

SILHOUETTES OF PAST AND PRESENT

Up-and-coming young Tunisian artist Riadh Abdi and his tribal, human forms.





Currently living and working in Oman, Riadh Abdi attributes much of his artistic ideas and inspiration to his childhood, an idyllic time spent in the small Tunisian town of Nefza. “I’ve been very creative ever since childhood,” he recalls, “and was lucky to live in the open countryside, surrounded by mountains, forests, rivers and valleys. Every day of my childhood was a creative adventure.” His family encouraged his artistic leanings, and he was able to learn from close family members; “My grandmother used to work in terracotta, and I would sit near her and create all sorts of objects; sometimes they made sense and at other times they didn’t. They were just creations. And I used all sorts of tools to make my own toys.”

The budding artist’s real chance came when he secured a place at the prestigious Institut Supérieur des Beaux Arts in Tunis. Abdi recalls how “going there was a real turning point for me. It was then that I really began to breathe art, it became my means of liberation.” After his first degree, Abdi went on to gain his master’s and was by now thoroughly immersed in the art world, an experience that he continues to value and feel humbled by. Yet at the same time, he says there is something inescapable about it, “art is like a love story. That’s certainly part of the attraction, but the rest is pure destiny. I love approaching the world as an artist.”

Abdi’s first solo exhibition was held on the island of Djerba, an occasion he recalls with great excitement. “My works had something really original and emotional about them, and the crowd that came to see them, which was made up of Tunisians and

tourists from overseas, was attracted by the presence of a human silhouette, which wove a pattern in front of them.” Silhouettes of the human form have proved to be a seminal aspect of Abdi’s art, his expressions of man’s physical aspects assuming a decidedly primeval and tribal cast.

Although firmly rooted in the present, Abdi is constantly aware of the significance of his heritage; “Tunisian heritage inspires me greatly. My country has always been an open and tolerant place, absorbing many different influences, and from this I have learnt to be open in my approach to my art.”

Yet, as for many artists, the issue of identity is one that absorbs and concerns Abdi. “Local identities are increasingly threatened by globalisation,” he exclaims, “and I feel as if art offers the final roof under which these identities can shelter.” He tackles identity, crisis and all, via his exploration of the human form on both a macro and micro level. All the time, his emphasis is on movement, “my silhouettes constantly weave, whirl and tighten, they are like an organic system and sit at the very heart of my artistic endeavour,” he explains.

What next, then, for Riadh Abdi? His works were successfully shown by Bait Muzna Gallery at artparis-AbuDhabi 2008 and a solo show is scheduled for the gallery in May 2009. As for the artist’s plans, he clearly has much up his sleeve: “I am continuing to develop my human silhouette concept, and believe that there are totally new areas that I can explore in my work. I like showing my work around the world, as I love to communicate and commune with others. That’s my artistic mission, after all.”