

ARTISTS



IN RESIDENCE

COLOUR, TEXTURE, PATTERN, MANNEQUINS WITH LETTUCES *FOR FACES*... YOU DIDN'T EXPECT THE HOME OF CELEBRATED ARTISTS ROKNI AND RAMIN HAERIZADEH AND HESAM RAHMANIAN TO BE DULL, DID YOU?

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When brothers Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh and childhood friend Hesam Rahmadian staged *I Put It There, You Name It* at Dubai's Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde in 2012, they sought to recreate the unique atmosphere of their home in a gallery setting – challenging the traditional bare, white-walled format. Donning the cloaks of architects, the artists replicated the distinctive feel of their Dubai villa in a ground-breaking and memorable exhibition.

They used a variety of flooring, ranging from black-and-white chequered tiles to hand-painted vinyl and even AstroTurf. On the decorated walls of the spaces (inspired by their studios, dining area, kitchen and common area) they placed their artworks, interspersed with pieces by Monir Farmanfarmaian, Nargess Hashemi and Louise Bourgeois, among others from their collection. Their own unique pieces of furniture filled the gallery. Every centimetre of the exhibition area was transformed by the artists – much like their own home has been in reality.

“We looked at more than 40 houses before we settled on this one,” says Hesam of the Barsha villa, which is a coveted stop on the annual Art Dubai VIP programme. And for good reason. The affable roommates continuously redecorate their rented home, where they have lived since 2009. The floor, Hesam tells us, keeps getting higher and higher as they add layers. When we visit, the flooring is different in every area of the home; in the dining room, for example, it is hand-painted by Rokni. In Ramin's bedroom, it bears a black-and-white diamond pattern.

The walls are coated in pink, purple, blue, yellow and green and in some places, in a black and white triangular pattern that signals a collaboration between the three artists. Muzzafir the cocker spaniel follows Hesam around, while an adopted stray Persian cat gets comfortable in one of the outdoor plastic chairs the trio have turned into an artwork. Classical music plays uninterrupted in the background.

Unassuming from the outside, inside the villa offers a fascinating insight into the kaleidoscopic minds of these celebrated Iranian artists. The brothers have been living in self-imposed exile in Dubai since the spring of 2009,



Left: Rokni Haerizadeh.
Above: Patterns adorn most of the home where the Haerizadeh brothers and Hesam Rahmadian live
Opposite: Hesam Rahmadian, Ramin and Rokni Haerizadeh have lived together in Dubai since 2009



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when their art became the subject of a crackdown by the Iranian authorities. Hesam joined six months later.

Their home is also their studio, with the villa split into individual areas and one common staging space that they like to refer to as the “theatre”. “When you detach yourself from the artwork, it becomes a little bit pretentious,” says Rokni. “So it’s kind of performative for us to live in our art, and start the process through living. It’s identity as a performance.” Rokni and Hesam are painters, while Ramin works predominantly in collage and photography. All three take part in collaborative performance practices, creating characters and identities that end up living with them – this explains the mannequins we find around the house, made of up accumulated objects and topped with fake lettuce heads for faces. In fact, the three artists live in a continuous process of accumulation, through which emerge intriguing narratives.

Every area of the house is a work area for the trio; Rokni, Ramin and Hesam follow a strict schedule that involves waking up early, having lunch together after a few hours of work, taking a short nap and resuming work until the evening, when they gather again, often to watch independent films that will inform their morning discussions. In turn, this individual versus communal arrangement informs each of their practices deeply.



Clockwise from top left: Artworks by the trio mingle with pieces by other celebrated artists, including Jessica Maine, The Guerilla Girls and Etel Adnan; Ramin Haerizadeh; the dining room floor is handpainted by Rokni

Opposite (clockwise from top): The artists refer to the common staging space as the "theatre"; Hesam Rahmanian; Ramin's bedroom features a chequered black-and-white diamond pattern floor and B&B Italia's Big Mama chair

They are also avid art collectors, zeroing in on works that explore the body and that, Hesam explains, are "on the margins of the market, both financially and content-wise. We try to focus our collection on women artists, since their works don't feature as much in collections or museums, or are not selling for as much as works by male artists." Pieces by Nargess Hashemi, Etel Adnan, Sarah Lucas, Monir Farmanfarmaian, Cindy Sherman, The Guerilla Girls, Jessica Maine, Lesley Diehl and Leila Pazooki, to name just a few great female artists, hang on the walls, blending in seamlessly with the trio's own works.

Seasoned artists themselves, they were the recipients of the Han Nefkens Foundation/MACBA Award, and have staged exhibitions at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston, the Zurich Kunsthalle, the Milan Triennale and the Liverpool Biennale among other institutions. In the UAE, the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi commissioned the Haerizadeh brothers and Hesam to create *Another Happy Day*, an installation that addressed the concept of the body – both physical and conceptual, redefining it in specifically regional terms.

No doubt, by the time this magazine has gone to print, Rokni, Ramin and Hesam will have completely redecorated their villa once again. Such is the nature of these artists, who have turned their home into a living work of art. □

