

CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

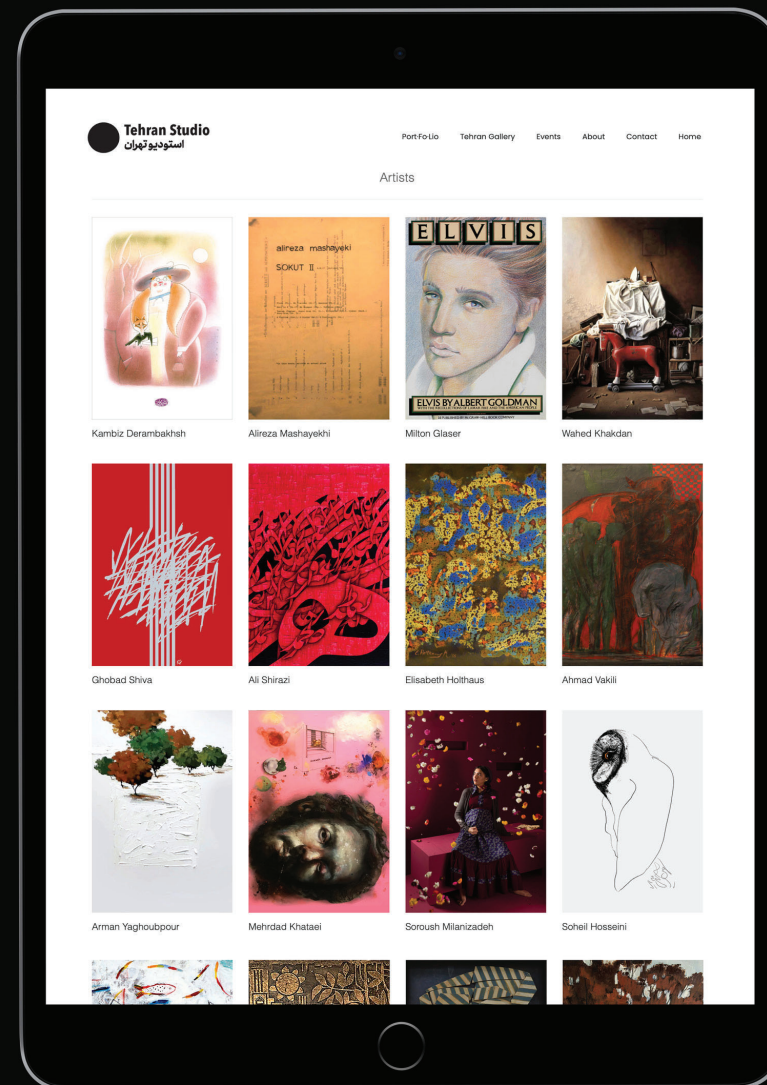
Nilay Akbaytürk | Ammar Al Attar | Liu Entung | Dénes Ghyczy | Alice Clough | Kanchan Karjee
Sadik Kwaish Alfraji | Faisal Samra | Mürüvvet Turkeyilmaz | Shiva Nooran | Leila Heller | Fabio Gamberini



ISSUE #15 Sep. 2022

I have no fear of making changes, destroying the image, etc.,
because the painting has a life of its own.

Jackson Pollock



www.tehranstudio.com/tehran-gallery/
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Parinaz Eleish, The best little
boo tick Hotel in the East,
2022, Mixed media and collage
on canvas
180.34x152.4 cm, Courtesy of Leila
Heller Gallery

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EDITORS' NOTE

In the fifteenth issue of ContemporaryIdentities our intent is on direction of the quality of the media, the differentiation of styles and of course, as usual, the internationality of the selected artists and art critics. As we wrap up this issue, we are struck by how much we learn every time we dialogue with the artist. This time we had chance to interview Leila Heller the founder of Leila Heller Gallery based in USA and UAE. Since its establishment over three decades ago, Leila Heller has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists.

In addition to our board member Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary), who writes for the magazine regularly, we also had the pleasure of working with international art critics such as Nasser Abdullah (UAE), Flounder Lee (USA), Judit Nahóczky (Hungary), Lenka Piper (Czech Republic) and Anna Righetto (Italy).

