



SCRAPS, THE ONGOING ART EXHIBITION AT THE TOTAL ARTS GALLERY DUBAI, IS A SALVAGED FROM A MASSIVE FIRE THAT BROKE OUT IN AL QUOZ LAST YEAR

Entering the exhibition space, one is struck by the theatrical ambience and the mood created by the artwork. You are instantly transposed to a world of devastation. Dimly lit and exuding a faint smell of smoke, the exhibition area is strewn around with burnt and corrugated metal sheets, hanging wires, twisted steel frames, a clump of forks and knives stuck together. Aptly named *Scraps*, the exhibition is a collection of objects that Dariush Zandi and Shaqayeq Arabi collected at the aftermath of a massive fire that broke out in Al Quoz last year.



COLLECTION OF OBJECTS AND MATERIALS

It also features photographs of that very tragic event. A visit to the remains of the burnt warehouse by the husband and wife team started a process that led to the present exhibition at the Total Arts Gallery. Zandi, a photographer and architect, and Arabi, an artist, say *Scraps* commemorates the moment of shock that was created by this massive explosion that took place last March

ART FROM SCRAPS

by Indrani Mishra
Photos by Nisham A Manaf

and destroyed 83 warehouses. Zandi and Arabi who live nearby visited the site out of curiosity. They were part of the mob, which visited the site just to have a closer look at the place and pick up things that would be of some interest to them. The endeavour initially started as a Friday afternoon activity. They started collecting the remains of objects and materials left behind by the aftermath of the explosion and fire. What attracted them was the morbid beauty of the objects. As they realised the aesthetic value of the things that they were collecting, they put them together to form *Scraps*. Arabi explains: "We never thought of putting up an installation when we first visited the site. But as we visited it more often, we developed an aesthetic relation to the site and also to the materials and objects that we collected."

The scale of the event and the impact it had on their life startled the artists. "The incident affected us personally because it happened just a few hundred yards away from our gallery. We could see smoke billowing out and the whole area was filled with a very strong burning smell and pungent odour of burning plastic and metal," says Arabi. *Scraps* portrays the ferocity of the fire and sense of tragedy. Talking about the experience, Zandi



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explains: "This was an unique experience. During our trips to the site, we discovered that amongst the massive devastation, something new had started rising from the ruins. We could see the rebirth of things." The couple has given a new meaning to many of the things that they had collected during their four-month long excursion to the site.

Set into the context of the gallery, the retrieved objects received a new dimension — not just material-wise, but also in meaning and value. There were everyday objects such as toothbrushes, spoons and forks, scissors, safety pins — all fused together to form sculptured forms. A burnt generator resembled a birdcage. At another corner, there was a heap of rusted cans of paint, with a bright orange colour oozing out of them — a very realistic representation of what could have happened at the explosion site.

With the sound of explosions in the background and a projector showing pictures of the burnt site, the duo has effectively illustrated a slice of history. Bright amber light is used to create the hues of the burning warehouses. Sheets of perforated cardboard illustrate broken walls with sunlight filtering through.

But how logical is it to portray a tragedy? On this note, Zandi and Arabi make it apparent that the exhibition is an immersive, contemplative and reflective experience for the residents of the city. "This is the first 'art installation' in the region made entirely out of scrap salvaged from a local accident. The installation was done to recre-



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Dariush Zandi



Shaqayeq Arabi

ate an event that people of Dubai can relate to. The event affected many people who lived in the vicinity. *Scraps* was an effort to show how an event or accident can transform the very form of life — not just its morphology but also its value and usage."

The artistic duo emphatically points out that they are in no way exploiting the tragedy or are being insensitive towards it. "We have just recognised the innate aesthetic qualities in all these objects and have enhanced them to a piece of art by a simple transfer of place and a change of environment, from the everyday world into the space of art."

Arabi and Zandi have proved that *objet trouvé* — found art objects — is a very striking component of the conceptual vocabulary of contemporary artists. The artists have taken a very definitive step in the concept of re-use and metamorphosis of objects, portraying the aesthetics of the clichéd and common things in contemporary art.