

## **WIDEWALLS**

### **Experiencing Entropy Differently - Angela Bulloch and Maria Zerres in an Exclusive Interview**

Abstract Art, Young British Artists (YBA), by ANA BAMBIC KOSTOV



Featured image: Installation view 2016: Considering Dynamics and the Forms of Chaos, Sharjah Art Museum. Photo by Michiel Huijben

One of the head cultural institutions in the Emirates, the Sharjah Art Museum, is currently showing a comprehensive exhibition, the first one in which two artists from Europe are exhibiting together. Two renowned artists, Angela Bulloch and Maria Zerres, draw parallels between their visions in *Considering Dynamics and the Forms of Chaos*. The colossal setup of this two-person artistic spectacle offers a singular overview of both of the artists' oeuvres, curated by Amira Gad and Brigitte Schenk.

Emerging from the universal idea of chaos, practices of Angela Bulloch and Maria Zerres collide and embrace each other, enticing the observer to take in the entire complexity of the concept on a visceral level. Bouncing between visually engaging paintings by Zerres and ever-changing Bulloch's installations, the visitor of the current Sharjah Art Museum exhibition is invited to contemplate more than the mere idea of the exhibition. Placed in a very specific environment, this pioneering show supports the idea of a very interesting ne

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wart scene emerging in Arabic countries, while waking the desire to be experienced, rather than merely – seen.

In a conversation with the artists Angela Bulloch and Maria Zerres, we learn about their visions for the exhibition, the collaboration with the Sharjah institution and their general experience in the contemporary Arabic world.



Featured image: Angela Bulloch, Installation view 2016: Considering Dynamics and the Forms of Chaos, Sharjah Art Museum. Photo by Michiel Huijben

### **Two Complementary Practices**

Widewalls: Your practices are individually very complex, very conceptually rich. How would you present them to a broader audience?

Angela Bulloch: Well, the best way would be in actuality, if you came and saw the exhibition, but here in the podcast, I'd say: my side is sculptures and installations, using music and light, and Maria [Zerres] is showing paintings and drawings.

Maria Zerres: My side are paintings and drawings.

Widewalls: Maria, you're a painter, and I've seen that the exhibition has a very interesting title, to which both of your works correspond in a particular manner. It's "Considering Dynamics and the Forms of Chaos". How would you say that your painting practice corresponds to this premise? Why chaos? I see it's very rich in color, it has bold movements, I would even say a little bit aggressive, would you agree?

MZ: I started painting through drawing, so it's always starting from one point which emerges into a chaotic line, which later forms the painting. When I refer to chaos, I can

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say “yeah, that’s my line, starting and turning into form, a dynamic form.”

Widewalls: What about the entropy? Can we find it in your work?

MZ: Yes, if you see oil colors, you see chalk, you see pencils, they all merge into a new form, a new painting, a new picture, a new work.

Widewalls: And Angela, about your work: I saw that you were doing different kinds of installations, are you exhibiting all of them in Sharjah? How do they work with the idea of chaos?

AB: Of course, I haven’t shown all of them, but there’s about nineteen rooms. I’ve shown here I think about twenty eight works, which is quite a lot. The earliest was, I think, from 1993 or the early nineties and up until today. We carefully selected specific works, together with the curators, to make up the totality of the exhibition. It’s been created so that I have one half of the museum and Maria has the other, and there’s the kind of balancing effect that sends us around the central place where we each have one work.

There is a very strong dynamic created between two different kinds of work, as well as looking into details in one specific room of mine or Maria’s in the other. It’s a kind of a curatorial conceit, in a way. The concept of entropy is something that certainly can apply to Maria’s work: in the way that oil shifts around, it changes with the weather, it breathes, it lives, really, nearly. There’s different way of interpreting the concept of entropy. With my work, it’s just in a different way. I use texts and information as the faces of something that forms a kind of movement around something, like the idea of thermodynamics, or something like that. The laws of thermodynamics are four, and finding the first three was something that came a long time ago, but then to find the fourth.. people realized that should have actually been the first one, the more fundamental law of thermodynamics. That one’s named the Zeroth law. It’s finding a structure that then has to recreate its own structure, to talk about how things inter-react. And that’s interesting to me.

MZ: And also, in your work, you’re using color and light, for example your *Drawing Machines*. The colors, lines and spaces in my paintings are overlapping with them in the show. There are two different buildings which have one central point, with one work of yours and one of mine – like two circles were actually overlapping in the centre.

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Featured image: Maria Zerres – *Carpet Riot*, 1991; *Rajasthan*, 1991; *Ramallah 1-3*, 1991. Oil on canvas. Installation view 2016: Sharjah Art Museum. Courtesy Galerie Brigitte Schenk, Cologne. Photo by Wladimir Tschirsky

### The Sharjah Art Museum Experience

Widewalls: How interactive are your works? I mean, with paintings it's about the viewing experience, but Angela's works are very connected to time and the interaction with the viewer. Would you say that this human experience is an integral part of your work?

AB: Definitely, especially some works more than others. There's one piece called *Spotlight with Video Games* and the spotlight is projected on the wall and when you try to walk into that spotlight, it turns off. It sets up a kind of a dialogue with the viewer, but makes it impossible to do the thing that creates a desire, and then it takes it away. And all this time, there's a sound of various video games coming out of this little box in the corner, which just relentlessly goes through its list of sound and loops.

Widewalls: How did this collaboration with Sharjah Art Museum come to be?

