

canvas

ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD



WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON?

ART IN THE PANDEMIC

MUSEUMS IN CRISIS
FAIR DISRUPTION
ART BASEL
GOING DIGITAL
BLACK LIVES MATTER
MOHAMED MELEHI
MOHAMED A. IBRAHIM
ABU DHABI ART

Published out of the Dubai Development Authority

AED 45 | BD/OR 7 | SR 45 | £ 15.00 | € 16



Joseph Kosuth. *EXISTENTIAL TIME #6*. 2019. Installation view at GAM Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Torino. Warm white neon, clock. 12 x 142 cm. Artissima 2020. Image courtesy of Galleria Lia Rumma Milano/Napoli. Photography by Perottino – Piva / Artissima



WHAT ON EARTH IS GOING ON?

ART IN THE PANDEMIC

With the world reeling under the impact of the ongoing COVID-19 crisis, the lives of millions of people have been affected. Beyond the immediate tragedy and upset of the many deaths, the economic and social well-being of vast swathes of the global population is potentially at risk for years to come. The arts and culture sector has faced additional particular challenges, struggling at times to articulate its voice and often regarded by governments as less worthy of financial support than other parts of the economy. We take a look at how the art scene is coping.

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Eduardo Navarro. *Self-Doll*. 2020. Stuffed doll with phone compartment. Commissioned and produced by Gasworks. Image courtesy of the artist. Photography by Andy Keate



ARTISTS

With creatives across the world questioning their role in such volatile times, we talk to seven artists about their experience of the pandemic and how they now see the world and their future in it.

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sara rahbar

Iranian-born Sara Rahbar lives and works in New York. Using a range of different media, she explores the intricacies and contradictions of the human situation, often with an autobiographical theme. Her current exhibition, *The Space Between Us*, runs at Dubai's Carbon 12 until 5 January 2021.

How has your day-to-day life been affected by the pandemic?

SR: I have enjoyed the silence immensely. But not being able to travel around searching for strange objects, not being able to go to the foundry to continue working on my bronze sculptures, these things have been very challenging for me. I'm at a loss for words at times.

I have been at home in New York with my two dogs, Sophie and Oliver. I have been fostering Oliver during the pandemic. He is an animal testing survivor, like Sophie. They came from the same laboratory. I wound up adopting him, because I could no longer imagine life without him. He's a furry little angel. My dogs have helped me to maintain my sanity during this challenging time. As well as lots of meditating, running, nature walks, cooking amazing vegan food and working, always working, no matter what.

Thinking about your work, what impact has the pandemic had on your creative output?

I have had to shift, grow and change. I've had to discover new ways of living, working, being. Change is inevitable. I wish it didn't have to be such a pressure cooker, but it is what it is. I began a new body of work entitled *Animals*, which I am showing in my current exhibition at Carbon 12.

Have you adapted or changed the sort of work you do, or used different media and approaches?

Absolutely, and I have enjoyed the shift, it was a breath of fresh air, a new beginning. I am learning to enjoy the ride, to embrace change and uncertainty, attempting to understand and fine-tune my artistic style and language, to be open

to new media and ways of seeing and working. With *Animals*, I am experimenting with paper, paint, ink, oils... Playing around with different ideas and colours, and trying to develop a new way of communicating the concepts that I have been working with for the past decade.

Has the pandemic changed how you perceive yourself as an artist and maker of art?

I'm not sure, it's not over yet, we're still in it. I'm not sure what the future will bring. I'm taking it one minute at a time, trying to survive and hopefully thrive. So much uncertainty, all my plans have fallen away. I have surrendered.

Some days it's tense, uncomfortable. Trying to hold things together, so that they don't fall apart. Trying to continue working in the midst of this tornado, that's spinning around the world, endlessly. Trying to make work that's a reflection of this life: raw, unforgiving, uncompromising, brutally honest. In piecing this work together,

I am piecing myself back together. Making work is my attempt at understanding life. It's not about art, it's about being alive on this planet, constantly wrestling around with yourself and others, and attempting to survive this thing that we all know so little about.

Grasping at nothing, trying desperately to hold on to something, because all of this uncertainty is deafening, crippling. Some days are great, but other days I have a panic attack just trying to buy toothpaste.

Sara Rahbar.
Animals #43. 2020. Paper collage from vintage books and ink. 38.1 x 27.9 cm.
Image courtesy of the artist

