

Artistic practice, wherever it wants to be an expression of individual world views, is closely connected to realities of life, social, political and not least aesthetic questions. The artist himself or herself thus becomes a seismograph and interpreter of reality, in every artistic form of expression, without proceeding exclusively in a documentary and pictorial manner: For the artistic process always entails a transformation, an individualization that is so fascinating precisely because it combines personal approach to the world and at the same time the need to express oneself in a way that is comprehensible to others.

Depending on the social structures within which it takes place, working in the field of visual art holds great possibilities for triggering discursive processes. Artists are free to position themselves creatively and personally in the social context and to raise their voices. But the free choice of topics, which follows personal interest and is not necessarily oriented to the needs of a more or less developed art market, is often confronted with the practice of massive restriction: Be it through censorship, state expectations and guidelines, aesthetic standards dictated "from above" or even through religiously connoted limits to creative activity. In this case, artists are not free, but sometimes even – outlaws, because they visualize alternatives: new thought cosmos, wishes and dreams. Resistant concepts of life and the world.

In such a situation, creating art as a way of life is not only primarily a possibility of free expression, but becomes a direct threat to the artists themselves and their immediate environment as soon as the works and their creators become visible. A female painter, for example, can do little more dangerous than depict her femininity and her social situation. In doing so, she violates social as well as religiously connoted rules and restrictive creative guidelines, and this can easily result in her right to live being denied. Comparable developments happen to musicians and other artists, whose practice brings them into suspicion of immorality or disrespectful-antireligious behavior and who thus come into immediate danger for their lives. Exhibitions, expositions, therefore not only present artifacts, but they also expose their creators and can, in the worst case, put them in menace. Therefore, it may be necessary to pursue a "double strategy", as in this project, so that on the one hand artistic voices become audible, and on the other hand their owners are not exposed to direct threat. Anonymization offers an opportunity to make artistic practice visible, both for the international community and, hopefully, for a broad public that will engage with the questions posed by the exhibition.

Even if the individually ascribable personal achievement becomes invisible through anonymity, each work of art speaks for itself, out of its individual strength, and can also be stylistically assigned to other works with the same authorship. If, in addition, an art object comes from a different cultural sphere than the one in which the presentation takes place, an explanatory mediation may be necessary (which, in this case, the artists themselves cannot take over), so that the artistic content communicates itself further. But the message will become all the more audible if the viewers engage with it. Where personal encounters are not possible, they are substituted by a work of art that invites the viewer to come closer and engage in dialogue across spatial and cultural boundaries.

And it is precisely here that exhibition venues and international artist colleagues and collaborators play an important role. They become catalysts for what would otherwise remain hidden, at most to be found by chance in the social media – if their use does not already pose too great a danger. Alongside the desire to give works of art a podium is the difficulty of tracking down these works in the first place and presenting them in an appropriate form. The

Nassauische Kunstverein Wiesbaden has succeeded in this in close cooperation with the Offenbach-based artist Yama Rahimi and other artists, academics and activists. Here it proves once again to be a blessing that the world wide web allows an exchange of data that does not make the artistic originals tangible but their message digitally perceptible across thousands of kilometers and preserves the statements and information even where the originals are lost or destroyed. Our experiences in the period of isolation during the pandemic have also led us to make greater use of technical developments that allow encounters at a digital distance in a more intensive way than has long been possible online. The exhibition benefits directly from this, because the technology provided by *Walter's Cube* makes it possible to create entire individual exhibitions of Afghan art digitally.

Transcultural Image Discourse

Perceptibility is both an opportunity and a challenge. Opportunity because it offers works of art the podium they deserve. But it is also a challenge because the message of a work is not necessarily as unambiguous as one might think at first glance. Not only do certain culturally specific topics require explanation when they become visible outside their usual framework or cultural context of origin. Aesthetic questions also become important - and much more important than they might appear to the viewer at first glance. Anyone who approaches the art of other cultural circles with a European-influenced view can, without intending to, grossly misunderstand it.

If European art history, its ideals of beauty and its avant-garde achievements are elevated to a standard, it often obscures the view precisely of the specifics of art that does not come from its ranks. In a country like Afghanistan, figuration as a pictorial means stands in a completely different context than in Germany. Who remembers that many of the paintings from the Kabul Picture Gallery survived the Taliban's rule before 2001 only because a dedicated artist and restorer painted over their figurative elements, thereby saving them through the times of crisis and then restoring the works later? And who knows today what has become of these works as well as of their rescuer since the international troops withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021 and the situation for the artistic community worsened again? Critical voices are silenced, forcibly muted. The fear of being exposed leads to an increasing disappearance of artistic and creative free thinking, at least in public. The power of art to create social impact is dwindling.

Against this mental background, the discussion of Afghan art unfolds a fascinating potential without having to obey a globalized contemporary aesthetic, and also an enormous urgency. At the same time, the discussion in the art field in recent years, especially around the past Documenta, has also taught us that we ourselves, as Western viewers, are limited in leaving our cultural context and perceiving foreign works without bias. Intercultural exhibiting always has the potential to trigger controversies that can only be smoothed out if all participants are willing to question their own world views and listen to each other. But then such an exchange can become a true enrichment, enabling an often saturated Western art world to face uncomfortable questions and offer a podium to artworks as well as artists who would otherwise be active far beyond the Central European horizon of perception.