

Interview with artist Ruqaya Al Hashmi, conducted at the artist's studio on 11.01.2024 by Prof. Katarzyna (Kasia) Dzikowska

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Speaker Name	
<b>Kasia Dzikowska</b>	Please introduce yourself.
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Hello, I am Ruqaya Al Hashmi. I'm a multidisciplinary artist. I recently graduated from Zayed University with a bachelor's degree in Fine Arts.
<b>K.D.</b>	How long you have been in the creative industry?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Professionally, since I entered university.
<b>K.D.</b>	Could you describe your artistic process?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	I am inspired by the nature around me. I like collecting natural items like plants. Recently, I've been interested in the palm tree's skin. I'm trying to figure out how can I incorporate it with my art. I usually get inspired by how the environment influences or connects to the human body, the soul and the mind.
<b>K.D.</b>	Why nature? Why palm trees?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Because it's in our surroundings. I grew up with palm trees around me; it is part of me. And I believe it's a part of almost every Emirati. We live in an environment where we have this plant, we used to see it as a resource of food, a resource of shelter. I recently discovered that we used to make coffee using the skin of dates. It was true pre-modernization and we are still connected to them now, we get dates from them. It's part of our lives one way or another.
<b>K.D.</b>	Tell me more about those experiences in the university.
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	My experience, of learning visual art at Zayed University, was great. I had a lot of fun creating and I learned a lot, practically and theoretically. I also worked at the university as a teaching and research assistant during my studies. I worked with Afra Al Dhaheeri, Walter Willems, Kasia Dzikowska and Ioannis Papavasileiou. I gained valuable knowledge from each one of them. That was before I started preparation for my senior show. I love and I'm proud of what I did for my senior show. I did this huge installation using the palm tree skin. It was a fantastic experience working with Afra Al Dhaheeri as my professor and Walter Willems as the curator. I really enjoyed that experience.
<b>K.D.</b>	How have you develop your art career years so far?

<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	<p>Since university, I worked with Guggenheim Abu Dhabi as a curator assistant. It was one of the best experiences I ever had.</p> <p>The team was testing the exhibition lights, and they were very excited about my artwork being a mockup for it. I worked with them as a curator. Now I'm being represented by the Aisha Alabbar Gallery. I think I'm doing good as someone who just recently graduated, but I feel like I'm still developing.</p>
<b>K.D.</b>	From all of those, what was the most influential to you?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	<p>Working with other people, I believe. I enjoy hearing other's points of view. I appreciate seeing other people's perspectives on subjects, that is what I'm interested in. It really opens doors.</p> <p>Working with the Guggenheim, working with professors, working with Afra. I see how she discusses her ideas, and how she talks about her work. It's interesting to me, it affects me.</p>
<b>K.D.</b>	I know that you are a multidisciplinary artist. Tell me more about your mediums and your techniques. When it comes to the topic, what determines a specific medium or technique?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	I don't have one medium; I like to explore. I do ceramics, I do installations. I work with found objects. Sometimes paintings, and photography, for sure, and mixed media. I don't have a specific one, I work with a range of them. It's the feeling. If I feel this medium will translate my idea, I will work on this medium, it is my message. But I create art not because I want to send a message, but because I want to feel it. I want to immerse myself into my work. It is more about the process.
<b>K.D.</b>	Where does the motivation to create come from?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	I have multiple motivations. I sit with people, talk, discuss. This motivates me to create art. I want to feel it, I have this thing inside me and I want to get it out. I want to escape from reality. I don't want to think. When reality becomes too much, yalla, Ruqaya in the studio, working.
<b>K.D.</b>	What attracted you to become an artist?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	When I was small, there was this creative child in me. I used to draw on my mother's leg when she was asleep. She would tie my foot to hers when I was a little so I don't run away, to the garden or outside. And she would give me a sketchbook and some sharpies. And whenever the sketchbook paper finished I started drawing on her legs. My family members are also creative, my father used to draw a lot. My sisters, my brothers also. I'm the only one who took it professionally, becoming an artist.
<b>K.D.</b>	What does your family think about you being an artist, and being represented?

<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	It's something very new to them, being a professional artist, doing interviews. They're supportive. They gave me space for my studio, they support me as an artist, and I appreciate this, I love them.
<b>K.D.</b>	How would you summarize the role of an artist.
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	I feel like it depends on each artist. Why do we exist in this society? I can't speak on behalf of everyone, I can't speak for other artists. For me, it's an interesting question, but I don't know how to respond. Why does an artist exist? The world without artists would be dead. Because art is culture. Art is identity. You can tell where is from, this piece is from an Emirati artist, or Saudi artist, an African, or an Egyptian. It's an identity and a world without art would be scary. It will be a Utopian world in a way. Very ordered, no room for mess. It gives me anxiety to think about it.
<b>K.D.</b>	Which part of the UAE are you from and how does that affect your work?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	I'm from Abu Dhabi, specifically from Baniyas, and my work is connected to nature in my region. I don't know how many artists are from Baniyas, but it does affect the work I do.
<b>K.D.</b>	What is your connection to the desert?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	<p>The desert connects with me because it's vast and quiet. It is also misunderstood sometimes. When you ask people about the desert, they usually say it's a dead space that has no plants, that has no nothing. But there is more to the desert. We have plants there. It's not always quiet. When I think about the desert, I don't think about the sun, I think about the moon and the stars.</p> <p>With my family, I used to travel to Saudi Arabia by car, and we would go at night. My father used to drive, I would go with my parents and siblings. I would look at the sky, because in the desert there is less light pollution. I used to watch the stars in the car at night and stargaze while we're driving. When you ask me about the desert this is the memory. I connect with it when driving, and traveling. I look at the stars at night. I see the moon following us.</p>
<b>K.D.</b>	So you've got strong childhood memories.
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Yes, driving through the desert in a full car. And usually, we would sleep in the car, all my siblings. I wouldn't, I would stay awake. Just watching the stars. I have this connection with the stars. This is almost a relationship. We have this dialog now and then. I still go to the desert to camp and stargaze.
<b>K.D.</b>	You talked earlier about the misconception of the desert.

