Discovering Art and Khalid Kodi at Centerpoint Gallery

BY RISHI SIDHU

“To offer new visual possibilities for people to look at,” said the Boston-based Sudanese-American artist Khalid Kodi about the purpose of his artwork. “That is why we go to the museum to discover.”

Finding new possibilities is certainly what you will do at Kodi’s exhibit, *Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony,* at Centerpoint Gallery, a multiuse exhibition space connected to the Rudolf Steiner Bookstore and the Anthroposophy NYC at 135 W. 15th St.

A series of paintings, “From the Book of Triptych,” contain abstract patterns and enigmatic images fitted into a deep, thick, brilliant red that demands the viewer’s attention. Some paintings in the series feature human figures that look like characters in the middle of a story—one dramatic example is a woman standing under an arch armed with a knife, as if preparing to assassinate somebody. These paintings more explicitly convey Kodi’s goal for the series, namely, to explore the relationship that communities have with their traditional texts and books.

In one oblong piece in the “Triptych” series, however, Kodi exhibits a style that more closely resembles the larger pieces found in the main gallery space of the exhibit. In it, silhouetted humans colored in brown earth tones suggest feelings, thoughts and ideas but do not explicitly show the viewer how they feel.

Using silhouettes to keep art suggestive may seem like a simply creative approach but, according to curator and fellow Sudanese American Azza Satti, it is based on the real life topography of Sudan.

“Sudan is a flat land in the North,” said Satti, “so [people] always seem [like] silhouettes in the distance.”

Silhouettes play a prominent role in all of Kodi’s work, but their use is perhaps most striking and profound in the largest work on display. In “Waves of Refugees,” a 10-foot piece stretching across half of a wall in the main gallery, innumerable forms of human beings would otherwise blend into a desert background of yellow ochre if it weren’t for their colorfully painted clothing.

“Waves of Refugees” uses a political event to investigate the human condition. However, while much of what an average Westerner may know about Sudan is political, most of Kodi’s work on display does not play into the common images of war and refugees that are all too often found in images of the Sudan and, for that matter, Africa.

What Kodi does in his art is try to represent the fundamental, most basic elements of the human experience by painting people in their natural forms.

In “Narrative by the River,” the human figures are active, dancing or embracing while surrounded by nature or even groups of people. They are often kissing, in a clear celebration of their sexual desire.

The silhouetted depictions of their embraces and kissing are oblique and sensual, not voyeuristic, making their sexuality subtle and presenting sexuality as the profound connection that it is, one that can be filled with lust but also with love and affection.

Taking art from the personal to the political is part of how Kodi operates, both in his art and in his activities.

Half of all proceeds from the sale of the works on exhibit will go to the Darfur Rehabilitation Project, an advocacy group based in New Jersey working for peace and rehabilitation in Darfur.

Visitors to the gallery are also encouraged to donate, with proceeds going to the aforementioned group as well as the Darfur Resettlement Project, a separate initiative working to resettle 25 refugees from Darfur in the United States, according to Joyce Reilly, co-president of the council of the Anthroposophy Society in New York.

On the whole, *Metaphor* does a good job of providing a sample of Kodi’s work, both the abstract and the representational and figurative. The only complaint is with the gallery space: the light pink and green walls do not provide a contrast for the art on display, and in general they do not work for a gallery. But the space is large, and there is plenty of room for perusing Kodi’s work.

As Kodi, an adjunct professor at both Boston College and the Massachusetts College of Art, said, “The role of the artist [is] to challenge the viewer’s consciousness and their relationship to the world.” A lofty goal, but the art on display at Centerpoint Gallery certainly gives reason to start stretching the imagination.

*Metaphor, Metonymy, Synecdoche and Irony*

Through Nov. 12, Centerpoint Gallery, 135 W. 15th St., viewing by appointment; 212-744-0257 or www.asnyc.org.