



***Maher Diab draws his inspiration from the world, and wants those who share his cultural world to tell him about it***



Lebanese painter Maher Diab is an artist with a philosophical edge. He defines his art “as a reflection of what lies beneath, a description of reality, illustrated in my own words, through the language of the ancients.” With such a poetic take on art, his muse for painting is not limited to one or two sources of inspiration.

“I’m inspired by anything,” he says, “from a flying bird to a dead man, all the way to an abstract placement of objects that I glance at randomly while walking to my work. It’s hard to decide on what inspires a person – it’s as variable as the light spectrum.”

What matters most to Maher is how people relate to his work, how they interact with it. “When I share a piece of work,” he says, “I share it with people of my age, who tend to have been subject to the same social and cultural influences as myself, and hence, can better relate to the subject matter. I am not aiming for art collectors.”

He finds it fascinating when he is able to ascertain who from his friends and acquaintances will like a certain piece or not. “The response varies from one artwork to another” says Maher, “and from one friend to another, depending on their personal experiences – and it is this that keeps me going.”

Born in 1980 in Lebanon, Maher graduated from the Lebanese University of Fine Arts at the age of 23. Upon graduation, he moved to the United Arab Emirates where he entered the world of advertising with one of the region’s leading agencies, Team Young & Rubicam. Spending almost three years with them, Maher was introduced to various visual approaches from photomontage to digital illustration, the latter now occupying his most recent fascination.

“My affinity for digital illustration fostered a bridge between my passion for fine art and my digital interests,” Maher adds. “Discovery is never ending, and I am still working in the advertising industry, and I am also still discovering the secrets of visual encoding.”

Talking about technology and art, Maher admits that while some people feel that it destroys the real meaning of art, he finds that it has actually helped him in delivering his messages more clearly and faster.

“As we race with time,” he says, “I find myself a supporter of technology. The time-based medium of art is gaining more popularity. It is still debatable as to whether it should be considered as such, but no one can deny that it’s a new medium that is about to change our perception of art.”

Nevertheless, Maher does not blame the hesitation of art critics to embrace the concept of time-based art. “It is human nature to be sceptical towards a new variable in life. Such was the case with Galileo, when he discovered that the Earth is spherical as opposed to rotating on a turtle’s shell.”

Maher’s love for art and his attitudes toward change were felt from his childhood. “I lived in a world of my own,” he recalls. “The statement is not so much a cliché as it is the most accurate description I can explain my views through.” At various points in his life, Maher believed that he was not from this planet. He adds, “But when I grew up and it was time for me to exit my childhood cocoon, I found myself metamorphosing and expressing new sides of myself. That was when I felt I had something inside me that I needed to express.”

Maher is a person who believes in constant development. “I look at myself now and I see that there is a vast space in me yet to be developed and explored.” Asking Maher where he thinks he’ll venture next in his art form, he explains that one doesn’t decide what one wants to be. Likewise, he suggests, it is the same with one’s taste in art.

“There is always a time when you find yourself amidst the winds of change, your crest eroding with its mighty blows, but your core slightly revealing with every breeze,” expresses Maher with full enthusiasm.

Maher’s work has been presented in five exhibitions in Beirut, in Daraj el-Fan in Jemayzeh and Espace SD, titled Nafas Beirut. His latest exhibition was in the UK, called I LOVE BEIRUT. He is currently participating in the UNESCO campaign for environmental awareness – he was approached by them after having seen his work online.