

Congratulatory words Anaïs Lellouche, on behalf of the jury

The Inspire Art Award supports artists who have lived experiences of war and violent conflict. Today, this initiative is more important than ever with serious conflicts raging around the world.

One of the artists here today reminded me of the saying: “A community grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they know they shall never sit.” As am sure all of you here today do, we all try to help at our own level.

Four years ago, I was invited by Katarzyna Grabska to be on the advisory committee of the academic Inspire Art Project at the Peace Research Institute, which she leads.

I struck me that it would be an amazing combination to take the thoroughness of academia and add to this a ‘real life’, by that I mean, a museum experience for artists to create and share their work with audiences. So, I came up with a crazy idea, to organise an Award.

Kasia, as she is known to those who love her, and there are many in the world and in this room; said YES! Of course, it’s one thing to have a good idea, the other all together to see it through. Just last year, Kasia was in Sudan where the civil war broke out and was stuck in Khartoum for harrowing days. The next day she was repatriated, she was on a call with the Jury members to nominate the artists you have here today. I would like to thank Kasia for her extraordinary dedication and commitment, as well as to Monica from Nitja for all her insights and hard work over the past three years, without whom we would not have been able to materialise this dream.

For me the most challenging part, was that we had to self-fund the project. Coming from the public sector to the private sector, my dream was to use private resources to have impact onto the public. It was not an easy feat, but we managed, so I would like to thank the individuals and institutions who have supported us: Nitja and the Peace Institute of course, Naila Collection, Brandeis University, Thanks for Nothing, Goethe Institute, Residency Unlimited, and the many individuals who have contributed to pull together the resources to support the artists via the Inspire Art Award.

We wanted this to be a real stepping stone for artists, so we gathered an esteemed jury and did an international call out, the jury nominated five extremely talented artists, in the room today. Our success is a reflection of the quality of the works presented here at Nitja; I am humbled and transformed by what you have created.

Brief statement from the jury: Inspire Art Award Jury Statement

In the Inspire Art Award exhibition there are five new works by Zahrasadat Hakim, Eyoal Kefyalew, Gervais Tomadiatunga, Zun May Oo and Daria Pugachova. Representing different artistic practices and disciplines, different geographies, and different contexts, they all bring attention to past and ongoing, visible and forgotten, conflicts in the world.

While the works are so diverse and powerful each in their own way, there are common threads running through them – through the personal stories that they share. All the works have a strong sense of storytelling as a base of the creative expressions. Yet, in the artists’

sharing of personal experiences they speak to universal concerns about the world filled with uncertainties affecting us all.

Resilience and hope are present in each of the creations. Still, there is something much deeper than hope in these works: They remind us of the possibility for change. And change is perhaps more important than inspiration alone.

People change when they hurt enough that they have to. People change when they see enough that they are inspired to. People change when they learn enough that they want to. People change when they receive enough that they are able to.

A sense of urgency defines each work. In each artwork, the personal story is political speaking to issues of violent conflicts, displacement, dispossession, loss and need for justice and recognition. As artworks they offer thought provoking and subtle ways of encouraging us to reimagine the world in radical, new ways.

The jury would like to stress how the exhibition opening today, is already a recognition of the quality of these five artistic practices as well as the effort and achievement put into these projects.

The laureate artist will be offered a limited-edition clock “Time for Peace” by Sarah Boris, and a one-month residency at Residency Unlimited, New York.

While it was impossible to choose among these impressive works, the jury has had to make a decision.

The work that the jury selected is complex and sophisticated – formally, visually, and conceptually. It represents a multidisciplinary practice.

In addition to being personal, it is poetic. It gives the viewers space to breathe. It allows us to take distance without losing connection. In that way it shifts from the personal to the universal. Beautifully constructed with attention to intimate gestures of sharing, of togetherness, the storytelling evolves and flows in an intuitive manner. As a viewer you are invited to enter the personal space of past memories and present moments. The work embodies poetry through sharing a meal, space, time, and connecting through conversation.

Each is left with a responsibility to leave the world a better place.

Congratulations to all! And congratulations to Zahrasadat Hakim!