

The optimistic power of Mouteea Murad's colors

Ayyam Gallery is showcasing the artist's paintings for a month, starting from May 15

By Sara Ismail

Photography by Carole al-Farah

"I wanted to take color to its maximum power, in a complete abstraction of form. Each canvas is a hypothesis within the same body of research, a growing calculation and re-evaluation."

Surrounded by a series of unlucky events, Mouteea Murad is an artist made of a colorful breeze of optimism. A 2001 Faculty of Fine Arts graduate from Damascus University, Murad's art stands out with its distinct impression of color, rhythm and sense of geometrics. Despite Murad's fascination with mathematical relationships between the colors of the rainbow, his canvases express a very instinctive knowledge of colors. "I get a flash in my mind of how a painting should look," Murad comments; "it's a very long, well calculated process to get to that flash in my mind, though." Holding the spirits of both, the spontaneous and the well calculated, Murad's recent paintings show a child's view of happiness; they are bold and energetic.

But Murad was not always this optimistic. His early works articulated an alienation and darkness that expressed the state of mind he lived in back when he was a student. His years in the Faculty of Fine Arts were anything but smooth; he was moody, and too proud to take criticism well. He found himself one of many, all

of his peers being skeptic of his passion and even his talent. "In my third year of fine arts," says Murad, "I made an exceptional final project to prove to the world that I deserve to be here, and I'm here because I'm passionate about art."

After working on his final project proposal with well-studied conceptual and philosophical grounds, his proposal was rejected by his professors.

Murad, however, was not discouraged; "When my graduation project proposal was refused," he explains, "I decided to go ahead and do it anyway, to challenge my professors... and I received one of the highest grades in my class."

With an open mind to thoughts more empowering than his pessimistic view and style, Mouteea Murad stepped into marriage, teaching children, being a father and exploring color all at the same time. This newly found interest had sprung from a true change of heart, from seeking art as a way of releasing negativity and a pessimistic view of life to finding the internal power that Murad knew he had. "Teaching children" Murad explains "reminded me of the size of internal energy that we all have, the power to change and create."

"I am grateful and proud of my interest in religion and the philosophy of religion" Murad comments "Islamic art and décor are of great influence in my work and I hope to add something, however small, to Islamic art, and grow as much as I can in the process." This influence shows greatly in Murad's work with all the

geometrical shaping of negative space and its relationship with color. It also shows in pieces where Murad uses very sharp and geometrically-styled Arabic calligraphy in his paintings to frame, and even include the festive colors that mark his works. His paintings adopt this rigid but playful mathematical logic only found in Islamic décor and Islamic architecture. The rhythm and repetition of geometrical shapes found in Murad's work also show some of their roots in Islamic art patterning and motifs.

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"I put my whole heart into my art, and that's all an artist can do," Murad confesses, he spends hours after he comes back from working in the school in his studio, spending with it also all the emotional and physical energy he possesses. His studio shows the constant work-in-progress that his paintings undergo for a long time before they are ready to face their audiences. His "real self" as he puts it, is always present in his studio and his work. "Sometimes an artist has to replace their real face, the sensitive person, with the mask of a salesman" Murad says commenting on having Ayyam Gallery as his agents "because artists don't understand the logic and language of buying and selling. Now, Ayyam Gallery can speak for me and I don't have to bargain, or explain myself!" ■

Mouteea Murad's new exhibition will be showing in Ayyam Gallery from May 15 – June 19.

