

MOHAMED AL MAZROUEI – EXPRESSIVE EMIRATI ARTIST



"Some of my artwork explores the themes of labor and struggle juxtaposed with the discovery of ease and comfort. I clearly remember the first time I had an 'easy' job, where I did not feel a burden associated with my work. It was when I began working as a photographer. Behind the camera my role and my world changed, filled with relief that a job did not always have to be a struggle. The same thing happened to me when I discovered monotype printing - my art practiced changed. I had a strong foundation in writing and painting, two forms of expression that require a great amount of effort on my part. When a friend introduced me to monotype printing, I realized I could express myself with a medium that I find easier and simpler to work with. I have the freedom to experiment with forms and figures, creating mere shadows and silhouettes. These pieces allude to the ephemeral." - Mohamed Al Mazrouei

Al Mazrouei was already well known as a writer, poet and successful photographer when he started to express himself in another creative way: painting. Having been provided with a profound philosophical education, he has surely the background and the basis to come up with meaningful and deep ideas for his artwork - whether writing, photography, or painting. As a consequence, it should not come as a surprise that his work has already received noteworthy recognition worldwide.

Born in the Egyptian city of Tanta in 1962. There he spent the first half of his life before moving to Abu Dhabi. Examining the artist's paintings carefully, it becomes obvious that elements of both cultures can be found in his artwork combining of North African and Arabian features in every body of artwork he creates. In his 2013 painting "Silent Fire" he discusses a past situation within his family; "Soumaya Syndrome" (2013) displays a close relationship of friendship. This work is a perfect example of his deep and meaningful way of expression: The painting includes numerous elements, which appear rather cryptic to the spectator at first sight. However, getting to know the story behind the creation of the piece, little bits and pieces of his personal thoughts are exposed. In other words, comparable to a stream of consciousness, a narrative device from literature. "Soumaya Syndrome" includes its creator's train of thought that can be read.

Being aware of this autobiographical dimension in his artwork, a rather striking issue can be explained easily: the appearance of Christianity themed paintings by the Emirati artist. After his mother passed away, he found an image of the Virgin Mary among her belongings. Embracing this inspiration, he surprises the spectator by including Christian motifs and topics in some of his recent paintings. This is noticeable in the group exhibition in 2013 in Abu Dhabi where a number of works by with Christian themes such as "Jesus and Mary Magdalene" (2013) and "Holy Family Visiting Egypt" (2013) were displayed. Here, Al Mazrouei picks up very common iconographic elements, such as the haloes of the Holy Family or the typical gesture and position of Jesus giving his blessings. However, there are also works, which are rather freely composed, like his version of the last supper ("A Part of the Last Supper", 2012) where the initial understanding comes from the inscriptions.

To sum it up, the artwork of Mohamed Al Mazrouei does have obvious autobiographical tendencies, which are shown in very diverse manners and often he focuses on painting portraits.

Thick and strong lines, dark eyes - often appearing almost in a monochrome way - and missing body parts are major features of these paintings. The use of color is hardly ever subtle or moderate; instead it is eye catching and distinct. He uses color independently from any restrictions or rules. Consequently, the deep and strong impact that

the painter creates in doing so appears remarkable and outstanding. If one looks at Mohamed Al Mazrouei's pictures from a European point of view, an immediate association might be the artistic creations of Jean-Michel Basquiat and Willem de Kooning. An often distorted and almost primitive occurrence of contours and lines. Additionally, they share a very expressive and often disharmonious way of painting. Thus, similar impressions develop from their art works, namely strength, agility, expressiveness, and power.

"I have the freedom to experiment with forms and figures, creating mere shadows and silhouettes," recalls Mazrouei. The essence of his works lies in the previous quotation. By treating color, form, texture, and content in an experimental and expressive way the artist creates a capturing tension. Repeatedly, he leaves the spectator with unanswered questions and strong emotions and plays with divergences, disharmonies, and contrapositions. It will be exciting to observe his career and eventually figure out where his experiments may lead him. For now, his artwork is surely an example for overcoming restrictions and even combining North African, Arabian and European elements successfully within one fascinating piece of art. In addition to that, the inclusion of very personal elements and past experiences of his life make the artist's artwork even more intense and substantial: It is exactly this kind of approach that is acknowledged by the sensitive spectator who is in search for a deeper and meaningful context within an art piece.

Mohamed Al Mazrouei (*1962, Tanta, Egypt) is an award-winning Emirati writer, artist, cultural commentator, and manager of the UAE Writers' Union in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, he is in charge of cultural programming for the Abu Dhabi Book Fair.

So far, he has published six collections of poetry and has also written a short story. The writer's works have been translated into English, French, German and Spanish.

He had numerous solo exhibition locally and internationally. Furthermore, the artist participated in the 30th annual EFAS Exhibition in Sharjah in 2012, for which he won a prize. He has also been awarded the Sou'ad Al Sabah 1st prize at the Al Kharafi, 3rd Annual Exhibition in Kuwait.

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1) Holy Family Visiting Egypt, 2013. Acrylic and pastel on canvas, 100x100cm. Courtesy of Private Collector Switzerland

2) A part of the last supper, 2013. Acrylic and pastel on canvas, 79x119cm. Courtesy of AB Gallery Switzerland and artist

3) M 2, 2012. Acrylic on gauze mounted on canvas, 150x190cm. Courtesy of Private Collector UAE

4) Soumaya Syndrome, 2013. Acrylic and Oil on gauze mounted on canvas, 170x120cm. Courtesy of AB Gallery Switzerland and artist

5) Untitled, 2015. Acrylic on paper, 120x90cm. Courtesy of AB Gallery Switzerland and artist