

Hi, I'm Jennifer from the Jennifer Lauren gallery, and thank you for coming today to listen to the second of the meet the artists. These are three artists that were in my monochromatic minds exhibition, that was a pop up exhibition in London, earlier this year. That was the largest ever monochrome exhibition of self taught, disabled and outsider artists from around the world, and it featured 61 artists. We did do several talks in the space, when it was on. I thought it was a really nice idea to give artists a platform where more people around the world could hear their voice and hear more about their practice. So tonight we have Rashidi. We have Julia Sisi, and we have Cathy Ward. So we're going to do it, alphabetically. And so I'm going to start with you Rashidi, and I hope that your sound is working. So do you want to switch your sound on.

10:41

hi, hi Jenny.

10:42

Hi. So Rashidi Can you tell us a little about your upbringing and your life.

10:49

Okay. He's talking in German and I'm conflating, that's fine. Yes. Okay.

10:59

his name is Mehrdad not Rashidi – that is his last name.

11:16

Yeah, okay.

11:21

He would like to thank Jennifer for this conference and opportunity. especially in this current times. and he would like to thank Mr. Henry boxer for introducing him to Jennifer and to Roger Cardinal - he was very nice guy and a supporter of outsider artists.

His name is Mehrdad Rashidi and he hasn't been in Iran which is his home country since 1983. He has two children. His biggest dream is to go back to Iran it's us country. He hopes that the Iranian people would get back their freedom. Yeah.do you have any questions,

13:31

I can carry on. And when did you start your drawings and do you remember why you started drawing.

13:40

Okay in 2006 his brother started painting and then he asked him about his techniques. He is writing poetry since he was eight years old so this is all connected. He always loved landscape painting and realism painting so he never thought about adding those extra things to his work.

14:52

I forgot to mention to everyone that if you'd like to ask any questions please pop them in the chat box, and I'll ask them at the end for each artist. So my next question is: your drawings feature a lot of people and animals in them, especially birds, what is the reason why you're focused on this.

15:27

all of his paintings have a special topics so the birds represents his wish to fly. In his paintings, you can see women, you can see man, you can see all people just like all kinds of people you can have around your neighborhood, for example, and all are connected to each other just like everyone around you. do you have further questions?

16:37

so someone's asked do you draw or paint about your life in Iran, and if so does that help you in any way.

17:03

Yes. Two things about Iran and life in Europe and, for example, old Persian culture too. This happened this year.

18:07

And Paige has asked what's the text in this picture that's on the screen now, what sort of things do you write in your pictures.

18:14

Sometimes it's his own poetry or his own songs he writes and sometimes it's like poetry stuff from other people, which he likes. Okay, if it's so important for him then, and he feels like he is connected to the picture he might sometimes starts drawing and then writes poetry afterwards. Like in this picture we can see here is like the old Persian pictures and he can see himself in this picture. Okay.

19:50

So more recently you've been adding a lot of faces onto works like this, so it's quite different to your more fuller images with your drawing on them - is this something that you're trying to move towards.

20:19

this is my new style. It just happened he says

20:46

in 2013, you won the grand prize for marginal art at the 16th biennial of naive and marginal art in Belgrade. So, can you tell us about this?

20:58

He was very happy to go to Belgrade and get this prize and he wants to mention the museum because mr boxer sent his paintings to Belgrade. He went there and met the director of the museum Nina. He didn't get any money. Okay, there were two prizes coming and he got one of them and he can't remember what it was.

22:47

well it was a few years ago, that's fine.

22:52

So he was very happy to be there and work with them. It was Good.

And what pen do you use to draw with, Do you always use the same pen.

23:19

Yes I use a mixture of ink pens and biros. This is his latest work can you guess what material it is on?

23:49

What is it?

23:52

it's a mushroom you painted on.

23:58

a Real mushroom?

24:00

yes a real mushroom that he painted yesterday and now he can't eat it. And this is an orange skin.

24:08

but they will eventually they will go mouldy won't they?

24:18

He likes to find new materials to draw on. like weird stuff like mushrooms,

Well that's completely fine if that's what you want to do.

24:44

Someone else has asked a question that says, Does the pattern you use represent connection between everyone.

24:52

Yeah. He says life is connected to everything just like people are connected to each other. the Earth is connected to the people like that. And as a result, everyone's connected to each other. he told me that he thinks everything is connected, and this is biggest wishes to connect to other worlds and maybe other galaxies so this is why I had to laugh, sorry for this

26:29

someone else has asked, Are the images and text influenced by Iranian poetry and pattern?

26:38

A lot of them have, but most of them he's written on his own poetry, so not just like Iranian stuff just his own works. Yeah.

