

OTHMAN EL KHELOUFI – RABAT

What do you want to share about your current living and working conditions?

For me, choosing an artistic career is already a risky choice from the start. Our job is one of financial instability. It is true that today, the situation is much more difficult, but I admit that I have a strange feeling, something between danger and relief. Danger, because I have no idea about how my future will evolve: will I find myself forced to choose another job so I can make a living? The feeling of comfort and relief comes (I think) from this impression that everyone is affected, and not just me. This time, the whole planet stops and for once, the banker and the artist are in the same boat. It makes the predicament less difficult: I see that, for the first time, it is shared. It's really strange. Is it the feeling of a kind of solidarity? I don't know

What can you share about the general situation of the city or country you are based in?

I believe that here in Morocco, the state is trying to do better, but after all I am not sure who exactly the state *is* – and what it can do.

There's also a behaviour towards the people that is somewhat paternalistic. I feel that the latter is a little less affected by panic and suddenly becomes a big producer of humorous content – to the point that every day I receive funny things on my WhatsApp. The Moroccan people surprise me day after day with their creativity and lightness of mind.

On the other hand, the official discourse of the state communication apparatus has changed. Today, the gentleman in a tie who presented the TV news, the officers of the Ministry of Interior, or everyone who spoke on behalf of any power whatsoever – today, they make their prevention statements in public in a very down-to-earth dialect: no standard Arab, no protocol. It's as if there was finally a desire to speak with the people and be understood.

However, I do feel the sadness and the misery when I meet the eyes of the people in the souq. Here, people have nothing. Neither social security nor fund of support. The state has decided to help and comfort some wage earners, thanks to a charity fund – following the call of his majesty. It's the equivalent of €150 per month, but people can only benefit from it when they are registered at a health insurance company, or recognised by the system. But what to do when you have a parasite economy based on the black market, illegal trade, a system of 'rent by agreement' (royal reward). So meanwhile people cling to their optimism, to their religion, to philosophical notions like the *mouktanbe* (written destiny) and to their King, whom they await impatiently. When is he going to give a speech? Do they want to know his point of view? No, I don't think they care at all about it (anyway, my mother never watched him delivering speeches, she doesn't even understand him). I think people just need to feel him present, also in the hardest times, after all, he's a big symbol, right? But, will he still speak in standard Arabic? In Darija? Or in Amazigh? I don't know why this idea excites me so much...

What is the impact of the pandemic on the production and presentation of your work?

At this level, I would say that it is rather positive. I have more time for myself, to practice my instrument, to read. I would say that it reconciled more with my multidisciplinary: I draw, I wrote a play and I finished another one, I made two small pieces of furniture for my mini studio, I composed a lot and I did a big clean-up of my apartment. What more can one hope for? At this level, I'm very happy with the confinement.

As for the presentation of my work, at the very beginning I posted work twice on the internet. But

very quickly I realised that it might not be a good idea, because social networks started to be overwhelmed by a lot of artistic content and I did not want my work to be drowned in a great flow like that. I don't know if I was right, but everyone finds a strategy to communicate their work.

As an artist, how do you see the future today?

It's really at this very moment that I tell myself that I would have liked to be a *faqīh* or a *marabout*. But I don't follow them, and so I'm just going to act on what I already know. Today, making risky artistic choices (in the hope of making things happen) or at least face the real question, means: no mass-selling, no commercialisation, because that means being totally at the mercy of politicians, economists and heads of government (and even worse when it's about capitalist regimes). They are the ones who have their hands on the tap, either they cut us off, or they water the large visible plants, or they install a drip system. All I hope for is that by the time these people want to put some grease in their machines, they will have the intelligence and the reflex to see that their industrial zone also needs a vegetable garden.

Another thing. Everyone is saying today that the recovery plans will save the culture sector only lastly, making this sector the first to be hit and the last to be saved. I would even add that when over a long period of post-crisis, the galleries, the museums, will start to resume their normal course, the world of live performance will still be suffering, because it will really take time before we can put a lot of people in the same room and let them enjoy the big show, side by side. Anyway, even if you want it, people will not feel comfortable. They need time.

I don't know if it's so bad either. This will force us to do only concerts with a reduced number of audiences, which will involve an upheaval in the entertainment market. Gone are the days of 'Let's programme the show that fills the most venues!' Maybe this will liberate the space it takes for **quality to breathe**. Basically, the ratio **number of shows/gain** will change. This will reduce the gap between **star artists** and the **lesser known**. Something that can only be beneficial for our sector.

Are there any ideas, thoughts, quotes, works of art or books that you would like to share?

No, not really, at least not at the moment :)