



Moataz Nasr

The Khalid Shoman Foundation
Darat al Funun

Moataz Nasr

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Moataz Nasr



Born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1961. Lives and works in Cairo.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2006 - Darat al Funun, The Khalid Shoman Foundation, Amman, Jordan
- Galleria Continua, San Gimignano, Italy
- 2005 - Touchstones Art Gallery, Rochdale, UK
- 2004 - Falaki Gallery, The American University in Cairo, Egypt
- Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
- 2003 - Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
- Franco Riccardo Gallery, Napoli, Italy
- 2002 - Franco Riccardo Gallery, Napoli, Italy
- "Espace-La Bodega" Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
- 2001 - Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
- 2000 - Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
- Egyptian Cultural Center in Paris, France
- 1999 - Al Ahram House Gallery, London, UK
- Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Fine Art, Cairo, Egypt

Group Exhibitions

- 2006 - "For Lebanon", Gallery Ibda'a, Cairo, Egypt
- ECHIGO-TSUMARI Triennale, Japan
- AFRICA REMIX, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- "Ghosts of Self and State", Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, Australia
- CCA 94th Annual Conference, CCA - College Art Association, Boston, USA
- 2005 - "Forming with Light", Palace of Art, Opera House, Cairo, Egypt
- Bamako Biennale for African Photography, Mali
- Yokohama Triennale, Japan
- AFRICA REMIX, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France
- "Mediterranean Encounters", Sicily, Italy
- 4x4, Artists Space, Broadway, New York, USA
- "Imagining the Book", Alexandria Library, Egypt



- Sharjah Biennale, U.A.E.
- "Loose Your Identity", Kunstverein Kreis, Ludwigsburg, Germany
- Museum of Contemporary Art, Bahea, Salvador, Brazil
- French Cultural Center, Damascus, Syria
- AFRICA REMIX, Hayward Gallery, London, UK
- 2004 - Museo del Cristalino, Colle, Italy
- "La Forma delle Nuvole", "Arte all Arte 10", curated by Achille Bonito Oliva and - James Putnam, Montalcino, San Gimignano, Poggibonsi, Colle di Val D'Elsa, - Siena, Buonconvento, Italy
- Sneeze 80x80, Athens, Greece
- Castello di Trani, Bari, Italy
- Le Opera e I giorni, Triennale, Certosa di Padula, Italy
- 25th Sao Paulo Biennale, Brazil
- Milly Pozzi Arte Contemporanea, Como, Italy
- Bosane Biennale, South Korea
- AFRIKA REMIX, Museum Kunst Palast, Dusseldorf, Germany
- Dak'art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal
- 2003 - 'Miart', Milano Art Fair, Milan, Italy
- Bologna Art Fair, Bologna, Italy
- Espacio Arte Contemporaneo Camargo, Spain
- Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
- "Disorientation", House of World Cultures, Berlin, Germany
- Bologna Fair, Bologna, Italy
- 2002 - "Unplugged", Arts Electronica Festival, Linz, Austria
- Video Marathon, Chisinau, Moldova
- Galleria Civica d'Arte Contemporanea Premio Suzzara, Italy
- Dakar Biennale, Senegal
- "You Can Touch", Espace Karim Francis, Cairo, Egypt
- 2001 - "Intresecus-Extrincus", Studio Casoli, Milan, Italy
- "Ambiente: Le Area Non Protette", Palazzo Pretorio Sala del Consiglio Comunale, Sandrigo, Italy

- Cairo Modern Art Exhibition in Denhag, Holland
- 8th International Cairo Biennale, Opera Arts Palace, Egypt
- Participated with Martin McNally in Al Nitaq Festival, Downtown, Cairo, Egypt
- 2000 - "The Palm Tree", Mashrabia Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
- ..with Egyptian and Italian artists, Gezira Art Center, Cairo, Egypt
- Prepared & participated in Jerusalem art exhibition, Hanager, Opera House, Cairo
- La Bodega, Cairo, Egypt
- Cairo International Biennale for Ceramics, Opera House Arts Palace, Cairo
- Nitaq Festival of Art, Downtown, Cairo, Egypt
- 1999 - 27th National Exhibition for Fine Arts, Opera House Arts Palace, Cairo, Egypt
- Small Artworks at the Center of Art Cairo, Egypt
- 1998 - 26th National Exhibition for Fine Arts, Akhnaton Center of Art, Cairo
- The First Show for Artists over 35 years and honored, Museum of Fine Arts (Hussein Sobhy), Alexandria, Egypt
- 4th Cairo International Biennale for Ceramics, Center of Art, Cairo, Egypt
- "The Days of Kom Ghorab", Cairo, Hanager Gallery, Egypt
- 1997 - 25th National Exhibition for Fine Arts, Center of Art, Cairo, Egypt
- Heliorama exhibition at the French Cultural Center, Heliopolis, Cairo, Egypt
- 1996 - 24th National Exhibition for Fine Arts, Center of Art, Cairo, Egypt
- 1995 - 7th Salon of Youth, Center of Art, Cairo, Egypt

