

Between Playfulness and Bitter Truths

War and Desire in the Dialectic of Life and Death

Works by Bashar Alhroub
Gallery One, Ramallah

Excerpts from an article written by Eissa Deebi.

Palestinian artist Bashar Alhroub in his new project “War and Desire” presents a new collection of sculptures and paintings that showcase the history of military as a childish game that lacks innocence. This “plastic bag,” outside of which laws and values simply do not exist, contains a holistic military corps. The bag permits you to playfully manipulate it, with infinite possibilities in an imaginary game of power and violence between art and the daily lives of Palestinians in their occupied lands.



In his new experimentation, Alhroub tries to employ the idea of “visual hybridization” as an aesthetic tool for his new artwork. [He] presents a collection of “composed-hybrid” 3D structures that are trying to coexist in a beautified context. A beauty that reminds us of heritage aesthetic designs whose roots go back to Arabic popular arts, particularly the effect of the repetition of shapes borrowed from Arabic and Islamic art. Alhroub’s works represent metaphorical concepts of violence and eroticism as an aesthetic state. They highlight the complex relation between desire, on the one hand, and

violence as manly military actions with origins from the history of war, triumph, and defeat, on the other. With these hybrid works, Alhroub tries to establish a tense relationship between the sculpture and the viewer/recipient/dealer. Looking at the sculpture presented in the form of a missile - if one recognizes it as a missile at first glance - one cannot ignore the fact that the artist used the color pink or magenta, a color that symbolizes femininity, desire, and romance. The color pink, promoted through Western marketing programs at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the United Kingdom, has today become

a feminine color par excellence. Should one consider the artist’s choice of color and shape simply a coincidence? Or did he mean to link the color, as an economic geopolitical gender symbol, to the writing of war’s history as a dominantly masculine mission? Perhaps the artist meant to present a feminine missile, if one looks at it from a humoristic aesthetic perspective.

Through his works, Alhroub, the artist, reverses the balances of the relation between the ego and the “other.” He establishes a provocative visual project to make the viewer confront the heart of a philosophical question: What is the purpose of art as a cultural, provocative work? In the Palestinian context, specifically in the imaginary place of *al-watan* (the homeland), the image is reversed for the other military Palestinian. The image, limited in color, was to become an image of a Palestinian with a military appearance who puts the first lines towards the establishment of some form of superego. These works are hybrid military figures that were composed and fused with the know-how of *al-tarazi* or the tailor. These sculptures were meant to represent a military strategy prepared by an “adolescent” artist, in the philosophical sense of aesthetic as a military adolescence. An artist trying to translate an imaginary nightmare into the human mind and give it a theoretical interpretation – the imagination and the imagined. Alhroub has managed to run in the nightmare, in the same way he has done previously in his photographic works of the camps. Here, Alhroub “is playing” the naïve and soft game of fire – using the strategy of the dreamer artist – but with a visual intelligence and deep understanding of his artistic project.

The exhibition runs until February 28.

