

# CONTEMPORARY IDENTITIES

International Art Magazine

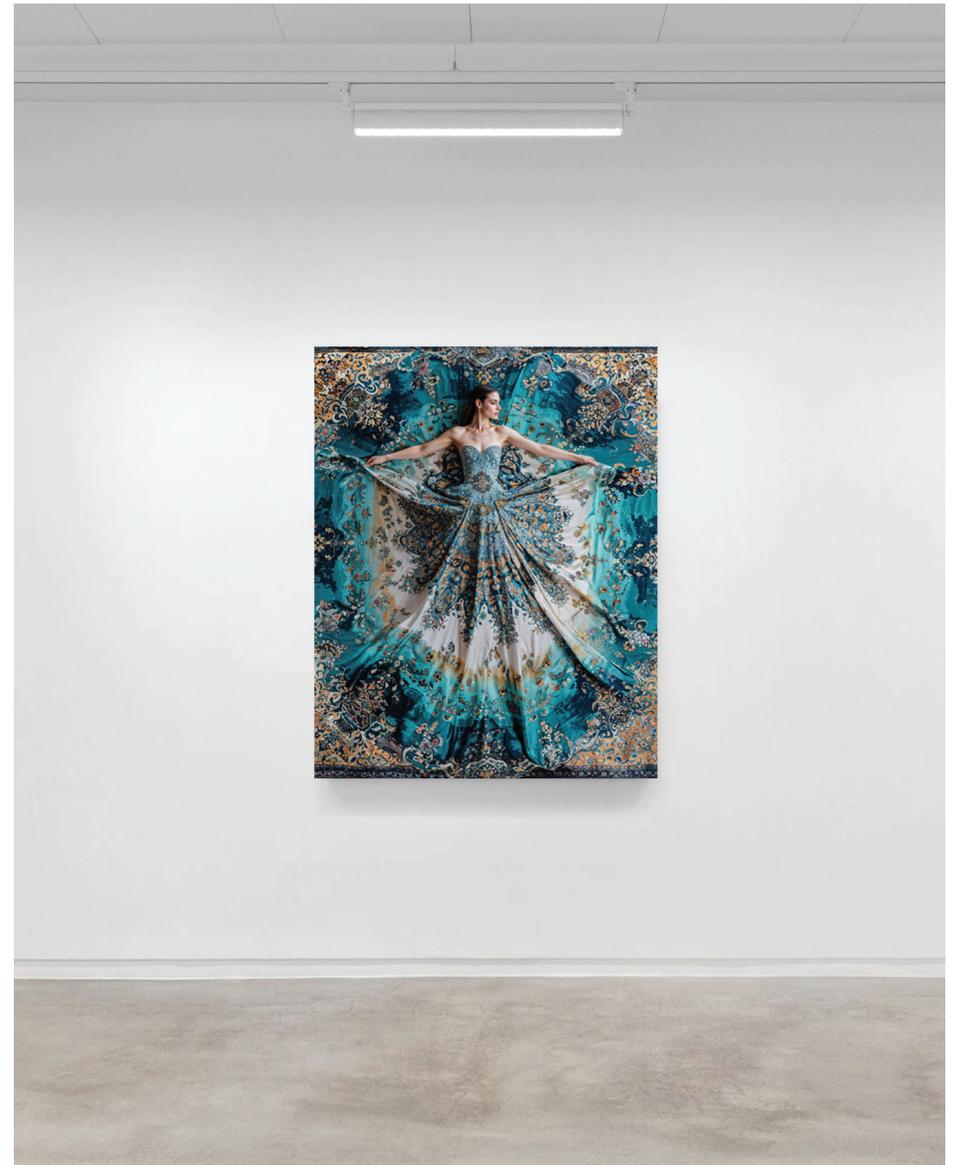
Abdullah Al Saadi | Mounira Al Solh | Kristina Bajilo | Ming Lu | Aida Mahmudova | Alireza Memariani  
Zhu Peihong | Soheil Rad | Alfredo Sciuto | Ampelio Zappalorto | Zeinab Alhashemi | Marco Senaldi



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Art must be an integral part of the struggle. It can't simply mirror what's taking place. It must ally itself with the forces of liberation.

Donald Judd



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Zeinab Alhashemi, There May Exist, 2024, Oil barrels, Camel hides, The Theseus Temple, Vienna, Austria, Exhibition view ©KHM-Museumsverband

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## EDITORS' NOTE

As we embrace the arrival of summer, we are thrilled to present the twenty second issue of ContemporaryIdentities. We invite you to embark on an art-filled adventure that will enrich your summer plans. This issue offers a captivating exploration of aesthetics from diverse perspectives, providing a comprehensive overview.

ContemporaryIdentities endeavors to ignite your imagination and evoke a sense of wonder through the power of art. It is our mission to facilitate your viewing and experiential journey with the artworks. By immersing yourself in this Issue, we hope to enhance your understanding and appreciation of the artistic realm.

In this edition, we had the opportunity to interview Zeinab Alhashemi and talked about "There May Exist" exhibition at the Theseus Temple in Vienna. She is a conceptual artist based in Dubai. Her installations offer site-specific commentaries that engage with the cultural traditions of the Arabian Peninsula. In her landscape sculptures, Alhashemi merges diverse materials and structures, creating a dialogue where cultural and natural histories intersect.

We are grateful for the participation of our contributing artists and writers. In addition to our dedicated board members Zoltán Somhegyi (Hungary) and Izmer Bin Ahmad (Malaysia-UAE), we had the pleasure of working with international art critics such as Anna Guillot (Italy), Federica Falchi (Italy), Sophie Kazan (UK), and Brajan Vojinovic (Serbia).

