

Marwan Chamaa

Marwan Chamaa is a painter, designer, and storyteller. His Middle Eastern Neo Pop-Art art is a mélange of fiction, reality, and vanity. Chamaa's art spans over three decades of thematic interpretations of the world around him. It is fundamentally his view of the world as he sees it with an ironic and sometimes sarcastic undertone.

Born in Beirut - Lebanon, raised in Munich - Germany, and having lived in the USA for more than a decade, exposed him to different cultures and formed him into the eclectic versatile artist he is today, viewing the world and interpreting it through diverse mediums.

Marwan Chamaa's art journey began in the mid eighties at the American University of Beirut and two years later at the Beirut University College (now known as the Lebanese American University) where he enrolled in the fine arts and graphic design department. In the late 80s he was enrolled in the Corcoran School of Art in Washington DC, where he focused on fine arts and computer art, which at the time was just in its infant stages.

During college Marwan focused on creating art for the sake of creating art and experimented with a select group of artists on different types of media and techniques. In the 80s Marwan Chamaa's art was a collection of impressionistic interpretations of his surroundings including collages, a collection of which was shown in 1991 as a duo exhibit, and a few months later as a solo exhibition.

His background in graphic design/ fine arts and interest in the consumer world led him in the late eighties to co-found with two college mates *Art Factory*, a graphic design production house that served as a vehicle for launching creative ideas in the advertising world.

In the early to mid 90s, when downtown Beirut was undergoing a massive makeover, Marwan's paintings took on old Beirut: Beirut of the 50s and 60s. His paintings marveled at the vibrancy of the old souks, the details brought out in his signature use of bold colors. Although Marwan was residing in the USA at the time, he still pursued his project and made use of old pictures and postcards, turning them into homage to the city under reconstruction.

Towards the end of the 90s and the turn of the century, so-to-speak, Marwan Chamaa painted New York City. Living in the eclectic and dynamic East Village in New York City, which was the mecca for artists, musicians, writers, and poets, exposed Marwan to Latin beats, Indian kitsch, Japanese punk, and Ukrainian flavors. The chaos of China Town and the Godfather feel of Little Italy, the lights, sounds and captivating larger than life feel of the brightly illuminated Times Square iconified as “the crossroads of the world”, the yellow cabs zigzagging, honking through the streets and avenues, the business world of mid-town, and the mono-chromatic uniqueness of Wall Street, the über artistic edge of Soho, Noho, West Village, Chelsea, the former epicenter of the poor immigrant cultures of the Lower East side and the jaggedness of Harlem... all left an eternal imprint in Marwan’s creative mind.

The streets of Manhattan were interpreted in a vibrant style with large expressive brushwork and primary colors, all representative of the world as seen by Marwan Chamaa. Throughout his career, his surroundings manifested themselves in his work. His physical world is his muse. He would spend hours on end in Times Square just absorbing the electronic billboards, fascinated by their staggering overwhelming hypnotic effect on his creativity.

“La Dolce Vita” was launched in 2013, a series that weaves the components of our world with a little dash of retro nostalgia. It is a collection of 12 collage paintings that flow from one canvas to the next to form a 22 meters mural. The collection is an illustrated narrative of a romantic story set against the backdrop of a decadent metropolis starring characters very representative of our time. “La Dolce Vita” was shown on May 4, 2013 as a solo show at Galerie Tanit, (Beirut, Lebanon), September 19, 2013 at the Beirut Art Fair (Lebanon), and September 26, 2013 as a group show at Galerie Tanit (Beirut, Lebanon), and mid of December, 2013 at Bel-Air Fine Art Gallery (Geneva, Switzerland).

At the end of 2013 he showed “Caramels, superheroes, fried eggs et chocolats” comprising of two (191 x 405cm) triptych paintings and one (240 x 185cm) diptych painting. The vibrancy of colors used in the series further emphasizes their imposing size. In both, “La Dolce Vita”, and “Caramels, superheroes, fried eggs et chocolats” Marwan chose to depict his story in a collage of images set against the back drop of a

contemporary story. “Caramels, superheroes, fried eggs et chocolats”, like “La Dolce Vita”, is a storyboard narrative, triptych and diptych depicting two scenes that illustrate his message.

