

Mythology of postponed promises Intriguing secrets seduced by artist Reda Abdel-Rahman

In his exhibition "Mythology", which is now on display in the Gallery Misr artist Reda Abdel-Rahman comes up with a new experiment based, technically and conceptually, on space (pictorial aesthetics) and time (narration). They are the chief features of the spectacular Island of Gold on the Maadi's Nile. Abdel-Rahman's experiment appears to be a threshold of a new phase in his career. He triggers the viewer's curiosity about linear narration and the artist's adventurous attempts to explore its intellectual and aesthetical dimensions. Throughout his five-year adventures, Abdel-Rahman drew much of his inspiration from the ancient Egyptian art. The influence of the ancient Egyptian artisan was apparent in an experiment Abdel-Rahman launched at the Gezira Art Centre in May, 2010. At that time, he keenly named his experiment 10 Inspirational Egyptian Papyri, which ran parallel to a literary experiment of the same name adopted by Egyptian man-of-letters Mohamed Salmawi. Historian Taqqyy-Eddin Al-Maqrizi (764-845hijra), who was dubbed the doyen of Arab historians, admired Maadi's Island of Gold for its unique location in the area. The island was in a constellation of fertile plots of land emirs and rulers used to bequeath to eminent scholars and the elite. In the meantime, the Island of Gold acted as the magnet for renowned Sufi sheikhs and hermits, who were highly respected by middle class and ordinary citizens

Abdel-Rahman's new experiment drew a good measure of inspiration from the island, which witnessed social and political momentous events. These events, which featured chiefly in mid-1990s attracted intense media coverage. They were at the centre of topics of television talk shows, as well. Likewise, charged with his artistic, social and intellectual passion, Abdel-Rahman, in his Gallery Misr's experiment, addresses the public concerns; he attempts to explore the dark labyrinths of the people's psyche. His former exhibitions, their themes and headlines should substantiate this argument. For example, the artist revealed the exhibition "People Around Me" in Amman in 2008; he launched the 2nd edition "People Around Me-II) in the Ibdaa Centre in Alexandria. However, Amman's and Alexandria's editions showed the artist's keenness to give the woman the central role in his work. It was also apparent that Abdel-Rahman appreciated the woman as the inexhaustible source of inspiration and creativity. In the meantime, he acknowledged the woman as the perfect embodiment of a plethora of controversies associated with symbols, emotions and the existence. His "Mythology" is an adventure to decode mysteries shrouding the female and her universal and existential role

The artist's Scheherazade, who is the narrator of the Arabian Nights, introduces optical tales to dramatize-also pictorially—the dreams and ambitions of the miserable and marginalized category in society. Scheherazade's beautiful physical features highlight tales inherited from great-great grandmothers. These tales are punctuated by relics of the ancient Egyptian heritage, and morning and evening echoes of Muslim-Copt culture and tradition in Egypt. Abdel-Rahman acknowledges woman as man's safe refuge and the keeper of collective heritage, and native habits, traditions, tales and activities. The artist's woman is also responsible for passing these features and qualities on to generations. In addition, the woman in Abdel-Rahman's work admires her eternal role in stimulating sensual and aesthetic pleasures

In his new exhibition, Abdel-Rahman invites his women to sing praise to mythology; the artist's woman is also the cauldron of heritage. She is qualified to deconstruct and reconstruct the mythology and weave the existing reality in its (the mythology's) broken surface

Fairytales and mythologies Abdel-Rahman's Scheherazade narrates echo in the afternoon or in the evening conversation the island's female inhabitants engage themselves in. Such a unique lively buzz of life on the island motivated Abdel-Rahman's decision to open his studio in the area to save himself from the deafening noise of the city nearby. He gave himself up to the tide, which is frothing with the ancient heritage, the inhabitants' concerns, dreams and ambitions

By Yasser Mongy