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Direction of publication:	Pierre Naquin
Editor-in-Chief:	Carine Claude Stéphanie Perris Gilles Picard Clément Thibault
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Distribution:	275,000+ digital subscribers

Untitled (Temporary Homes, 2019-), Daria Svertilova

© Daria Svertilova

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CAN WAR "CREATE" ARTISTS?

Can one continue to create when coming from a war-torn country? Far from the myth of a "creative destruction", artists share the realities of their daily lives.

Can war produce artists? Can art be seen as a tool to magnify traumas? Throughout history, the subject has given rise to masterpieces, such as Bruegel the Elder's Massacre of the innocents or Poussin's The rape of the sabine women (which more accurately reflects a lived reality and its ongoing collateral damage) as well as the grand Napoleonic frescoes by David or Gros. Following World War I, the emergence of Dada, Surrealist, or Expressionist movements seemed to favour a renewal of artistic possibilities, embodying the idea of making a "clean slate of the past" — a notion that would spread throughout European modern art in a 20th century marked by successive wars.

The concept of war as a bearer of tragic yet fruitful creative impulse suddenly appears romantic. In light of testimonials from those affected, reality tells a different story. Interviewed artists from war-torn countries reveal their reality today, highlighting their daily lives beyond any representation. Beyond history too, too immediate and media-driven, or from a post-event or distant rewriting. For those living it day by day, whether in areas of armed conflict or having chosen to escape, face both material and psychological difficulties that sometimes prevent them from keeping on creating. "To write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric," Adorno wrote. What remains of art, then, for artists currently suffering the consequences of war?

Impossibility to create

Mohamad Omran, a sculptor of Syrian origin residing in France since 2007, shares the impact on his work of the revolution that erupted in 2011 in his country: "Initially, I was blocked. Artistically, I couldn't express myself. Later, I started to draw. It was full of emotions,

— Diotima Schuck

violence, sadness, powerlessness. It resembled a lot of automatic drawing." Thus, the artist temporarily abandoned sculpture for drawing, which he found more "effective" — "sculpture takes time, you have to make molds... And I didn't have the time," he recounts. The shock, then the urgency to create: acts performed after the fury and chaos.v

Mika Sperling, a Russian-origin artistphotographer living in Germany since she was one, largely bases her work on her heritage, native language, and her parents' culture. Although not directly affected by the war in Ukraine, the event impacted her both professionally and personally: "Before the war, I spoke Russian to my daughter to preserve and pass on this heritage. But since February 2022, it has been very hard for me to continue. Speaking Russian immediately reminded me of the war, and my body couldn't handle it. It also affected projects I had in Russia, where I would have to face relatives who are not necessarily against the invasion of Ukraine," she shares. While she gradually resumed using her native language, the shock experienced suspended for some time all creative possibilities.

Similarly, the war greatly disrupted Ukrainian artists who find it difficult to pursue their artistic activities. Some, exiled or having left before the war started, can still create, like Misha Zalvany, Julia Beliaeva, or Sergiy Petlyuk [see p.64]. They have the material and mental ability, despite relatively precarious situations. Julia moves from residency to residency, Misha works as a waiter three days a week and decided to go for another course at the Beaux-Arts de Paris school since graduating in 2022. Staying in school gives him the opportunity to continue his projects, but also to have access to a studio and necessary equipment. Sergiy, who arrived in France at the end of 2022, first lived at the Cité internationale des arts and now benefits from the Herodotus programme created in 2017 by the Beaux-Arts, which assists non-Frenchspeaking exiled artists in integrating into the French artistic scene. Despite this support, "the situation remains difficult," he comments.

Adapting practices

Other artists, who remained in their countries, saw their practice transform and adapt to the urgencies of their daily lives. This is what Delphine Dumont, director of the Hangar in Brussels [see p.70], which curated a photography exhibition honouring Ukraine, explains. Whether they are young or more established, "photographers have shifted from artistic work to a more documentary practice, recounting their day-to-day lives", she comments. The distinction between artwork and testimony becomes more blurred, raising once again the question of the possibility of creating art in such a context. Delphine Dumont shares the evocative story of the exhibition's poster, a portrait of a short-haired woman captured by Daria Svertilova. A curator before the war, she decided to abandon her practice to go to the front.

Is there still room for art in times of war? The question, often posed, evokes both the absurdity and the

Africa: the anonymous wars

Distant, forgotten, there are wars about which no one speaks in the West... This is what Mohamad Omran explains about the Syrian situation, extremely media-covered at the time of the revolution, but now stalled. Regarding Yemen, the Houthis - a politico-military group controlling 20 to 30% of Yemeni territory - declared war on Israel last 31 October. Supported by Iran, they have since conducted strikes on the Red Sea, to which the United States has responded with bombings and a naval reinforcement in the Mediterranean. In East Africa, Sudan has been facing a complex political situation for decades, which led to a civil war in April 2023. The 37th summit of the AU, which concluded on 28 February in Addis Ababa, recorded tensions between the presidents of Ethiopia and Somalia, and those of Algeria and Morocco. In the West, the Sahel region has been experiencing regular jihadist attacks for twenty years. On 28 January, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger announced their withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) after three successive coups d'état in 2020 in Bamako, in 2022 in Ouagadougou, and in 2023 in Niamey. Since September 2023, these countries have indeed united through the Sahel States Alliance, notably denouncing the instrumentalisation of ECOWAS by France. And in the DRC, the UN called for funding a humanitarian aid plan, this 20 February, in the face of new clashes between the FARDC and M23 fighters supported by Rwandan forces. A concerning tally for the African continent, confirmed by the leaders at the AU summit...

necessity to continue creating. Pauline de Laboulaye and Dunia Al Dahan from the association Portes Ouvertes sur l'Art [see box p.15] chose to highlight the work of artists who had to leave their country of origin due to conflicts. Initially focusing on Syrian artists, they however decided after three exhibitions to broaden their scope to other cultural contexts. Through these encounters, they observe: "Syrian artists, in their works, tend to dwell more on nostalgia. They have left their country longer ago, whereas Ukrainian artists are more about action, confrontation."

Similarly, Mohamad Omran gradually returned to sculpture from 2015, four years after the start of the Syrian revolution. Since 2011, he has not been able to return to his country. It is in Beirut that he sometimes reunites with his family, only about a hundred kilometers away from Damascus, where he can no longer go without risking arrest. Today, the events in Gaza, though not directly involving him, resonate with his story. "I am not a politically committed artist as I want to do things that are personal to me," he explains. "But there are events that are stronger than you, to which you must respond. With what is happening, I feel a bit blocked, but at the same time, I need to do something in my soul. It's my way of saying, 'No, I do not agree."

Bringing artists to the spotlight

As with Ukraine today, artists from war-torn countries are gaining visibility from institutions that organise events, exhibitions, and shine a light on geographical areas previously overlooked by the West. Olga Oleksenko, who specialises in jewellery, precisely witnesses a newfound international interest in Ukrainian creators [see p.64]. But this phenomenon can sometimes be double-edged... "After the revolution, we had many exhibitions. Europe was discovering this part of the world. But after two or three years, I started to find it a bit sad to be invited simply because it was fashionable," shares Mohamad Omran. He is not alone in this observation. Yesterday Syria, today Ukraine... Tomorrow Palestine? [see p.72] While giving voice to artists helps draw attention to tragic events



Women in Black Against the War (2022), Ekaterina Muromtseva Courtesy Ekaterina Muromtseva



Lucie Touya, La Colonie © La Colonie



and reconnect the European public with exceptional situations — European policies are often not unrelated to the causes of these conflicts —, the sudden spotlight on their practice sometimes seems akin to a double bind: a reduction to nationality and an expression confined to the event... or even to voyeurism.

Today, Ukraine and Russia are at the centre of attention in Europe, while Syria, whose situation is now stalled, is neglected by the art world. "Politically, it's no longer of interest. We were going to have a large exhibition at the Institut du Monde Arabe dedicated to Syrian artists, but it was first postponed in favour of more current topics, then simply cancelled. Syria, today, is dead," declares Mohamad Omran.

His testimony rightly raises these recurring issues in the Western art world, namely, the instrumentalisation of narratives from non-European or exiled artists. Le Monde reported at the end of 2023 the discomfort of artists hosted by the Atelier des Artistes en Exil, an association for support and assistance to artists of all origins. A public letter signed by around forty creators denounced the "fetishisation" of their stories, used in exhibitions organised by the association. Such incidents reveal the difficulty for institutions to engage with subjects produced in different historical and geographical contexts, even as other initiatives sensitive to the issue attempt to showcase artists without confining them in stereotypical narratives, as seen with Portes Ouvertes sur l'Art.

Through their personal stories, artists sometimes become the bearers of a more universal message — in the context of creation during wartime, art historian Dolores Fernández Martínez notes that the work "transcends the anecdote and deals with the human condition in general". But she also reminds: "The majority of artists who have produced paradigmatic examples of the representation of the limits of human suffering or malice may not have been direct witnesses to the events, even if their work is considered by all as the most successful and complete expression of denunciation."

Therefore, it is not necessary to have lived through war to speak about it.

On the contrary, it causes limiting transformations for artistic creation and for the artists who are its victims. And the sudden dissemination of their stories, the spotlight on their experience, which until now had been of little concern, seems problematic when it instrumentalises and confines discourse.

3 questions to... P. de Laboulaye and D. Al Dahan

Pauline de Laboulaye is the president and Dunia Al Dahan, the vice-president of the association Portes Ouvertes sur l'Art, which promotes the work of artists in exile... but not only.

How was the association founded?

The idea originated from a collective of art professionals formed at our initiative with Paula Aisemberg and Véronique Pieyre de Mandiargues. In 2017, we created Portes Ouvertes sur l'Art to support Syrian artists and promote their work through exhibitions on a voluntary basis. Then,v we quickly decided to extend our focus to other nationalities to avoid confining them. This was very important to us. The association follows in the footsteps of the project carried by the Maison rouge situated in Paris, which closed in 2018 and to which we were connected. We do not have a physical location, which gives us quite a lot of freedom; projects are indeed conducted organically, through encounters. This was the case for the "Dislocations" exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo, realised because we happened to meet the curator Marie-Laure Bernadac, who eventually proposed a collaboration.

In what ways does the association support artists?

We follow the artists in their professional journey by connecting them with the French art scene. During exhibitions, they naturally receive exhibition and installation fees, and we produce the artworks if necessary. We also pay invited curators, unless they wish to volunteer. However, even though we obviously support them in case of need, our role is not to assist them on social and administrative fronts, as there are already dedicated structures, such as the Atelier des Artistes en Exil or the Beaux-Arts, which has a welcome programme for refugee artists and asylum seekers. Therefore, we focus on exhibitions, conducted in partnership with different venues, for example, the Cité Internationale des Arts, where we have organised several events.

How do you navigate the necessity for artists to talk about their history without feeling confined or restricted by it?

Artists are often visible through their affiliation with a painful and publicised national history. But they do not want to be confined to this story. Above all, they had to leave their country to continue creating and to freely express themselves on all subjects that affect them, not just the situation of their country. We find ourselves in a paradoxical situation where we attract partners, funders, and the public thanks to their condition as exiles. Then, we try to make people forget the often tragic context of their personal stories so that they discover above all works of art and artists. We encourage curators to identify a theme inspired by their encounters with these artists, then to open the exhibition to other non-exiled ones to deepen the theme, make it more universal, and rather create a community of artists in France.

Cliff of the Buddhas of Bamiyan Photo Zabihullah Habibi

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Untitled, Amer Nasser © Amer Nasser

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"GAZA HAS BECOME A BLACK BOX. EVERYTHING NEEDS REBUILDING."

Dismantling stereotypes, perceiving Palestine through the vitality of its artistic scene rather than violence, and amplifying a range of voices... Anthropologist Marion Slitine demonstrates how Palestine defies all *clichés*.

She is among the few researchers who have delved into art in Palestine, a "neglected subject". At the intersection of art anthropology and urban sociology, Marion Slitine's research focuses on the interplay between art and politics in the contemporary Arab world. Following a master's degree in History (Paris I-Sorbonne), political science (Sciences Po Paris), and a degree in Arabic (Inalco), she completed a PhD in social anthropology at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS) under the supervision of Franck Mermier. Defended in 2018, her thesis titled Palestine in creations: The making of contemporary art, from occupied territories to globalised scenes explored the dynamics and commitments of artistic practices within a context of colonisation and globalisation. Now a postdoctoral researcher at EHESS/CNE - MuCEM and General Secretary of the CCMO (Middle East Researchers Circle), she co-curated the exhibition "What Palestine brings to the world" at the Insitut du monde arabe (IMA), an event that attracted around 100,000 visitors in six months in 2023. Having recently stayed in Gaza last August, she reflects on the creativity and vitality of the Palestinian artistic scene and the unbearable reality of the current conflict.

The exhibition 'What Palestine Brings to the World" concluded on 31 December 2023. Could you talk about your collaboration with the Arab World Institute?

Having worked on the Palestinian artistic scene for over ten years and having completed my thesis on this topic, I was approached by the IMA to co-curate this exhibition, particularly focusing on contemporary creation. The overall goal was to showcase the multifaceted creativity and vitality

— Carine Claude

of the Palestinian people, to bring forth diverse artistic voices, and to present a Palestine that is not monolithic, challenging stereotypes of a violent society caught in skewed dichotomies of victimisation or heroisation. The aim was to move beyond these *clichésv* to represent Palestine differently and, through the lens of creators, depict what daily life under occupation looks like in one of the last colonial situations of the century.

What is your research area?

