

When the reality is questioned

By Ati Metwaly



Cooks, Cook's Series, 2012, Acrylic on Canvas, 150x90cm - Courtesy of the artist.

“I was born at 5pm, on Friday,” is what an Egyptian artist Ramy Dozy tells you when asked about his birth date. “16 July 1982” follows... a minute later. Considered “a difficult child” due to his highly energetic temperament, Dozy was raised in a family where his parents and four siblings had no inclination to art. Restlessness and revolting spirit that characterized his childhood and early youth was in fact a source of sparkling creativity, soon translated to appealing and nonconformist artistic fruits. But to understand Dozy, it is not enough to look at his compelling work. A coffee on the roof top of one of the buildings in Cairo’s district Zamalek, where Dozy resides since March 2012, reveals a creator whose seemingly composure hides a bubbling energy of a gifted soul.

“I never liked regular toys. Instead I would create my own cars or barrows from material found here and there.” Dozy recalls years spent in Minya (a city located 250km south of Cairo) where he was born. While wandering around the neighbourhood, he would explore nature, climb the mountains, or join one of his uncles fishing, the only hours that he could stay still for hours and for which – naturally – he created his own fishing rod. . “I would catch flies, spiders or mosquitoes and inspect them. I would analyze all the details... I always had my notebook on me... I would doodle or note scattered sentences...” He would watch another uncle calligraphy work; he’d build sand castles at Alexandria’s beaches. Though Dozy recalls his childhood as filled with inspiring experiences, those years were not deprived of



Nasset, *Cook's Series*, 2012, Acrylic on Canvas, 150x50cm - Courtesy of the artist.

alienation and a rift that existed between him and what many consider to be a “normal world.”

“I felt life was going against what was in my head,” he recalls. “I hated school and teachers; I hated all the rules,” Dozy describes his school years as setting him in chains of academic instructions. In secondary school he established a “Creative Kiosque”, his little artistic asylum. And it was much later, at the Faculty of Art Education in Cairo where he learnt to find his way within the rules. He graduated with high marks in 2007. “Studying is very important to one’s development, but the methods used, especially in Egyptian schools, are against any educational values,” Dozy affirms adding that the process of growing and studying should include an element of creative provocation and should reach to the many experiences from all life-stages.

Continuing his playful discoveries and experimentations with objects and reality, Dozy matured emotionally and artistically without losing the irreplaceable and at times a superb child-like ability of truncating the reality into the single images, juxtaposing them in the most astonishing combinations.

Today, this way of processing the reality constitutes Dozy’s creative journey, an intensely nurturing accumulation of interactions, experiences and active observations. Triggered by the outside reality, many images are born in Dozy’s sub-consciousness, or when he is asleep, conditions to which he reaches for inspiration, often deliberately. “I can’t tell how my mind processes what it sees. Sometimes I see objects before going to sleep. Then as if my brain starts forming relation

between them...” Dozy reveals one of the repeated scenarios when his mind is incessantly preoccupied with the process of creation.

It is within this process that Dozy’s hyper-reality challenges certainty. His exhibition that took place at the French Cultural Centre in Cairo in February 2012 was one of the examples of his different perception of the environment. Though he called his exhibition *Eshta*, the centre’s management gave it a more direct title: “Hyperréalisme.” In a collection of photos, Dozy challenges many national icons: he strips Nahdet Masr (Egypt’s Renaissance) statue of its glory and places it on a pickup truck; creates an identical twin for the Cairo Tower, a free-standing Cairo’s concrete pride and a touristic spot built in 1950s; surrounds Taha Hussein statue by spheres filling the sky; allows Naguib Mahfouz to walk on a fence barrier on a bridge. Works from *Eshta* series were also exhibited during the Cairo’s annual Salon of Young Artists, 2011. In another series *Perfex*, one of the projects that Dozy is still working on, the artist experiments even further. We find the air conditioners pending from the balconies, flying lampposts or kaleidoscopic restructurization of pigeon’s houses suspended over the ugly steel structures serving as billboard advertising. In this conceptual approach, Dozy’s world soaks up multitude of data represented by contemporary fabrications, only to rearrange its elements into personalized and often cynical views of the eternal verity. This seemingly awkward perspective challenges our minds are prisoners of pre-established cultural and social habits, how they are taught



Kappa, Cook's Series, 2011, Acrylic on Canvas, 100x100cm - Courtesy of the artist.

throughout the years to see people and objects in a predefined way. Similarly, another series on his desk is a journey through Cairo's zoological garden, where Dozy captures the most shocking images and ridicules them by providing a different perspective or creating contrasts between the details.

In his artistic expressions, Dozy research of contemporary environments is freed of meanings encrypted by social norms and as such it regains ideological liberty, possibly the one he was struggling for since his childhood. While he reassesses the surroundings, the final analysis generated by his accumulative memory points to ridiculous incidents, shatters iconism and toys with everyday objects. And Dozy doesn't seem to spare anyone or anything. In solo exhibition Vanilia Al

Basar Maarad (Vanilla Eye Candy) held in April 2012 at Gezira Art Centre in Cairo, Dozy presented series of images that were combining logos and Egyptian colloquial phrases. Time and again, he smashes clichés implanted in our minds by the corporate environment and insightfully points to the hypocritical juxtaposition between the marketers' and the reality.

"This was the last experience where I played with words," Dozy states adding that his future works will include shapes and possibly numeric forms. His current works are triggered by a phrase preoccupying his mind: Ganat Fawakeh – Shanab El Hagg (Fruit Paradise – Moustache of an old man). For Dozy, it is hard to tell where the idea came from, yet somehow it encompasses the accumulated experiences from Ard El Lewa, one of



Ramy Dozy, *Lacoste*, *Cook's Series*, 2011, acrylic on canvas 100x100cm - Courtesy of the artist.

the Cairo's poor districts where he lived for six months. In Ard El Lewa, Dozy observed the crowd, people, animals, listened to conversations, sounds, looked at the life's dynamics... This is where he spotted a young barefoot girl playing in the narrow alleys. He named her Alia. Since then, the girl keeps returning to his mind, each time inducing the artist with new creative energy. "Alia comes and goes in those paintings, and even if absent, she remains the main sparkle that motored all this work," Dozy stresses pointing to shapes and creatures emerging from his sketches and unfinished paintings covering the small space at the rooftop.

Dispersed papers and calque sheets are scattered at Dozy's desk... Though today's final creations differ from simple sketches that were filling notebooks of Ramy-

the child, the doodles still constitute the beginning of all of his work. Between scribbling, collages, pop art elements, and hyper-realistic environment, wishing to protect his creative liberty, Dozy refuses to be classified. Faithful to those principles, one of his dreams is to further develop workshops he conducts and turn them to an alternative art school that would promote freedom of artistic creation with support of meditation, human interactions as well as emotional healings, freeing the creative minds from social, educational or traditional clichés.