

A temple for extended days

Using art, Egyptian artist Khaled Hafez recreates the feeling of entering an ancient Egyptian temple

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By Jyoti Kalsi, Special to Weekend Review

Ayyam Gallery has inaugurated its new space in Alserkal Avenue with a multimedia exhibition by Khaled Hafez, titled “A Temple for Extended Days”.

With three large hieroglyph-like paintings on the walls, the Egyptian artist has created the feeling of entering an ancient Egyptian temple. But a closer look at the paintings titled “Tomb Sonata in Three Military Movements I and II” and “Book of Flight” reveals that Hafez has combined various epochs, genres and cultures to create his own hieroglyphic vocabulary.

Ancient Egyptian deities cross paths with modern-day icons on his canvasses, highlighting the continuity of time, the recycling of history and the influence of the past on the present.

The artist has used media images of warfare, ultra-slim fashion models and muscular bodybuilders to play with the fine line between reality and the fabricated hyper-reality that exists in our media-driven world today. Through these playful, allegorical narratives Hafez speaks about mankind’s march into the future and raises questions about whether we are heading towards self-destruction through violence and egomania, or can we change course and save ourselves.

“In these paintings I have simulated the narrative technique of ancient Egyptian paintings to tell the stories of our times. My contemporary hieroglyphics are based on military iconography taken from media images and reflects the violence, power struggles and forced migrations of today.

By combining Egyptian deities such as Anubis and Bastet with modern representations of male and female perfection and fictional characters such as Batman and Catwoman, I am able to break the barrier between the past and present, East and West, sacred and profane, timeless and ephemeral,” Hafez says.

In his multimedia installation, 10 fluorescent, life-size busts of a muscular Anubis rise from the sand, and in a video on the wall, titled “On Presidents and Superheroes”, the same figure comes alive to wander around modern-day Cairo, observing the decline of a once beautiful city, while a political speech by the late Egyptian leader Nasser is heard in the background.

“I want it to leave it to viewers to decide whether these figures of Batman-Anubis are villains out to destroy us or resurrected gods come to save us,” Hafez says.

“A Temple for Extended Days” will run at Ayyam gallery’s new space in Alserkal Avenue until January 14.