We also extend our thanks to Fabio Gamberini, our editor in the Artificial Intelligence section, who conducted insightful interview for this issue. For this Issue he interviewed with Marco Senaldi. Marco is a contemporary art critic and scholar of new media who has charted a unique path in analyzing the connections between art, technology, and society. Currently, he serves as the artistic director of Laba in Brescia and holds a teaching position at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera in Milan, Italy.

Enjoy this artistic journey and let it inspire your summer.

Sincerely,  
Sara Berti & Elham Shafaei

# Abdullah Al Saadi

UAE | Sophie  
Kazan



Abdullah Al Saadi and Tarek Abou El Fetouh, Image Courtesy of National Pavilion UAE - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo credit: Daryll Borja

Representing the UAE at the Venice Biennale 2024, with an exhibition entitled *Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia*, the artist Abdullah AlSaadi recalls eight journeys into the UAE's natural wilderness. A veteran of the UAE's contemporary art movements, AlSaadi's artistic practice is mindful, immersive, and deeply attuned to nature and local beliefs. These are hand-painted scrolls, annotated rock installations, colorful travelling trunks with boxes containing maps, paintings, drawings, and objects collected by the artist. These sensory archives record specific memories of his travels. The curator, Tarek Abou El Fetouh relates the artist's holistic practice to that of ancient Arab poets who would also commune with nature for inspiration. Unusually, performers from Sharjah Performing Arts Academy are on-hand throughout the pavilion's installation to bring the artist's work and reflective process to life. "I ... hope this exhibition will lead to thinking about the world around us, and our place within it." (AlSaadi)



*Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia*, 2024, Image Courtesy of National Pavilion UAE - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo credit: Ismail Noor of Seeing Things



*Sites of Memory, Sites of Amnesia*, 2024, Image Courtesy of National Pavilion UAE - La Biennale di Venezia. Photo credit: Ismail Noor of Seeing Things

# Mounira Al Solh

Lebanon | Sophie  
Kazan



A Dance with her Myth, 2023. Wooden boat and mast, sail (organic red textile, beige cotton canvas & embroidered cotton), fishing cages, sage and bay leaves, plastic bottles, and other materials, Boat: 130x490x170 cm; Embroidered sail: 190.5 x 310 cm; Video, color, sound, 12 minutes, Courtesy of the Artist; Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg © LVAA, Photo credit: Quinn Oosterbaan



Pavilion of Lebanon at la Biennale Arte 2024, Courtesy of the Artist & Sfeir-Semler Gallery Beirut/Hamburg, Photo by Federico Vespi gnani © LVAA

Mounira Al Solh is a visual artist from Lebanon whose work occupies the country's national pavilion at the Venice Biennale 2024. The solo-exhibition, entitled *Dancing with Her Myth*, explores the myth of the Greco Phoenician goddess Europa through paintings, drawings, ceramic sculptures, videos, and a semi-constructed boat installation. According to the Roman saga, Zeus, king of the Gods, disguised himself as a bull to seduce and then abduct the Phoenician princess, however in Al Solh's retelling of the myth, it is Europa who occupies the role of power. In one of her paintings, Europa is portrayed carrying the bull and in full control of her destiny. The artist dances between mythology and fantasy. Al Solh's colorful animation and her Phoenician boat installation breathe new life into an ancient story. Mask-like sculptures portray critics or onlookers as colorful but mute figures around the peripheries of Europa's tale. The effect is mesmerizing and powerful.



Fragments, notes & lines, 2018, Group show together with Fereydoun Ave and Ali Razavi, Courtesy of Total Arts, Courtyard, Dubai, UAE

# Kristina Bajilo

Serbia  
Brajan  
Vojinović



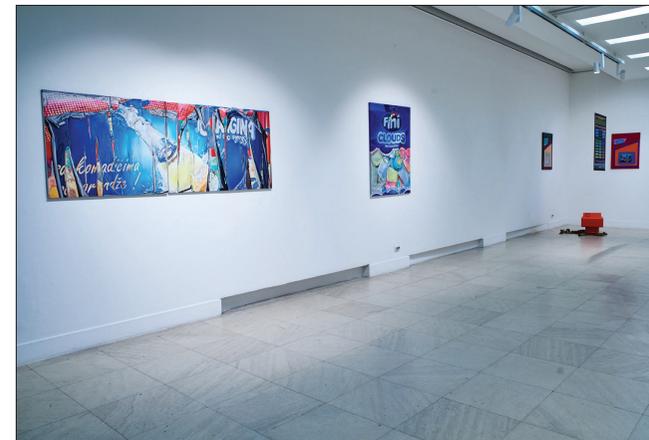
Untitled, 2016, Oil on canvas, 115x165 cm

In the recent exhibition "Superposition", Kristina Bajilo uses traditional painting media in combination with "pop objects", video, and installation. Bajilo subjectively analyzes contemporary civilization trends, criticizing the commercialization and fetishization of art. She points to the dominant role of advertising and its irreversible influence on younger generations, recognizing "false promises" as a tool. Bajilo questions the authenticity of the work as a material object and chooses symbols to activate the "consumer" of the work. She puts them together in an accumulated visual statement, which opens up space for parallel narratives.

Superposition is also a geological term that indicates a new layer cannot exist below a geologically older one; however, anomalies created by human activity exist. Using this metaphor, Bajilo points out the irreversible damage. She alludes to the various technological elements that were used before the widespread use of the Internet, activating feelings of nostalgia in the "consumer" of the work. Bajilo sublimates her research into global pop culture, consumer society, and the passage of time into a frozen billboard-like statement.



