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## Joseph El-Hourany Exhibition: The Joy of Carving Memories on Wood

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Wooden sculptures depicting faces on display at Joseph El-Hourany's exhibition.

Beirut - Vivianne Haddad

Woodcarving is one of the oldest and most ancient art forms. The variety of types and color of wood allow artists to create sculptures that directly reflect nature's beauty. This kind of art employs a multitude of different wood types, such as ebony, boxwood with their bluish color, and jujube, known for its red color. Artists also often use walnut wood and forest trees that have beautiful veiny patterns.

Joseph El-Hourany is one of the few Lebanese artists to turn to wood to express his ideas. He is a university professor, an architect and holds postgraduate degrees (MA) in

## Philosophy and Musicology.

Hourany is displaying artwork he had created between 1995 and 2020 in an exhibition hosted by Beirut's Saleh Barakat Gallery.

The exhibition includes unusual sculptures of faces and bodies without organs and vice versa. In an interview with Asharq Al-Awsat, Hourany said: "Whenever the sculpture contains compositional details, it loses its poetic feel. Hence, I had the difficult challenge of making an art exhibition based on breaking the rules of composition when highlighting the idea of each sculpture."

Hourany's exhibition is not intended to be a celebration of commercial artworks. Instead, he wants it to be a space for contemplation and intellectual provocation. "I do not usually improvise my sculptures, as I always make plans for my designs and then implement them. My sculptures are neither symbolic nor abstract, and my primary concern when designing them was to satisfy my aspirations and take this form of art to vast, unprecedented horizons."

Hourany believes that it is very easy to please people through traditional, easy-to-understand works and difficult to appeal to them through unusual artistic experiences. He reckons that this created a challenge for him, saying: "I have always tried to steer away from superficial artworks that only serve as a piece of decor befitting a living room, so I sought an art form that doesn't focus on aesthetics."

Many people were drawn to the complexity of Hourany's artwork at the exhibition. He commented: "There are people who found it hard to interpret my sculptures because they see them as complicated, but many were drawn to my artwork and went on to purchase them without hesitation, which was surprising given these uncertain times."

Regarding the sculptures which allude to human organs that Hourany has carved, he said: “I am not a conventional artist, and I’m always on the lookout for new challenges. I presented the human guts, liver, kidney and heart in disjointed sculptures, which reflect their importance in a manner we cannot sense in real life. Some people did not find the way in which the sculptures were installed appealing, while others saw it as a healthy artistic expression that took their minds out of the conventional “

In addition to having held exhibitions in many countries and cities, like Canada and Boston, Hourany today is putting his sculptures on display at Art Dubai. He concluded: “It took me a long time to find my artistic niche. I chose to integrate my engineering ideas within an art form that combines both science and culture. For me, it has been a grueling process that resulted in about 1,000 wooden sculptures, of which I displayed nearly 100 today.”

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