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‘Painting is magnificent way of life’

Jennie Moore



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Renowned Egyptian artist Essam Marouf has opened his maiden art exhibition in Dubai. He tells City Times what fires his abstract world imagination

INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED EGYPTIAN artist Essam Marouf opened the exhibition of his latest work at Artsawa gallery in Al Quoz on November 12. This is Marouf's first exhibition in the UAE and a great opportunity for the art lovers here to experience his unique approach to portraiture. Artsawa, a 12,000-square-foot converted warehouse, is an ideal space to view Marouf's most recent collection entitled 'Same Story, Different People.' Part of the collection will also be on show at ArtParis, the upcoming modern and contemporary art fair at Emirates Palace in Abu Dhabi from November 18-21.

Essam Marouf has been painting for more than 20 years and has shown his work all over the world. He studied art for eight years, five in Egypt and three in Italy, where he was inspired by the art of Renaissance masters Giotto and Piero della Francesca. Marouf went on to explore abstract painting for six years before returning to portraiture - "the favorite subject of all in the history of painting and artists." His interest in the abstract is still visible in his use of color and light and in his approach to the human form.

“I paint human figures but in an abstract way,” he explains.

Marouf paints on large canvases without visible brushstrokes, using monochrome backgrounds and minimalist figures, to create works that radiate in their simplicity. The faces in his paintings, often modeled on his wife and “muse” wear remote and dreamlike expressions. Marouf describes his artistic process as fast paced and “full of surprises.” “You can’t make it,” he insists, “It has to become.”

Marouf divides his time between Egypt, where he produced his latest paintings, and the Netherlands, where his wife is from. Although his Egyptian origins have informed his “way of looking at life,” he sees his art as more “universal.” “It’s mixed from Egypt, Italy, Holland and the world. It is not a cultural statement, it is a human story.” He is excited about his first exhibition in Dubai and impressed by the burgeoning local art scene. “I love what is happening in Dubai now. And for an artist, it is so beautiful - the architecture, the sea, the sky...”

When you go to Essam Marouf’s website you will find no images of his paintings or biography of his life, only six words: “Painting... this magnificent way of life.” Spending twenty minutes with Essam Marouf, the energy and enthusiasm which pours out of him as he describes his work and his love of art, you understand why he chose this simple but beautiful statement to represent himself. When asked if he would be sorry to part with any of his pieces, he replied, “The experience of painting is what I love. I have already enjoyed each of these pieces by making them. Now you can take them away, I don’t need them anymore.”

Event Details

‘Same Story, Different People’ exhibition will run at Artsawa gallery in Al Quoz until December 31

Citytime@khaleejtimes.com