

SONS OF THE MOUNTAIN

Artworks by Alaa Awad

Written by Dominique Navarro

Known for his revolutionary murals and epic imagery, Dr. Alaa Awad's new collection, *Sons of the Mountain*, is an intimate odyssey of paintings and sketches. Immersing himself in the rural south of Upper Egypt, Alaa's tableaux of daily life and private portraits are evocative of artwork found in ancient Egyptian tombs.

Alaa takes us on a meandering journey, down timeworn streets to Old Qurna at the foothills of the Theban mountains, and along the Nile with its idle river boats. We wander into cattle markets on cool mornings, where men and animals gather shoulder to shoulder, the air filled with the heated hustle of vital commerce and fraternal handshakes. In the warm shadows of palm trees, we experience the timelessness of Egypt's famous camel souq: the countless herd of golden dromedaries with their long legs and arching necks standing like majestic royalty, while men huddle in the foreground, swathed in galabia, conducting their contracts with long wooden staffs.

The fellahin congregate throughout Alaa's artwork, a vision of community and the harmony of village life, working side by side, day to day, century after century, as they always have since time immortal. Like the artwork found in ancient tombs, Alaa Awad shows us not just scenes from daily life, but close up encounters. In personal portraits, he reveals rugged men bound in heavy robes and head scarves exposing sunburnt faces and weathered eyes, noble and proud.

Alaa depicts women in portraits as vibrant individuals, isolated in private spaces. Unlike the men, they are youthful and languid. Regardless of their traditional dress, each woman is bold and confident, self-assured in her beauty, unafraid to confront the viewer with an assertive gaze. They let their hair down unapologetically. They are contemporary, young women living for the promise of tomorrow, but within the ambience of an Egypt whose glorious pharaonic past is still alive in the blood of its people today.

Through Alaa Awad's depictions of people, in gatherings and festivities, and intimate portraits, he encompasses a message of dignity and charisma. His art speaks of the past and a present which have merged to create a society as timeless as the land, and reminding one how little the Egyptian people have changed over millennia, in their day-to-day lives, and in their glorious spirits.

*At daybreak, when thou risest on the horizon,
When thou shinest as the sun disk by day...
Men awake and stand upon their feet,
For thou hast raised them up.
They wash their bodies and take their clothing,
Their arms raised in praise at thy appearing.
And all the world they do their work...*

*...All mankind, cattle and wild beasts,
Whatever goes by foot upon the earth
Whatever flies on high with wings...
The world came into being by thy hand...*

*Eyes are fixed on beauty until thou settest,
All work is laid aside when thou settest in the west.
But when thou risest again,
Then everything is made to flourish...*

-Hymn to the Sun, Akhenaton (circa 1375 B.C.)