From the outset of my research, I've been interested in how art reflects the social, political, and economic dynamics of a country. Initially, I was based in Syria, working on art and authoritarianism, to understand how artists navigated through intense processes of censorship and dictatorship through their practices. I was attached to the French Institute in Damascus until 2011, the beginning of the revolution and when the cultural centre was closed. I was then offered a position at the French Institute in East Jerusalem, where I was responsible for the Visual Arts



department in the Palestinian Territories, covering six cities: Jerusalem, of course, but also Ramallah, which has become somewhat the cultural capital of Palestine, Bethlehem, Gaza, Hebron, and Nablus. This led me to discover the contemporary Palestinian artistic scene and inspired me to further explore this under-researched topic through a PhD in anthropology at the School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences.

What were your initial observations?

When one thinks of Palestine, its artists are not the first thing that comes to mind. Instead, images of violence from mainstream media are more prevalent. Palestine is read through science fiction, to rethink the past, present it, and propose future perspectives in a context where the horizons themselves are blocked. To achieve this, the use of humour as a safety valve is a strong component of their artistic expressions.

What was the focus of your study?

In my thesis, I specifically focused on artists working in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, comparing three very different cities in terms of creative conditions: East Jerusalem, Ramallah, and Gaza. Until the 1980s, Jerusalem was a significant cultural and artistic centre, but cultural infrastructures suffered due to the wall built in 2002 that separated Jerusalem from the rest of despite the precariousness, or rather the outright absence of cultural infrastructures - there were only two art galleries in Gaza, which, moreover, were destroyed during the current war. Yet, this city under embargo since 2007 represents one of the most important centres of Palestine, with a very dynamic expressionist painting school and a significant number of professional artists. My focus was therefore on creation within the Occupied Palestinian Territories because when we talk about Palestinian artists, we often actually refer to artists of the diaspora, those who are already integrated into a globalised art market, but much less so those who live and produce locally. I was

Artists from Gaza live literally in a closed-off environment. Since the embargo of 2007, it has been very difficult, if not impossible, for them to leave the territory. That's why it's not really possible to talk about a single Palestinian art, but rather about Palestinian arts in the plural and very contrasting artistic situations.

— Marion Slitine

solely through the lens of urgency and political news, which, in a way, dehumanises the Palestinian people. Viewing it through the prism of art offered a way to visualise the daily life of a society and to understand how, in such an extreme crisis situation, such a diverse artistic scene could emerge.

How do artists translate this everyday life and resistance into their practices?

Many Palestinian artists claim a form of engagement through their practices, as it often involves bearing witness to a situation of injustice characterised by daily humiliations and colonial domination. Their perspective on this situation allows for a closer understanding of the political and social realities of a country. It enables moving beyond a binary vision and opening up new horizons — a third way, so to speak. With the geopolitical field being blocked, artists use their imagination, for example the West Bank. With East Jerusalem under Israeli annexation, any support for Palestinian cultural infrastructures there is forbidden. Therefore, artists have to invent strategies to circumvent these restrictions. Ramallah has become the *de facto* creative capital since the 2000s. It is where galleries, cultural centres, curators, artists, as well as the headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, diplomatic representations, and international organisations are located. The Palestinian Museum. dedicated to modern and contemporary Palestinian art, opened its doors there in 2016. Many Palestinians from Israel -20% of the population - have decided to move to Ramallah to benefit from this cultural vibrancy. Lastly, Gaza was another observation point. I did not expect to find such a dynamic artistic scene, one of the most significant in Palestine,

interested in taking the opposite approach and exploring this underresearched area to analyse how creation occurs in a situation of occupation, with both external constraints related to the presence of an occupying state and internal pressures that artists face from Palestinian governments.

What are the differences from one territory to another?

The issue of the mobility of artists — and their restrictions — is central to the experience of Palestinian artists and leads to extremely differentiated regimes and distinct administrative statuses depending on the territory where they operate. Following their trajectories, it quickly becomes clear that it's a story of hindered, prevented, or even forbidden movement, which is not the same whether one is in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, or the current State of Israel. For





example, Palestinians from Israel hold an Israeli passport, and therefore can honour international invitations from galleries, festivals, or exhibitions abroad. This is not the case for those from the West Bank, because even with a Palestinian Authority passport, they cannot pass through Israel, nor even Jerusalem. To travel abroad, they must therefore go through Jordan, which has the only airport in the region, making the journey much longer and more expensive. And I'm not even talking about the artists from Gaza, who live literally in a closed-off environment. Since the embargo of 2007, it has been very difficult, if not impossible, for them to leave the territory. That's why it's not really possible to talk about a single Palestinian art, but rather about Palestinian arts in the plural and very contrasting artistic situations. As I mentioned, Gaza represents one of the major cultural centres of Palestine. It's a scene of urgency, survival, and experimentation. This eclectic scene is distinguished by the strong presence of artist collectives, formed in the early 2000s in response to the lack of public funding for culture and a dearth of cultural infrastructure. These collectives can establish galleries, which are not commercial galleries, but rather selfmanaged and informal spaces that artists rent to work, mount exhibitions, and conduct art training. It's worth noting that there are very few artistic training opportunities in Gaza, except for a Department of Fine Arts at Al-Aqsa University - which was bombed by the Israeli army during the current war in Gaza focused more on art education to train future schoolteachers. The two main artist collectives and galleries in Gaza are Eltiga and Shababik. They have played an active role in promoting contemporary art there. They have also facilitated

learning in new media, video art, installations, performance, and art in public spaces, which is very important in Gaza. They have nurtured an entire generation of artists, some of whom were showcased at the IMA as part of the "museum of clouds" founded by the HAWAF collective [see box], which will also be presented at Palais de Tokyo. Today, these two galleries have been destroyed by the Israeli army. An entire history and years of archives showcasing the creative vitality of the Palestinian people have been erased.

Sahab, the cloud museum

For Gaza, a territory under embargo and without a contemporary art museum, the HAWAF collective envisioned "a museum of possibilities that stimulates imagination and a vision for the future". Created in virtual reality on the Cloud, Sahab, the Museum of Clouds will be accessible online to highlight "the history and futures of Gaza". Initiated by artists Mohamed Bourouissa, Salman Nawati, Mohamed Abusal, and Sondos Al-Nakhala, the HAWAF collective was hosted in residence at the Cité internationale des arts in 2022 and presented its project, supported by the French Institute of Jerusalem, the Art Explora Foundation, the French Institute, and the Ateliers Medicis during the exhibition "What Palestine brings to the world". From 16 February to 30 June, the Palais de Tokyo presents "Signal", the first retrospective of Mohamed Bourouissa in a national institution. A fitting tribute to this co-founder of the HAWAF collective, whose work "creates collective narratives rooted in bitterness."

"Together for Gazan artists"

Given the absolute urgency of the situation of Gazan artists, a fundraising campaign has been launched by several French cultural organisations to host 16 artists featured in the exhibition "What Palestine brings to the world", as well as their families. The goal? To organise their temporary shelter and welcome in France, in artistic residencies, art schools, and cultural programmes. "The artists who exhibited at the Arab World Institute are in danger in Gaza. Some, unfortunately, have died or have lost many of their relatives, their homes, their workshops. We can help by welcoming them to France under dignified conditions so that they can keep on living and creating," writes Jack Lang, president of the Institut du monde arabe, which is coordinating the campaign with SINGA, an organisation for the inclusion of newcomers led by Benoît Hamon. "Numerous initiatives in the cultural sector are underway to envision 'the day after', like this fundraising campaign initiated by several actors in the French cultural scene for the temporary welcome of these artists in France, under dignified conditions, until they can rebuild and return to their country to rebuild their lives - culturally," explains Marion Slitine. The crowdfunding campaign, aiming for €108,000, will cover the transport from Gaza to Paris, the accommodation of the artists and their families for three months, and their subsistence upon arrival in France. The message is clear: "We continue to call for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Gaza, which will allow these artists to return to their country when they wish."





Man holding a burnt manuscript, Amer Nasser Courtesy UNESCO

What is the relationship of Palestinian artists to their heritage?

Modern Palestinian art has long been characterised by strong symbolism. These highly codified symbols are part of the Palestinian imagination and identity. For example, until the 1990s, the Palestinian flag was banned in public spaces by Israeli decree, even in representations, including on canvases. This led some artists, like Fathi Ghaben in Gaza, to spend years in prison for combining the four colours of the flag in his 1980 painting, Identity. Other Palestinian artists adopted strategies to circumvent this by embroidering the flag's colours: red, green, black, and white on traditional embroidered dresses, or by depicting the watermelon, which consists of these four colours. Painted on canvases or brandished during protests, the watermelon became a symbol of resistance. Additionally, the cactus, a plant that is able to survive bombings, has also become a very important symbol of this resilience and the perseverance of life. Contemporary artists reinterpret all this symbolic iconography in personal and intimate registers. For example, Majd Abdel Hamid, who will be exhibited at the Palais de Tokyo, creates extremely contemporary embroidery by diverting it from its traditional uses.

Despite the constraints mentioned, how do artists from Gaza manage to gain international recognition?

The digital space is privileged for Palestinian artists, especially those from Gaza who are confined and thus do not have access to globalised art scenes. They have quickly embraced digital tools, both in their creative processes and for disseminating their work, even before the rise of social media. They had set up videoconferencing systems to showcase their works, exchange with artists from other Palestinian territories, and those from the diaspora. To overcome the impossibility of normal movement, they have invested in virtual museums, online galleries, and established digital archives, as is the case with The Palestinian Museum Digital Archive. In Gaza, the digital space is used not only as a means of disseminating creation but also as a medium of creation itself: for example, there was a trend during the 2014 war called "Smoking art". Artists reinterpreted images of bombings digitally, creating human shapes and forms to assert their right to life and to humanise their people.

You mentioned urban art. Is it still very prevalent in Gaza?

Urban art has a strong tradition in Palestine, and particularly in Gaza, notably through the practice of graffiti which, since the first Intifada, was used by political factions as a tool for political communication and resistance to occupation, at a time when media was heavily controlled. Today (before October 2023), art in public spaces continues in various forms — street art, tagging, graffiti, urban installations and sculptures, etc. — but a major form of practice in Gaza is what's known as Parkour the art of moving through the urban landscape, performing acrobatic jumps. Gaza has become conducive to this practice since the 2010s due to the city's topography: flat surfaces, high urbanisation, many ruined constructions. Parkour in Gaza became a means of escape, emancipation, suspension, and resistance to the weight and confinement of daily life.

Are you able to maintain contact with the artists who have remained in Gaza? What do you know about their situation?

Maintaining contact with artists remaining in Gaza is challenging. Universities, cafes, the few galleries, libraries, archives, cultural centres, and other places of life have been destroyed. In terms of infrastructure, nothing remains in Gaza today. About 85% of the buildings have been destroyed, making life there untenable. Artists, like the 2.3 million Gazans trapped in the snare of a colonial war, have lost everything: their works, workshops, archives, and already precarious structures before the war. The situation is unprecedented in terms of horror and dehumanisation, though it perpetuates a history of colonialism, ethnic cleansing, and apartheid, which didn't start in October 2023 but has been ongoing for 75 years. In what some researchers call a "culturicide" or cultural genocide, the intellectual and artistic world was deliberately targeted to erase not just a territory but also its memory, heritage, and culture. Numerous historical and archaeological sites have also been destroyed, like the Al-Omary Mosque, one of the oldest in the region. What we know today about the losses is just the tip of the iceberg, and the future will reveal an even grimmer picture since no external observers can enter Gaza. Israel has cut off connections, making communication extremely difficult. Sometimes, through the rare Esim cards still in circulation, a text message saying "I am alive" is all that comes through, nothing more. Gaza has become a black box. Everything needs to be rebuilt.

The future of artists in Gaza has been made impossible. Cultural life has been completely undermined. They are cut off from the world. Some photographer artists have turned into war reporters. This is the first time such a large-scale conflict is documented from the inside by the victims themselves, who, moreover, have no means of escaping what international observers call 'a hell on earth'. Even the living are the walking dead. — *Marion Slitine*

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Mahmoud Darwich (2008), Marc Trivier © Marc Trivier. Nabil Boutros. MNAMCP

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ART AND RESISTANCE: A FASHIONABLE EFFECT?

Art sometimes becomes a tool for social transformations. Today, more than ever, it reveals deficiencies in a dominant Western art history that is male and white... and the responsibility of institutions regarding its exhibition.

"The modern artist no longer paints, he protests," said Tristan Tzara. Perhaps it was the Dada movement that initiated the idea of "resistant" art. As a foundational avant-garde for the movements that would follow in the 20th century, it was succeeded by surrealism and expressionism, born in the aftermath of World War I, and in reaction to it. In the 1960s, the Situationist International sought to break with them by advocating for art with a social rather than aesthetic purpose, creating "situations", a "moment of life, concretely and deliberately constructed by the collective organisation of a unitary ambiance and a play of events," as its founding document specifies.

In the United States, Fluxus championed the "elimination of fine arts", with Maciunas, the movement's main founder, stating: "Fluxus is definitively against the art-object as a non-functional commodity." At the same time, Viennese Actionism in Europe developed a performance art, closer to the spectator and to a reality that classical art only described. There, artists lived, incarnated reality, and directly involved their bodies. From the 1980s and 1990s, art as a tool for resistance and social struggle appeared through queer, homosexual, feminist, or ecological causes, and artists like Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer, the Guerrilla Girls collective... In denouncing, art appeared as a possible instrument for societal transformations.

