

# SEANKELLY

Seaman, Anna. "What we loved at Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi, Isabelle van den Eynde, Green Art and Grey Noise," *The National*, March 26, 2013.

## TheNational



## What we loved at Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi, Isabelle van den Eynde, Green Art and Grey Noise

Anna Seaman  
Mar 26, 2013

Its name is beautiful and its concept, wrapped in Sufism, is romantic. The piece *Al Warqaa*, named for the ancient Arabic word for dove, symbolises the soul on its flight to a higher plane. But strung from the ceiling of Lawrie Shabibi Gallery in Alserkal Avenue, *Al Warqaa* is trapped. The bird is tied to a rock and, with creaking, screeching sounds, is trying to escape. What's more, this bird is no beauty; it is a jagged skeletal sculpture that resembles its prehistoric ancestors.

"It is the soul of the soul," says Adel Abidin, the artist. "I went through Sufism and the teachings of Ibn Sina to present a metaphysical piece. The dove usually represents the soul so I made the dove's skeleton and used it to explore the idea of discrimination."

Abidin's *Al Warqaa* takes centre stage in his solo show *Symposium*, which was unveiled last week during the quarterly Art Night, when galleries simultaneously reveal new exhibitions. Lawrie Shabibi was among those showcasing their best works to coincide with Art Week, an initiative that encompasses the Sikka Art Fair, Design Days Dubai and Art Dubai.

Asmaa Shabibi, the co-owner of Lawrie Shabibi in Al Quoz, is full of passion for the show. "It is clever,

poignant and works on so many levels," she says. "Plus it is well timed because it is the 10th anniversary of the Iraq invasion this month."

This is the undercurrent of Abidin's spiritual exploration. Alongside the bird installation, which was commissioned by the Barjeel Art Foundation in Sharjah, is a video showing a massacre of clay figures who all die with a dove strung from their mouths. There is a morgue where the clay figures are boxed and an LED screen densely filled with flickering images representing white noise or dead TV. All were produced in response to the 90 Iraqi students who were stoned to death by religious extremists in Baghdad for having "emo" appearances.

"I am totally against discrimination in all its forms," says Abidin, an Iraqi who lives in Helsinki, Finland. "Nobody has the right to judge for any reason. I used the issue that happened in Baghdad and took it as far as I could to speak a universal language. I think everyone discriminates, even animals, and, according to religion, we are even discriminated against when we die. That's why I made the soul of the soul, to explore that idea."

Abidin, who is charming, funny and genuinely perplexed by violence, usually produces sarcastic and humorous work. So Symposium is a departure of sorts. Unlike his installation at the Maraya Art Centre in Sharjah - a large machine called Blueprint that satirises the manufactured nature of Arab identity in the post-Arab Spring era - this is a carefully considered piece and one that every visitor to Alserkal in the next month should experience.

*Adel Abidin's Symphony is at Lawrie Shabibi Gallery until April 18*

### **Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde**

The layers of painted Arabic script stamped onto the wall of Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde in a radial pattern are, in many ways, a revealing representation of Idris Khan's inner life. A veritable celebrity in the art world - represented by Victoria Miro in London, Sean Kelly in New York and Yvon Lambert in Paris - Khan shows a new series, *Beginning at the End*, for the first time in Dubai.

Although illegible, the words are translated poems Khan wrote after reading Sufi texts from Imam Al Ghazali and Ibn Sina. In an expression of his journey of self-discovery, Khan presents a series of black-on-black ink drawings where even the act of seeing the text symbolises the mystical elements of the search for identity. The large wall painting is an explosion, a revelation and the result of the inner journey.

"The show is called *Beginning at the End* because in some way you want an artwork to give you a start. It doesn't matter where you go or where you end up, there is a visual experience first."

In the vast and lofty warehouse, somehow muted from the outside world by the silent yet powerful show, there is a certain elevating experience. We recommend visiting on a weekday or when the area is quiet because, despite its popularity, if you can get a moment alone with the show, you might get a moment alone with your soul.

*Beginning at the End is at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde until April 21*

### **Green Art Gallery**

Ever since he took part in the Art Statements section at Art 43 Basel, Shadi Habib Allah's career has taken an upwards trajectory. Represented by Green Art Gallery at what is arguably the most prestigious art fair in the world, Habib Allah presented *S/N: 8F1GNA0021*, a multimedia installation that tracked the journey of a stolen camera that gained a new identity on the black market.

This month, the gallery is home to the slightly more digestible *Evacuated Containers*, a conceptual take on how we place meaning in objects.

The idea was born after Habib Allah, a Palestinian, was detained and questioned in Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv for carrying a prosthetic leg that was part of a sculpture. The leg was destroyed in an adjacent room. After the incident, the artist decided to commission a sketch artist from the New York Police Department to recreate the room in three large pencil drawings, exploring the idea of memory by using other people's reports to construct a space he had never seen.

"My idea was not about trying to get back at power. That is too direct and too boring," Habib Allah says. "I digested the material to question where meaning gets constructed."

In the vacuous drawings, his highly conceptual work takes form. The investigation rooms are deliberately empty and colourless so viewers can insert their own thoughts.

On the wall, a video of two helium balloons presents the idea in another format. "I was thinking about how, in conversations, we navigate not by saying what is in our minds but by trying to understand what the other [person] is thinking, so it is a kind of play," he says. "The balloons for me show a similar thing; they are playing with each other."

To see the play in all its acts, you have to step behind the curtain at the gallery and enter Habib Allah's world.

*Shadi Habib Allah's Evacuated Containers is at Green Art Gallery until May 5*

### **Grey Noise Gallery**

Entering Grey Noise Gallery this month may elicit an almost audible sigh of relief. The small flame and cooking pot, the large photograph of a burning Persian rug in the Australian outback and the elements of wood, leaf and mud bring viewers back down to earth with a resounding and comforting thud. "It is real because objects are real," says the softly spoken Hossein Valamanesh. "I play with the rhythms of nature rather than any concepts. I love simplicity and found objects."

The Iranian-born Valamanesh has been living and working in Australia for the past 40 years and has established himself as one of the most important contemporary voices in the southern hemisphere. This is his first survey exhibition in the Middle East and spans a portfolio of work from 1992 until now.

On the wall is a poem by Rumi in his native Farsi and a branded paper bearing the word *eshq* (love). In the central space, a collection of prayer mats found in Lahore is lined with mirrors and sprinkled with dirt. A video work of the artist's hands, signifying time passing, is nestled in a corner. The show has rhythm and physicality, and it easily communicates both his Australian and Iranian sympathies.

"I do think but I am not intellectual. For me, getting further to the depths of my feeling about life is to simplify it. Sometimes just beauty is enough."

Some of Valamanesh's most moving work is with maps. Grey Noise is showing *Night Traveler*, a suitcase filled with black clothing, shoes, an oil burner and a map that shows the night sky.

"Of course I want to engage the viewer but I don't want to tell people what to think. Who am I to do that?"

Now in his mid 60s and with four decades of artistic practice behind him, Valamanesh may be in the perfect place to do just that, but he lets his work speak for itself.

*Hossein Valamanesh's Selected Works 1992-2013 is at Grey Noise until April 30*

[aseaman@thenationl.ae](mailto:aseaman@thenationl.ae)