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Syrian art in Dubai

Khaldoun Chichakli's art portrays the Damascus of yesteryear [Discuss this article](#)



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Khaldoun Chichakli, a professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Damascus University, was born in the Syrian capital in 1944. His solo show, 'Damascenes', is a poignant depiction of the Damascus of a bygone era. The 42 works that make up the exhibition feature drawings – both inked originals and watercolours – and woodcuts, which depict life in the city and its architecture of decades ago – much of which has now disappeared. The works are on display at Green Art Gallery until Saturday June 27. 'Each of Chichakli's works is a labour of love, having taken him three to six months to complete,' explains Green Art Gallery manager Aleksei Afanasiev. 'As a whole, they form an epistolary love letter to a city decimated by war and the onslaught of architectural progress.'

Chichakli's vibrant works are constructed using the 'tahsheer' (crosshatching) method, where the artist begins by drawing fine lines and goes over them to darken an area. These black and white images are then scanned and printed before colour is applied to show various scenes at both day and night. 'Chichakli's use of the tahsheer method allows him to build on intensities of light, depth and shade through the tools of a pen and Chinese ink. His process of re-inscribing, carefully going over the same lines to make them darker, is almost as if he's trying to bring the past back into being through this repetitive gesture – even the people and buildings remain immobilised as if frozen in time and in memory,' says Afanasiev.

Chichakli's works also present a sense of longing for the city he sees as having been destroyed not only by war but by the callous drive to improve and renovate it in the name of modernity and progress. Afanasiev concedes that 'in depicting the structures he does, Chichakli's works bear gentle witness to the violence of colonialism and act as a reminder that there is beauty to be found in even the ugliest of urban passages'. But that's not to say the works are bleak. In fact, several scenes appear almost celebratory, with one work, 'Illuminating al Marjjah', looking similar to that of a fairground, with lights strewn from a pole and hordes of people.

The drawings are presented unframed, in an attempt to create an intimate experience, and the astonishing intricacy of his woodcuts is accomplished through the use of utensils used in the diamond trade in Belgium, where Chichakli studied and lived in the '80s. 'This level of detail is almost

impossible to produce with standard tools. He employs techniques allowing him to achieve a heightened level of precision,' says Afanasiev.

'Damascenes' is an expression of Chichakli's experiences and encounters, from rural and everyday life to souk vendors and abstract themes such as love, fear and exile. For a view of the Syrian capital of old, this exhibition is well worth investing your time in.

Until June 27. Green Art Gallery, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz (04 346 9305).

Three more galleries showing Syrian artists

Ayyam Gallery

The gallery showcases contemporary collections with a focus on Damascus.

Gate Village 3, DIFC (04 323 6242).

Art Sawa

See paintings by Damascus-born artist Sara Shamma.

Al Marabea Road, Al Quoz (04 340 8660).

Courtyard Gallery

The space features works by Kevork Mourad, who experiments with various media.

Street 4b, Al Quoz (04 347 9090).

By Time Out Dubai staff

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