**Black Poetry**

Armen Agop’s delicate curvilinear sculptures are pliable-looking, like whirling forms caught in action. Fascinated by dervishes, he moulds solemnity and power in black granite and basalt. Currently on view at Meem Gallery until 13 February, the gallery is also showing his sculptures and cosmic paintings at a solo booth in ADA.

**What led you to working with black granite?**

Granite is the material of the gods — most likely due to its dignity, pride and dense inner energy. Somehow granite has always succeeded in playing that role. What draws me to it is its potentiality and how it carries the invisible in diverse ways.

**Your process is heavily meditative, especially in MANTRA. Is art-making cathartic for you?**

No, it’s more a way of life. I don’t want to communicate a particular message. I don’t want to limit my practice to a cerebral concept or follow what’s in fashion and I don’t really care for what society calls success. What I want is to live my life authentically, which often means a need to connect with some elements from nature like stones or colors, and then consider how I want to spend my time with them. It’s not meditation per se — I call it being in my world.

**What influences have your Egyptian-Armenian roots and your time in Italy left on your work?**

One element is integral to all three cultures: the presence of the past. It’s very difficult to detect, but I am lucky to have had the chance to observe the essence of what survives, what remains in our present day. This witnessing has led me to research inner dimensions, to think about monumentality as something beyond scale.

**While sculptures carry a stillness, yours seem to evoke a movement found in Sufi practices. What draws you to such rituals?**

What interests me is the unification with oneself, when the energy is gathered or accumulated inward and keeps intensifying. That form of Sufi asceticism and way of being inspires me a lot.

**Your work has often been described as “contrasting art”, the point at which the contemporary and the ancient conjoin. How do you reconcile these two strands?**

Others describe my work in those terms, but I don’t personally see the distinction as I am usually attracted to the old and the new in equal measures. I always see something new in old things. The sun may be ancient for instance, but when faced with a sunset, there’s always something new to see.

**What is your favorite piece on view at the Meem Gallery booth in Abu Dhabi Art and where do you hope it will end up?**

It’s very difficult to say, but perhaps the ellipse Mantra 50 because it’s the last one I worked on. I would like to see it in a spacious public place like a museum, where the viewers can have enough space to experience an intimacy with the work, and to perceive the unseen.

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