

Huda Lutfi, "Stripping off the Garments". Photo: Courtesy The Townhouse Gallery.

10



CAIRO.- In Making a Man out of Him, Cairo-based artist Huda Lutfi explores gender politics and identity through the prism of the male. For her first solo exhibition in Egypt in several years, Lutfi returns to the repositories of her city, excavating Cairo for found objects, ready-mades, sculptures, and a multitude of photographic resources that offer vignettes to explore the diverse cultural representations and performances of the male body. In this new and diverse body of work, Lutfi makes a departure from the feminine, choosing instead to examine the cultural and gender implications underlying the dissemination of global notions of male hegemony. In her sculptural wall piece, Imagined in America, Made in China, Marketed in Egypt, Lutfi employs the repeated image of Batman to demonstrate how idealized masculine icons, widely present in the mass media and children's toys, serve to condition and discipline the male body. She takes it further with her humorous, even satirical, critique of masculine stereotypes, by contrasting idealized depictions of masculinity with non-hegemonic and hyper realistic representations of the male figure. She combines muscular action figures of super heroes and perfected mannequin busts with images of ordinary men shot on the streets of Cairo or appropriated from the internet. Lutfi juxtaposes cultural icons of Batman, Elvis Presley and Obama with images of grocers, policemen, sweepers, workers and builders, highlighting the non-glamorous, but often elided forms of everyday masculinity. In her sculptural piece, The Obelisque, Lutfi references the ancient Egyptian architectural structure, which she manipulates to symbolize the male sexual organ. Covering this phallic structure with a mixture of textual narratives from Egyptian writers, films and real life conversations, Lutfi demonstrates that representations of the phallus can only be apprehended through such depictions, and narratives which condition phallic symbolism as a stand in for a masculinity that vacillates between expressions of dominance and vulnerability. In Making a Man out of Him, masculinity is presented as a continuous and changing performance of power versus vulnerability. The work is multi-layered, playing, as Lutfi is known to do, with an array of collected objects and images from around the city, which meticulously give new meaning through carefully constructed compositions. In a work that introduces new technique and conceptual departures, Lutfi cleverly underpins socio-cultural forces defining masculine identity and exposes notions of restriction previously explored in her works on the feminine body.

Stripping off the Garments - installation

As a coda to her show, Lutfi invites us to a self-examining and contemplative experience via Stripping off the Garments, asking the question: who are we when we strip off our socio-cultural conditioning and identifications? Through a metamorphosis of en vogue Gaultier perfume bottles collected from Al-'Ataba area in Cairo and assembled en masse in a dark room, Lutfi creates pure forms of being that incite us to question the socio-cultural baggage from which we derive definition of ourselves and the world around us. Liberated from such conditioning influences defining our identity, a possibility of recognizing our essential nature may arise.

As we concede a new meaning given to these commodified bottles, we come to realize that meanings in language are assigned rather than intrinsic to objects. Inspired by the symbolism of light as the pure essence of being, Lutfi creates a serene aesthetic and spiritual experience that spurs us to strive for this moment of intuitive clarity to become light in the metaphorical and literal sense of the word.

As a continuation of her work in the 2003 installation Circle of Remembrance at the Found in Cairo exhibit, Lutfi delves once again into the spiritual side seeking to remind us of this wholesome and pure state of being

Huda Lutfi is an Egyptian visual artist and cultural historian, who lives and works in Cairo. She received her Ph.D. in Arab Muslim Cultural History in 1983 from McGill University, Montreal, and has been a practicing artist since the nineties. Lutfi works with mixed media, recycled and found objects, and adopts an archeological approach excavating the city of Cairo for materials for her work. Her work has received high recognition in the local and international art scenes. She received the second prize at the 1997 Biennial for Women Artists of the Mediterranean, Marseille and Arles. Recent solo exhibitions include Zan'it al-Sittat (2008) at The Third Line gallery, Dubai; 'Arayis (2006) at the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo; Calligraphic Abstractions (2004) at La Bodega-Karim Francis Gallery, Cairo; and Found in Cairo (2003) at the Townhouse Gallery, Cairo. Selected international group shows include Icons Reloaded (2009) at Elysee Arts Gallery, Liege; Umm Kulthum (2008) at the Arab World Institute, Paris; Contemporary Egyptian Art (2007) at the Museum of Modern Art, Bonn; and Contact Zone (2007) at the National Museum of Bamako, Mali.

The exhibition runs through March 17 at the [Townhouse Gallery](#)

Townhouse Gallery | Huda Lutfi | In Making a Man out of Him |

You May Like

Sponsored Links by Taboola

Simple, Cool Tracking Device - Selling Like Hotcakes