

INTERVIEW

Walid Nahas' symphonies of color

Self-taught artist brings balance and motion of music to his canvases

By Maryam Ghaddar
The Daily Star

BEIRUT: "No relation of a dream can convey the dream-sensation," Joseph Conrad wrote in his 1899 novella "Heart of Darkness," "that commingling of absurdity, surprise and bewilderment in a tremor of struggling revolt, that notion of being captured by the incredible."

Conrad's words might have been written about Walid Nahas' exhibition "Senses in Motion," now up at Artspace Hamra. It is a symphony of color – crimson, mauve, azure and varying shades of black and white – a hybrid of song and scene.

Nahas' bright acrylics may shock some onlookers like sound waves made visible, conjuring up a misty perception of what we see, feel and hear. In these melancholy works, indistinct shapes and colors ripple in graceful chaos.

"I'm a musician, a pianist, a composer. Then I am a self-taught painter," Nahas told The Daily Star. "Everything here revolves around

music, especially the movement. It's all about highlighting emotional intensity, which is why it is called 'Senses in Motion,' because in one way or another, I use all my senses to create these pieces of art. By doing so, I think I show my emotions through my paintings, a bit like I do with my music."

Nahas arouses an impression of suspended time and spectators may be entranced by how these works mingle patterns, incoherent forms and vivid colors. The artist explained that while we have our five traditional senses, there is also balance and motion – both fundamental components of his visual art.

"At first I start with the movement, with just a few drops of paint. I sketch the movement of the painting and then I add the layers of color. It's like in music," he repeats. "I compose the chord progression, the scale, and then I put the melody on top of it, the color being the melody here. I try to play with the colors the same way I play with musical notes. The spectrum of color and the musical range of notes ... they're very similar."

In one nook of Artspace's gallery, everything seems more quiet, a respite from the storm of visual noise, like the intervals in a symphony. With so many pieces here being so loud, it's a calming atmosphere away from the hullabaloo.

"We chose to place these specific



Walid Nahas' "Senses 9," 2016, acrylic on canvas.

pieces here in this corner because they feel very earthy and autumnal, whereas the rest of the paintings are celestial and ethereal," Artspace director Nour Haydar opined. "It's nice to step away from the sound and seek some peace. At first sight, they're very strong, but the memory of the lightness of the other paintings is not overwhelming, because

they balance each other out. So you still have the memory of what you just saw and then finally, in the end, you come back down to earth."

Nahas says he's evolved in his use of color. Rather than simply splatter paint on a canvas, he moves with the hues, shifting the canvas, exerting physical effort, using his whole body to bring the elements together.

These paintings are the stuff of dreams. The movement in the works, the blur and confusion they stimulate – it's like trying to retain your dreams as you return to consciousness, like water slipping through your fingers.

"Senses in Motion" is up at Artspace Hamra through June 23. For more information, see www.artspacehamra.com.