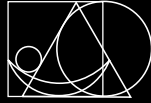


پیل ہر تاریکی

CURATED BY AMIRALI GHASEMI



DEVI ART
FOUNDATION

THE ELEPHANT IN THE DARK

January 25-May 30, 2012

Commissioned and Published by
Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, 2012

Assistant Curator

Reha Sodhi

Catalogue Design

Neelima Rao, Reha Sodhi

Light Design

Lyle Lopez

Printed at

Archana
www.archanapress.com

Printed on

Rendezvous Natural White

ISBN

978-81-921393-2-6

© 2012 Devi Art Foundation,
artists and authors

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photo copying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Participating Artists

Samira Abbassy . Iman Afsarian . AKSbazi
Shirin Aliabadi . Samira Alikhanzadeh
Afruz Amighi . Mojtaba Amini
Nazgol Ansarinia . Kamrooz Aram
Reza Aramesh . Mehraneh Atashi
Shoja Azari . Mahmoud Bakhshi
Gohar Dashti . Alireza Dayani . Ala Ebtekar
Shirin Fakhim . Golnaz Fathi
Parastou Forouhar . Shadi Ghadirian
Amirali Ghasemi . Bita Ghezelayagh
Barbad Golshiri . Amirali Golriz
Ramin Haerizadeh . Rokni Haerizadeh
Elham Doost Haghighi
Khosrow Hassanzadeh . Ghazaleh Hedayat
Peyman Hooshmandzadeh
Shirazeh Houshiary . Katayoun Karami
Shahram Karimi . Simin Keramati
Abbas Kowsari . Farideh Lashai
Amir Mobed . Masoumeh Mozaffari
Pendar Nabipour . Timo Nasser
Farah Ossouli . Leila Pazooki . Sara Rahbar
Mohsen Rastani . Shirin Sabahi
Hamed Sahihi . Zeinab Shahidi Marnani
Behnoush Sharifi . Jinoos Taghizadeh
Newsha Tavakolian . Sadegh Tirafkan
and Ali Zanjani

Contributors

Daria Kirsanova, Amirali Ghasemi

Devi Art Foundation extends its thanks to the following for assistance with photography: all artists, Aaran Art Gallery, Agastaya Thapa, Assar Art Gallery, Azad Art Gallery, Galerie Sfeir-Semler, Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eynde, Green Cardamom, Isak Berbic, Leila Heller Gallery, Mah Art Gallery, Reha Sodhi, Rose Issa Projects, Shovan Gandhi, Silk Road Gallery, The Third Line and Wikinson Gallery.

Some Hindus had brought an elephant for exhibition and placed it in a dark house. Crowds of people were going into that dark place to see the beast. Finding that ocular inspection was impossible, each visitor felt it with his palm in the darkness.

*The palm of one fell on the trunk.
'This creature is like a water-spout,' he said.*

The hand of another alighted on the elephant's ear. To him the beast was evidently like a fan.

*Another rubbed against its leg.
'I found the elephant's shape is like a pillar,' he said.*

*Another laid his hand on its back.
'Certainly this elephant was like a throne,' he said.*

*The sensual eye is just like the palm of the hand. The palm has not the means of covering the whole of the beast.
The eye of the Sea is one thing and the foam another. Let the foam go, and gaze with the eye of the Sea. Day and night foam-flecks are flung from the sea: amazing! You behold the foam but not the Sea. We are like boats dashing together; our eyes are darkened; yet we are in clear water.¹*



REVEALING THE ELEPHANT

The ancient story about the elephant in the dark room is teaching us of the impossibility to make an assessment of events and situations by only addressing one viewpoint. It is also saying that all the senses or sources available should be used to get the information that will help to draw a more objective conclusion. Following on this wise advice, the exhibition of Iranian contemporary art at Devi Art Foundation is giving a broad outlook on the main formal and conceptual lines that have developed in Iran in the last decade or so. Having Rumi's poetic tale as a point of departure, the show inevitably brings up multitude of similarities between Indian and Iranian cultures. Furthermore, it gives an opportunity to see how these cultural similitudes have developed in the contemporary context. Or, on the other hand, where they have grown apart.

The selection of works at Devi Art Foundation gives a unique opportunity to build a comprehensive narrative of either social or artistic transformations. This exhibition brings together artists from different generations; each one of them has their own set of concerns. However, one main story line is very prominent, it is reflected in the majority of the works shown here – an investigation into the new formal language of artistic expression.

The show is divided into three main sections, each section has a theme around which the works are placed in a position of a possible dialogue. Three main areas of curatorial inquiry are the following: in *Departure from Form* the traditional form is re-contextualized and used for contemporary critical expressions. Here the works by Timo Nasser, Nazgol Ansarinia, Shirazeh Houshiary and others are exploring traditional Iranian visual territory through the language of minimalism. The other group of works in *Reflections of a Complex Society* raise troublesome questions of the relationship between sexes and gender in Iran. It would be superficial to call the works by Shadi Ghadirian, Katayoun Karami or Shirin Fakhim feminist. Yes, there is a denouncement of the censorship and of the restricted position of women. Yet the objectives of Iranian women are different. They don't compete with men; they demand their own place, their position as women, and their right to fully express the female side of their being.

The final, and probably the most engaging group of works, is in *The Politicized Scenery*, the one that directly responds to the political situation in Iran, the Middle East and even wider, to the international community. Artistic expression is one of the few possibilities to be outspoken about one's preoccupations, especially concerning politics, and the artists in Iran are using this channel of communication to its full. Series of rather powerful statements are to be found throughout the exhibition. In fact the works that reference politics are a train of thought that runs throughout the show forming unexpected dialogues between works that are not necessarily physically positioned next to each other. There is a very articulated group of works in Gallery 3 that speaks about Iran and exposes the country's political discontent. However, other artists such as Leila Pazooki, Pendar Nabipour, Mojtaba Amini, Amir Mobed, Nazgol Ansarinia are without doubt strongly affected by the political situation in their home Country and this reflects in their work. The exhibition is rich with the conceptual narratives intertwined and articulated in the artworks. The unfolding of these narratives is what makes the journey of discovery of Iranian contemporary art so exciting. In one of his main theoretical texts, *Aesthetic Theory*, Theodor Adorno describes articulation as the main quality of an artwork: "It is not possible to conceive the rank or quality of an artwork apart from its degree of articulation. In general artworks are more valuable [conceptually]² in direct relation to how articulated they are. Articulation is the redemption of the many in the one."³

Despite the division of the show into main topics not only conceptually but also spatially, it is not as simple as it appears on the surface. One of the main characteristics of Iranian art, and it is probably rooted in the traditional Persian poetry, is the multiplicity of the layers of meaning that can be found in the artworks. In some ways, almost every single work in the

2. Author's comment

3. Adorno, T. W (2004). *Aesthetic theory*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group p. 250

exhibition is addressing all of the three main curatorial questions. The immense heritage of poetic tradition in Iran has had a strong influence on almost every Iranian artist. Some of them are preoccupied with the idea of creating a bridge between contemporary realities of modern society and the mythological tradition. Zeinab Shahidi, a conceptual artist whose practices include situationist and text based video installations, seems to have found a formal solution to this problem in her sculpture *Gofta* (2008). The grid structure of the work contains four verses from a poem by Hafez executed in the *Square kufi* script of the traditional calligraphy. The trick is – the verses are only legible from a certain visual angle and only one at a time. Therefore, the viewer has to move around the sculpture in order to be able to read the text. This clever formal structure of the work neatly merges together such different things as: traditional calligraphy and poetry alongside the minimalist formal solution and the concept of an interactive artwork which the viewer brings to completion.