Public Art

- 2001 Permanent installation at La Bodega lounge (Hurricane), Cairo, Egypt
- 2000 Permanent installation at Diwan bookstore in Zamalek, Cairo, Egypt

Workshops

- 2002 - Close Up Workshop, 3 Egyptian artists with 3 Swedish artists, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt
- Workshop The Open Studio in Townhouse Gallery Cairo (10 Egyptian and 10 foreign artists)
- 2000 Participated in the Fashion Design workshop at the University of Applied Arts, ending in a number of exhibition in the Gezira Arts Center, Townhouse, Zeinab Khatoun and the Goethe Institute in Cairo, Egypt

Others

- 2000 Member of the Jury Board at the 15th Art Festival Sondrio, Italy
- Commissary of the Egyptian Contemporary Art exhibition in Nicosia, Cyprus
- 1996/98 Participated in Kom Ghorab Project in Old Cairo, Egypt

Awards

- 2005 Grand Prize, Sharjah Biennale, U.A.E
- 2004 Ministry of Culture Prize, Dakart Biennale, Dakar, Senegal
- 2002 The Biennale Prize, Dakar Biennale, Senegal
- 2001 Grand Prize, 8th International Cairo Biennale. Opera Arts Palace, Egypt
- 1997 Prize of Painting, Heliorama exhibition, French Cultural Center, Cairo, Egypt
- 1995 Third Prize, 7th Salon of Youth, Center of Art, Cairo, Egypt

art reviews

Moataz Nasr, or the Evidence of Things not Seen

Simon Njami



Moataz Nasr is Egyptian. In Senegal in 2002, at the Dakar Biennale, he discovered that he was also African. Of course he was aware of this before, but the physical experience of being in the darker side of the Sahara desert made him appreciate fully, for the first time, the indelible familiarity that exists between the different countries of the African continent. Regardless of - or perhaps because of - their history and regardless of their different influences and priorities shaped by different geopolitical and cultural climates, he could not help becoming aware that all those countries face the same questions. Any attempt to decipher the essence of Nasr's work has to make this realisation its starting point. An Africa suffering for lack of self-determination and for want of a dream. An Africa robbed of its dreams by the constraints of economic and political necessity. An Africa shackled by insoluble contradictions that prevent it from writing its own history.

Hence Nasr's Egypt is only a metaphor for a web of issues that reach far beyond the strictly local confines of his country. The work presented here is the product of fifty years of independence echoing questions posed throughout the continent, and beyond this, perhaps even echoing the basic questions posed by existentialist philosophers such as Edmund Husserl and Jean-Paul Sartre. What is freedom? What is initiative? How should we view ourselves within a context that is both specific and invasive? How should we view ourselves outside this context? And finally, who are we exactly when we say "I"? Is this "I" simply the echo of a history of which we are at once the inheritors and the destroyers? Does this "I" represent a specific and unique entity, genuinely and intrinsically free to seek fulfillment? Or are we rather condemned to play our part in a collective story, the dénouement of which was predetermined way back in the mists of time? A story of which



we can never become the author, as our deeds, our gestures and our most private thoughts have already been formulated for us? What does this "I" represent, ultimately, if not an aborted dream? A useful dream, such as the illusion of pan-Africanism which never came to pass or the illusion of independence movements which happened to become nothing but failures and disappointments? The answer is complex and presupposes an in-depth analysis of the postcolonial phenomenon that has helped to shape the essence of contemporary Africa. However, artistic creativity, providing a magnified reflection of the societies that have forged it, none the less offers us a few sketchy outlines of an answer. It does so through the work of people who owe it to themselves to play a part in the making of history.

