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Portrait of a lady

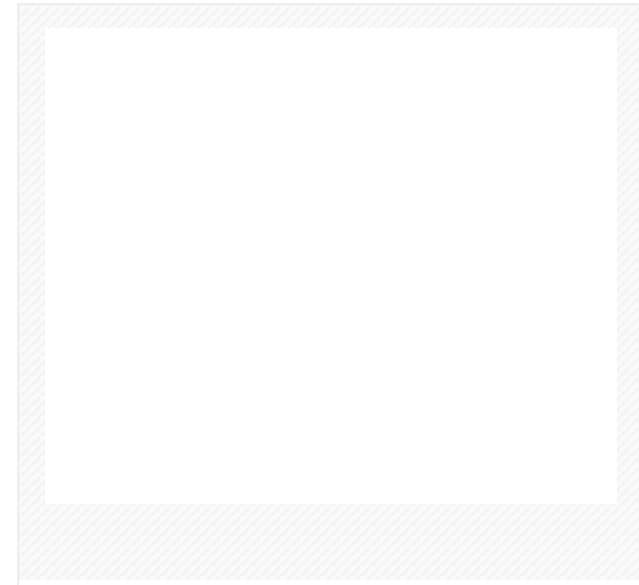
Filed on December 20, 2008

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ANOTHER WEEK, ANOTHER gallery. It seems that in Dubai, art spaces are springing up like mushrooms after rainfall. Separating the good from the cleverly-packaged bad can be as difficult as telling porcini from poisonous puff balls, though the results admittedly not as perilous.

Art Sawa, I am happy to announce, falls on the former side. Located in Al Quoz — where else? — the gallery promises a “distinctive art platform dedicated to the awareness and promotion of contemporary art from the Middle East, North Africa and neighbouring countries.” The converted warehouse boasts 12,000 square feet and includes over 3,000 feet of linear wall-space. For the gallery’s first solo exhibition, curators have chosen work by Egyptian artist Essam Marouf, an artist known for his love of portrait painting. Fittingly, it will mark the first time that the artist has showcased his works in the UAE.

According to Marouf, a man committed to his choice of art form, “the portrait never went out of fashion.” So why is the portrait so enduringly popular? It is a genre which foregrounds the face and its expression and promises to reveal the personality of the sitter, but it goes beyond this, hinting at mood, lifestyle and aspirations. Portraits often show a person looking directly at the painter or photographer, in order to most successfully engage the subject with the viewer, and it is here in particular that we find ourselves connecting with a stranger. If the eyes are the window to the soul, then the artist gives us front-row tickets into the private lives of his subjects. The most famous portrait in the world, Leonardo da Vinci’s Mona Lisa, is testament to the popularity of the genre.



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Critics and art lovers continue to debate what her expression and seating suggest and what lies behind that evasive but mesmerising smile.

Speaking about his Art Sawa exhibition, Marouf recently commented that “I have the possibility to create something new when I reproduce the human head. The portrait offers us an opportunity to imagine stories and reflections and I’m extremely excited to be able to show my latest portrait works to the people of the region.” Marouf’s paintings are haunting, vague and at times, verge on the insubstantial. The shadowy figures represented allow us a passage into another realm where we are invited to create realities for his characters; names, jobs, histories. What we each take away from the portraits will be very different. But the exhibition unites us in fruitful imagination and continues to feed an obsession, so deeply imbedded in our natures, with uncovering the hidden lives of others.

Event Details:

Art Sawa, (04 340 8660), Al Quoz. The exhibition runs until December 31.

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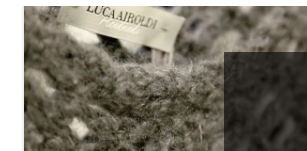
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