This essay has an uneasy task to analyze in depth some of the conceptual connections within the works shown in this vast survey. It should naturally begin with two sculptures in Gallery 1, one is *Untitled III* (2009), by Nazgol Ansarinia and the other *Poppy Garden* (2007-2009) by Afruz Amighi that might look similar at first glance. Both artworks find their reference points in the traditional patterns of the Persian rug. Despite the same formal source the message contained in each work is very different. Nazgol, who grew up in Tehran, has been using traditional ornaments of Persian rugs in her work in order to draw attention to everyday life in Iran. Her practice is strongly preoccupied with statistics of the quotidian and small changes that happen in Iran everyday which largely pass unnoticed. Her *Untitled III* is the third work in a series of large drawings that observes life in Tehran and the routine events of city life. It is probably the most complex one with a prominent narrative interwoven into the traditional floral ornaments. On the other hand, Afruz Amighi who is born in Iran, but is currently based in the USA sees the Persian rug as a nostalgic romanticized object, a memorabilia of her Country of birth. Even though nostalgia of her homeland has significant input on her art, the conceptual essence of Afruz's work is informed by a perception of Iran which is strongly influenced by the Western media. It is critical of the Iranian political regime and the implications it may have had on the society. The romantic floral patterns turned into poppy flowers sprouting hypodermic needles as stamen, is a critique of the alarming drug abuse in Iran arguably triggered by the lack of freedom. The sculpture itself is made out of a material used by the UN for the refugee tents suggesting the critique of militarization of the country. These two different viewpoints, one from inside Iran and another from outside, somehow represent the tensions and lapses of understanding in the area of international politics. Similarly, they convey two very different narratives using the same visual language.

Reflections on, and a critique of the complexities, that to a certain degree shaped Iranian society is the main subject of the next group of works. Shirin Sabahi is interested in the city as a living, constantly changing system. In her practice she explores the transformation of an urban landscape in Tehran over periods of time. In fact, a building under construction is one of the main protagonists of *The Sleepers and the Walkers* (2011). The building is a backdrop, a sort of physical representation of a timeline in front of which the events take place. Here Shirin draws attention to a social phenomenon that is currently strongly affecting the country – a so-called 'brain drain', where talented youth is leaving Iran in search of a better life elsewhere. The work is dated (2005-2009) and over this period of time five of the six people pictured on the first slide of the sequence have gone abroad. Looking back at Iran from abroad, American born Ala Ebtekar records his impression of his parents' native place. Using the method of laying drawings over each other Ala captures the dual essence of society. In his series of drawings *The Absent Arrival* (2006) ordinary young men are shown hiding within either a soldier or a Persian mythical hero. On the one hand these works glorify that hint of a mythological heroism that is a part of the Iranian identity. From another perspective, it is, however, a critique of the military spirit, of a war all-pervading in society whether it is mourning for the past or fear for the future. In order to explore the

character of a mythical Persian hero, Mehraneh Atashi went to Zurkhaneh – a house of strength. It is a traditional male gymnasium exclusive to Iran, a place where men develop bodily strength as well as high spiritual values. Women are traditionally banned from Zurkhaneh and in her *Bodiless Series* (2004) Mehraneh is absent. It is only her reflection in a mirror that is present in this magical world of real men aspiring to become Iran's new Rostam. Jacques Lacan claimed a mirror to be deceitful in self-identification, creating distortions and misconceptions. However, in this series of works Mehraneh uses the deception of the gaze to her advantage and enters the prohibited world to leave her mark on it.

The artistic production in Iran has been booming since the mid 1990s, as the country started recovering from the eight-year war with Iraq so did the art world. Iranian contemporary art moved beyond the borders of its native country, raising alongside the worldwide recognition, the problem of the positioning of this art within the International discourse. Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*, was one of the first academics to raise the question of misinterpretation of the art coming from non-European countries. The issues discussed in Said's text are still very relevant. There are numerous clichés, largely created by the media to fit certain political agenda. Unfortunately, the interpretation and categorization of the art works has also been affected by this agenda. Often works that contained specific iconography are cherry picked to project an impression of the society that fits neatly into the media influenced set of misconceptions. Some of the works in this show have suffered from this so-called *neo-Orientalist* approach in curating: Shadi Ghadirian series *West by East* (2008), Shirin Fakhim sculptures *Tehran Prostitutes* (2008), photographs by Abbas Koswari *Women Police Academy* (2006) and Shrin Aliabadi *Miss Hybrid 6*, (2008) and Amir Mobed *Virginity* (2005). Each work from this group has its critical message but the reading of these works constantly stumbles upon the gender question and notion of female oppression. Even though, for example, Amir Mobed's installation and Shirin Aliabadi's work are more preoccupied with the critique of the growing consumerism and materialism in the society rather than the position of women in Iran. When placed within this context, highly lyrical photographs by Mohsen Rastani, who was one of the artists to represent Iran at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011, change their subjectivity. From paying homage to the sacrifice of the war heroes they turn into yet another metaphorical brush stroke on the canvas where Iran is painted as a military state with oppressed women and overwhelming censorship.

Politics, however, is omnipresent in Iranian society. It is part of day-to-day life and the authorities make sure people don't forget it. Clearly, the artistic community in Iran is strongly involved in the interpretation and reappraisal of the political situation in the country. The generation of artists currently most active in Iran is predominantly young, mainly in their late 20s and early 30s. They grew up in a situation of radicalized cultural distortion and alienation from the ideals of the Islamic revolution, not to mention the Iran-Iraq war. Their socio-political condition shaped a distinctive and fierce feeling of discontent, translated into groundbreaking artistic language. Jacques Rancière described his idea of the social engagement in art as: "*Critical art is an art that aims to produce a new perception of the world, and therefore to create a commitment to its transformation.*"⁴

The works in the exhibition that carry this highly charged subjectivity and address various political issues and problematics are assembled together in Gallery 3. One of the strong points of critique highlighted through display of the works is the complexity of modern Iranian political history. The works brought together in this tongue-in-cheek arrangement are suggesting a kind of wicked game played between the people and the ruling classes of Iran. They tell the story of the resistance and oppression strongly present in the Iranian internal politics since the end of the Iran – Iraq war. Three artworks by Nazgol Ansarinia, Mojtaba Amini and Ghazaleh Hedayat displayed on three tables in the centre of the gallery space reference an old game 'rock – paper – scissors'. Here Mojtaba Amini's *Tehran 88* (2009), is a chronicle of the protests that took place in summer 2009, inscribed in history as the Green Movement (Revolution). Mojtaba has approached the issue of documentation

4. Ranciere, J. (2010) *Dissensus, on politics and aesthetics*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group. p.142

from a rather detached position. He simply collected the stones thrown by either of the sides during the protests, put the name of the place where they were found and dated them. In this archive, Mojtaba did not take sides or show his personal standpoint. He was collecting artifacts in order to record the events, in order to objectify history, to give it materiality. In the game, paper beats rock. Another work by Ghazaleh Hedayat *Forgotten Days "Gone" Series*, (2004), gives this narrative a new, historic dimension. In her oeuvre Ghazaleh successfully combines the complexity of the references and their meaning with very simple formal solutions.

Forgotten Days "Gone" Series is a reprint of the text from Iranian newspapers, published between 1988 and 1998 on plain white tissues. During this decade a number of intellectual, opposition leaders, writers and journalists died under mysterious circumstances. This series of suspicious deaths has become known as 'Chain Murders of Iran'. Although there was an official trial of the perpetrator of these killings, neither human rights commissions, nor the relatives of the victims found it satisfactory. Some members of the public still support the unofficial version of events – that the killings were undertaken to prevent tilt to the more liberal and open line in politics in post-war Iran. The reference to the newspapers in this conceptual curatorial plot is among other things a signifier for 'paper'.

The tension created by the two above described works tells the story of the dissensual political climate inside the country. Lastly, the third artwork that carries the meaning of an 'invisible scissor' in the curatorial game, puts Iran and its perception into wider perspective within international relations. A reference here is more to cutting than to scissors, and in this case relates more to the way in which the work was produced. In her *NSS Book Series* (2009) Nazgol Ansarinia uses her method of decomposition of the existing social systems of interaction to unveil hidden faults and messages that they contain. She rearranges the contents of the post 9/11 US security policy document into alphabetized lexicon and breaks syntactical relationship. It allows a new meaning to emerge; suddenly the limited vocabulary of the document comes to prominence, constant repetitions of the same words lay bare its emphases. The work is presented as four books with a different arrangement of the visual elements of the US presidential seal on the covers. The visitors are invited to flip through the pages of the books and to cast their own opinion about the source document.