Born of historical upheavals, these artists carry the germ of the ideas that could enable us to decode a

phenomenon that affects the entire planet. They are more or less the same age as the independent states of Africa. This produces responsibilities that are difficult to shrug off. It opens up inexorably the path that leads to searching self-analysis, which in turn triggers the questioning of invalid assumptions. For unlike their Old World contemporaries, the children of this generation have every right to assume a familiarity with countries that they view as their equals.

Nasr is Egyptian, as we were saying, but by labelling him, we do not mean in any way to diminish the scope of his thinking or his aims. On the contrary, our view of the world is conditioned by what we are and by the unique experience that has made us thus. And if this experience may be transformed into something shared by humanity as a whole - according to Immanuel Kant's words, "Le beau est ce qui est représenté sans concept comme objet

d'une satisfaction universelle"¹ - it none the less keeps its specific social and historical context. For example, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome, painted for the glory of a religion at a particular historic moment, can now be seen just as an art masterpiece; one can appreciate its beauty without knowing the inspiration that created it. The very nature of that inspiration comprises what I call our unique experience, or, in this specific case, Michelangelo's unique experience. This is echoed by the Ghanaian artist El Anatsui's observations on globalisation, or on universalism and its perverse effects: "As for hybridity, the hybridisation of cultures, as of now, is to me more of a conjecture than a reality. I do not buy the idea of a universal culture. Every culture has its essence which, like the soul of man, you cannot change or infect easily. Unless a culture has strength, it cannot contribute effectively to a universal, or multiversal, dispensation, and that, perhaps, is why it is dangerous for an artist easily to throw away his cultural heirloom and superficially take on an alien one."² The question of identity - which clearly goes beyond the limits of nationality - is therefore central and fundamental to any movement towards freedom, because it is by knowing who we are and where we come from that we can share with the Other. And this very freedom is the identity claimed by Nasr. Multiple and singular. He will never leave his country, as he feels he has both rights and responsibilities there. He would not be who he is were it not for the legitimacy conferred on

him by this mass of land. Abstract debates concerning the role of the artist - constantly rehashed over recent decades to take account of changing tastes and preoccupations - do not concern him. He is no campaigner for a popular art, a social art developed in the street, for the people and by the people.

Nasr is a true artist in that the fundamental question posed by his work has nothing to do with its usefulness, but rather forms part of the very essence of his personal experience: the air he breathes, his childhood memories, or - to use a word that is sometimes bandied about rather too easily - his "roots". It is this humanity that dictates his choices, not some populist determination to democratize the act of artistic creation. The boundary between the private space of his studio and the public space in which the work is delivered up to the world is clear and precise in general. The agora, the collective space of the museum or social meeting place, represents a discrete stage in the life of the work and one that is quite distinct from the act of creation. In Nasr's case, this does not suggest a return to the myth of the artist in his ivory tower, in splendid isolation from the world. The truth is the very opposite. The studio is the space to which the artist invites his street, his country, his continent and the world. The encounter that takes place there involves him, but as a protagonist in that world, in a necessary form of schizophrenia. An observer and

commentator in the outside world, an anonymous constituent in the great mass of the people, once back in his state of solitude, he dissolves in the midst of those whom hitherto he had regarded as an alien body. In the silence of his studio he deconstructs the feelings and intuitions, the reflections and observations that he has brought back with him from the world outside. It is also within this privileged space that the osmotic process - transforming the self into the 'observed' - takes place. In this context, the word 'studio' should not be taken to mean the cloistered space occupied by artists in nineteenth-century Europe, however. Rather, it simply expresses the notion of a private space, reserved for the artist. It conveys that ineffable moment when all the fragments of a complex tapestry suddenly come alive and arrange themselves around a specific framework. The notion of the studio or workshop should be experienced as a metaphor for a specific moment, a time of unique lucidity. For him, artistic commitment is not just an empty phrase. He has a part to play, like any other citizen, in his country's development. But this commitment should not be confused with the will to produce 'useful art', as championed by intellectuals such as Cheikh Anta Diop: a didactic form of education for the masses which can be summed up as fragmented and contextualised readings of the artistic project. The freedom that is implicit in all forms of creativity cannot be made subservient to the political aims of a Marxist-inspired philosophy, which

itself obeys the revolutionary blueprint adopted by those who have fought for the independence of African countries and which envisaged the subjugation of the individual to the collective. This is a form of commitment concerned more with self-analysis; with the suggestion, through the feeling conjured up by an image, of a sound or gesture; with sowing the seeds within the spectator of a reflection that is the only route to gaining awareness. Nasr's commitment corresponds to the quest contained in every artistic act, as defined by André Gide when he claimed that art is nothing but a political and social commitment.

