

Towards the Light

Mouteea Murad Emerges from Darkness

“My paintings come to me in flashes,” says Syrian-born Mouteea Murad. “Even though they are Abstract compositions, they are very much alive. They can easily be made into a circus!” Such total immersion in the joyful vividness of colour, line and shape has not always been Murad’s driving force.

He began his career as an artist filled with rebellious existentialist anxiety. The contrast between pieces created then and now is clear. One of his earliest works consists of a collection of charcoal on paper depicting devils, jokers, and skulls - the disturbing sort of images that are frankly ugly and can only provoke disgust, dismay and cynicism. “See how ugly they are? I actually sold them!” he says with an ironic smile on his face, referring to his 2005 exhibition at Ashtar Gallery entitled ‘Tasa’ulat’. In Murad’s opinion, the show revealed a philosophical aesthetic that used form to delve into existential issues and dig deep into our ethical values. It posed the question, “Why do we look down and see devil’s feet even though we’ve been blessed with hearing the tales of the prophets? Why do you forgive us when our lives are your blood and your tears?”

Murad displays one image after another of distorted and absurdly smiling faces beset with hollow eyes. Even he still can’t quite understand the rapturous reception such works brought on. “Maybe depression rings a familiar tone in people nowadays,” he remarks.

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Those days are over as Murad’s brilliantly colourful style today is testament. Is it possible that the painter of those dreary diabolos is the same man who now drenches his canvases in a jubilant cacophony of colour? “I went through that black phase and came out the other end. I felt I could finally let it go and do something new,” he says.

“Maybe if I had not succeeded, I would still be stuck there. Now I can confidently say that those days are gone, and gone for good.”

Murad is now married with two children and teaches art at a private school in Damascus. “I went into colour once I had children,” he recalls, standing in the middle of a room surrounded by bright fluorescent tubes and jars of paint. “After five years of monotone, I felt like I had forgotten how to do colour,” says Murad, who is bent on exploring the spectrum to the maximum. And so began his vibrant venture into the rich world of colour.

Murad is a keen observer of natural harmony. He plays with the elements of the colour wheel, mixing primary and secondary colours and juxtaposing opposites; red next to green, blue with orange, yellow beside purple. “They contrast each other to the extreme, so you see them all at full strength,” he explains.

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His playful canvases delight in Abstract expression. Viewing a Murad painting is akin to listening to the sound of improvisational jazz or the sound of laughing children. Colours are intense and plentiful dancing amid spirals and swirls in a random patterning that celebrates line, movement and above all freedom. “I am an optimist now,” he says. “For me, depression is no longer the way.”