The juxtaposition of Reza Aramesh's large-scale photographs and Mahmoud Bakhshi's sculpture is one of the vivid examples of a dialogue formed in the exhibition space between the works that create conceptual tension between them, which ultimately might alter how these works are interpreted. Reza Aramesh picks up on the theme of evaluation of the US international policies in his *Action 62* and *Action 72*. Both works show restaged photographs of the military atrocities of the Korean War, where protagonists are places in the luxurious neo-classical interiors filled with old masters; most probably museums. Although in his practice Reza is more interested in re-contextualization of the figure of a hostage, military prisoner or a victim of terrorism and even a terrorist. By extracting the characters from reportage photographs of the zones of conflicts and transporting them into museum interiors the artist creates a visual rupture. When taken out of their context and placed in a traditional museum these figures come across as a group of people participating in an odd performance. However, even though the connection here is quite subtle once the viewer encounters Mahmoud Bakhshi's sculpture *Mother of Nation* (2008-2009) with its pronounced criticism of the so called 'oil capitalism' that widens the gap between rich and poor, sustains totalitarian regimes and provokes armed conflicts. At the point of collision between two critical messages Reza's photographs assume new significance. Once again, the US international politics and the questionable reasons for the invasion of Iraq in 2003 come to mind.

The importance of a historical moment to art has been discussed extensively in theoretical writings. Mentioned previously Theodor Adorno has determined it as: "*The historical moment is constitutive of artworks; authentic works are those that surrender themselves to*

*the historical substance of their age... They are the self-unconscious historiography of their epoch...*⁵ In the recent Iranian history the demonstration against the election results in summer 2009 was one of the latest formative historical moments that has shaped not only the artistic practice, but also has given a new direction to social trajectories. The so-called Green Revolution has had a significant impact upon the artists' works and upon the interpretation the artworks received after the events. In this show the importance of these events, and the tragedy in which they concluded, is acknowledged through the number of works spread across different exhibition spaces including Masoumeh Mozaffari *Heat Stroke* (2011); Mahmoud Bakhshi *Bahman Cinema* (2010); Leila Pazooki *Pixel Diary* (2009-2010) and previously discussed work by Mojtaba Amini *Tehran 88* (2009). The most direct of all these works is perhaps Leila Pazooki's *Pixel Diary*. It is reportage from the demonstrations on the streets of Tehran. Leila uses low resolution, relatively small images of the protests, the very ones that inundated Internet at the time, to create her large-scale digital prints. The difference between the actual source image file size and the size of the print could be read as a juxtaposition of how little was said and known to the outside world about the events in relation to the importance of what was happening to the future of Iran; and as we have witnessed since February 2010, to the future of the entire region.

The protests of the Green Revolution were brutally suppressed by the authorities, after months of hope and expectations people had to abandon the streets and accept their defeat. According to those who were in Tehran after the protests were over, a feeling of disappointment, fear and helplessness was almost tangible in the city air. Eventually, the artistic community responded to what had happened - first by public mourning for the loss, then, a series of exhibitions, performances and happenings that in one way or the other were conceptualizing and reassessing the events. At the end of Gallery 2 one work strikes the attention due to its unusual formal qualities. Upon further scrutiny its clever interpretation of the traditional Persian proverb, makes one think again and maybe smile. The sculpture by Pendar Nabipour entitled *Water will not even slide over water*, is an example of strange objectification of a metaphorical expression. The original proverb, which is the title of the work, is usually used to state a situation which is unstable but silent and in which nothing happens. In this case, however, the situation referred to in the work is clear – a model of Azadi Tower surrounded by numerous figures of people is an obvious connotation of the 2009 protests, great hopes for change that resulted in profound disappointment. Yet the formal solution of the work is rather curious. The actual sculpture is placed in a tank half filled with water that covers the tower up to about two thirds. Because of the optical illusion created by the water surface the remaining top part of the tower seems to have shifted, or more precisely slid above the water. This unexpected contradiction with the title, all of a sudden, turns the sculpture into a sarcastic charade and gives a sparkle of hope for the future. Despite the fatalism of the proverb and the political circumstances the curiosity of the artistic inquiry will, without doubt, produce new modes of expression and take Iranian contemporary art further to new aesthetic solutions.

Daria Kirsanova

Bibliography:

- Adorno, T. W (2004). *Aesthetic theory*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group
Bowie, M. (1991) *Lacan*. London: Fontana Press
Ranciere, J. (2010) *Dissensus*, on politics and aesthetics. London: Continuum International Publishing Group
Rumi J. translated by Arberry A. J. (2002) *Tales from Masnavi*. London: Routledge
Said, E.W, *Orientalism* (2003) 3rd ed. London: Penguin Books



ABBAS KOWSARI

Abbas Kowsari was born in Tehran, Iran in 1970. He currently works as the senior photo editor for *Shargh* newspaper in Tehran, Iran.

Kowsari started his career as a photo journalist in 1994 with the Tehran Times Daily and then later worked for many Iranian newspapers, most of which have now been banned. His photographs have been published in *The New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, *Paris Match*, *Der Spiegel* and many other international publications.

He has participated in group shows since 2002, of which his recent ones are *A Positive View*, Somerset House, London, UK; *Iran Diverso: Black or White*, Verso Artecontemporanea, Torino, Italy; *The Promise of Loss: A Contemporary Index of Iran*, Arario Gallery, New York, USA and *Iran 1979-2009: Between Hope and Chaos*, 30 Years of Iranian Documentary Photography, Monnaie de Paris, Paris, France.

AFRUZ AMIGHI

Afruz Amighi was born in Iran in 1974. She now lives and works in the USA where she received her MFA from New York University in 2007. She is the recipient of the inaugural Jameel Prize awarded by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, a new international award for contemporary art and design inspired by Islamic tradition.

Her designs mine the rich Islamic visual culture of her native land for her subject matter. There are references to the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and to foreign interventions in the Middle East.

Amighi has had solo exhibitions at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai and Nicelle Beauchene Gallery, New York in 2010.

AKSbazi.com

AKSbazi.com was established in 2009 as a digital installation. An empty digital space was created and photographers of all levels were encouraged to enter the site by submitting a photograph to one of its many games which are in fact galleries with specific Iranian themes.

The purpose of this exercise was to challenge and reconstruct the established and distorted image of Iran that has been steeped in political propaganda since the Iranian revolution, with the help of its own people. The digital space of AKSbazi.com did not require photographic prowess, or technical brilliance; it just wanted images of Iran from all kinds of different angles and eyes.

Like many art projects, what was originally planned and anticipated was accompanied by so much more once the project took off. Not only has AKSbazi.com become a space where Iranians can define their own image away from political stereotypes, it has also become an invaluable archive of life in Iran through the lens of its citizenry.

ALA EBTEKAR

Ala Ebtekar was born in Berkeley, California, to Iranian parents. He completed his MFA at Stanford University in 2006. As with many Iranian exiles, he too feels torn between countries, but has found intriguing ways of combining the two different countries.

His work has been exhibited internationally including: *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now*, a touring exhibition originating at the Asia Society, New York, USA; *2006 California Biennial*, Orange County Museum of Art; *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1989*, ZKM Museum for Contemporary Art, Germany.

He is currently a visiting lecturer at Stanford University, and lives and works in San Francisco.

ALI ZANJANI

Ali Zanjani was born in Isfahan, Iran in 1986. He currently lives in Iran where he works as an independent photographer.

Zanjani finished his academic education in graphics and rug design, and simultaneously took photography classes. Since 2007, he has had three solo exhibitions: *Nature, from the Choral Singing Series and Counting the Days*. His work has also been featured in *Re Assemblage, Obligatory Military Service, Portrait 13x18* and the *11th National Photo Biennial* in Tehran in 2008.

ALIREZA DAYANI

Alireza Dayani was born in Tehran, Iran in 1982 and went on to study psychology.

He has exhibited at several of Tehran's leading galleries including Mah Gallery, Golestan Gallery, Emam Ali Museum, Arya Gallery and Dey Gallery.

AMIR MOBED

Amir Mobed was born in Tehran, Iran in 1974. He studied fine arts at Tehran's Azad University of Art and Architecture from 1995 to 2001. Soon after graduation he won the third prize at the Tehran Sculpture Biennial.

Mobed works with various forms including sculpture, photography, installations, performance art and videos. Through these he seeks new definitions of volume and space, time and vision.

Quite often he uses materials such as plaster, mirrors, candles, apples, flowers, human hair and his own body.

Mobed has participated in various solo and group shows, out of which the important ones in Iran include: *Tehran's Second and Third New Media Exhibitions* (2003, 2004); *Tehran Biennial of Sculpture* (1997, 1999, 2001); *Spiritual Look and Iranian Garden* at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (2003, 2004).

