

# THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

## Trad makes masterworks his own



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BEIRUT: Who would think of linking aspirin, cans of Coca Cola, an old typewriter and several Beatles albums with Michelangelo's "Creation of Adam"? Those with rarefied preferences might regard such a combination as the embodiment of bad taste, yet this is precisely what Lebanese artist Emilio Trad has done in his "Le Monde a Vendre" (The World for Sale).

This mixed-media work is among the 17 works now on show in "Hommage aux Grands Maitres de la Peinture" (Homage to the Great Masters of Painting), Trad's solo exhibition at Aida Cherfan Gallery.

These oils and mixed-media canvases represent Trad's unique tribute to old masters such as Leonardo da Vinci, Johannes Vermeer, Jan van Eyck, Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, Georges de La Tour and Louise Elisabeth Vigee-Lebru. Innocents might hope Trad's show comprises outstanding reproductions of these works. Contemporary art aficionados might hope for a mutually reinforcing synthesis of old

and new.

Upon entering Aida Cherfan, such refined expectations collide abruptly against the actual works on show.

In his essay in the exhibition catalogue, Trad notes how art travels through time without aging. “Revolution in painting will happen within the traditions,” he writes, “and not outside of it.” He seeks to affect this revolution by referencing some iconic works of the Western canon in his own work.

Trad’s technique is assured – his talent as a copyist cannot be questioned, and each of the classic pieces he reproduces is skillfully rendered. Yet the somber-hued world he represents is a gloomy, disturbing one peopled by disarticulated dolls, birds of prey and blankly staring versions of himself.

Trad represents himself in each of these paintings but – far from naturalistic or self-flattering depictions – the leveled gaze in these self-portraits have a bizarre, bone-penetrating, goose bump-provoking quality about them.

In his representation of van Eyck’s “Les Epoux” (The Arnolfini Portrait), a couple sitting on a red couch are rendered as variations on a theme of the artist himself, so that they look more like fraternal twins than husband and wife.

It’s a confusing vista. What contemporary gesture is he juxtaposing with the van Eyck – a naughty wink at cousin marriage, or at transgenders?

In “La Perle,” Trad revisits Vermeer’s “Girl with a Pearl Earring,” with the artist’s self-representation staring unrelentingly at the viewer while holding his reproduction of the original. Through the window behind him – devised from paints and newspapers – is a vista of European city, which itself could be a reproduction of a great work from the European canon.

The girl’s yellow headdress recalls the hues of Trad’s shirt, and there is something peculiar about the figures’ expressions, as if the onlooker has interrupted an embarrassing indiscretion.

A touch of humor can be deciphered from several of these works. A parallelism between Trad’s representation of Canaletto’s Venice painting and one of René Magritte’s paintings can be found in the Lebanese artist’s “Ceci n’est pas un Canaletto.”

Belgian surrealist artist Magritte, who was famous for his wit, had one of that same kind named “Ceci n’est pas une Pipe” (The Treachery of Images). Trad wants to trigger that same humor and provoke impressions through his representation of Canaletto.

It is hard to say whether this is the effect it has on onlookers or not. It surely suggests something.

“Hommage aux Grands Maitres de la Peinture” is on show at Downtown’s Aida Cherfan Fine Art Gallery until Nov. 29. For more information, please call 01-983-111.

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