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FROM STUDIO TO DINING TABLE: HAERIZADEH, HAERIZADEH & RAHMANIAN

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Are artists particularly creative when it comes to cooking? A look into in the patchwork kitchen of the artist trio between table landscapes, Ottolenghi and Meissen porcelain.



Alice Waters, chef and co-founder of the famous Californian slow food restaurant Chez Panisse, describes the relationship between cooking and art as follows: “The most literal visceral connection we make is with food... The acts of art-making and cooking align in many ways; both reactive and creative, they mimic and accommodate one another.”

So, is there a connection between what happens in artists’ studios and what goes on in their kitchens? Amid all the pots and pans, can we find points of references to their work and their personalities? Are artists particularly creative when it comes to the everyday act of cooking? Through photos and inventories of their kitchens, as well as anecdotes relating to their eating habits, we will try to gain an insight into the culinary worlds of some well-known artists.

Again and again, Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, and Hesam Rahmanian long for the dishes and tastes of their homeland Iran. The artist trio has been living in exile in Dubai for eleven years, more than a thousand kilometers from their home city of Tehran. They moved to the United Arab Emirates in 2009, after the two brothers’ socially critical works came into the focus of the Iranian government through a group exhibition at London’s Saatchi Gallery. Consequently, they were warned by family and friends not to return to Iran. Hesam Rahmanian, a friend from their youth, followed the two to Dubai shortly afterwards, and since then the three have been living, working and cooking together under one roof.