'42° 25' 19.8 N, 18° 46' 11.4 E', 2022, Oil on canvas, 100x150 cm



Installation view, 2024, Belgrade Youth Center

# Ming Lu

China-Germany | Brajan Vojinović



Dialogue, 2019, Blue and white porcelain, 26x26x18 cm

Ming Lu is an artist who engages in a meaningful relationship between the media she uses, rich cultural heritage, and challenging contemporary perspectives. In "Dialogue", she reconsiders the complexities of communication and connection, fostering empathy in relation to the self. "Blues is My Business", explores the relation of past and present through playful expression and association with Chinese cultural heritage and the contemporary observer. Using her ability to foster an emotional connection, Lu embroiders a sorrowful child in gold, reminding us of those earliest emotional wounds and the opportunity to alchemize them. Stepping even further in the exploration of media, Ming challenges one's perception through the use of light, material, and sound. In "Translucent Echoes", the atmosphere of being a part and in between the space of language, meaning, and substance engages the viewer to reconsider assumptions about the material world.



Crying child, 2023, embroidery, 80x60 cm



Blues is my business, 2019, Blue and white porcelain, 30x16x9 cm



Translucent echoes, 2021, Porcelain, LED lights, dimension variable

# Aida Mahmudova

Azerbaijan | Zoltán Somhegyi



Across the border, 2024, Mixed media, 155×162 cm, Courtesy of Gazelli Art House, London-Baku

The mixed media pieces by Aida Mahmudova require careful observation, especially because first it is the bold mixture and juxtaposition of diverse materials that may capture our attention. What's more, we tend to get lost, in a positive sense, in these fascinating details, before turning our focus to try to get the full picture. It is only then that we realize that these are landscapes in which the artist does not aim to "just" depict a certain location. It is much more important for Aida Mahmudova to show the aesthetic results of her analyses of the emotional aspects and sentiments that can be expressed through these representations. Therefore, memory, nostalgia, personal and cultural identity are surveyed, with the help of paint, marble, clay, and other inserted elements, that constitute the material basis of these compelling pieces.



On the other side, 2024, Mixed media, 85×65 cm, Courtesy of Gazelli Art House, London-Baku



The crossing, 2024, Mixed media, 65×85 cm, Courtesy of Gazelli Art House, London-Baku

# Alireza Memariani

Iran | Federica Falchi



Landscape without deers, No.2, 2018 Staged-Photography, Edition 2-5, 80x160 cm



Landscape without deers, No.3, 2018, Staged-Photography, Edition 2-5, 80x160 cm

Merging visual lyricism with photographic narratives, Alireza Memariani deftly reveals the essence of Iranian hardship through tales of the ordinary, each a poignant meditation on existential and environmental demise. Through his project titled Public Mourning, Memariani delved into these themes whilst unearthing the convergence of nature and religion, ultimately revealing their cosmic synthesis. In the haunting embrace of Hormuz Island's environmental decline, Public Mourning sprang from the mass death of antelopes on the Iranian island: Memariani conceived metal mummies to honor their silent cries. These osseous forms are accompanied by several characters in contemplative stillness: they perhaps seek solace in life's meditative dance with decay. In revering the religious significance of deer within the Muslim Shia belief, the artist weaves the mass demise into a lament for lost innocence: amidst endangered antelopes, a nation's struggle is mirrored.



Lost innocence, 2017, Staged photography, Edition 1-5, 80x120 cm

# Zhu Peihong

China | Izmer Bin  
Ahmad



Crystal 2018-3, 2018, Acrylic on canvas, 100x200 cm, Courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong-Shanghai

Zhu Peihong's series of abstract paintings bring together the fundamental elements of abstraction where flat shapes of colors harmonize with intricate lines. The intersection of these elements contributes to compositional effects, creating visual dialogues on negotiating complexity with simplicity, accommodating excess of possibilities and absolute order within the border of the image. These paintings are rooted in the excesses of reality, seeded by the urban infrastructure of Beijing, the artist's home city. Dead leaves that occupied the city's surface, power lines that form the gateway to its heaven and the neon lights that illuminate between its earth and sky, are simplified, abstracted, and aestheticized. Lines, shapes, and colors in the paintings evoke such complex intricate network and interconnectedness. They represent the labor to articulate the city and the overwhelming life within it.



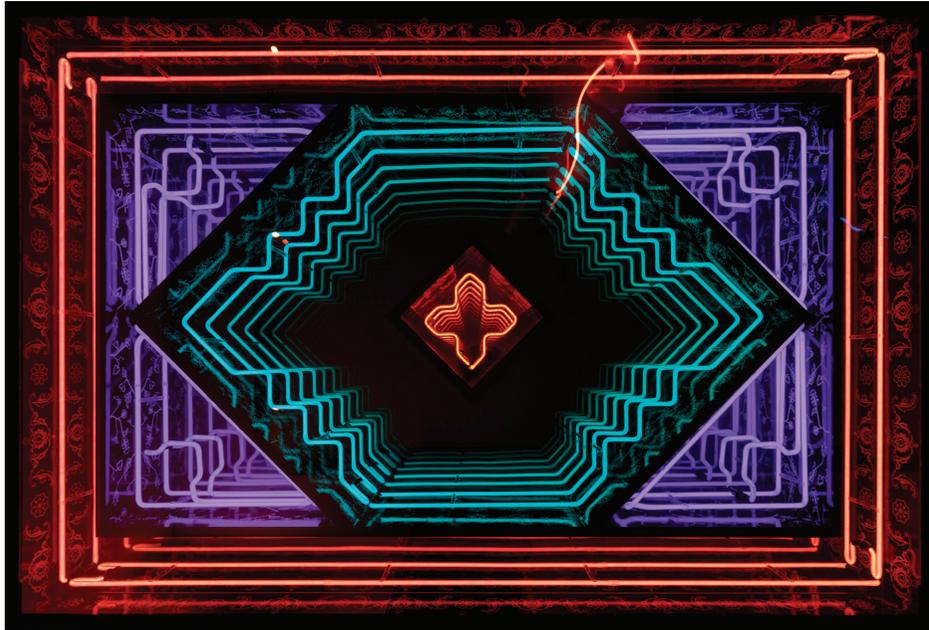
My Space Growing Pink, 2017-1, 2017, Acrylic on canvas, 100x200 cm, Courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong-Shanghai



