**THE POETRY OF WATER**

**Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai**

**Until January 15, 2024**

I was invited on a shamanic journey on the Nile in December 2021, the start of an adventure in the Middle East for which I was not prepared. Once back in Cairo, I chose to visit Dubai, a city that fascinated me from the time I saw pictures of its building. Given its proximity and that I had designed an interactive, multimedia “living museum” of water, I went to investigate the latest technologies and innovations at the international Expo 2020 in Dubai.

Planning a three day visit, I stayed three months, a covid refugee escaping the height of Omicron raging in New York City, where I live. Staying was both an education and an opportunity.

As a filmmaker and artist, I had never photographed nature, never moved to frame its majesty. But in the 1990s as I sat in the hot springs of the California desert, I was mesmerized by the lush abstractions in water. That began water summoning me to film and photograph wherever I went, from Argentina to Zambia, Iceland to Antarctica, Bali, Bosnia, Brazil…. oceans, ice, waterfalls, lakes and rivers.

In Dubai, Leila Heller suggested I film the waters of the UAE. ***The Poetry of Water***, taking place at the Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai until January 15th, includes paintings, large format photographs, multimedia works, mixed-reality, and video furniture.

UAE is mostly desert and natural water was hard to find. The water I did find was nothing like I had experienced elsewhere in the world. When I arrived at the Jabail Mangrove Park there was no water. There was only sand. Slowly, as the tides shifted, water seeped in. As I looked through my camera at an ever-changing landscape devoid of lushness, weirdly different, and ultimately inspiring, the vegetation reminded me of Arabic calligraphy in the fluid way it curved and danced. When I saw the large-scale prints I had made from my photographs, I started to paint on them, calling on the spirit of water to speak through painting.

There are video stacking tables of the Persian (Arabian) Gulf on which the flowing waters of the Gulf at sunset roll from one table to the other. I was inspired the U shaped seating in traditional Arabic homes, imaging these grand tables, the video surrounded by mirrors reflecting the water.

In the desert of Abu Dhabi I filmed the Al Wathba salt lake and when I edited it, the way the salt moved in the wind, created geometric patterns with its pearlescent white, shades of silver shimmering that reminded me the spiritual grandeur of the Sheik Zayed Grand Mosque.

The videos, including one taken on the Nile, the fish swimming in the mangroves, the shimmering of the Al Wathba salt lake, pools, and palm trees, are installed in several ways, including framed in lush and rich marble, in wall pieces refracted in mirrors and framed in wood, in tables, or standing alone.

When I began filming water in the California desert I envisioned installations that immersed people in the majesty of water to restore themselves, as we become disconnected from ourselves in cities. This evolved into *A Movement in Water™*, a (mobile or permanent) “museum” of water, innovative in art, architecture, science, technology and eduction. As I learned about the new science of water through Gina Bria, the founder of the Hydration Foundation, I was fascinated by the science that verified the consciousness of water. Through Gina, our project to create these transformative engagements, was invited to participate in the first cohort of the Buckminster Fuller Institute’s Design Science Studio.

The ***Poetry of Water*** became a wave of what is still to come. By the wonder of life, I was introduced to William Wong, the founder of dArt, an artist collective that is creating a deeper emotional connection with art by engaging all five senses through mixed reality, sound, haptics, scent and taste. Wearing an EEG headband, a haptic vest, and an MR headset, viewers can see their own brain activity translated in water, translated into art, sound, and feeling. This is Bio-Resonant Art, a term that I learned from Jason Snell, the artist who working with coders, created *Looking Glass*.

This breakthrough in art and science enables viewers to experience their own thoughts, demonstrating that our thoughts impact our biology. Translated through electromagnetism, the water in us carries information, affecting our cellular biology – our thoughts altering the gallery of our own body’s cells.

In another mixed reality work, when the viewer wears goggles and approaches a video table in the center of the space, what erupts is a new kind of story telling that is fantastical and delightful filling the entire gallery. Made by Ben Stout. signed with his moniker Monster Mike, *Gradus ad Parnassu*s, is stored and verified on the blockchain.

When I left the UAE, I returned to Cairo; expecting to be gone a few days, I needed to pick up my luggage. Thirsting to be in water that is alive, I ventured a whole night’s journey in the direction of Libya to land in Siwa Oasis. Here, in the midst of the Great Sand Sea, hot springs and salt lakes abound. 20 meters below sea level, Siwa is filled with abundant fresh and salt water under a desert of fine beach sand where I even found sea shells. The photographs and videos I made in Siwa are among my favorites, as they transmit the energy of the exhilarating and serene waters.

It is my profound hope that these works bring beauty and tranquility to people’s environments.

Water recovers me. It is where I dive deep, free the mind, and let go of my body. It is the element of creativity, a womb-like return... inner peace, free flowing. May this work be my prayer for peace, for clean water for all. May it bring beauty, calm, and uplift the spirit.

By Maxi Cohen

ABOUT THE ARTIST/AUTHOR

Maxi Cohen is an award-winning artist and filmmaker based in New York City. Her films, videos, photographs, and multimedia installations have been exhibited internationally and are in the permanent collections of numerous museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

Her films have influenced two generations of filmmakers, having played in movie theaters, film festivals and on television internationally. As a media activist, her film and television work has had significant influence in creating visible social change. Maxi has been supported by grants and awards from The National Endowment for the Arts, The Rockefeller Foundation, The Annenberg Foundation, New York State Council on the Arts, The Karan-Weiss Foundation, and most recently The Buckminster Fuller Institute's Design Science Studio, among others. (https://www.maxicohenstudio.com/biography)

The latest evolution of Maxi’s reverence for water is A Movement in Water™ an interactive traveling “living museum” of water, intended to increase one’s reverence for water, both within oneself and in nature.