



Mirror mask

*Syrian artist
Simon Kabboush
reflects on his
paintings, country
and concepts*

Simon Kaboush, the youngest of 22 participants in the Damascus-based Ayyam Gallery Prize for Emerging Syrian Artists competitive exhibition, talks shop with Skin.

Skin: Tell us about your work and the concept behind it.

Simon Kaboush: My work is realism, in particular modern realism in all its aspects - its subject, the treatment of it, and its conceptual composition. My work is not based on the principles of the realist school of thought; it's different in the sense that I generate my concepts from reality, mould them, modify them, and then represent them in a new context. It is that new context, with that particular vision, that defines my work. As our reality is littered with moments when we see ourselves reflected through a mirror, I use the mirror as a concept, directly and indirectly. The mirror as is, which is the reflection of the true us, or as an opposite extreme, when we use masks to hide our innermost vulnerability using false pretence, as a tool battling through life. I execute my work mainly at night, choosing darkness over the bustle of day time, finding tranquillity in the silence of the night.

Skin: All your paintings are portraits. Do you consider yourself a portrait painter or do you have a hidden concept behind them?

SK: It is the norm for artists to use themselves as the subject for their paintings, but not me. I am not interested in portrait representation or, for that matter, others' portraits. My work consists of many elements that are combined to form an idea which goes further and deeper than the superficial. I am not interested in literal recording, but rather in searching and researching through my inner soul.

Skin: Do you paint from photos?

SK: My paintings are bursts of self expression; they are like shards of light through darkness. It is a recurring theme in my paintings, continuously injecting life to them. I take satisfaction in using as few tools as I see fit. I enjoy the challenges of limitations. Obstacles for me are desirable.

Skin: How do you find art scene in Syria?

SK: I don't know. Art is a special case. It's a subjective matter, a creative process. It is an open field here; it's up to each one of us where to draw one's individual boundaries. Each artist monitors his own space, so it is very difficult for me to comment. I can only speak of what I do, but I can definitely say the opportunities presented here are truly beautiful.

Skin: What is your next step?

SK: My next step is to keep a beautiful distant space, as I will continue to inject life into it, making it ever more beautiful.