Nasr's earlier works, many of which use video, also display this constant impulse to toy with the spectator's emotions and feelings. Video images are never used in isolation, but are invariably set within a precise architectural framework. In *Ears* (2001), the spectator is overwhelmed by a looming wall of ears which seem to both hear and see, a scary scenario which plunges us into a waking nightmare. The screen at the end of the wall acts as a counterpoint. The piece as a whole is an image of the totalitarian power of an omnipresent state and could easily be subtitled 'walls have ears'. In *Wheelchairs* (2001), we find ourselves in a sort of cinema auditorium, in which the audience - in the form of empty wheelchairs - gazes at the screen, evoking the metaphor of a sick society watching its life unfold before its very eyes. But rather than hammering his message home like a

television evangelist, Nasr allows us our freedom. The forms are there to articulate those things that cannot be expressed. He leaves us free to see whatever we want to see in the wheelchairs. In this way, a metaphor that has its origins in a commentary on Egyptian society proves equally valid in Paris, Dakar or New York. The finger is pointed at this state of impotent passivity to which we are all condemned at some time or other and each of us is free to fill the empty spaces according to our own individual conscience. We find this passivity again in a work such as *Water* (2002). Whereas in *Wheelchairs* we may act as both protagonists and spectators, in *Water* we are definitively condemned to watch and are denied any power to act. Like the waters of the Red Sea before they parted to let the Jewish people pass, the water that stretches out before the spectator seems to pose an insurmountable barrier. And we are forced to stand and watch, powerless to act, as a man appears to drown on a screen at the far side.

Powerlessness and frustration seem also to form the foundations of Moataz Nasr's latest project, *Tabla* (2003). The tabla is a small drum and, in African culture, the drum has traditionally been used to create not only sounds but also meanings, using a precise and established syntax to communicate and set up dialogues. Here, in a new play on the Hegelian paradox of master and slave, Nasr creates an opposition between the Drum and drums, the individual and the masses. Here again,

social commentary is never far away. Returning to a scenario which he has used in other works and which sets up a dialogue between installation and video, he places some four hundred drums in front of a screen. Immediately, we are reminded of an orchestra and its conductor, which is further reinforced by the appearance on the screen of a musician whose face is hidden from us. We see only his hands, pounding the taut skin. The drum on the screen is elaborate, while those in the space in which the viewers stand are common or crude. Here Nasr brings the drama of power back to centre stage. As I write these words, with Eastern and Western nations vying in the clamorous rhetoric that presages war, it is impossible not to project oneself beyond the national frontiers of Egypt.

This work is not merely about the impossibility of dialogue between a particular leader and a particular people. The clamour of these drums, this cacophony orchestrated by the conductor according to his whim summons us back to the cacophony presently spreading before our eyes, from New York to Baghdad. Will the peoples of this world always be condemned to follow leaders whose legitimacy is not set in stone? What freedom and what choice do people have, save to follow their leaders' commands with blind obedience? While Nasr offers no definitive answer to these questions, he nevertheless allows us a glimpse of what James Baldwin described as "the evidence of things not seen".³ The truth, if

it exists, is more complex than it appears. But it requires that we should be constantly questioning, incessantly challenging the established order of things. Our voices, like those of these crude drums, are no less important than those of our leaders.

Moataz Nasr appears to have made it his mission to decode ideas that have been accepted with too much haste. He seeks to train the spotlight of his rigorous approach on the contradictions that we are expected to accept as theorems, on the aberrant courses of action that are sold to us as views of the future. He is not motivated by any political activism, nor by any messianic zeal to replace the old truths with new ones. Nasr seeks simply to safeguard for art the elements required for its own contradictions. For him, art and life are inseparable, as observed by Pierre Restany twenty years ago: "Art is a phenomenon of language, and only that. Language, the expression of men's thoughts, is a living thing. There are times when the oscillating movements of art become locked or stuck, when art appears to have lost the internal factors necessary for its own counter-arguments, when it seems to be cut off from life."⁴

Simon Nijami
Art Critic and Curator
Paris, France
2005

Notes

- 1 "Beauty is that which is represented without concept, as the subject of universal gratification." Immanuel Kant, *Critique de la Faculté de Juger (Kritic der Urteils kraft)*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1986.
- 2 El Anatsui, "Conversation with Olu Oguibe", in *Third Text*, no. 23, summer 1993, p. 49.
- 3 James Baldwin, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Wilson, 1985.
- 4 Pierre Restany, *l'Avant-garde au XXe siècle*, Paris: Balland, 1969. *Critique de la Faculté de Juger (Kritic der Urteils kraft)*, Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1986.

