

Ouroboros

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## Interview with Nour Malas

By Ouroboros

<https://www.ouroborosarts.com/blog-1-1/Blog%20Post%20Title%20One-t48lh>



**Ouro:** Can you start by saying a little about your background and how that has informed your art practice?

NM: I'm Syrian and was raised in the UAE. I've been making work since I was a teenager. I grew up around art as it was an interest of my mother's, so I've been surrounded by and looking at paintings from a very young age. After high school, I knew that I wanted to be an artist so I chose to study art and art history in university. A whole world of possibilities opened up. I think exploring what my practice was whilst trying to figure out who I am as a young adult really started in university. My work mainly is based around navigating a sort of world within an artwork—trying to resolve something with intuition and impulse, allowing a narrative to form itself. I'd say that my cultural background really informs this as stability is not something that is a guarantee in the Arab world. The unknown is always at the forefront of everyday life.

**Ouro:** You're currently exhibiting and focusing on your painting practice but have a background in sculpture. Can you tell us about your relationship with these two mediums?

NM: Although I have been painting since high school, sculpture was the one discipline that really clicked for me at the start. I love making things with my hands and sculpture really paved a way for my physical body to be a part of that experience, where the tactical and the cathartic were both involved. However during the end of grad school, I found that painting actually allowed me to do the same, and in a more simple way- mark to surface. So currently, I am focusing on painting and nurturing that side of my practice. But I do think about how I can reintroduce sculpture in the same way I approach painting. It's exciting.

**Ouro:** You just opened a solo show in Dubai and moved to NYC within the last year or so. Can you say a little about producing this new body of work and how living in NYC has impacted your practice?

NM: It's been a very eventful year to say the least. The body of work presented in the current show at Carbon12 in Dubai was all produced in NYC, starting from the month I moved. The work is definitely charged in the sense that it deals with the feelings of navigating a new space and a shift in environment- both personally and politically. I think NYC is magical not only as a city and what you are surrounded by everyday, but you also get to see a lot of art in museums and galleries etc. The inspiration is never ending. This city is so alive and it gives me energy that I feel inclined to let out in the studio. Hopefully it's just the beginning.

**Ouro: How do you find navigating the art world professionally? What aggravates you? What excites you?**

NM: I think being an artist is so difficult cause you're not only developing a whole practice but also navigating an industry- and you are usually on your own at the start. It requires a lot of patience and consistent trust in the process- so that can feel frustrating. Working with people you trust is very important and I think one needs to take their time to find the right fit. What excites me are a lot of things- opportunities for the work in the studio to be exposed to the world, it feels like a huge accomplishment. Meeting people- I like being social and have made some great friends in the art world that I met along the years.

**Ouro: From being in your studio and our conversations, I know that you often have references open, and are consistently looking back at art history as a source of inspiration. Painting seems special in that it allows for a dialogue and for a sort of hybrid language to evolve between artists living and dead. How do you know when to look and when to stop looking?**

NM: I love this question because nothing exists in a vacuum, everything comes from something. I love looking at art, it was important to me even before I became an artist. In painting, it's pretty amazing how much my subconscious can pull out references from paintings I saw years ago and I'm not aware of it until way after the fact.

Having said that, I do think it's important to have some sort of limit on how much information we let in sometimes. For example, if I feel stuck on a painting, I deliberately don't look at other people's work or go to shows during that time. I want the painting to guide me as much as I can allow it to.

Sometimes we can end up working from a place of anxiety and think that the answer is outside of us when we actually already have the answer.