

ABRAAJ 2008

its meaning cuts through everything else and immediately. It is understood and heart felt. When I show it in the west, there is only one measure they use: whether it is funny or not! It could have no other meaning! These are supposed to be learned curators, writers and critics! To me, this is a very sad position to find oneself in. Art world has become very shallow indeed in the last few years. This is sadder than me having to be 'seductive' by wearing a belly-dancing outfit and trying to dance on those high heels. And this is why it is not a dance, but a slap. It is a 'wake up, dammit' kind of slap!

RF: How does the narrative style of Turkish literature influence or impact your work?

KA: I like circles and I am always attracted to circular structures that bring the head and the tail together, where oppositions become one. A closed circle is a perfect concept for me.

RF: Who are your biggest influences?

KA: I am influenced by what is commonly referred to as ordinary people and their ordinary lives.

RF: How does changing social and political climates affect your artistic practice?

KA: As a social being, I am first influenced by these changes and I am sure it must have an effect on the way I interact with the world and my practice.

RF: What kind of response do you hope your project will achieve at Art Dubai?

KA: Nothing other than what I always hope, an intellectual response with a healthy and balanced dose of criticism and praise.

RF: What advice could you give to future video artists / documentary makers?

KA: I wish I could have an answer for this but I don't. If I had any advice I think I would give it to myself first. People think that because I achieve things I must know something, but I really don't. I follow my natural instincts and I have no formulas.



NAZGOL ANSARINIA

An interview with Nazgol Ansarinia, 2008

One of the winners of the Abraaj Capital Art Prize

Reem Fekri: Many artists from the Middle East use the notion of displacement as integral to their body of work and evidently your work is heavily influenced by your background and the on going situation in Iran. Could you describe how your work has changed from when you moved to the UK from Iran, and then back to Iran?

Nazgol Ansarinia: Interestingly enough the subject of displacement came to me when I moved back to Iran four years ago. As my education in the creative field started in the UK my creative language developed in Europe and later in the US during my graduate studies. So the real shift and the great challenge came when I moved back to Iran after seven years of working and studying abroad. I was suddenly confronted by a new audience and much of my previous work seemed irrelevant or perhaps hard to understand in the new context. I went through a process of adaptation but as my work has al-

ways been about my everyday life in relationship to the social context, my subjects changed in their form but my method of work remained the same.

Now after working in Iran for the past years, I have embraced the notion of displacement not only as a subject to work with but also as a way of working and living.

RF: In your practice, you incorporate the everyday (the ‘amplification of the mundane’ as you once put it) to a wider social context, and make the ordinary appear extraordinary. Could you describe a body of work that reflects this?

NA: I can speak about my latest body of work «Patterns»: Patterns is a collection of drawings inspired by the familiar images and experiences of life in Iran. While the main subjects are contemporary, the drawings retain the original designs and structure of the Persian carpet. These new patterns are therefore familiar in terms of their form but convey very different meanings to that of their origin. At the first or distanced view they may look ordinary but in a closer view they start to reveal unexpected images, breaking the romanticized view of the orient for the outside viewer and calling attention to the potentials of an overlooked everyday object/image for the Iranian viewer. In other words I adapted «The Persian carpet» as an ordinary object of Iranian life and used it for its intricacy, complexity and the symbolic value of its images in order to display/discuss the complexities of social existence in Iran.

RF : How do you use Western philosopher Walter Benjamin’s notion of ‘technique’ as a basis for your work?

NA: In this essay, Benjamin discusses the relationship between the quality of a work and its «tendency» and poses a question as to the determining factor of this relationship. He states: «Rather than ask ‘what is the attitude of a work to the relations of production of its time?’ I should like to ask, ‘what is its position in them?’» While Benjamin sees the social condition to be determined by the relations of production, I have restated the question for my purposes in more general terms as what is the position of a work with respect to the social conditions of its time? I take this to be the leading question and the main criterion for examining the value of any work. I believe that the value of a work cannot be judged adequately apart from the role it plays in its social context.

RF: You started off as a graphic designer and now your work incorporates various media such as drawings, prints, and projections – how did your practice begin to change? Was there a realization that graphic design was somewhat restrictive?

NA: During the last year of my undergraduate studies, I had the opportunity to also work in the professional field. While the educational environment was encouraging experimentation, discussion and deep investigation of your subjects, the work environment was demanding the opposite. The decision to start a graduate course came from that experience. On one hand I wanted to delay entering the professional field and on the other I believed that there was another way to practice in the field of my study and my interest. While my practice shifted gradually from design to fine art, design remained a very important part of my way of working. This background has not only influenced the media I work with but my process of work includes research, analysis and creating work based on those findings which I believe are also core elements of design.

RF: Who are your largest influences?

NA: Of course there are many whom their work I admire and I learn from. However, I tend to be influenced mostly by what happens around me and the situations I encounter. In other words I see particular works of art or writings as parts of a larger assemblage containing many other elements that equally inform me.

RF: There is the issue of size within your work – you adapt from large to small quite frequently – how does this translate?

NA: My work is very much processed based and therefore I have no preconceived notions about what form the work will take before that process has taken place. My form and medium are defined through the subjects I work with and my method of working. While this method usually involves a practice of collecting, dissecting and putting things back together, the issue of size falls within the process of finding the appropriate visual language for representing my subjects.