

canvaS

ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD

THIS IS
NOT A
REHEARSAL

Published out of the Dubai Development Authority

AED 45 | BD/QR 7 | SR 45 | £15.00 | €16



ISSN 1814-7082

9 771814 706006

CONTRIBUTING TO THIS ISSUE

Living between Cairo and Jeddah, **Nour Hassan** has constantly been caught between an infatuation with chaos and a fervent love of solitude. Founder of creative platform *Radical Contemporary*, she produces long-form content for the mega-aesthete nerds out there. After all, "Instagram is a microwave dinner for the eyes," stated Robert Bound in an issue of *Monocle*. Reviewing *Codes of Coupling for Canvas* – a show that meditates on notions of togetherness, sameness, and intimacy – came at a serendipitous moment when the world seemed to be searching for what makes us feel alive.



Brady Ng has been wearing black masks and face coverings for more than nine months. Although they were originally donned to maintain anonymity in public spaces for an anti-government movement, the concealment of facial features now has a different meaning as COVID-19 changes the frequency and nature of interpersonal contact. He currently spends most of his time scraping together information on the internet, collaborating with people whose faces he has never seen before – much like the former entrants of Cao Fei's *RMB City*, which he uncovers in this issue of *Canvas*.



Himali Singh Soin is an armchair astronaut and a failed astronomer. Short of an actual trip to the moon, she writes poetry and performs them in interstellar environments of her own making. This year, she plans to feel more at home here on Earth, tracing her family's roots to the Himalayan range and following its mysterious animistic forces in search of the cosmic. Her dispatches will be posted as the 2020 Whitechapel Gallery's *Writer-in-Residence*. For the *Last Word*, she draws from the poetic perspective of a spaceship to explore the conditions of quarantine.



Annabel Daou was doing a residency at the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) when the current global crisis hit. Since then, she's been pacing her Brooklyn apartment every night with other peoples' worries on her mind for her *I will worry for you* project. Her contribution to this issue derives from an in-progress video work for which she was collecting voices from strangers in public spaces when that was still a thing you could do. Lately she's been driving through the empty streets of Manhattan at dawn catching green lights.



Mumbai-based **Skye Arundhati Thomas** is currently working from her teenage desk – covered in glitter and puffy stickers – in Pune. She is mostly confined to one room during this time of quarantine, and obsesses over the view from her window, thinking about the sea and how cephalopods live short but intensely subjective lives. Since the state of emergency is no longer the exception but the rule, she finds herself desperately looking for writing and artwork on friendship, love, ancestry and kinship (both animal and human), and for photographs of the open sky.

Matthew Collings, who just finished a four-year stint as art critic for the *Evening Standard* (the best job he's ever had), makes collaborative paintings with Emma Biggs that are exhibited regularly at Vigo Gallery and are in collections worldwide. His routine was to turn up at whatever gallery it was, empty save for a handful of other critics, all like him unable to believe their luck, enjoy the show, and send the words in every Monday. In this issue, Matt shares the creative rewards and perils of artists working in isolation.

Mona Ayyash is a Dubai-raised visual artist. Her practice is focused on small gestures – those mundane acts that could be overlooked. She teaches photography and digital video, and in her free time she walks in circles or ovals in Barsha South. She also likes to host gatherings and believes that pretzels have become a notable snack in her hangouts. She wrote the answers to her interview with *Canvas* about her practice while looking out the window and watching the odd person sneak a little walk during the city's quarantine.

Travel is currently at a standstill, but **Rahel Aima** was excited to return to her former home in Dubai (virtually) while holed up (and visa-trapped) at the centre of NYC's pandemic. For this issue of *Canvas*, she also reflects on a trip to Dhaka, and how artists embed political critiques of the present in works about past events – like a parent hiding vegetables in pasta. In between, she is working on her magnum opus of essays about Enya, water scarcity and lizards, and trying to teach herself Russian for her next move.

Nomadic and armed with her camera, **Tara Sakhi** is obsessed with strangers who stroll and the mystery behind unknown personas. With one foot in Beirut and another in Paris, she captures these fleeting impressions in blurry silhouettes, drawing from her passion for film to inject a cinematic feel. After a Masters in architecture, she joined forces with her younger sister Tessa to co-found a multi-disciplinary studio, **TSAKHI**. Their projects range from designing ephemeral structures for Beirut nightclubs to Murano vases in Venice, stone sculptures in Cairo and lighting installations in Tulum.