> Art activism gained momentum at that time, fuelled by action and inheriting from the successive artistic resistance movements of the 20th century. In the introductory chapter of The Routledge Companion to Art and Activism in the Twenty-First Century, titled "How can art change the way we act?",

— Diotima Schuck

Lesley Shipley and Ney-Yen Moriuchi examine the work of Tania Bruguera who, in 2003, invented the concept of "useful art" (*arte útil*) and wrote: "Art should enter the so-called real world as a tool... *Arte Útil* is about changing people's lives. It's activist art, and artistic activism." Lesley Shipley and Ney-Yen Moriuchi comment: "For Bruguera, looking at art is not enough."

Today, in the era of increasing globalisation, art presents itself as a tool of cultural production capable of creating discourses, building bridges between societies, and writing a history that would break away from traditional Western canons. Contemporary art may, in fact, automatically enter into resistance the moment the artist, their history, their culture does not belong to that narrative. It is not so much a question of seeking where forms of resistance in art still lie - any art that is part of the world is, somewhere, engaged – but of understanding where discourses develop... and to what extent.

Places of resistance

For art that has entered resistance, "it is no longer a question of objects, but

RESISTING ART

of actions, not of formal aesthetics, but of socialised forms, not of the public, but of populations. Museums are deserted in favour of public spaces," explain Samira Ouardi, researcher, and Stéphanie Lemoine, art critic, in their book Artivism, Art, Political Action and Cultural Resistance. With the "transformative, even revolutionary, power of art" comes a shift in its stakes. For some artists and critics like Lucy Lippard, Nina Felshin, or Bob Thompson, the idea is to move activist art outside of traditional spaces, as observed by historians Lesley Shipley and Ney-Yen Moriuchi.

Yet, other artists, like Felix Gonzalez-Torres, born in 1957 and deceased in 1996, strive to infiltrate institutional settings in order to disrupt them from within. Through his work, Felix Gonzalez-Torres never ceased to invest in public space to share his ideals... and to make visible battles ignored by politics, also subject to discrimination, and widely stigmatised by public opinion: the recognition of homosexual rights or access to health care for HIV carriers, among others. The artist's attitude towards institutions — as well as many other, contemporary artists today - indeed questions the political role of these institutions and how they position themselves, through the voices they decide. or not, to represent and uphold.

Institutional engagement

"The need to invent creative forms of resistance is also due to the fact that we live in a media society, where no cause will ever become popular if it doesn't make the headlines," write Stéphanie Lemoine and Samira Ouardi. In this context, one may wonder if artistic resistance can today do without the fashionable effect induced by its media coverage.

World War II

In 1937, the "Entartete Kunst" ("Degenerate art" in German) exhibition, designed by Hitler, made the Nazi artistic prerogatives clear — and their prohibitions [see p.80]. Presenting 730 works by a hundred artists, it led to the confiscation of more than 21,000 works in German museums, targeting modernist expressions and avant-gardes: abstraction, cubism, expressionism... Were there forms of artistic resistance in Nazi Germany or under the Occupation in France?

Historian Laurence Bertrand-Dorléac distinguishes several types of artists and responses during the Occupation: artists who explicitly responded to events by adapting tended to lose their stylistic identity; there were those who continued to paint in a traditional manner; and those who chose, despite everything, to align themselves with modernity. The historian explains: "The entirety of French criticism and institutions was so timid that renouncing figuration and exhibiting in the few small galleries that welcomed them became an act transgressing totalitarianism." For artists, the use of modern modesv of expression already signified a form of struggle against the ruling power: "The disarray revealed by the expressionist body, the infinity or chance suggested by abstraction, the derision and critique expressed by Dadaism, are all factors of the disintegration of the social body as defined by National Socialism," note historians Ulrike Aubertin and Annick Lantenois. For this reason, institutions that promote an independent, apolitical art, like the Bauhaus, saw their doors shut. Artists were persecuted, or forced to exile to continue such practices.

And if this media coverage is not, sometimes, so much a way to make struggles visible as to show, for the institutions, their commitment to these struggles. A phenomenon that may seem rather positive, but where a number of ambiguities lie.

The article by Nathan Magdelain, a student of art philosophy, "Kehinde Wiley at the Musée d'Orsay: subcontracting critical discourse and promoting institutional engagement", reflects a sometimes problematic institutional modus operandi as the author revisits the invitation of the African American artist to exhibit three of his sculptures within the museum. Far from the enthusiastic articles about Orsay's commitment to racial issues, the text questions the outsourcing in the public cultural service that allows "to externalise the production of critical discourse and

monetise political subjects that are by no means a spectacle." He adds: "In recent years, the echo that postcolonial theories have found in public debate has intensified these criticisms of questioning the museum's status, considered as the temple of the West's appropriations and lootings."

A similar phenomenon can be observed on the issue of feminism and the place of women in institutions — one can recall the famous Guerrilla Girls poster that was already observing in 1989 that, at the Met Museum, "less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female". *Towards a Curatorial Activism*, written in 2018 by curator Maura Reilly, discusses the role of institutions in perpetuating discriminatory practices. She cites the example of MoMA which, upon its reopening in 2004 and

In art, revolt ends and perpetuates itself in true creation, not in criticism or commentary. The two questions, now posed by our time to a society at an impasse: is creation possible, is revolution possible, become one. - *Albert Camus*





FOCUS

despite expanded exhibition spaces, offered only 16 works by women out of the 410 presented. And even fewer non-white artists. "A recent visit to the same galleries in 2009 revealed that little had changed, except that there is now a room dedicated to feminist art (with a total of six works), and a room dedicated to Jacob Lawrence, as the sole representative of African American art."

It's about being mindful of the effects of trends and the disengagement of institutions that sometimes leave the artist with the responsibility of carrying a discourse which, while made visible, implies none of the internal and structural transformations that seem necessary today for museums and their missions. Thinking of the myth of the visionary artist who, through their creative force, could change the world, seems somewhat outdated. Presenting art carrying a discourse outside of traditional canons sometimes appears more as a way to offload institutional responsibility, to instrumentalise artists, and to attract crowds under the guise of false rebellion.

An alternative art history

"What are our options?" questions Maura Reilly. For her, art history can be revised in favour of discovering artists previously sidelined, but also through studies aimed at the polyphony of voices that would allow for an escape from the current hegemonic, Western canon. The work of some artists echoes these searches, like that of Dutch artist Barbara Visser who, in 2023, presented the documentary Alreadymade. There, she precisely questioned the paternity of Duchamp's Fountain, which could have originally been conceived by the American artist and poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, a friend of the artist at the time.

Additionally, major institutions are giving greater prominence to female artists by presenting their work. This includes, for instance, the recent and sudden spotlight on women surrealists who had been sidelined for decades and are now celebrated. "Surrealism and Magic" thus opened its doors in April 2022 at the Peggy Guggenheim in Venice and placed female artists at the heart of the movement, side by side with their male counterparts. The Montmartre Museum in Paris, for its part, presented "Female Surrealism?" between March and September 2023, highlighting the contributions of Leonora Carrington, Lee Miller, Dorothea Tanning to the movement and to art in general...

The works of these resistant female surrealists can be considered for themselves or compared to their male counterparts who were at the forefront at the time. The attention they are receiving today indeed responds to a contemporary struggle: the place of women in art history. A history rewritten in light of discoveries that break with the previously dominating patriarchal perspective. However, this alone is not sufficient to hope for profound changes. Similarly, presenting art with an ecological scope does not make a museum an ecological institution without integrating these discourses into their very operational structure. Beware of fashions and the visibility given to artists showcased here and there to feed everyone's good conscience.

La Colonie, founded by recognised artist Kader Attia, serves as a quite telling example of a general lack of commitment. This fertile space for reflection — notably on decolonial thought — had to close in 2020 due to a lack of funding... without receiving any support. The proposals of these institutions, which would like to be at the forefront of social transformations, are often sanitised and their commitments ultimately quite timid. And the resistance displayed, all too rarely, exceeds their corridors.

Counter-propaganda

More subtle than the idea of resistant and heroic art, the concept of counterpropaganda suggests points of resistance that would not be immediately visible and would reveal themselves through images or proposals available to all, but that require specific interpretative keys. This is particularly revealed by the use of modern modes of expression during World War II: it is through the context and understanding of the stakes developed by expressionism, Dadaism, abstraction — especially in terms of the body and its disintegration, which goes against the body as idealised by Nazism — that the mechanisms of artistic counter-propaganda can be glimpsed.

From the Middle Ages, in the illuminations of sacred texts, here and there appear lewd, scatological, or pagan scenes next to religious writings. A tradition and subversive method that was perpetuated and found in the 20th century. Zofia Kulik, an artist of the Polish avant-garde during the USSR era, recalls: "When I worked on objects or statues commissioned by the government, I also added contestatory inscriptions." She was definitely not the only one — porcelain plates, in particular, mediums of propaganda illustrating personalities or emblems of the Soviet regime, were often used by artists to express their disagreement. In charge of making and drawing them, these artists also seed, like Easter eggs, small inscriptions almost invisible, but indeed present on the objects.

Far from being spectacular, counter-propaganda resides in the detail. It embeds itself within the context and very space of propaganda forms to directly oppose them — unlike resistant art acting a posteriori. The visual history of counter-propaganda, a history of the anecdotal and the detail, reveals itself in popular, anonymous, and collective imagery. One just has to look close enough.



he burden of guilt (1997-1999), Tarma utgev Tania Bruguera

Site of Hatra in Iraq Courtesy UNESCO
HERITAGE ON THE FRONT LINE

From Afghanistan to Gaza, from Syria to Ukraine, the onset of the 21st century has been marked by major geopolitical upheavals, posing a continuous threat to heritage.

March 2001. A burst of dust and then, nothing. Nestled for fifteen centuries in the cliffs of Bamiyan in Afghanistan, two giant Buddhas were dynamited by the Talibans. Broadcast live, the destruction of these symbols of Afghan pre-Islamic art, deemed blasphemous by radical Islamists, went viral worldwide. A shockwave repeatedly featured in the 8 pm news broadcasts. Yet, vandalism and destruction aren't a new thing in times of war: targeting monuments to erase history has always proved brutally effective in making an impact and paralysing actions. However, this episode of cultural terrorism and its political exploitation signifies a turning point in the recent history of conflicts, particularly due to the media coverage these destructions received despite the fundamental rules of international humanitarian law (IHL) which stipulate that "All seizure, destruction or wilful damage done to institutions dedicated to religion, charity, education, art and science, historic monuments and works of art and science, is forbidden." As a double penalty, terrorism generally strikes where previous conflicts have already weakened heritage, as in Iraq during the first Gulf War, then in 2003. Afghanistan, Mali, Syria, Yemen, and now Ukraine... Most of these countries signed the 1954 Hague Convention for the protection of cultural property in the event of armed conflict. There's a catch, though: the lure of profit often prevails over the ideological aspect of heritage destruction, with the lucrative side of ruins being the systematic looting of museum pieces and archaeological sites for funding terrorism or armed conflicts.

> Thus, with the establishment of its caliphate in 2014, the Islamic State initiated a systematic campaign to destroy the cultural heritage of



territories under its control in Iraq, Syria, and Libya, with many violent actions widely broadcast on social media through propaganda videos. A "cultural genocide", as described by UNESCO Director Irina Bokova, who asserts that the destructions in Mosul constitute a violation of UN Security Council resolution 2199, which condemns the destruction of cultural heritage and decides that "All member states must take the necessary measures to prevent the trade of Iraqi and Syrian cultural goods and other items of archaeological, historical, cultural, scientific, or religious value, which have been illegally removed from Iraq since 6 August 1990, and from Syria since 15 March 2011, including by banning the transnational trade of these objects." For the UNESCO Director, the destruction of the Nimrud site, the capital of the Neo-Assyrian empire, amounts to a war crime. Because Mesopotamian and Assyrian sites constituted a real boon for the terrorist organisation, which, on one hand, arranged the trafficking of cultural goods from excavations and, on the other hand, gained a media showcase during their

destruction. Thus, in June 2015, 20% of the 10,000 Iraqi archaeological sites were reportedly in the hands of the Islamic State. Within a few months, the sites of Nineveh, Nimrud, and Dur-Sharrukin — the current Khorsabad — were attacked, the ancient city of Hatra was razed. Doura Europos, Mari, and Ebla, Mesopotamian cities, were looted. Completely emptied of its antiquities, the Mosul museum saw all its monumental Assvrian statues destroyed, including a large Lamassu, a winged genie with a bull's body, disfigured with a jackhammer.

Syria also paid a high price for terror. In Ragga, two Assyrian lions from the Arslan Tash site were destroyed by a bulldozer. Also in 2015, Palmyra, nicknamed "the pearl of the desert", was in turn destroyed. Refusing to reveal to the Islamists the location of certain "hidden" archaeological sites, its former director, Khaled al-Asaad, was beheaded on 18 August by jihadists, and his body was displayed on the site a few days before the explosive destruction of the temples of Baalshamin and Bel. The Roman monuments of the ancient city, its triumphal arch, tetrapylons, and theatre were also destroyed. Palmyra is now but ruins. However,

archaeological sites were not the only targets of ISIS. Christian churches and monasteries, as well as tombs, mosques, and Muslim shrines deemed "corrupted", also underwent massive destruction across all territories under the control of the terrorist organisation.