AMIRALI GHASEMI

Amirali Ghasemi was born in Iran in 1980. Ghasemi is a curator, media artist and a graphic designer. He graduated in 2004 with a BA in graphic design from Central Tehran Azad University, with an emphasis on research in digital art history. In 1998, Ghasemi founded *Parkingallery*, an independent project space in Tehran and in 2002 he set up *Parkingallery.com*, an online platform for young Iranian artists.

Ghasemi has shown his photographs, videos, design works in various festivals and exhibitions internationally. As a curator he has been directing many exhibitions, workshops, and talks for *Parkingallery projects*, such as *Deep Depression* (2004-06), *Sideways* (2008). He has co-curated *The Urban Jealousy, 1st International Roaming Biennial of Tehran* (2008-09) and three editions of *Limited Access Festival for Video and Performance* (2007-11), followed by his involvement in a variety of projects for institutions, project spaces and universities in Germany, Netherlands, Serbia, UK, Egypt, Turkey, United States, Brazil and India.

He is currently working with photography, video, installation and interactive projects, besides writing on the Tehran arts scene and contemporary Iranian art for various magazines and on his own art-log. *IRAN&CO* is his latest curatorial project, an ongoing exhibition and archive of Iranian art representation beyond its border.

AMIRALI GOLRIZ

Amirali Golriz was born in Tehran, Iran in 1975. He is an artist, poet and writer.

Golriz graduated in Italian literature from Azad University, Tehran. He has shown his work in 11 solo exhibitions in Karimkhan-e-Zand Gallery (1995-1999) and 7 in Samar Gallery, Tehran (2002-2011).

He has published 4 poetry books and has been collaborating with various Iranian art and literary magazines as an illustrator, writer and translator.

BARBAD GOLSHIRI

Barbad Golshiri was born in Tehran, Iran in 1982. He has worked both as an artist and a socio-political critic of art. His medium varies from video, installation, photography, documented performance to bande dessinée and critical writing. He is also translator and editor of Samuel Beckett's dramatic works into Persian. Most of his works are language-based and contend with art and literature's plane of the feasible; the impossibility of quitting the possible field of expression; aporia of expressing not to express. Golshiri has also been portrayed as a critic of the current socio-political situation in Iran, hegemony of the new art market of the region and the living doxas.

Some of his participations include: *Cura, The Rise and Fall of Aplasticism*, 4th Moscow Biennial, Solyanka State Gallery, Moscow; *And I Regurgitate and I Gulp it Down*, Aaran Art Gallery, Tehran; *The Language Show*, Vivid, Birmingham; *Nothing is Left to Tell*, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York; *Iran: New Voices*, Barbican Centre, London; *Medium Religion*, ZKM, Karlsruhe; *Unveiled; New Art from the Middle East*, Saatchi Gallery, London; *Masturpiece(s)*, Access Artist Run Center, Vancouver; *Camera Ardens, A Performance With the Blind and Those Who See*, Bétonsalon, Paris; *The First Contemporary Art Biennial of Thessaloniki*, Archeological Museum of Thessaloniki, Greece.

BEHNOUSH SHARIFI

Behnoush Sharifi was born in Tehran, Iran in 1984. She graduated with a BA in painting from Sooreh Institute of Arts, Tehran in 2009. Sharifi held her first solo show in Homa Art Gallery, Tehran in 2010. Her paintings have been shown in various group exhibitions in Iran since 2008, some being *The Kitchen*, Mohsen Art Gallery, Tehran (2010); *Self Portraits*, Azad Art Gallery, Tehran (2009) and *The First Sooreh University Student Expo*, Tehran. She was shortlisted for the fourth edition of *New Generation* at Melat Pardis, Tehran in 2009.

BITA GHEZELAYAGH

Bitá Ghezelayagh was born in Florence, Italy in 1966 and moved to Tehran, Iran in 1968. She now lives and works between London and Tehran.

In 1984, at the height of the Iran-Iraq war, she went to Paris to study architecture at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris La Villette, where she received her MA. She returned to Tehran in 1994 and started work in building restoration for the *Association of Iranian Calligraphers* in Tehran ("Anjomane Khoshnevisan"). Ghezelayagh was also the art director of three notable Iranian films, including *The Pear Tree* ("Derakhte Golabi") by Dariush Mehrjui.

In 2003 she started studying the traditional Iranian craft of felt-making and had her first solo exhibition at the House of Artists ("Khane Honarmandan") in Tehran in 2008.

Her first international solo exhibition, *Felt Memories*, Rose Issa Projects, London (2009); followed by the UK touring solo exhibition, *Namad: A Persian Journey in Felt*, The Collins Gallery, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow; Quilt Museum, York; and Hawick Museum, Roxburghshire, Scotland (2009-2010). In 2009 she exhibited at the Golestan Gallery in Tehran, and in January 2011 at the Albahreah Gallery in Bahrain.

ELHAM DOOST HAGHIGHI

Elham Doost Haghighi in 1998 joined the University of Graphic Design. After a short time she found animation more interesting than graphic design. From then onwards animation became her main focus, while she continued to learn photography, painting, drawing and graphic design. She now specializes in paint on glass technique and 3d character animation.

FARAH OSSOULI

Farah Ossouli was born in Zanjan, Iran in 1953 . She graduated from the Tehran High School of Fine Arts and received her BA from the Department of Fine Arts Tehran University, Iran.

The cultural isolation that followed the 1979 Iranian revolution forced many artists who remained in the country to re-examine their identity. It propelled Ossouli to pioneer new avenues for the outmoded genre of miniature paintings, which was one of the genres she had studied for three years in art school. A decade later, she found a way to incorporate traditional elements of miniature paintings into an authentic, personal and contemporary artistic expression.

Besides being an artist, Ossouli has curated exhibitions in Iran and abroad, and has served as the Director of Painting Biennial 2003 in Tehran. She is a frequent juror in committees of contemporary artists in Iran and advises students writing dissertations on contemporary art. Ossouli's works have been shown in six solo and more than a hundred group exhibitions in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia.

FARIDEH LASHAI

Farideh Lashai was born in Rasht, Iran, and has been painting since the late 1960s. Following her graduation from high school, she left for Germany, where she took a translation course in Munich. Later she went to Vienna to study decorative arts.

Throughout her distinguished career spanning over five decades, Farideh Lashai has always juggled with varying means of expression, without recognizing any frontiers. Perhaps lyricism is the connecting line, whether it is painting, writing, sculpture, installation or a combination of animation and painting. Fascinated by cinema, today she is a storyteller, through animated characters set against the background of her paintings.

GHAZALEH HEDAYAT

Ghazaleh Hedayat was born in Tehran, Iran in 1979. She received her BFA in photography from Azad University, Tehran in 2002. She also received her MFA in new genres from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2005. Hedayat has been involved in different fields such as photography, video and installation. She is very concerned about visualizing 'silence' through other human senses. Hedayat has been showing her works in Iran and abroad. She has co-curated two shows in San Francisco. She has also participated in residencies and has been the recipient of several scholarships and awards.

GOHAR DASHTI

Gohar Dashti received her MA in photography from the Fine Art University, Tehran in 2005. She concerns herself with social issues with particular references to history and culture in modern society.

Dashti creates artworks using different media such as photography and video. She has participated in several art residencies and scholarships such as *DAAD award* (2009-2011); *1mile2 project*, Visiting Arts, Bradford-London, UK (2009) and *Art Bridge*, International Arts and Artists, Washington DC, USA (2008).

Her work has been exhibited in various festivals and biennales and is in the collection of Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (USA) and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City (USA).

GOLNAZ FATHI

Golnaz Fathi was born in 1972, into a professional middle class Iranian family and was educated at a boarding school near New York. Returning to Iran, she studied for a degree in Graphics at Azad University, Tehran and then in 1996 did a diploma in calligraphy at the Iranian Society of Calligraphy.

A trained calligrapher, Fathi has turned the literary art form on its head by skilfully transforming known language into form and composition.

In 1995, she was the first woman to win an award for *Ketabat* (a genre of calligraphy) at the Iranian Society of Calligraphy, Tehran, Iran. Some of her solo exhibitions include, *Liminal-Subliminal*, October Gallery, London, UK (2010); *Controlled Chaos*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2010); *Doha Series*, The Third Line, Doha, Qatar (2009) and *Beyond Words*, La Fontaine Centre of Contemporary Art, Bahrain (2007).

