



Artist Nabil Nahas. Courtesy Ben Brown Fine Arts

Nabil Nahas shows his paintings in London

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We saw your paintings in a solo show in Lawrie Shabibi (Fractals) in November and some of your older work at Art Dubai in March. How do they relate to your new exhibition Phoenix Dactylifera?

The paintings at Lawrie Shabibi were first seen in 1996 and were quite a departure from the more traditional works I had showed previously. The paintings at Art Dubai were part of my first three shows from 1977 to 1979. At that time I was quite interested in merging Islamic geometry and the geometry of stress-bearing structures used in architecture.

The paintings at Ben Brown seem, at first glance, not to have much in common with either body of work. They came about after I returned to Lebanon in 1993, after an 18-year absence, and was taken with the landscapes of my childhood.

When did you start this series?

One day in 2006, in my New York studio, I found myself painting palm trees

in parallel to the fractal works I was doing. I painted them using the palette knife as I had done before and scratched the drawing, showing their multilayered surfaces like one would peel layers of memory.

You are committed to the medium of paint, which is unusual in the world of contemporary art, which these days often relies on concept. Have you ever wanted to adapt your paintings accordingly?

The art world is vast and multifaceted, fads come and go and it is evident that, in the past few years, curators have placed an emphasis on conceptual art, video art and installations over painting. However, it seems to me that the tide is turning and painting is coming back in favour. But no, I never wanted to adapt my paintings accordingly. I was never interested in socio-political statements, in appropriation or consumerism, I am much more interested in the "larger picture", the ticking of the universe, and no matter how much I turn it and twist it, painting will be my choice of expression.

The new show contains paintings of trees that come from your Lebanese heritage and your childhood, which was partly spent in Egypt. How important is your nationality in terms of viewing your work?

As I've often mentioned, I think it is a privilege to be born Lebanese, we are the multicultural people par excellence and that is no small feat. So, for me, being Lebanese equates with being a man of the world at large.

There is no question that there is an emotional facet to the paintings I am showing in London that is quite different from the rigorous mental approach to my fractal paintings.

Absence makes the heart grow fonder and it also makes the eye grow keener, so certainly these landscapes of my childhood have a particular resonance to me.

Do you consciously try to retain your identity as a Lebanese artist?

A good painting has no nationality, but I do want these paintings to be a testament to the Middle Eastern basin where they originated from, especially Egypt and Lebanon.

Do you still feel pressure about the way the art will be received?

I don't want to sound arrogant, but I have never paid attention to what people might think and always did my own thing. I try to be true to myself first, the rest will follow.

• Nabil Nahas: Phoenix Dactylifera runs until November 14 at Ben Brown Fine Arts in London. For more information, visit www.benbrownfinearts.com

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