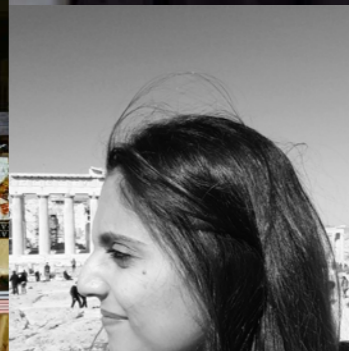
As director of the fine art division at CXA in NYC, **Anne Verhallen** witnessed the impact of the coronavirus pandemic firsthand. Anticipating the closures of museums and galleries in the city, she went to her friend Barbara Pollack with the rhetorical question, *How Can We Think Of Art At A Time Like This?* This became an intentionally non-commercial website – a curated exhibition on a platform dedicated to the free exchange of ideas, allowing artists to express themselves when many of the usual outlets to show their work have closed.



Barbara Pollack is an authority on Chinese contemporary art, and travels to mainland China several times a year. When all her forthcoming shows were closed in January, her first reaction was, "What do I do now?" The perfect antidote to "cancellation blues", and ironically one of her most successful projects so far, came when Anne Verhallen, another curator and artist-agent, suggested they launch *How Can We Think of Art At A Time Like This?* 70,000 viewers later, this virtual exhibition has circumvented the travel bans and quarantines.



Dean Kissick first met Chloe Wise during Frieze in New York in 2015, late one night outside the Edition hotel by Madison Square Park. That year her career was taking off, and he recalls seeing her paintings for the first time at the NADA art fair. He had just moved from London to LA, but was starting to wish he lived in Manhattan. Now he lives Downtown, NYC, just down the street from Chloe. Although he prefers his block to hers, he admits her apartment is much nicer and better for parties.



A lover of all that is creative and powerful about the individual, recorder player **Eloi Fuguet** is convinced of the capacity of culture to transform society. Armed with a degree in Recorder and Music Management in Catalonia, Spain, he expresses his passion for music through teaching others and performing, never more so than from the rooftop of his home during the current pandemic. In this issue, he explains why playing to the crowd is helping us all get through the crisis.

After a first visit to Syria in 1994, anthropologist and musician **Jonathan Shannon** couldn't wait to go back. Since then, he has spent over 25 years researching and writing about Syrian music and culture (with parallel projects in Morocco, Spain and Turkey). His current book project, entitled *Sounding Home*, draws on research about musical performance and cultural politics in Istanbul, Milan, Berlin, Amsterdam and Stockholm. Now based in Abu Dhabi, he teaches at New York University while playing oud and trying to perfect his recipes for *mjaddara* and *muhammara*.

Melissa Gronlund is a former writer on art based in London, but she now mostly spends her time making Peter Rabbit puppets with her five-year-old while fielding questions from a seven-year-old about Komodo dragons. All overlap with her subject – an amazing triad of animals, women and art – for this issue's text are entirely coincidental. Although Melissa is definitely not taking this coronavirus lockdown as a reset button she is, with all seriousness, hanging on for dear life. For *Canvas*, she writes about the sound of the future in posthumanist conditions.

Ellen Winner grew up in an academic family wanting to become a visual artist, but in her 20s she realised she didn't have the unwavering stamina to paint all day so she became a research psychologist instead. Now, instead of looking at art all day, she looks at data about art, helping put the psychology of art on the map. Merging her interests in the field by focusing on development and learning in the arts, she has also authored two books *Invented Worlds* (1982) and *How Art Works* (2019).

Saira Ansari is a researcher and writer with an interest in South Asian art history, alternative narratives and science fiction. She trekked all the way to Abu Dhabi to catch a few shows before COVID-19 shut everything down, had a steak lunch with a motley crew from the South Asian contingent, and sanitized her hands every step of the way. For this issue, she discusses *The Stonebreakers*, curated by Murtaza Vali (and inserts a stab at the 'Venice Biennale Refugee Ship Art', which she thinks deserves flak at any given chance).



THIS IS NOT A REHEARSAL

With this edition emerging during the global pandemic, we look back to the pre-lockdown events as a bygone era and fast-forward to our present time of creative practices arising via virtuality and sociality, simulation and repetitive action, inside-out perspectives as well as hope as a practice. Navigating the new normal of our lives in confinement, we ask leading figures in the UAE about world-making and rebuilding culture. Curators tell us why art is so important at a time like this and artists reveal what the future will sound like in a seemingly posthumanist environment – from metronomic sewing machines to spaceship visions.

