



Sameh Ismael

By Anne De Groot

After several successful collaborative exhibitions, Zamalek Art Gallery and Kempinski Nile Hotel's Chocolate Lounge have joined forces to bring an exhibition taking place simultaneously at both venues. This time they present the work of Egyptian artist Sameh Ismail.

After studying fine arts at Helwan University, Ismail went on to work as a freelance graphic designer for advertising agencies and Egyptian TV where his work was sampled in various films and TV shows. His newest exhibition consists mainly of artwork inspired by the January 25th revolution. Older paintings are also on display, proving just how much Ismail's style has evolved since January 25th.

His previous work consisted mainly of ink on paper and monochromatic paintings in black and white. The designs were also more traditional with mashrabeya designs. The three pieces displayed at the Chocolate Lounge are inspired by Muezz Street in Islamic Cairo.

In his new collection, Ismail has worked with acrylic paint and spray paint. It's worth noting the significant difference between the new collection and his old work in the use of colors. In his new work, Ismail has used many pastels, giving the paintings a cheerful vibe. The artist himself says the revolution brought him to this change. To him the colors reflect hope; an emotion that he felt on the streets of Egypt after the revolution. Another new element of Ismail's work is his use of graffiti, which is another indication of the revolution's influence on his work. While most graffiti artists work on the street and use walls and bridges as a canvas, Ismail combines street art with refined art in his work.

The words in the artist's art pieces don't necessarily mean anything; in fact, some words are merely drawn to display the beauty of Arabic calligraphy. Even viewers who can't read Arabic will appreciate the beauty of the paintings.

One of the exhibitions' highlights is a painting of a list of orders at an ahwa. On the list we see shisha orders like apple, lemon and grape flavors as well as tea orders. When all of this adds up, the total amount reads 'Al Dostor Awalan', or, 'constitution first'. Another painting shows a sun accompanied by the words 'search for bread and freedom under the sun'.

The artist's main focus seems to be to modernize Arabic calligraphy, and he's done a good job in bringing politics and art together. His work could best be described as modern abstract. Though sometimes there are still some old influences, most of Ismail's work is of Arabic art with a modern twist. If you're ever in the Zamalek or Garden City neighborhoods, pass by the Zamalek Art Gallery or the Kempinski's Chocolate Lounge to check out Ismail's collection.

While passing by the paintings, you must pass through the Chocolate lounge with its irresistible sweets.