My Space 450-314-909, 2023, Triptych, Acrylic on canvas, 140x160 cm, Courtesy of Pearl Lam Galleries, Hong Kong-Shanghai

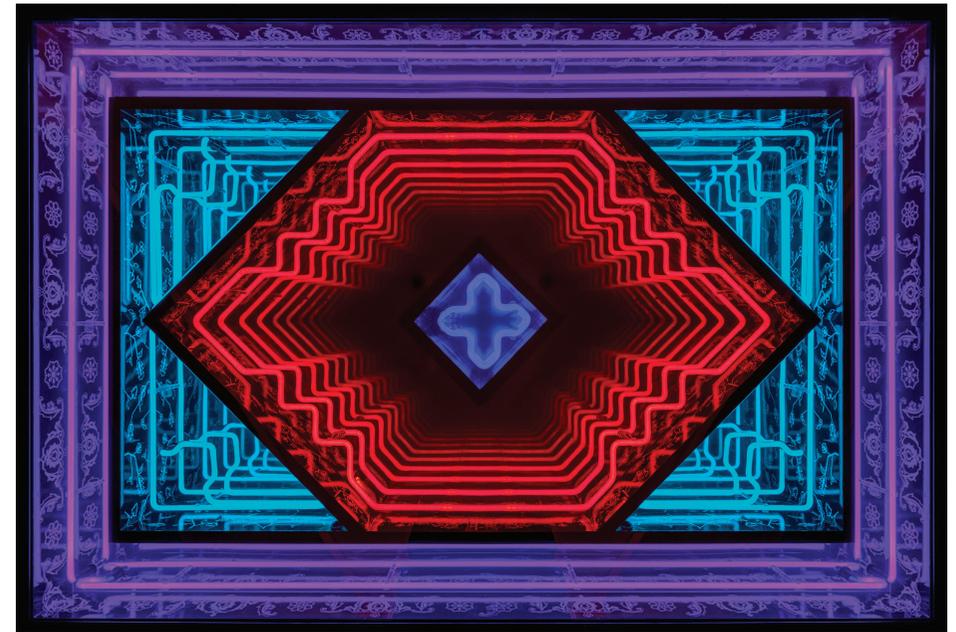
# Soheil Rad

Iran-Italy-UAE | Zoltán Somhegyi



The Core, from carpet series, 2023, Metal, infinity mirror and variable neon light, Two sizes: 120x180x20 cm and 100x150x20 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE

Soheil Rad invites us to look deep in the past. In this recent series, the past is evoked through the reference to the traditional appearance of carpets. However, their formal aspects are recreated with the use of neon lights and infinity mirrors. In this way the aforementioned “looking deep in the past” is not simply a metaphorical image, but we can really see an endless profundity in the pieces and thus the reference to the inspiring values of traditional artistic forms and modes of expressions that are “woven” in such works. When observing the pieces, we can create personal connections to this past, and find ways of interpreting our novel relations to these classical art forms.



The Core, from carpet series, 2023, Metal, infinity mirror and variable neon light, Two sizes: 120x180x20 cm and 100x150x20 cm, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE



Exhibition view at Leila Heller gallery, 2023, Courtesy of Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai, UAE

# Alfredo Sciuto

Germany | Anna Guillot



Kakao, 2024, PVC and adhesive tape, 3x11x3 m

'Kakao' is the most recent creature by Alfredo Sciuto aka Gotland Fünf, a naturalised Italian artist from Berlin. A giant PVC dog with a walkable interior. The creation created for KMZ Kollektiv (Laia RiCa, Antonio Cerezo, Yahima P. Córdova, Dani Pomar), which develops an interactive theatrical work using the means of material theatre, is a work that can also be considered a stage object. After the distant experience with the OPENSOURCE group, this is Sciuto-Fünf's first collaboration with the KMZ group, with whom the artist is in contact via the costume designer Reyes Perez, who had organised Performance-Festival with the Openspace Collective.

