



Nadine Knotzer



'The Hector' by Sara Rahbar, Wall Paper, 2010



Images courtesy of the artists

A CONVERSATION AND COLLABORATION WITH NADINE KNOTZER AND SARA RAHBAR

As it happens, Nadine Knotzer co-founder of Carbon 12, a dynamic Dubai gallery that stands for everything in name and artistic expression, met Sara Rahbar not too long ago. Sara is a spirited artist working in highly charged mixed media, exploring and reworking unlikely signs and symbols that span generations and cultures, forcing us all to contemplate the varying values of existence and acceptance imposed on our worlds. In three years time, Sara, Nadine, and Carbon 12 have developed a deep and inspiring relationship, illustrating the profound potential that the region generates in support of a promising contemporary art and design scene. Here they meet again, as the artist is interviewed by the galleries about the vision behind her work and how they're both looking to the future for good.

Nadine Knotzer: Your work tells a story, from your process to your choice of known material like the flag and veil, to the deep meanings and rich histories that you draw up. Tell me, what's your story Sara?

Sara Rahbar: My life. My work is a direct reflection of my life. The work is an outcome of the way that I see the world around me, through personalized and very intimate filters that belong only to me. What ever is going on inside me, comes through in the work.

NK: Why did you become an artist?

SR: I didn't consciously choose to become an artist, it was very natural and instinctual process, a lot like sleeping. You don't think about it, you just do it. Making things isn't something that I choose to do, it's something I have to do. It is my way of surviving in the world around me. I can't imagine doing anything else.

NK: What were the first sparks of inspiration for you?

SR: I've been making things since I was five years old. I never thought about it, I just did it.

NK: How does traveling impact your work?

SR: For every I am, I am immensely effected by my surroundings and environments.

NK: Each of your Flags from your Flags series takes on its own identity, is dressed in a certain way unique only to that very flag. Is any one flag representative of your only identity?

SR: I never choose to talk about my identity. The first flag just happened very naturally, without specific planning, or much thought. I just had to do it. It was a very aggressive and strong image that came to me and I just went with it. And after a few flags, the work took on a life of its own, a world of its own.

NK: What is the main drive behind your work?

SR: I make work because it saves me from myself somehow. My mind is a very overwhelming place to be, and the work is my release, my savior, my sanity. I resolve a lot through the work, its my therapy in a way. The work is about me and the way that I view myself, my life, and the world around me.

NK: If you weren't an artist what would you be doing right now?

SR: I can't imagine doing anything else other than this.

NK: What's next for you?

SR: My solo with you, Carbon 12, Art Dubai with Carbon 12, Art Cologne with Carbon 12, and a solo at Galerie Suzanne Tarasievie. And we're working on my second book together, "Restless Violence," which will be out just in time for the opening of the show, on March 19th. The book will focus on our two newest series, War and Confessions of a Sinner.

NK: We've been working with you since we started Carbon 12 and it's been an amazing adventure. You are a very inspiring artist and I couldn't imagine the gallery without you. You've shown us a new world of contemporary art, strong works full of pain, power and poems. What has been the defining moment thus far for you?

SR: No defining moments. It is a long and bumpy ride, a process, a life, with plenty of learning, growing and transforming.

NK: Your biggest accomplishment then?

SR: I look at the bigger picture, things as a whole and how they piece together along the way, like a long chain. I don't really think of amazing defining moments and accomplishments, its not about that for me. Accomplishments don't really cross my mind. Yes, I have goals, but its more about a personal, intimate struggle with myself and the work. There is always a wrestling match going on in my mind. And it is more about that, more than anything else. It is always about the next piece that I will make, the next thought, the next idea. I can't tell you how I feel when I get a new idea and I watch it come to life before me. What an incredible feeling, a high, an incredible sense of happiness and fulfillment. I am happy to be working with people that I love, respect, trust and work amazingly with. I am happy to be doing what I love and live for, and to be able to support myself through it. I am eternally grateful for that, because that allows me to concentrate fully and completely on the work. I am very happy to just have my work. I really don't know what I would do with myself if I couldn't do this.

NK: Who or what has been your greatest influence?

SR: Life is an endless inspiration. As long as I am alive, I am influenced. The editing is the hard part.

NK: Who are your favorite artists and designers?

SR: I'm not a big "favorites" kind of a person because everyday things change for me. So whatever I tell you today is only temporary and momentary. Plus I have been blessed with a really bad memory so I always leave someone out. But if I had to name a few, George Segal, John Michael Basquiat, Forough Farokhzad, the Chapman Brothers, Francis Bacon, Robert Rauschenberg, Louis Bourgeois, Alexander McQueen, Sylvia Plath, John Galliano, Richard Serra, Kiki Smith... The list goes on and on and every moment there is a new discovery.

NK: I'm impressed with the way that contemporary art and design is being received in the UAE and greater Middle East. How do you feel about the sudden artistic evolution?

SR: Its about time, don't you think? It is a great start and I am very happy. But we still have a long way to go. It is a process not an end result and we still

have a lot of growing and learning to do.

NK: I love the art scene in Dubai, and I am proud to be a part of it, yes. But of course it is our aim to see it growing bigger and better. It would be great if we had a more museums, more collectors, more artists living and working from here, art critics, writers, school trips to galleries, government funded art projects. What is your biggest criticism of the current state of contemporary art and design in the UAE?

SR: That the focus is on auctions and price tags, more so, than anything else.

NK: What kind of power do you see artists having?

SR: Unlimited. Its really about where we want to take the conversation and how big we want to play. I think that one very important factor here is that we don't make this an elitist game and that we widen the conversation. Art is a very powerful and beautiful language and it should be shared.

NK: What are you looking forward to most this Art Week, Art Dubai, and Design Days Dubai?

SR: I am looking forward to seeing lots of great art, showing my new work and spending time with my three favorite people, you, Koorosh Nouri and Ramin Salsali.

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