

Chaos and Order

Sometimes Shatana International Artists Workshop feels like it's the most normal art activity to take place in Jordan, and then the reality of its uniqueness is brought to light in the context of such a small and limited art scene. With only a brief and classical historical repertoire; the visual arts are generally dominated by a commercial gallery scene and dictated by an older generation of artists whose conformist aesthetic definitions leave little room for contemporary forms of practice and thinking to emerge.

Perfect grounds to host an International artist workshop that encourages the exact opposite!

The workshop takes on a particular standpoint in that it emphasizes the exchange between emerging Jordanian and Arab artists with an International community of artists. This point is emphasized for several reasons. Firstly, there are very few opportunities for the Arab artists themselves to exchange; the workshop is an ideal place to open such an opportunity. Also, while the Arab World / Middle East are terms that are misleading to both the Arab artist and the International ones alike; the workshop requires the artist to reassess this particular notion. On the other -and a more natural outcome- is an opportunity for the International artist to get a closer and personal view at the visual arts and culture of the Arab World.

I like to use the terms *chaos* and *order* for Shatana Workshop. The workshop balances both elements throughout the workshop in creating an atmosphere very much geared in its energy and drive towards taking this open platform (I am tempted to simultaneously call it a *playground*) to experiment and realize an idea -or several as some artists seem to find the time and the energy for several projects! While at the same time, there is no pressure to realize if the opportunity doesn't arise. Concurrently, the seriousness is tipped the other way, and the participants' ability to cook, eat, talk, sing and dance is taken just as seriously.

Shatana Workshop is also functioning outside of its immediate objective as an international artist workshop in that it brings to exposure, activity and income to the inhabitants of Shatana village. Also, the open day proved a surprising success in that it pulled in many curious visitors - who are not museum or art-goers in any sense - from surrounding towns and cities as well as from the main city Amman, to attend the event. Bringing art in contemporary forms, outside of its usual 'temples' of display into the public sphere brought about a new experience as well as dialogue amongst attendees as to what art is and isn't.

Brewed over lengthy dinners, the Shatana team lives the 'Shatana experience' in almost every meeting towards the workshop. Pulling together an air of seriousness and humour, the meetings for the team become a build-up of excitement as the call for applications are answered by hundreds of artists from around the world; the workshop's characters start to come to life! Keeping in mind the importance of the workshops' longevity, the Shatana

Workshop team is very keen on keeping a flexible attitude towards the 'ownership' of the workshop. Jordanian artists who have previously participated in the workshop are invited to become part of the team to manage the workshop in this coming year. In this, the team hopes that these new faces will bring a new element and dynamic to the workshop, as well as try to guarantee that the workshop is not dependant in its realization every year to a small team, and the time they might be able to put into the project.

While I myself have been an organizer and participating artist in Shatana for two consecutive years; this year was my first time as an artist in a triangle arts workshop, which took place in Scotland. On the one hand, the experience 'on the other side' was a very important one to bring the whole picture together to how the format of a workshop lead by artists for artists can be interpreted flexibly to achieve a common objective and result. On the other, it was great to talk, eat, engage, contemplate, make and play with ideas, and be well taken care of!

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