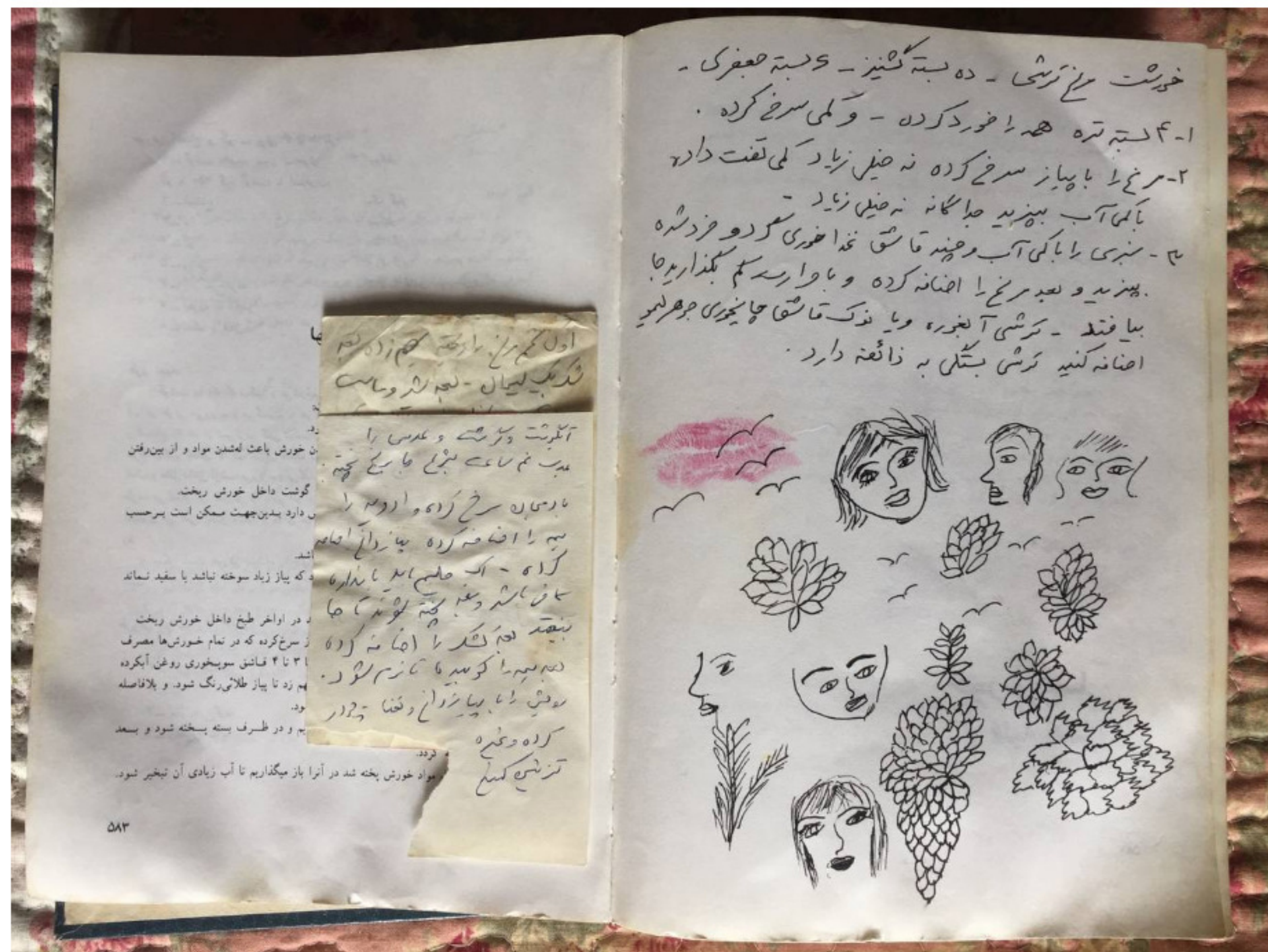




In the colorful, spacious kitchen of their house in the Al Barsha district, there is always something bubbling on the stove. Often it is traditional Persian dishes like stuffed eggplants, lentil stews, couscous or saffron chicken, their spicy aromas flooding the open living and dining room. As a child, Rokni often stood in his grandmother's kitchen, watching her cook while watching cooking shows with her, loudly urging the TV chefs to pick up the pace. At home, the brothers first studied the illustrations and, as their reading skills progressed, the recipes of the cookbook classic "Honar-e Aashpazi" ("The Art of Cooking") by Roza Montazemi with great interest. Today, the artists don't have Montazemi on their shelves, but Yotam Ottolenghi, whose creative Israeli fusion cuisine has become a reference for ambitious amateur chefs worldwide.

In the house of Rahmanian-Haerizadeh, unexpected elements meet: they interweave classics from their home with local spices and vary them with ingredients that are unusual for Iranian cuisine. Thus the collective creates new, radically personal dishes, a patchwork of their culinary and cultural experiences. The strong presence of Indian cuisine in their adopted home of Dubai plays just as much a role as their fascination with the British yeast paste Marmite, which the Haerizadeh brothers inherited from their mother and frequently had on their lunch sandwiches as children.







The extreme climatic conditions of the Persian Gulf also left their mark on the trio's menu. For seven years, Rokni has been preparing a juice made of coriander, cucumber, ginger and lemon juice every day at five o'clock in the morning. According to Ayurvedic principles this juice has a cooling effect. In addition, many creative deviations from standard recipes are born out of the motivation to develop a healthier version of their favorite dishes. For example, Ramin prepares the classic Tahchin, a saffron rice cake, with quinoa – a radical step, considering that rice is the heart of Persian cuisine.

The naturalness with which Rahmanian and the two Haerizadeh brothers draw from the most diverse sources of inspiration to create their culinary collages is strongly reminiscent of their artistic practice. Here, the artist collective playfully combines art historical references and pop culture, personal life stories, and biting social criticism. In their exhibitions, painting, poetry, performance and sculpture come together to form space-filling, multi-layered narratives. The generous use of bright colors and patterns in unusual combinations creates a strong visual attraction – a phenomenon that can also be observed within their four walls.





From the kitchen furnishings to the self-painted dining table, one finds cross-references between work and everyday life throughout the house. The three of them live in a kind of permanent artist residence, in which art and everyday life merge seamlessly. Most of their work is done in the dining room, where they simply turn the plates upside down to protect the paint on the still wet paintings to make room for the steaming stew at lunchtime. Even the daily setting of the table becomes a creative act: they build elaborate table landscapes in which food, crockery and flower arrangements form a well thought-out composition, which they call “instant installations”. Fruit bowls distributed on tables and sideboards set color accents that vary according to season, inspired by the Japanese art of Ikebana.

The extensive collection of plates is worth a separate chapter: here, the most diverse styles are represented, from Meissen porcelain with delicate flower motifs, to artists’ editions, such as the “Seder Plate” by Nicole Eisenman, traditional Moroccan crockery, to anniversary plates of the British royal family. As an artistic medium, plates also appear in her work: Whether hand-painted and mounted on a steel frame, as in the sculpture “Alluvium, March-June 2020” (on show in the current **Schirn exhibition**), or wall-paper, where snapshots of leftover food on plates with the face of Queen Elizabeth form humorous compositions.







For Rokni, Ramin and Hesam, cooking is an expression of their cultural identity, a creative act and an integral part of their life together. For seven years they have been eating every single meal together, often accompanied by friends or collaborative artists. As is customary in Iran, they always cook a few extra portions, in case unexpected visitors show up.

In order to find the right ingredients for their family recipes, the three of them sometimes take a long way round. In the supermarket of the Iranian hospital, half an hour's drive from their house, they find almost everything their heart desires, from dried herbs to cheeses from the northwest of Iran to special dried fruits. They buy bread from an Persian baker in their neighborhood. Only the popular Nan-E Barbari, a traditional flat bread with grooves, is not to be found in Dubai. This is where Ramin and Rokni's mother comes in, bringing large amounts of the frozen bread in her suitcase when she visits the trio. Then she briefly becomes the fourth member of the collective, sews together fabrics for sculptures, paints, draws and helps with the preparations for upcoming exhibitions. Her only condition: that the three of them cook for her every day.

SPECIAL TIP

In the short film **"From March to April...2020"**, made during the lockdown, the camera slowly moves over the collective's dining table and provides insights into their culinary and artistic everyday life. An unplanned side effect of the film is that the water in your mouth starts to water while watching. The video work can also be seen in the Schirn exhibition.