By OLIVIA SAND

There are many things to explore in the art of Sarkis. A Gesamtkunstwerk by himself, he is a true multi-disciplinary artist who handles diverse aspects in the world that surrounds us in order to create works of art. It is tempting to say that such artists as Sarkis are no longer working in this way today by exploring, Questioning, and reaching out to film, music, literature, theatre and the science to name just a few. Therefore, it is no surprise that his art is seen as demanding, requiring the active visual and intellectual participation of the viewer.

Born in Turkey, and based in Paris since 1964, Sarkis has pursued his way to tackle the complexity and endless possibilities in relation to making art. In the interview below, he discusses his work and approach with the Asian Art Newspaper.

ASIAN ART NEWSPAPER: On the one hand, many people know your name, but on the other, it is hard for people to associate your work with any specific type of work. Paradoxically, you are extremely well known, and yet, unknown.

SARKIS: That is because I have always fought against becoming a kind of brand.

AAN: You came from Turkey to France in the 1960s. Why did you leave Turkey?

S: After I did not want to leave, but the overall conditions at that time were not really good. Nevertheless, I had a few exhibitions then and I remember the first show I had after graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts in Istanbul. I was twenty-two years old — and I did everything from — finding the exhibition space, printing the opening invitations, hanging the pieces and explaining my work. Decades later, I have not changed and I still work that way today. I may collaborate with specialists in their respective field, but I remain the one that oversees everything, for all my exhibits, whether we are dealing with the Louvre, or the Centre Pompidou. This is simply my way of working.

When I started, I had never seen an original painting. Therefore, culture primarily came from reproductions. This is exactly what the late Ray Lichtenstein summarised so well: what we learn about art history is from books, and from magazines. In my case, there were very few magazines available and the only original painting I saw was a small painting by Bonnard at a museum. All the rest, all the other works were copies. So it was because of these circumstances, really, that I came to France. Also, it is often a language that encourages you to go somewhere. I spoke French, as I attended a French school in Istanbul, France was the natural choice. Of course, I could also have gone to Germany; all the more so, as my work had nothing to do with the École de Paris. A few years after my arrival, I probably felt closer to a certain momentum that was taking place in the art world in general rather than to the specific situation in France.

Travelling widely in Asia, he was a Professor of Anthropology for over two decades at the University of Hong Kong and during that time he wrote numerous outstanding books on Lao’s history and culture. Dr Evans eventually moved to Laos in 2005 to pursue his permanent residence whilst writing his wife Keesmány and their daughter. He became Senior Fellow with the prestigious Ecole Francaise d’Extrême-Orient and also co-operated on many projects with Ministry of Information and Culture as well as with the Lao Institute of Cultural Research and the Lao Academy of Social Sciences. This year, his most recent publication The Art-Lao and Nan Chao/Tali Kingdom: A Re-orientation, appeared in the Journal of the Siam Society.

NAGEL JUBILEE AUCTION, GERMANY

From 8 to 10 December, Nagel, the German auction house is holding its 25th anniversary sale of Fine Asian Art in Stuttgart. The Fine Asian Art sales, Nagel’s flagship events, have taken place twice a year since 1990. In the December sale, there are over 2,800 lots with a total estimate of 10-14 million Euro.

Highlights of the ceramic section include a steatite sub-cylinder vase, Hongwu period (1368-1398), height 33 cm, from a Singapore private collection, with an estimate of Euro 200,000. The vase is painted in copper-red with flowers of the Four Seasons, comprising camellia, pomegranate, chrysanthemum and peony. Also on offer is a lime green-glazed flower-handled Boys vase, inain red-sea mark and period of Jiaqing (1796-1820), height 69.5 cm, estimate Euro 150-250,000. Another highlight, from a private Asian collection, is a familiale-cerire porcelain vase depicting the thangka of the 18th century, height 13 cm, estimate Euro 350,000.

