



(Left) 'Untitled (Abakua)' David Zink Yi (2006) (Below) 'Consumption Of War' (2011) Adel Abidin (Courtesy the artists/Athr Gallery)

ATHR GALLERY, JEDDAH

VIDEO [WORKS]

Saudi Arabia got its first group exhibition of contemporary global video art at Athr Gallery's 'VIDEO[WORKS]' exhibition. Saudi artist Sami al-Turki discusses the event within the context of being a participant as well as an established practitioner of video art.

Video art has been referred to as the medium of the century, for its mass-media properties, essential in an era of ephemeral imagery and dwindling attention spans.

In essence, telling a story with just one image is somewhat difficult - you really would need to be a photojournalist to grab attention with just one single shot.

So, with the increasing presence of video as an art form, viewers are being allowed to take more time interacting with the works, since they know from a lifetime of watching television and films, that with moving pictures, you have to wait for a conclusion. And viewers will find, more often than not, that videos are conclusive. It is in their form to function.

Generally speaking, with paintings, sculpture and even photography - the father of video - one needs some kind of background information about the work, in order to complete the journey of understanding of the subject at hand. Explanatory texts are a commonplace feature in today's art world. On the other hand, video art can be self-explanatory in its action-reaction methodology, and almost all can perceive the main point of the work. Most would find a type of coherency in video. It's easier to watch a video than read a 1000-page novel; this is due, obviously, to the bombardment of modern-day mainstream television catered to the masses who in turn, believe it to be the ultimate source of information, whether it be true or false. So it is only natural artists would seize upon the potential of this tool to portray their visions of a subject and put it forth to an audience.

And so to 'VIDEO [WORKS]', the exhibition at Athr Gallery, the exhibition in which I participated, along with six other artists. It was unlike most exhibitions that I have seen here - a show devoted solely to international contemporary video art. This has never been done before in the Kingdom, and to the best of my knowledge, the wider Gulf region. The



exhibition at Athr was nothing less than cutting-edge, and provided a fresh perspective on the art form.

Most likely the exhibition acted as a kind of catalyst for future shows. 'VIDEO [WORKS]' took the viewer through a journey, from start to finish; a visual walk through of the art form of video and its possibilities. Bearing in mind the cliché 'A picture can tell a 1000 words' - well then, try 24 pictures a second on a 40-minute video! The main fear of many exhibitions is that they end up looking state and repetitive. Luckily, through the wide variety of video art on display - from artists of the Middle East such as Ahmed Mater, Hazem Harb and Adel Abidin to international names such as Hans Op De Beek and David Zink Yi - there was no danger of anyone being bored or unimpressed at the Athr exhibition.

In conclusion, with the moving image dominating our societies in modern times, with all due respect to all media and art forms, video is for today by today. **HBA**