



SANCTUARIES ([HTTPS://SELECTIONSARTS.COM/READ/SANCTUARIES/](https://selectionsarts.com/read/sanctuaries/)) JANUARY 21, 2019

SANCTUARIES | NABIL NAHAS

([HTTPS://SELECTIONSARTS.COM/SANCTUARIES-NABIL-NAHAS/](https://selectionsarts.com/sanctuaries-nabil-nahas/))

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In an attempt to delve into the private universe of artists and art collectors, Selections is exploring the sanctuaries of various men and women, some living and others who have passed away, and shedding light on places that remain out of bounds for the majority of people. We examine how these artists and art collectors live, what surrounds them and how they go about thinking, dreaming and creating. In order to get as personal as possible, we came up with customised questions that we then presented to each of these men and women (and in the case of those who passed away to their children), tailoring our queries to the way each of them

lives and goes about creating his or her work. In parallel, we shot a short film, which you can view on our website, that navigates each artist and art collector's sanctuary. The film allows viewers to get up close and personal with artists and art collectors who seldom open their personal space up to the world. A fascinating artistic journey into the hearts and minds of some of the region's most intriguing people.



<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-nabil-nahas-in-studio.jpg>

Nahas working in his studio

New York-based Lebanese artist Nabil Nahas grew up in Cairo and Beirut and studied fine arts at Yale University. Over the course of a phenomenal career, the 69-year-old artist has had exhibits at some of New York's most important galleries, in addition to exhibits in Paris, Beirut and São Paulo, always reinventing himself by exploring new artistic techniques. Throughout the years, his paintings have been abstract, pointillistic or impressionistic, and sometimes a mixture of all three techniques. Most recently, his works have been inspired by Lebanon's magnificent cedar trees, providing a moving artistic tribute to the country of his birth.



<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-Nabil-Nahas-explaining-his-working-technique.jpg>

Nahas explaining his working technique

How conscious is your decision to reinvent yourself at your different periods?

Reinventing myself was never a conscious decision. When things were going terrific, and I felt in total control of my work, an accident would happen on the canvas, a bit like throwing a monkey wrench in the wheel, and my curiosity would take me there, eventually developing into a new image. It was a bit scary at first but always a fun adventure, which seemed to occur every decade.

What is it about New York and the contemporary painters you got acquainted with at Yale that made you settle in New York? Can you tell us about one or two of those relationships?

I was given for my 13th birthday a Skira book “Contemporary Tendencies,” which surveyed the “school of Paris” and the “New York School” through 1958. What an amazing visual experience that was. A Pandora’s Box, which I avidly devoured.

Back then my preference went to the New York school, and I dreamed of one day settling there to pursue my artistic carrier. When a few years later I got my high school degree from Antoura in 1968, I boarded a plane and off I went to the United States.

Being part of the Yale Art School was a great experience. We were only 12 students per year, so you can imagine what a privileged situation that was. Its proximity to New York made it possible to have weekly visits by renowned artist as well as us going on Saturdays to see museums and galleries. One artist in particular, actually the reason why I wanted to go to Yale and who became my mentor, was Al Held. So my Yale experience made my moving to New York a childhood dream come through and a smooth transition from New Haven.



<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-amongst-furniture-pieces-created-by-Royère.jpg>

The studio

<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-Nabil-Nahas-amongst-his-works-that-are-based-on-a-starfish.jpg>

Nahas amongst his works that are based on a starfish he found along the beach in the Hamptons

Would you consider yourself a cerebral artist or an impulsive one?

Am I a cerebral artist or an impulsive one? I believe to be a balanced combination of both. A mind is a kaleidoscopic tool and to reduce it to hermetic compartments that do not merge is a very obtuse interpretation of our mental potential.

Do you feel like your world is an internal exploration or an external one? Is it related to your dreams/unconsciousness?

My world is as much an internal one as it is an external one. It is not related to my dreams, but how can one deny the role of the subconscious at work? Observing “nature” in the most universal sense of the world, whether microscopic, cosmic or simply our natural daily surroundings, is the core of my inspiration.

Do you feel like you are part of a trend or do you differentiate yourself from it. Is this relevant in terms of the wave in Beirut and New York?

I never considered myself part of a trend. Perhaps in the 1980s my monochromatic paintings could have briefly fit the bill in the New York art scene, but overall I differentiate myself from it. That does not mean that I don't find the art scene in Beirut very creative and buzzing and that is a real treat.

(<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-amongst-furniture-pieces-created-by-Royère-1.jpg>)

Nahas amongst furniture pieces created by Royère in his studio, a revamped silk factory

What is your definition of success?

My definition of success? Having people come up to you and have no idea who they might be... just kidding. I never really thought of it – maybe having reached a place where you feel free to take chances and be oblivious to the consequences

[.https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-from-studio.jpg](https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-from-studio.jpg)

From Nahas' studio

(<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-Nabil-Nahas-from-studio.jpg>).

From Nahas' studio

How nationalistic are you?

I am very attached to Lebanon, its earth, its history, its legends, its independence and sovereignty. I guess that transpires in my paintings of cedar, olive, cacti and palm trees, which I felt a strong desire to paint after my return 18 years later. I am not politically engaged

although I abhor foreign inference, which destabilizes what would otherwise have been a peaceable haven.

Does that make me nationalistic? No it makes me patriotic.

(<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-nabil-nahas-studio-garden-1.jpg>)

Nahas observing a detail on an olive tree from his garden

Are you a people person?

A people person? Not really. I like as much time to myself as possible although I recognize it to be a luxury.

The light that suddenly shone on your art, when did it click on?

I got attention since my first show in New York in 1977. I was lucky to have been represented for 40 years by three prominent New York galleries but I was never a “star” per say, perhaps

more of a painter's painter. It is of course nice to have gained some recognition in my motherland, and I feel very grateful for it.

(<https://selectionsarts.com/wp-content/uploads/selections-arts-sanctuaries-Araucana-Chicken-from-Chile-laying-blue-eggs.jpg>)

Araucana Chicken from Chile laying blue eggs

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A version of this article appeared in print in Selections, Sanctuaries #47.

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