Another important lot is an 18th century Chinese export porcelain vase, Qianlong six-character seal mark and of the period (1736-1795), a crackle-glazed turquoise vase, Qianlong six-character seal mark of the period (1736-1795) sold for €304,300 (est €20-30,000) and a pale celadon dragon and shishi disc, Qianlong period (1736-1795), which sold for €89,500 (est €3-5,000), again both to the Asian trade.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

Arnold L. Lehman, Shelby White and Leonard S. C. White Director of the Brooklyn Museum, has announced that he will retire in mid-2015. Lehman, who turned 70 in July, joined the Brooklyn Museum as Director in September 1997. Under his leadership, the Brooklyn Museum has undergone nearly two decades of sustained growth, more than doubling in audience and its endowment.

NEW GALLERY, LONDON

Rossi & Rossi, leading dealers specialising in South Asian Art, is moving its London premises. On 4 December, the gallery opens its new gallery at 27 Dover Street, in the heart of London’s Mayfair. One of the highlights of the opening show is a rare early 13th-century Tibetan thangka of the Buddha Shakyamuni. Never previously exhibited in the UK, it is considered one of the most important early thangkas of its kind, depicting a principal figure in Buddhism: the universal Buddha from which all buddhas emanate, and the representation of wisdom and omniscience in Tibetan tantric practice.


OBITUARY: SHEIKH AL-THANI

Sheikh Saif bin Mohammed Al Thani of Qassim, at one time the biggest art collector in the world, died at his home in London in November, aged 48. Sheikh Al-Thani, a distant cousin of the current Emir, served as Qatar’s minister of culture from 1997 until 2005 and oversaw an ambitious museum building programme for the oil and gas-rich Gulf state. He also built large collections of antiquities, photography, Chinese and Islamic art. Many of his purchases in the Islamic art field are now on display in the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. Other areas in which he amassed collections were furniture, vintage cars, natural history, and jewellery.

Continued on page 4
The Golden Age of China has arrived (in London).

Visit the British Museum from September 18th to experience the BP exhibition *Ming: 50 years that changed China*. Having partnered closely with China for 40 years, BP is proud to make some of their finest art accessible to people in the UK, helping bring to life a snapshot of China’s rich cultural heritage. The beautiful pieces on show encapsulate a hugely successful time for China, from AD 1400 to 1450. So come and enrich yourself by witnessing the treasures of China’s ‘Golden Age’.

For more enlightenment, visit bp.com/arts
starting 1968, I was better acquainted with the young American artists of the time. I got to know Robert Rauschenberg quite early and we became friends in around 1967, and I also became friendly with Robert Morris. I was close to these artists because I had started working with the Sonnabend Gallery in New York. In the late 1960s, Robert Rauschenberg was already well-known, Robert Morris much less so, and Bruce Nauman not at all. It is also around this time that I met Joseph Beuys. There were some encounters then that had a critical impact on my way of working.

AAN: What were the encounters, or the events, that particularly affected your work?
S: In 1967, I was making collages relying on a certain technique. Looking back, I realise that the technique was referring to what in music is called the aleatoric technique, which is the repetition of a note, or an image, after the other parts have been used. At that time, there was a biennale taking place in Paris and I was awarded the first prize for my collage work, although this collage was a two-month affair. Two months later, a gallery contacted me to ask me to come to see them. There were no curators, rather it was art critics and art historians that advised these young galleries. I did the show with my collages and within one day everything was sold. The next day, the gallery started to pressure me. I was a young artist with no experience and instead of being flattered as the gallery asked me for additional pieces instead of being flattered as the gallery asked me for additional pieces, I was immediately taken in. From the very beginning, as I started to be interested in art, I have been very attached to certain artists. For example, I started off with Munich, when I was fifteen or sixteen, and over the years I collected many films and watercolours with Munich as the starting point. It still continues today. I also have done several pieces based on the work of Louis Kahn, John Cage, Morton Feldman, and Andre Tarkovsky.

