

daily

artivats

19 MARCH 2010 | ISSUE 4 | ART DUBAI EDITION

- 04 **Q&A WITH ALICE AYCOCK**
- 06 THEN & NOW: ARTISTIC METAMORPHOSES
- 08 POLITICAL ARTWORKS
- 10 SOLD: ROUNDUP OF DAY THREE'S SALES
- 12 GALLERY PRICING: THE INSIDE STORY
- 14 PREVIEW: *EDGE OF ARABIA*
- 18 SPOTLIGHT: VIDEO ART
- 20 OPINION: LAILA SHAWA
- 21 5 MINUTES WITH NAZIF TOPCUOĞLU AND MOUNIR FATMI

OPINION

Laila Shawa, Artist



“ I’ve been in Dubai for the last few days – wandering around the art fair viewing the many artworks on display. I’ve just ground to a halt. The more I look, the more I question the validity of ‘the process’ that produces the things we artists are making. I include my own work here, as well as all the other works I’m seeing. However, one piece alone answers all my questions – that immense work by El Anatsui.

Art doesn’t have to make statements, or be about politics, or follow trends or even – if truth be known – have any meaning at all. Here, my own work hangs next to the work of an artist who is taking what has been rejected by other people, and who makes of it a thing of beauty – not just mundane beauty – but something sublimely beautiful, and which draws gasps of amazement from everyone who sees it. He has taken everyday bottle-tops – the kind of thing we all break open every day – and transformed them somehow to give a sense of opulent abundance, a hint of the last word in luxuriousness.

This is the work of an artist who lives and works in Africa – a place that makes most people think of poverty and scarcity – despite the fact that, as a continent, Africa still tops the list in the richness of her natural resources. I include here the wealth of her artistic contributions to the world. These

bottle-tops are the product of a rampant consumer society, the detritus of bottles sold to the African people yet which fill the overflowing coffers of a few rich companies and do nothing at all to improve those peoples’ lives. And yet they are transformed – returned to us as art – as a rich tapestry of precious things, a field of a cloth of gold that speaks of nothing so much as of the marvellous. If you get close enough to see it, it’s absolutely nothing – but if you step back for a moment, it’s back, it’s there! It exists! And its very physicality is proof that our own perceptions have no real value. When many things of no value take on such immense significance, then we are forced to question deeply our way of thinking about the things we consider do have value.

This is a master in our midst. Having met him before at the October Gallery in London, I can say that he is one of the most modest artists I know. Yet his piece, *In the World, But Don’t Know the World?* – notice the question mark! – forces us face-to-face with the most profound question of our time. How can an artist, living in the midst of an economic crisis, sitting atop an ecological crisis that is fanned by an existential crisis of global proportions, still create anything of beauty? Prepare to be amazed at his answer. But you’ll have to go and see the work itself to understand. [👉](#)