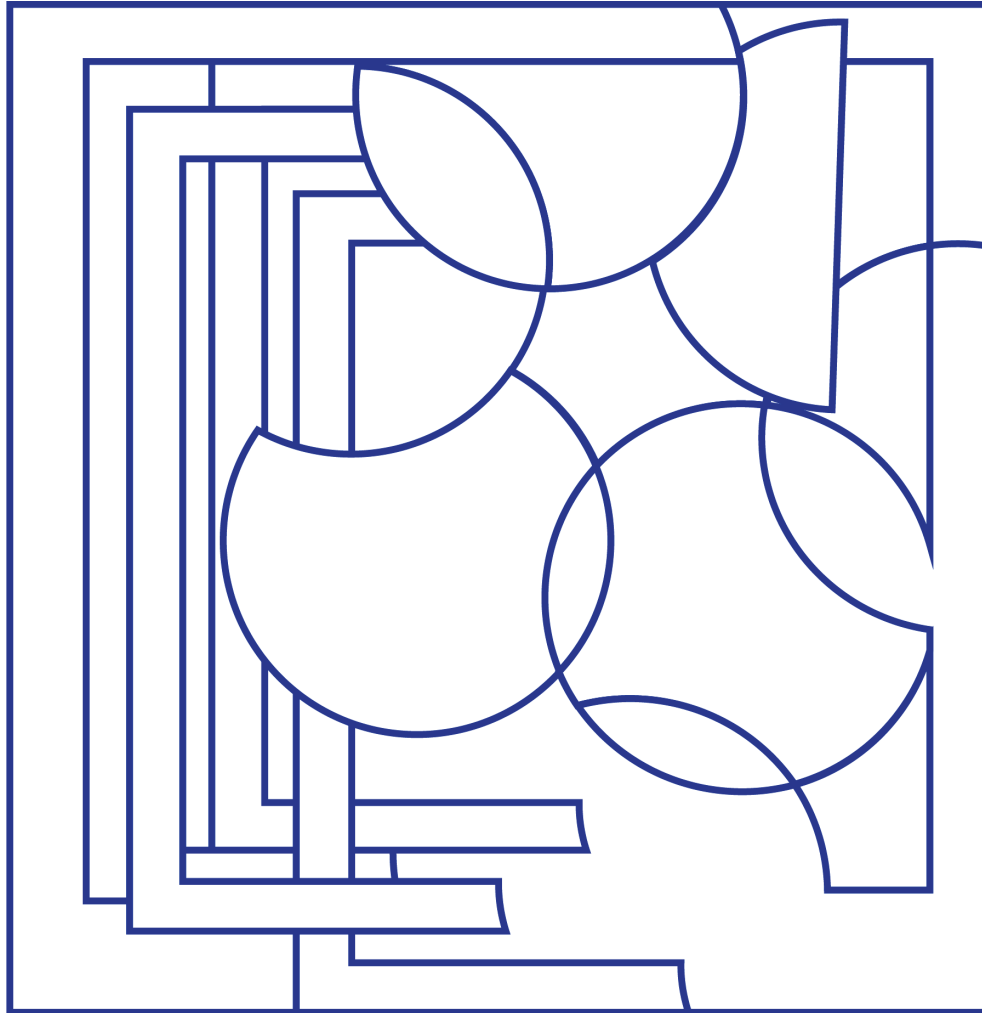
Moreover, we have an additional section to our magazine to introduce and cover the Artificial Intelligence (AI) art. Artificial Intelligence artwork refers to art generated with the assistance of AI. Our Fabio Gamberini is our editor in Artificial Intelligence section.

We hope our readers will be in touch and let us know how we could better use these pages.

