



Beautiful strangers

The carefully staged images created by Turkish photographer Nazif Topcuoglu entice viewers in with their classical themes, beautiful models and seductive wash of colour. But, as the artist tells *What's On* on the eve of his first Dubai show, things aren't quite as they seem

You work exclusively with young women as your subjects – why is that?

Many reasons. First of all, female subjects are one of the most common in western art. Also, I was interested in the idea of [the representation of] women in Turkey and also in Islamic countries. I don't know. I sort of idealised them – if women ran the world, it would be a better place. But my girls, they grew up and they didn't turn out as an ideal, because I have women doing bad things to one another; they started taking male roles.

This show covers your work from 2001 to the present.

How has your work evolved over that time?

At the start, it's like a child; I started with images of young girls reading and studying, very introspective pictures. Then as they grew up and started to interact with the real world, they became more curious and got more interested in the world and history and current affairs and theories, like religion or philosophy; they started to question things. Now they're really worried; they're sort of confused, my girls. In the pictures I mean [laughs].



You talk about them almost as if they're real. Is that what you're projecting onto them, or are you commenting on the way you've seen young women behave?

It's not very literal. It's a narrative, almost allegorical thing that I'm making. They're very topical references, however. They're re-enacting stories that usually have male heroes in history, literature and television. I'm kind of reversing the way that in classical theatre the male used to take the female roles, taking revenge in a

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way. But also people quite simply like to look at pictures of girls – it draws them in; it's sort of a trick. **But there is quite a strong nod to classicism in there too. Your work *Lamentations*, for example, is a reinterpretation of the 19th century painting**

***The Raft Of The Medusa*. Is that another trick?**

One reason, I guess, is because I try to talk about classical themes. *The Raft Of The Medusa* depicted a real event (see box, right) but it's also a very classic theme. In another work, based

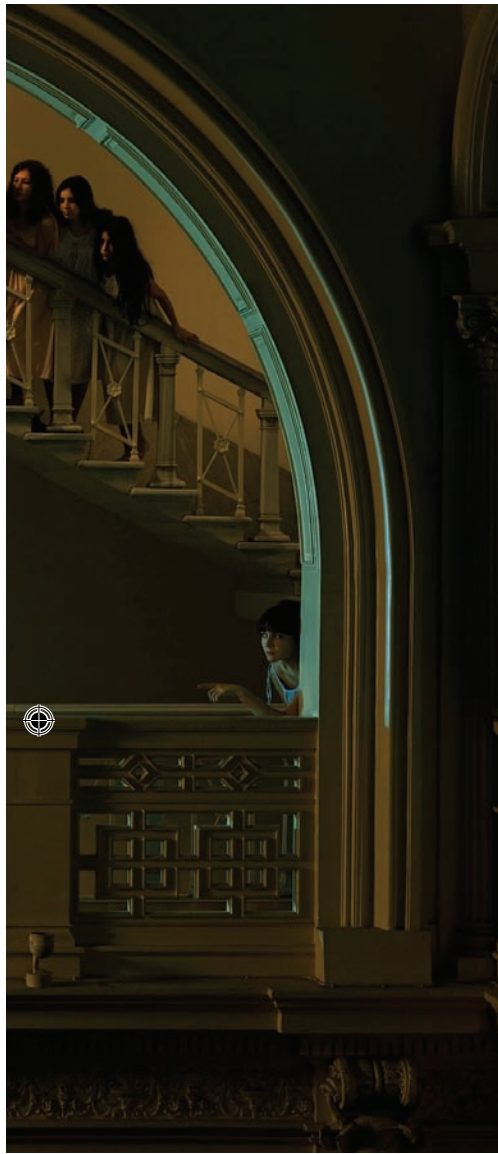


Starry, starry nights

It's a busy time at the Madinat Arena this month. The venue's foray into showcasing the kind of quality international comedy acts that saw 'pub landlord' Al Murray take to the Arena in December continues apace into the new year. Jon Lovitz, US funnyman and star of legendary comedy show *Saturday Night Live*, will be gracing the venue with his presence on January 14 under the Comedy Club banner. With screen credits from *Seinfeld* and *Friends* to *The Wedding Singer*, this is likely to be a hot ticket: we recommend you book your place fast.

Equally ambitious in scope, if rather smaller in scale (it's being staged at the more modestly-sized Madinat Theatre), is the planned run of Willy Russell's musical *Blood Brothers*. The tale of twin boys who are separated at birth but reunited by

fate as adults, it's one of the biggest ever hits on London's West End, where the show has been running for 21 years. This production promises a West End cast (not *the* West End cast, mind, but you can't have everything – they've got their own show to perform) and a live orchestra. Looks like the UAE's oft-anticipated theatrical flowering could finally be about to blossom. Jan 14 Comedy Club with Jon Lovitz, Madinat Arena, Jan 25 to Feb 6 *Blood Brothers*, Madinat Theatre, Souk Madinat Jumeirah, Dubai. Tel: (04) 3666546. www.madinattheatre.com



Reinterpreting the classics



FRENCH ROMANTIC PAINTER THEODORE GÉRICAULT'S 1818 painting, *The Raft Of The Medusa*, depicted the aftermath of the wreck of a French frigate, which saw its surviving crew members set adrift on a makeshift raft for 13 days before being rescued. It's estimated that nearly 150 people

boarded the raft, but only 15 survived the ordeal. It was a huge scandal at the time, with political incompetence cited to have played a major role in the death of many innocents – a subject that, sadly, doesn't take a genius to link to some of the tragedies of modern times.

on the old story of a father being stopped from sacrificing his son, I'm reinterpreting it as a story of children being sacrificed for so-called higher ideals like wars and revolutions. It's good to use familiar imagery because they incorporate universal themes. I also like that people recognise them. They feel reassured initially, but then they look more closely and see that all the men are women and they think, 'What's going on here?' It creates some tension, which helps. It makes it more attractive.

PHOTO: GETTY IMAGES

