

# Art on 56th Alaa Abou Shaheen

Alaa Abou Shaheen was born in 1983, and graduated from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus University in 2006. He later worked as a Fine Arts Assistant professor in Aleppo during the years of 2010 and 2011. Alaa has held several solo and collective exhibitions between 2005 and 2018 in his homeland, Beirut, Amman, Bahrain, London, and Paris. His artwork was acquired by YINCHUAN Museum of contemporary art in China. The artist is currently living and practicing sculpting in Paris.

## Artist statement

He cannot find his place in this life.  
Is he disguised by this moustache? Or is it real?  
Does he have a big head, or is it just swollen and bulging?  
Is he a dwarf? Or is he normal?  
Many are the questions about our journey in life.

Alaa Abou Shaheen

## Exhibitions

- 2018 Solo exhibition, Europa Gallery, Paris, France
- 2017 Art Fair Bahrain, Kozah Gallery, Bahrain
- 2017 Summer collective 2017, Art on 56th, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2016 Never been seen Collective exhibition, Art on 56th, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2015 Beirut Art Fair, Biel, Art on 56th, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2015 Collective 2015, Art on 56th, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2015 Art 15 London, "Emerging & Upcoming artist from Lebanon & the MEA" Art on 56th, London UK
- 2014 Summer Collective Exhibition, Art on 56th, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2013 Beirut Art Fair, Mark Hashem Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2012 Beirut Art Fair, Kozah Gallery, Beirut, Lebanon
- 2011 Solo Exhibition, Dar Alanda, Amman, Jordan

## Museums

Alaa Abou Shaheen's artwork has been acquired by YINCHUAN Museum of contemporary art in China.

## Awards

- 2011 Third prize in sculpture, Gallery Kamel, Damascus, Syria
- 2009 First National Youth Sculpture Symposium, Palmyra Festival, Homs, Syria

## Our Animals - Us

It seems as though Alaa Abou Shaheen is reaching out to the depths of sober art, to snatch from the mound a silk thread. A rare thread of irony. The artist often finds himself unable to express what is around him, the severity of cruelty, futility and irrationality. He thus resorts to irony to reveal what burns inside of him.

Critics and historians rarely focus on cynical art. Although works of the cynical nature are as old as time and go back through a lengthy creative history, from Egyptian papyrus produced three thousand years ago, to Greek, Chinese and Roman art, through the European Renaissance, and all the way up to the Modern era...

Who could forget the small and scandalous sculptures of Daumier, depicting the French parliamentarians and their hypocrisy in the second half of the nineteenth century. And who could overlook the statue of the Sheikh by the Egyptian pioneer Mahmoud Mukhtar, looking around clumsily, like a rooster on a dump.

Caricature is often confused with sarcasm, despite the difference between the two terms. Caricature is a form of modern art, related to the press and to political criticism, which grew popular in Europe in the eighteenth century, and was then known by Plana in the late nineteenth century. Irony on the other hand, is a much older and profound stream, which deals with human life, humanitarian conditions, tragedy and contradiction.

The works of Alaa Abu Shaheen belong to this second stream, focusing on social concerns. The artist began pursuing this cynical path after graduating from the Faculty of Fine Arts in Damascus in 2006, resorting to the world of animals in order to express the most severe forms and bitterness of the human realm. He began with iron sculptures that he welded into stupid chickens, rotating around themselves. Then, years later, he followed with a group of rabid dogs, ready to destroy everything in their path, which eventually led him down to his latest group: the donkeys. These embody ridicule and stupidity, with big heads that are sometimes larger than their own bodies.

What is striking is the consideration of Abou Shaheen's artistic work. Unlike many artists who hold the sense and lose the structure, Abou Shaheen maintains the two sides of the equation with great force and spontaneity, without sacrificing the other. We can observe this for instance through his interest in broad surfaces, which he combines with narrow surfaces and intense touches. This places his work in the category of "soft" sculptural works. Those are characterized with soft surfaces, which do not outweigh the softness of their appearance yet only brush the softness of their ideas.

One can only wish that Abou Shaheen's works could be reproduced in large scale in public squares, so that his chickens, dogs and donkeys would become a visual pleasure for a larger audience, as well as a subject of hope, as we see stupidity, violence and arrogant impertinent reign as a nightmare in our political and social lives.

Youssef Abdelki