Images

- Left: Tabla, video installation, 2003
Center: An ear of mud another of dough, video installation, 2001
Right: The Water, video installation, 2002

Egypt's Moataz Nasr captivates wonder of international art scene; Paint, video and installation, artist has gained acclaim for his evocative works

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie



A wall of ears sculpted from dough and clay, a room full of wheelchairs bolted in place, an artificial ceiling constructed of misshapen wooden logs, a scene from an old film re-enacted and projected back as a mirror image of itself. The world of Moataz Nasr's imagination is vast and all consuming. The Egyptian painter, video maker and installation artist uses a seemingly endless array of materials. Sometimes they are tangible and concrete - squares of mud, a contained field of green grass or a puddle of water acting as a reflecting pool for a video screen. Other times they are more conceptual and abstract - an idiomatic expression in Arabic, an alphabet built from burnt clay blocks, an allegorical chessboard or ruminations on such notions as progress, stasis, masculinity and change. Whatever Nasr culls together in a given piece, and however he chooses to express himself, his work has escalated dramatically in volume and recognition over the past few years. Now 43, Nasr has been creating

artwork in various guises for 15 years, mounting exhibitions throughout Egypt and occasionally abroad. But the 8th International Cairo Biennial in 2001 marked the tipping point in his career. At that outing, one of the few of its kind in this part of the world, Nasr installed a piece called "An Ear of Mud, Another of Dough" and walked away with the grand prize. The work incorporated elements of sculpture, video and sound collage, with some 7,000 ears molded from clay bisque and bread dough affixed to a wall opposite a silent video looping footage of people shrugging their shoulders, all held together by an audio track droning in the background.

Based on an Arabic expression roughly equivalent to "in one ear and out the other," it offered a damning if general critique on societal indifference. After the Cairo Biennial, Nasr won the Culture Ministry prize at Dak'Art 2002, Senegal's committee-driven biennial for African art, for an installation



called "The Water". He participated in the 2003 Venice Biennale with an installation of 4,000 tabla drums, part of Egyptian curator Gilane Tawadros "Fault Lines: Contemporary African Art and Shifting Landscapes". This September, Nasr became one of just two artists from the Arab world exhibiting at the Sao Paulo Biennial, the most heavily attended of such international exhibitions in the world. At the Busan Biennial in South Korea this fall (where the Middle East fared better in terms of representation), Nasr installed one of his most trenchant works to date, a video piece called "The Echo". "Biennials and group shows [are] a door," says Nasr, speaking from Cairo. "Art now has changed and after postmodernism, you can say that art has opened a new chapter." Nasr pegs this as the age of curating, and he believes international exhibitions have become popular because they have the budgets to promote video art and installation, both of which are less secure in the traditional art

market. Two of Nasr's installations were included in "DisORIENTATION", something of a landmark survey of Middle Eastern cultural production held at the House of World Cultures in Berlin. Highlighting Egypt's fortuitous regional overlap, Nasr is also included in "Africa Remix," a sprawling exhibition of 88 artists that hits the Hayward Gallery in London in February, then tours to the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo. And, along the way, Nasr has staged gallery shows at Townhouse in Cairo, Arte Visiva in Napoli and Arte Continua in San Gimignano. Coming down the pike, he has a site specific installation in the works for London's Covent Garden, appearances at Brazil's Museum of Contemporary Art in El Salvador and the Sharjah Biennial and a new work called "Father and Son", which he will unveil at the American University in Cairo's Falaki Gallery in December. All this, and the list goes on. "Everything happened suddenly, since 2001", says Nasr. "It was surprising

for me. The question I'm always being asked everywhere I go is: 'Are you living in Egypt? And why?' So I feel I'm responsible, as I'm representing Egypt and the Arabs wherever I go; a kind of ambassador, showing the world that there are people who speak the same language as they do, who are open-minded and still choose to live in the Middle East".

