


 Periodicals  Literature

 Search

 Keyword  Title  Author  Topic

T E X T

G+1 1.6k

Like 1.7K

Share

[The Free Library](#) > [Communications](#) > [News, opinion and commentary](#) > [The Daily Star \(Beirut, Lebanon\)](#) > [November 26, 2011](#)  
[The Free Library](#) > [General Interest/Informational](#) > [General interest](#) > [The Daily Star \(Beirut, Lebanon\)](#) > [November 26, 2011](#)  
[The Free Library](#) > [Date](#) > [2011](#) > [November](#) > [26](#) > [The Daily Star \(Beirut, Lebanon\)](#)

## Hussein Madi's paintings, sculptures and tactile pleasures.

[Link/Page Citation](#)

G+1 0

Like 0 Share

Summary: Two years ago, the critic Joseph Tarrab published a hefty book on Hussein Madi's sculptures, in which he made a bold assertion about one of Lebanon's most popular and prodigious artists.

BEIRUT: Two years ago, the critic Joseph Tarrab published a hefty book on Hussein Madi's sculptures, in which he made a bold assertion about one of Lebanon's most popular and prodigious artists. Madi's entire alphabet of visual forms, Tarrab proposed, consists of just two letters, a straight line and a curved line.

Everything else is multiplication and variation, as dazzling and varied as the end results may be. Anyone interested in testing Tarrab's theory has another week to catch Madi's most recent exhibition, "An Art to See and Touch," on view through Dec. 2 at AE[macron]da Cherfan Fine Art. Around 40 works are piled high in the shoebox-sized gallery, near Beirut's Place de l'Etoile.

All the works are indeed composed of straight and curved lines that converge to create stylized abstractions, still lifes of fruit and flowers, and two of Madi's most enduring subjects -- women and birds. The austerity of Tarrab's formulation, however, is formidably challenged here by the riot of Madi's colors and the remarkable ingenuity with which the artist has, for the first time, fused painting and sculpture.

None of the works on view are flat. Some are as much as 10 centimeters deep. In fact, they defy the categories of sculptures and paintings completely. Each shape -- be it a leaf, a stem, a fallen flower petal, a sliver of fruit, a woman's conical breast or a cock's wattle and comb -- is an individual piece of carved and painted wood, affixed to a wooden panel and arranged with scores of others like a jigsaw puzzle inside a thick painted frame. The effect is Madi's signature geometric style punched into three dimensions.

To see an artist of Madi's stature playing around like this, at the age of 73, is a joy. What's more, the title of the exhibition is for real. Neither Cherfan nor her staff will roll their eyes or intervene if you lay your hands on these works. Trace out the forms with your fingers, and calculate the extent to which Tarrab's assertion is true.

Some of the works feature grids of 100 striped discs tilted at various angles. Others feature steady repetitions of squares and triangles. All of them mess with color and shadow to create visual rhythms that jostle between order and interruption, like musical compositions.

Born in the southern town of Shebaa, in the shadow of Jabal al-Shaykh, Madi studied at the Academie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts as a young man. Although the school had no sculpture studio at the time, Madi won a sculpture competition organized by Lebanon's Education Ministry in 1963. The prize was a scholarship to continue his education in Rome. He went for two months and remained there for 22 years.

Madi returned to Lebanon in the mid-1980s, although he had been making frequent trips back to teach at the Lebanese University's Institute of Fine Arts since the mid-1970s. In Italy, he had learned everything from frescoes and mosaics to sculpture techniques in bronze and wax, but his teachers had always encouraged him to keep his culture and history close.

In 1973, he made the first of his now famous alphabet works, for which he created a grid of 30 forms representing extended visual riffs on the letters of the Arabic alphabet. Several of those forms developed over time into highly symbolic and oft-repeated figures in Madi's oeuvre.

"The bull is for power," he said a few years ago. "The bird is for freedom. The horse is for nobility. The woman," he paused, for dramatic effect, "the woman is for love."

Parallel to his paintings, lithographs and prints, Madi developed an ingenious approach to sculpture. Dissatisfied with Lebanon's bronze foundries, and lacking a kiln in his Beirut studio, he devised a mathematical method of generating illusory volume from folded forms -- all lines, edges and impregnated empty spaces -- which he worked out first in cardboard models before translating them to elaborately creased and cut sheets of wrought iron.

A consummate formalist, Madi has in the past decade become one of the most commercially successful artists in the region, and a quick study in how the market for modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art -- a somewhat artificial category -- has grown.

