

FAULT LINES AND INTERSECTIONS

Exhibition-making can be seen as a performative gesture. And as galleries establish themselves, they become their own brands, developing a recognisable language in their intellectual and visual framing of art. In the case of Green Art Gallery, the overarching aesthetic is largely minimalist and sculptural. Creating a lot of space around which to navigate artworks in conceptually strong shows, the gallery forges connections between international and regional contemporary artists from its home base in Dubai.

Words by Nadine Khalil

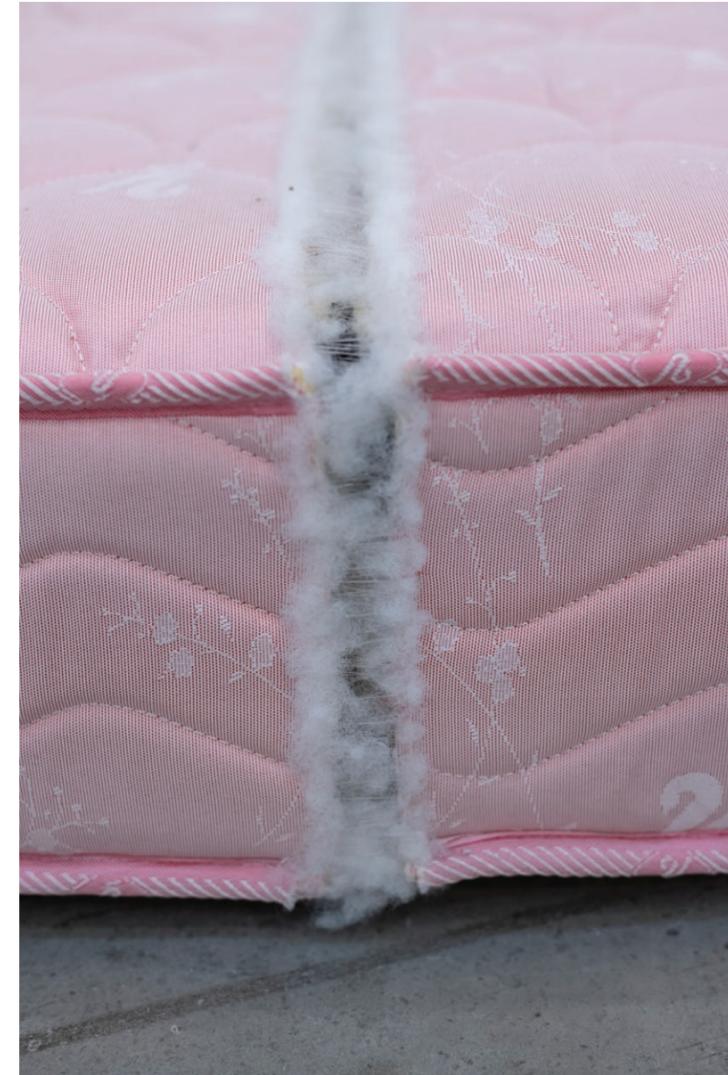


Wilfredo Prieto. *anti-bird lines, anti-human lines*. 2018. Bird deterrent spikes, wire razor. Dimensions variable. Photography by Hanna Orlowski. © *Canvas*

“I never wanted to be just a Middle Eastern gallery,” admitted Yasmin Atassi, the director of Green Art Gallery. “Our mission is much broader, to bring together artists from all over the world who might not otherwise have the opportunity to meet.” An excellent example of this ethos in practice was the recent exhibition, *Remnants* (17 September–26 October), curated by Paris-based Cuban art historian Sara Alonso Gómez, which found synergies among artists working from Cuba to the Middle East around the concept of waste. Although Atassi is careful to insist that her approach is less about country specificities than it is about linking artists who are all grappling with our collective contemporary moment, regardless of where they are from, the mapping was not haphazard. “We have been

interested in Latin American art for the last few years,” she explained, “and have represented Venezuelan artist Alessandro Balteo-Yazbeck since 2012 and Brazilian artist Ana Mazzei since last year. The creativity emerging from South America chimes loudly with much of what’s going on in this region, both socially and aesthetically.”