To play the role of cultural ambassador is a dicey endeavor, as an artist's particular vision of the world will always be called upon to speak in terms far more expansive than his or her own imagination. Like many Arab artists who have achieved success in the West, Nasr has been criticized for creating works, particularly the tabla piece, that are seen as reductive, exotic or too easily digestible. To be sure, there is something seductive and phenomenal about Nasr's installations, putting him in league with an artist like Olafur Eliasson, who wowed London's art public with a recreation of the sun in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall last year. (Eliasson has so fine-tuned the sudden and sublime effect of his installations that critics often speak of the "wow factor" in his work.) In such works as "The Water" (featuring a video screen reflected in a pool of water, where images of different faces are intermittently and unceremoniously disturbed by the crush of a large foot in the puddle) and "The Earth, the Sky, and What's in Between" (installed across three rooms: one with a life-size chessboard in water and clay on the floor; one with a false ceiling

and thin beams of penetrating light; and one with a series of large sticks braced awkwardly between floor and ceiling), Nasr plays on moments. He rigs his works to produce visceral flashes that carry an aftereffect of symbolic meaning. The puddle splash evokes human cruelty, the false ceiling suggests a view from the grave and the chessboard represents conflict, war and the machinations of power politics. While these works tackle universal themes, "The Echo" pinpoints Egyptian society precisely. Nasr revisits a scene from Youssef Chahine's 1969 film "Al-Ard", based on Abdel Rahman al-Sharkawi's novel of the same name, in which the character Abou Swelam regales his male colleagues for their complacency in the face of British occupation and economic recession circa 1933. Using the talents of Egyptian storyteller Chirine al-Ansary, Nasr reshot the scene in a bustling, present-day coffee shop in downtown Cairo. The finished work juxtaposes the two scenes on separate screens facing each other as if in dialogue (the set-up is thus reminiscent of Douglas Gordon's masterful reworking of the "You talkin' to me" scene in "Taxi Driver"). In this work, explains Nasr, "Words are very important, since it's a movie where all the genius lies in the actor's performance and in what they say. The movie is in the memory of all Arabs, that's why the words and Chirine's performance were very important". "The notion of masculinity is [a] big part of my work", he adds. "This is the reason I have chosen a woman in particular, not a man, to

play this part, talk to the men, insult them ... It was a woman who had to tell the men things like: 'How come you're sitting here like women putting your hands on your cheeks, crying and doing nothing but saying words, words, words ...' In the original movie, while the actor Mahmoud al-Meligui is talking, there's a mashrabiya (an oriental window) behind him, behind which we can see two women standing and eavesdropping. They don't take part in the conversation, and this image shows the place of the women in the society at that time. They couldn't take part in any opinion-taking or serious conversation. Egypt is a macho, masculine society. Yes, women are taking a big role now, but still, it's totally a man's society". Nasr's treatment of masculinity takes a more intimate turn in "Father and Son", another video work to be projected on two screens. "It's a work [about] the relationship between my father and I," he says. "My father is 85 years old, born in 1919, and I'm talking with him about how I was raised as a man in this society, about his relationship with my mother and how he was so controlling in the house, in a dictatorial way, no voice above his own." For someone who started out as a painter, and a commercially successful painter at that, what are Nasr's thoughts on the potential of installation and video art? "Painting for me is a hobby which I love," he explains. "It's a daily release. I can't do an installation everyday to express my feeling, because it needs money or funding and it will take time, but I can paint everyday. I [haven't]

shown my paintings for two years now. Painting has become a more personal activity, even though I see my paintings ... as something similar to the texture of the walls of the city I live in ... Sometimes I think of other works like installations while I'm painting, and I can see deeply into the work. Painting is helping me a lot in my life, as a person first and as an artist second". In terms of his approach to other media, he says, "It differs from one work to [another]. It depends mostly on what I want to do and say and what effect I want to have on people ... I think that contemporary art nowadays is open to everything. Cinema, theater, story telling, even ballet and music can be used as material ... I'm challenged, provoked and stimulated by everything that happens to me in my life. Don't you think we all are? But the thing," he adds, "is how to express yourself".

