

BAHAA

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In 'The Sweetest Haven', Adam Henein chose to exhibit with 39-year old midcareer surrealist painter Bahaa Amer. Where there is flux, Bahaa searches for continuity in that together with Henein, he has found a haven, a place of safety or refuge, in Mother Nature. More importantly perhaps, both artists are committed to contribute to the preservation of ancient Egyptian heritage. In 1990, Henein led the restoration of the Giza Sphinx. Throughout the past decade and parallel to painting, Bahaa has taught restoration and developed conservation plans for archaeological sites such as Isis Temple in Luxor and the ceiling of the Coptic Museum in Cairo. Working out of Luxor or in Harraniyya with Adam in the museum, Bahaa seeks to express the self in the face of the world and his world resembles an animated ancient relief or a modern puppet theater. Deformed human figures, animals and insects float, stand on the earth or sail over a sea, interlaced into a complex web. Movement through space and time seems to occupy Bahaa as though he is waiting for an imminent departure or a return. Yet, he appears to be rooted, as he faces obstacles to respond to the shifting tide.

Different from Henein who prioritizes form but similar in his firm reference to ancient Egyptian art and culture, Bahaa exposes the perks of being young in today's shifting sociopolitical climate in Egypt and builds on his extensive knowledge of the fundamental myths and beliefs of his past ancestors to recount present day problems. Migration, romance, livelihood and the afterlife feature as elements of hope and challenges. In *The Northern Night Sky*, a reference to the belief that the former rulers of ancient Egypt lived in the sacred and heavenly North after their death, three figures seek to find balance as they stand on a gigantic animal that resembles the iconic medieval sculpture, She-wolf, suckling Remus and Romulus. In *The Hunting Chase*, a heroic act exercised by the ruler and a basic livelihood means for the people in Dynastic Egypt, a main figure, arms wide open, stands tall on a boatlike object that seems to have just crossed through a block of stone coming out of the sea. In *Bird From The South*, a reference to Upper Egypt where the capital of Egypt was located during the period of the New Kingdom, a massive crow stands on a tree, with sparse leaves, staring at its prey coming out of a boat-shaped pot. The tree floats on a sea and there is no sight of a border. Dreaming the possibility of a better life, Bahaa mixes surrealism and abstraction and plays with soft and sharp lines to create a poetic atmosphere that eventually replaces despair with hope.

Born in Gharbiah Governorate, north of Egypt, in 1977, Bahaa Amer received an MA in Restoration Painting from Cairo University in 2010. His thesis focused on the 'Bio Deterioration of oil paintings and method treatments and conservation applied on Khedive Ismail Pasha painting'. He holds a Bachelor of Arts Education degree from Helwan University (2005) and a degree in Art Criticism from the Fine Arts Faculty in Cairo (2005). Parallel to painting, Bahaa teaches and practices restoration. He has participated in over 35 group exhibitions, locally and internationally and works and lives in Cairo.

