

Dancing to Life's Melody

The Indefinable Abdullah Murad



Abdullah Murad. 'Abstract'. 2006. Mixed media on canvas. 180 x 180 cm.

“Art is like a dance. You keep moving and moving to whatever is going on,” he says. “When I dance, I go crazy with joy!” It is no surprise to hear that Abdullah Murad is a fan of the Rio de Janeiro Carnival. “Sometimes we miss that in our culture,” he says. “We focus too much on sadness - on expressing negative emotions.”

Murad is an instinctive Fauvist and enjoys a carefree and experimental relationship with painting. He is a serenely quiet man, a grandfather although far from elderly, and seems to have retained an inner joy akin to that of a child. He has an innocence that is primitive, simple and untainted. ‘Improvisation’ is the sounding bell of his soul, manifesting in an array of Abstract Expressionist works that exude energy and freedom. Grasping the beauty of Murad’s paintings is not instantaneous; time is needed to embrace the torrent of colour and motion in his works. “A painting takes time to reveal itself,” he says. “It does not reveal its secrets at first glance,” he says.

Murad’s creative process is as complex

as the understanding of his practice. He applies layer upon layer of colour; often in thick impasto, other times thin and translucent. He plays with textures and surfaces, creating collages of newspaper cut-outs bound together by waxy paper glue. His brushstrokes oscillate from frantic and condensed to considered and sparse. Forget symmetrical alignment, Murad never pays claim to a hidden or evident configuration; rather he seeks to express the tensile relation that exists between balance and imbalance; that pregnant potential of unexpected movement. “Art is not imitating nature,” explains Murad emphatically. “I am inventing something that does not exist.”

“We all have a daily obsession to draw, to paint, to dance,” he says. “It is the release of positive energy.” Murad does not see himself as a siphon for human expression; his role as an artist is not exclusive or elitist; and he resists categorisation. “I don’t like to be thought of as a painter,” says Murad, whose three children have inherited his creative impulse. His son, Fadi, has chosen to study graphic design. “I am happy that Fadi is independent, building himself a new direction, and trying to get out of my influence,” he says with a satisfied smile. “I like that about my son.”

Murad’s dreams, desires, fears and frustrations pour onto the canvas without much deliberation for there is no philosophy behind his work; it is simply the expression of life. “I am playing,” he says. “It is a mystery where it comes from and where it is going.” Murad resists the temptation to over-analyse the process of painting. “I just like to let things happen spontaneously,” he says. “I don’t like to burden the playfulness of art.”

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His ability to visually communicate subconscious desires is a language that, by definition, seeks to express that which the logic of words and phrases fails to capture. Critics and collectors admire Murad’s work because he is constantly breaking the boundaries. His paintings possess a tactile force that stimulates more than just the single sense of seeing. His lines can compress like a springboard in the corner of a painting; ready to catapult into the open space. Others are frantically compulsive, or fragile interventions dancing amid a world filled with commotion. His colours collide and crescendo unpredictably and

he is constantly invoking an expansion of space. This sense of openness can be put down to Murad’s fascination for the aesthetics of Chinese painting. “An empty space with just one off-centre line that indicates the branch of a tree, for example, can be an electrifying force,” he says.

One who indulges in such energetic improvisation is difficult to define. “I get bored quickly,” he says. “I find that my paintings are not limited to a single style.” Murad is always adding new elements; he explores different styles or revisits existing lines of enquiry with renewed vigour. Yes, he has done portraits, landscapes and sculptures, but Murad finds himself entranced by Abstraction. A recurring question might sit in the back of his mind, and the mere fact that there is no answer is the wheel that turns the creative process; it is, “like spiralling,” he says, “like dancing.” There is no end to Murad’s experimentation. “I need to break whatever becomes structured.” Out of destruction comes rebirth. “Art is health! Art is life! It is dynamism, struggle, and especially joy,” he says. For Murad, the notion that an artist must be a darkly brooding, introverted character is simply disgraceful. “Why should artists add darkness to this world?” he asks, “Art is like lighting a candle.” ■



ABDULLAH MURAD

The Homs-born graduate of the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus, Syria, has been refining his unique style of Abstract Arabesque for more than three decades now. His work has been exhibited in several galleries and cultural centres throughout the Middle East and beyond, and has generated substantial critical acclaim. Murad’s latest exhibition at Ayyam Gallery, Damascus, in March 2007 was an undeniable hit, and coincided with the release of a 150-page monograph showcasing the masterpieces he has painted in the last 20 years.

Considered one of the most celebrated Abstract painters in the region, Murad’s paintings can be found in collections across the world. To date, two works have been auctioned by Christie’s in their sales of Modern and Contemporary Arab art (February and October 2007), dramatically surpassing pre-sale estimates. When asked about the meaning of his paintings, Murad says, “I am not the one who decides; each painting is a living creature. She’s the one to decide and explain her own meaning.”