



## Reading faces

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Renowned Syrian sculptor **Mustafa Ali** is presenting his latest body of work in his first solo exhibition in Dubai titled “The Distance”. The multimedia artist, who was born in Latakia in 1956, and lives and works in Syria, is known for his elegant, monumental sculptures that pierce the consciousness and underscore the fragility of mankind. Among his most well-known works are public art pieces such as “The Gate of Syria”, displayed in the Mediterranean Olympiad in Pari, Italy, and “The Tower of Memory”, standing in the Damascus International Fairground.

This show features a series of human heads sculpted from wood. The pensive faces speak about the conflicts that human beings have to deal within themselves and in the world around them, and the rough chisel marks on many of the faces depict the physical and mental scars of our suffering. The mesmerising faces reflect the dreams and desires of ordinary people, the greed and ambition of ruthless leaders, and the eternal human longing for peace and spiritual enlightenment.

In many of the pieces there is a deep fissure splitting the faces through the middle. This rift, perhaps, depicts the constant struggle between the different thoughts and voices that exist in our minds, between ego and empathy, between the material and spiritual world, and between the culture and experiences that carve our identity and the forces of change that compel us to redefine it.

Although the artist essentially engages with existential questions, given the ongoing conflicts in his country and the region, it is impossible not to read political connotations in his work. This is perhaps most evident in a piece titled “Peace & Vacuum & Mask” which features a face with eyes wide open, masked by another face with closed eyes and split in two. Although Ali’s work highlights the struggles and conflicts we must endure, it also offers us hope that the distance between what is and what we wish it to be can be traversed.

“The Distance” will run at Art Sawa, DIFC, until October 25.

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