Turning to large dimensions and monumental contexts, 'Domus Aurea', Sciuto's inflatable environment of just over a decade ago, was, on the other hand, in its topicality and concept akin to unconventional forms of architecture and design - Hans Hemmert's Balloon sculpture, the interiors of the Penique Prod collective, Tomàs Saraceno's cells - and was born as ephemeral architecture. It was a golden, vibrant, glowing 'Domus' embedded in the severe structure of a medieval fortress, the Tower of Frederick II of Swabia in Enna (IT). It was conceived as an inflatable environment that could be easily deconstructed and reproduced elsewhere; an endo-membrane of golden film anatomically superimposed on the inner walls of the octagonal tower, aimed at generating a new environment with sound (sound design Federico Leocata), a 'dwelling' as an



Domus Aurea, 2012, 800 m<sup>3</sup> volume x 80 m<sup>2</sup> walking surface, 320 m<sup>2</sup> gold reflective polyethylene and 1600 m adhesive tape and a fan system, detail

immersive occasion. It was a resplendent and once ringing place, amidst sounds, rustles and air currents produced by the system's sealing system and the half-open access slot, which helped to hold it up, lying against the walls up to the umbrella vault of the roof. It happened that the public, having entered this sublime space barefoot, sharing its breath in a state of precarious wonder, found themselves witnessing an unexpected experiment in yoga practice. The days-long work-in-progress necessary for the collective construction of the canvas covering found the coherence of its functions as 'participatory art' in the form of collective awareness.

As with 'Kakao', Alfredo Sciuto has therefore not ruled out any concrete functionality in the case of 'Domus'.



Domus Aurea, 2012, 800 m<sup>3</sup> volume x 80 m<sup>2</sup> walking surface, 320 m<sup>2</sup> gold reflective polyethylene and 1600 m adhesive tape and a fan system, detail

# Ampelio Zappalorto

Italy | Anna  
Guillot



Pas de deux, 1994, Object used for the performance Narrentanz, Apparat Galerie, Berlin, Courtesy of On the Contemporary, Catania, Italy

Ampelio Zappalorto's artistic practice does not disdain any medium: he moves from painting to installation, from photography to video, from printmaking to terracotta. His is wide-ranging research that in now its various evolutions has privileged the environmental space, now that of canvas and paper, now the plastic space of sculpture. Dominant seems to be the psychological theme of which identity is one of the central issues.

Unpredictable, always allusive, and ironic but also sarcastic, not only towards himself, Zappalorto uses photography from the point of view of figurative art. It is always his to direct the photographic sets that see him 'on stage', sometimes making use of collaborators, more often practicing the self-timer. For Zappalorto, photographing is also documenting private moments and at the same time can serve as a reminder for pictorial and plastic work. However, paths also arise that use the medium from further angles. A frenzied form of narcissism often places him as the almost unique subject of an investigation that basically focuses on the search for the face and the body.

Ampelio Zappalorto's basic idea coincides with the thought of Elémire Zolla



Horse, 2005, Courtesy of Historical Archive Pari&dispari, Reggio Emilia

when the philosopher writes: "Narcissus is the absolute, infinite mind, which projects itself onto the screen of nothingness and thus creates the external world, in whose reality it believes, remaining stupefied, narcotized. Narcissus is the man who forgets that he himself is the origin of what in the world seduces him and, because of his error, goes astray and dies. He alienates in externality the idea of perfection that dwells within him and seeks to embrace its fluid, inescapable appearance on the screen of becoming."



Untitled, 2001, Black and white photographs with collage, 58.5×42.5 cm, Courtesy of Diagramma Gallery - Luciano Inga-Pin, Milan, Italy

# Zeinab Alhashemi



There May Exist, 2024, The Theseus Temple, Vienna, Austria, Exhibition view © KHM-Museumsverband

CI: Please introduce yourself.

ZA: My name is Zeinab Alhashemi, a conceptual artist from Dubai, UAE specializing in site-specific installation and Public Art. I am fascinated by the transformation of the UAE following the country's construction and industrial booms, and my installations aim to create a new perception of reality by deconstructing the viewer's understanding of their surroundings. I work around a variety of materials to position the viewer between the natural and artificial, suddenly reminding of human interference.. I have participated in numerous art fairs and festivals, and my works have been featured in group exhibitions at prominent galleries around the world.

CI: What inspired you to create "There May Exist," and how did you develop the concept for this installation?

ZA: My installation "There May Exist" at the Theseus Temple explores how humans and animals adapt together to their environment. It delves into the transformative impact of the oil boom in the

Gulf region and the enduring significance of camels in local culture. The artwork is an evocative composition of oil barrels transformed into a pyramid, symbolizing the profound metamorphosis that has swept through the United Arab Emirates since the revelation of oil.

CI: You use camel hair and leather in your art. What draws you to these materials, and how do they contribute to the themes you explore?

ZA: In my sculptural works, I utilize camel fur and hide dyed in El Ain, an oasis city in the UAE. By mounting the leather on various surfaces, I create sculptural landscapes that blur the boundaries between disparate forms and objects, reflecting the interconnectedness of nature and human experience. The link between progress and decline also reverberates through my work. As



There May Exist, 2024, Oil barrels, Camel hides, The Theseus Temple, Vienna, Austria, Exhibition view © KHM-Museumsverband



There May Exist, 2024, Oil barrels, Camel hides, The Theseus Temple, Vienna, Austria, Exhibition view ©KHM-Museumsverband

Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the founder of the Emirate of Dubai, explained: 'My grandfather rode a camel, my father rode a camel, I drive a Mercedes, my son drives a Land Rover, his son will drive a Land Rover, but his son will ride a camel.'

CI: How do you perceive the impact of the oil boom on the cultural and environmental landscape of the Gulf region, and how is this reflected in your art?

ZA: My creative process involved deconstructing and repurposing oil barrels into a striking pyramid using welding, shaping, and upholstery techniques. The textured surface of the



There May Exist, 2024, Oil barrels, Camel hides, Photo credit: Artur Walczewski, The Theseus Temple, Vienna, Austria, Exhibition view ©KHM-Museumsverband



There May Exist, 2024, Oil barrels, Camel hides, The Theseus Temple, Vienna, Austria, Exhibition view ©KHM-Museumsverband

pyramid, reminiscent of camel hide, serves as a metaphor for the resilience and adaptability of both Emiratis and camels in response to survive in harsh environmental conditions in the past.