A breath of renaissance in Mali

The Muslim heritage paid a heavy price due to terrorism and armed conflicts not only in the Middle East but also in Africa. From 2012, the Islamist troops of Ansar Dine demolished the mausoleums of Timbuktu, a ravage that the prosecutor of the International Criminal Court described as a "war crime" amidst an armed conflict and civil unrest ravaging a region destabilised by the raids of Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). Dubbed "the city of 333 saints", Timbuktu was home to numerous pilgrimage sites since the 11th century, notably the mausoleums of Muslim saints. Of the 16 inscribed on the World Heritage list, 14 had been ravaged. The attacks also targeted the Al-Farouk monument. According to UNESCO's estimates, 4,203 manuscripts stored at the Ahmed Baba Institute of Higher

Enhanced protection

The Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict is one of the foundations upon which the protection of heritage in times of war rests. And its reconstruction in times of peace. Adopted under the auspices of UNESCO, its two Protocols (1954 and 1999) provide the framework. One of the mechanisms, "enhanced protection", is established by the Second Protocol of 1999 and aims to "ensure the effective and comprehensive protection of cultural properties specifically designated, during armed conflict, whether of an international or non-international character." One of its major benefits is that it provides for criminal sanctions and penalties for "those who intentionally damage a cultural property under enhanced protection or use such property or its immediate surroundings for military purposes". Since prevention is the best way to protect cultural heritage, states are encouraged to submit requests for enhanced protection in peacetime, in order to ensure the safeguarding of cultural properties under all circumstances and against all risks. This, however, also stands as the limit of the mechanism, as the exposure to risks and the extent of damage are most often measured after the onset of hostilities...

Studies and Islamic Research (IHERI-ABT) were burned or stolen by armed groups. These destructions led to one of the first criminal cases of its kind: in 2016, those responsible for their destruction were found guilty of war crimes, and the International Criminal Court sentenced Ahmad Al-Fagi Al-Mahdi for leading the attacks that destroyed these monuments. Since then, an international cooperation campaign has enabled the revival of part of this heritage. UNESCO and France have developed an action plan at the request of the Malian Government to rehabilitate the mausoleums and restore the damaged ancient manuscripts. Delving into oral history and the study of ancestral construction methods, forty young masons were trained in traditional earth construction techniques to rebuild the monuments. The resilience against oblivion.

Forgotten conflicts, endangered heritage

Unfortunately, the fate of several countries ravaged by war goes under the media radar. Engulfed in a bloody civil conflict between Houthi rebels and the government, Yemen has also suffered massive destruction of its heritage. "Three-quarters of the sites damaged or destroyed (37 out of 49) occurred in the first three months of 2015, when the bombings were particularly intense and violent," writes Jérémie Schiettecatte in Yemen. A vandalised heritage in a country in chaos (2019). He continues: "The city museum of Dhamār was completely destroyed shortly after its completion. It housed over 12,000 archaeological objects. It was guarded 24 hours a day, and the belligerents' argument of a weapons cache to justify its destruction is challenged by the testimonies from the presidency of the GOAM, the general organisation of antiquities and museums of Yemen. The excavation of its rubble allowed the recovery of the remains of 7,000 objects." As for Sudan, whose numerous sites are classified as world

Scanning studio of ancient manuscripts, Timbuktu Courtesy UNESCO



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heritage of humanity, notably the island of Meroe, clashes between paramilitary and armed forces have intensified since the beginning of 2024. According to the Regional Network for Cultural Rights, "reliable sources, images, and videos posted on social media showing fights between the army and the RSF which likely exposed the sites to vandalism, destruction, looting, and theft". An invaluable heritage in danger, intimately linked to the Pharaonic civilisation. "The archaeological sites of the island of Meroe, a semi-desert landscape between the Nile and the Atbara, the seat of the rulers who occupied Egypt for nearly a century, contain pyramids, temples, and residential buildings as well as major water management facilities," describes UNESCO.

The story of an announced destruction

The epicentre of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, the Gaza Strip and its millennial heritage have been hit hard since 7 October 2023 [see p.18]. International bodies were guick to mobilise, like ICOMOS, the International Council on Monuments and Sites, which, ten days after the Hamas attacks, called for international aid. "The heritage of Gaza, with its 3,000 years of history, represents a strategic crossroads of civilisations whose traces - religious buildings, historic buildings, museums, archaeological sites, traditional neighbourhoods can be found throughout the Gaza Strip, but especially in its densely urbanised northern part, in and around the city of Gaza," commented ICOMOS at the end of December 2023. "This heritage has suffered irreversible damage - and each additional day of fighting puts it further at risk." Reports notably mention the destruction of the Great Omari Mosque, dating from the 7th century, and airstrikes hitting the compound of Saint Porphyrios Church, dating from the 5th century. The figures are staggering: out of the 325 heritage sites listed in the Gaza Strip, more than 200 have already been destroyed, amounting to a 60% destruction rate of cultural heritage according to ICOMOS data in January 2024. NGOs like Heritage for Peace, Arab Network of Civil Society Organizations for Cultural Heritage Protection (ANSCH), or Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor also report the partial or total destruction of dozens of buildings like the Byzantine church of Jabaliya or the Centre for Manuscripts and Ancient Documents completely razed. However, archaeological sites, some dating back to the Neolithic, have particularly suffered, such as Tell al-Sakan (3rd millennium BC) on the northern bank of Wadi Gaza, the Roman cemetery (1st century BC), or the archaeological site of Tell Umm Amer, also known as the monastery of Saint Hilarion (4th century AD), which was nevertheless listed on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage and on the list of cultural property under enhanced protection [see box p.38].

\$7 billion in damages

Ukraine, too, remains in the headlines as it faces considerable damage. According to UNESCO, by the end of 2023, the cost of rebuilding cultural buildings was estimated at over \$7 billion, a figure that is expected to rise further as the war drags on. A total of 327 sites have been damaged or destroyed, including 28 museums and 124 religious buildings. The regions of Kharkiv and Donetsk have paid the heaviest price, with 56 and 85 sites damaged, respectively. In Odessa, a missile strike in July 2023 severely damaged the Transfiguration Cathedral in the city's historic centre, which had been listed on the World Heritage in Danger list since January 2023 and thus supposed to be protected from targeted attacks. As a signatory state to the 1972 World Heritage Convention, the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and the 2017 UN Security Council Resolution 2347, the Russian Federation is bound by its commitments... in theory.

As destructions continue, UNESCO's Emergency Fund for Heritage has financed some actions to safeguard Ukrainian heritage through digitalisation of archives, inventories, and protective measures, particularly in Odessa. The multisectoral programme "Support to Ukraine in the fields of culture and education through UNESCO", funded by the Japan-Fund-in Trust, brings together experts from ICOMOS and ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) who have gone to Kyiv to train Ukrainian heritage professionals in emergency preparedness. The programme includes express training modules, techniques for documenting cultural heritage, and an introduction to photogrammetry and laser scanning. The material needs are also immense. State-of-the-art scanning and restoration equipment worth €15,000 has been donated to the Centre for Digitisation of Architectural Documentary Archives,

The widespread and systematic destruction and looting of cultural sites that we are witnessing today have underscored the significant links between the cultural, humanitarian, and security dimensions of conflicts and terrorism. Attacks against diversity and cultural heritage are also attacks against the people, their rights, and their security. -UNESCO

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set up by the National Polytechnic University of Lviv (LPNU). Additionally, 440 water mist fire extinguishers were given by the Foundation for the Preservation of Sacred Arts of Ukraine and ICOMOS, in partnership with the World Monuments Fund, to ensure the protection of the historic wooden churches, the famous *tserkvas*, of which there are 2,500 solely on Ukrainian territory, a unique concentration worldwide.

When it comes to reconstruction, international aid is indispensable: logistical, material, human, and, of course, financial. Numerous NGOs, associations, private law foundations, and policies are reinforcing governmental institutions. Based in Girona, Spain, the Heritage for Peace mission offers support to heritage workers in Syria "in their effort to protect their collections, monuments, and archaeological sites during armed conflicts", while also serving as an observer on the ongoing destruction in Gaza. On the other side of the spectrum, the International Alliance for the Protection of Heritage in Conflict Areas (ALIPH), a Swiss private law foundation, has raised €90 million to fund 150 heritage restoration projects in about thirty conflict-ridden countries such as Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Mali, Libya, Eritrea, Ivory Coast, Niger, and Afghanistan. This foundation, created in 2017 at the initiative of France and the United Arab Emirates in response to the massive destruction of cultural heritage in the Middle East and Sahel countries, now brings together representatives of states, as well as groups like Total and private patrons such as Thomas Kaplan, Jean-Claude Gandur, or Andrew W. Mellon, in partnership with UNESCO, ICCROM, the International Council of Museums (ICOM), the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS), the World Monument Fund, and the Aga Khan Trust for Culture. Faced with the urgency, some say it is high time to speak through one voice...

AMA







Meditation Tree (detail, 2018), Ibrahim El-Salahi Courtesy Salon 94

AN ART OF INTUITION

Acclaimed painter in Africa and beyond, Ibrahim El-Salahi has been a leading figure of the Khartoum School and the father of modern African art.

In 2013, he became the first artist from the continent to be honoured with a retrospective at a major institution, the Tate Modern in London. This belated recognition for the artist, born in 1930 in Omdourman, Sudan, was made possible by the sudden interest that contemporary African creation garnered in the West. Yet, in Africa, his reputation had long transcended the borders of his native country, stretching from east to west. Ibrahim El-Salahi worked in Khartoum until 1976 before moving to Qatar, then England. Today, at 93, he still dedicates his life to his art and the exploration of a unique and composite visual vocabulary that he has been developing since the late 1950s. A work that earned him the regard of institutions worldwide.

Synthesis

From his expansive paintings to his smaller drawings, Ibrahim El-Salahi presents a body of work that is symbolic, metaphorical, and allegorical. "I keep moving in and out of abstraction," the artist, resembling an old sage, commented in a 2016 interview. He developed this language in the 1960s. Initially intending to become a doctor, he decided to dedicate himself to art, starting his education in Khartoum. At 24, he received a scholarship to study at the Slade School of Fine Art in London, returning in 1957 with a deep understanding of Western modern art. Eager to showcase what he had learned, he organised several exhibitions featuring landscapes, still lifes, nudes, and portraits, which failed to capture the local public's interest.

> "I didn't know what to do," he recounts. Yet, it was the beginning of a reflection that led him to experiment with forms associated with Sudanese

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— Diotima Schuck
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culture, incorporating them into his drawings, a practice driven by the Hurufiyya movement that grew among Muslim artists on the continent in the 1950s. Sensitised to Arabic calligraphy learned from his father, an Islamic scholar, Ibrahim El-Salahi began to use it as graphic elements, initially for clarity and reception. "It was much more understandable than any other painting I could have made. With writing and words, my message was directed at people," he explained.

"Letters are originally symbols derived from animal or plant forms, sounds, visions, ghosts, which calligraphic writing drew inspiration from to be comprehensible to all," comments Ibrahim El-Salahi. Recognisable at first in his drawings and paintings, these letters became abstract over time, revealing themselves in the outlines of shapes taking on the appearance of characters, ghostly figures, animals, plants, trees... like a return to the very source of their creation.

Yet, there is much more to his works. If the artist is celebrated today, it is because he has managed to propose



With a certain knowledge of Western modern art, one can view the works and directly place them within this context. But what's extraordinary with El-Salahi is that he can just as easily be situated within an African context, and more specifically, a Sudanese one. -Laura Hoptman

a synthesis of arts with diverse heritages. Laura Hoptman, art historian and director of the Drawing Center in New York, which recently organised an exhibition around one of the painter's latest series, explains: "Ibrahim El-Salahi combines patterns, colours, and Sudanese artistic traditions he learned in art school or identified later during his travels in the country with elements of post-war modernism — particularly Picasso."

A modern African painter

If El-Salahi's art stands at the crossroads of diverse artistic cultures, it equally reflects a pivotal, historical moment for African countries and the pan-Africanism movement that emerged in the 1930s, championed by writers such as Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor. Through their critique of colonialism and the highlighting of black African culture, the movement encouraged artists to celebrate their local cultures hence, notably, the popularity of the Hurufiyya movement that appeared in the latter half of the 20th century across the continent. Ibrahim El-Salahi, for his part, returned from London just one year after Sudan's declaration of independence in 1956. And this newfound emancipation quickly

What remains of Universalism?

Inherited from the Enlightenment, universalist thought was once promoted, placed at the heart of the Declaration of Human Rights of Man in 1789, elevating all citizens of the nation to common principles, rules, and values. A beautiful idea, if it hadn't subsequently justified colonial thought and the desire to "civilise" the populations of the African continent. In the decolonial era of the 1960s, many countries had adopted democracy as a political system. However, outside of the Western model, the application of universalism stemming from a dominant West often proves problematic, seeming to prevent the consideration of cultural particularisms and often feeding contemporary racism, Islamophobia, antisemitism...

During a debate for the programme Paroles d'Honneur in 2017, philosophers Norman Ajari and Étienne Balibar, specialists on the issue, pondered: "Should we end universalism?" To which Balibar responded: "It would be absurd. Ending universalism would mean ending equality, with the idea that human beings from all these deeply different and even contradictory places that make up the planet, would have no common goals or interests, nor ideals to share." Universalism remains to be constructed. Proof of the subject's relevance, In Search of Africa(s), Universalism and Decolonial Thought, published in 2018, brought into dialogue philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne and anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle to recontextualise relations between Africa and the West through the notions of universalism, cultural specificities, and pan-Africanism. To the "overarching universalism", they preferred the idea of "structural universalism", woven by particularism. While the means to achieve it remain a subject for debate, today's pluralist universalist thought undoubtedly remains vital for initiating conversation and communication between cultures.

paved the way for the revaluation of African vernacular arts, developing in the west in Nigeria, in Senegal... and in the East, in Sudan, with the Khartoum School as its figurehead.