Best wishes,
Sara Berti & Elham Shafaei

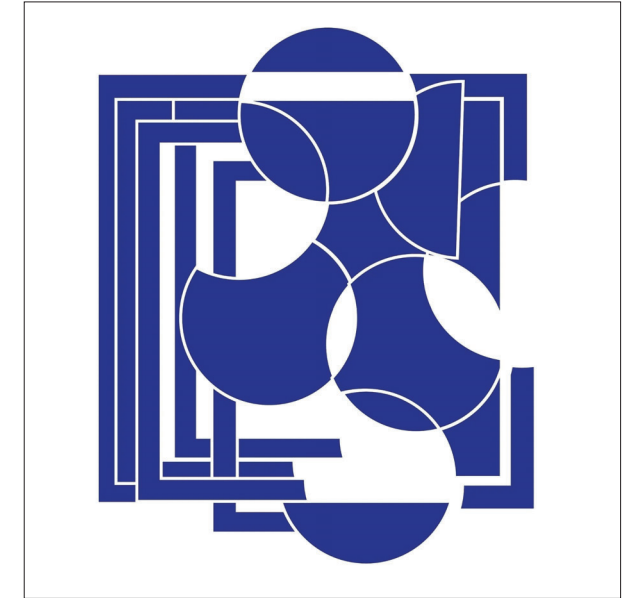
Nilay Akbaytürk

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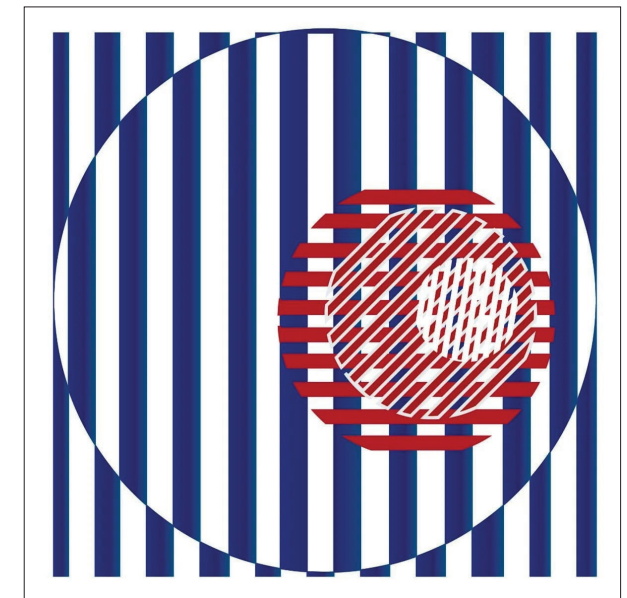


Room III, 2021, Graphic design, 30x30 cm

In her recent graphic design works - Room I, II, III - Nilay Akbaytürk, an artist from Turkey, uses geometric shapes to represent life creating itself, the constant transformation of situations. The overlapping of circles and lines that interpenetrate and interact with each other, sometimes in a chaotic way, describes the unforeseeable and not always linear developing of one's life path. The place where all of this happens is the room, a symbol of a private, as well as a vital space for the human being.



Room I, 2021, Graphic design, 30x35 cm



Room II, 2021, Graphic design, 30x30 cm

Ammar Al Attar

UAE | Nasser
Abdullah



Talking Trees, 2020, Photography, Sharjah, UAE

Ammar Al Attar found refuge in abandoned and arid farms and injected a new life into the dead trees, old irrigation tanks, and dry streams. He attempted to experiment with life after its inevitable death. In *Tying Trees*, he connected dead palm tree trunks using cloth. Al Attar's efforts to cover the water tank took months of planning and preparation before production. However, the environment surrendered to the will of the wind, which swept the place, creating its art masterpiece. This natural interaction became symbolic of the natural balances that humans have lost amid the complex metropolis life. *Moving 1* is another interactive work that documents the dynamics between the living body and the dry water course. The body of work is another documentation of the body's ability to mimic water in its flexibility as it flows and transcends in life. What becomes evident is the intense physical torment and abrasion that indeed leave their marks through time.



