

Holding ^a Heart in Artifice

Abbas Zahedi

Nottingham
Contemporary

27 May – 3 September 2023

Abbas Zahedi works with people and places to help process difficult emotions and histories. In *Holding a Heart in Artifice* , Zahedi combines visual and sensory elements to create space for conversation and shared experience. Under his guidance, a gallery can function as an emotional utility into which we are all implicated.

Initially trained as a medic, Zahedi diverted his energies towards making art following a close bereavement. In this exhibition, he considers the parallels between the aesthetics of medical environments and contemporary art spaces – namely, the white sterility of both that he associates with sickness, dying and death. Following conversations with staff from the Extra Corporeal Membrane Oxygenation (ECMO) department at Glenfield Hospital in Leicester, Zahedi accentuates this parallel by placing loaned ECMO equipment in the gallery space. ECMO – a treatment that Zahedi has a personal connection to – is a life-support therapy that uses an artificial heart-lung machine to oxygenate a patient’s blood outside of their body. Whilst receiving this treatment the patient is in an in-between state, neither dead nor alive; they are reliant on the medical system surrounding them to survive. In *Holding a Heart in Artifice* , the machinery quietly hums, pumping moisture gathered from the gallery atmosphere through its system. The artificial heart sits visibly within the carcass of a wall built for a previous exhibition. Here, the machine alludes to another form of support; that of the visitor’s presence energising and stabilising an institution. Neither can function alone.

Around the perimeter of the gallery Zahedi has positioned a number of steel buttresses – heavy-duty equipment traditionally used in the construction of major building projects. Stretching from wall to floor, these industrial forms not only strengthen the gallery against external pressures, but conceptually function in a similar way to cardiac stents, which hold arteries open allowing blood to flow around the body. Here the buttresses hold the gallery open for a flow of communal moments; enabled by Zahedi through the programme of “How to Make” events that run throughout the exhibition.

Elsewhere, two artworks subtly reference Zahedi’s previous projects and conceptual interventions. A green “PRESS TO EXIT” button is modified to play a sound work. When pressed, visitors gain access to a non-visual space that offers an intimate moment of pause. Hung high from the gallery ceiling, a bronze cast of a work Zahedi made in 2017 for the Diaspora Pavilion at the Venice Biennial acts as a form of insurance. Should the building collapse, the work could be sold to rebuild the gallery space. In this way, it proposes another form of support: how traditional art forms have made space for conceptual forms to emerge.

Holding a Heart in Artifice encourages us to think about interdependence; how art, audiences, workers and artwork are all reliant on each other. By passing the palliative threshold of the gallery, visitors can connect to different realities and support systems, opening themselves up to cathartic and vulnerable conversation and understandings.

RELATED EVENTS

Exhibition Walkthroughs

Wednesday 31 May, 12pm

Welcome walkthrough

Explore the exhibition with our team and partners, and join us for refreshments and conversation in the café afterwards.

Wednesday 28 June, 2pm

With Linda Kemp, Research Fellow in the School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University.

Wednesday 12 July, 2pm

Curator’s walkthrough

Learn more about the exhibitions with Nicole Yip, Chief Curator and Niall Farrelly, Assistant Curator.

12.30pm every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, starting Tuesday 6 June

Join one of our friendly Gallery Assistants for a short exploration of one of our exhibitions. For more details visit our website.

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Artist Talk

Tuesday 30 May, 6.30–8pm

Abbas Zahedi in conversation with writer and curator Eva Wilson.

How To Make...

May–September 2023

Throughout the summer, join us for skill-sharing sessions that expand and reflect on themes within Zahedi’s exhibition such as community-building, grief, care, and emotional processing. Please see our website for more details.

Free Family Activities

Spring Half-Term: 30 May–1 June

Summer Holidays: 1–24 Aug

Explore the themes in the exhibitions through making and play.

For more details visit our website.

Abbas Zahedi: *Holding a Heart in Artifice* is commissioned by Nottingham Contemporary, and generously supported by the Henry Moore Foundation, and the Abbas Zahedi Exhibition Circle: Belmacz, Matthew Greenburgh, Yassaman Haj Mohammad Ali, Knotenpunkt, Kimiya Minoukadeh & those who wish to remain anonymous. With in-kind support from RMD Kwikform.

Exhibition graphics by Åbåke.

For more information about the exhibition, related events and learning programmes, visit nottinghamcontemporary.org or scan here:



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If you would like a calm space to reflect during your visit, please feel free to use Gallery 0 (room adjacent to Gallery 1), where you can also find support resources and tools. Please speak to a member of staff for more information.

Environmental: Nottingham Contemporary is committed to advancing sustainability within the organisation and aims to explore and embed sustainable working practices and habits within our workplace and across the sector. This includes standardising environmental considerations at all stages of decision making.

Most of the materials in *Holding a Heart in Artifice* have been borrowed, repurposed or reused. We have used electric vehicles for some of the artwork transport. This document is printed on FSC Mix paper (Forest Stewardship Council ® certified products manufactured with a variety of sources including FSC-certified virgin fibre, controlled wood and/or recycled materials). Please return to a member of staff or recycle should you not want to keep after your visit.

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