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NADINE KNOTZER INTERVIEWS ANAHHITA RAMZI



Iranian Beauty by Anahita Ramzi

NK: What were your first thoughts after you received the invitation to show at this year's Venice Biennial?

AR: The request to show at Padiglione Venezia came very much last minute, so actually I was very surprised. But of course, I also thought, if there is a way to properly show a work that makes sense within the framework, I'll go for it.

Your work *Iranian Beauty* premiered at the Biennial, was this work specifically done to show in Venice?

I had the concept for the work in mind for a longer while and then chose to realise it for Venice, as it directly relates to the exhibition's theme of the "Silk Road" at Padiglione Venezia.

It is a work that directly relates to a present political/social issue, I am happy that I got the chance to realise and show it now.

The work deals with the current currency struggle in Iran which you combined with appropriating the famous scene of the movie *American Beauty*. Could you explain the work and its background as well as why choosing the iconic scene from the movie *American Beauty*?

It is interesting, that the scene with the girl lying naked within a bed of rose petals is a scene that everybody seems to remember. I find it interesting to make use of that "collective memory" - relating it to a contradictory issue. I am lying naked in a bed of devalued Iranian Rial Notes that are raining onto me - it is the opposite of a seduction.

For the shooting I used ten thousands notes of 500 and 1000 Rial, - the value of a 500 Rial note is currently around 2 Pennies.

Iran currently suffers from very high inflation and devaluation of the country's currency.

It is a very urgent issue that is also directly related to trade struggles and western sanctions.

The video is referring to that relation on a shifted basis, with the aim to raise questions about the established connections.

Producing the work you faced the issue of printing several thousand Iranian Rials. I can imagine it's not easy to print money with the explanation it's for an Artist Video.

How did you manage and in which country was this made possible?

Initially I would have loved to use real Rial notes, but there is no way to get such a big amount outside of Iran. Overcoming that difficulty, I then eventually got excited printing the money, as it is so beautifully useless to expensively print thousands of bank notes worth nothing.

This fact also helped to convince a print shop in Los Angeles, where I shot the video.

Next time I am gonna go for Swiss Francs.

You have been in Venice for about two weeks, to be there for your set up and to be part of the Opening. What are the challenges you faced setting up on an "Island"?

I needed to finish a part of the work shown at the pavilion on site in Venice. In addition to the video I did do prints of Iranian Rial Notes on Fortuny Irani Fabric. I loved the idea to connect this luxury venetian fabric with its name to pictures of the devalued Iranian currency. It creates a site-specific addition to the video.

Anyhow, it was quite a challenge to find production facilities in Venice, one has to travel long distances outside of the city and carry a lot of stuff on small boats. The direct collaboration with Fortuny and the organizers in Venice made things possible.

Were you able to see some of the Pavilions and exhibitions yourself? Which exhibition or Artwork will you remember after everything you saw?

Yes, I tried my best to see as much as possible! This year's British Pavilion with Jeremy Dellers collage of a national "History of Violence" worked beautifully for me. I also enjoyed the Iraq Pavilion a lot, it's great to see it made possible with very interesting works.

Between all the exhibitions, previews, cueing for Vaperetos, Parties etc. what are the must see/ do during Venice Biennial?

I didn't do much else, but I enjoyed a lot to have a morning coffee in a very small alley at the very small round the corner Osteria without any tourists and buzz. I would suggest everyone to find a spot like that.

Any tip for other artist to add to their Venice Biennial survival guide?

For me it was sometimes helpful to think of it as: we are all in this together.