Covering 1, 2020, Still image from video, Sharjah, UAE



Moving 1, 2021, Still image from video, Sharjah, UAE

Liu Entung

Taiwan-USA
Flounder
Lee



I Am Where I Am, Week 7, 2021, Photograph of a series of performance art with photos and videos



I Am Where I Am, Week 5, 2021, Photograph of a series of performance art with photos and videos



I Am Where I Am, Week 14, 2021, Photograph of a series of performance art with photos and videos

Born in Taipei but living in New York City, Liu Entung creates performative photographs that, when focused on daily life, spin the mundane on multiple axes until a bizarre version of reality remains. Her recent work has tackled an omnipresent theme in most people's lives—one that grew in importance during the recent lockdowns—screens and the social media we view on them. The project bounced back and forth across the blurry border between the physical and digital shot in her house then posted weekly to Instagram. Are there still borders between online and offline at all or, if so, when will those borders blur to invisibility?

Dénes Ghyczy

Germany-Hungary

Zoltán Somhegyi



Orangerie, 2022, 180x170 cm

The works by Dénes Ghyczy have a fascinating double appeal. First, we are captivated by their sheer visual qualities, the light and quick brushstrokes and bold combination of colors that vividly depict these curious spaces – many of them are, especially in the latest series, winter gardens and orangeries. Soon however we realize that another layer awaits us, behind and beyond this visuality, that questions our perceptions of our contemporary reality through the symbolic reading of these interiors that often become ideal and idealized places, meditative spaces of longing and desire of an undisturbed and timeless harmony.



Duett, 2022, 170x250 cm



Casting, 2022, 180x190 cm

Alice Clough

UK Zoltán Somhegyi



Tending, 2019, Installation; digital self-portraits, burnished unfired bowl made from porcelain and the artist's hair, 2x2x2 m



Tending, 2019, Installation; digital self-portraits, burnished unfired bowl made from porcelain and the artist's hair, Detail



Archaeo/body, 2022, Research-led digital film, <https://youtu.be/CNcowXUjH68>

In her practice, Alice Clough connects contemporary artistic processes with archaeology, anthropology, and their methodologies, thus uniting radically different temporal perspectives. Her investigative and research-based works focus on (re)inventing novel modes of interpreting the past and recounting the findings, as well as reflecting on the very act of archaeological research. Such survey is pursued for example in her video work titled "Archaeo/body", where the somatic encounters in an archaeological excavation are analyzed, while "Tending" brings these investigations on a more personal level.



Archaeo/body, 2022, Research-led digital film, <https://youtu.be/CNcowXUjH68>

Kanchan Karjee

India | Flounder
Lee



Wrapping life, Wood watercolor, 97X30X25 cm



The girl, Wood, grafit, color, 94X87X13 cm



Kanchan Karjee is a figurative sculptor based in Mathabhanga, West Bengal, India. His work deals with a variety of issues including class discrimination in India through the use of mixed media sculptures. They often use a wide range of wood and are sometimes adorned with found objects like shoes and clothes bought secondhand from local markets. Titles—as well as the works themselves—vary from prosaic—The Girl, to the poetic—Wrapping Life, even into the enigmatic—Latitude 22.55395, Longitude 88.33813.



Latitude 22.55395, Longitude 88.33813, 2021, Wood, color, cane stick, glass, iron, 302x230x190 cm

Sadik Kwaish Alfraji

Iraq-Netherlands

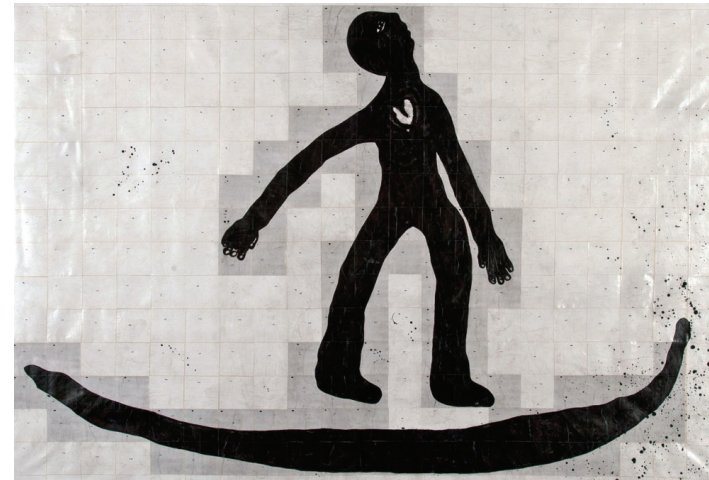
Judit Nahóczy



Nightmares of the Reeds 8, 2019, Oil and ink on paper, 100x70 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai



