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SANCTUARIES | NABIL NAHAS

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In an attempt to delve into the private universe of artists and art collectors, Selections is exploring the sanctuaries of various men and women, some living and others who have passed away, and shedding light on places that remain out of bounds for the majority of people. We examine how these artists and art collectors live, what surrounds them and how they go about thinking, dreaming and creating. In order to get as personal as possible, we came up with customised questions that we then presented to each of these men and women (and in the case of those who passed away to their children), tailoring our queries

which you can view on our website, that navigates each artist and art collector's sanctuary. The film allows viewers to get up close and personal with artists and art collectors who seldom open their personal space up to the world. A fascinating artistic journey into the hearts and minds of some of the region's most intriguing people.



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New York-based Lebanese artist Nabil Nahas grew up in Cairo and Beirut and studied fine arts at Yale University. Over the course of a phenomenal career, the 69-year-old artist has had exhibits at some of New York's most important galleries, in addition to exhibits in Paris, Beirut and São Paulo, always reinventing himself by exploring new artistic techniques. Throughout the years, his paintings have been abstract, pointillistic or impressionistic, and sometimes a mixture of all three techniques. Most recently, his works have been inspired by Lebanon's magnificent cedar trees, providing a moving artistic tribute to the country of his birth.

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Nahas explaining his working technique

How conscious is your decision to reinvent yourself at your different periods?

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Reinventing myself was never a conscious decision. When things were going terrific and felt in total information that you've provided to them or that they've collected from your use of their services

wheel, and my curiosity would take me there, eventually developing into a new image. It was a bit scary at first but always a fun adventure, which seemed to occur every decade.

What is it about New York and the contemporary painters you got acquainted with at Yale that made you settle in New York? Can you tell us about one or two of those relationships?

I was given for my 13th birthday a Skira book “Contemporary Tendencies,” which surveyed the “school of Paris” and the “New York School” through 1958. What an amazing visual experience that was. A Pandora’s Box, which I avidly devoured.

Back then my preference went to the New York school, and I dreamed of one day settling there to pursue my artistic carrier. When a few years later I got my high school degree from Antoura in 1968, I boarded a plane and off I went to the United States.

Being part of the Yale Art School was a great experience. We were only 12 students per year, so you can imagine what a privileged situation that was. Its proximity to New York made it possible to have weekly visits by renowned artist as well as us going on Saturdays to see museums and galleries. One artist in particular, actually the reason why I wanted to go to Yale and who became my mentor, was Al Held. So my Yale experience made my moving to New York a childhood dream come through and a smooth transition from New Haven.

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The studio

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Nahas amongst his works that are based on a starfish he found along the beach in the Hamptons

Would you consider yourself a cerebral artist or an impulsive one?

Am I a cerebral artist or an impulsive one? I believe to be a balanced combination of both. A mind is a kaleidoscopic tool and to reduce it to hermetic compartments that do not merge is a very obtuse interpretation of our mental potential.

Do you feel like your world is an internal exploration or an external one? Is it related to your dreams/unconsciousness?

My world is as much an internal one as it is an external one. It is not related to my dreams, but how can one deny the role of the subconscious at work? Observing “nature” in the most universal sense of the world, whether microscopic, cosmic or simply our natural daily surroundings, is the core of my inspiration.

Do you feel like you are part of a trend or do you differentiate yourself from it. Is this relevant in terms of the wave in Beirut and New York?

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briefly fit the bill in the New York art scene, but overall I differentiate myself from it. That does not mean that I don't find the art scene in Beirut very creative and buzzing and that is a real treat.



(<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-amongst-furniture-pieces-created-by-Royère-1.jpg>).

Nahas amongst furniture pieces created by Royère in his studio, a revamped silk factory

What is your definition of success?

My definition of success? Having people come up to you and have no idea who they might be... just kidding. I never really thought of it – maybe having reached a place where you feel free to take chances and be oblivious to the consequences

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From Nahas' studio

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From Nahas' studio

How nationalistic are you?

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after my return 18 years later. I am not politically engaged although I abhor foreign inference, which destabilizes what would otherwise have been a peaceable haven.

Does that make me nationalistic? No it makes me patriotic.



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Are you a people person?