HAMED SAHIHI

Hamed Sahihi was born in Tehran, Iran in 1980. He did his MA in painting from the Art University, Tehran. He has since then enjoyed considerable success in Iran, with several solo shows in Tehran and participation in over twenty group exhibitions.

Having made several short films and animations, Sahihi enjoys success as a filmmaker. His films have been shown internationally.

IMAN AFSARIAN

After completing his BA and MA, Iman Afsarian had five solo exhibitions at the Aria Art Gallery and Haft Samar Art Gallery in Tehran. Further afield, Afsarian's work has been exhibited at the Moscow Artist's House in Russia (2005) and at the Mousonturm Cultural Center in Frankfurt, Germany.

Two years ago, Afsarian was invited by the Iran Heritage Foundation to participate in an exhibition of contemporary Iranian art entitled *Broken Promises, Forbidden Dreams* in London.

JINOOS TAGHIZADEH

Jinoos Taghizadeh was born in Tehran, Iran in 1971. In 1988 she did a diploma in graphics from Azadegan High School, Tehran. Before doing her BA in sculpture from the University of Tehran, College of Fine Arts, she also did a diploma in pottery and dramatic literature.

Taghizadeh's work has been widely shown. Some of her solo exhibitions include, *Rock, Paper, Scissors*, Aaran Art Gallery, Tehran (2009); *Kunsthof Self-Portrait*, Kunsthof, Zurich (2006); *Messages*, Azad Art Gallery, Tehran (2006); *Abu Reyhan Self-portraits*, Aria Gallery, Tehran (2004) and *Frough Farokhzad*, Streets of Tehran, Iran.

KAMROOZ ARAM

Kamrooz Aram was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1978, just a year before the Islamic Revolution. His family moved to the USA when he was eight years old, where he trained as an artist. He studied at the Maryland Institute in Baltimore and then at Columbia University in New York. The artist lives and works in Brooklyn, USA.

His work explores themes relating to the systems of belief, including nationalist, religious and artistic ideologies. Aram's work uses iconography as well as abstraction to present the viewer with imagery that challenges their ways of seeing social, cultural and political issues of today.

His solo exhibitions include *Negotiations*, Perry Rubenstein Galley, New York, USA (2011); *Of Flame and Splendour*, Perry Rubenstein Gallery, New York, USA (2009); *Night Visions and Revolutionary Dreams*, Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery, New York, USA (2007); *Lightning, Thunder, Brimstone and Fire*, Wilkinson Gallery, London, UK (2006) and *Beyond the Borders, Between the Trees*, Oliver Kamm/5BE Gallery, New York, USA (2004).

KATAYOUN KARAMI

Katayoun Karami was born in Tehran, Iran in 1967. She studied at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey. Since 2002 she has exhibited her work in a number of Tehran galleries as well as outside of Iran. For Karami, photography is a tool with which she can explore issues of culture, identity and perception in a simple straightforward way.

KHOSROW HASSANZADEH

Khosrow Hassanzadeh was born in Tehran, Iran in 1963, into a traditional family of fruit sellers. After serving in the Iran-Iraq war in 1979, he studied painting at the Mojtama-e-Honar University and Persian Literature at Azad University. He works as an actor and visual artist. The artist lives and works between Tehran and London.

Hassanzadeh first gained international recognition with *War* (1998), a grim and trenchant diary of his own experiences as a volunteer soldier during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988). In *Ashura* (2000) a 'women-friendly' interpretation of the most revered Shiite religious ceremony, he depicted chador-clad women engulfed by religious iconography. *Chador* (2001) and *Prostitutes* (2002) continued his exploration of sociological themes particular to Iran's hyper-gendered urban landscape. The latter paintings used police mug shots to pay tribute to sixteen prostitutes killed by a serial killer in Mashhad, a religious capital of Iran.

Khosrow Hassanzadeh has had solo shows in Amsterdam, Beirut, Dubai, London, Phnom Penh, and Tehran. It was his solo exhibition at Diorama Arts in London in 1999, which first introduced his work to public institutions. His work is now in the collection of The British Museum, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, World Bank and the Tropenmuseum in the Netherlands.

LEILA PAZOOKI

Leila Pazooki was born in Tehran, Iran in 1977. She studied painting at the Art Academy in Tehran. After moving to Germany, she studied Media Art at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and completed her MA in Context at the Berlin University of Arts in 2009.

Pazooki's work explores the aesthetics of context. She explores the creative force within certain moral, religious or ideological frameworks and the means by which people transcend the boundaries marked by these structures. She also uncovers the nature of this transcendence and how the magnitude of this is so often entrenched in the context of where a person lives or where they are from. There is often something confrontational in her encounters as she documents the complexities of place.

Her work has been exhibited internationally, with solo shows in Dubai, Mexico City and Tehran.

Pazooki has participated in a number of group shows in Berlin, London, New York and Guangzhou, China, along with the touring exhibition *Persian Vision* that moved throughout the USA in 2007. Also in 2007, the artist conceived and realised an interdisciplinary project entitled *I'm Longing and I Don't Know for What* which brought together seventeen artists from Berlin and Iran and dealt extensively with the exchange of art between East and West.

MAHMOUD BAKHSHI

Mahmoud Bakhshi was born in Tehran, Iran in 1977. The main inspiration for Bakhshi's works comes from political and social issues. He attempts to propose direct answers to the situations he observes in Iran by looking for connections with the historical past of his Country. Having grown up after the Revolution and during the Iran-Iraq war period, Mahmoud says that he finds it difficult to create artworks disconnected from his own personal surroundings.

Bakhshi received a Diploma in Graphics and a BA from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran. He was the winner of the Magic of Persia Contemporary Art Prize (MOPCAP), with an exhibition of work at the Royal College of Art, London in September 2009. His solo exhibitions include *Namayeshgah-e-Enferadi*, Ave Gallery, Tehran and *Mahmoud's Driving School*, Tehran Gallery, Tehran.

MASOUMEH MOZAFFARI

Masoumeh Mozaffari was born in Tehran, Iran in 1958. She did a BA and MA in arts from the Faculty of Art and Architecture at the Azad University.

She has taught in many colleges and is also a member of the Society of Iranian Painters and *Dena* (Iranian Women Artists Group).

Mozaffari has participated in more than fifty exhibitions. She has had solo shows at Azad Art Gallery (2011, 2010); Mah-e-Mehr Gallery (2010); Momayyez Gallery (2004) and Arya Art Gallery (2001, 1999).

MEHRANEH ATASHI

Mehraneh Atashi was born in Tehran, Iran in 1980. She studied photography at Tehran University.

Atashi has exhibited her work in Tehran and internationally. Some exhibitions include: *Metropolis - City Life in the Urban Age*, Noorderlitch Photo Festival, Groningen (2011), *Die iranische weltanschauung*, Freies Museum, Berlin (2011), *Disturbing the Public Opinion*, Roda sten, Goteborg, Sweden (2011); *Right Here, Right Now*, International Format Festival, Derby Museum, UK (2011); *Bizmar (Fearland)*, Azad Art Gallery, Tehran (2010); *Inside Tehran Out*, Forum Schlossplatz, Aarau Switzerland (2009).

MOHSEN RASTANI

Mohsen Rastani was born in Abadan, South Iran in 1958. He graduated in photography from Faculty of Fine Arts, Tehran University in 1987 and then started his career as a photo journalist covering the Iran-Iraq war from 1980-86, the civil war in Lebanon from 1980-90 and the war in Bosnia from 1994-96.

Rastani lectured on photography at the Tehran and Azad University from 1989 to 1990. He served as the photo editor of the monthly photography magazine *Tassvir* and the newspaper *Sobh e-Emrooz*; and co-founded the Iranian Association of Photo-journalists in 1998. He is also a director of photography for Iranian documentary films.

MOJTABA AMINI

Mojtaba Amini was born in Sabzevar, Iran in 1979. He received his diploma in graphic design from Kamal-ol-Molk School of Arts and he graduated with a BA in Painting from the Art Faculty of Tehran University.

Towards the end of the 90s, along with graphic design, he started experimenting in different disciplines and mediums; activities such as reverse glass paintings, mural paintings, collaborating with different caricature magazines, copying classical painting for Dadashi and Towfighi Galleries and some antique shops in Manuchehri St. in Tehran.