In his book Contemporary African Art published in 1991, Pierre Gaudibert, French curator and art critic, described the Khartoum School as "an exceptional meeting of the Arab-Muslim world and Africa, but also of Western modernity, thus constituting an Afro-Islamic art." He explained its significance: "In Sudan, it was first the realist pioneer Bastafi Baghadi, then the birth of the very original Khartoum School that gained international recognition; the leader of which is Ibrahim El-Salahi, trained in England and the United States. He managed to evolve the traditions of Arabic calligraphy learned from his father as well as motifs from traditional art and crafts, expressing himself powerfully in both paintings and drawings and exhibiting in Europe as well as the USA. A whole school of quality artists has emerged in this country around him."

Born in the 1960s, the movement was initiated by three Sudanese artists, Ahmed Shibrain, Kamala Ishag, and Ibrahim El-Salahi, who sought to establish a national, multifaceted culture, bringing together a great diversity of ethnicities and languages. After becoming a teacher in his country, Ibrahim El-Salahi took part in those years at the Mbari Club. a cultural activities centre created in Ibadan, Nigeria, in 1961. In 1962, he received a UNESCO scholarship to study in the United States, where he returned two years later with the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. In 1966, he led the

Untitled (1999), Ibrahim El-Salahi Courtesy Salon 94

Saladi 12.3.'99 Oxford

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Untitled (1999), Ibrahim El-Salahi Courtesy Salon 94

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PORTRAIT

Sudanese delegation to the first World Festival of Black Arts in Dakar, Senegal. In the 1970s, he began to play a major role in Sudanese diplomacy and was appointed Undersecretary at the Ministry of Culture.

However, in 1975, everything came to a halt: the artist was accused of participating in a military coup aimed at overthrowing the Sudanese government. The Khartoum School group disbanded after Ishag's departure and El-Salahi's imprisonment. But in the meantime, the School had already opened up a whole cultural renewal, paving the way for the younger generations of artists of Sudan and Africa as a whole.

Visionary

"I am not a calligrapher, but I use calligraphy in my own drawings," explains the artist. "I work from what comes from within myself. If someone asks me to paint something or if I'm commissioned, it becomes very difficult for me to create." This "organic development" of his painting, as he calls it, starts from a nucleus, without knowing what the final result will be. A creative process far removed from Western methods and their preparatory sketches, from which emerges, in a meditative surge, a painting of intuition.

During his imprisonment, the artist continued to draw despite extremely difficult conditions. Following the coup d'état — led by one of his cousins — Ibrahim El-Salahi was incarcerated for six months and eight days. Decades later, his arrest remains a mystery to him. In 1976, he left his country for good to live in Qatar. And after a few years, he finally decided to settle in Oxford, where he has remained and still works.

"It's incredible that an artist, at ninety years old, has remained so prolific and that his work can be so contemporary, interesting, and poignant," attests Laura Hoptman.

3 questions to... Rahiem Shadad

Rahiem Shadad is a Sudanese curator.

How did you establish your curatorial practice?

I don't come from an art background, but around 2012-2013, there were many open-air exhibitions I attended, featuring well-known professional artists in Khartoum. I joined a collective in 2015 where we began discussing art in Sudan, its social role. By 2018, we started writing. It was the time of the revolution. In response, many artists began creating murals to protest, and we conducted research on this, from a more political than technical angle — I myself had not received an art education, nor had the people I was working with. It was in 2019 that I finally met my associate, with whom I opened the Downtown Gallery.

What did you exhibit?

The gallery's goal was to showcase the art of the revolution. Our first exhibition was very political, as were those that followed. It wasn't until after Covid that we truly became curators, in a sense, with a progression in our exhibitions and a list of artists we worked with. Downtown Gallery became the most important local gallery in Sudan, generating significant income for the artists. Last year, we undertook the very first collaboration of a Sudanese gallery with a European one, in Lisbon, which was quite complicated to conduct because Sudan is internationally sanctioned. The Sudanese banking system is not allowed to have any interaction with any outside system...

What has been your situation since the conflict broke out in April 2023?

I was on holiday in Egypt at the time. I haven't been able to return to Sudan since, and all I have left is the backpack I took with me. The area where the gallery is located is the most dangerous as it's also where the presidential palace and government buildings are... Many artists residing in the area are trapped in their studios and the gallery has likely burned down. I couldn't just sit by idly, so I started a campaign that was able to assist over 45 artists through financial donations. Now, I'm in Kenya, where I'm a cultural manager. I work with artists, musicians, filmmakers... I've also come to realise how much East and Central Africa have to offer in terms of art. It's absolutely insane.

A year ago, the Drawing Center presented the exhibition "Ibrahim El-Salahi: Pain Relief Drawings", dedicated to his series of the same name and created on the medication packets he takes to relieve his chronic pain. "Drawing is a form of meditation for me," the artist commented. "Images enter my mind and flow through my fingers. Something will make me start: the pattern and the indentation of the braille on the packet, or perhaps a memory, or something that comes to mind at the moment."

Despite his fundamental role in the development of modern African art, the artist once suffered from a lack

of interest from Western institutions in the continent. Laura Hoptman, however, recalls: "While El-Salahi may have less visibility in the United States, he remains an absolutely major painter for the history of art in Africa, and for the history of contemporary art as a whole." Among the most well-known and recognised artists of the African continent, Ibrahim El-Salahi is indeed today one of the great figures of the renewal of artistic practices in the 20th century. And, from his studio in Oxford, he pursues the writing of two grand narratives of art, Western and African, incessantly merging one into the other.







Flamenco Dancers (2012), Ibrahim El-Salahi Courtesy Salon 94



WHEN ART SILENCES VIOLENCE IN COLOMBIA

In Medellín, the Proyectarte Foundation is working towards the social reintegration of child soldiers by harnessing their creativity through art therapy. The approach demonstrates how peace can be achieved through self-esteem and mutual respect.

They have chosen to call themselves Estrella or Tocayo [see boxes p.58] to protect their identities and build a new life. Like hundreds of other children, some as young as ten, they have sought refuge at Proyectarte, a Medellín foundation where violence is replaced by art. Child soldiers recruited by the FARC, minors enlisted by illegal armed groups or drug trafficking gangs, and victims of domestic violence... These young Colombians are healing their wounds by freely expressing their creativity thanks to a method developed by the foundation established in 2010, which combines art therapy, education, and psychology. "We support youngsters from the outskirts of Medellín, areas marked by violence, a violence that, regrettably, is often found within families themselves," observes Christine Meert, the founder of Proyectarte. This Belgian artist, passionate about personal development, has been fighting in Colombia for over thirty years to secure a brighter future for youth whose lives oscillate between extreme poverty and insecurity.

A gentle approach

The guiding principle is not to rush. "With psychologists and social workers, we have developed a methodology that allows children and teenagers to discover and develop their potential through art, as well as to heal the wounds they have accumulated over their lives in violent family contexts, their neighbourhoods, or within armed groups," she explains. "We offer them a supportive community that enables them to broaden their options for building a life project that matches their dreams."

In this sanctuary, some explore their creativity through writing, others through drawing, painting, weaving, or embroidery. This "very beautiful and



colourful" living space is animated by a team of 35 people, where the youth interact among themselves and with psychologists in an informal manner, facilitating the expression of often complex emotions. "What they lack most are opportunities," Meert notes. "At the foundation, they find a caring space and companionship — in fact, youngsters from the neighbourhoods sometimes complain more of loneliness than of poverty and violence. Why? Because they often come from single-parent families and find themselves alone and vulnerable from a young age. Let's not forget that more than 300 illegal armed groups are lurking around Medellín, exerting pressure on them "

A complex situation

Many children supported by the foundation were formerly part of the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), a Marxist-Leninist guerrilla group that opposed the Colombian government from 1964 to 2016. Supposedly protected by international humanitarian law, which stipulates that children should not be recruited by armed forces or groups, thousands of Colombian

The Tocayo tale

In this autobiographical tale told in the third person, Tocayo (a pseudonym) uses the metaphor of a secret to narrate his childhood, his experiences of war, his emotions, his process of transformation, and his deep desire to build a new life project. Excerpt.

"Tocayo dreams of studying Law to help other children and young people who have gone through difficult experiences similar to his own.

He dreams of sharing his experience, the things he has seen that were not good for him or for others.

He dreams of telling his story to those who are willing to listen, because he knows that nobody can be forced to do so.

Tocayo understands that children and young people who have experienced war carry red, difficult, and heavy secrets in their hearts. These secrets weigh them down because they have not yet found someone ready to listen.

That's why Tocayo wants to listen to them, just as his friend Ana did for him. He wishes to put himself in their shoes and give them a bit of the love he has kept. Can Tocayo change the world in this way? Yes. He can at least transform the vast world of his heart."

The Estrella tale

Written by a 12-year-old girl recruited by the FARC who has chosen Estrella as her artist name, this tale narrates her dream of the future where she sees herself running a restaurant.

"To light her path, Estrella needed to reach for the stars.

The first star she wanted to catch was small and close: to do internships, obtain a technician's certificate in tailoring, and also her high school diploma. The second star was bigger: to study at university and become a head chef. The third star was the brightest and furthest of all: to open a restaurant in honour of her mother and brothers, the stars of her life.

The restaurant will be called 'Estrella Palma' and will be located on the outskirts of a city so that all travellers can visit.

It will have three house specialties:

Banana soup to give strength. This soup has the gift of helping people find the best way to move forward. It gives them the strength and wisdom needed to overcome difficulties.

Beet salad for tolerance. The magic of this recipe is that it helps to have a bit more tolerance. A gift that Estrella has had to conquer lately.

Rice *arepas* for inner peace. These *arepas* (traditional corn cakes) have the power to infuse inner peace, because Estrella knows that she and the whole world greatly need it. Peace and inner tranquillity to forgive oneself and forgive others. Estrella dreams, with the help of her grandfather who watches over her like a star in the sky, of being able to offer her recipes that are good for the stomach and the heart."

minors were unfortunately subject to forced mobilisation during the five decades of conflict.

The figures are horrifying: over 18,600 cases of child soldier recruitment have been documented in the context of the armed insurgency. And the number of children displaced due to the guerrilla warfare runs into the hundreds of thousands. "A vast majority of these young people who were part of the Colombian armed conflict originally come from peasant families living in relatively isolated regions where, precisely, there are not many opportunities," Meert specifies. "However, they all possess a great potential for resilience, creativity, and joy, despite quite harsh living conditions."

The journey towards demobilisation of child soldiers began in 2016, following the peace agreement between the Colombian government and the FARC. This marked the start of a lengthy and delicate process of reintegrating them into civilian life, carried out by state services under the auspices of UNESCO and the ICRC, with support from specialised transition centres, Salesian religious congregations, and civil society organisations like the Proyectarte Foundation.

A never-ending story

However, some dissident armed groups that rejected the peace agreements remain active, continuing to recruit underage fighters. Yet, some voluntarily join these revolutionary groups, presenting a complex situation that defies simplification or generalisation, as Christine Meert explains: "In their adolescent imagination, armed groups in very







We always support these youths with a higher goal in mind, which we articulate as: transform to transform. Because we are convinced that personal and collective changes come through this work of self-transformation. Every action makes a difference. - Christine Meert

We are a creative and interdisciplinary team of artists and professionals committed to a fulfilling life, a culture of peace, and respect for the planet. Our priority is to support teenagers, youths, families, and communities in economic, social, and family vulnerability, affected by contexts of violence, with the goal of a better living together. — *Christine Meert*

isolated regions have become reference figures. It's very difficult to generalise the situation. In some places, guerrillas have played a role of protectors, in others, a role of terror. In this context, each teenager has their own story, their own journey, their own motivations. I've known some for whom family conditions were so difficult that they felt like they had 'nothing to lose."

Poverty, unemployment, isolation... When the conflict was at its peak in recent decades, many of these rural areas were gradually abandoned by the state, with education being the first casualty. "Some children received a basic education, rarely a complete secondary cycle or vocational training," Meert observes. "Moreover, many come from dysfunctional families, and their adherence to guerrilla groups is also explained by the search for a sense of belonging. Some return because, in their minds and hearts, the guerrillas have become their true family, especially now, due to the resurgence of armed groups. It takes a lot of courage to forge a different path... It's difficult, but many manage to do so." At the invitation of Christine Meert, a few child soldiers have agreed to share their stories through the writing of

metaphorical and autobiographical tales [see box p.58]. "Each story is different. Everyone has their own universe, a way of behaving and relating to their story. It's important not to depict them as monsters."

"Generation hummingbird"

Reintegration is not always straightforward. To find work, these young people often have to conceal their pasts. This is a challenge for children distanced from their families and their bearings in an urban environment they may not be familiar with. One of the foundation's programmes, "Paths of opportunities", offers them support to clarify their professional project and assists them in obtaining training by exploring scholarships, financially accessible studies, and job opportunities in connection with schools, universities, and local businesses.

Today, the Proyectarte Foundation is expanding its initiatives for youths and their families across Colombia. In Envigado and Copacabana, it teaches them to care for themselves, others, and nature. A new "Generation hummingbird" for whom peace comes through respect for others and the environment. "We need to reconnect individuals," asserts Christine Meert. "For example, we propose that companies participate in the project and, in return, they can host well-being workshops for their employees based on our method." The founder of Proyectarte also aims to reach out to Belgian and European companies. To this end, she launched the "European friends fund Proyectarte" with the King Baudouin Foundation in August 2023 to broaden the community of donors. "But what we dream of is being able to exchange through method transfers with other organisations facing similar challenges to ours in other countries," she says. So that child soldiers worldwide are no longer seen as ex-combatants, but as ordinary adolescents.



Non-violent changes (2019-2020), Olia Koval © Olia Koval. Courtesy Hangar

UKRAINIAN RESILIENCE

Two years ago, the Russian invasion of Ukraine began. With it came the shock of a disrupted everyday life, a situation the Ukrainian revolution of 2014 had already hinted at. Invited to share their experiences, Ukrainian artists and curators recount the upheavals affecting their lives and their work.