CI: How do you feel about presenting "There May Exist" at the Theseus Temple in Vienna? How does the location influence the way audiences perceive your work?

ZA: Being the first Emirati artist to showcase my work at The Theseus Temple was a monumental experience. It provided me with a platform to share insights into the cultural evolution of the UAE and its artistic expression on a global stage, fostering dialogue and understanding between different cultures. Being commissioned by the KHM (Kunsthistorisches Museum) has been a year in planning.

Through "There May Exist," I aim to raise awareness about environmental sustainability and the impact of human activity on the planet which I call it "Human interference or dominance on Nature"

The pyramid symbolizes the ascent of progress fueled by the discovery of oil, while also prompting viewers to reflect on the cultural heritage of the UAE and the ongoing quest for identity amidst industrialization. Because this is "our landscape". The other works presented represent an internal reflection between man and landscape, through time. Mood swings that coincide with the fog, which clears and darkens, represent the concept of hypochondria and depression in a possible form, a fog that walks, grows and decreases, like the mental swing that often binds the majority of humanity.

CI: How has your artistic practice evolved over the years, and what key experiences have shaped your development as an artist?

ZA: Through my artwork, I strive to preserve and celebrate the legacy of the UAE's heritage while also encouraging dialogue and reflection on its evolution in the modern era. My artistic practice has evolved tremendously over the years. Initially, I was deeply inspired by the rapid transformation of the UAE due to its construction and industrial

booms. This led me to explore themes that bridge the natural and artificial, using materials such as oil barrels and camel hides to symbolize the resilience and adaptability inherent in both our environment and culture. A significant milestone in my journey is my installation at the Theseus Temple in Vienna, which allowed me to delve into the cultural impact of the Gulf's oil boom and share this narrative on an international platform.

CI: What do you hope to achieve through your art in the future, both personally and in terms of broader societal impact?

ZA: Looking ahead, I hope to continue raising awareness that art is a universal language and it is a great way to tell the stories we encounter on my deep levels of our being and how it can have a profound impact of human activity on our planet. Through my art, I strive to foster a dialogue about the cultural and environmental transformations occurring in the UAE, balancing the themes of progress and heritage. Personally, I aim to keep evolving as an artist, constantly experimenting with new materials and techniques to address broader societal issues through my conceptual work.

CI: What advice would you give to emerging artists who are inspired by your approach to conceptual art?

ZA: To emerging artists inspired by my approach to conceptual art, I would say: embrace experimentation and stay true to your unique perspective. Visual storytelling is powerful, and using innovative materials can help convey complex themes. Engage deeply with your cultural heritage and use your art to provoke thought and dialogue on contemporary issues. Remember, perseverance and adaptability are key—qualities that have been central to my own artistic journey.

CI: If you have any current or upcoming exhibition, please don't forget to mention it.

ZA: I will be taking part in PAAD Beinnale which will take place in the city of Abu Dhabi and the first public art biennale in the region. Also I will have my next solo show in November 2024 at Leila Heller gallery during Abu Dhabi Art Fair. In addition I am setting up my warehouse studio to have it up and running by the end of the year.



There May Exist, 2024, Oil barrels, Camel hides, The Theseus Temple, Vienna, Austria, Exhibition view ©KHM-Museumsverband

# Interview with Marco Senaldi

By: Fabio Gamberini



Errori, midjourney, 2023-2024 - Courtesy of Alessandro D'Isa.

Marco Senaldi, acclaimed contemporary art critic and scholar of new media, has charted a unique path in analyzing the connections between art, technology, and society. Through seminal works in the field of contemporary art, he has offered a penetrating vision of the cultural dynamics of our time. Currently, he serves as the artistic director of Laba in Brescia and holds a teaching position at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera.

FG: Welcome to Contemporary Identities. Drawing inspiration from this context, we would like to delve into how Duchamp's thinking, with his bold challenge to artistic conventions, can engage in dialogue with the emerging world of AI Art. How might Duchamp's approach to creativity and conceptualization influence our understanding of art generated by artificial intelligence? And what perspectives, challenges, or opportunities could emerge for the future of contemporary art?

MS: Well, Marcel Duchamp was undoubtedly an innovative artist, but we cannot forget his connections with science. Not only because he lived in the early 20th century, but because, for example, he was called the engineer of lost time. Indeed, in his works, there is always a reference to mathematics, to the fourth dimension of geometry, and his works were carefully designed.

However, he understood that it was necessary to leave an important space for chance. So, there is certainly a possible connection with artificial intelligence, except that we tend to think of artificial intelligence as a device, a tool that serves to predict the future and, in this way, we demonstrate our fear of chance. While Duchamp's great lesson is precisely this: despite living in a scientific and technological era, we must learn not only to coexist with chance but, in a certain sense, to tame it.

A famous phrase by Duchamp, in fact, refers to chance as "l'hasard en conserve", in French, that is, opportunity in a can, as if it were jam or peaches in syrup. Because chance cannot be eliminated and not even artificial intelligence will succeed, even if it can predict many things, but it is also diabolically exposed to this force.

This force therefore risks making us believe that we have defeated chance when in the end, it re-emerges in the most furious forms. So, it really needs to be tamed, it needs to be thoroughly understood, and perhaps the artist who knows how to use current technology in this way has yet to be born.



Errori, midjourney, 2023-2024 - Courtesy of Alessandro D'Isa.