A people person? Not really. I like as much time to myself as possible although I recognize it to be a luxury.

The light that suddenly shone on your art, when did it click on?

I got attention since my first show in New York in 1977. I was lucky to have been represented for 40 years by three prominent New York galleries but I was never a “star” per say, perhaps more of a painter’s painter. It is of course nice to have gained some recognition in my motherland, and I feel very grateful for it.



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Araucana Chicken from Chile laying blue eggs

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SANCTUARIES | MONA SAUDI

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by SELECTIONS ARTS (HTTPS://SELECTIONSARTS.COM/AUTHOR/SELECTIONS-ARTS/)

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Mona Saudi's rings

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Saudi in her atelier

Jordanian artist Mona Saudi's career path is something of an epic journey. The 73-year-old artist was born in Amman, Jordan, in a conservative family in which women were prevented from pursuing higher education. She ran away from home at age 17 and took a cab to Beirut, which then was a cosmopolitan capital city and the centre of the Arab World's artistic scene, and in Beirut she had her first exhibit at Café de la Presse. From Beirut, she moved to Paris and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. It was

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Saudi working

Since childhood you've always been occupied by questions of existence and creation, to what extent is that fascination portrayed in your sculptures?

These questions still occupy me since childhood. One of my early sculptures is entitled "Mystery of Creation."

Do you visualize your sculptures beforehand?

At the beginning I used to make samples in clay or plaster, then I started to compose my sculptures

directly in stone, step by step.
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Do you see your own reflection in your work?

I work with all my heart. I give my total knowledge and my total self to a piece. For me sculpture is a research in form so I just think of how to form a three-dimensional sculpture in stone. It is form and not feelings or ideas.

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Saudi's rings

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Saudi takes of her rings to be able to better manipulate her tools

Describe you working process.

I work for two to three months at least on the same piece, and the polishing might take one or more months. I do the polishing with papers and water. Stones are my friends, and while working, I take care to bring out the richness of the materials. Some stones have colours, I love this element of colour to be kept and to be part of the whole sculpture because these are not added colours, and they are colours that come from the original stone. Sometimes I leave some parts of the stone chiselled to show its maximum beauty. I would polish just a small piece. And the contrast between the rough and the soft sides gives a kind of richness for the form. I polish some sculptures to the end.

What was the first piece of art that really shook you up?

Picasso's Blue Period.

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As a student in Paris, you made sculptures in a tiny room. How can you compare your studio today and your work in it to that tiny room?

In the École des Beaux-Arts, I worked in the large studio and in my tiny room just on the weekends.

(<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-stone-after-polishing.jpg>)

After polishing, the finishing of the stone will appear when you pour water over it

Your studio is set aside from your house in a garden that is alive with shrubs and flowers. Is your studio the centre of your inspiration? How much time do you spend there?

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My inspiration has most to do with the sound of chiseling a piece that I love. Sometimes I write the information that you've provided to them or that they've collected from your use of their services

You said that you used to be absorbed by your surroundings at the Museum of Modern Art and in the exhibition halls of Paris and that has marked the beginning of your artistic life. Tell us more about that. It is in Paris that I discovered past and present civilizations, the richness of human creativity.

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Saudi's Tools

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Saudi's Tools

When an artist shifts cultural locations, does that affect their work?

Every situation has a kind of impact, big or small.

Does the history of a place have an impact on the production of your ideas?

It is more the important events, like the announcement of Palestinian Land Day.

You've said "the West is not an example for us, we should have confidence in our values." Tell us more how you integrate those values in your art.

We should not be imitators, but creators. We are people of abstract, symbolic, poetic cultures.

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Saudi's Tools

What are your ambitions for your art?

Just to continue creating more sculptures, my way of life.

How do you think creativity is sustained with years?

It has been my dream since childhood to create forms, and I just work to fulfil that dream.

Start the following sentence:

... Mother/Earth... and... glorifying life... are the constituents of Mona Saudi's sculptural world.

Where do you consider yourself to be at this stage in your career?

I have done hundreds of sculptures but until now I feel that I'm at the very beginning, and I have done nothing at all from what I could have been able to do, so let's see what might come in the future.

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From Saudi's atelier

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