

BEIRUT

Rafik Majzoub's moving interior landscapes

The raw, sarcastic and tense paintings of Rafik Majzoub were recently exhibited at Art on 56th in Beirut

by India Stoughton



FAR LEFT: *Mirror*, acrylic and pastel on canvas, 145 x 145cm, 2014

LEFT: *Umbrella above the rain*, acrylic and pastel on canvas, 140 x 140cm, 2014. Photos courtesy of Art on 56th

BELOW: *My lungs are fine*, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 200cm, 2003

True to form, Majzoub exhibited a series of harrowing self-portraits, which cast light on his inner turmoil. His angular features were reflected back at the viewer from all sides, picked out in vicious strokes of pastel or smeary acrylic paint, over which the artist had thrown water, causing his image to melt and deform.

Majzoub's paintings are not portraits as much as they are interior landscapes, conveying the artist's pain and self-loathing. Disturbing to look at, they are also powerful and deeply moving, displaying a rare willingness to lay bare the most private emotions and experiences. A talented autodidact, Majzoub has been creating figurative portraits for three decades, and his work retains its rawness and energy as it matures. It's to be hoped that we won't have to wait another half decade to see more. ♦

In 'Rafik Majzoub: Memoirs of a Screw', the Beirut-based artist recalls his childhood in Amman. His parents led a whirlwind social life, he says, and as a child he would hide under the table when they threw parties. Often, he recognised the figures dancing in his house from seeing them on the television. Later, it was he himself that danced and partied among the bohemian crowd of artists living amid the carnage of post-war Beirut.

A frank interview with Majzoub, who has been based in Beirut since 1991, soon after the end of the Civil War, forms the backbone to the five-part documentary by Australian-Egyptian filmmaker Ann Megalla. The film, which throws light on the struggles the artist has faced ever since his isolated teenage years, was recently screened at Art on 56th, where Majzoub held his first solo show in Beirut after a hiatus of five years. Entitled 'Rain on me', it paired a series of paintings completed last year with older works that shared the same thematic approach.

