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## THE BREATHING SCULPTURES OF ARMEN AGOP

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First Published: October 30, 2008

I imagine yourself walking into an aquarium after announcing that a new species has been discovered. Consider for a moment the apprehension, hesitation and awe one senses on witnessing these new creatures for the first time, with all its beautiful and bizarre traits.

This is exactly how I felt upon entering the Zamalek Art Gallery as I laid my eyes on the sculptures of Armen Agop. Each piece is thematically connected to the next, giving the impression of a genetic map, yet every single one has a distinctive personality.

Made of heavy basalt and bronze forms, the sculptures balance on 2mm pivots. Organically shaped, the contradiction between the material used and the forms created from them is fascinating. The pieces are bottom-heavy with an edge that leads to either a single or multiple points on top — akin to whipped cream in both form and lightness.

Agop has clearly thought through the creation of the pieces.

“It’s important to allow the dynamic between mind, body and soul to operate. It’s the relation between all three and their surroundings, either harmonic or conflicting, that lend to the creation of the piece,” Agop told Daily News Egypt.

The Egyptian-Armenian artist was born and raised in Cairo. Currently residing in Italy after the Ministry of Culture agreed to sponsor him for one year; Agop’s work has gained international success throughout the past few years. While he has exhibited his works in several countries, ranging from Italy and Spain to Denmark and Japan, working in Italy has had a great impact on his work.

“When I left Cairo almost 10 years ago, there was too much thinking about the work itself, too much analysis of how the pieces will show and how one could work in a way that would be worth an exhibition. In Italy, the appreciation of the work and its identity made me lose concern with judging my work. I just do what looks and feels right to me and hope it’s sincere enough to touch people.” And it certainly does.

Agop’s uncannily pieces look almost alive. Viewers are only required to focus their attention on a given piece and leave it for a few moments before it begins breathing. Such effect is accomplished not only through the contrast of stillness and movement, but also due to their matte surface. The pieces are predominantly black in tone, with an occasional auburn brown color of pure bronze.

Agop’s has purposefully kept the surfaces of the sculptures almost matte, allowing only a trace of shine that catches enough light to draw attention without any reflections.

This is an excellent choice by Agop; polishing the pieces would’ve simply made them look artificial and lifeless in addition to distancing the viewers from the pieces. By adding this slight touch, the pieces maintain their individuality that could’ve been easily shattered by the interference of reflection.

Yet the relationship between the work and the viewers here is tangible. The sculptures look as though they are inquisitive in their own right, reaching out from the bulk of their weight to the tips of their edges and pivots towards their surroundings.

The impeccable presentation at the Zamalek Art gallery’s grounds — the contrast between the bleach white supports on which the sculptures rest and the sculptures themselves — allows the pieces to come to life. The lighting which haloes each piece (a crucial element for successful exhibitions that is usually taken for granted) provides the works with an ethereal feeling.

"Exactitude is not the truth," Agop said, quoting French artist Henri Matisse. His work manages to exemplify just that. It steers away from the certainty of form that is inherent in sculptural work yet maintains its statuesque effect. By all standards, this is an exceptional exhibition.

