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THE REDEEMING POWER OF GUIRGUIS LOTFY'S ART

Guirguis Lotfy's latest art exhibition, *Renée*, pays tribute to his life companion, his kryptonite, and his muse through whom he has come to see the beauty in Egypt's decaying society.



NIVEEN GHONEIM

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Guirguis Lotfy sees the good in the world even when there is none. Amid all the moral decay and the cultural degeneration, his eyes have the extraordinary ability of beautifying and enhancing everything and everyone they gaze upon, and therein lies his talent.

"I've always loved art, ever since I was a child," Lotfy reminisces. He was geared towards a career in arts as far back as he can remember, and with a Bachelor's degree from Alexandria University's Fine Arts School, a BFA and PhD, and friends like groundbreaking Egyptian artists Hamed Nada and Hamed Owais, the sky really was the limit for this visionary. "I dabbled in academicism, impressionism, and experimentalism until I found my own place - my own voice - and developed my own style," he recounts. "In time I turned to my personal style, got inspired by the life I lead and the people around me. That is why my paintings all have people in them, because I live among them so I paint them. You will see our folklore and our holidays and celebrations, and everything that pertains to Egypt in general."

His 40th and most recent exhibition, *Renée*, is inspired by his wife, his kryptonite, and muse through whom he has come to see the world and, more precisely, Egypt. His art arsenal comprises egg yolk, beeswax, and gold leaves, as the artist adopts the ancient technique of tempera painting in his work. "It is an old technique that has been around for over 2000 years; I earned my doctorate in tempera, used it in my work, researched it, and now it's developed," Lotfy says.



You don't have to be an art cognoscente to see that Guirguis Lotfy's body of work has always revolved around Egyptian life. His paintings have this Egyptian quality to them; they are loud, animated, and visceral - three adjectives that truly capture the Egyptian character. "My art is purely Egyptian - it comes from Egyptian society. I am inspired by our streets, my neighbourhood in Alexandria," he romances.

To understand what the world looks like from his vantage point, look no further than your street; look closely at the people, watch their moves, and try to fathom this prodigious and overwhelming human experience - this reality - dissected into a million tiny pieces. Looking at his art with an Absolut vodka cranberry and a cigarette in hand at ArtTalks Gallery in Zamalek, each piece looks absurd on its own; but, once you put them together, they fit perfectly and form this mosaic that is Egyptian life: saintly yet sinful, mystical yet hedonistic, the perfect balance between the grotesque and the magnificent.

If you were to ask him how he does it, how he can paint an abundantly beautiful picture of the mundane, he would simply suggest you look out of the window then roll his eyes at you if the idea is lost on you. "I depict Egyptian society the way it is - I would look out of the window and see people throwing wedding parties in the streets in my working-class neighbourhood because it is all they can afford, or a watermelon vendor who came all the way from Upper Egypt to sell his produce," he explains.

As you can probably tell by his art, his influences are deeply rooted in *Om el Donia's* rich art history. "I don't have a favourite painter or artist, there are many. Mahmoud Said, Mohamed Nagy, and others have had a great influence on me, but Margaret Nakhla has probably had the biggest," he says.

Another major force that shaped his work is Coptic art. You can see it in the details and the icon-like paintings where each individual is depicted as if they were taken out of an icon themselves, revered and loved. In this branch of Egyptian art, human subjects are depicted such that their virtue shines through their faces, hence the aura of light surrounding the faces. They are both miserable yet content, because amid all the despair, they see hope and find contentment in their few possessions and pleasures.



They say that beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, but it takes a lot more than a beauty-seeking eye to see what Guirguis Lotfy sees in us. His art and his work almost redeem us of all our vices and look right into our souls to portray for who we are as human beings rather than what we do, or in many cases, what we are made to do. From a humble abode in Alexandria, Lotfy can spend hours looking out of the window with searching eyes until he finds this one little story to tell on his canvas. His talent is not just aesthetic; his true ability is love.

Shoot by @MO4Network's #MO4Productions.
Photography by Ahmed Najeeb.

You can take a look at all the shots from Lotfy's exhibition at ArtTalks Gallery on [CairoZoom here](#).

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