Weeping of the South, 2019, charcoal and ink on canvas, 270x565 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai



2016, Mixed Media on canvas, 270x395 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai

Sadik Kwaish Alfraji is a reputable Iraqi born multimedia artist, living in The Netherlands. As a leading artist he worked for the Iraq pavilion at the 57th Venice Biennale. The topic of the exhibition was the "archaic". Alfraji entitled the series he created on this occasion: I am the hunter/I am the prey reinterpreting the meaning of hunter and prey in a wider context and emphasizing the frailty of human entity. His figures are two shadowy, faceless heads (self-portraits of the artist?) face-to-face that represent our dual nature of experiences in which we are at the same time hunters and preys, such as love, as our dreams, our curriculum vitae, the heritage of Iraq, his beloved country, i.e. „it is the relation between our surroundings and who we are“. His homeland and its fate are an always present subject in Alfraji's art. The shadowy, tormented figures capture the losses, sometimes without arms with turned-down head watching the little bird, other figures instead of arms having wings, and others bending down with hope for a rose. All records of the lost Baghdad.

Faisal Samra

Bahrain-Saudi Arabia
Anna Righetto



Distorted Reality; Performance # 36, 2007, Digital Photo, Lambda Print Edition of 3+1AP, 133X100 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai



Distorted Reality; Performance #43, Triptych, 2006, Lambda Print Edition of 2, 100 X 133 cm (each), Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai

In the project Distorted Reality Faisal Samra, one of the Arab Gulf's most outstanding artists, represents the political and cultural distortion of reality in our lives, caused mostly by digital medias. Faisal Samra uses these very same medias: he takes pictures of his performances and places them in a group of three or four frames to create a sense of movement. His characters are bizarre, even grotesque because of the masks they wear and the objects they hold, implementing a sense of commotion.



Distorted Reality (Improvisation), 2005, 09:58 minutes Video Edition of 5 + 1AP, Lambda print, 80x107 cm, Courtesy of Ayyam Gallery, Dubai

Mürüvvet Türkyılmaz

Turkey Lenka
Piper



Brain map, 2008, Script-drawing on the wall. carré d'art museum, Nimes, France



Chamber of secrets, 2013, Installation



Forest of dream, 2019, Performance in Dordogne-France

Mürüvvet Türkyılmaz works with a broad variety of media and at first glance, her drawings can look abstract, with long trails or lace streams running along a wall, or paper. These streams sometimes resemble contour lines on a map and depict figures or various objects, but closer inspection reveals a continuous flow of letters, words and sentences that may construct the object or complement it. These script-drawings may be supplemented with watercolors, or everyday objects and interrogate the space between an abstract and literal representation of life. The artist varies the media to suit the questions she is attempting to resolve through her work. For example: script drawings are one method of exploring the nature and limits of individual and collective memory. In addition to drawings, she incorporates photography, video, mixed-media, and other everyday objects.

Shiva Nooran

Iran | Lenka
Piper



Untitled, 2022, Textile art, 70x70 cm

Iranian water reservoirs are regularly constructed in areas without natural water sources, to preserve water for local communities and their simple architecture is the primary theme of Shiva Nooran's art. The exteriors may be lavishly decorated, or kept plain, but Nooran's work depict reservoir domes made from cheap materials in desert areas. The domes are constructed from precise stitches that protrude from a textile base and the contrast between the glowing domes and their dark backgrounds refer to the plain appearance of these buildings versus their life-giving function.



Untitled, 2022, Textile art, 150x150 cm



Untitled, 2022, Textile art, 70x70 cm

CI: Please introduce yourself.

LH: My name is Leila Heller and I am the founder and president of Leila Heller Gallery, a contemporary art gallery in New York and Dubai with a curatorial emphasis on bridging the gap between the East and the West. I received my B.A. in Art History and French Literature from Brown University and my Master degree in art from Sotheby's Institute in London, as well as a second Master's degree in Art History and Museum Management from George Washington University. I then became the art curator of an investment bank in New York before opening my own gallery in New York in 1982.