Amin's professional practice varies from large installations to painting with his self-invented laser technique, and sculptural objects, which deals mainly with Iran's socio-political issues. His works have been shown in Sweden, USA, Brazil and Belgium as well as in many exhibitions across Iran.

NAZGOL ANSARINIA

Nazgol Ansarinia was born in Tehran, Iran in 1979. Ansarinia's work brings new languages and systems of meaning to traditional objects, motifs and patterns, to explore contemporary life and the social issues that often lie behind the ordinary, the familiar and the beautiful. These conceptual interests are combined with a commitment to material and making, resulting in drawings, video and text-based works and, more recently, modified household furniture.

She was one of the three short-listed nominees of the *Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative* program (2008). She was also along with curator Leyla Fakhr, one of the three artist/curator team winners of the inaugural *Abraaj Capital Art prize* (2009).

NEWSHA TAVAKOLIAN

Newsha Tavakolian was born in Tehran, Iran in 1981.

A self-taught photographer, Tavakolian began working as a professional photographer in Iranian press at age sixteen. She started at the women's daily newspaper *Zan*, and later worked for nine other reformist dailies, all have since been banned. At twenty-one she began working internationally, covering wars, natural disasters and social documentary stories in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Yemen.

Her work has been published international magazines and newspapers such as *Time Magazine*, *Newsweek*, *Stern*, *Le Figaro*, *Colors*, *New York Times Magazine*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, *NRC Handelsblad* and *National Geographic*. Tavakolian is particularly known for focussing on women's issues. Her current works section between documentary photography and art.

PARASTOU FOROUHAR

Parastou Forouhar is a photographer, installation and multi-media artist who was born in Tehran, Iran in 1962. She received her BA in Art from the University of Tehran (1990), and since 1991 has lived in Germany, where she received MA from the Hochschule für Gestaltung, Offenbach am Main.

Forouhar has developed several distinct strands of artistic production that combine technology with traditional Persian script. Drawing, calligraphy, digital manipulation, film and installation all come together in an exploration of identity.

Forouhar's recent solo shows include *Written Room* at the Fondazione Merz, Turin (2011); *He Kills Me, He Kills Me Not*, Karin Sachs Gallery, Munich (2011); *Parastou Forouhar*, Leighton House Museum, London (2010); *Links of Violence*, Orgelfabrik, Karlsruhe (2009); *Parastou Forouhar*, Karin Sachs Gallery, Munich (2009); *Parade*, Kunsthalle Vierseithof, Lückenwalde (2008) and *Just A Minute*, Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, Rome (2007).

PENDAR NABIPOUR

Pendar Nabipour is a visual artist based in Utrecht, the Netherlands, originally from Tehran, Iran. He is an MFA student from the Dutch Art Institute/Artez institute of the Arts. He has studied and gained experience in different art fields such as graphic design, illustration, painting, sculpting, installation and interactive art.

He has participated in various exhibitions and art events, while having the chance to curate a number of events. He has been influenced by contemporary issues and their relation to the arts. His concerns are mostly social and political issues. Of late he has been interested in public interaction and his current projects are related to this kind of genre. His work is mostly related to the third dimension and he tends to use different kinds of installations and sculpting, in order to express his art.

PEYMAN HOOSHMANDZADEH

Peyman Hooshmandzadeh was born in Tehran, Iran in 1969. He graduated in photography from the Azad University in 1988, and started right away as a photographer for various Iranian newspapers and agencies before founding his own agency, *135 PHOTOS*, together with Javad Montazeri and Omid Salehi. He has received many prestigious awards since 1997, both as a photographer and as a writer.

Hooshmandzadeh has exhibited not only in galleries in Tehran but also worldwide, with first solo show in Keyhan Gallery (1995); Molavi Hall (1996); and Golestan Gallery (2004). His solo shows outside Iran include: *Hands and Belts*, Villa Moda, Kuwait (2002); *Ashkal Alwan*, Lebanon (2003); *18th International Biennial of Humour and Satire*, Gabrovo, Bulgaria (2007). His group exhibitions include, *Ey Iran*, Gold Coast City Art Gallery, Australia (2006); *Images of the Middle East*, Copenhagen (2006); and *Glimpses of Iran*, Thessaloniki, Greece (2002).

He has since become a very successful novelist also with his latest collection of short stories, *Ha* (2007).

RAMIN HAERIZADEH

Ramin Haerizadeh was born in Tehran, Iran in 1975. He studied economics at the University of Tehran (1994) and for photography trained under the guidance of Mr. Massoud Massoumi.

Now based in Dubai, Haerizadeh has fought his way from the paths he was expected to follow to acquire a diverse education in the arts. Exploring photography, drawing, painting, film, animation and collage, he has created multifaceted works that lyrically reclaim and transform found images into arrestingly witty, but tragically troubling scenes of humanity.

Some of his recent exhibitions include: *Big Bother*, L'Artiste Face aux Tyrans, Palais des Arts et du Festival de Dinard, France (2011); *Beware of this Image*, Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2011); *The Right to Protest*, Museum on the Seam, Jerusalem, Israel (2010); *I'll Huff and I'll Puff*, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, Dubai, UAE (2010) and *Unveiled: New Art from the Middle-East*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK (2009).

REZA ARAMESH

Reza Aramesh was born in Iran in 1970. He left Iran at the age of sixteen. He did his MA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Aramesh is interested in poetic and political compositions that can be realized in a diverse range of media, including performance, installations, video, photography and work on paper. Using this diverse media, he explores the themes of identity, politics and morality.

Aramesh has exhibited in London, Dubai, Beijing and Tel Aviv. Performance is often inextricably tied to the artist's process. Previous projects have included site-specific work in Trafalgar Square, Tate Britain and the Barbican, London. Aramesh is currently based in London.

ROKNI HAERIZADEH

Rokni Haerizadeh was born in Tehran, Iran in 1978. He did his BFA and MA in painting from the University of Tehran.

The work of Haerizadeh ranges from painting, collage, sculpture to animation, forming a narrative that explores the extremities of human behaviour. He finds humor in the arts from the late Safavid to Qajar eras, in their exaggerated depictions of existence where intended dignity disappoints to reveal farcical imperfections. By rejecting romantic nostalgia, he captures the humor we depend upon to negotiate our flawed world.

Some of his recent exhibitions include: *Big Bother*, L'Artiste Face aux Tyrans, Palais des Arts et du Festival de Dinard, France (2011); *Fictionville*, Sharjah Biennial, UAE (2011); *Be Crowned with Laurel in Oblivion*, Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, France (2010); *Oh Victory! You Forgot Your Underwear*, B21 Gallery, Dubai, UAE (2009) and *Unveiled, New Art from the Middle-East*, Saatchi Gallery, London, UK (2009).

SADEGH TIRAFKAN

Sadegh Tirafkan was born in 1965, Karbala, Iraq to Iranian parents. In 1989 he graduated with a degree in photography from Tehran University.

Tirafkan was six years of age when his family fled the country before the start of the Islamic revolution. His family returned to Tehran where he grew up. As a young man, Tirafkan fought in the eight year long Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s as a Basiji or conscripted soldier. The artist's work is characterized by a strong emphasis on the intrinsic role of the male in traditional Iranian society. Tirafkan employs different media in his work: photography, video installation, and collage. He has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions worldwide.

SAMIRA ABBASSY

Samira Abbassy was born in Ahwaz, Iran in 1965. In 1967, her Arab-Iranian family moved to the UK where she studied painting at Birmingham Polytechnic and then at Canterbury College of Art.

After enjoying a successful career in London throughout 1980s and 1990s, showing with galleries on Cork Street and the Royal Academy of Arts in 1998, she moved to New York where she is now permanently based.

Some of her solo and group exhibitions in New York have included Skoto Gallery, Vernacular Press, Kim Foster, Kathleen Cullen and Leila Heller Galleries, the Islip Museum and the Queens Museum.

SAMIRA ALIKHANZADEH

Samira Alikhanzadeh was born in Iran in 1967. She studied at Alzahra University and then did an MFA at Azad University.

Her initial works depicted windows and frames, focusing on the movements of light in interior settings. She then introduced figures into her works, women and children, in particular – and began incorporating shards of mirrors in her paintings. This technique forces the viewer to interact with the work and encourages reflections over one's own identity and heritage.

She regularly exhibits in Tehran and has taken part in many group exhibitions internationally.

