

Omar Khouri

As part of its overseas program, xanadu\* is proud to present the recent works of its third resident artist Omar Khouri. Flying in from Beirut, Lebanon Omar arrives in New York with an entourage of portraits that tell stories. Also presenting Christian Sbailo's musical performance. The exhibition will open with a reception on Thursday, November 10th 2005 at 7pm.

Born on July 14th 1978, Omar Khouri grew up in the mobile environment of comic books, video games, cartoons and movies. His repressed urges to draw and create a part of the world he immersed himself in, as a child, overcame him when he found himself majoring in Illustration at Massachusetts College of Art. But soon he felt suffocated by the "stiffness, cleanliness, and wholesome packaging of the program", and realized his passions lurked elsewhere. Picking up painting by accident, Omar soon discovered "the absolute freedom and infinite possibilities it provided". After graduating, Omar worked as a storyboard artist for music videos in LA, and the movie, The Final Cut, starring Robin Williams in Vancouver, all the while developing his painting skills. Now Omar lives in Beirut where he pursues the life of a full time painter.

Applying the movement and progression of story telling in time, yet maintaining the theme of the "relatively unexplored inner landscapes of people through portraiture", Omar injects life in his work through the use of a multitude of techniques familiar to those used in comics. He is interested in the difference between still imagery and the rest of the arts, specifically that still imagery is, to the audience, absolute in time, while the rest have an imposed timeline. Bringing together his background in illustration, and his interest in movie sequencings' capabilities to story tell, Omar's recent works integrate the language of comics with the stillness that paintings represent.

A predominant technique used by Khouri, in his recent work, is the use of panels. While the colors and brushstrokes set a mood for the viewer to distinguish one subject in his paintings from another, the panels emphasize what Omar feels should be concentrated on. "Panels imply a longer period of time. So by default it gives a story: painting then becomes a story about the sitting and the person." Whether it be a moment in time that he felt should be captured while in the process of painting, or a feature he attempts to strengthen, Khouri's use of panels are his current signature that aid almost in a brail effect for the viewer's blind spot.

Khouri derives his inspiration from various sources, from a close set of friends to a cold winter's day. He stays away from the philosophies of politics and the current state of the Middle East, finding that if affected at all by either of these then it is purely an unconscious drive. His interest in painting people and capturing them in a capsule of time is a personal relationship developed between the artist and the subject. Willing to paint anyone, his portraits begin as a handshake, a greeting of paintbrush on canvas, concluding in a beautiful product, an intimate meeting captured in time that he once had with that person.

For the future, Omar can only see himself painting and making comics for the rest of his life. He plans on traveling and continuing his documentation as he sees things, telling his stories in his own way, while returning to his current state of habitat, Lebanon.