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ARAB NEWS

How Taher Jaoui merges acting improv with his artistic process



DUBAI: Dubai-based French-Tunisian artist Taher Jaoui is taking his dynamic, improv-inspired work to the MENART fair in Paris this week.

The fair, running from Oct. 23-25, brings together galleries and artists from the Middle East, North Africa and their diasporas.

Jaoui's series of works "Semi-Forms" will go on show at the event, with the artist speaking to Arab News about his practice.

After years of acting classes to break out of his shell, the former financier turned to the canvas. However, Jaoui still believes "acting is the purest way of art ... because the instrument and the brush is our body, our emotions, and they have to be ready."



It is not surprising, then, that the artist, whose work is rooted in abstract expressionism, has such a physical process, often laying his canvases on the floor to get to grips with his media of choice — pastels, oils, acrylics, and more recently tufted fabric.

"I'm always in the process of doing, erasing, correcting, adjusting, even turning the canvas," he explained.

In "Semi-Forms," Jaoui reimagines portraiture through abstraction and fragmentation, presenting almost robot-like faces that are suspended between distortion and being fully formed.

The artist took inspiration from Pablo Picasso's abstract portraits, based on the Spanish pioneer's introduction to traditional African masks and sculptures in the early 1900s.



Other sources of inspiration include US artist Jean-Michel Basquiat and French painter and sculptor Jean Dubuffet — "these are like the two big chords," Jaoui said.

Jaoui's work is open to interpretation, with the viewer free to make their own choices about the dynamic forms on the canvas.

"It's much more interesting to see different views," the artist says of the decision to relinquish control of his work once it is hung.

"My work is like an improv on stage ... If me and you watch the same scene of improv, I'm not sure we're going to ... interpret what was played in front of me the same way."