

Art imitates life, once again

By Jimmy Dabbagh

BEIRUT: Art does tend to reflect the context from which it emerges. The turmoil that has persisted in Syria since 2011 appears to have triggered a sort of cultural renaissance, as it's inspired the work of many of the country's, now expatriate, artists.

The media attention, largely unheard of before 2011, has also piqued the curiosity of galleries and collectors, many of which betrayed little interest in the country's art before Syria's popular revolution devolved into what it is today.

"Clay and Bronze," the show of recent work by Fadi Yazigi, up at Galerie Tanit, presents another opportunity to view art that imitates life, sort of.

In an email interview from Greece, the Damascus-based Yazigi told The Daily Star how his decision to remain in Syria throughout the conflict has influenced his practice.

"In fact, the current situation made me learn to enhance realism," Yazigi said. "When you are near the tragedy that is occurring every day, you become much closer to death and blood. [You] start up a new life filled with thorns of time and a destined waiting."

Yazigi's new body of work assembles 11 bronze sculptures and 53 clay reliefs, representing different phases of the war, from 2011 until today.

Over the course of his career Yazigi has worked with a variety of media, applying paint to various surfaces, for instance. Apparently he was driven to transfer the characters he encountered during the revolution, first rendered on canvas, to sculpture.

For Yazigi, Ghada AlBaher suggests in one of the show's catalogue essays, working with clay and bronze was an "instinctual and automatic process."

"My artworks are executed with both; accumulation and daily practice," he wrote. "Building my figures requires effort and dedication to come up with a form that is concise, [while] revealing the sensuous side of the structure of the work.

"In this exhibition, I presented clay and bronze for their ability to converge. They are similar to life of its: solidity and fragility, continuity and [lack thereof], flesh and shadow, life and death."

In his 2013 bronze "Tree," a cluster of severed heads bloom from atop a tree. Tanit's Marc Mouarkech posited that the severed heads allude to the growing loss of life since the beginning of the war.

Like many of the misshapen figures that can be found in Yazigi's oeuvre, the blooming heads maintain a jovial disposition.

"The desires for life, and the inability of expression, together are the base of making what's

happening around me very ironic,” the artist wrote. “This collection is a continuation to my previous work, [and] an extension to the art that I have executed before. It takes, though, a more mature orientation from its predecessors.”

The works in “Clay and Bronze” are elaborate.

“Untitled,” 2015, a bronze, depicts a sort of deconstructed zigzag maze. On each side of the maze’s walls are confined figures, their backs cemented to the surface.

Each figure, Mouarkech pointed out, appears to be holding a different item that reflects something they are trying to protect. One figure holds a rock, ready for combat. Another clutches a child to its bosom.

Yazigi also retains his work’s animal-like motif in some of the works.

“The human being is a combination of all creatures,” the artist writes, “physically and spiritually.”

An untitled terracotta relief represents a human head fused with the body of what appears to be a chicken. Another relief depicts a lone figure, running with a stupefied smile on its face, with wings sprouting from its back.

Defying definition with their larger-than-life heads and disproportionate bodies, Yazigi’s figures exude a sort of innocence, uncontaminated by the trauma that inspired the artist’s subjects.

Fadi Yazigi’s “Clay and Bronze,” is on view at Galerie Tanit until July 10. For further information, contact 01-562-812.

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11/06/2015