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Tokyo Gallery BTAP, Jiro Takamatsu, *Oneness of Brick*, 1971



DUBAI**Music in color**

Asaad Arabi's Return to Abstraction at Ayyam Gallery Dubai DIFC was a visual symphony

by Dr. Zoltán Somhegyi

At first, viewers were arrested in their tracks by the striking colours. Intense yellows, lush purples, vibrant reds and rich blues seemed to glow on Asaad Arabi's canvasses at the DIFC branch of Ayyam Gallery in Dubai. His solo show, *Return to Abstraction*, showcased new work at the gallery throughout May and early June. The work may have been abstract, but these electrifying colours were not used simply for aesthetic reasons, nor were the compositions random. In fact, one of the most impressive features of Arabi's work is that although each of the colours he uses stands out vividly on the canvas, they maintain a balance. No one shade succeeds in dominating the whole of the painting.

Due to the sharply defined colour blocks, some of Arabi's paintings seem to have the quality of fabric, as if they were collages made by solid elements rather than paint. In other cases the different shades overlap one another in translucent veils. It is the overall harmony of the image that is the artist's overall focus, not the competing parts that make it up.

This harmony is achieved by the careful composition of the elements, which derives from several influences on Arabi's work. For some years now, he has executed his works using a multi-angle method – the canvas is placed horizontally on his table, instead of vertically at an easel, and he works on it from all sides. This gives his painted forms a polished finish.

The artist's prudent attention to the proportions within the composition also comes from the experience accumulated during the time spent creating his previous body of works. Throughout his long career, Arabi has oscillated between figurative and abstract expression. After studying in his native Syria, he moved to Paris in the 1970s, where he experimented with lyrical abstraction. He then began creating portraits, producing, among others, a captivating series focusing on the iconic Egyptian singer Umm Kulthum.



Assaad Arabi, *Melodic Mirroring*, 2014,
Acrylic on Canvas, 162 × 130 cm

Today, Arabi has not only mastered both figurative and non-figurative styles, but builds inspiring bridges between them. In his new works, which appeared at first sight to be non-representational, viewers gradually discerned figures, architectural forms and patterns. Arabi is unwilling to close doors, instead choosing to work on a new synthesis between styles.

What's more, this synthesis is not only of artistic styles, but also of various art forms. Holding a doctorate from the Sorbonne, Arabi investigates the spiritual relationships between music, architecture and painting, both on a theoretical level in his writing and on a practical level in his artistic work. This explains why the observer can trace architectural components in the images, deriving from his formative years in Saida, Damascus and Paris, cities which often serve as sources of inspiration. The artist's keen interest in music has also had a deep influence on his paintings. In both art forms, rhythm, proportions, stresses and tones are key to creating powerful work. In his powerful abstracts, Arabi seems to represent music in colours. ♦