In her curatorial statement, Gómez explained how she sees humans as subject to mass production and abundance, victims of both surplus and a bulimic consumer society as well as information and image overload. Yet you wouldn’t have been able to tell from her show at Green Art, a rather sparse essay on the residual in a less literal sense, in both its visible and invisible forms. Here, artists who have fashioned waste into artistic material in the form of Duchampian readymades or Pop art critiques



Nazgol Ansarinia. *Mendings (pink mattress)*. 2012. Detail. Mattress, see-through thread. 180 x 54 x 23 cm. Photography by Hanna Orlowski. © *Canvas*

of mass production, were absent. Cuban artist Wilfredo Prieto’s site-specific crisscrossing barbed wire (*anti-bird lines, anti-human lines*) mildly demarcated the middle of the gallery on a below-the-knee level, equating human with animal barriers in a zone of exclusion, while Ghaith Mofeed explored other, less tangible, boundaries in his life as a Syrian refugee with *Citizen of my World*, a cartography sewn on fabric – one that places Syria at the centre and diminishes the countries from which he is barred from entry. “Ghaith, who is from Damascus and had to flee Syria by walking to the Turkish border, disrupted the map to highlight the green areas, which are visa-free for Syrians,” Gómez explained.

Nazgol Ansarinia took the notion of rupture and displacement further in her salmon-coloured *Mendings (pink mattress)*, a standout

piece placed next to Prieto’s wires. A tear runs through its middle like a surgical dissection, its fluffy interior bursting at the seams. Drawn from the Iranian artist’s series of domestic objects, where she splits them apart and attempts to put them back together again, it’s strikingly evocative of a human wound that will never heal, even when sutured. “It’s a kind of bipolar situation, since it cannot be put back together in the same way,” Gómez said thoughtfully.

Reynier Leyva Novo’s archival photographs depict political leaders such as Francisco Franco, Fidel Castro and Mao Zedong in large and small format pairings, with their figures obliterated when blown up in size, leaving blank spaces for alternative interpretations. “During the first 15 years of the revolution in Cuba, the leaders were accessible and Fidel



Sara Alonso Gómez, curator of *Remnants*, next to the work of Ghaiḥ Mofeed. *Citizen of my World*. 2018. Screen-printed, sewn canvas. 40 x 50 cm. Photography by Hanna Orlowski. © Canvas



Fatma Bucak. *Scouring the Press*. 2016. HD digital video, colour, sound. 9 mins 20 secs. Image courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery



Reynier Leyva Novo. *A Happy Day FC No. 2*. 2016. Ultrachrome imprint, Baryta paper 300 g. 10 x 6.6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery

“Every time we make a choice in our life, we’re basically leaving something behind.”



Yornel Martínez. *Atlas (version 3)*. 2014. Installation view. Book made of clothes used for painting. 32 x 30 x 4 cm. Photography by Hanna Orlowski. © Canvas

was very visible in society, meeting with the labourers, the nurses and the professors. But then he came under threat and couldn't be as openly present. The effacement of these figures in the photographs gives us the chance to imagine history in a different way," Gómez explained.

This notion of the erasure of history resonated with Fatma Bucak, a Turkish artist of Kurdish origin, whose performative video *Scouring the Press* saw her kneeling with two other women in front of basins in a desolate landscape. Here, they washed and kneaded Turkish newspapers clear of ink in a reference to routinized national censorship and collective amnesia. "The content of the newspapers will remain in these pots, as the remainder," Gómez added. Neatly installed on the wall beyond the barbed wire, they were adjacent to the gestural works of Yornel Martínez's *Atlas*, comprising scraps of painting clothes that redefined the nature of the leftover as an artwork, and Elizabet Cerviño's site-specific all-white sculptures, *Sigh in a Niche*, made from 200 kg of wax sourced locally, which stood rather silent and impassive.

The "remnants" created in this show were ghostly objects, devoid of a human element while still reminiscent of humanity. The overall atmosphere was somehow one of sterility. Emblematic of Gómez's fragmented meditation on history and its erasure, movement and its borderlines, was Jenny Feal's ticking clock, covered in a hardened clay that cracks and falls, adding weight – literally – to the notion of time, while subverting the very function of telling time. In traversing different histories and migrations, *Remnants* also subtly alluded to Green Art Gallery's own story as a space that has come a long way from its original Syrian home in 1987, above a bookshop in Homs.

"Every time we make a choice in our life, we're basically leaving something behind," Gómez said at the end of our conversation at the gallery. "Every thought or idea we have will become a remnant as well." And the exhibition does leave you with that feeling of a nebulous, vague latency, and a lot of room for interpretation.