27:01

And finally, is there anything else you'd like to share with everyone about your artwork and what's important to you. Let's have

27:09

He would like to thank you for meeting you, Jennifer and for this conference. Thank you for making it happen. Once the coronavirus has died down he would like you to do a real life meeting with outsider artists from all over the world. So this is one of his words, that would be great.

28:11

Thank you and thanks for talking, I'm going to mute you now, and ask sisi to unmute yourself. So hi, so your full name is Julia sisi, but you like to be called Sisi.

28:47

Yes. Shall I tell you the story? So you're going to love this story.

28:49

Yes, yes.

28:52

My parents had a baby. Two years before my birth. They call her Julia, but she was very ill, and she was in the hospital. So, when they gave me her name. To me, I feel that they didn't choose a name for me. They just re-used the name of the other Julia. I don't feel really it's my name, so I choose to be called Sisi, that is my family name, but I feel this is my real name.

29:46

Good. That makes sense. So I'll start with your first question can you tell us when you started making art, and was it different to what it's like now.

29:57

Yes. Well, as many artists I started when I was younger, I was always drawing. All my life I was drawing. They were personal drawings for me. I didn't show for anybody. Just my family, my friends.

But when I was 46 years old. I was living in Catalonia, with my partner, now my husband and I said, we were antiquarian, we had an antiquarian store and a normal life. And I felt this was not enough for me, for continuing in that kind of life. We decided to completely change. We decided to be an artist, we decided in one week, we decided to make a living from art. So, we were in Catalonia, we sold all our things and we went to Canary Islands to live.

31:13

It's a big life move sisi. What were your first works like?

31:16

So yes, my first works were very different because the only way I have to make a living from my art was selling on eBay. So I made more and more. And I was selling that for \$9, But yes, we started that way.

31:57

So can you tell us about where you live now.

32:05

Now I live in France, in central France in a rural village. Very quiet. Very, very nice, because nature is at the door. We have a river. We have a forest, they are not my property. This is very good to find a piece of of soul. So, is very very good for me, for my health, and you see in my art there's always birds, or fishes, or things of nature because I need to be creative, I need to be surrounded by nature. Oh, I have the doors open. I need that. I can't live in a big city.

33:30

So this series of works that we are showing now at the moment you said was inspired by where you lived and so can you tell us about this particular new series of black and white works

33:40

This is a series that is black and white, and also colour and is called constellations. The night is incredible. You see the Milky Way. You see, all the things. I try to make understand that people are important, because I draw people, well always faces. Mm hmm.

So I try to, to go inside of these portraits that are not one concrete person. I think we are infinite inside. So, like the sky, like the Milky Way. So, I see a relation between this.

35:02

why do you draw faces, what is it that makes you want to draw the face if that's what you always draw?

35:12

because as a human The only thing I really know is humans, because I can see, I can see objects, animals, but the I don't really know the other things, I know people because I am one. So I draw the only thing I know,

35:44

two people have asked the same question sisi, which is what do the numbers represent in your work. I think you could see more in this picture.

35:55

Well to do with mathematics and science because when I was young I was studying physics, nuclear physics. So, I love algebra, and when we study the zero, the serial number. Oh, yeah. That's the zero boldly to philosophy, because it's incredible. I went from science to philosophy. And from there, I leave the university, and I started to make work when I was in my 20s early 20s, more or less, but in that moment I didn't show as just making art. And I know my husband. In that moment, in an exhibition. So, and then in three hours later, we move, we moved from Argentina that was really too good for us living there. Because of politics. So we moved to living in Catalonia.

37:42

Yes. And someone else's asked do you have music on when you work?

37:50

Yes, always. I need to have music, I like listening to black music from the 60s and 70s. So, then, you know, some days, I need for it to be silent.

38:31

And so with these works that you've got on the screen now. It's a black paper and then colour on to the black?

39:01

Yes, this is fabriano for the smallest, and now I'm making bigger bigger bigger is another kind of paper but this black paper. And when it's Canvas, I paint the canvas in black. And then I draw over

39:23

with what pen Do you use ?

39:29

posca pens. They are this is permanent acrylic ink. This type of color is very vibrant, it is just fine to me

39:46

say like the picture that's on the screen now. How long would that take you to complete. in terms of timeframes would you say they're like a couple of weeks for you to do is it a month, sort of, how long would you spend on it.

42:24

Well, I think it's usually just in the afternoon So, maybe one week, two weeks. And now you're showing another one. It took me One month, more or less because it's really big.

43:08

Yeah. So What year were you on the cover of raw vision and can you tell us a bit about the article that was in there.