Errori, midjourney, 2023-2024 - Courtesy of Alessandro D'Isa.

FG: Aristotle is known for considering art as an imitation of nature. Examining AI-generated artworks, we can compare this Aristotelian concept with the ability of neural networks to learn from existing artistic styles and generate similar works. This raises questions about creativity and artistic authenticity, as AI-produced artworks might be seen as imitations derived from pre-existing models rather than as original expressions of human creativity.

MS: Applied to art, artificial intelligence raises many questions, but we must not fall into the trap of associating it with any will or subjectivity. It is simply about algorithms that rework data. Now, if this data is sparse and of low quality, the results tend to be repetitive and mediocre. It's no coincidence that so far, the outputs generated by artificial intelligence applied to art often resemble a certain second-rate science fiction, or a certain comic book style, because this artificial intelligence has

so far been fed with data of that kind. Therefore, the functioning of artificial intelligence is interesting to the extent that it is based on scripts, that is, commands. The artist who uses it does so in a quasi-literary manner, in a sense, explaining what they need and what they want to achieve, perhaps in very detailed terms. The more complex the script, the more likely it is that artificial intelligence will give us an interesting output, a result. But if the software and algorithm are not supported by an adequate amount of data, the result will always be rather poor.

Thus, the human element, the element of choice, is more crucial than ever with artificial intelligence because essentially, artificial intelligence brings us back to a qualitative issue, not so much an imitative one, that is, the subtle problem of what the quality of something beautiful means.

FG: Pierre Lévy, a Canadian philosopher known for his studies on digital culture and collective intelligence, has theorized about the importance of co-creation in the era of new media, emphasizing the active role of the audience in cultural production. Exploring the use of artificial intelligence in art, we can consider how this technology can engage the audience in the very act of artistic creation, allowing users to interact with algorithms to generate unique works of art, thereby expanding the concept of authorship and artistic participation.

MS: Well, it is clear that, artificial intelligence seems to challenge the notion of authorship, but we need to reflect on the fact that authorship is a relatively interesting concept, perhaps fundamentally modern. In reality, most works, let's call them artistic or spiritual, human works, have been expressions of a collective sentiment. Think of the most astonishing mega artworks, from the pyramids to cathedrals, from prehistoric settlements to more recent realities.



Errori, midjourney, 2023-2024 - Courtesy of Alessandro D'Isa.



Errori, midjourney, 2023-2024 - Courtesy of Alessandro D'Isa.

So, in the end, it might even turn out that artificial intelligence is essentially an expression of collective intelligence. However, an enigma remains. We keep talking about artificial intelligence, but we should remember a crucial distinction between intellect and reason. Intelligence is fundamentally different from reason because it addresses solvable questions. The greatness of human reason, as Kant said, is that it poses those very questions to which humans typically do not know the answers, even though they cannot help but ask them. And these are fundamental questions. Why are we here? Does God exist? What is the cosmos? And it is in facing these questions that we remain completely human.

