



XVA GALLERY

I Hate My Friends

Artists: Charlotte de Bekker, Nino Cricco, Shakhbout Al Kaabi, Nikolai Kozak, Khuood Thani, Agustina Zegers

Curator: Grace Hauser

Vernissage: September 20, 6-9pm

Exhibition dates: September 20 – October 9, 2014

XVA GALLERY, Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood, Bur Dubai

This September, XVA gallery is hosting a group of five up-and-coming artists. Having met at NYU Abu Dhabi the artists have an extensive range of skills, talents and academic fields; spanning from political science, to film and new media, to cooking and philosophizing. Added to this is a vast variety in their cultural backgrounds, religious beliefs, and nationalities. All these components have come together as five individual artistic concepts, which together explore the intricate relationship between memory and identity.

The idea of the exhibition was born as the group of friends brainstormed an innovative way of presenting their artwork. What was essential for the artists is that the exhibition was focused on and around the notion of conceptual art and trespassing beyond the guidelines and conventions of what one might normally expect to experience in an art gallery. As Sol Lewitt defines, “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair.”

The art shown in ‘I Hate My Friends’ is of much greater depth than what initially meets the eye. The artists have spent a great deal of time exploring and imagining conceived concepts before they actually went about creating tangible artwork. Much more is to be said about the process of the artist journey rather than the art piece itself.

Charlotte de Bekker – *I See I See What You Can't See*

Artist Statement:

I have only recently become sensitive to things like black marks in magazines — but this work is not a commentary on censorship.

I lived in Zanzibar this summer where artists sell almost exclusively paintings of Masai, zebras, and lions. This didn't seem strange until I realised that there are no Masai, zebras, or lions in Zanzibar. However, there are tourists who want a nice souvenir so they can tell their friends about their African island adventure. The artists explained “this is what the tourists buy so this is what we paint, we need the money” — tourists have singlehandedly changed what artists choose to create. But more than that, because of them alcohol is now allowed and booty shorts are a common sight on the strict Muslim island. I realise that in a place where the economy relies on tourism, tourists have an immense power.

I returned to my home in the United Arab Emirates and realised that Zanzibar is really not so different from here. But in this country it's not just tourists; it all foreigners. Making up around 80% of the population it is these expats that the UAE depends on. I've come to realise that as visitors in a country we are not only deciding which paintings are painted, we are singlehandedly shaping and changing what is the norm with every dirham we spend, every choice we make, every product we want imported. As foreigners we make demands for bikinis on beaches, cocktails and bars, and because the UAE partly relies on us they cater to these demands even though it goes

against the very nature of the local traditions.

I grew up in Ras al Khaimah and remember seeing the “no short sleeves allowed” signs on the buildings, the mysterious missing moments in movies, the black marks in the magazines; things that all worked in an attempt to abide by the Muslim modesty of the place. Although the marks covered the people in the magazines five minutes away on the beach my little eyes saw all the bellies, butt cracks, and thighs that were hidden from me moments ago.

For the longest time I saw myself as a visitor in the UAE, a passive citizen abiding to the rules of a foreign country, a guest. But I now realise that the entire time that I have lived here I have simultaneously changed it. And as the marks are slowly leaving the magazines too, I ask myself: have I exploited the country’s desire for my stay? What *is* the right way to a be guest here?

Charlotte de Bekker is a Dutch filmmaker who was born in England. Besides a long list of other countries she spent the majority of her childhood living in the emirate of Ras al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates. Charlotte now attends New York University in Abu Dhabi, where she studies both Film and Philosophy. She has worked on documentary projects in the United Arab Emirates, the Netherlands, and Zanzibar, and plans to film her next project in Nepal.

Nino Cricco – *Walk Through*

Artist Statement:

Underpasses are traversed for fleeting moments in the lives of pedestrians. Utilitarian by nature, they serve no purpose other than to get from point A, to point B. They are unremarkable and unappealing - a site of perpetual motion, used by pedestrians ambling through on their commute. They are an integral part of Abu Dhabi’s urban fabric. They lie below the wide avenues of air-conditioned cars, hiding a population of pedestrians who, by the nature of their commute, share a common experience of the city.

This video installation was created as documentation for a larger project that traces Abu Dhabi’s urban sites as communities under construction. By documenting a space in time in an urban site, the installation evokes the fragmentation of memory and shared experience of the city. This experience is punctuated by an accrual of lives, stories, and memories. Hidden beneath the surface, the memory of each individual is personal, but the experience of the city, however ephemeral, is shared.

Abu Dhabi is a city in constant transit. Residents arrive and depart on a regular basis. This flow becomes a constant state of flux but the traces and memories of who comes before and those yet to arrive echo throughout the city. The personal relationship with the city may be isolated- the community may be fraught. What does the sum of these individual memories tell us about Abu Dhabi? Is the notion of a community fragmented or made possible by the fleeting nature of our passage through the city? This installation presents the collective memory of a city that is individual, but shared.

Nino Cricco is a Paraguayan artist based in Abu Dhabi. As a student of art and sociology, Cricco is interested in the intersection between communities, art, and public space. He approaches art as a collaborative endeavor between the artist and the viewer and relies on people’s actions as a central component in his body of work. This is his first exhibition.

Shakhbout Al Kaabi - *I Am Memory*

Artist Statement:

Seasons change, and so do circumstances through the natural flow of space- time. It is a part of our personal identity, leaving us with the binaries of memories: the good and the bad ones. They shape our past experiences and, consequentially, our perspective about the future. Yet, the vector of time is not linear, allowing us to quest different conceptual patterns of events and represent them artistically. In this variety of work all the new

happenings are deeply rooted to my personal experience which is my subjective contribution to the decisive moment that turns the objective reality into the photographic art.

