

MEDIA AND MICROPHONES

For artist **Adel Abidin** the media is “a composition that is both pretty and dangerous.” **Jessica Milek** speaks with Abidin about his painted microphones, manipulation and the meaning of mediatized reality.

Lraqi Helsinki-based artist Abidin believes that by looking at the world through different angles, new levels of awareness and understanding can be achieved. “When you pay attention you always see something else... when you zoom in on an [object] you can see new relationships,” he tells me on the phone. “When you go deep, small concepts open up for you.” The artist’s latest thought-provoking series *Immortals* emphasizes exactly this and much more as he explained to me on the phone. According to Abidin, there is a process for artistic awareness and also for artistic manipulation.

Abidin is painting for the first time in 13 years. Conditioned we are to expect installation and video work from artist, who has hitherto become known for his Conceptual *oeuvre*, in *Immortals* we’ll be introduced to another Abidin: Abidin the painter. Colorful and large-scale oil paintings, as well as a site-specific wall painting, will be displayed at Lawrie Shabibi turning the gallery space into a vibrant array of canvases layered in paint. In these works Abidin zooms in on the tools that the media uses for interviews and presents them in monumental sizes — with no figures in sight. He paints an array of

microphones that are representative of Arab news stations that signify the media’s sway on the public. Microphones convey the messages that flood the media, “they are like lollipops — brightly colored and seductive,” he says.

When asked about reverting back to painting, Abidin tells me that his has enjoyed it. However, “it’s a slower process [and] there’s more thinking.” Abidin believes that “perceptions change over time [and] truth is based on many surfaces. Every step, you see it differently.” The layering of paint is like a metaphor for viewing a concept differently over time. Abidin didn’t want to “imitate reality” by using audio and visual means, rather, he wanted to put a different perspective on the way new mediums are used by going back to oil painting. Like his previous works, the works in *Immortals* incorporate opposing ideas as well as a different visual angle to better convey varying perspectives on a cultural and political issue.

Abidin explains that his latest body of works is an expression of the audio-visual rouse that takes place in media. The artist was in Oman, watching the news on the television when footage of a man speaking at a press conference came on screen. “Someone was saying a speech that was

[outrageous and] absurd,” he said. “[Also] there were so many microphones you couldn’t even see his face — it was all microphones! With that many microphones, how many channels were waiting to transfer this unsophisticated brainwashing?” The media is often used in the Arab world to propagate ideologies, like for instance, using the belief of immortality for critical sociopolitical gain. Abidin asked himself: “how is this manipulation happening?” His answer is microphones — [they] are the first component of manipulation. It is where the message starts.”

Communication theory says that there is always a sender and a receiver, but the medium that shares the message can be expressive as well.

Moreover, Abidin sees the media as a “composition [that] is pretty and dangerous.” Many believe what they hear in the media because of the medium that the message is being delivered through. Abidin emphasizes this in his artwork. He believes that “the message is not the point. How it is delivered is.”

If we truly are a product of our surroundings, then the context in which we experience things needs to be perceived through the lens of our senses as well as our thoughts. Sometimes, if we don’t look closely enough, manipulation can happen. Abidin believes that “manipulation is the most dangerous tool”; this belief is also reflected in the artist’s previous exhibitions *Symphony* and *Three*

Love Songs. Abidin zooms in on the relationships that he believes are creating dangerous effects on those who seem to only glance instead of look with a keen eye at what is going on around them.

We end our conversation on an inspirational note. “It is not technique that matters as much as how you argue the concept,” says Abidin. “Good art is when you are having fun and you are balanced. If you’re calculating like a machine the art will be bad. But if you are interested and laughing, [as well as having a good time when you’re make it] then the art will be good.” Although Abidin creates artwork that is meant to foster discussion, he doesn’t think about igniting debate when he creates; he rather immerses himself in the expression of his ideas. Art is a personal endeavor between the artist and their tools and according to Abidin, the more an artist is able to let go and feel, the better they will be able to express. And in so doing, he let’s his painted microphones speak. ■

IMMORTALS IS ON VIEW UNTIL 5 NOVEMBER AT LAWRIE SHABIBI, DUBAI. LAWRIESHABIBI.COM



Adel Abidin in front of his artwork. Left: *Propos*, 2015. Right: *A Platform*, 2015. Oil on canvas. Both: 220 x 165 cm. Photography by Pekka Niittyvirta. Courtesy of Lawrie Shabibi.