<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Not all Emiratis understand it fully. Bedouin's descendants still do. They knew the space they inhabited. With their body, with their soul, with all of them. They still connected, even if they now live in the city.
<b>K.D.</b>	How much the connection to the desert affect the feeling of being Emirati?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	<p>I mean, it's not only the desert. We have people who lived in the sea. I think it's a tricky question. Because, we are affected by space, the environment, and our body, Our identity gets affected by the environment, the surroundings. It is not so straightforward, we don't only have deserts, we have mountains and sea. I think each one of these elements has its people. Yes. I mean, it's not also about the elements of nature. It's what's also inside the person.</p> <p>For me as an Emirati, desert means a lot of things. It is the place I grew up in, my parents came from. It is my surroundings, my environment. The little quirks of daily life that people do. What would make you different from Saudi, Omani or Yemeni? If you think about it, it's all very similar in terms of the environment where you're coming from.</p> <p>It's the people who create the environment. And vice versa. It's the environment that creates the people. If you look at the urban landscape here, it looks very different to, let's say, American cities and European cities. Because the environment, it's reflected in the houses, in the buildings and their architecture.</p>
<b>K.D.</b>	You talk about the desert and going to the desert in the night with your father. Are there any other childhood memories that are connected to a desert?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	<p>There is camping. Also, I had a car accident in the desert. We were drifting, I was 12-13 back then. But still, it didn't stop me to not going to it. These are the three vivid connections to the desert: camping, stargazing, and the accident.</p> <p>I love the desert because of the stories I have. I have a connection with the stars when I think of the desert. It gives me clarity. The desert is the medium that allows me to connect and see the night sky because there is no light pollution.</p>
<b>K.D.</b>	You mention stars a lot. Is that something that occurs in your work?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	It has been in my senior show, my installation was partially about stars. One of the things that inspires me as an artist is the stars. The birth of a star, the act of stargazing.
<b>K.D.</b>	Have your stories changed now with your interactions with the desert? Is there a difference between childhood and adulthood?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Yes, when I was a little kid, I had this idea of a desert being a dead space: no plants, no animal, except the camel. But now reading more about it, going there, and listening to the singing dunes, made me immerse myself to the space, it's changed my idea of a desert. It's a space where I can escape from reality. I mean, I create art to escape reality, and I would go to desert to escape reality.

<b>K.D.</b>	Does the desert play a role in your artistic practice?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Main role? No. But I think it plays a role in my character. I get the skin from palm trees in the desert, but it doesn't have the main role. It connects to my practice in some way or another. I can't escape from it not that I want, the opposite. I really love the desert and how it connects me with the stars. It's something deep in me, in my character. If I would describe myself as a natural element, I would probably say I am either a desert or a sea. Desert needs someone to be patient. You need to be strong to live in it. It has plants, but not that many.
<b>K.D.</b>	That's really poetic, really beautiful. Do you think that desert is treated as a symbol?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	We have this misconception about the desert. Some people, when you ask them about the desert, they would say there is nothing. Only Jinns and stories. that's it. But no, if you know the place the desert has a lot of plants and life. Explore the desert with the right people, they can teach you what it really means. In my philosophy, I believe that we have small particles of the elements in our bodies. That's why the desert is in us. The sand is in us. Take Iceland for example. They don't have desert, they have ice. I feel the particles of the ice are there immersed with their body.
<b>K.D.</b>	Does the desert influence artists in the UAE?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Yes, it is our surroundings. Wherever you turn it around, you see a desert. The space affects you and you affect the space, it's a relationship.
<b>K.D.</b>	Does the desert have a personality?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	Yes, yes, a strong personality. Patience: teach people how to be patient. You have to be slow. You have to let it go in a way. With water or the sea, you don't have to be tough with it or strong with it or force it. You have to go with the flow. But the desert, you have to be strong with the space. You need to know what's around you. You have to trust the process. Trust the nature, the surroundings.
<b>K.D.</b>	Is the desert still authentic?
<b>Ruqaya Al Hashmi</b>	It is a real place. But not for many people. Not like what it used to be, not like in the past, like 50 years ago let's say. It changed for most of the people, sadly it is still changing. I'm not happy with the change, I get inspired by nature. I don't want to see essence of the desert fade away.