

Eva Scharrer, Curator, Sharjah Biennial 8

Can Art save the Planet? That was the question asked on the front page of this year's August issue of Art Review: also referred to as "the green issue". The answer is most likely No - and why should it? But even if art does not change the way people behave, it might have the potential to infiltrate and irritate people's way of thinking – at least that's what we hope.

Will the Sharjah Biennial 8: Still Life: Art, Ecology and the Politics of Change, thus become "the green biennial" (as asked in a recent issue of The Art Newspaper)? Doubtfully. In fact, the Biennial might at times seem to be just the opposite of a "green biennial". And if art is said to potentially be a mirror of society, then this Biennial might in fact not be contaminated/ing enough to fulfill this function.

Arguably, as organisers and curators, we do have a certain responsibility when addressing such a threateningly serious and hyper-actual subject. However, the selected artists – many of them will do site-specific in-situ installations, others will show pre-chosen works – raise questions rather than come up with solutions.

In that peculiar time and place, we aim to introduce a slightly different - at times ephemeral - kind of aesthetic, including a DIY-approach and associations to recycling, which will question the love of luxury and the ever faster, "higher" lifestyle, specifically in the regional context of the Sharjah Biennial, as well as our daily ways of production and consumption.

Via strategies of deconstruction and contamination, but also through the use of metaphor, humor and play, the artists taking part in the Sharjah Biennial 8, will make visible some of the daily absurdities, within which society exists today.

Some of the projects will include performative installations where 120 cars run to fill a cubic structure with their exhaust fumes, where air conditioners are made into a cumulus cloud to create artificial rain, where people locked up in an inflatable balloon have to decide in which direction to go without seeing out and where an artist feeds the boat he's traveling in to its own engine until the boat sinks.

Some artistic attempts might look untimely or even naïve, like for example, an artist proposing to not fly anymore in the 21st century (and choosing to travel to the UAE without having to mount an airplane) – but isn't it more naïve to think that man can reconstruct the earth according to his own will?

Last but not least, the Biennial will also include work which looks at nature with a disenchanted glance, seeing it as a fragile construction, and shedding light on the sheer beauty of endangered species.

The different approaches that the Sharjah Biennial 8 will present, might raise paradoxes, argue with each other, or question each other. They might also mushroom to our own surprise, or perhaps fail in their attempts.

But having proposed the theme of the Biennial with a certain openness, rather than constructing a finite conceptual framework, or prescribing an approach or a certain position in relation to the subject at hand, certainly bears risks for us curators and organisers.

But perhaps we can see this Biennial as a kind of ecosystem in itself, metaphorically expressed, where the various components interfere and interact, and which might in the end, hopefully survive as a whole.