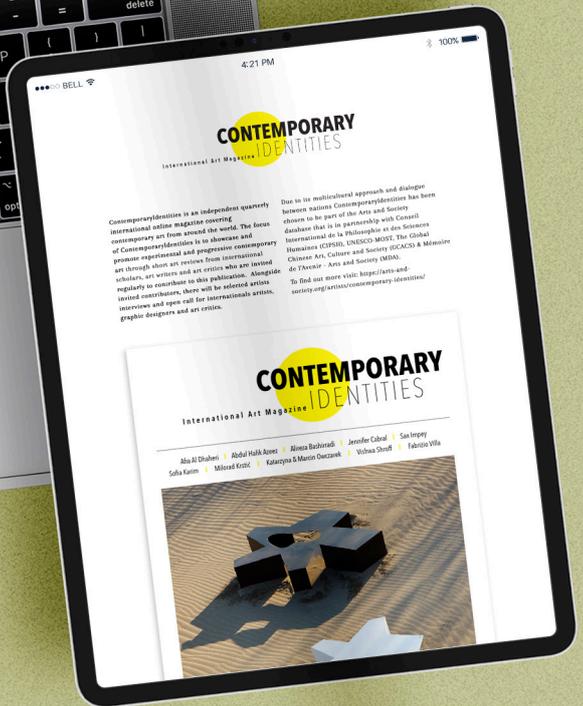
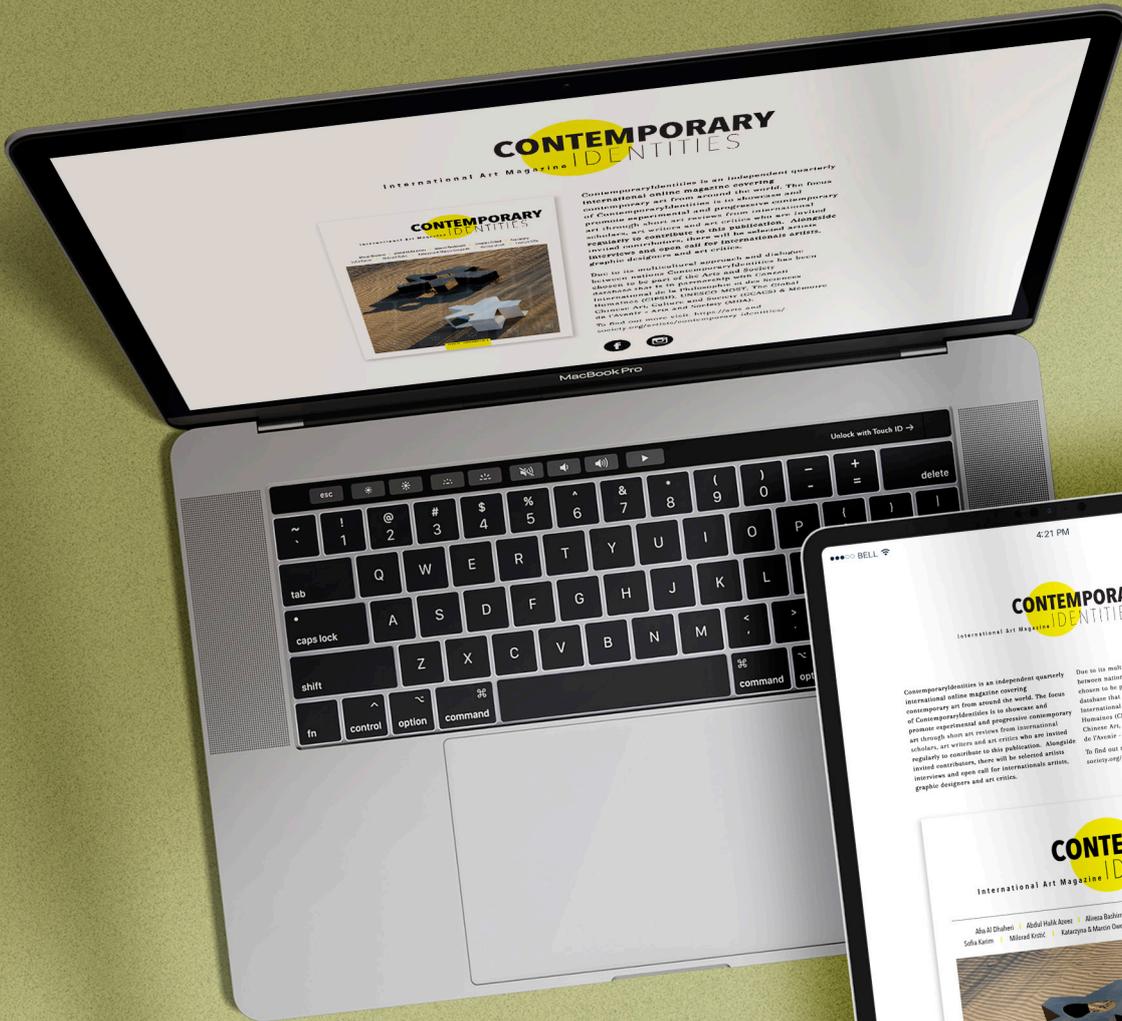
FG: As the artistic director of Laba in Brescia and a teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts of Brera, how do you see the evolution of artistic education in the digital age?

MS: Arguably, innovation is not a topic we can set aside, especially not in fine arts academies, which today are more than ever not just places for transmitting cultural heritage, but true centers of experimentation. This is precisely why, for example, at "LABA," our academy of fine arts in Brescia, we already have young students working with artificial intelligence, thanks in part to the presence of an Italian artist who has become famous in this field, named Francesco Disa, who specifically focuses on this tool. In essence, it corresponds to what paintbrushes and tubes of paint once were, which were themselves a 19th-century invention that made plein air painting possible, and consequently, the Impressionist movement.

So, artificial intelligence undoubtedly has a very powerful educational value, provided we understand that it is a tool. The interesting thing is that it is a cultural tool, one that, in essence, reactivates, recovers, rehabilitates, remixes, and reproduces based on billions of data points that come from the history of art. It is a kind of fantastic reinterpretation of everything that has been produced so far in the artistic field.

FG: How do you see the role of art curators in the digital and artificial intelligence era? In what ways has this role changed or is changing?

MS: I sincerely believe that not only will the role of the critic change, but perhaps that of the intellectual entirely, meaning the one who believes they can explain things in words, such as artworks, history, the evolution of mankind. Perhaps artificial intelligence in this sense is a very powerful bet, because already today there are some who have written books completely based on artificial intelligence. I myself have tried this experiment and have published an entire article asking artificial intelligence what future artificial intelligence would have, and I assure you that the answer was very intelligent, that is, worthy of artificial intelligence, because it took into consideration various variables, including the fact that if the algorithm were to prevail over humans, this would create possible negative reactions that artificial intelligence itself defined as clashes, strengthening the conflict between man and machine. If this is true, if artificial intelligence really not only lends us a hand, but in a sense completely relieves us of this task, I think this is absolutely fantastic news. Truly, this is the most interesting part of all the questions, and therefore the answer is perhaps crucial. Think about the advent of photography in 1839, which completely upset poets like Baudelaire, painters like Pivod and Chavanne; they were scared, desperate, thinking that an invention had arrived that would make them all fail because no painter can paint with the precision, sharpness, and indisputability of a camera, but this instead turned out to be a masked blessing because in the end, artists could do something else, for example, create abstract paintings, something that obviously a camera cannot do. And if this were to truly happen in the field of intellectualism, how many beautiful books, but essentially very tied to the contingent, do we read every day that could not be developed by artificial intelligence, and finally we intellectuals could finally devote ourselves to the study of something higher, spirituality, authentic philosophy, dialogue; perhaps these are the things that matter, instead we have all become writers of books, writers of catalogs, but perhaps culture is not this, perhaps it never was, perhaps we are not at the end of an era, but rather at the beginning, a fantastic, promising new beginning, a new horizon of total emancipation, where all these secondary tasks of intellectualism will ultimately be carried out by machines, and this is fantastic if we truly know what to do beyond this horizon.



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