Chapter One: Going Live	62
Chapter Two: Music, Balconies and Hope	86
Chapter Three: Why is Culture Important?	98
Chapter Four: #canvascurates art in quarantine	104
Chapter Five: Future Sounds	118



Lawrence Abu Hamdan. *Convention of Tiny Movements: Spinneys Supermarket, Achrafieh Beirut August 2017*. 2015. C-type print. 220 x 140 cm. Image courtesy of the artist





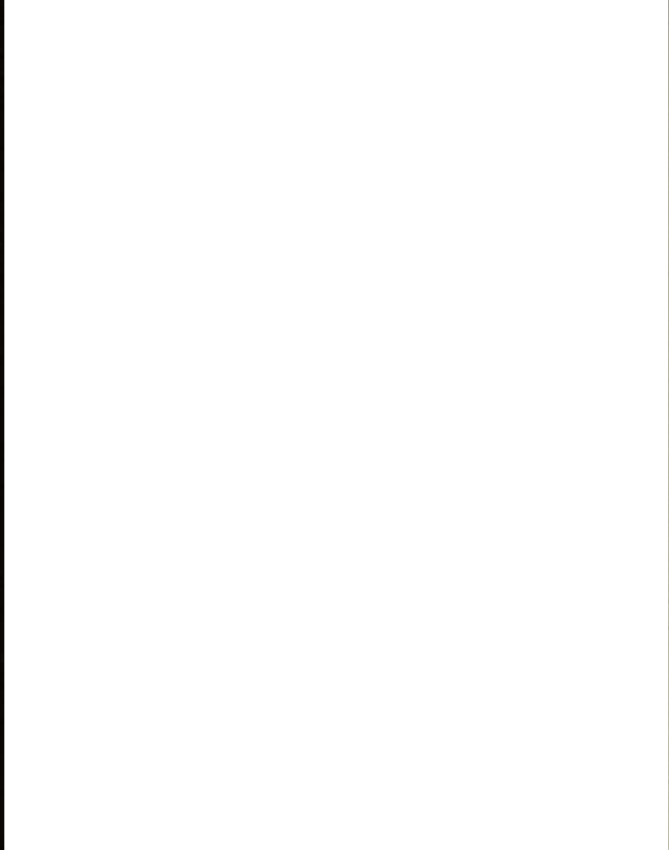
Above: Tara Sakhi. *Follow me*. 2017. Orvieto, Italy. 60.7 x 61.7 mm
Below: Tara Sakhi. *Jeu de mains*. 2016. Paris, France. 36 x 24 mm

Tara Sakhi. *An almost made up poem*. 2019. Batroun, Lebanon. 36 x 24 mm

HAND DIARIES

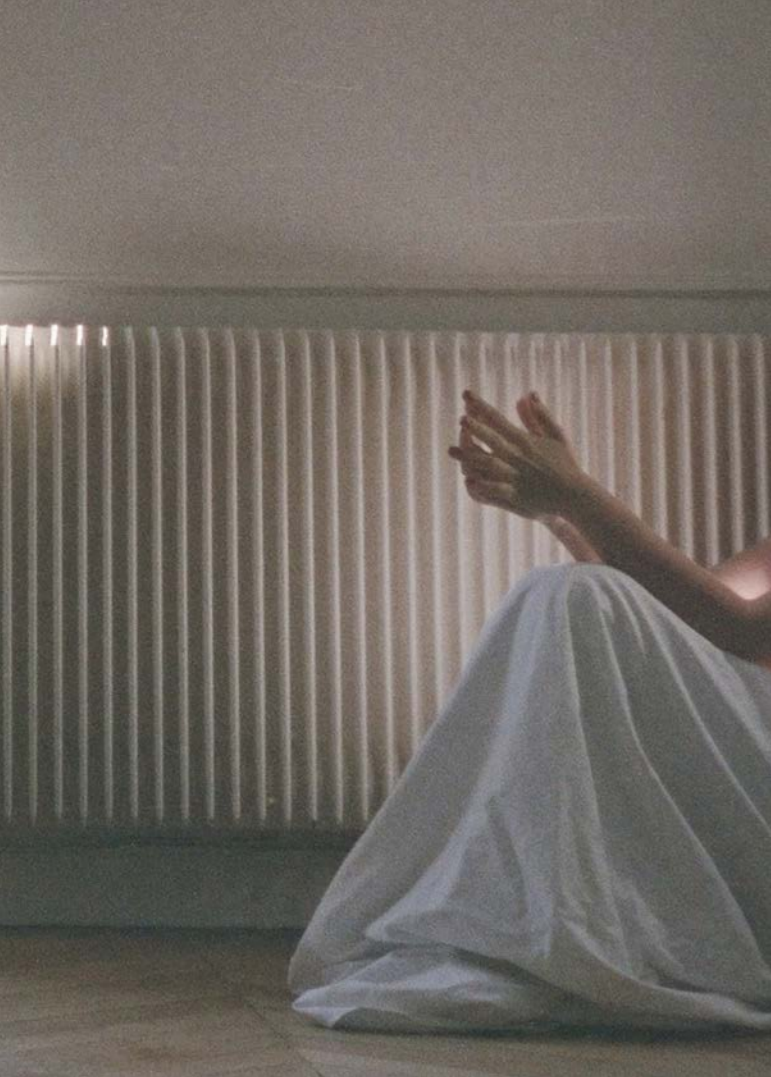
Beirut-based architect and photographer **Tara Sakhi** shares the hands of loved ones and strangers as visual documents. Using an analogue camera, she is drawn to their unspoken intimacies – from the intricate ways in which artisans work with their craft to the defiant fists raised in Lebanon’s revolutionary protests, which began last October. With a subtle gaze towards how our gestures connect us to our environment and to each other, Sakhi’s lens picks up on moments of recognition, tenderness, synchronicity and revolt. Turning the spotlight to this ever-so-subtle part of our lives, seemingly mutated with the current pandemic, this is an artistic acknowledgment of what we have taken for granted.