SARA RAHBAR

Sara Rahbar was born in Tehran, Iran in 1976. She and her family fled Iran during the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war. Rahbar pursued an interdisciplinary study program in New York and Fine Arts at London's Central Saint Martins College of Art (2005). Upon completion of her studies, between 2005-2010 she lived and worked between Tehran and New York.

Rahbar's work ranges from photography to sculpture to installation and explores issues of belonging, memory and displacement. Rahbar's work always stems from her personal experiences and is largely autobiographical.

In recent years she has been recognized for her ongoing, *Flag series* (2008-Present) in which traditional fabrics and objects are reworked as collages that form various incarnations of the American and Iranian flag, exploring ideas of national belonging, as well as the conflicting role of flags as symbols of ideological and nationalistic violence. Her work has been widely shown internationally, including Cairo, Mumbai, Dubai, Madrid, Vienna, Moscow, New York, London and Paris and is held in multiple collections worldwide, including the Centre Pompidou in Paris, the Saatchi Collection in London, The Burger Collection in Hong Kong and the Devi Art Foundation in Gurgaon, India.

SHADI GHADIRIAN

Shadi Ghadirian was born in Tehran, Iran in 1974. She studied photography at Azad University, Tehran. After finishing her BA, she began her professional career as a photographer.

Her early works were inspired by traditional images of Qajar women from the mid-19th century. She cleverly adds to these modern anomalies or dissonances, such as a can of Pepsi. Ghadirian plays with these juxtapositions/contrasts, expressing difficulties women face in Iran today – torn between tradition and modernity in the Iranian society.

She draws inspiration both from her life and from lives of women around her in Iran. After her marriage to fellow photographer Peyman Hooshmandzadeh, Ghadirian's work commented upon the daily repetitive routine. Photographs from *Like Every Day* series depict a figure draped in patterned fabric. Instead of the face, each figure has a common household item such as an iron, a tea cup or a pan.

Currently, Ghadirian works at the Museum of Photography. Her work has been exhibited in museums and galleries across Europe and the U.S.A.

SHAHRAM KARIMI

Shahram Karimi was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1957. Since 1988, he has lived and worked in Germany and New York. Working mostly in paint, he produces intriguing pieces that often have a subtle political message.

Karimi has also collaborated with Shirin Neshat as production-designer on films as well as with Shoja Azari on their 'video paintings', in which moving images are produced onto paintings, bringing the surface to life.

SHIRAZEH HOUSHIARY

Shirazeh Houshiary was born in Iran in 1955. She moved to London in the early 1970's and graduated from the Chelsea School of Art in 1979, emerging with a group of artist that included Anish Kapoor and Richard Deacon. In Europe she is well known for her sculptures in which she investigates spiritual principles and abstract forms. In her first solo exhibition in New York at Lehmann Maupin Gallery (1999) she exhibited a series of paintings that explored her interest in Sufism and the 13th Century mystic poet Jalal al-Din Rumi. The calligraphy was implemented in graphite and repeatedly laced into the luminous surfaces. In her labor-intensive paintings she unites the word and the canvas into a meditative visual experience which results in work that is about presence and experience. Houshiary has said of her work, *Presence is like light - how can you describe it? Light can be only experienced, it has presence. This work also has a presence and has only to be experienced, it has presence.*

Houshiary, who was a Turner Prize nominee in 1994, has had solo exhibitions at the Musée Rath, Geneva (1989); the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford (1989); Camden Arts Centre, London (1993); SITE Santa Fe, New Mexico (2002); Tate Liverpool (2003); and most recently the 2010 exhibition, *Light Darkness* at Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York. Houshiary's work is in prestigious public collections including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; and the Tate Collection, London among others.

SHIRIN ALIABADI

Shirin Aliabadi was born in Tehran, Iran in 1973, but then moved to Paris while young and spent most of her childhood there. She studied History of Art and Archaeology at the University of Paris.

Some of her selected solo exhibitions include, *Chesa Planta*, St. Moritz Art Masters, Zuoz, Switzerland (2011); *Eye Love You*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE (2010); *Operation Supermarket*, Kolding Design School, a part of Images of the Middle East, collaboration with Farhad Moshiri, Denmark (2006); *Operation Supermarket*, The Counter Gallery, collaboration with Farhad Moshiri, London, UK (2006) and *Room installation*, 13 Vanak st. Gallery, Tehran, Iran (2006).

SHIRIN FAKHIM

Shirin Fakhim was born in Tehran, Iran in 1973 and is a self-taught artist. Her work has been exhibited in New York, London, Rome, Lille and Dubai.

Shirin Fakhim takes us to the inner world of the artist; a world full of complexity, fear, wonder, and observation. Shirin's sculptures begin with assemblages of readymade traditional terra cotta pots of various shapes and scales, which are used as the body. They are then decorated with fabrics, wigs, jazzy coloured high heel boots, and other accessories bought from public markets, second hand shops, and the bazaars. In her work, we also find strong references to pop culture and language that is prevalent in Iran.

SHIRIN SABAHİ

Shirin Sabahi was born in Tehran, Iran in 1984. She received her MFA from Malmö Art Academy in 2009. Her work has been exhibited at Loop Video Festival, Barcelona; Konsthall C, Stockholm; 7th Mercosur Biennial, Brazil; Platforma Revolver, Lisbon and Århus Kunstbygning, Denmark among others. Sabahi is a 2012-2013 film and new media fellow at Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart.

SHOJA AZARI

Shoja Azari is an artist/filmmaker who has been living in New York since 1983. He studied psychology and philosophy before making films and video installations, which have been screened and exhibited widely around the world. Azari has been collaborating with the renowned international artist Shirin Neshat since 1997 on numerous video installations including *Turbulent*, which won the Golden Lion Prize at the Venice Art Biennale.

Since 2006 Azari has also been collaborating with painter Shahram Karimi on video paintings, a new form which examines the juncture between film and the plastic art. Azari and Karimi's most recent collaborative series, *Oil Paintings* was met with much attention at the Leila Heller Gallery's exhibition at the 2009 Art Dubai, art fair.

SIMIN KERAMATI

Simin Keramati was born in Tehran, Iran in 1970. She is a new media artist who studied painting at the Art University of Tehran. She has had more than forty group exhibitions in Iran and abroad.

Keramati began her career by working as a painter. In 2000 she show-cased her installations in Barg Gallery, Tehran. Thereafter she took part in Tehran's first big conceptual art exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Arts. She won a prize at Dhaka's International Biennale (2003-04) for the video installation *Rising up or falling down*.

TIMO NASSERI

Timo Nasserri was born in Berlin in 1972 to a German mother and an Iranian father. He studied photography at the Lette-Verein, Berlin.

Nasserri started his art career as a photographer, moving later into drawing and sculpture. In his drawings he explores geometry in architecture and many of his sculptural works take this theme forward.

Some of his solo exhibition include: *Ghazal*, Galerie Sfeir-Semler Hamburg (2009); *One of Six*, Kunstverein Arnsberg (2009); *Optical Properties*, EADS Berlin, Berlin (2006); *Jet Skin*, Galerie Schleicher+Lange, Paris (2005). In 2011 Nasserri won the Abraaj Capital Prize, Dubai (UAE).

ZEINAB SHAHIDI MARNANI

Zeinab Shahidi Marnani was born in Iran in 1983. She received her BA in visual communication from Tehran University and MFA in Sculpture from the Yale School of Art.

The artist lives and works between Tehran and New York.

DARIA KIRSANOVA

Daria Kirsanova was born in St Petersburg, Russia in 1980. She is an art historian and art theorist based in London. She holds a specialist degree with distinction in art history from the State University of Culture and Arts in St Petersburg and an MA in Art Theory from Chelsea College of Art and Design (UAL), London.

After she moved to London in 2007, Kirsanova worked in a number of contemporary art galleries, including the Serpentine Gallery and Victoria Miro Gallery. During this period she has collaborated on a number of projects that include the exhibition *The Collectors* at Danish and Nordic Pavilions at the 53rd Venice Biennale 2009; *Fare Mondi/Making Worlds* curated by Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset (2009); monographic publication *Grayson Perry* published by Thames and Hudson (2010); *Wolfgang Tillmans* exhibition at the Serpentine Gallery (2010) and Christian Boltanski 'Les Archive du Coeur' at the Serpentine Gallery.