Initially, I thought I was interacting with approximately 30 thinkers, but we ended up with more than 80 and eventually the number of people amounted to more than 300. So we decided to set up the exhibition by showing how my work was born out of the interaction with other artists. I selected all the pieces, made two or three huge files, and gave them to Christian Bernard. On his side, he worked on the files as if it were a music score. To me, Mancoo is one of the best museums around. Another museum I like is the Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam and the Musée d’Art Moderne in Paris. S: You have been head of the art department at the School of Decorative Arts in Strasbourg, France, for 10 years, from 1980 to 1990. I know that teaching and the transmission of knowledge are very important to us. What were you trying to convey to students?
S: It is my opinion, teaching is a creation and it is this that I have been trying to make them understand. Also, I wanted to show them the importance of being able to read their own work, for example, after putting this, that, then why then move away from the initial step in order to go in another direction? What is this experience? Each artist does this differently. I am not talking about a diagnosis, but how they actually go about the process. I tried to teach them that they had to create a conversation, a language within what they were doing. I asked them to do this on paper or poster, but for real, in action. Everything comes from action. In my teaching, I have always been very direct. When I took the students to exhibitions, I asked the museum director to talk to them for about an hour about the exhibition. Then, once we were alone, we started talking amongst ourselves to discover how we saw things and how we saw the world.

I was very fortunate to be part of various projects that were very innovative in their approach to teaching. I was invited to collaborate with the Institut des Hautes Etudes en Arts Plastiques in Paris, which was set up by the late Pino Buholz. Here, there were experts in other disciplines like the artist Daniel Buren, or Serge Tachnau, who was a great connoisseur of Malvech and of Russian and German art from the 1920s and 1930s.

We invited 20 young artists from around the world to work with students. They would spend a total of six months with us (two segments of three months) in order to hold a dialogue and to talk. We started at 9.30 in the morning, closing the doors and never making our work public, or allowing any outsiders to attend. Then, for seven, or eight hours later, we continued to talk about what was happening. For example, the first day, we tried to identify the territory called art.

We invited great thinkers, film directors, and musicians. At this time, Susan Beccilet and Robert Kantor were still alive, so we thought about inviting them, but both of them sadly became ill. All the same, we invited their loved ones to speak about the issues of the interpretation of the world. The musicians – Luciano Berio and we invited him, and Pierre Boulez – in order to understand what moment music conductors, or film directors, or painters, or writers have which is: proper disciplines. Needless to say, we had fascinating discussions.

Similarly when we discussed the AIDS virus. The discovery of the virus was made by a group of French scientists, so we invited one of the scientists to join us as we wanted to find out how a cell that had existed for a long time suddenly had become so dangerous.

Then, by the year 2000, I had started my mobile school whenever I have an exhibition in a museum in France, Switzerland or Canada (French speaking countries because I cannot hold a conversation in English and I do not speak German), young artists have the opportunity to discuss their work with me over five hours. This happens on a first come, first serve basis with no selection. They come at 9.30 in the morning and I see the person just once. I have done this at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, at the CAPC in Bordeaux, in Nantes. It is an ongoing project.

AAN: Speaking of interactions with other disciplines, have you ever been tempted to collaborate with a theatre, or opera house, in order to...
simply magnificent. Unfortunately, my association with Pierre Boulez. It was the Ring in Bayreuth from 1976, done in an example of a truly global vision. However, there is a beautiful vision. There is no global. I do not think every piece is connected to its time, but I am, in fact, trying to find a way of how one piece can talk to the other. There are pieces that are older with past, which really give a strength and energy to the others. Other pieces are in the background, but I am not going to eliminate them. At the Venice Biennale, I brought a piece from my studio from 1979 that had never been seen before and, even next to recent pieces, the dialogue worked out very well. It all depends on the scenography.

AAN: Some of your pieces are now permanent installations in various museums around the world. Do you keep track of them?

S: I follow the faith of my installations and pieces that are with museums. For example, the museum in Istanbul recently sent some stained glass windows abroad, and one of them that was given to the curator who had produced the window in the first place and asked him what could be done. I suggested that he add some lead to repair it, as a craftsman did in the Middle Ages, which he then did. Even if in terms of process these windows relate to the 16th century, this time, it is as if the window had made a trip to the 16th century and had come back.

LEE KANG-HYO

The first major UK show by this leading Korean potter
15 November - 14 December

View pots and watch our film online
64 page catalogue £10 plus p&p

goldmark
Orange Street, Uppingham, Rutland, LE15 9SQ
01572 821424 goldmarkart.com