Sergiy Petlyuk

Sergiy Petlyuk is a multimedia artist with a focus on video and installation. His works are politically and socially committed. Having graduated from the Lviv National Academy of Arts in 2005, he has been actively participating in exhibitions and residencies in Ukraine, Europe, and the United States. When the war broke out, his wife and son left Lviv and moved to Paris. He eventually decided to join them at the end of 2022.

"When the war started, it was, of course, a tremendous shock for all Ukrainians. I found myself unable to work. It was as if my brain had frozen, and I could do nothing. Therefore, I volunteered in Lviv to help those fleeing. The city had become a massive hub for people from the east and south of Ukraine, passing through to reach Eastern European countries. It was an utterly mad period. I thus abandoned my work as an artist for a while, but after six months, I felt the need to reconnect with it. I created the work, And Who?, at the end of 2022. It's an installation featuring a phrase in Russian, 'And who allowed you to live so beautifully?' displayed on LED panels in the shape of artillery fire. This sentence carries a very strong, real, colonial connotation. Even though I now live in France, I think about the war constantly; I live it every day and night. My day always starts with reading the news from Ukraine. But if I were to go now, it would be a one-way trip because the martial law that has been established prevents men from leaving the country. So, for now, I remain in Paris, where I am a student at the Beaux-Arts. I was admitted after explaining my situation, but it's still quite strange because I don't speak French and it's really difficult to be

— Diotima Schuck

part of this student life even though it's very interesting! Regarding my work, it's entirely focused on the theme of war... which isn't necessarily a good thing, to be honest, but I can't help thinking about anything else. I don't know how long I will stay in France, but I want to work and exhibit. Being part of the academy is a good way to integrate into the artistic sphere. Holding exhibitions is also a way to make oneself visible, to explain what's happening in our country. But of course, we also want to gain this visibility because we are good artists, not just because of our nationality..."

Olga Oleksenko

Born in Kazakhstan to a Ukrainian family, Olga Oleksenko moved to Kyiv at the age of 16. There, she became a curator of private jewellery collections and a collector herself. After managing the Van Cleef & Arpels boutique in Kyiv for over twelve years, she became the brand ambassador. At the time of the Russian invasion, Olga Oleksenko decided to take action: she founded Strong and Precious to promote Ukrainian creators. "Strong and Precious is a child of the war. My team and I initiated the project in 2022, a few months after the Russian invasion, initially to keep international awareness alert to the events, but mainly to support and celebrate the craftsmanship of Ukrainian jewellers worldwide. We promote them through our expertise, contacts, and by offering visibility. We have already organised four exhibitions at GemGenève, as well as a charity auction with Sotheby's Geneva. We also showcased Ukrainian jewellery at Art Basel last summer and at the New York Jewelry Week in November. Unfortunately, some of the artists we represent had to flee the country, but the majority continue to produce in Ukraine. The workshops and craftsmen are still there! We select them for their talent, individual style, and authenticity. Of course, the industry was heavily impacted by the war in the early months; artists had to stop working due to the chaos in the country. At that time, no one was buying jewellery in Ukraine. But the situation has stabilised. especially in regions far from the front. Of course, there are still many difficulties, particularly in sourcing metals like gold or precious stones. Manufacturers now have to turn more to silver, brass, or be inventive in finding other materials. Last winter, during the power outage caused by Russian bombings, jewellers couldn't operate the necessary equipment for metal melting, but this year, the situation has significantly improved. Furthermore, as international brands closed their shops, Ukrainians turned to local productions, which is also a way to support their culture, to claim it. Guzema jewellery, for example, is now hugely successful. And in general, international interest in Ukrainian jewellery has increased. The public has realised how beautiful and masterful our jewellery can be!"

Misha Zalvany

Misha Zalvany was born in Kyiv in 1985. He graduated from the NTU "KPI" Publishing and Printing Institute in 2008 and has participated in Ukrainian and international exhibitions. In 2017, he joined the Beaux-Arts de Paris, where he graduated five years later. His work will soon be featured in the "Dislocation" exhibition at the Palais de Tokyo, organised in association with the Open Doors to Art initiative [see box p.15]. It opened on 16 February 2024.

"My practice first transformed when I arrived at the Beaux-Arts de Paris, where I could start working on a larger scale, in a more interdisciplinary manner. There's no technical section, and the school is very 'multi-media', which I find allows for a broader view of art. But when the war started, my work changed again, incorporating a more collaborative dimension. I then met many people in the same situation as me, from Ukraine, but also from Iran, Syria, Palestine... countries where things are happening. Meeting artists who had fled and discussing with them, I learned a lot. It changed my environment, but also the way I approached art and my own production. At the time of the Russian invasion, everyone felt they had to do something. As I had the lithography workshop at my disposal, I launched a war poster project that lasted a year, during which artists came to produce their posters using print techniques. The people who passed through were very diverse, not just artists, but also individuals who initially came simply to visit the workshop; they would draw something, and I would print it in a small edition. In the end, I accumulated many images related to the spirit of the times, expressing the energy of action. In Ukraine, the

population turned to the army or became volunteers. But me, I'm at a distance, and that's where the idea to create posters came from. During the revolution in Iran, Iranian artists sent us images, and we made posters to support them too. Before the war, I must say, I was quite individualistic in my work. I focused on my viewpoint, my ideas. But with such strong events, mobilising so many people, it was clear to me that I had to change the way I approached my work."

Julia Beliaeva

Julia Beliaeva was born in Haysin, Ukraine. A multimedia artist, she graduated from the Mykhailo Boichuk Institute of Decorative Arts and Design in Kyiv in 2011. Her practice focuses on digital printing, sculpture, video art, and more. Her latest exhibition, "Fragile City", held in spring 2023 at the OK Center for Contemporary Art in Austria, addressed the fragility of human life in a wartime context.

"I believe that for me, and for all Ukrainians, the change began even before the full-scale invasion of 2022. It was felt as early as 2014, the year of the Maidan revolution. Looking back, I realise that these past eight years, from that precise moment, have been marked by the strange premonition that something serious was about to happen. My son was also born that year, in 2014, and I have worked a lot on this feeling of anticipation and the changes in my life. Today, I still live in Kyiv, although I am currently with my son on an artist residency in Gothenburg, Sweden, until April. As I use digital tools like 3D scanning, modelling, printing, or virtual reality, my work focuses on how these new technologies affect us and our consciousness. But I am also interested in how they can complement traditional media. For example, I work a lot with

Julia Beliaeva Photo Maksim Hetman





the change began even before the full-scale invasion of 2022. It was felt as early as 2014, the year of the Maidan revolution. Looking back, I realise that these past eight years, from that precise moment, have been marked by the strange premonition that something serious was about to happen. — *Julia Beliaeva*

porcelain, which allows me to reflect on the issue of heritage and lost traditions. Working with factories in Kyiv enables me to support small businesses and the Ukrainian economy, even though we have encountered some problems, such as with clay, since some mines are located in now-occupied territories. But the most challenging part is having to work in different places, on artist residencies, even though I am fortunate that my practice allows me some flexibility since I can work from my computer. Some experiences I've had were truly extraordinary, but that's not always the case... In Gothenburg, with the support of the residency, I inaugurated an exhibition dedicated to Ukrainian children, to show the reality of the war through their own experience. One of the sculptures is based on the story of Yana Stepanenko, a twelve-year-old who lost her two legs in the bombing of Kramatorsk station in April 2022. In total, at least fifty people, including five children, were killed. I named this work Siren, in reference to the myth of sirens who lured people to their death with their song. Today, nearly all Ukrainians have a smartphone app with an integrated siren sound."

Delphine Dumont

Delphine Dumont is the founder of the PhotoBrussels Festival, whose 2024 edition will conclude on 25 February. Concurrently, she organised the "Generations of resilience" exhibition from 26 January to 23 March at Hangar in Brussels, where she is also the director. She discusses the genesis of this project, which brings together the work of 22 Ukrainian artist-photographers and how their practice has evolved since the war began [see box p.10].

"At the time of the lockdown four years ago, we proposed a project for artists confined in Europe... The same philosophy motivated us for this project, with the desire to support Ukrainian artists. We therefore met with curator Kateryna Radchenko, who co-curated the 'Generations of resilience' exhibition with the Hangar team. She is the founder of Odesa Photo Days, a festival initiated in 2015, but which had to be stopped in 2022, especially since Odesa was one of the first cities affected by the invasion. Quickly, we wanted to go back to the country's history to enable our audience to better understand Ukraine. For this, we present artists who began working during the Soviet era, including Boris Mikhailov, who was the leading figure. These artists were at the forefront of a major movement called the Kharkiv School, during which they produced works considered subversive and banned, as nude photography was prohibited, as well as street photography. Poverty and misery were not to be shown. And then there's today's Ukraine, whose scene remains extremely dynamic and active. We focused on artists in wartime: how does their practice evolve? How do they position themselves? Are they still working? About fifteen contemporary artistphotographers are represented in the exhibition, most of whom have continued to work. We decided to present a series produced before the escalation of the conflict, that is, before February 2022, and one after. The last part of the exhibition shows the practice of very young photographers aged between 18 and 22, who are supported through the mentoring programme set up by Kateryna Radchenko. In the form of a video, we present the work of six young artists out of the forty she has followed. Generally, what we have observed in these projects is a great variety of conceptual and aesthetic proposals. We have also moved to a more documentary photography where artists capture their everyday life, either through a diary, documentation of diversity in Ukraine, or the war itself. In the exhibition title, the word 'resilience' resonates with their creative work, which, in a way, saves them. And by the way, as an anecdote, the woman with black hair on the exhibition poster taken by Daria Svertilova, is a Ukrainian curator who went to the front. We found this very powerful, and extremely symbolic."

Cat Princess (detail), Misha Zalvany © Misha Zalvany

Jidar, OOC (detail, 2022), Ghassan Abu Laban Courtesy Palestine Museum US
FAISAL SALEH, THE CHALLENGE OF PALESTINIAN ART

Founder of the Palestine Museum US, businessman and philanthropist Faisal Saleh discusses his commitment to the Palestinian contemporary scene and highlights the critical situation of artists amidst the raging war in Gaza.

The story of Palestine and the creativity of its contemporary scene remain largely unknown to the general public in the US and Europe. It is with this in mind that businessman and philanthropist Faisal Saleh decided to establish the first museum dedicated to Palestinian culture in the United States. Opened in April 2018 in Woodbridge, Connecticut, this private, nonprofit museum aims to give voice to Palestinian artists and "to showcase the Palestinian experience, pre and post-Nakba (the 1948 Palestinian exodus, ed.), in Palestine and the diaspora". Adopting a non-religious and apolitical stance — and with a board of directors consisting exclusively of Palestinian figures — it traces the history of the people and their diaspora through its permanent collections and travelling exhibitions, featuring historical photographs, films, oral histories, objects, and artworks.

> Invited by the associated programme of the Venice Biennale in 2022, the Palestine Museum US presented the exhibition "From Palestine with Art" at Palazzo Mora from April to November, a group exhibition highlighting the richness of contemporary art produced in Palestine and the diaspora. "By contextualising the language of modernism, the artists interpret codes and symbols to show the beauty of the land and the Palestinian people," stated the Biennale. Today, the revisited exhibition is hosted by P21 Gallery in London [see box p.76], "a powerful statement reflecting the Palestinians' determination to embrace their land and heritage". As a voice for Palestinian culture across the Atlantic, Faisal Saleh provides insight into the precarious situation of Palestinian artists today.

Could you tell us about your background?

I come from a Palestinian family from the village of Salaam, five kilometers east of Jaffa. My family was expelled from their home and became refugees in 1948, following the establishment of the State of Israel. I was born three years later in the Ramallah area of the West Bank, where my parents had settled. I grew up in the West Bank and came to the United States to complete my final year of high school. After that, I attended university and began a career in the business sector. I enjoyed a successful 45-year career in entrepreneurship, which ended in 2010 when I sold the company I had founded 25 years earlier. Following this, I began looking for ways to work for Palestine, as I hadn't had the time to do so during my professional commitments.

How did the idea of creating the Palestine Museum US come about?

Since the age of ten, I have been practicing photography and developed a passion for this medium. It's the only form of art I have experienced. After retiring from

- Carine Claude



Venetian Red (detail, 2021), Samia Halaby Courtesy Samia Halaby. Palestine Museum US

Being part of an exhibition during the Venice Biennale is a dream that many Palestinian artists would never have thought possible, but the museum made this dream a reality for many of them. — Faisal Saleh

business, I was drawn to the idea of creating a Palestinian art museum; at the time there was no such museum in the Western Hemisphere. In the United States alone, there were more than seventy museums supporting the Israeli narrative, but a significant gap existed regarding Palestinian art. This presented an opportunity to create the first Palestinian museum and to extend my artistic involvement to the entire spectrum of visual arts. It led me to inaugurate the Palestine Museum US (PMUS) in Woodbridge, Connecticut, in April 2018.

What are the main missions of the museum?

The museum's purpose is to narrate Palestinian history to a global audience through the arts. This includes showcasing Palestinian artistic talent, exhibiting the works of Palestinian artists at the museum and in international venues such as the Venice Biennale and the Accademia di Belle Arti di Roma. We also see it as crucial for the PMUS to play an active role in recognising emerging artists and in promoting their works locally and globally. Over the past six years, the museum has featured more than fifty Palestinian artists who had never been shown in major exhibitions or international venues.

How did you conceive the "From Palestine with art" exhibition for the Venice Biennale in 2022?

