

# COME IN, WE'RE OPEN



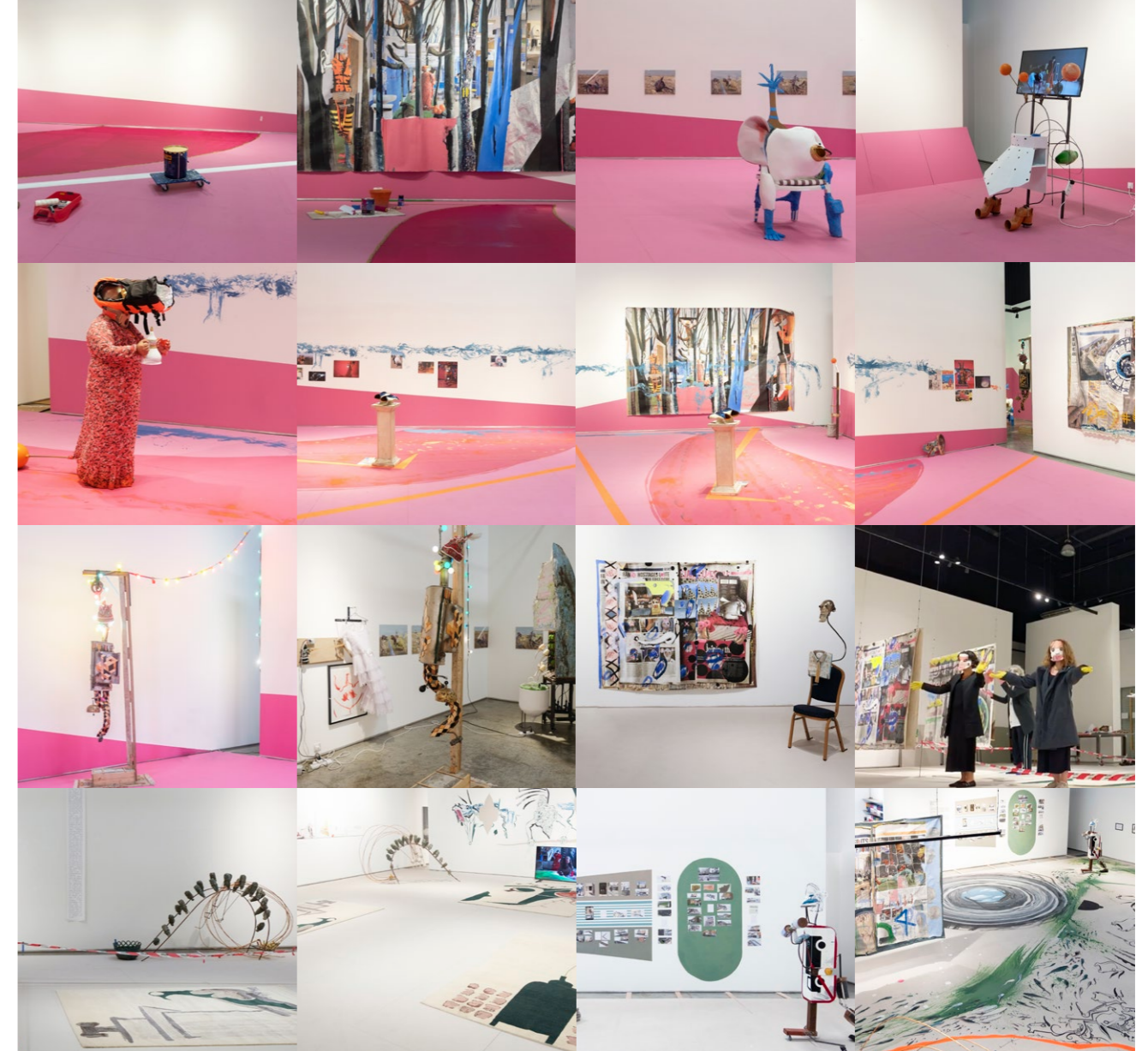
From left to right: Ramin Haerizadeh, Hesam Rahmanian and Rokni Haerizadeh. Image courtesy of the artists and Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde. Photography by April Morais

On Alserkal Avenue this summer, the playful yet ever-contemplative Dubai-based trio of the Haerizadeh brothers (Rokni and Ramin) and Hesam Rahmanian took over the **Isabelle van den Eynde gallery** space with *We Are Open For Installation* (ended 9 November). This three-phase process, occurring over five months, questioned the entrenched mechanisms of the art world and the very practice of exhibition-making.

Words by Ruba Al-Sweel

Twenty-five years ago, Ramin and Rokni spotted Hesam in a clandestine drawing class in Iran. Set up by laid-off educators in the wake of the Cultural Revolution that purged academia of Western influences, the makeshift studio in which the class took place was a professor's living room where men and women were separated by a thin curtain. "It was an alternative space that blurred the lines between its multiple uses," says Rokni Haerizadeh, alluding to the fact that what is one man's home could serve as another's

muse. It is perhaps this very mutability that best defines any space activated by the trio. In their latest show at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde (IVDE), the space suspended its white cube format and morphed into a live workshop with no sequential assembly line and no particular end product – one that studied and revelled in Process, ipso facto. "We don't create exhibitions," Hesam Rahmanian explains. "We create environments in which things grow, and growth is a process."



Exhibition view of *We Are Open For Installation*. Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde. Photography by April Morais

While the three artists control the variables of their environments, it's the resulting ecologies, economies of space and unspoken vectors created that give birth to what they've dubbed a 'Field of Negotiation', and which lie at the heart of their practice, becoming creative collaborators in the process. In their IVDE setting, the trio spent most of their days workshoping ideas and experimenting in real time. Inside, cryptic writing coated portions of the wall in what they've come to identify as 'Unfaithful Poetry'. Comprising verses of ancient Farsi poetry that have undergone several translations, these have been regurgitated into new forms. Screens dotted the ground and in *From Sea to Dawn* (2016), the artists traced the mass exodus of refugees heading to Europe and the accompanying perils of venturing into sea. Interspersing their works in progress were scheduled performances every few weeks. In one activation, the artists obstructed their vision with life vests atop their heads and proceeded to splatter blue, orange and yellow paint in mechanical rhythms while gallery-goers watched. "Our work is not improvised – it's carefully calculated and research-driven," Rokni attests. Indeed, these creative collaborators can only spring pleasant surprises after a sort of bargain that establishes spatial politics anew. "The one telltale aspect of our practice is the collectivity element. To us, it's

a process that is experienced together with the 'other'," continues Rokni.

But Ramin insists that the participants transcend the space-time continuum: "It's the history that binds us, the news cycle that drives and shape-shifts the work, and it's everyone's individual experience and perspective." With this in mind, the trio create a fourth dimension in which their work operates. "The 'others', whether a welcome intruder or a foreseen byproduct of the new milieu created, are woven seamlessly into the fabric of this ecology," explains Rokni. It's certainly true that it's virtually impossible to determine where the object ends and the subject begins, and where the lines between art and spectatorship are drawn.

So it was that IVDE was not only open for installation, but also accessible to much more: speculation, observation and participation – in ways that were not merely supplementary to the work but actually comprised 'the work' itself. In their subversive style, the trio not only undermined the traditional operation of this eminent gallery, but they also turned the entirety of the space, the people and the time into a living, breathing installation that made us all question the very nature of art and the ways in which we view it.