“Caramels, superheroes, fried eggs et chocolats”, again is a story of our times, about the struggle between good and evil and the replacement of moralethical standards with the decadence found in our everyday life. The “It” girl makes an appearance in this series as well, and both triptych and diptych portray her struggle with her choices and her loss of innocence.

“Caramels, superheroes, fried eggs et chocolats” was shown in December 27, 2013 at Bel-Air Fine Art Gallery in Gstaad, Switzerland.

In early 2015, Marwan created “unplugged”. This series is partly based on photographs that Carlos René Pérez took of NYC. René an accomplished photographer was Marwan’s neighbor in the East Village of New York City where he spent perhaps the best years of his adult life. The images chosen for this series from René ‘s collection of images all speak intimately to Chamaa. They represent a snapshot of his old neighborhood or a vignette of a favorite spot in and around the city. Through René’s lens Marwan sees and interprets NYC. It is void of the veneer, and more flawed than outsiders perceive it. The series “unplugged”, was shown in February 25, 2015 at Bel-Air Fine Art Gallery in Geneva, Switzerland.

In the Spring of 2015, “Chagrin d’amour – the musical” series was born. The mélange of the Occident and Orient, as is typical in Chamaa’s works is evident in this series. Vintage Western comic book covers as well vignettes from famous pieces by Roy Lichtenstein are wittingly, woven with 1940’s - 1960’s Arabic love song lyrics. Marwan’s choice to incorporate Lichtenstein as a backdrop to this particular series is a natural selection as a tribute to the pop artist, who since the beginning of his career, used comic books as subject matter in various of his early paintings. One painting of this series was auctioned on Paddle 8, New York, NY to benefit SEAL (Social and Economic Action for Lebanon). This series was on display in Opera Gallery, Dubai in the Spring of 2016.

Also in 2015, Marwan again uses his surroundings as his muse as he sets forth two large paintings for his series Ecstatic. Using the current affairs in his place of residence

at the time, Beirut, where quasi-revolutions were in the making Marwan created this series. Inspired by the likes of Vitaly Komar, Alex Melamid, Wang Guangyi, and Alexander Kosolapov who use communist propaganda symbols as a base to convey a message. However, unlike those great artists Marwan is not criticizing the communist drives but rather using the original propaganda posters of Chairman Mao Zedong, the founding father of the People's Republic of China, as a backdrop to Lebanize his message. The success of the massive revolution in China has many similarities to the success of McDonald's mass branding according to Marwan. This series was exhibited in Vick Vanilian Architecture & Design in January of 2016.

In 2014-2015, Marwan created Mashrou3 Lulu (The Lulu Project). This series is about the adventures of Lulu Moppet, nicknamed Little Lulu, and her friend Thomas Tompkins, aka Tubby. The series is painted in the style reminiscent to the original "The Little Lulu" comic strip covers. The series is comprised of two installations, one triptych and two large format paintings. This work by Chamaa depicts a playful and innocent adventure of Little Lulu and Tubby, incorporating other characters like Hergé's character Archibald Haddock and many hidden surprises. This series is on display in Tawlet, Beirut until August 31, 2016.

Selected exhibitions:

- L'Association Libano-Allemande pour la Promotion de la Culture, Kaslik, Lebanon, January 1991
- Le Thé Art Café, Beirut, Lebanon, May 1991
- Galerie T anit, Beirut, Lebanon, May 2013
- Beirut Art Fair, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2013
- Bel-Air Fine Art Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland December 2013

- Bel-Air Fine Art Gallery Gstaad, Switzerland, December 2013
- Bel-Air Fine Art Gallery, St. Tropez, France, April 2014
- Galerie Des Lices, St. Tropez, France, May 2014
- Beirut Art Fair, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2014
- Opera Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, February 2016
- Bel-Air Fine Art Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland February 2015
- Paddle 8, New York City, USA, May 2015
- Beirut Art Fair, Beirut, Lebanon, September 2015
- Vick Vanilian Architecture & Design, Beirut, Lebanon, November 2015
- Opera Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, April 2016
- Tawlet, Beirut, Lebanon, June 2016