

Musique Art

SEPTEMBER Show Guide

AT A GREEN FAIRYLAND

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KHALED SABSABI

khaledsabsabi 019by Grace Balev

Stretching the bounds of conventional art and bridging the gap between the political and creative, Lebanese-born multimedia artist Khaled Sabsabi has spent his life crossing the border. His powerful work now speaks out to abolish it.

Politically charged and socially engaged, Sabsabi's art explores the delicate region of migrant territories, cultural conflict and racial tensions that have resulted from political borders. Integration, Assimilation and a fair go for All cleverly manipulates an exploration of mediums across two levels of Gallery 4A in Sydney. The multimedia exhibition exposes the veiled political borders constructed by collective society and the individual psyche which bind and breed racial tension in multicultural Australia. The advocate artist demonstrates the destructive effect of ignorance and calls on society to acknowledge and accept barriers of cultural difference in the interest of a harmonious coexistence. Sabsabi's work urges us to identify and claim identity; only by acknowledging a border and respecting it, does it lose its power. Borderline genius.

When and why did you decide to become a visual artist?

I made the transition from working with hip-hop music to visual arts around the mid 90's. About 1996 I was asked to create an installation piece for an exhibition by a gallery director who was familiar with my musical work. From there I entered the visual arts aspect. I then went back to Uni and formalized it all with a Masters degree. For me, it's just an extension of making creative work.

What do you consider to be your role as an artist?

I think the work that I do is driven by people, their opinions and beliefs and views. That's what my work is really about. And coming from an Arabic background, I cover both global issues and local issues documented through avenues of the media. What we've seen from previous governments and their approach to multicultural Australia.

GetAttachment.aspxDo you have any specific major artistic muses or influences?

I grew up within the hip hop movement. It was a real alternative to the mainstream at the time to what was being offered here in Australia. My influences came mainly from the lyrical content of the music. As far as art movements, I'm inspired by the Futurist Movement, and also the 60's/70's Modern period as well. I enjoy all art that explores the use of different mediums to deliver a message. That's how I approach my work. Crossing mediums and materials is exciting and gives me a bit of freedom within my practice.

What does your art making process entail, from conception to creation?

It's all ongoing for me. Integration, Assimilation and a fair go for All started back in 2006. It's a process. I'm continually making work - I never really stop. I try to capture ideas, I write things down, video things or record in sketch form. I might leave it and come back to it or just continue developing the idea. I never say I'm going to sit and make a work now, besides with performance work which is very site-specific.

What is the intended meaning behind Integration, Assimilation and a fair go for All?

The work represents the social attitudes and tensions that taint multicultural Australia. There are some very racist views being ignored when it come to migrants and their place in society. This work is about facing the problem head-on.

The main medium used is video installation. Why was this easy choice for you?

I travel a lot and do lots of work in refugee camps and prisons. I run a lot of workshops and teach people the art of what I do. Video is such a lightweight medium; so convenient and portable for documenting purposes. It's highly manageable and suits my lifestyle. I am able to work, travel and make my art all at the same time. Video is also a medium which delivers great impact.

Was there anything in particular that inspired you to create the show?

Part of the work formed from John Howard's policies of immigration and how he dealt with the refugees and Arabic and Islamic people. I constructed the work but decided to wait until the election was over to display it. Now that Gallery 4A has installed it, it's finally out there for people to see. The issues haven't changed and I feel it's still really relevant. I readapted some of the work and created some new aspects for the exhibition.

Your thought-evoking work confronts the viewer with realities of social ambivalence. What is your aim in doing so, and what is your personal opinion regarding the cultural conflicts you portray?

I strongly believe that for people to be able to meet in conversation or come to some sort of mutual ground, all opinions need to be considered. We have to acknowledge opposing realities and borders around us. If we don't confront these and come to some sort of understanding, regardless of whether we agree or not, we can never reach a common ground and coexist in harmony. We are all entitled to our opinions and perspectives and I think it's important we share these. Some say it's propaganda, or statement art. For me it's just about putting realities out there and encouraging people to face reality.

Do you believe that it is ignorance that drives cultural conflict and injustice?

There's no doubt. Beyond the ignorance of the individual, there is ignorance being adapted to an institutionalized level by governments across the globe. Governments are setting collective standards for the people to adhere to and the people don't ask questions and simply think and do as they are told. We need to face reality as individuals and as collective society in order to end the ignorance and relieve the tensions.

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