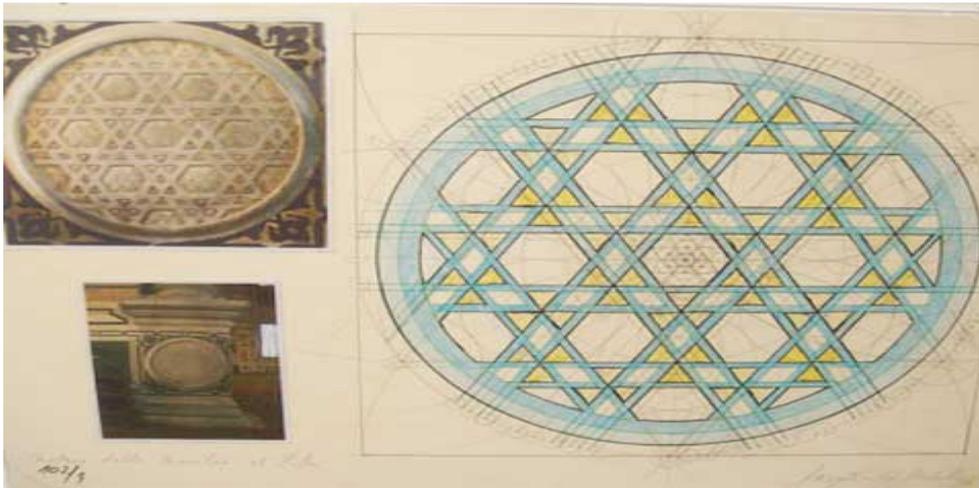


The mysterious realms of 'Nether Matrix'



Melcher's collection of paintings and drawings bank on his love of straight lines and angles.

By **Mariam Hamdy** **September 23, 2008, 2:00 am**

The Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia has repeatedly proven to be one of the most reliable art venues in Egypt in pulling a conceptually sound show.

During Ramadan, Pro Helvetia is hosting "Nether Matrix, a joint exhibition between Swiss artist Gaspare Otto Melcher and Egyptian artist Amr Fekry, which tackles the concept of sacred geometry.

The term "Nether Matrix refers to a hidden or undisclosed fabric or circumstance of sorts. Melcher's "Saqqara Sequence: Sacred Geometrical Symbols is held at Horizon One Gallery, at the Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil Museum, while Fekry's Exhibition "Basirulmala'ekah: Meditations on the Holy of the Holies is held at Al-Ghuri Dome.

During his six month residency in Egypt, Melcher managed to create connections between his own personal cognitive symbols and the principals of construction in Ancient Egypt, otherwise known as "The Scared Geometry. The resulting body of work is a collection of paintings and drawings, all of which heavily bank on an architect's love of straight lines and angles.

The paintings far surpass the drawings, placed as an introductory attraction in the show, though the latter do possess a particular charm. The drawings are geometric studies of certain photographs that are attached to them, such as a lined analysis of the Key of the Nile, or a reconstruction of a door or archway. The drawings barely sustain interest for closer inspection, but they certainly serve the purpose of leading towards the canvas pieces, paving the way from a precise underlined clarity in pencil to purposeful chaos in Tempera paint.

The paintings by Melcher are best described as blueprints on canvas. The thin line these pieces tread between geometry and pictorial gesture is simply excellent. It feels as though you're looking at a precise architectural outline of a specific object and, at the same time, an abstract painting, both moulded into one. His choice of colors is calm and calculated, making the otherwise harsh lines warm and worthy of reflection.

This brings us to the second half of the exhibition, "Basirulmala'ekah: Meditations on the Holy of the Holies, (a more accurate translation is Vision of Angels) displayed at Al-Ghuri Dome. From first glance, it's difficult to imagine a more ideal location for Amr Fekry's work than the dome to be admired and understood.

Fekry's latest presentation is a collection of kaleidoscope type photographs of tree branches. All exhibited pieces create a symmetrical formation, using tree leaves and branches, each surprisingly different from the other. Each piece is accompanied by a label next to it, stating a few verses from the Hermetica, the popular ancient Egyptian literature believed to contain secret wisdom. The language of Hermetic texts is generally simple, distinctly practical in nature. The texts were also believed to lead to enlightenment of the mind, eventually inducing a kind of a spiritual rebirth.

The combination of the pieces and the verses literally elevates the viewer.

The idea of creating what looks like a geometric design from these mirrored tree branches stimulates the senses, akin to meditation. The serenity brimming from these drawings is inescapable, magnified by their position at the center of the Al-Ghuri Dome. This is one of the few examples where a distinct location - essentially a white cube format that's not among this critic's favorite art sites - enriches the displayed art rather than distracts from it.



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The curation of the exhibition is striking, with both artists successfully choosing untraditional locations for their work to shine; to highlight their distinctive features. The artists should also be lauded for tackling such an unusual, challenging and non-commercial subject matter like "Nether Matrix".

Fekry and Melcher were inspired to produce works that not only are simultaneously different yet quite similar, but also ones that strike a chord with any ordinary viewer whether they're aware of the concept of the show or not.



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