CI: Can you tell us about Leila Heller gallery?

LH: Leila Heller Gallery was the first gallery in the United States to feature primarily Middle Eastern artists alongside global artists. My gallery in Dubai is the largest gallery in the Middle East and features an international roster of artists. In addition to presenting a dynamic exhibition schedule, Leila Heller Gallery actively organizes shows with world-renowned curators, hosts educational panels and film screenings, and produces monographs, catalogues, and books with scholarly essays by prominent curators and authors worldwide. Each year the gallery participates in major international art fairs and stages off-site projects as a platform for exploring new conversations within a wider context of galleries, artists, and institutions. The gallery's artists have participated consistently in international museum exhibitions and biennials and are included in leading institutional collections worldwide.

CI: Can you please tell us about Parinaz Eleish Gharagozlou and her exhibition in Dubai?

LH: Parinaz Eleish Gharagozlou is an Iranian-Egyptian artist whose work is based on history and its relation to our future. When a society's link to the past is severed, it promises a rootless lot. With the systematic destruction of the familiar stories of a people, we will have no evidence and no memory to propel us toward a sane future.

Her work may provoke strong emotions of nostalgia in the viewer, but it is not backward-looking. The goal of these works is to alert the viewer that, as a society, we need to be mindful of what has been handed down to us and preserve it for the next generation. Preservation of the past is an investment in the future.

Parinaz was raised by a family of amateur historians and her mother, no amateur, a professor of history ever presents in her life. Her vacations were spent exploring historical sites. Like so many kids, she thought that she would be an archeologist. During the artist's teens, she remembers passing through an older section of Tehran, seeing a small house with filigreed windows lit up in the dusk and the smell of cooking seeping into the street. Oddly, her mother asked her if she ever wondered about the inside of these homes. She asked whether the stories of the people living inside interested her. She asked if she ever would want to write about them. It turned out Eleish became a painter intrigued by the past. She still has the habit of looking through windows and doorways in search of stories fit for a canvas.

Eleish chose to focus on homes and structures in Tehran and Cairo and the ever-changing and intertwining streets of these cities that are crumbling under the force of time and neglect. Each home abandoned to war, revolution, or lack of care has within it a treasure trove of photo albums, letters, love stories, and memories that will be lost to those whose task it is to build the future.

CI: What elements characterize in Parinaz Eleish's paintings?

LH: The process of choosing mix media and collage was part of the artist's long journey to this series. The work began small, limited by her narrow vision of the path she was taking. As the work progressed it required scale, texture and the possibilities of multi-layered story telling. To render these paintings, the artist needed ample space to accommodate the details. She chose not to frame and stretch the canvasses. The traditional Iranian curtains painted for Ta'zieh, Iranian passion plays, were the inspiration behind the borderless scale and size of her canvases, giving the possibility of telling a tall tale. In the old days, Iranian traveling storytellers would unroll huge naively hand-painted panels representing heroes, wars, or passion plays and mesmerized the villagers. However, unlike the Ta'zieh paintings, Eleish chose the Persian miniature style as the style to tell the minute details of the stories. In this way she would have the possibility of painting in detail by mixing the indoor/outdoor spaces and scales. She found the mixed media and collage a perfect medium for the work of this series.

The paintings may speak of loneliness, abandonment, and destruction, yet in contrast the bright and brilliant colors and the occasional humor encourage pride and hope, not sadness.

CI: Why have you chosen to exhibit her works in Leila Heller gallery, Dubai and what are your expectations for this exhibition?

LH: Parinaz's paintings have captivated me for a while. I love the nostalgia they emanate, referring to a past life of glory and yet the remaining memories and thoughts of a bygone era. Her work documents history with a poetic touch and she recalls moments in time that stand still but are still rich with a myriad of stories and memories of a distant past. Parinaz being half-Egyptian half-Persian is a perfect exhibition to be hosted in Dubai, which is a melting pot of so many middle-eastern cultures. I am sure her exhibition will touch the psyche of many UAE-based viewers, collectors, and curators.

CI: Tell us about other current or upcoming exhibitions you are showing.

