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When the Other makes us think about our own selves October 15, 2011 01:52 AM By [Chirine](#)

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BEIRUT: When the Lebanese painter Katya Traboulsi first came out with her idea of collaborating with international and local personalities for a book on the notion of the "Other," not many people believed in the project.

That was a year ago. But last week, her book "Of Others" was finally released at Beirut Souks, alongside an exhibition of her paintings that are featured in the book. The book combines texts in Arabic, English and French written by renowned authors with Traboulsi's illustrations.

"We are looking for ourselves in others," Traboulsi told The Daily Star.

She explained how the expansive and tough-to-define notion of the Other has always been a source of inspiration for her paintings. In combining text and painting, she hoped to create a project that would be accessible to a variety of audiences.

Lebanese painter Chaouki Chamoun was one of those who agreed to collaborate with Traboulsi. The prose poem he wrote for the book discusses his "constant search of the other." His text is like a kaleidoscope of how he feels regarding this Other, which in his case is everything and everyone that is not him. "Whoever it happens the other could be, The other woman / The other lake / The other dog." His emotions toward this being swing from love to hatred.

Traboulsi has illustrated Chamoun's text and her painting faces his poem in the book. A massive red heart is painted, and it appears paint has been thrown randomly on the canvas. In the center of the heart is a line from Chamoun's poem: "I love the other / Life is me and the other."

If we truly concentrate on the way Traboulsi illustrated this text, we notice that what seem at first like blotches of red and grey paint are actually representations of people. These Others are gathered outside the heart, as some people might gather around a sacred totem.

Traboulsi has also worked with renowned thriller writer Percy Kemp. Lebanese-born Kemp associates the relationship of the "self" and the Other with the well-known chicken and egg idiom. In other words, we don't know which one came first, but for there to be a "me" there must be someone else.

For Kemp, the self asserts itself in reaction to the Other's flaws.

Traboulsi's illustration of Kemp's text is intriguing. A person is painted – whether male or female we can't tell – holding the head of another human being. Although the image may seem disturbing, it accurately illustrates Kemp's title: "Et le Moi crea l'Autre" ("And the Self created the Other").

Traboulsi also painted black arrows which go back and forth, from one face to the other, as a way to express their interdependence and recognition.

The French writer Marc Levy wrote about the act of writing to the Other, about how each place and each event makes him think of this Other: "Je t'ecris de la rue ou l'on danse et chante" ("I'm writing to you from the street where we sing and dance").

Levy's text – which is a song he dedicated to a young French singer, Gregory Lemarchal, who passed away in 2007 – is filled with repetition. This repetition makes it seem as though he is trying to convince himself that he is writing to this Other, presumably Lemarchal. All his sentences begin with “Je t'ecris” (“I'm writing to you”).

Here, Traboulsi's drawing renders a dreamlike world where the two main characters are floating in the air and seem filled with happiness.

The female figure is drawn in a way as though she is protecting the male one. Her arm is lifted and extended towards the male's head. The male being seems to do the same. Are they protecting each other, or are they holding hands?

Traboulsi's project may once have attracted doubters, but it now forces readers to ask the questions. Readers are drawn to confront themselves, and ask how they relate to the Others in their lives, whoever they might be.

Katya Traboulsi's “Of Others” is published by Tamyras Editions. Her paintings are on display at “The Venue” in Beirut Souks until Oct. 23. For more information please call 01-390-004.

Read more: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Culture/Books/2011/Oct-15/151321-when-the-other-makes-us-think-about-our-own-selves.ashx#ixzz1bKUfZlyK>
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