

## QUESTIONING THE QUEEN

Artist trio **Ramin and Rokni Haerizadeh** and **Hesam Rahmanian's** publication **Her Majesty?** is a brilliant satire focused on the British royal family

by Laura Egerton

"Her Majesty is a pretty nice girl but she doesn't have a lot to say," sang Paul McCartney in 1969. Gentle mockery of the monarchy is rife in popular culture, but no one has taken it to such a creative extreme as the trio of Iranian exile artists, brothers Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh and childhood friend Hesam Rahmanian, in their recently launched publication, *Her Majesty?*

The British royal family has been a frequent theme in Rokni Haerizadeh's paintings in recent years. Vast canvasses demonising the key protagonists at the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton push the boundaries on acceptable satire. Since the trio have lived and worked together since 2009, anything one of the three grows interested in becomes a group project.

The interior of their villa is a work of art in itself and indeed elements have been regularly transported to museums, galleries and art fairs around the globe, most recently to the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Boston. For such shows, they collaboratively curate and make: often dressed in costume, working organically to create a wholly immersive and often disorientating, theatrical mise-en-scene. Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde represents Ramin and Rokni Haerizadeh and Hesam Rahmanian in Dubai and both their Alserkal space and their booth at Art Dubai have been given over to the artists to transform in previous years. This March, a rectangular table jutted out from the gallery's booth at Art Dubai. Covered with a hand-painted, spotted tablecloth, the table supported a dynamic, upright concertina display of a

dozen or so book jackets from an XL-sized coffee table book, the lush green baize from the cover cut up, with sections of it remaining in the centre. Each jacket was individually decorated with a heady mix of patterns, caricatures and question marks, with cast-off sections of sticky-back plastic

lying on the floor. This was the workbench of the three artists, transported from their villa, there to draw attention to an event launching *Her Majesty?* at the fair. Taschen Verlag produced the original book in 2012, to commemorate the Queen's Diamond Jubilee, and a fresh edition marks her 90th birthday. What the artists have done is meticulously intervene on every one of its 370 pages. Edition Patrick Frey has published a limited facsimile edition of 600, each with a unique, handmade cover. Page after page is a showcase of the artists' quirky brilliance; Daniel Baumann, director of the Kunsthalle Zürich has called it "a delirium of caustic wit, a cornucopia of waggish brainwaves and a grandiose masterpiece of draftsmanship and the art of collage".

Absurd depictions of animals, masks and totems, even the artists own faces, are imposed on top of images of the monarch and her family. There are less than subtle suggestions of terrorism and racism. Despite the obvious humour, this is a critique on the establishment, an obsessive study of a life lived in the public eye. It is as if they have rewritten history, or at least altered our perspective on it rather brilliantly. ■