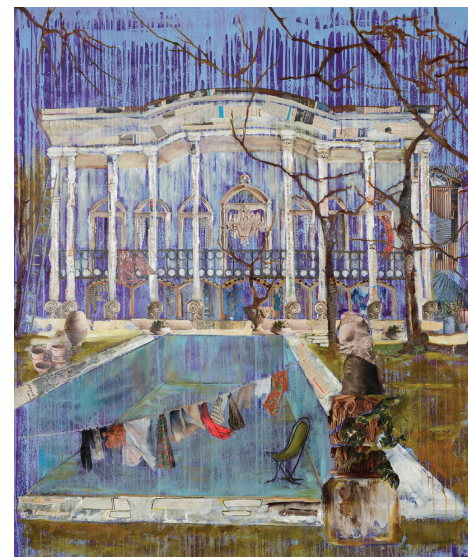
LH: In gallery one we will have the work of Emirati artist and jewelry-maker Azza Al Qubaisi. As a fierce advocate of all that is home grown and sustainable, Al Qubaisi has been dedicated to a sustainable future for her country. She is seen to use simple materials that were an essential part of Emirati families' lives in the pre-oil period. The natural landscape and cultural references coalesce in her pieces, from the shapes, patterns, and textures of the desert to the revival of traditional ancient techniques which can all be easily observed in her works. The works of Al Qubaisi are a reflection of her journey as an artist as she explores her Emirati heritage. In the coming year, we will also be showing the work of Lorenzo Quinn, Darvish Fakhr, Behrang Samadzadegan, Aref Montazeri, Lin Jingjing, Robert Wilson, Mana Sazegara, Marwan Sahmarani, and Ana Carreras.



Parinaz Eleish, Being a woman, 2022, Mixed media and collage on canvas, 179.7x152.4 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery



Parinaz Eleish, My own seat at the table, 2022, Mixed media and collage on canvas, 156.21x182.88 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery



Parinaz Eleish, The blue swimming pool, 2022, Mixed media and collage on canvas, 183.5x153.67 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery



Parinaz Eleish, *What of the broken roof of my house*, 2022, Mixed media and collage on canvas, 184.15x304.8 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery

Fabio Gamberini



This woman is going to change history of art forever.
 Spoiler: she isn't a woman. She doesn't even exist. Or does she?
 This is the result of myself "prompting" this line of code:

`"/imagine prompt: portrait of midjourney AI, how does it feel today? ar-- 3:4"`

Where? On a bot on a remote chat with a server farm who knows where in the world. Sent to an artificial intelligence machine instructed to be knowledgeable on one specific subject.

Art making:

And it's very good at it. So good that we are not here to debate if this technology will forever change our concept of art.

We are here to simply acknowledge that Art, as we know it, has changed forever, and it will never be the same.

We are talking about image generators like Dall-e, Midjourney, Disco Diffusion and all the other algorithms that are spawning in the universe of Google colab and similar projects.

What are they?

In the simplest possible way, they are machines that learnt how to understand human language and used to generate images based on a text input.

Some of them have been "fed" with data regarding visual arts, some other with inputs focused over music, literature, medical diagnosis, facial recognition, space exploration and obviously... war.

What is the current situation?

The AI ecosystem is extremely variegated and thanks to some big names (such as Open Ai and Google Colab) the last months have seen the rise of several AI models in the field of imaging and design.

Now the 3 big names are:

Dall-e: this is the "photographer" of the trio, it's extremely good at creating photorealistic imaging of whatever u can think of. Although great for other applications like mimicking the style of several artists its dataset is very photography based and results are very linked to this choice.

Midjourney, is the sensible artist of the family, with a dataset explicitly focused on visual art. Oil painting, carving, gouache, ink, ballpoint... there is no limit to the number of medias and artists that can be mimicked. The concept it's yours. The hand is theirs. How fab is that?

Disco diffusion is the "Geeky one" and it can do a lot of things, especially videos.

It's the geeky one because it is where AI capabilities are pushed to the limit. It's a laboratory where developers can contribute to the research of new ways to use and understand AI

What can you do with them?

