

Storytelling through art Thursday, 17 March 2011 01:04



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by Francesca Astorri

"Told, Untold, Retold" brings together 23 artists to tell their stories through specially commissioned works. The exhibition is open till May 28 in the Exhibition Hall of the Museum of Islamic Art Grounds on the Corniche.

The exhibition, curated by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, brings to Doha a selection of the best Arab artists to express the art of storytelling through different means. The curators wanted the artists to try the challenge of confronting themselves with artistic means that they have never tried before: that's why you can find paintings, photographs, multimedia installations, sculptures and videos, all used not in their ordinary and orthodox way.

"The best surprise was the freedom we had in selecting the artists. We started from a hundred names and after a year and a half we made the selection of the ones that we wanted for this exhibition" said Sam Bardaouil, Curatorial Director of the Exhibition and co-founder of Art Reoriented. "We didn't have to select on national or gender criteria, we were very free. We decided to choose some new artists to make the exhibition more interesting and dynamic, and some famous and well-known artists in order to maintain an high standard level and attract art critics," added Bardaouil.

The storytelling theme is the starting point from which each artist begins his own narration in which the time factor is determinant as it's hard to distinguish past, present and alternative future.

The works of art exposed don't have the aim of pure aesthetic contemplation, but to tell their story with their political statement and frustrations, with their misunderstandings and fears. The visitors will find a peculiar connotation that combines all the masterpieces of the exhibition: a great immediate emotional impact and a deep and twisted story behind the composition that is related to the personal experience of the artist.

Most of the artists in fact are living in western countries and are originally from the region, from Syria, Palestine, Egypt and other countries in which their artistic expression was banned or just not comprehended.

Both the curators Fellrath and Bardaouil live between New York and Munich and have been working all over the world. As Doha clearly wants to turn into the cultural center of the Arab world, what is Qatar still missing in order to succeed?

Till Fellrath, Executive Director of the exhibition and co-founder of Art Reoriented, explains me that Qatar is moving in the right direction, investing in Art Education and in Independent Museums.

We all perfectly agree on the fact that this is the right direction, even if the government's investment in art education still seems timid as most of the Universities in Doha do not have art faculties. Virginia Commonwealth University in this sense looks like an excellent exception, having departments entirely dedicated to fashion, graphic design, jewellery manufacturing and art.

"Investing in Art Education and in Independent Museum is the first step, but then you need to attract art critics and to open art galleries for art collectors in order to support the interest in art with new initiative and to improve the business that goes around it" said Fellrath.

"But I just don't see this happening yet" he added. In fact the business of art in Qatar is missing its core: the high-middle class.

The middle class's investment in art is what makes the business of art so dynamic and wealthy in the western countries. As we have seen outstanding investments in very expensive masterpieces bought by the state, we can't actually see a middle class oriented art market that can self-support itself through its own initiative without depending on the government's funds.

But this is the counterpart of the business of art, as in the US is just all the way round: curators as Bardaouil and Fellrath would have had to start with an exhausting sponsors' hunting in order to set up in the US an exhibition as the one that they have now shaped in Doha.

"You don't have to fund-rise like in the US. Here in Qatar the state 100 percent supports you," said Fellrath.

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