

## Aya El-Fallah Working and Searching



I wear a white top, 2013, charcoal acrylic and oil bars on canvas, 160x80cm. Courtesy of the artist.

Five figures stand tall with dignity. The reduction of details doesn't quite hide the underlying emotions and the almost monochrome palette, resembling the black and white photography, gives much seriousness and weight to the characters. The creator masters the play of light and shade in a way that enhances the truthfulness of the entire project. Aya El-Fallah, born in 1986, is happy with her accomplishments yet still thinks there's a long way to go. "It is understandable that the art public would see resemblance between Aya's figures and those of renowned painter Samir Foad; they were both inspired by late veteran artist Hassan Soliman. Not only the figures of Aya recall those of Soliman, but the pale color scheme that she uses and the air of popular districts are also inspired by the works of the late artist. Among the European artists whom she likes are Lucian Freud, Shelly Wilkerson, Degas and Toulouse Lautrec. Though she doesn't like to be called feminist, women and women's issues are present in a subtle manner in Aya's works. She uses symbols like the underwear for instance to highlight the contradiction in society, when people accept things in certain context and reject them in another. "In some popular neighborhoods, people would hang the underwear first row on the rack however they feel pretty much embarrassed if the camera starts taking pictures," says El-Fallah.

El-Fallah, starts out with photography; with a good eye and a camera lens she goes around searching for the interesting images and details, then tries to decode the messages that the images carry so that she can turn it into a painting. Aya is very visual so she starts out with the picture not the other way around. Contradiction catches her eyes and she likes to expose it to people and make them think about it.

"I collect data that I don't know where or when I'm going to use, but the images just arrest me. I watch, capture and attempt to discover what lies behind those images," explains El-Fallah and goes on saying, "I sit on my desk and look from the window at the people queuing to buy bread. I use the photos for my painting but sometimes I get the feeling I'm intruding on their privacy. I get great results with the camera but I wouldn't dare put



Beep Beep, 2012, charcoal acrylic on canvas, 120x90cm. Courtesy of the artist.

my photos on display, especially the portraits! I only photograph people that I closely know so I wouldn't dare expose them in an exhibition". In 2012, El-Fallah had quite a remarkable experience when she participated in the Festival of Tourism ITB in Berlin. It was an event involving 10 artists of different ages; a 12 day workshop where each participant got to carry out his own project. "It was the first time I work in 3D and I have to say it wasn't so easy. Since tourism was the focus I decided to work on ankh (the ancient Egyptian key of life). I worked on quotes from the autobiography of Egyptian thinker, Dr. Galal Amin, where he tells the story of a polish film that he had watched." The story goes on as follows; two people, carrying a wardrobe with mirrors, come out of the sea and move around in a small town.

With the burden of the wardrobe, people rejected them. "The wardrobe is all our cultural and personal legacy that we carry around, while the mirror is the reflection of the others and what they say about us," says El-Fallah who believes that at the end her project turned out to be very personal. "I used the text to move the spectators' eyes over the sculpture. Here the text was meant to be read but in other works not necessarily." The works were displayed in the street during the Festival then moved to be housed in an art establishment in Berlin. Aya tried it with different media; photography, video and installation and might try it with sculpture but she shows what she feels most confident about. She also uses a variety of pigments and sometimes mixes more than three types in one work. She was brought up in her aunt's home. Her older cousin who was an architect helped her get acquainted with drawing and with the material at an early age. "I was a kid but I already knew what a sketch table is. I used to assist my cousin and her colleagues in drawing and inking their projects," El-Fallah says with a smile. "I like to start working then put my work aside for some time and get back to it later. The immediate feeling after having exerting mental and physical effort is always biased so when I wait and forget totally about the work, I do handle it more objectively when I get back to it. I get better results this way," El-Fallah says. Yet Aya is still trying and experimenting; she hasn't yet found her life time project. And for that particular reason she doesn't want to be hooked to a famous gallery or else at this stage she can be easily conditioned by the market rather than being on top of it. Aya started exhibiting in 2007, when she was still a university student. She took part in a number of group exhibitions all over Egypt. She got another chance to explore the European art scene and get some international exposure; in 2013 she took part in the The first collective Egyptian exhibition held on the sideline of the Biennale, Venice, Italy. "I guess now the opportunity for spreading awareness about arts is much better many people want to learn about art and learn to draw without thinking what they want to do with it. I'm happy even conceptual art finds room now in Egypt," says El-Fallah.