Literally anything.

Imagine anything you want. Anything you can put into words.

Then the AI is gonna try to understand what you have said and then start to "recall" images of that thing. It starts then to assembly the image accordingly.

If you say "Cat" for an instance, it doesn't simply look for an image of a "Cat".

The AI start to think how cats are made, according to the dataset (talking of hundreds of millions of images)

And then start to make a version of his own trying to match it with the environment described.



You can add an almost infinite list of parameters and adjectives, art references and so on. And results are just mind blowing in terms of composition, sensitivity, general appeal. They are just not... very defined, yet.

Ethical implications:

The first one I that came in my mind is about the inevitable biases in the dataset.

They are mostly western-centric databases. No question about that.

Now this isn't a choice by developers, it simply resembles the current availability of data to be fed to the AI. Yet it sparkles a due and complicated debate.

Another enormous debate is about ethic use since you can theoretically fake anything.

Image's intellectual ownership, rights of the living artists present in the algorithm, repercussions over applied art field first, and over the 7 arts in general later; are all aspects that are sparking harsh debates within the community, what's your take about it?

Is it scary?

Yes. It is, leaving aside for a second all the other aspects of life that will soon change due to the rise to this new technology, I must say that as applied art craftsman I feel I am witnessing to a "dinosaur doomsday meteorite" kind of change for the industry.

Concept artists and designers of all

Kind of is going to be hit hard and fast. Way faster than the advent of photoshop or dsrls or cad, it will not take 10 years to revolutionize everything.

Within 3 years' time I expect to see a realistic commercial Hollywood movie completely "told" to an AI and processed by it.

And guess what? We now have machines that can write books and scripts too. So, get ready for some popcorn time.

"ERRATA CORRIDGE BOX"

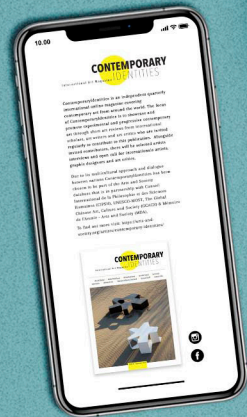
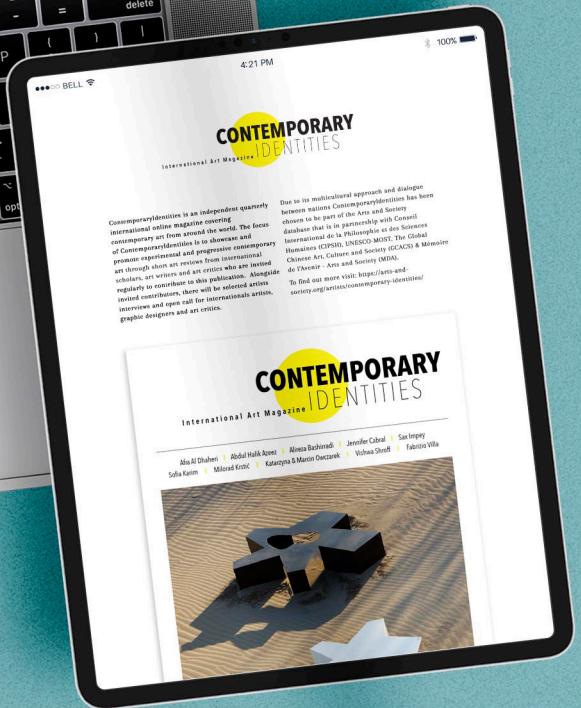
As this article was written the AI world has been shaken by the now wide availability of "Stable diffusion" a model used both by commercial platforms such midjourney and private artists.

It's a community project so, skilled users can manage to download a version of the Ai machine on their PC completely free of charge or use one of the paid platforms for a more user-friendly interface if you have no IT skills.

The industry is moving fast. So fast that now new groundbreaking advancements are made on a weekly basis.

Stay updated!

Fabio Gamberini, September 2022, Image created with Stable diffusion model run on Midjourney; Testp ephebic androgynous male model, editorial fashion photography, haute couture middle age inspired by Christian dior, Gucci, uncropped, unmarked, sharp focus



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