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An homage to a nearby homeland



Summary

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Inspired by his frequent



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BEIRUT: Agial Art Gallery's latest exhibition, "Mother Earth," spotlights Syrian artist Anas Albraehe's recent series, revolving around representations of rural workers in their everyday lives, both in moments of leisure and when hard at work.

Inspired by his frequent trips to his birthplace, the village of Swaida in Syria, Albraehe documented his findings on canvas, detailing the efforts of the local women in replanting the fields after the Syrian war withdrew from the region, leaving much of the land scorched.

"I wanted to focus on women working in agriculture because they represent Mother Earth," Albraehe told The Daily Star. "Before the idea of a male god, the first civilizations worshiped female deities as the source of life, the land, motherhood and fertility so I connected the physical land to the women who work it, as a tribute to all women who haven't always been given their rights."

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...ation, because when women lead revolutions they tend to be more logical," he added.

"The show also looks at how our societies have been in deterioration, favoring concrete over nature and neglecting our relationship with the land we live off."

Gathering about 25 oil paintings and smaller sketches, the pieces are colorful with earth undertones and textured brushstrokes. Block rights reserved. Powered by DS.

"The women in Swaida were dressed in these traditional, embroidered and colorful dresses, which I connected to the colors of the land too," he said. "Some paintings even show naked women wearing nature and trees as their clothes, showing how connected they are."

The show also explores the older traditions and superstitions carried out in the village, incorporated from remnants of the area's Mesopotamian history - particularly with the imagery of the goddess Ishtar, who later came to be known as Umm al-Ghaith.

"This painting is about Umm al-Ghaith, a folktale which people have almost forgotten now," he said of one painting. "When there was a drought or a lack of rain, people used to go outside with wooden dolls and banners, like a little carnival, singing a song asking Umm al-Ghaith to bless them with rain.

"They would knock on all the neighbors' doors and collect offerings, anything people didn't have a use for anymore," he added. "I wondered why Umm al-Ghaith is invoked for such a thing and not god. Water, another source of life, is given by a female representation."

Smaller sketches, done in oil pastel or charcoal on cardboard, include a tribute to French artist Jean-Francois Millet, who was also fascinated by people tilling fields and harvesting crop.

"Mother Earth" is up at Agial Art Gallery, off Hamra, until Feb. 22.

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Daily Star on January 23, 2020, on page 8.

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