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In the name of peace – Lebanese artist Katya Traboulsi's unique art project

The Kurator speaks exclusively to Lebanese artist Traboulsi about her Dubai solo show

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Katya Traboulsi's solo show Perpetual Identities is running at Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai until September 1.

Image Credit: Leila Heller Gallery

Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue recently announced the 'Perpetual Identities' exhibition by Beirut-based multimedia artist Katya Traboulsi celebrating humanity with a unique artistic process.

The exhibition, running until September 1, reflects the artist's experience with the tragedy of war in her home country, depicting 46 mortar shells made of a variety of different materials such as ceramics, porcelain, resin, wood, and brass, with each shell dedicated to a different nation. Traboulsi transforms in this way an instrument of death into an object of beauty showcased in the gleaming space of an art gallery.

Born and raised in Lebanon, Traboulsi's formative years were spent in a Civil War that tore the country apart from 1975 to 1990. "Perpetual Identities is a project that finds its origin in my experience of youth and of all the generations who knew the war," she says.

"The war started when I was 15 year old and I have spent till my 29th year a life with the rhythm of an ongoing war that led the country to what it is today: a non country, a place of corruption and injustice."

Her art takes on themes of governing, religion and politics, and the reflections of these concepts in our every day lives, in our thoughts and interactions. Traboulsi never forgot how the manipulation of greed and power ripped her country apart. "The world is collapsing and human values are disappearing. 'Perpetual Identities' is a scream, a wake-up call for the beauty of our identities and the need for peace," she says. "We, human beings, are all the same, have all the same needs, of love, peace, compassion, recognition..."

**Vietnam, hand carved marble**

Image Credit: Leila Heller Gallery

By transforming mortar shells into hand-made objects of history and art she extends a universal message of peace. For every one of the 46 shells in the project, Traboulsi engaged local artisans in the depicted countries to craft the pieces, which makes Perpetual Identities a truly worldwide and collaborative effort.

“The production of this project could only be hand made,” she says. “Some pieces I made by myself, but most of the collection is made by craftsmen. I had to travel to many countries to find the source, the soul of the historical artisanal art of the country through the hands and the experience of the craftsmen, to reproduce the visual identity of each piece.”



Korea, hand painted porcelain

Image Credit: Leila Heller Gallery

It was a massive undertaking that took six years to complete, and Traboulsi would have ideally included even more countries but ultimately had to limit the project to 46 shells and 46 nations partly down to the spiralling costs involved.

“Travelling, and discovering other cultures is a wonderful experience,” she says. “Sharing the beauty of these different identities was a goal to show that the exchange of cultures can enrich a country in many ways instead of creating intolerances and racism. Most of those wonderful artisans that I met came from poor backgrounds and

unfortunately their skills are disappearing. By doing this project I was proud to show the world their existence and wonderful talent.”



Afghanistan, hand carved and painted resin with a brass base and top

Image Credit: Leila Heller Gallery