

Egyptian contemporary artist, Khaled Hafez, to show at Art Palm Beach for the first time

With the ebb and flow of occupying forces, over the centuries, Egypt's cultural and political identity has become layered like a 'Big Mac'. It is the consequences of this layering, that I explore in my work." Khaled Hafez



*Khaled Hafez - Dakar Running
200x140cm - Mixed Media*

Cairo, Egypt, 19th January, 2012

Egyptian painter, video and installation artist, Khaled Hafez, will be participating at the Art Palm Beach Fair that opens on the 19th January 2012. Exhibited by Syra-Arts, Hafez will be showing two mixed media works spanning different periods of the artist's career: "Two Gods and Two Cats", 2011 (200 x 140cm) completed after Egypt's January revolution, and "Dakar Running", 2006 (200 x 140 cm).

These painting works illustrate the development of an artist who, over the past two decades, has emerged as one of Egypt's most outspoken political commentators. After Egypt's January 2011 Revolution, Hafez received the label "premonition artist", at home, for his work that foretold the events of the revolution long before it began.

For the past 16 years, Khaled Hafez's work has been concerned with identity and what it means to be Egyptian, and Arab, in a contemporary world. The artist uses the flat graphic surface of the ancient Egyptian tomb wall as a space within which to explore the boundaries of, and contradictions between, such "media-enforced" constructs as: East/West, sacred/commercial, old/new, male/female/ good/evil, static/kinetic/, and sacred/ephemeral.

Using 'super hero' figures drawn from Ancient Egyptian culture alongside modern day images of the perfect human form, Hafez explores the cultural recycling of images and symbols as societies construct their own divinities (or 'super-humans') and accompanying myths:

"Across the diversity of the mediums (painting, video, installation) that I utilize to express, I attempt to explore the notions of the complex nature of the Egyptian identity and what it is to be Egyptian in a post September 11 world..." says Hafez.

About his technique he explains: " I generally work on symbols of male (using body-builders) and female (using fashion top models). I always build on the idea of the perfection of the human body; the idealization

and the idolization of the human body. I use cutouts from magazines and digitally rework them, then manually work them into the canvas to create my narrative.”

In *Dakar Running* (2006), the figure of Batman, with the perfect masculine body form, takes his seat as Pharaoh in the centre of the canvas. To his side, the uniform images of human figures running insinuate the idea of flight of identity, of power, or the flight from faith to agnosticism and from agnosticism to faith. Ironically dressed in the western fitness attire, the runners also refer to the notion of forced migration, both in the physical literal and the metaphoric senses; the escape to another space or reality.

Meanwhile Hafez’s post-revolution work “Two Gods and Two Cats” (2011) features the perfect masculine body forms, symbols of strength and power, flanked by the lioness, and Ancient Egyptian Goddess of War, Sekhmet. Dominating her space, Sekhmet reminds us that the sacred feminine (in this case a reference to Egypt) is capable of boundless generosity and sacrifice, as well as bloodshed and war. Begun in 2010 and completed in 2011, the painting addresses the struggle for power and for wealth and is a reflection on the events of the revolution and the chaos that soon followed on the early days of euphoria.

The colours dripping in lines across the canvas represent the diversity of people in Tahrir Square, all coming from different walks of life: “The surface of the canvas is a field of expression, just like Cairo’s streets and squares, and the ‘dripping’ is the protestors and demonstrators all expressing their different lives and their intermingling narratives”, says Hafez

Through thickly overlapping layers of paint and image, Hafez’s work attempts to capture the intricacies, and contradictions, of an Egyptian identity forged through 7,000 years of history – a phenomenon for which Hafez has coined the phrase: “Big Mac Identity”:

“I think one of the greatest sources of struggle for Egyptians has always been what I call our ‘Big Mac Identity’. With the ebb and flow of occupying forces, over the centuries, Egypt’s cultural and political identity has become layered, cumulatively, like a ‘Big Mac’. These layers encompass our identity as Ancient Egyptians, as citizens of the Middle East, and of the Mediterranean and Africa, spiced with Judo-Christian and Arab-Islamic faiths. Problems have always arisen when certain factions have sought to isolate a single layer in this accumulated whole, ignoring all the other factors that make up our unique ‘flavour’.”

This rich tapestry of narrative is characteristic of Hafez’s work. He explains: “I try to create a visual narrative that simulates ancient Egyptian murals with contemporary iconography...the large scale canvas allows me to tell several stories in different manners: whether through drawing, painting or collage.”

Khaled Hafez

As painter, video and installation artist, Khaled Hafez enjoys a prominent international career. His works are represented in prestigious international collections such as the Saatchi Gallery and Tate Gallery in London, United Kingdom, and are regularly shown at international biennales including: The Bamako Encounters Biennale, Mali, 2011, 8th Mercosul Biennale, Brazil, 2011, Manifesta 8, Murcia, Spain, 2010, 2nd Thessaloniki Biennale, Greece, 2009, 3rd Guangzhou Triennale, China, 2008, 7th Sharjah Biennale, UAE, 2007, 6th & 7th Dakar Biennale, Senegal, 2004 & 2006 and 1st Singapore Biennale, 2006.

For further information on Khaled Hafez please visit : www.khaledhafez.com
or the artist’s blog: blog.khaledhafez.com

Syra-Arts

Based in Washington DC and Cairo, Egypt, Syra-Arts is an organization dedicated to promoting Egypt’s leading contemporary artists to American art audiences.

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