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Inside the Artist's Studio: Elisabeth Piskernik of Le Cube **There was no place to show contemporary art in Morocco**

by Georgia Kotretsos

[Le Cube - independent art room](#) was founded in 2005 by art historian and curator Elisabeth Piskernik, who serves as the director of the space to this day. The initial goal was to create an experimental art platform that supported both Moroccan and international artists of all disciplines. It helped form the Collective 212, and a series of events that compile its programming such as the Nights of the Galleries, [video night](#), of video art, the [Summer Lab](#), the [New Generation of Art](#) and most recently the [Curators Zone](#).



© Murat Gemen

It is located in the center of Rabat, it is intimate yet as I was once told by someone institutions no matter what their size is, are made of people and this space due to Elisabeth Piskernik's presence exceeds the walls of Le Cube, it oozes with hospitality and creative appetite by making the space immensely open to the world and artists it holds.

It is not unusual for art spaces to share formally or/and informally some of their roster of artists with other spaces in the city. This practice unlike anything else I've come across, allows artists to casually space-hop by sustaining healthier art practices within an intimate art community. The spaces provide a tight supportive safety net for the local artists relieving them from the pressure to exclusively work with "a" space. When we talk about art scenes, it is important to remember they are founded on art communities, and if we're talking about bright examples then we should also keep in mind that they cannot be divided especially when they are relatively modest in size, or still in their emerging stages. This way, Le Cube allows me to discuss it as part of an alternative art scene that has been in the making for nearly 15 years. The good news is that there is nothing forced about this discussion, the conclusions flow, the interest remains in tact, the curiosity is being fed but not quite satisfied yet. My inquiry on art spaces in Rabat was supported by [L'appartement22](#), another alternative space that has significantly contributed to the formation of the creative safety net discussed earlier and this lasting personal account.



Elisabeth Piskernik © Murat Germen

It is my pleasure to present to you today Elisabeth Piskernik of Le Cube - independent art room in Rabat, Morocco.

Georgia Kotretsos: How did Le Cube - this independent art room come to be? What creative gap did it come to fill in Rabat?

Le Cube/Elisabeth Piskernik: It all started in 2005, when I met a number of Moroccan artists from the contemporary art scene. They all complained about the bad situation for young contemporary artists. They had no official status as artists and secondly no support from the state or the ministry of Culture, which was the only institution running the National Galleries in Morocco. These few spaces were - and by the way still are - more or less dedicated to the generation of Modern art and

primarily focused on painting. There was no place to show contemporary art in the sense of conceptual or experimental works, no private gallery or initiative that could cover this need.

I worked at this time at the Austrian Center, a private initiative to promote Austrian Culture, and in the premises of this center there was one little empty room of about 10m². A cube, *nomen est omen!* So we decided together with seven artists, five Moroccans, a French-Gabonese artist and an Iraqi artist both based in Morocco, to give birth to the « Cube » and at the same time to the *Collective 212* (Amina Benbouchta, Jamila Lamrani, Safaa Erruas, Myriam Mihindou (F-GAB), Hassan Echair, Younes Rahmoun, Imad Mansour (IR)), the first artistic group in Morocco, in order to join our synergies, to have more power and impact in the existing art scene. At the end of 2005 we had the first group exhibition with the *Collective 212* at Le Cube that was followed by seven personal exhibitions of each member of the collective. It was a fulminant start! All eyes were on us and our spirits high!

GK: Le Cube is not an introvert space; collaborations, dialogues and exchanges are fostered within Morocco and abroad. How has this practice affected the local artists and the perception of the art in Rabat by your affiliated art communities abroad?

LC/EP: From the beginning on I tried to initiate a dialog with the Moroccan art scene as well as international artists and cultural institutions. On one hand it was always my aim to promote the young Moroccan generation of artists; primarily in Morocco, in order to offer them a platform where liberty of artistic expression and a non-commercial approach were declared. I wanted to introduce their way of seeing the world to the local public through contemporary expression. I always considered Le Cube to be a place for exchange and discussion, not an ivory tower for a small elitist community. I think that it's important for artists and public to break the idea of « l'art pour l'art » and to open the doors to everybody who is interested and who is ready to discover a new territory. This approach affects the artists I work with, because they have this very close contact to the people and they can share their statements with people who are concerned. This philosophy of breaking encounters has been concretized with the project «art in school» where children – and particularly children from socially disadvantaged areas – were invited to come to Le Cube in order to visit an exhibition and to meet the artists. It's a question of opening new horizons for a generation that doesn't necessarily have this opportunity.



Mohamed Arejdaal © Elisabeth Piskernik

GK: I will always have a soft spot for alternative art spaces, especially for the ones that intentionally set themselves free from the mainstream art world expectations. But they require a different kind of creative stamina in order to be sustained, a different kind of a dreamer who keeps the project alive by always evolving. What is Le Cube dreaming of next?

LC/EP: I think that the creation of Le Cube in 2005 was already a kind of a big dream that came true. During all these years a lot of cutting-edge projects were introduced to the Moroccan art scene. For instance the idea of the artist in residence program that was among the first private initiatives of this kind. Further on the project of «new generation of art» in order to support emerging artists at the beginning of their career and to facilitate their artistic development; the project “summer’s lab” for experimental artistic creation, where the space of Le Cube becomes a laboratory, a working studio for artistic research and experimentation; also the initiative of “video night” is an important contribution for the promotion of video art in Morocco.



Jutta Strohmaier © Le Cube

Actually I am not a dreamer, I am more a doer and therefore I would like to undertake as a next step of Le Cube a solid residency program with a financial support by international partners that allows to offer a real residence-package covering all necessary fees for the artist.

Currently on show at the Le Cube is the collaborative project entitled “[Embroiderers of Actuality](#)” by artists Aglaia Haritz and Abdelaziz Zerrou.

GK: When I look at your work I cannot help but think of the [Amazwi Abesifazane \(Voices of Women\)](#) as well, which also provided a creative outlet for women and of course a voice just like the Embroiderers of Actuality did. In your case here in Rabat, the stimulus for this voice was sexuality, will you tell me a little bit about your collaboration process, goals and of course interest on the topic?



Aglaia Haritz & Abdelaziz Zerrou © Le Cube

Aglaia Haritz & Abdelaziz Zerrou: We used the embroidery as an excuse to spend time with a group of women, by creating a situation where intimate discussion could take place. In general in Rabat discussions on the topic are very reticent and very few... primarily because of the taboo on the subject of sexuality. Actually, the participating women were quite open to speak about it - they weren't surprised at all... they had their own opinions on the subject.

In Rabat we worked with the Foundation Orient-Occident, with sub-Saharan embroiderers and Moroccan women and with the Association AMEJ, with young Moroccan girls from the Medina. Because of the presence of sub-Saharan immigrant women, we spoke also about immigration and we recorded a video of very interesting points of view from the Sub-Saharan immigrant women on habits of the Moroccan women.

We chose the thematic of the sexuality, because there's a real need to speak about the sexuality, to know the tradition and to compare it with the knowledge we have of the human body.