Kaelen Wilson-Goldie
The Daily Star
Beirut, Lebanon
2004

* Copyright the Daily Star, Beirut

Images

Left: The Echo, video art, 2004
Right: Father & Son, video art, 2005

exhibition



father & son
video art



the echo
video art



insecure
photography



man made
installation



fiat nasr
photography

father & son

video art

Father and Son began as a simple documentation of a dialogue between the artist and his father. With the need to resolve familial conflicts in a patriarchal society, Nasr was more attached to his mother than his father. He addresses her primarily as the loving care-giver, housewife, and finally as the woman deprived from marital affection.

After his mother's death Nasr felt an obligation to put her soul and his mind at rest by confronting his father on the faults of their relationship, be that between a man and his wife or a father and his son. During one of Nasr's visits to his father's home in Cairo he set-up a video-camera to record their conversation as they delved into sensitive subjects regarding his father's relationship with his mother and his relationships with other women.

During the making of this video Nasr used two cameras that would finally accommodate the presentation of this piece to an audience.

In this work Nasr searched for reconciliation with a father who he had grown apart and disconnected from. The work surprisingly shows his father's honesty and steadfastness in answering these sensitive questions creating a bridge of understanding and a potential degree of closure for the artist, which we as an audience can perhaps learn and reflect on in our own experiences.

Previous shows

*Falaki Gallery
American University of Cairo
Cairo, Egypt
2004*

*AFRICA REMIX
Centre Pompidou
Paris, France
2005*



And that influenced, maybe that was the main influence on me on the issue of the relationship between a father, with his son and his mother



First, does not lie, does not do sins, do you understand? That's why some of the things I used to punish you severely on, was when you lied to me.

the echo

video art

In 1968 Abdel Rahman El Sharkawi wrote a novel entitled "El Ard", "The Earth". It discussed the Egyptian struggle against the British Occupation at a time when the World was suffering from the economic depression, specifically, the year 1933. In 1969, Youssef Shahine took the novel and turned it into a movie, keeping the same title, "El Ard". The main character of the movie is Abou Swelam and his role is played by Egyptian outstanding actor Mahmoud El Meligui.

One of the most important sequences of the movie takes place in a village house in which the male villagers are gathered. In that sequence Abou Swelem expresses his frustration with the Egyptian people's attitude and how passive they have become. This 4mn 29sec monologue is the center piece of the movie and until today, the impact it left in the memory of all Arabs and Egyptians

is alive; it moved the people for it very accurately reflected the state of society at that time.

In the year 2003, this work was conceived with a video of Egyptian story teller, Chirine el Ansary, who stands in the middle of a coffee shop in down town Cairo and spontaneously recites the monologue as it was in the movie, delivering it with the passion and immediacy it held then.

In The Echo, the two sequences are projected facing one another, echoing each other, highlighting how nothing has changed, what could be said in 1933 and 1968, remains valid in 2003; the political and social situation has remained stagnant over the past 70 years. One is left with the resonance of what Abou Swelem says and what the storyteller in the Caireen coffee shop repeats, "we are living in words nothing but words".



with my mouth shut, patiently waiting



with my mouth shut, patiently waiting



We sit, talking, complaining, waiting like women...



We sit, talking, complaining, waiting like women...



Previous shows Disorientation
House of World Cultures
Berlin, Germany
2003

Townhouse Gallery
Cairo, Egypt
2004

Busan Biennale
South Korea
2004

Loose your identity
Kunstverein Kreis
Ludwigsburg, Germany
2005

Sharjah Biennale
Sharjah, UAE
2005

insecure

photography

Insecure consists a series of large photographic prints made with a very special sun printing technique. Nasr comments: "I'm using a very ancient method for producing images that no one uses any more, it's called 'Van Dick' or 'Sun Print'". The negative is transferred onto drawing paper treated with an emulsion and exposed to the sun until the image begins to develop. Only then is the photo processed with industrial chemical elements. This method enables the artist to personally control every phase of the work, guaranteeing the originality and distinctiveness of every photo. The subjects of these photos are Middle Eastern faces reflected in the water, portraits of people but also portraits of a society. Insecure develops a central theme in the poetics of the artist: human insecurity, the instability of our existence and the impossibility of recognizing and being ourselves.

Text courtesy of Galleria Continua, Italy





man made

installation

A new installation of wall sculptures and photographic diptychs. These depict men and horses that seem subjected, equivalent and to have interchangeable roles, masks that preclude the possibility of seeing and speaking. The artist's focus shifts here to a political dimension, stressing the human inability to relate in a concrete and active way to the political and state system.

Text courtesy of Galleria Continua, Italy



