

Ahmed El Shaer



Star of the East, 8 bit Portraits, 2010, Digital Print on archival paper, 70x100cm, edition of 5. Courtesy of the artist.

An artist who never stops seeking new media to express his ideas and to give room for new creative possibilities; this is Ahmed El-Shaer. As a graduating student, still a beginner in video art, El-Shaer dared to include a short video to his graduation project. His professor was not as daring and wanted to fail him for thinking out of the box, but luckily he only downgraded him after the assistant professor talked him into it.

El-Shaer started out as a painter and had his first exhibition when still a student in the Faculty of Art Education; he participated in the 5th Saloon for Small Works. “However, soon after I started feeling

that painting is quite restricting while I have ideas in mind that involve motion, music, text etc. Even as a student I was always searching for other dimensions,” says El-Shaer. He truly believes that a true artist should experiment with different media and make his choice based on the subject matter. Sticking to one medium where the artist feels comfortable is quite limiting from the point of view of El-Shaer. Though the top management in the Faculty of Art Education was still rigid accepting and acknowledging the new media and forms of expression, El-Shaer says that his class was lucky enough to be instructed by a group of contemporary practicing artists who opened wider horizons for his class. “When Dr. Shady El-Noshokaty came from the US in 1999 after having studied video art and film in Chicago, he wanted to give a workshop for video art so he organized the first one at the Faculty in 2000 and I enrolled in it. This was my introduction to video,” says El-Shaer. While working on his video projects, El-Shaer used to work in the Fine Arts Sector at the Ministry of Culture. He had exhibited in the 14th Youth Saloon in 2002 and got an honorary award in video art. Dr. Ahmed Nawwar who was the head of the sector at that time, urged those who got the awards to apply for work in the sector. “I was working in graphic design at the time; I applied, got accepted and started working in the multimedia CDs of the exhibitions and events. I stayed there till 2007 while proceeding with my video art and new media work,” explains El-Shaer. Though most artists don’t usually go to government jobs, El-Shaer owes much to his job, especially for making him more aware of the reality of the art scene. “The only prizes I got so far where from the Ministry. I had difficulty covering travel expenses to workshops twice and upon applying the ministry covered the plane tickets and gave me small pocket money as well, such sponsorship is available to all artists but the young artists don’t try to resort to the Ministry. In 2006 artist Mohamed Abla got nominated to teach in the Summer Academy in Salzburg and to help a number of young Egyptian



I'm interested in the balance between military power economic power, and this creates kind of force



Snail Struggle, HD video stil, 2013, 1920 × 600pix., edition of 6.

artists enroll in the program, he got them sponsorship from Sekem to attend the course. “I was among the group and I chose then to study video art with world renowned Chinese artist Feng Mengbo. I produced my first Machinema film (videogame film) during the three weeks workshop,” says El-Shaer who added that his film “Home” was chosen by Mengbo as the best film in the class. The prize was another scholarship in the same Academy the year after so he went back to Austria in 2007 to study with Austrian artist Valie Export who works in video art since 1965. El-Shaer learned immensely from both artists but studying with Feng Mengbo was a big shift for him since he added a new dimensions to El-Shaer’s way of thinking; the interactive dimension, and stimulated him to focus on future plans, “It was a more contemporary experience,” he says. On the other hand he learned from Export about creating the concept and how to plan for a project and study it. Many young artists who joined the revolution used their art as a form of protest while others wanted to live the moment and be among the crowds. El-Shaer couldn’t use the camera during the 18 days but upon a suggestion of a fellow artist he took a camera and with a group of fellow artists, they took sporadic shots of one another talking about the revolution. El-Shaer produced a two minutes film where phrases are repeated in a well studied pattern that recall the Soviet montage, “I managed this minute the same way the Egyptian society dealt with the act of revolution. I projected the movement in society on

tangible time, repeating the event in time. This film was shown in Tokyo, Madrid and Berlin and it was added to the Centre Pompidou archive,” he says. El-Shaer’s films include ‘Home’, ‘Do Not Step Down’, ‘Bar Code’, ‘Snail Struggle’, ‘Selection Reflection Intention’. His discovery of Machinema or game video art gave him the opportunity to produce Machinema films like ‘Home’ and to produce interactive games as well like ‘Nekh’. In most of his works the issue of struggle is much present. In ‘Snail Struggle’, he made fun of the format that Arabic documentary films follow. He wrote a script based on interviews with gamers then he gave it to actors who recited the script as if they were military analysts in documentaries. They were even shot in the same documentary style. From El-Shaer’s point of view ‘the fight is fake’ and that’s why he chose snails for the title, “When snails fight they can’t kill one another,” he says. The upcoming project of El-Shaer is a game inspired by the works of late painter Abdel-Hady El-Gazzar. ‘The Green Elf’ is the name chosen for the game so far and it’s the title of one of the famous works of El-Gazzar. El-Shaer got intrigued by El-Gazzar and has been studying him for a year now. He believes that the late artist was the best among his generation to take the popular art and themes to another dimension developing a very outstanding character. “I think about the idea, the concept and about the long term project. I brain storm, create details and interact with those details.” he says.