

## Exhibition in the memory of painter Mahmoud Said



For the first time ever Shafei added few key quotations above the paintings (Photo by Nayera Yasser)

By Nayera Yasser

“Magic is renewed every day in the works of Mahmoud Said.” This is how Ramses Younan, pioneer Surrealist artist, chose to describe the iconic modern work of the late Mahomud Said back in 1964. This is also how Sherwet Shafei, one of Egypt’s most famous art aficionados and collectors, chose to represent the genius to today’s generation.

“The first programme I did was with Mahmoud Said,” Shafei, who had a weekly art-specialised TV programme for 30 years, explained. “I went to his place in Alexandria and spent the whole day with him, that is how I began my love for art.”

Shafei first met Said back in 1960, and since then Shafei became a major art expert. Today, she owns one large collection of rare works that are routinely displayed at her Zamalek art gallery, Safarkhan.

Nine of these paintings have Said’s signature on them. For his 118th anniversary, the loyal art-lover and fan showcased printed and magnified versions of his original paintings in her art gallery. “I cannot display the original ones, given the current circumstances; it is not safe now,” Shafei explained.

The tribute exhibition took over the gallery as Shafei organised the paintings in a way that gives each and every masterpiece the needed space and light. To add an informative appeal to the exhibition, Shafei wrote a few of the most famous quotations about the artist and his work.

“I do not do this for profit; none of these paintings are for sale. I do it to honour the artist and share the beauty of his work with everyone,” said Shafie.

However, two of the displayed paintings (“The Whirling Dervishes” and “Damsels of the Delta”) are no longer Shafei’s property. “It is very hard as a collector to sell one of your pieces, but sometimes things happen in life, and you need to get money,” said Shafei.

Said's work showed great passion towards the Egyptian identity; therefore today it is considered a visual documentation of a few decades in the country's history. His paintings showed a glimpse of women's daily trips to the Nile every morning, the local night hubs and their belly dancers, and it also amazed the world with the beauty of Egypt's streets and mosques.



Said's work captured the elegance and beauty of Egypt and its people  
(Photo from Safarkhan.com)

His journey as a lawyer, then a judge, clearly reflected on his work. As part of his job, Said met many locals who fascinated him with their clothes, body language and details; that is why he later on focused on capturing this spirit in his masterpieces. The artist had several famous models that he spent years painting every day.

Worldwide, Said is still considered an Egyptian icon as he established the modern school of painting after quitting his day job as a judge and focusing solely on art. More than 118 years since his birth, and 51 since his death, the demand on his work only continues to increase, competing with well-known international artists.

Locally, Said's old villa in Alexandria has been turned into a museum that holds several of his paintings, which are owned by the government and his family. With that being said, Said's legacy is not taught well-enough to the youth, and the upcoming generation of painters.

"It is a major educational fault; where are the museums and their role?" Shafei exclaimed. "We have a great and enormous museum that has a lot of paintings."

Shafei added: "I cannot do anything more, I only have this outlet, nothing more. I do these exhibitions and give the young generation the opportunity to come, but they do not come."

Shafei is a major art expert who worked on turning Safarkhan into a prominent art incubator to convey the pioneers' legacy to the newer generations and support up-and-comers.

Safarkhan arranges eight to 10 exhibitions every year, in an attempt to help the local scene and give it the needed push.

"Art in Egypt is currently decaying because artists stopped having a message; any artist of the pioneers knew what he wanted to do and the message behind it," Shafei concluded.

"The main problem is that the new generation is in a hurry and for them success is to sell, not to become a better artist," Shafei said.