One of our main goals being to showcase Palestinian art, we aimed to bring it to the pinnacle of the art world, namely the Venice Biennale. I worked hard to curate a unique exhibition that brought together a wide variety of works and personalities. We sought geographic diversity — the West Bank, Gaza, pre-1948 Palestine, and the diaspora —, diversity of genres and generations, in addition to representing a cross-section of Palestinian talent and artistic experiences. We did not want to limit the exhibition to wellknown names only; we wanted major artists to be represented while also giving space to young, emerging artists who had been overlooked and marginalised, and who had not had the opportunity to participate in globally significant events.

What is the main thread of your exhibition?

The exhibition we created did not have a specific theme, other than the art of Palestine. We wanted it to reflect the thoughts and feelings of Palestinian artists from around the world. Naturally, Palestinian identity was a common thread throughout all the works displayed. We aimed for the exhibition to reflect the beauty of Palestine and its landscapes, in addition to documenting life under occupation.

How is the Palestinian artistic scene today?

There are thousands of young emerging artists at various stages of their career development. Many of these artists explore themes related to current events such as life under occupation in Gaza. Most young artists are really on their own. It's challenging for them to make a living from their art, so they often have jobs to cover living costs. There are a few NGOs and foundations that provide minimal grants and financial support, but it's usually not significant.

Do you have any news from the artists remaining in Gaza since the conflict? What do they report about their situation and daily life?

The PMUS has works from eight artists currently in Gaza. We try

"From Palestine with art"

It speaks of heritage and struggles, but above all, of a vibrant culture of incredible diversity. The exhibition "From Palestine with Art", which was presented at the 59th Venice Biennale, returns in a new version to P21 Gallery in London throughout February. Paintings, sculptures, installations, as well as embroidery and multimedia projects make up this choral exhibition that brings together around twenty artists aiming for "a deeper understanding of the Palestinian narrative". On this occasion, the exhibition features the work of three artists not shown in Venice: Subhiya Hasan Qais, a painter from northern Palestine active before the Nakba with a painting depicting the depopulated village of Lifta in 1948; Janan Abdu, an artist from Haifa presenting four watercolours and pencil sketches of children from Gaza titled The children of war from her evocatively named personal collection, Give us back our childhood; and Samira Badran, with Siege, a drawing on textile. The mixed media work Women's march by Gaza artist Mohammed Alhaj, paying tribute to Palestinian women, and Enough, by Jerusalem-based artist Nameer Qasim, referencing gender violence, are also featured.

Alongside the exhibition, the gallery is hosting a Palestinian embroidery workshop every Saturday in February, led by artist Rifqah Sultan Al Tamimi, from Hebron. Another way to create dialogue between heritage, recognition of Palestinian culture, and contemporary creation.

"From Palestine with art" Until 2 March P21 Gallery. 21-27 Chalton Street London. www.p21.gallery Faisal Saleh Courtesy Palestine Museum US

DISCUSSION

Palestinians must be the ones telling their own story. — *Faisal Saleh*

to contact them periodically to ensure they are still alive. We have managed to contact all of them at some point. One of them was injured and is recovering at the Khan Younis hospital. The majority have had to relocate to the south of Gaza, sometimes multiple times, and are currently living under tents, struggling to find food and water under particularly austere and difficult conditions.

Can art be a form of resistance for them?

Palestinian art has long been considered a powerful form of resistance. Artists in Gaza surface from time to time and manage to post recent works on the internet, which is very hit and miss and requires the artist to travel many miles in some cases to reach a connection point.

Is dialogue through art still possible between Palestinian and Israeli artists?

At this stage, Palestinians are only willing to talk to Israelis who renounce Zionism as a racist movement; who accept that the full human rights of Palestinians are equal in all respects to those of Israelis; and who support the right of Palestinians to return to their homes.

What can be done today to give a voice to Palestinian artists?

Tell Western artistic establishments to stop blocking all art that embarrasses Israel and to give Palestinians a place on the international stage. For example, the Venice Biennale recently rejected a collateral event proposal for Arte 2024 submitted by the PMUS, but instead accepted a proposal for a Palestinian project led by Europeans... Western institutions must stop doing this, that is, not trusting Palestinians to tell their own story and always having to appoint a foreigner to narrate the culture of an indigenous people.

Faces of Resilience 1 (2020), Hanan Awad Courtesy Palestine Museum US

Sitzender Akt mit blondem Haar (1931), Otto Dix Sold for £1,451,250 by Christie's London on 18 June 2019

OTTO DIX

Otto Dix, a founding father of the New Objectivity, was a tortured and visionary witness to two world wars. A painter of the apocalypse, ostracised by the Nazis, his engraved and painted works resonate with a striking and unsettling modernity.

At the age of 23 in 1914, on the front lines, Otto Dix bore witness to the horrors of the First World War with a truthfulness and intensity unprecedented in the history of modern art. Born into a workingclass family in Untermhaus in the German Empire on 2 December 1891 and influenced by his mother, a poetess, Dix was still a young student at the Dresden School of Applied Arts, immersed in Cubist and Futurist avant-gardes, when he volunteered for the artillery. The hellish campaigns in France and Russia quickly quashed his enthusiasm as a young soldier. The apocalypse of war led him to adopt a resolutely critical and anti-militarist viewpoint, which later drew the ire of the Nazi regime. From the outset of the conflict, the slaughter and absurdity of the trenches overturned his pictorial approach. Unvarnished, the raw truth shines through in his self-portraits from that time, such as Self-Portrait as a soldier (1914) and Self-Portrait as target (1915), now preserved at the Stuttgart Municipal Gallery. The contrast is stark compared to his prewar paintings, rare at auctions, notably Selbstbildnis (1913) sold for €1.3 million in 2021 and Sonnenaufgang (1913) sold in 2012 for €650,000, both auctioned at Grisebach Berlin and ranking among his top 10 sales – Grisebach being the auction house with the most lots of the artist (590) against 210 for Sotheby's and 235 for Christie's.

> Upon his return to Dresden at the end of the war, Otto Dix entered the Academy of Fine Arts and founded "Group 1919", a secessionist movement with an expressionist influence alongside Conrad Felixmüller, Peter-August Böckstiegel, Wilhelm Heckrott, Constantin von Mitschke-Collande, Otto Schubert, Lasar Segall, and Hugo Zehder. Alongside experiments with Dadaist collage, Dix dedicated

himself to studying the techniques of the old masters, using an overlay effect produced with egg tempera covered with an oil glaze — leading his contemporary George Grosz to nickname him "Otto Hans Baldung Dix", in hommage to the great German master Hans Baldung Grien. The year 1919 marked his very first exhibition with Dresden Secession group. It was also that year in which Dix painted The electric tram, which would later become one of his most auctioned works, sold in 2012 at Sotheby's London for €3.1m. In the same year, he painted *Pregnant* woman (1919), his second-highest auction record, sold for €3.2m in 2016 at Christie's London. Otto Dix's second exhibition, "The First International Dada Fair", took place at the Otto Burchard Gallery in 1920.

Obsession and trauma mark a series of major works from the early 1920s depicting the harsh reality of war cripples with *War cripples playing cards* (1920) and *Skat players* (1920), while *Prague street* (1920) reflects the political and social climate of a defeated Germany where antisemitism lurks in everyday

– Carine Claude and Diotima Schuck

interstices. In *The butcher shop* (1920), Dix targets a greedy and obscene petite bourgeoisie as the economic crisis brings Germany to its knees. A distant, impersonal painting that embodies the principles of the New Objectivity movement (*Neue Sachlichkeit*), of which he was a leading founder.

In 1922, Otto Dix moved to Düsseldorf, where he joined the Das Junge Rheinland artists' association. He was then supported by Johanna Ey, a German art dealer active in the 1920s who acquired The electric tram; the gallery owner was known for her support of Max Ernst and artists associated with "degenerate" art by the Nazis. As his fame grew, Dix began to receive institutional recognition. This did not prevent him from being charged with pornography in 1923 for Young girl in front of the mirror. A portrait as uncompromising as the prostitutes depicted in Der Salon, I (1921), sold for €830,000 in 1986 at Christie's London, the artist's seventh auction record.

From the early 1920s, he stood out with his portraits of dignitaries, diverging from the artistic productions of the era. For Otto Dix was, above all, one of the greatest portraitists of his time. Superseded and rendered obsolete by the rise of photography, the portrait became for the artist a revolutionary format for the raw representation of men and the postwar world. "Painting portraits is considered by modernist artists as a lesser artistic occupation," he commented, "yet, it is one of the most exciting and challenging tasks for a painter." Indeed, Otto Dix's highest auction record is a masterful portrait from this period, the Portrait of the Lawyer D^r Fritz Glaser (1921), which fetched €5,098,180 at Sotheby's London in 1999.

1925-1927: the pinnacle

In 1925, Otto Dix undertook a study trip to Italy before settling in Berlin. A major exhibition in Mannheim in 1925 heralded the birth of the

















New Objectivity with his comrades Max Beckmann and George Grosz. Together, they rejected any form of idealisation and tackled the excesses of society and the Weimar Republic through impersonal and realistic depictions. The influence of Cranach, Holbein, Dürer, and Grünewald was palpable. Reflecting on this era in 1965, Dix stated, "We wanted to see things completely naked, clear, almost without art. I invented the New Objectivity."

In 1923, *The Trench* was a shock. Upon its acquisition by the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, the public was confronted with a heap of mutilated bodies and ruins. Many considered this disastrous representation an insult to the army and the victims of the Great War. The controversy escalated, and The Trench had to be hidden behind a curtain. In 1925, the future Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, then Mayor of Cologne, managed to cancel the order and forced the museum director to return the work to the artist's gallerist. At the same time, Dix began his major cycle, The War, with a series of fifty prints published in 1924, followed by the eponymous triptych in 1929. "These engravings, simple and extremely clear, depict with great sharpness and precision the horrific and cruel scenes of trench warfare," wrote Jérôme Thomas in Passion for death and the monstrous in German expressionist painting (1919-1930). "The reader is faced with the brutality and violence of the images, the morbidity. One can immediately see the horrible consequences of combat



on bodies and souls with skeletons torn and re-torn by shell fragments, bodies destroyed and merged with the upheaved earth, suicides, and everywhere human distress. This work, akin to that of Callot and Goya, is much harsher and more difficult in its representation." And in 1926, the painter created one of his most iconic

I have studied war closely. It must be depicted in a realistic manner to be understood. The artist will work so that others see how such a thing existed. I have primarily depicted the terrifying aftermath of war. I believe no one else has seen the reality of this war, the tearing apart, the wounds, the pain, like I have. - Otto Dix

"Otto Dix and the present"

The Deichtorhallen Museums in Hamburg are hosting a significant exhibition on Otto Dix (1891-1969) and his influence on art up to the present day. For the first time, Otto Dix's work during the Nazi dictatorship is presented comprehensively, a period when some of his works were considered "degenerate". The exhibition sheds light on the artistic implications of censorship, adaptation, and political iconography in reference to contemporary art. Curator Ina Jessen, who completed her thesis on Otto Dix, focuses on the works from this period. "From Otto Dix's radical and provocative works that remain popular from the 1920s, a set of works emerged from 1933 that were visually less critical socially: the striking social images of before were transformed into forms of temporal criticism that were sometimes subversive, sometimes subtle," she writes. The exhibition makes visible the changes in cultural and social signs in the reception of Otto Dix's work, but also highlights the great fascination his work still holds for about fifty major modern and contemporary artists, including Georg Baselitz, John Currin, Lucian Freud, Alice Neel, Catherine Opie, Cindy Sherman, and Kara Walker.

"Otto Dix and the present" Until 1st April Deichtorhallen Hamburg 1 Deichtorplatz. Hamburg www.deichtorhallen.de portraits, the *Portrait of journalist Sylvia von Harden*, acquired in 1961 by the Centre Pompidou, an iconic embodiment of the "Neue Frau" with her bobbed hair and monocle, a slender, androgynous intellectual figure smoking and drinking alone.

At the zenith of his art, Otto Dix was appointed professor at the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts in 1927, and his work was now exhibited worldwide. In 1927, he was given his first solo show at the Kestnergesellschaft Foundation in Hanover. In 1928, he gained institutional recognition with his participation in the 16th Venice Biennale, where he was exhibited for the second consecutive time in 1930. He was also exhibited in the United States, first in 1931, then in 1932 at the MoMA.

"Degenerate art"

Otto Dix was acutely aware of the antisemitism and the rise of Hitler festering within German society. Branded as a degenerate painter by the Nazis, he was dismissed from the Dresden Academy of Fine Arts for "violating moral sensibilities and subverting the militant spirit of the German people". He was banned from teaching and exhibiting. Over 260 of his works were confiscated from museums or burned. Forced to leave, Dix settled near Lake Constance in southwestern Germany, then in Switzerland in 1936, where he devoted himself to an innocuous landscape painting. Yet, the Nazis had not forgotten him. Displayed as trophies, his confiscated paintings were hung at the Nazi exhibition of "Degenerate Art" in Munich in 1937-1938, which featured canvases by Chagall, Picasso, and Kirchner among others. The selection of 600 paintings from the 20,000 works stolen by Joseph Goebbels from museums was subjected to public scorn: over two million visitors in four months rushed to it, 3.5 times more than the neighbouring exhibition dedicated to grand German art.

This ostracism explains why he was primarily exhibited in the United States from 1934. He would not be exhibited in Germany again until 1950. St Etienne Gallery, founded in 1939 in New York and specialising in German and Austrian Expressionism, exhibited Otto Dix most frequently, with 33 exhibitions. Among museums, the MoMA exhibited the artist ninety times, accounting for almost 11% of the total museum exhibitions of the artist. In comparison, the second museum in terms of the number of exhibitions dedicated to Otto Dix, the Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin, only presented the artist thirteen times. However, Germany remained the country that exhibited Otto Dix the

most despite the long ban that prevented presenting his works in his own country during his lifetime, with 491 occurrences (53% of the total exhibitions) and a first peak of 25 exhibitions in 2004, then 28 in 2011 and 27 in 2014.