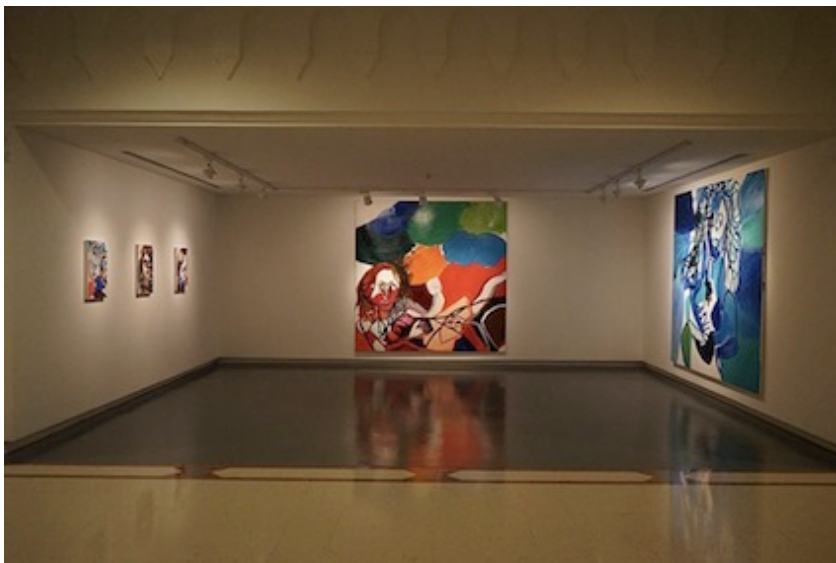
MZ: It started with my gallery, Brigitte Schenk, she's been working here for almost ten years, with the Sharjah museum and Esther Schipper gallery. It's the first time that two artists from Europe or America are showing in Sharjah together.

AB: In this museum, in this country, in this way, this kind of exhibition doesn't happen here. This is quite unusual. They wanted to put something like this together, and it turned out to be me and Maria.

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Widewalls: The curators are Amira Gad and Brigitte Schenk. Did you both work with both of them?

AB: Brigitte has a very good knowledge of Maria's work, and I've worked with Amira Gad quite a lot. They each bring different practices and skills and things that come together and are very useful.



Featured image: Maria Zerres – Reclining Woman, 1997; Maria in the Water, 1992-2008; Selfportrait 1-3, 2003. Oil on canvas. Installation view 2016: Sharjah Art Museum. Courtesy Galerie Brigitte Schenk, Cologne. Photo by Wladimir Tschirsky

### **Sharjah as a Different Arabic City**

Widewalls: Let's turn back to your Sharjah experience and the art market in the Emirates and Sharjah in particular. How would you comment on it, in comparison to the European and American market?

MZ: My experience here was very positive. People are walking through the exhibition and they're really taking their time to look at the artwork, and they have great interest and knowledge about it. It was quite amazing to see how the viewing experience is; very different from Europe, where everything is faster. It was a quite deep experience for me.

AB: I don't really know about the art market in this area, but there's the Abu Dhabi Guggenheim, which has not been built yet. There's a lot of anticipation for that. But right now we're in Sharjah, which is quite different from Abu Dhabi and Dubai. What you have

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here is the Sharjah Art Foundation, and they are doing a lot, so that's been an incredible thing to see, actually. They fund the Sharjah biennale, which is every two years, and we saw that last year. The Sharjah Art Foundation is hosting all kinds of exhibitions at the moment, which we had a chance to go and have a look at. It's pretty amazing. We've seen a historical exhibition, work from the region from 1980 until today, curated by Sheikha Hoor al Qasimi. It was first shown at the Venice Biennale, at the United Arab Emirates pavilion. And we saw that exhibition brought home as it is, in this crazy building called The Flying Saucer, this removed architecture from the 1970s. There are all these other old buildings being renovated in a marvellous way.

Widewalls: But in a very specific way, it all seems very museum-bound and not very diversified into private little galleries. It's all about big institutions, big projects... Is this really so?

MZ: I think it's much more related to the artists, it's not all big, over-the-top project. The scale is quite artist-related, it's quite human.

Widewalls: And coming back to that human experience: as artists and women, how do you feel walking around the city? How different is it from the Western experience? Is it different? Or rather the same?

MZ: The people have very open-minded relationships here. It's different, but you don't feel any kind of tension, you feel very comfortable walking, even though there are only men. I'm not afraid or anything. It's quite tolerant. Western people have a different kind of image of it.

AB: In Sharjah there's no alcohol permitted, and that puts everything into another kind of experience, really. It's not like walking Saturday night in Manchester, or London. And it's a port, it's a trading place, there're lots of people coming and going about their business, it's busy. We had an unusual weather incident the other day when it was raining terribly much and all the drains don't work very well. It's things like that that really put a spanner in the works and that's the sign of global warming. People should talk about that maybe, rather than... [laughs]

Considering Dynamics and the Forms of Chaos is Coming to Europe!

Widewalls: What are you both preparing for 2016? Are there some other projects down the line?

AB: I have to do a big show in London, will let you know when.

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MZ: 'I have a permanent installation in Traunreut, Germany AND in Marfa, USA.

AB: We're both planning to make the second incarnation of our exhibition here. We're looking into bringing it to Europe. We're not absolutely sure which venue or the city, but that's something we're working on it. It will test how the exhibition really works in another context.

MZ: At least, the people here are very interested in it, and that really surprised me.

In anticipation of the news about the European venue of Considering Dynamics and the forms of Chaos, all who will be in the Emirates in the next period should definitely take the time to visit Sharjah Art Museum and the exhibition. Currently on view, it will stay open till May 31, 2016.