An Emirati photography artist and filmmaker based in New York City and in Abu Dhabi. Shakhboub tends to work with street photography that articulates issues from the modern world with its political and social dimensions. He has received HE Hoda Al Khamis Kanoo's award for winning the Abu Dhabi Visual Art Festival. Shakhboub works have been displayed in New York City and Abu Dhabi and worked with several artists throughout the UAE in the collaborative projects.

Nikolai Kozak - *Migrant*

Artist Statement: I am a migrant.

The story of my family begins and ends at the ocean; it was in crossing it that we forgot who we were. *Migrant* is an exploration of the body as a receptacle and carrier of memory, and the subsequent denial of the possibility of an embodied memory.

In *Migrant*, I work with a filial body: my sister, whom I believe to be the most detached from any fragment of mnemonic history residing within the living members of my family. Her body is forced into interaction with cloths - floral fabrics that have remained in the care of my family since their departure from Ivano Frankivsk, Ukraine, more than a century ago. The constraining of her body with these fabrics alludes to both the suffocating desire to return to a mnemonic realm, while at the same time illustrating the absurdity of this desire.

The objects - at times interacting with the body, but more often than not positioned at a distance - are the absolute physical representation of non-lived and non-experienced memory. Their compositional relationship to the bound body is meant to both illustrate the failure of the body as a mnemonic object as well as explore the tension created by the juxtaposition. What interests me the most in this collocation is that, in the end, the realm of memory seems to truly breathe and thrive in the vacuous space between body and object.

Nikolai Kozak is a Chilean / Argentine multimedia artist based in New York City and Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirates). Working in a variety of mediums - among them sculpture, video, projection, photography and performance - Kozak explores ideas of memory, lineage, and trauma. He has received numerous awards for his work relating to political and social structures - among them her Excellency Hoda Al Khamis Kanoo's Young Artist award and the Christo and Jeanne Claude Honorable Award for Public Art.

Kozak's work has been displayed both publicly and privately in New York City, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Montreal, Buenos Aires and Santiago.

Khulood Thani – *Between the Dunes*

Artist Statement:

The inspiration for *Between the Dunes* comes from Arabia, specifically from desert life. Reflecting my own roots as a UAE national by taking elements from my background, such as the desert and camels, and framing this story in a more contemporary yet rough approach. As this project was first presented in *Origin, Passion and Beliefs* exhibition, supported by NOT JUST A LABEL, a platform for contemporary fashion designers, I strived to come up with a story that has in specific the UAE Design mark.

The project is a semi-couture dress along with unconventional accessories, the technique used in making the dress is laser cut of different golden tones shaping the sand dunes, along with “unconventional accessory”, a neck-piece with an attached camel hump shaped hood, made of bio-degradable camel leather. This project is also focusing on the importance of styling, and the connection between the “semi-couture” dress and the “unconventional accessory”, by styling the contemporary dress along with a rough accessory.

Khulood Thani is the first UAE national to resume her education in Fashion Management and Marketing from

ESMOD Paris, the first-ever fashion school in France, founded in 1841. Besides that, she has attended short courses at the prestigious London College of Fashion and Central Saint Martins College in London. Also, she holds a Masters in Strategic Marketing from the University of Wollongong. She is a graduate in Communication Sciences with specialization in Integrated Marketing Communication from Zayed University.

Agustina Zegers - Firma del Padre

Artist Statement:

This series functions as a photographic still life of objects that, in aggregate, become a portrait of their departed owner. Drawing from the pictorial tradition of the vanitas, I photographed something that, in the most personal manner, speaks to me of mortality and of the aftermath of an artist's life. The objects in question are personal belongings and tools of my father's that now exist in complete isolation of their original uses. The objects have been transformed by death into inanimate souvenirs of their deceased owner. Carrying the strong marks of circumstance, the objects hold the weight of a functionality that is no longer. Thus, an accidental scratch or misplaced dollop of oil paint becomes an almost sacred memento, creating an open narrative about objecthood and usage in, and after, the artist's life. Without the presence of their proprietor, the sum of belongings becomes a placeholder for his physicality.

Chilean-born Agustina Zegers is a Visual Arts student at NYU Abu Dhabi. Born into a family of painters, architects and art collectors, she has maintained close contact with the art milieu in Chile as well as an avid interest in aesthetic form. Her work is marked by the exploration of physical and psychological voids and absences in a variety of personal and cultural contexts. She is currently engaged in several photographic and sculptural projects in Abu Dhabi and Santiago, Chile.

About the XVA Gallery:

Established in 2003, XVA is one of the leading galleries in the Middle East that specializes in contemporary art from the Arab world, Iran and the Subcontinent. Exhibitions focus on works by the regions foremost artists as well as those emerging onto the scene. The gallery's artists express their different cultural identities and perspectives while challenging the viewer to drop prejudices and borders. XVA Gallery exhibits both locally and internationally; collaborating with galleries and participating in international art fairs, such as Art Basel Hong Kong, SH Contemporary, Singapore Art Fair and Abu Dhabi Art in 2014, in order to further expose Middle Eastern contemporary art.

XVA Gallery and XVA Art Hotel are located in Dubai's heritage district, now called Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood. XVA founded and organized the Bastakiya Art Fair from 2007- 2010 as part of its commitment to raising the profile of contemporary art practice in Dubai. For three years XVA was located in DIFC, and has now expanded itself in Al Fahidi.

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