

Caroline Kipp

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Social Distancing Studio Visit

<http://carolinekipp.com/social-distancing-studio-visits/2020/7/21/sara-rahbar>



Sara Rahbar left her birthplace during the period of immense upheaval that followed the revolution in Iran and the start of the Iran-Iraq war. While her works had initially explored deeper concepts of nationalism and belonging, her overall artistic practice stems from her personal experience and is largely autobiographical - driven by central ideas of pain, violence and the complexity of the human condition.

Rahbar's work employs various mediums - ranging from photography, sculpture and installation. Compelled by an instinctual obsession to piece together and dissect, her approach is reflective of her need to deconstruct these emotions and apocalyptic memories that have molded her into the artist and activist she is today.

She has exhibited widely in art institutions including, but not limited to, Queensland Museum, Sharjah Art foundation, Venice Biennial, The Centre Pompidou and Mannheimer Kunstverein, and her works are included in the permanent collections of the British Museum, The Centre Pompidou, Queensland Art Gallery, The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, and the Sharjah Art Foundation, amongst others.

First, and most importantly, how are you doing? How are you navigating the highs and lows?

I make work, spend time with my dogs, run, eat vegan and try to have a routine. Fear grabs you by the throat and can completely paralyze you. I had to replace fear with faith, faith that all is well. After that I was able to surrender and find my calm again.

It's my experience that most artists engage with some level of self-isolation in their day to day art practice. Has this been your experience? And if so, have you found these innate rhythms to be helpful during this larger, world-wide experience of isolation?

I stay on my own mostly - I need to in order to do the work. I'm mostly in my studio with my dogs. I prefer the silence; without the silence, I can't get the work out. I think that the isolation/stay at home part was not a problem for me, the unknown future was. What we are doing to the animals and the earth, not knowing when things are going to return to normal (whatever that means) ...these things haunted me and in the end, all I could do was surrender. This is something I have always had to do as an artist, and as a human being, living on this planet and not knowing; why we are here, where we came from, where we are going and what the point of all of this is. In the end, all we can do is surrender and take it one day at time.

It would be great if you could briefly talk us through your practice. Understanding it is integral to appreciating the multivalence of your work.

I have this deep obsession with attaching things together. I need to connect things, to put them back together again in a way that makes sense to me. I have been working and experimenting with various types of textiles and collected objects for over 15 years. The first textile that I began working with was the American flag (flag series 2005-2019). I eventually moved on to military and army textiles and canvas tarps (war series 2010-2013). As the collected objects that I was sewing on to the various textiles began to get larger and heavier, my canvases became tougher and more heavy-duty until I finally completely abandoned them and the objects took over and took on a life of their own, and very organically my work became predominantly sculpture (confessions series & 206 bones series 2013-present).

Has any of your imagery shifted in a reflection to what's currently happening? And why, or why not?

Before the Black Lives Matter protests started, my collages started shifting from war imagery to imagery about protests, the civil rights movement, police and riots. The work comes from a place that I can't always explain and put into words. I just trust it and let it take me wherever it wants to go. It never leads me astray.

Are you thinking differently? Coping differently? Inspired differently?

I have found my joy again in the making of work; I lost it somewhere along the way. It all gets so serious and heavy. I had forgotten to enjoy the process and appreciate the gift of being an artist. During this time of quarantine, I found it again, and I am so grateful that I did. I am a lot more patient and calm now, and I have stopped trying to control everything. I am learning to let go more and more every day and to live in the moment.

What is bringing you solace, or even joy, in this moment?

My work, my dogs and surrendering. I am vegan, I am constantly signing petitions, I support organizations that are bringing about positive change for people, the planet and the animals, I protest when I can, my dogs are animal testing rescues, I recycle, bring my own bags everywhere, I try to be respectful, kind and loving to all life on this planet, help those in need, I try to do the best that I can every day, and then I have to surrender. Because there are 8 billion other people living on this planet with me and I can't control all of their actions. It's hard to wrap your head around the darkness and evil that exists alongside all of the beauty and magic on this planet, but it does. I can't always make sense of it all, all I can do is the next right thing, all I can do is my best every day. I try to educate others, and surrender to what is until shifts happen, and they always do.