

**One of Majzoub's paintings being displayed in Beirut**

**Brush strokes and bruises: the art of Rafik Majzoub**

By: [Ali Jazo](http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/author/5f1e3c50-fadc-40e5-97f2-aaa95eba4ed9)Date of publication 29 January, 2015

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***Jordanian artist expresses the pain and trails of life through his self-portraits, which are on display in Beirut until 31 January.***

The faces in Jordanian artist Rafik Majzoub's self-portraits emerge from smudges and brush strokes. The mirror which guides him is not his eye, but his hand – often a far more perceptive type of mirror. *Mirror*is the title of one self-portrait in Majzoub's exhibition *Rain on Me*showing at the Art on 56thgallery, Beirut, until 31 January.

It is through his unique style that Majzoub transforms his portraits into his own blurred reflection. He uses constant repetition, daubs and smears of paint and unpredictable, chopping and changing brushstrokes. While this mirror may be revealing, it does not offer the shiny, pure kind of lucidity which is forged only from the simplicity of innocence or bright hopes for the future.

Majzoub's mirror is pierced and scarred, but there are also times when the muddled and affectionate world of childhood is almost tangible: a reflection as crude as it is refined.

The world we glimpse in Majzoub's portraits is complex, carved out of the accidents of fate, and struggling against suppression, love of the game and the power of conjecture. The lines weaving the artist's emotion are blurred and vague, rather than clearly defined, because depicting a pure likeness in his portraits never was Majzoub's aim. How could he, when there is no model to imitate?

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|      | http://www.alaraby.co.uk/Content/english/images/englishcaption.jpg | **The lines weaving the artist's emotion are blurred and vague, rather than clearly defined.**http://www.alaraby.co.uk/Content/english/images/tweetqouto.png |

Moreover, Majzoub's portraits are a blazing, uninhibited expression of a life full of twists and knots. The brushstrokes which trace his story contort and break from all angles, igniting his passionate revelation, before extinguishing it. Meanwhile, the faces themselves summon distant shapes and illuminate the inner core of the self, dragging it up to the surface of the water, cold and trembling, as though it had been drowning.

Just like the surface of the water, Majzoub's mirror is uneven and distorting: his brushstrokes ripple away, fluidly rising, dropping, merging and repeating themselves. His faces emerge as though from afar, obscured behind a thick sheet of fog and the entangled layers of memory.

Scratched and disfigured, the faces float in the shadows of a harshness which defies the realms of humanity. What were once wounds are now scars, and all time has frozen in a state of darkness. Their eyes do not project the light in the world outside them, but instead bore into the depths of the human soul, crystallising a self-image which no camera flash could ever capture.

In spite of their bold, immediate quality, the faces still seem to silently cry out from their frames, exhausted from an eternity of wandering. Likewise the bent, zigzagging lines which score the faces are the numerous streets which have been traversed in the artist's life – and the scars of things which could not be withstood. Taut memories are manifested in smudges of paint, and the vividness of the bruising is far more poignant than its long-forgotten causes.

With this in mind, Majzoub's repetition in his self-portraits comes to signify a bitter resurgence of memories, creating new layers of scarring from his "wandering" experiences with each different face. The way the artist uses repetition also makes us contemplate the simpler features, for example the phrase "try to be me", which is scrawled repeatedly across the background of one of the portraits. Yet by no means does this repetition instil a heavy quality to the faces, which almost splatter and melt before the eye can mould them into a solid shape.

Majzoub's collection of faces are only inspired whilst being painted, laying no claims to completeness even as they are being completed. In this way, the portraits effectively combine the literal and metaphorical realms, without requiring any secondary symbolic allusions. The stretched and haggard faces of Majzoub's paintbrush, bearing the graffiti of suffering, are as complex as they are tragic: silently wounded, weightlessly rugged, vast as a maze and naked as the water.

***This article is an [edited translation](http://www.alaraby.co.uk/culture/d16179b9-04ee-46cd-8450-d3be093f78a3%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)* *from our Arabic edition.***

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