

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Two styles crafted from the elements

By Sophia Tillie

BEIRUT: A solitary loofah dress falls suspended in the center of the room. Surrounding this ghost-like figure are a combination of installations made from organic material while mixed-media paintings line the walls.

The atmosphere is otherworldly, almost mythological. Driftwood covered in bold paints and black ink form strange shapes while bull-horns rise and dissolve into salt stones.

“Scripted on Water” is Afaf Zurayk and Cornelia Krafft’s joint exploration of our oneness with nature. “Time, for us, is scripted on water,” they say in their introductory material. “The sea calls us. We commit to its undulating expanse and imagine.”

Born in Munich in 1972, Cornelia Krafft, holds a Masters degree in Fine Arts from the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Austria. She developed her oeuvre in various media – painting, installation, photography and performance art – which she’s shown in several international group and solo exhibitions.

She has taught at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna and at AUB since 2009. Krafft’s work tends to represent literary themes through spatial transformations and her performances are generally mute, staged in natural or deserted urban spaces. The work focuses on the female struggle in society throughout history, especially in ancient myths.

In this most recent composition of paintings and installation, Krafft draws inspiration from the original myth of the Phoenician princess Europa, sister of Phoenix. Zeus, adopting the shape of a bull, abducted Europa from these shores to Crete. For Krafft, “revisiting the timeless dynamics of the relations between orient and occident allowed for the unfolding of our common humanity.”

A series of photos introduce Krafft’s work. A fair-haired woman walks barefoot through rocks and over sand in the loofah dress. “A loofah-dress,” Krafft states, “serves as texture for the inner psychological and mental structure as ‘externalized skin.’” The final photo shows human toes disappearing under water, while a pair of horns rise from the sea.

In a corner, a pair of black cornets form “Golden Joint,” inverted together into a passive curve, the hollow interiors glint delicate gold leaf. Her work insinuates sexuality.

In the mixed-media on canvas work “Sea Scream,” a pair of horns rises out of a wave of five shrieking faces. The Bulls face seems to morph into the open mouth of one of its victims. Yet its soft blue hues muffle it into dreamlike tranquility and serenity is brought to the image by the

horizontal line of the Golden rule.

With titles such as “Infected” and “The Sea Leaks” and with the juxtaposition of bold shapes and thin-lined silhouettes of isolated individuals bent over yet pulled back by tight strings, a tension is created between aggressive and passive forces that disturb the soft, organic textures.

Symbols of bull-horns and hoofs impressed into canvas suggest a haunting tale of the interaction between masculine and feminine forces, strength and vulnerability, that ebb and flow into and out of each other. The materials used for these themes – salt, henna, wax, sand and horn – “relate to the presence of their history still with us today,” Krafft explains. “This approach refers to Gaston Bachelard’s idea of cultural evolution as the reinterpretation of myths.”

Born in Beirut, Afaf Zurayk graduated with distinction from AUB in 1970 with a BA in Fine Arts. She then obtained a Masters degree in Fine Arts from Harvard in 1972. Her first international individual exhibition was in 1987 at the Addison/Ripley Gallery in Washington, DC and she’s has three solo exhibitions at The Foundry Gallery.

In Lebanon, she’s held solo shows at the Goethe Institute (1980) and Theatre de Beyrouth (1994) and Galerie Janine Rubeiz organized three more solo exhibitions – “Persona” (1997), “Conversations” (2001) and “Painting 2000-2007” (2008).

Since 1991, she has participated in a score of international collective exhibitions in DC, while in Lebanon she took part in Janine Rubeiz’s “Pinceaux pour Plumes” show at Musee Sursock.

In this current exhibition Zurayk combines a series of black ink-on-paper works with instillations made from acrylic and black ink on driftwood.

By painting over the texture of driftwood in bold acrylic and black ink, Zurayk transforms the driftwood into bio-morphic shapes. She emulates the cycle of the regeneration of life and animates the inanimate by evoking the presence of beings with such titles such as “Dragon,” “Amphibian 2,” “Crucifixion” and “Mediterranean Rock.”

In some cases, these shapes and titles are analogues of familiar animals, real and mythical. In others, fragments of landscape seem to appear. Together they form a multi-part entity yet separately each stands alone.

“To me,” Zurayk states, “the journey of the wood from earth to water to earth again in a transformed state is not unlike that of our consciousness as we realize the interdependence of each creature in nature.”

Through her series of seven sequences, “Love me as you would a tree I-VII,” Zurayk employs her signature sensuous thin-line drawings, but this time uses black ink on paper. She transforms the texture of wood and trees into ink onto paper. In so doing, her images seem to often take the shape of nudes in a delicate abstraction of determined continuity.

“The finished pieces reveal themselves slowly, in layers of understanding,” she explains. Scripted on water is beautiful exploration into the interplay of the forces that write our psyche as they do the textures of nature.

“Scripted on Water” will be showing at Galerie Janine Rubeiz until Jan. 31. For more information ring 01-868-290 or see <http://www.galeriejaninerubeiz.com>.

Copyrights 2011, The Daily Star - All Rights Reserved

26/01/2012