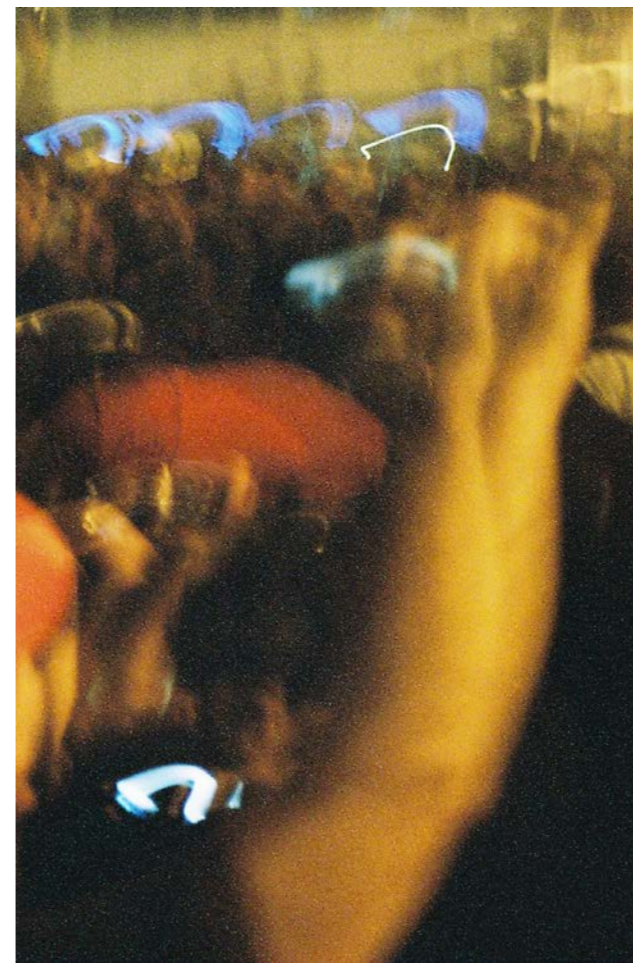


This page:
Above: Tara Sakhi. *An itch on my fingertip*.
2016. Venice, Italy. 60.7 x 61.7 mm
Right: Tara Sakhi. *Infinite*. 2019. Beirut,
Lebanon. 36 x 24 mm

Opposite page: Tara Sakhi. *Distant*. 2016.
Paris, France. 36 x 24 mm



Left: Tara Sakhi. *Time within time*. 2019. Paris, France. 24 x 36 mm; Right: Tara Sakhi. *Le Souffleur de vérité*. 2019. Paris, France. 24 x 36 mm



Above: Tara Sakhi. *Revolt II*. 2019. Beirut, Lebanon. 24 x 36 mm.
Right from top to bottom: Tara Sakhi. *Melting into One*. 2019. Beirut, Lebanon. 36 x 24 mm;
Tara Sakhi. *Revolt*. 2019. Beirut, Lebanon. 36 x 24 mm;
Tara Sakhi. *Libres*. 2019. Beirut. 24 x 36 mm.
All images courtesy of the artist



Left: Tara Sakhi. *Fading away*. 2017. Paris, France. 24 x 36 mm.
Right: Tara Sakhi. *The pleasure is mine*. 2019. Jiyeh, Lebanon. 36 x 24 mm

