

Artist Abbas Zahedi at Frieze London *Healing as an artistic practice*

Medical doctor Abbas Zahedi quit his job after his younger brother died after a heart transplant. Loss, grief and death have occupied him in his practice ever since. The British artist can now be seen at Frieze in London

What art is appropriate for today? Abbas Zahedi, the winner of the Frieze Artist Award 2022, is on the trail of an answer. In his art, he sensitively links urgent social and political issues and practices a form of communicative practice that conveys respect and connects without leveling the differences.

Born in London in 1984 to Iranian parents, Zahedi first studied medicine before graduating in 2019 with an art degree from Central Saint Martins. In a conversation he gives during a stopover on a train journey from Marseille to London, he explains: *A lot of my work reacts to a place or a certain invitation. There are participatory aspects, I use sound and other elements. People should have the freedom to interact with the work themselves.*

For the fourth Frieze Artist Award, which enables a young artist to realize a work at the London Fair, he refers to the bus stop as a space for dialogue. He wanted to create a work that would take place both inside and outside the art fair, he says: *The focus is on the transitory, on the threshold of transition. Public space has become rare in Great Britain, it is being privatized and commercialized – this is also what his project aims to communicate.*

Divided England

In the past, the artist has dealt a lot with traumatic situations in segregated English society. He dedicated his thesis to the fire disaster in London's Grenfell Tower in 2017, which was caused by a defective refrigerator and could not be stopped due to improper use of materials on the facade. Zahedi lost a good friend in that fire. In 2020/21, in the pandemic's first winter, he created an installation in a derelict Royal Mail post office in Chelsea that brought together the building's surveillance architecture and the lockdown state of lockdown.

Zahedi's empathy - he also nurtures a large Instagram following when he's not going offline to maintain his work-life balance - also comes from personal experience. He gave up medicine in 2011 after his two-year younger brother, whom he had been caring for due to their parents' early deaths, died after a heart transplant. The themes of loss, grief and death have accompanied him ever since.

Healing as an artistic practice: When Abbas Zahedi performs rap or spoken word, it also helps him to make the transition from the scientific thinking of medicine to the more creative area of art: *That way I was able to find other forms of care, which are also about healing, but in a different sense than the strictly medical one.*

<https://www.monopol-magazin.de/abbas-zahedi-frieze>

This article first appeared in the 'Watchlist' section of Monopol 10/2022 (see scan below)



Frieze art fair in London *Thoughtfulness was yesterday*

At Frieze in London, one looks in vain for uncertainty due to the current crises. The art is colorful, kitch and bold - with a few exceptions worth seeing

It's autumn in London and art galleries are well stocked with the proceeds of the past pandemic years. But anyone who would have thought that the booths of the approximately 120 exhibitors at this year's Frieze London or the Frieze Masters in Regent's Park might show a moment of uncertainty due to the current global crises is mistaken. Colorful, kitch and often bold is the motto, neo-pop art and abstract expressionism, which was believed to be dead, are back from oblivion. Painting is the genre du jour, thoughtfulness was yesterday.

The large-format works by British painter Jadé Fadojutimi at Gagosian demonstrate it right at the entrance: colorful, gestural webs of lines that go no further in depth. Not far from here, in a walk-in setting, is perhaps Frieze's most popular selfie motif: a pair of gigantic, squeaky red pumpkins by performance artist Anthea Hamilton, who is currently causing a sensation with her *Designer Vegetables* and has delivered a trivial but appropriate autumn motif. The fine critical note of these *pumpkins* is not in their surreal oversize, but in the fact that they are already out of air, lying limp in the expensive Thomas Dane Gallery booth.

The exuberant selfie mood actually corresponds to the cheerful faces of the gallery owners, who toasted each other with Ruinart's (appropriately not *ruin art*) champagne on the first day. At White Cube London, for example, all nine drawings by Tracey Emin were already sold at the preview for £50,000 each, while Georg Baselitz was still available at the same stand for £900,000. Smaller galleries reported sales of younger painters - such as Joanna Woś, who lives in Vienna, at Croy Nielsen for 16,000 euros. At the stand of the Viennese gallery, an object by Sandra Mujinga was quickly sold.

However, it is difficult to read current art trends from this, as the market often works in the opposite direction to the trends of international exhibition houses. What serious museum would own a picture of Muppets riding bicycles (seen at Karma)? But the question of whether the current tendencies of the institutions – diversity, feminist or queer art, i.e. topics that are not always in line with the market – are also emerging at an art fair like Frieze, would initially be answered with 'no'.

Critical art with political ambitions doesn't really appear here, but it is noticeable that many female artists are strongly positioned. Classics such as Paula Rego, one of the great artists who was long overlooked by the art market and whose impressive works were presented at this year's Venice Biennale, were offered at several stands. A painting of Rego's was sold by Offer Waterman (London) at Frieze Masters for £700,000.

When asked, many works were reserved if not sold: for example, an abstract wall collage by Isa Genzken at Hauser & Wirth for 450,000 euros. A large-format textile floor work by Cecilia Vicuña (whose gigantic hanging installations can currently also be seen in the Tate Modern Turbine Hall) was on hold at Lehmann Maupin (London, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul) for £106,500 for a museum in Latin America.

Dance at the abyss

If you keep looking for art that shows more than the surface, it becomes difficult. Taka Ishi (Tokyo) was still waiting in vain for a buyer for an outstanding large table installation by Yoshitomo Nara, but a number of smaller photographs by the artist have already been sold for 11,200 euros each.

The London gallery The Approach, which has long been run as an off-space, is also showing conceptual photographs and, above all, sculptural objects by British artist Megali Reus – a dysfunctional street lamp, for example – unruly art that is rarely seen at the fair. A superb conceptual-textile wall work by Croatian artist Hana Miletić, whose exhibition at the Kunsthalle Mainz is about to open, has been reserved at this booth for £22,000 for the time being.

Then, in the midst of the hectic and noisy crowd, you come across a quiet wooden island seating area. It is part of the installation by Frieze Artist Award winner Abbas Zahedi, who planned a 'bus stop' to relax, chat or pause. There are headphones through which live performances are broadcast, taking place in a pavilion outside in the park, also constructed by Zahedi. The artist is offering free VIP tickets to the fair in exchange for an open mic contribution. A wide variety of people communicate here, rap or recite their poems. This work is one of the most worth seeing and hearing of Frieze. It is completely contrary to the otherwise dominant dance on the abyss, where the pressing issues of the time are completely ignored.

<https://www.monopol-magazin.de/frieze-london-2022>