

# Cairo, the Real Picture

## An art exhibition offers Dubai a new window to the Egyptian capital

Karen Ann Monsy

If everything you know about Cairo originates from pretty picture postcards of pyramids, date palms and undisturbed desert stretches, it's high time you ditched those postcards.

'14.05.09 — Undercurrent' is a collective exhibition of 29 contemporary Egyptian artists, each with diverse schools of thought — and their own impressions about Cairo. Amel Mak-kawi, founder of Art Sawa (where the exhibition is being hosted till June 14)

explains, "We always see Cairo from a clichéd perspective. But the Cairo I've discovered, thanks to these artists is not the postcard Cairo everyone knows — it's so much more."

At first glance, Randa Shaath's 'Cairo Sidewalks' might fool the viewer into believing a major accident was the cause of the nightmarish tailbacks depicted in the black-and-white photograph. It's a scene of utter chaos (try multiplying Dubai's traffic woes five times over for full effect). "That," says Amel, "is Cairo everyday: jam-packed. You have to plan your meetings two hours in advance — in fact, you could even have them in your cars!"

Among other themes, you'll find social commentary as with Khaled Sorour's symbolic works; political commentary (check out Ahmed El Shaer's video portraying Cairo under attack); and of course, the many abstract works

that allow viewers to let their imagination run riot.

There's also the disturbing 'Remaining Despite Your Attempts', a seven-panel exhibit using photography and computer graphics by Marwa Adel. Each of the seven panels depicts different shots of a part-mutilated part-frenzied woman desperately attempting escape. Escape from what, you wonder.

"Marwa is a young lady who's suffered a lot because of social pressure," explains Amel. "Being a woman there means you're told what to be, do, speak and feel. Some accept it well, others suffer in silence and yet others try to bring about change." It's not the pain of all women, she adds, quickly. "It is hers. I think each woman will find a way to express this and for many like Marwa, visuals speak far more than words ever can."

At '14.05.09 — Undercurrent', pre-

pare yourself to encounter exhibits that starkly contrast others under the same roof. Mohsen Shaalan has a satirical take of his own on the women back home — and it's a far cry from 'the pity plea'. In 'Neither love him nor can leave him', he focuses on the strained relationship between husband and wife, where positions aren't what one supposes they'd be. Instead, it's a power struggle: the woman sees it all, but can't voice opinions — not conventionally, at least; the man wears the suit but his own thoughts are generally overridden by that of his ever-domineering partner.

Amel speaks of the vibrant art scene in Cairo, which is "accessible to everyone, from highly influential people to boot polishers." That's the atmosphere she's trying to recreate through this exhibition — one where Cairo comes to Dubai.

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