



How Are Artist-Parents Adapting to the Pandemic?

By Anuradha Vikram
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"How to Change" is a limited series for "Southland Sessions" exploring the most critical issues facing Southern California culture makers in this pivotal historical moment. Each column will explore a question posed to a range of artists and culture workers, and include recommendations to address these concerns from a practical, action-oriented perspective.

Parenting and Making Art?

For the seventh installment of "How to Change," I asked, "How are artists who are raising children adapting to the pandemic?"

For Los Angeles painter Amir H. Fallah, life before the pandemic was a challenge of balancing preschool drop-offs and pickups with his partner's work in the fashion industry and his own studio practice. When the closures occurred, Fallah's nanny initially did not feel safe working outside the home. "We kept paying her all the way to September," he confides, "more than half a year just paying out money for no services." This was a predicament they shared with many families whose caregivers were put at risk by the pandemic.

“How can I make something to leave behind for him, that would be some sort of entry into who his parents are, what their beliefs are, because everything that we teach him describes who we are.”

Amir H. Fallah, Los Angeles painter

For several months, Fallah and his partner would take turns structuring their work days around their son's care needs. "We would switch off, so let's say on Monday I would watch Julian 'til 1 p.m.," he explains, "and Jessica would work from the moment she woke up straight 'til [1 p.m.], and then she would watch him and I would go to the studio until 7 [p.m.] and then I would come back and then we have dinner, and pass out." They would alternate these half-days with full days where one parent would work until 4 p.m., and the other until nearly midnight. In September, their nanny was able to return, "so now it's kind of a normal schedule, except that we never have a break." With his partner working largely from home, Fallah found himself practicing art at the dining room table in a busy, full house.

Fallah paints in a studio in Alhambra, not far from his home in Highland Park. With limitations on the amount of time he could spend there, he began to make work on a small scale while spending time with his son. "He would do little drawings or color or do a craft project, and I brought some small works on paper," he describes. "It was nice because I felt like at least I was being productive." Fallah's 2020 exhibition at Shulamit Nazarian, "Remember My Child..." reflected the influence of parenting as a subject in his work. Fallah's paintings drew from his son's books and interests along with a range of other sources. "It actually ended up leading to a whole new body of work and a new way of working," he reveals. Fallah's recent large-scale paintings are run through with messages to his son: "How can I make something to leave behind for him, that would be some sort of entry into who his parents are, what their beliefs are, because everything that we teach him describes who we are." Compositionally, a work might include "a children's book about a puppy, but the puppy's gesture or pose might fit into this line of text that's dealing with our complacency about racism." Fallah has always addressed the complex formation of multicultural identities in his paintings, although rarely so personally.



1/5 A women on the side as a circular frame shows two hands — one white and one black — on the other side in "Remember My Child, No Place Is Safe" by Amir H. Fallah. | Courtesy of Amir H. Fallah and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles



2/5 A cheetah, a cowboy riding a two-headed horse and a man falling over as he holds a spherical earth is show in "Ruin of the Soul" by Amir H. Fallah. | Courtesy of Amir H. Fallah and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles



4/5 "They Will Smile to Your Face" depicts a man sitting by a cage with two birds inside. | Courtesy of Amir H. Fallah and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles



5/5 "No Gods No Masters" is a multi-layered artwork by Amir H. Fallah showing a flying rug with people on board, a man playing a wind instrument and a woman eating something. | Courtesy of Amir H. Fallah and Shulamit Nazarian, Los Angeles