

Moroccan-born artist **Younes Baba-Ali's** prolific output is concerned with the contextual framework that he locates his work within. Whatever makes the setting specific: the ecology, technologies, migratory patterns, the market, markers of the everyday; these are refracted through the work and become its form and material. Irony and playfulness are the language through which he communicates these textures. Bureaucracy, civil society, religion, power and conflict are nascent topics within the work, and are often presented with a humorous undertone. Humour, wit and irony are understood widely as powerful tools for dissecting and undermining power structures, but for Baba-Ali they are also a means for communicating with a broad and varied public. In the interview that follows, Baba-Ali discusses specific works and the influences and impulses behind his practice.

A sense of irony: Younes Baba-Ali *in conversation* with Daniella Rose King

Daniella Rose King: I sense a highly conceptual practice that is witty, and tongue-in-cheek in some ways. There is a real concern with the everyday – whether that is the setting for the work (in the streets of Rabat) or the use of everyday items (such as hairdryers, doormats, car horns etc). Why and to what end are these objects useful to you and your artistic exploration?

Younes Baba-Ali: Irony for me is an accessible language, which is a part of my culture as a Moroccan – I believe we are very ironic. I studied painting originally, and I found myself in a very complicated place with regards to my art, so irony became a way of distancing myself from the heavier aspects of art, the sacred, materialistic, institutionalised aspects.

So I found myself working with everyday objects and readymades, and found that irony was a way for sharing my work with a larger public. I am not interested in making art for an elite, but to speak the



same language as my audience. The everyday is a material to play with, and irony becomes a common language with which to interrogate power structures of assumptions – but it is a shared language, that does not require a background in art to decipher, only a sense of humour. In irony I find a possibility to take another point of view, or another level of interpretation that is not overly serious. It is to laugh with a thing that is as serious as art.

With regards to North African time-based artistic

practices, in which your video presentation at 1:54 will be framed, how do you feel your work fits into this narrative?

I work on specific projects, where there is a real emphasis on the process, so each project is made for a particular context. The process of developing and making a piece is important to me, for the surprises that can arise, and this is something I experiment with.

And what will you be showing at 1:54?

Televendita will be presented

within the 1:54 Forum video programme. This video is a collaboration with a TV salesman, Allesandro Orlando, who is famous in Italy for selling art on TV. I invited Allesandro to pitch my sound and video installations on his channel, and filmed this and presented in the gallery space. I was interested in the language he has developed as a salesperson – and as someone interested in art – that is an accessible, yet commercialised discourse about contemporary art, watched by a broad public. Presented alongside this work was a mural painting of my bank account details, where I invited the public to sponsor me as a “young artist”. This was fundamentally about proposing ways to live and to exist with my work; in light of the financial pressures on younger artists, this was an articulation of a way of making it possible. Again here, as with other works, it was an opportunity to play with a serious topic and to experiment with other forms of communication, language



Younes Baba-Ali's video installations "Tic nerveux" (2009), and (left) "Difference/Roznica" (2008); photos courtesy of the artist

and platforms for art. It also constituted a way of working within and against the market.

I'd like to ask about your use of and experiments with technology in the work. Technology is presented as almost useless, obsolete and bureaucratic. I sense an ambivalence to technology

on your part, could you talk about your intentions here?

I like to think of myself of a machinist, someone who tinkers with objects, technologies and devices. I use technology as a medium, and I'm concerned with showing the failures of technology. Failures are very compelling for me; whether these are technological, or they occur

in society – they are a chance to speak with contemporary language and materials, and to show their limits. So in art new technologies are constantly arising, which the artist can use as a material, but for me this is a simple tactic – to speak of other questions.

Daniella Rose King is a writer and

curator based in London. Younes Baba-Ali's video 'Televendita' will open 1:54 Forum's film program at 12pm on the 16th of October at Somerset House's screening room.

Younes Baba-Ali will be represented by Voice Gallery (Morocco) at 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair.