Beat: Arts

Artist Creates Using Natural Coloring

Pigments Made From Coffee, Tea and Fruit

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USPA NEWS - Sudanese artist Mutaz al-Fateh creates vibrant pictures with special ingredients. The paint he uses is made with colors derived from coffee grounds, tea leaves and shavings of fruit peel.

"I have a special vision in art," the 39-year-old said, surrounded by his eclectic art hung on the walls of his gallery in the capital Khartoum. "I am particularly interested in using natural materials." Many of his paintings feature colors derived from the fruits of the doum palm tree, and ground up fruit from the bulbous baobab tree. Fateh has spent his career crafting everything from everyday life images of Sudanese men and women in traditional dress to abstract drawings.
He takes pride in extracting pigments of blue, purple, and red from hibiscus leaves, shades of brown, beige, and gold from coffee grounds, and hues of black and gray from date seeds.

For many, these materials are simply food products, Fateh said. "But we can extract spectacular colors from them," he added. Fateh says he mixes the color extracts with gum arabic and other organic substances to ensure their durability on surfaces. The artist has been using his special recipes to create his unique paint for years, producing a wide selection of paintings. His quiet art seems a far cry from his activities three years ago, when Fateh was among the artists who painted street slogans on walls during a mass sit-in outside the army headquarters in Khartoum.

Even then, Fateh used his natural paint to daub on the walls. The street mural backed the mass protests to end the three-decade rule of hard-line president Omar al-Bashir, who was eventually toppled in April 2019. "My mural there carried the slogan of 'Freedom, Peace, Justice' but it has been largely removed since," he said. "I can't remake this mural nowadays, I tried, but I was stopped." Political unrest deepened in Sudan over the years, especially following the military power grab led by army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan last October. The 2021 coup, one of several to have rocked Sudan since its independence, was followed by a wave of steep price hikes of basic goods including food, fuel, electricity, and other essentials.

Fateh says his way of extracting colors to make paint is a good way for aspiring artists in Sudan to cut the cost of expensive materials. "The natural materials I use are very cheap," he said. "They are widely available on the market, some could be even acquired for free."

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