Conscripted once again during the Second World War, his antimilitarist sentiment reached its peak. From the end of the war until his death from a heart attack in 1969, the artist distanced himself from the new German artistic currents, notably post-war art in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and social realism in the German Democratic Republic (GDR).



Exhibitions galore

The periods of wars and the ban on exhibiting explain the delayed recognition his works received, unfortunately after his death. This is evidenced by his exhibitions, mostly organised after the Second World War, except in the United States where he enjoyed approximately one exhibition per year, even during the war.

Between 1920 and 1963, just six years before his death, the number of Dix's exhibitions rose from one to five per year. In 1966, a slight acceleration was observed with ten exhibitions in the



Schwangeres Weib (detail, 1919), Otto Dix Sold for £2,770,500 by Christie's London on 2 February 2016 © Christie's Images .

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Der Krieg (Karsch 70-119, portfolio, 1924), Otto Dix Sold for \$441,000 by Sotheby's New York on 21 April 2022

© Sotheby's Art Digital Studio

Otto Dix Photo Hugo Erfurth

DATA

OTTO DIX

year. Subsequently, their number increased significantly to reach ninety exhibitions. In 1994 only three exhibitions were dedicated to him, but their number continued to increase, reaching 37 exhibitions in 2004, 41 in 2011, 42 in 2014, and 40 in 2015 — years that preceded significant auction sales. Since then, their number has decreased, with only twenty in 2023.

Primarily exhibited in museums (630 events out of a total of 980 exhibitions, i.e., 68% of museum exhibitions versus 23% in galleries), Otto Dix benefited from strong institutional representation from 1919. This is also where he exhibited for the longest duration: his museum exhibitions lasted an average of 120 days, approximately four months (compared to 359 days for foundations, nearly a year) versus seventy days in galleries, just over two months. The artist was exhibited by 630 different museums, 215 galleries, and 65 foundations. He also appeared six times at the Venice Biennale (twice before the Second World War, then in 1948, and finally, three times posthumously, in 1972, 1978, and 1995), and three times at Documenta (in 1955, 1964, and 1992).

However, the artist was more frequently featured in group exhibitions than solo ones. Foundations and museums indeed account for 610 group shows (88% of total institutional exhibitions) and 86 solos (12%), while galleries held 197 group shows (92%) against 17 solos (8%). In France, his first solo exhibition took place in 1972 at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris. In 2003, the Centre Pompidou organised a second solo exhibition focusing on his drawings. More recently, in 2017, the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar gathered more than a hundred works for a solo exhibition showing how he was inspired by the museum's masterpiece, the Isenheim Altarpiece painted by Grünewald (1512-1516).

In total, Otto Dix was exhibited 490 times in Germany (53%), 205 times in the United States (22.09%); 30 times in Italy and Austria, and 25 times in Switzerland. The United States presents a more consistent average number of exhibitions per year during the Second World War, with an average between 35 and 65 annual exhibitions. In 2006, 2007, and 2008, he appeared in seven American exhibitions. Notably, the MoMA is the institution that exhibited the artist most frequently, with ninety occurrences (9%). France hosted him only 25 times, although he was the subject of major events, such as "Germany / 1920s / New Objectivity / August Sander" in 2022 at the Centre Pompidou. While auction sales in London yield good results for the artist, that is not where his visibility is greatest, with only 15 exhibitions in total, the first in 1978. In 2018, he was dedicated three exhibitions, the maximum in one year for the artist, after the noteworthy "Portraying a Nation: Germany 1919-1933", an exhibition by Tate Liverpool in 2017 featuring Dix and photographer August Sander.

Post-mortem auctions

With a total turnover of €63.9m from 5,400 lots and an unsold rate of 26%, Otto Dix's market is divided between his paintings, which realised €28.5m (44.6% of auctions), his drawings with €22.8m (35.7% of the turnover) and his editions (€12.6m, 19.7% of the turnover). This explains a significant disparity in the average prices of his works: €45,300 for paintings and drawings versus €16,300 for editions.

The first recorded auctions began very late, in 1983, although Otto Dix passed away in 1969. The first sales peak appeared in 1991. The number of lots offered jumped from twenty the previous year to eighty. Naturally, the phenomenon subsided in 1994-1995 then rose again, reaching 155 lots offered in 2000. In the following years, the number of lots fluctuated but always oscillated between eighty and 130 lots offered for sale. The peak was reached in 2012 with 180 lots. Since then, 2019 recorded the lowest number of lots — still at 105 — to rise to 160 in 2023.

In terms of turnover, the year 1992 recorded €1,500,000 in revenue — the first peak in terms of lots offered and results. This trend remained relatively stable until 1998. The year 1999 saw a revenue of €6,600,000, explained by the sale of the most expensive work by Otto Dix to date, Portrait of Lawyer Dr Fritz Glaser. Conversely, 2009 was the least successful year with only €500,000 in revenue and about 36% unsold, including many editions and drawings. The year 2012 represents the second record in terms of sales with more than €6 million in total, including the sale of Electric Tram by Sotheby's London. In 2016 and 2021, sales scored well, notably due to the sale of major works by the artist.

Otto Dix saw seven of his lots exceed one million euros in total. They represent \in 15.1m out of \in 63.9m, or 23.6% of the total turnover. The five lots between \in 500,000 and \in 1 million represent 5% of the turnover; the 32 lots between \in 200,000 and \in 500,000 represent 13%; the sixty lots between \in 100,000 and \in 200,000 represent 13% of the turnover. Finally, the vast majority of lots sold under \in 100,000 (3,830 lots) account for 44% of the overall result.

Generating almost half of its turnover in Germany, Otto Dix's home country auctioned off 4,420 lots (with 73% of the lots sold). With 37% of its turnover, the United Kingdom saw 340 lots go on sale (with 71% of lots sold), followed by Switzerland (235 lots presented for sale and 74% of lots sold) and the United States (165 lots presented with 81% of lots sold). In the rest of Europe, he was presented 240 times (with 61% of lots sold), but also four times in Canada, and in Australia and once in Japan. It's worth noting that the works

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offered in Japan, Spain, Norway, Scotland, Ukraine, and Ireland did not find buyers. Quite unusually for modern painting, France occupies a marginal place in Otto Dix's market: although he was presented by 25 auction houses, only eight works were sold, representing just 0.52% of the turnover of all auction houses.

Otto Dix's turnover is mainly divided among three houses: Sotheby's with €14,600,000 (23%), Christie's with €14,200,000 (22%), and Grisebach with €11,200,000 (17.5%). It was Sotheby's New York that first offered an Otto Dix work for sale in 1983. Despite an estimate between €4,300 and €6,000, the sale was not concluded. They tried again the following year without more success. Christie's London made the first sale of the artist in 1985 for €41,395, above the high estimate. Subsequently, sales were mainly held in London, with the exception of two auctions in New York at Sotheby's. However, as early as 1986, the sale of *Der Salon, I* for €832,400 to Kunstmuseum Stuttgart offered significant institutional recognition to the artist. Dating from 1921, the work is from the artist's most sought-after period, that of the return from the trenches in the early 1920s.

Beyond the duopoly, various German auction houses, with Grisebach at the forefront, have offered the most works by Otto Dix for sale: 110 German operators, compared to 25 in the United States and ten in the United Kingdom. Grisebach alone has auctioned 590 lots of the artist, against 210 for Sotheby's and 235 for Christie's.

Today, Otto Dix's message remains painfully relevant. Until 1st April, a major exhibition at the Deichtorhallen Museum in Hamburg explores for the first time the late work of the painter, engaging in dialogue with contemporary artists [see box p.83]. An opportunity to rediscover a striking and, in many ways, unique body of work.

Selbstbildnis (detail, 1913), Otto Dix Sold for €1,585,000 by Grisebach Berlin on 2 December 2021

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ABOUT CONSOLIDANTS...

Within GREENART, Giovanna Poggi is part of the CSGI team, dedicated to coordination, overseeing the project and assessing the progress of research. Here, the researcher shares insights into the role of Work Package 4 and the development of consolidants.

Launched in October 2022, GREENART is an international project initiated by the European Union, bringing together researchers, conservators, and institutions from art conservation and restoration. Together, they collaborate to develop new, green, and sustainable restoration products such as cleaners, protective varnishes, consolidants, and monitoring technologies. No aspect of their development is overlooked. Through its various working groups — referred to as "Work Packages" — GREENART shares its progress.

Giovanna Poggi initially pursued studies in conservationrestoration at university but quickly shifted her focus towards chemistry within the cultural heritage domain during her bachelor's and master's degrees. She then embarked on a PhD focused on the development of innovative treatments for the preservation of cellulosic materials under the guidance of Professor Piero Baglioni — who is also involved in the GREENART project. Today, Giovanna Poggi holds a position as a researcher in physical chemistry at the Chemistry Department of the University of Florence. She has also participated in several projects at the Center for Colloid and Surface Science (CSGI): FP7 NANOFORART, H2020 NANORESTART, and now GREENART. There, she works with the CSGI coordination team, managing the scientific aspects of the project and evaluating the research progress.

> Among the Work Packages of GREENART, Work Package 4 is dedicated to the development of new ecological consolidants. Giovanna Poggi elaborates on the role of consolidants in conservation/restoration and introduces the new products currently under development.

You are working on two classes of materials for the consolidation of cultural assets. Could you tell us more about this?

Work Package 4 (WP4) is specifically focused on the development of environmentally friendly consolidants and packaging materials. It involves various partners such as universities, research centres, and companies, as well as end-users. Regarding ecological consolidants, the CSGI, in collaboration with other developers, is concentrating on two categories of products: fibroin-based consolidants and starch nanoparticlebased consolidants.

Do they apply to the artwork's surface or the substrate?

Fibroin-based consolidants are optimised for strengthening silk textile materials, providing comprehensive reinforcement across the entire substrate. Conversely, starch nanoparticlebased consolidants are designed to enhance the cohesion of the artwork's surface.

— Antonio Mirabile

ECOLOGY

Compared to existing materials, in what way are they innovative?

Current consolidation systems used to reinforce substrates and restore the middle layers of artworks often consist of synthetic polymer solutions or dispersions. Although these materials exhibit high consolidating power, they frequently lack other essential qualities required for restoration materials. The ones we are developing are based on biopolymers, ensuring high compatibility with the original materials constituting the artwork. Moreover, due to their nanometric or submicrometric nature. our materials exhibit properties and performance that bulk materials could never achieve.

How are fibroin dispersions obtained? How do they work?

The development of this material stems from the need to create an effective system for consolidating silk while being compatible with this precious and traditional textile. In line with the Green Deal principles, we opted to use residual materials, specifically undyed silk remnants, from which we can extract fibroin. the main protein component of silk, through a relatively simple procedure. The fibroin, obtained in aqueous dispersion form, can then be applied to the original silk intended for consolidation, restoring its mechanical properties. Essentially, we are giving surplus silk a new purpose by using it as a basis to strengthen and preserve significant historical and artistic objects, thus creating a circular economy process. We are collaborating with our partners at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP) in Brazil and exploring the possibilities of adding other biopolymers derived from agricultural waste

 nanocelluloses — to the fibroinbased systems. Preliminary tests have shown that incorporating this material improves the consolidating efficiency of the fibroin-based product. This enhancement is particularly significant, especially considering the often precarious conditions of some silk fabrics.

What about the starch nanoparticles?

Synthetic polymers, known to form a thin, cohesive layer, can significantly alter the visual appearance of an artwork when used to reinforce the middle layer. This is particularly problematic for matte, porous, and weakly bound paint layers, often found in modern and contemporary artworks. To overcome the limitations of conventional methods, we chose to focus on synthesising starch nanoparticles, specifically derived from Jin Shofu starch, a traditional restoration product known for its excellent adhesive properties. The use of starch nanoparticles - typically measuring ten-billionths of a metre — on the middle layers of weakly bound artworks ensures effective penetration without compromising the object's aesthetic integrity. This results in a high consolidation effect thanks to their significant active surface area.

Can you tell more about sustainability?

Because GREENART regards this aspect as particularly significant, the project includes a dedicated Work Package for Life Cycle Safety and Sustainability Assessment, which involves all project partners and is coordinated by the research group from the University of Venice. Due to their nature and production procedures — which involve the use of eco-compatible reagents we anticipate a very positive evaluation of the green consolidants I have mentioned.

What are the most important steps in evaluating the material before its use on an artwork?

First and foremost, a consolidant must fulfil its role in consolidation. Therefore, initial tests focus on assessing the reinforcement obtained after application. Depending on the type of intervention, whether it is to restore the substrate or to strengthen the middle layer of the artwork, different pre- and postapplication tests are conducted. Since our work is focused on the development of materials intended for use in cultural heritage conservation, another essential property is examined: the alteration of the appearance of samples after treatment. If this change is deemed significant, it is likely that the products will not be applied to actual samples, unless they are applied to non-exposed areas of artworks, such as the back of paintings. Additionally, particular attention is paid to evaluating the new product's ageing and identifying any changes over time. Stability is a crucial property for materials used in restoration...

Do you think they will be ready for production and sale by the end of the project?

We are confident about the progress of product development by the end of the project. If the plan proceeds as anticipated, we envisage having at least one product tested and validated in the field, ready for the subsequent pre-commercialisation phase, namely, the preparation of the prototype.



BULK STARCH





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