### Article Details

[Printer friendly](#) [Cite/link](#) [Email](#) [Feedback](#)

 Publication: [The Daily Star \(Beirut, Lebanon\)](#)

Geographic Code: 7LEBA

 Date: [Nov 26, 2011](#)

Words: 1096

 Previous Article: [U.N. deputy secretary-general: Attacks against peacekeepers will not intimidate UNIFIL](#)

 Next Article: [Truth behind disappearances will be revealed: Rifi](#)

 Topics: [Artists](#)

 Advertisement. Bad banner? Please [let us know](#)

 Advertisement. Bad banner? Please [let us know](#)

In 2004, it was possible to buy one of Madi's small aquarelles for \$900, or a large acrylic on canvas for just over \$7,000. Now his paintings routinely sell at auction for between \$25,000 and \$50,000 apiece -- placing his work decidedly out of reach for all but a tiny minority of viewers.

The downside of easy selling is getting stuck in a lucrative style. In the last few years it has looked, at times, as though Madi's creativity had stalled. He churned out variations on his alphabet works that seemed more decorative and derivative than innovative. He spun his wheels in compositions of countless vamps and vixens, either reclining like so many modern-day odalisques or standing astride like impossible fantasies of an unrelenting femme fatale.

Yet, to be fair, the artist never drifted far from the artistic vision to which he committed himself some five decades ago.

"There is always one corner in the artist's mind, one unwavering core of logic from which he views and deals with his art," he told critic and painter Helen Khal in the late 1990s.

"I make art to empty the overload of emotion within me, to lessen that inner burden of spiritual debris we all carry. I look at the paints and other materials before me and I want to touch them, taste them and totally consume them."

Now, at a time when other artists his age might reasonably retire or slow down, Madi has returned to form with renewed vigor. He has replenished his deliberately limited vocabulary in a manner that expresses both spatial sophistication and childlike wonder.

To share the tactile pleasures of his work with his viewers is to cut through a certain barrier of inaccessibility imposed by the market. It is a generous and playful gesture. Whatever one makes of his work, this exhibition is not to be missed.

Hussein Madi's "An Art to See and Touch" is on view at AE[macron]da Cherfan Fine Art, near Place de l'Etoile, through Dec. 2. For more information, please call 01-983-111 or visit [www.aidacherfan.com](http://www.aidacherfan.com)

Copyright 2011, The Daily Star. All rights reserved.

Provided by Syndigate.info an Albawaba.com company

COPYRIGHT 2011 Al Bawaba (Middle East) Ltd.  
No portion of this article can be reproduced without the express written permission from the copyright holder.  
Copyright 2011 Gale, Cengage Learning. All rights reserved.

**Please bookmark with social media, your votes are noticed and appreciated:**



[The Free Library](#) > [Communications](#) > [News, opinion and commentary](#) > [The Daily Star \(Beirut, Lebanon\)](#) > [November 26, 2011](#)  
[The Free Library](#) > [General Interest/Informational](#) > [General interest](#) > [The Daily Star \(Beirut, Lebanon\)](#) > [November 26, 2011](#)  
[The Free Library](#) > [Date](#) > [2011](#) > [November](#) > [26](#) > [The Daily Star \(Beirut, Lebanon\)](#)

Publications by Name	Publications by Date	Authors	Literature
<a href="#">A-D</a> <a href="#">E-O</a> <a href="#">P-T</a> <a href="#">U-Z</a>	<a href="#">before 1995</a> <a href="#">1995-1999</a> <a href="#">2000-2004</a> <a href="#">2005-2009</a> <a href="#">2010-</a>	<a href="#">A</a> <a href="#">B</a> <a href="#">C</a> <a href="#">D</a> <a href="#">E</a> <a href="#">F</a> <a href="#">G</a> <a href="#">H</a> <a href="#">I</a> <a href="#">J</a> <a href="#">K</a> <a href="#">L</a> <a href="#">M</a> <a href="#">N</a> <a href="#">O</a> <a href="#">P</a> <a href="#">Q</a> <a href="#">R</a> <a href="#">S</a> <a href="#">T</a> <a href="#">U</a> <a href="#">V</a> <a href="#">W</a> <a href="#">X</a> <a href="#">Y</a> <a href="#">Z</a>	<a href="#">A</a> <a href="#">B</a> <a href="#">C</a> <a href="#">D</a> <a href="#">E</a> <a href="#">F</a> <a href="#">G</a> <a href="#">H</a> <a href="#">I</a> <a href="#">J</a> <a href="#">K</a> <a href="#">L</a> <a href="#">M</a> <a href="#">N</a> <a href="#">O</a> <a href="#">P</a> <a href="#">Q</a> <a href="#">R</a> <a href="#">S</a> <a href="#">T</a> <a href="#">U</a> <a href="#">V</a> <a href="#">W</a> <a href="#">X</a> <a href="#">Y</a> <a href="#">Z</a>

[Terms of use](#) | Copyright © 2017 [Farlex, Inc.](#) | [Feedback](#) | [For webmasters](#)