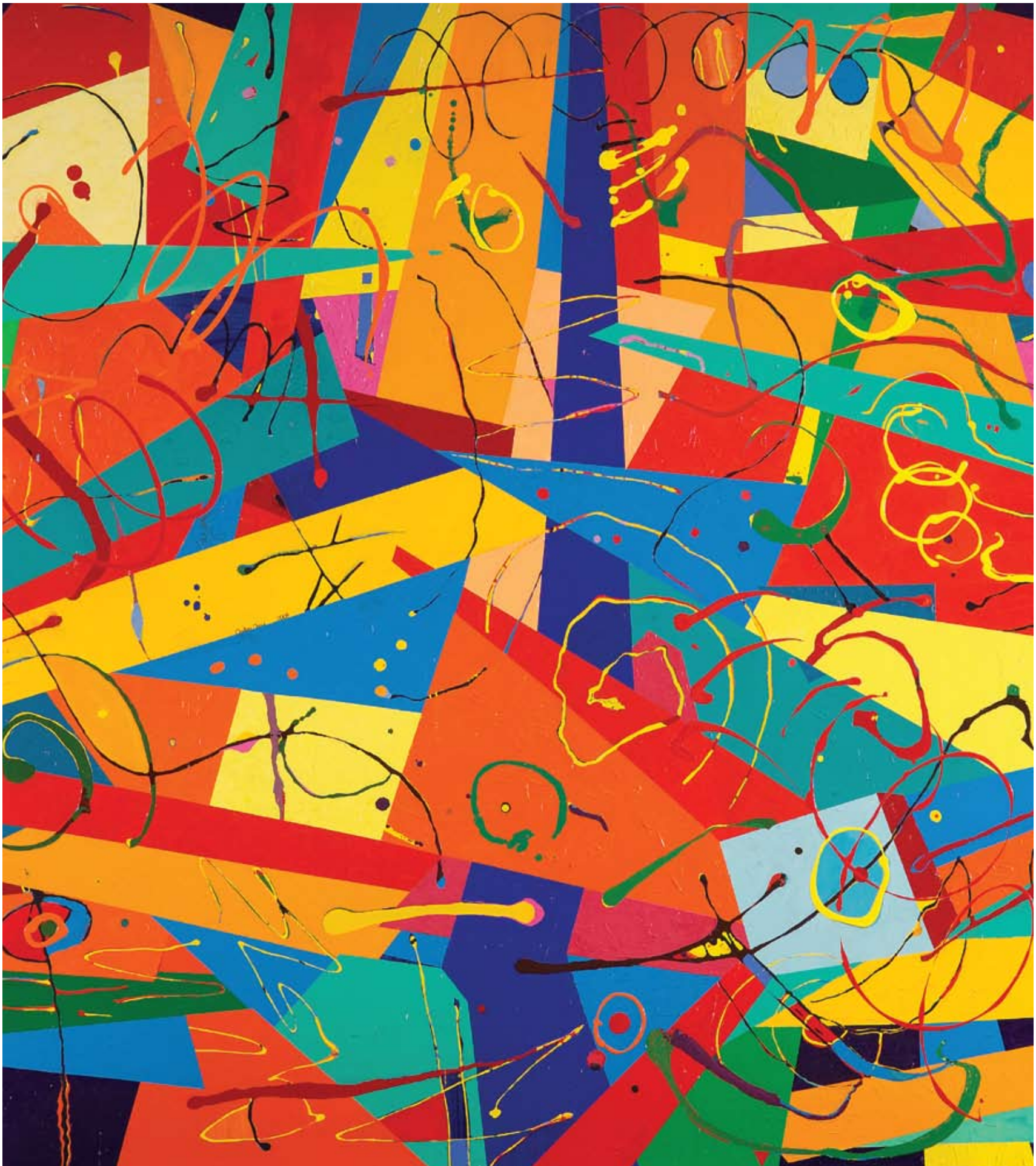
As prolific in his dark period, so is Murad in his colourful era, working with a tireless devotion. “I am totally inspired by colour,” he declares with an inexhaustible energy. The titles he gives to some of his paintings reveal the creativity behind his lateral thinking; ‘Firecrackers’, ‘The Hot Night’, ‘Abu Ali’s Mood’, ‘Wasp’s Maze’, ‘Paper Airplane’, ‘Musical Uproar’ and ‘Binomial Equation’. “All the senses feed into each other,” he says, “Just as the arts do.” Pointing to a canvas he is currently working on, still untitled, emblazoned with triangular shapes in bright pinks, yellows and greens, he asks, “Wouldn’t this be a great textile for a fashion designer? It shows hope. ■”



MOUTEEA MURAD

Murad moved from his birthplace of Homs to the Syrian capital to study at the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus. Having received second prize at the third Youth Arts Exhibition in Damascus in 2002, and a diploma of merit at the fifth Lattakia Biennial a year later, is testament to his nascent potential.

The 31-year-old artist has participated in numerous collective exhibitions in Syria and elsewhere. Solo exhibitions of his work were held at Ishtar Gallery in Damascus in 2005 and Zara Gallery in Amman, Jordan, in 2006. Having experimented with a variety of artistic styles, Murad now revels in creating cacophonies of bold colour and has already caught the eye of critics, many of whom are confident that he has a promising future ahead.



Mouteea Murad. 'Hope'. 2008. Acrylic on canvas. 180 x 180 cm.