43:15

Yeah. It was really fantastic for me because several years ago a friend in America announced this, they made a little bag. And it was embroidered over the bag it says dream come true. So I kept that little bag, and I put nothing in it, but one day, 10 years ago I put in paper with a wish – that I want to be on the cover of raw vision. For me in that moment, living in the Canary Island was totally impossible to arrive to that. I put the paper in that bag and dreamt. It was in the bag for 10 years. But it happened, So it was fantastic, obviously. The guy who wrote the article has wrote a book or Martin Ramirez. I've called him to make the article because he speaks Spanish, like me, so it was normal for me to express myself. He lives in the United States so we make, interviews through Skype. Yeah. And on one day john calls me and say, send me a high definition photo of that art. We are going to put you on the cover. Well, really amazing. Here it is.

45:44

well sisi thank you for chatting with me today. I've got to move on to the final artist so if you could mute yourself, and cathy if you could unmute yourself. Okay. so this is Cathy ward. cathy is based in London. So our first question is, can you tell us about your upbringing, and how you think this has influenced your art.

46:43

Well, I had the strange upbringing, as in like I got sent to a convent run by the Sisters of Mercy when I was five years old, and it's kind of impacted on me. It's been a really interesting kind of grounding for virtually everything that I've made since that, So, from the point of view to it's like the nuns, they were predominantly wearing always of course black and white, and they would they had their hair completely shaved so hair didn't exist for the nuns, and I think at the time that really, that really impacted me as a child, especially as it was in the 60s. And interestingly enough, with that school, lots of interesting stories that I can't go into, but the church that was attached to the convent was actually designed by George pujan, who was son of Augustus pujan who was the Gothic revivalist, and so I had this fascinating little church that I was, you know, forever in. I hate to say like mucking around in so we were always kind of playing in that church after school, doing things that we shouldn't. And after that, you know, even through my, my teenage years I was incredibly lucky because you know, I came up through all the youth, so there's from the point of view of bike, because hip is punks new romantics rave and everything, and, you know, predominantly like your art is your identity and it was really. your hair was was a really big way marker for kind of what your life was. So I think from really that both of those major things. I was always really interested in hair,

49:13

have you had no hair cathy?

49:15

yes I've had it. I've had dreads everything. Yeah, I didn't look so great with it all shaved off, cuz me heads a bit rounds but, um, yep. I've been there. Been shaved.

49:33

So this piece on the screen now is, it's a large piece called the ascent of the creatrix. That was in my exhibition, can you tell us about it.

49:42

yeah sure, it's really big I mean it's about six foot by five foot. I changed medium with it because I'm really constrained by doing these other drawings, which is because of the medium. They are small so I made it large scale I switch into doing painting. It's this kind of optimistic spirit from as far as I'm concerned, we really do need which is a really, really regenerative feminine spirit, that's, you know, for, for the world and everything so that's kind of what the Creatrix tricks means. And it's also that thing to do with embracing, you know, embracing the dark but it is really to do with energy, and regeneration. And it's made into a female form as you can see that you enter the region. I mean, it's also to do with with our planet, it is to do with Gaia, is to do with mythology. So it's also a mythological figure.

51:18

And so the other pieces in the show were the smaller works which you described as hair drawings, can you tell us a bit about that and what the medium of them is.

51:29

Okay, so the smaller ones in the show were called searching for Persephone, and so they relate to the larger one because to do with the persephone, which is again regenerative, which has personally been taken away by Hades into the underworld, and every spring after her mother brings her back, then it's like, you have spring. So, that is all to do with the regenerative part of that. but to do with the hair side. They originally started being worked as kind of memorials to some ex lover who died and everything that was in 1997 and they kind of developed from there. I didn't set out just thinking I'm going to be doing landscapes of these lines that that kind of mean hair. The thing is that I just use this line. And this metaphor as hair to develop into like ways that I can symbolically. I Try and get across both emotional things that I have. And also that it would also embrace things like where I've been. And, also I leave viewers to have their own interpretation of these things. But when I do these works I sculpt into ink that has like a base of scratchboard. And so I don't plan them, and they are wholly intuitive, and I don't know what's going to come out when I'm when I'm working on them. So, they've been kind of very interestingly revealing pieces of work that I do, and they literally do reveal themselves as I draw them. And sometimes have far reaching results, too, because sometimes quite strange things have come out with these drawings that relate to things that happen in the future. it just so happens that things like that have happened with them.

54:14

And the framing of these is very important. Can you tell us about, you know, you often feature your work in this particular type of frame.

