

New art exhibition explores Survival ? of culture and the individual



Karim Abed grew up in North Africa, an area with strong Amazigh (Berber) culture.

These traditions were an integral part of his everyday life, but when his mother died, he saw just how fragile this culture was.

‘I wanted to do something about this,’ says Abed, an artist now based in Newmarket. ‘It was hard because there is a lot of pressure on artists and intellectuals and a lot of people during that time probably got arrested ? it’s not easy to do some avant garde work.’

Despite the difficulty, he persevered and some of the results of this effort are now on display in ‘Survival,’ a curated exhibition of Abed’s work, now on in the Colleen Abbott Gallery at the Aurora Public Library through April 8.

‘Karim Abed uses the camera lens to examine the impact of modernity on ancient cultures that are fighting for survival,’ says the Aurora Public Library (APL). ‘The idea of power and how it is used in our day and age is at the centre of his work, building on the constructs of discrimination, colonialism, and the vulnerability of individuals.’

His work was first displayed in Lithuania at the Prospekto Gallery and subsequently at Scotland’s Glasgow Gallery of Photography.

‘After [Lithuania] I wanted to do more,’ he says. ‘I wanted to explore my potential and lately I was part of a different project I call ‘Escaping Civilization.’ Both [Escaping Civilization and the APL show] are both about survival. Initially, I started [my mixed media style] with just real photos capturing reality. I noticed that transforming and putting into an image a concept really requires some manipulation of the image: adding stuff, subtracting stuff from the image. I learned a lot from other surreal photographers and artists like Dali and photographers and noticed how we can put into images a concept [like] colonization and injustice.’

‘Engaging the viewer is the purpose of the exhibition. When they see a piece of art, it has to raise questions and those questions are very important. Every viewer should have some sort of theory behind the meaning of those images. That’s the beauty of art: it’s not direct. It invites the viewer to use his or her imagination. I think the hidden aspect is very fascinating and I think that’s what the viewers like about it.’

Due to the small size of the Colleen Abbott Gallery, which is on the second floor of APL, Abed had to be very selective in curating the show ? and adding importance to the show is the hometown element. With a limited artists’ budget, he says he couldn’t afford professional framing for the photos, so it was off to Home Depot for lumber and other materials (‘I am sure there are a lot of good artists who can’t afford showing their art to the public, but they should be encouraged. There is a lot of potential out there.’)

?I wanted to give the best to my community,? he says. ?I want people to relate to the topics that are there. Nowadays everyone is struggling with their bills, we're going through an economic crisis and there is one image that reflects that. We all talk about decolonization and there is an image that reflects that. We talk about returning to simplicity and there is an image [showing] we live in a complex world. With technology, maybe we're forgetting to connect with nature and there is an image that speaks to that. I think viewers, especially if they give themselves time to think and cogitate on the elements that are [there], they will identify with them.

?When you engage the public [on those topics], as artists we are building ties together, we're questioning things, we're inviting people to question or learn?and that's the dialogue that is missing these days. Everything is compartmentalized or polarized and if we want to get rid of that polarity, we have to engage in talk: a constructive talk through art, through literature, through different activities we do in the community. That dialogue is very important.

?There is a lot that fits into [the theme of] survival. We all fight for survival, and it could be cultural, it could be physical, it could be economical. In an upcoming exhibition in Scugog and it will be the Survival of Modern Man and other topics, all encapsulated in the modern meaning of survival.?

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