

Where the art is

In artist Rachid Khimoune's latest exhibition, he advocates, as Whitney Houston once sang, that the children are the future

Thirty years ago, in the capital city of Paris, a group of young children stood in a circle, holding hands, swinging their arms and giggling innocently, blissfully unaware of the multitude of nationalities they represented. They are “the children of the world,” muses Rachid Khimoune.

This seemingly run-of-the-mill scene occurred at his daughter's kindergarten and became the inspiration behind what would become Khimoune's lifework, *Children of the World*. The work comprises 21 remarkable bronze-cast sculptures, each portraying a monumental image of children of all races, colours and creeds from 21 different countries. The 21 theme is an intentional metaphor for the 21st century in which the children were born.

Initially installed in Paris, in 2001, the sculptures (all 10,500kg of them), are now being showcased until June 16 in Art Sawa, Dubai, under the joint patronage of His Excellency Alain Azouaou, ambassador of France to the UAE and of the Dubai Culture and Art Authority. The exhibition is set to be on a scale rarely seen in the emirate, with the colossal statues proudly representing Khimoune's most unique and contemporary designs.

Amel B Makkawi, founder of Art Sawa, said: “This is a truly inspirational and universal project and is particularly relevant to the youthful city of Dubai, where it will stand as a symbol of the complex relationship between art, history and the city's diverse urban communities.”

As part of his project, the Algerian-born sculptor spent eight years travelling the globe, immersing himself in different environments, capturing “the skins of the streets”. These so-called “skins” then became the DNA from which each of his genuine structures were made.

“You'd think that all of the pavements in the world are alike,” he says of his edifying journey. “Yet, from one city to another, the grids around the trees and the manhole covers are distinct signs, like tattoos, which reveal their identity, sometimes even their history.” Collecting paving stones, drain covers and broken bitumen, he added authenticity to his urban theme with these.

“The children all bear marks of their roots. They signify the city's real identity. I am interested in the idea of a symbol of a place. I used these idiosyncrasies to dress my children of the world, rather like a fashion designer would.”

Contrary to couture, Khimoune's pieces will never go out of fashion for they represent an ever-evolving innocence of youth and ancestry. Khimoune explains: “What makes art so strong is to see what we can't see any more, to look differently at the world... You don't forget your history, but you have to reinvent it. We're not here to witness misery, but to overcome our history. It's essential to work with a sense of humour, but behind that humour there is a serious point.” ■

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Left A kavak the Canadian
Centre Eve, the German girl
Right Felipe the Mexican

