

THE MOTIFS MOHAMED AL MAZROUEI

By: Katharina Winkler

"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, were 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 change. 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."

Say Mohamed Al Mazrouei



M 2, 2012. Acrylic on gauze mounted on canvas, 150x190cm. Courtesy of a private collector - UAE.

Al Mazrouei was already well known as a writer and poet when he started to express himself in another creative way through 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. The artist was born in the Egyptian city of Tanta in 1962 where 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, not only the combination of African and Arabian features resulting from his very own history but also the display of his own life experiences in his paintings. For example, in his 2013 painting "Silent Fire" he discusses a past situation within his family, consequently, the artwork have rather obvious autobiographical tendencies, which are shown in very diverse manners. 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, Mohamed Al Mazrouei 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 Emirati Expressions: Realised (2013-14, Abu Dhabi), which displayed a number of works by him with Christian themes such as "Jesus and Mary Magdalene" (2013) and "Holy Family Visiting Egypt" (2013). Here he 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 "Primitive Last Supper" (2012) where the initial understanding comes from the inscriptions.

In general, Al Mazrouei's artwork is figurative and quite often he focuses on painting portraits. Thick and strong lines, dark eyes 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. Just like the contours, Al Mazrouei uses color independently from any restrictions or rules and consequently, the deep and strong impact that the painter creates in doing so appears remarkable and outstanding.

Speaking about the artist's style, the figures and objects he paints appear abstract, and frequently are hard to define or to identify. A proper example might be the painting "M2" (2012) that presents numerous layers, rudimentary deletions and indicated figures and objects. As a consequence, many works offer a number of interpretations and associations, which increases the attractiveness of each art piece even more and invites the spectator to spend time in front of them. If one looks at his pictures from a European point of view, an immediate association might be the artistic creations of Jean-Michel Basquiat. An often distorted and almost primitive occurrence of contours and lines is similar in both, Al Mazrouei's and Basquiat's works.

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," Al Mazrouei indicates. The essence of Mohamed Al Mazrouei's works lies in the above 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 a perfect example for overcoming restrictions and even combining African, Arabian and European elements successfully within one fascinating piece of art.

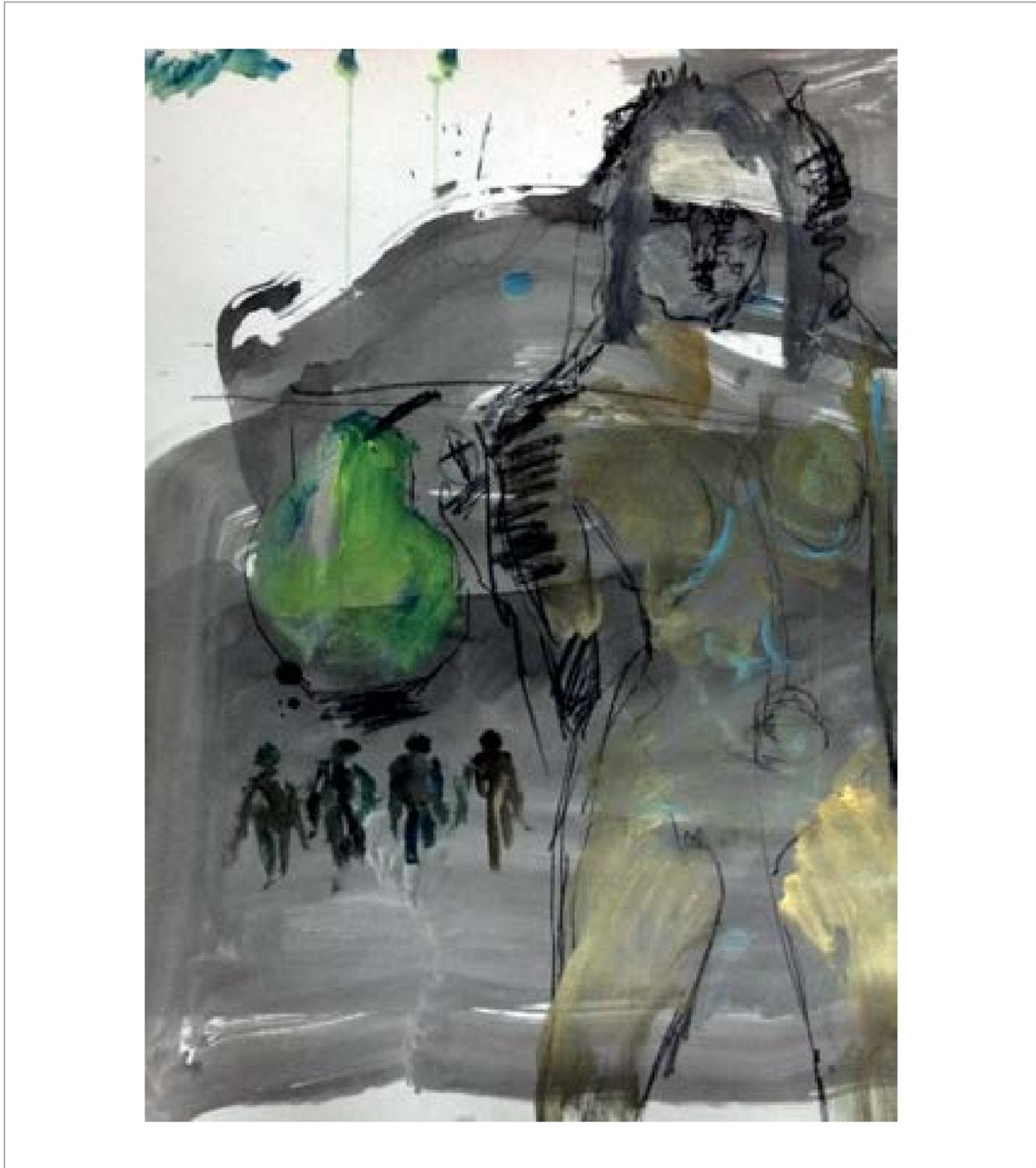
About the artist

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, of which most recently 2009's "Without Any Reason for We are Poor". Other published works include "The Agitation of the Pattern: The Mental Nature Of Apathy", "But It Is You, Adami", "On the Meaning of Watching Fire", "Blood Smell" and "The Lemming". Mohamed Al Mazrouei has also written the short story "Who Will Look After the Flies?" The writer's works have been translated into English, French, German and Spanish. Among others, his art exhibitions include Emirati Expressions: Realised (2013-14, Abu Dhabi), Mind/Body (2013, Dubai), The Maidens of Fair (2012, Abu Dhabi), and Flying House (2008, Dubai). 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.

About the Writer

Born in Germany, Katharina Winkler is an art historian based at the AB Gallery in Lucerne, Switzerland. From 2004 until 2010 she studied at the University of Trier, Germany and holds a MA degree in art history and English literature. For the period of two years she worked in an art gallery where she was mainly concentrating on American, British and German contemporary art. During the last few years Katharina Winkler wrote and edited several articles and catalogue entries on various artists and art themes. Working and travelling extensively in Oceania and South East Asia her researches and interests focus now on the contemporary art scene in the Middle East, North Africa and Iran.

We would like to thank AB Gallery for their support in providing material needed for this essay.



Untitled, 2015. Acrylic on paper on light canvas, 120x90cm. Courtesy of AB Gallery - Switzerland.



Untitled, 2015. Acrylic on paper on light canvas, 120x90cm. Courtesy of AB Gallery - Switzerland.