54:25

Um, yes, I use well I do my framing and everything and it takes me quite a long time sourcing very old frames, and I treat all of them as being really individual, and they're normally very old, so they have a

history with them. I use these, I like a lot of the cross framed lock frames. Because, I mean they relate back to again something from my childhood. So, it's like, you know, I try and carry these things through as being something very authentic and I like the fact that these are authentic old pieces of a friend of frames that have been hand carved. And they take me a long time to find them. So, I'm constantly out in the markets or, you know, anywhere, I mean I've collected a lot over the years, so it's been an ongoing quest. I suppose they are as important sometimes as the piece of work that go in them.

55:37

This piece is the largest piece that you've done, which is 23 foot long, where did the idea for this piece come from what medium Have you used and how long did it take you to create this piece.

55:52

Well, I'll start with the last one. I was working 16 hour days on this. So, it was quite tiring and I was up a ladder most of the time making this piece. I had been really challenged doing it because, I hate that word, but I really was because my mother had died, and I had to get sell, you know get rid of all the stuff from my mom's house and everything Prior to this being made. I had a show with Paige at the good luck gallery in Los Angeles, and I was under pressure to get this this finished, and it's like one of those things it's like how long's a ball of string. But it's acrylic on canvas. And I made it to fit her gallery wall. which was a very fine gallery by the way, which closed unfortunately. but the piece of work is actually based on other works that I have done prior that they are. I decided to start incorporating lots of pieces of my work into these larger pieces. the drawings are like, maybe a sentence or a paragraph, but with this way, I make them into a complete book, a story about what's going on. And three decades back, I was in Hawaii and Florida and I saw the decimation of the sea, what was going on. You know, under the sea with the dying of corals and everything like that, so a lot of the work with this is actually to do with a regeneration of things in the sea, and again, it goes back to these symbols of things to do with corn dollies is to do with. I was designing reefs, artificial reefs and everything. And at one stage I was actually trying to get funding and work with scientists to try and do something about it, really. But then, when my health changed and everything like that went out the window, so I then just concentrated on just making visions of what could be happening. And the fact is we need to have a huge Great, push to regenerate parts of the earth so that's kind of what that's about.

58:50

how much of paige's gallery did that fill up?

58:55

Well, it fits well on her on one large beautiful wall that she had. So, It was so nice. also it's another thing to like from God, it's really good to have an immersive experience with, that's what I've wanted with a lot of the work.

59:23

So this is your new book that's just been released by strange attractor press. Can you tell us a bit about what this book is about.

59:32

It's an overview of all the drawings, I've done since, 1997, so it's 23 years of drawing. I've took many attempts to try and get this compilation, feeling right. It was very difficult because I've worked on different formats and everything and I wanted it to make to feel like an immersive experience like that, because it's kind of a planet that I have been making and living through, you know like, the these pieces they do actually exist. they are a place. There's a big landscape that that is actually the dust jacket. So, I have like a whole landscape that wraps around the book. And I'm hoping that people will feel that it is quite an immersive experience going into it. And there's three very good essays by Edward Gomez, doug harvey, and Robert Wallace. And I'm very blessed I had them as writers for the book, and I haven't got any particular explanations with the works but I'm hoping that people look through the book and they look at the titles because the piece of work are often made at different times. So I've not done it chronologically. But it's to do with what they mean. and I'm hoping that people then can make up their own minds about what I've put together.

61:38

this photo on the screen now is from your book but it shows your exhibition at the horse hospital. You want to talk a little bit about that.

61:50

yes, Roger wanted me to do a show there. Roger burns the director of the horse hospital for the 25th year. And so I created these sculptures. This shows called sub Rosa, which has to do with like it coming up from the depths. And I have made these sculptures that they actually clad the three great big pillars that they have in there so I've actually made, they're kind of, they have an armature too. But I wanted them to be something that drew out my drawings as well. And so, they are really very tall, they're about 12 -13 foot tall, and, and, yeah, they kind of fit the space really quite well. I felt they worked, but they are to do with regeneration and also the horse hospital's under threat. And it was also this thing of trying to imbue some sort of good spirits for the horse hospital to try and we were trying to save it and to keep it going.

63:23

Cathy someone's asked what your own pillars are made from.

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they're painted wood.

63:38

And someone else asked this is going to be a launch event for your book.

63:44

I'm hoping that there will be a launch. When I don't know, but we've been talking about doing something up at the horse hospital. Hopefully, something like that will happen, and if so, please sign up to strange attractor to get any updates on launches.

64:13

Great. Well, that brings us to the end of the talk. So thank you, cathy.

thanks to all the artists, and thanks to everyone for listening today and apologies if I didn't get around to reading out your question, But there's one more talk, next week. That's featuring four people this time and you can book it the same way as you did this week. And just to remind everyone that there is a book of the show, that's available that I've still got a few copies left off. So send me an email or a message on social media, if you're interested in getting one of those. And all that's left to say is thank you very much and enjoy the rest of your evening.