In 2011 she completed MA in Art Theory at Chelsea College of Art and Design where her research topic was the relationship between political messages and artistic practice in contemporary Iranian art. This research project was reflected in the publication *Relay – Circulating ideas March-May 2011* (2011), published by CCW Graduate School (University of the Arts, London).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Our journey and experience of collecting art from Iran wouldn't have been possible without Ruchira Gupta and Sunil Narula. They not only invited us to stay with them in Tehran but also played a vital role in research and pointing us in the right direction. We gained immensely from their experience and their friendships in the Iranian art community.

Our profound thanks to all artists and their galleries for assistance with photography and text that have helped us to look at the works with greater clarity and engage more fully with them.

We would like to thank Amriali Golriz, AKSbazi.com, Barbad Golshiri, Leila Pazooki, Pendar Nabipour, Zarvan Rouhbakhshan, Sadegh Tirafkan and Zeinab Shahidi Marnani for loaning their works that helped fill the gaps in the collection.

In Iran, our particular thanks are due to Katayoun Karami and Azita Ebadi for being our guides and translators during our visits to Tehran, also Rozita Sharafjahan of Azad Art Gallery, Shahnaz Khonsari of Mah Gallery, Nazila Noebashari of Aaran Gallery, Anahita Ettehadieh of The Silk Road Gallery, and Maryam and Omid Tehrani at the Assar Art Gallery.

Special thanks to Borna Ahmadi, Mojtaba Amini, Daria Kirsanova, Azar Mahmoudian, Homayoun Sirizi and Zarvan Rouhbakhshan for their support, advices and their generous contributions to the curatorial framework of the exhibition, and to Negar Farjani for her ideas that lead to the title, The Elephant in the Dark.

We extend our gratitude to our Foundation team: Reha Sodhi, Anannya Mehtta, Jaya Neupaney, Kanupriya Bhat, Agastaya Thapa, Rakesh Rai, Vijay and Surinder. Sunita Paul, for going out of her way to edit the catalogue. Sandeep Bhatia of Golden Picture House for his work with the framing. Dilshaad Bhai, Shashi and their team for preparing the galleries. Naresh Magoo and Shailesh Kumar Jain for logical support.

Lekha and Anupam Poddar







Gohar Dashti

Slow Decay, 2010

HD video, colour without sound

6 min 50 sec

As much as our life today has been disassociated from its surrounding environment, yet involuntarily, it is directly influenced by it.

The shots have captured crucial moments of misery and fatigue, though they are not expressive of a particular event in time or place. They explore the depths of the collective memory of a people who have for generations suffered silently and tolerated much torment. The agony of which little by little has enwrapped their souls, much like a disease with which their body disintegrates bit by bit.

These pictures tell the tale of what is still left to be said. Tales which others have no interest in listening to.



Leila Pazooki

This is Not Green!, 2009

Green neon tubes

50.8 x 182 cm

Courtesy of the artist

The green neon sign in Farsi, *This is Not Green!* is an apt signifier for this exhibition, firmly oriental in script, unreadable as all good conceptual works should attempt to be and available 24 hours a day for further contemplation. It starts the process of arrival at a place in Vienna where much has to be deciphered and understood, of complexities and evocations that may allow or renege on access, depending on one's own place of acceptance. *This is Not Green!* in green neon is a fascinating place to start.

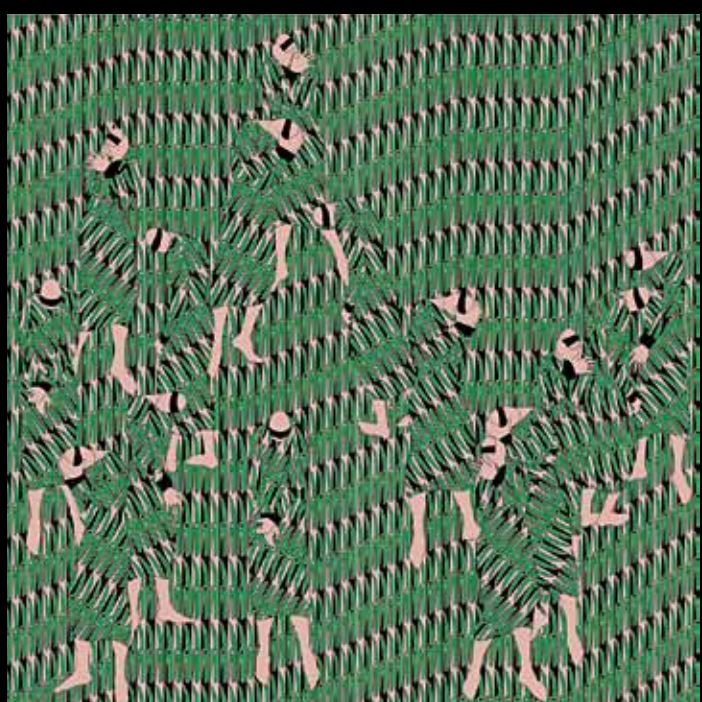
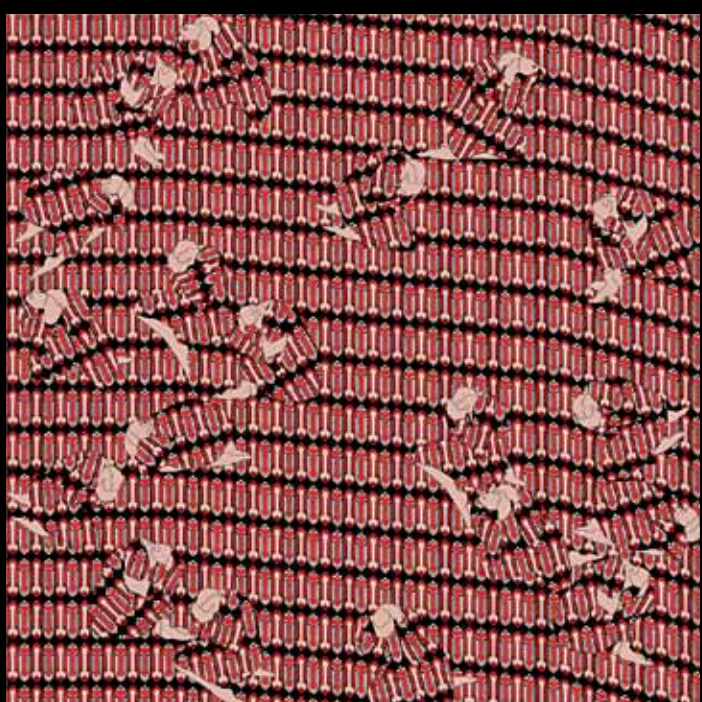
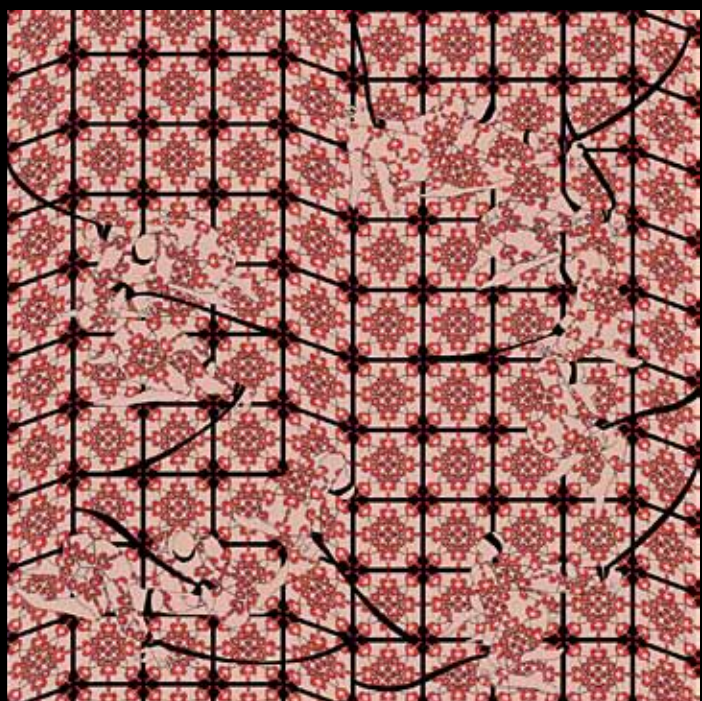
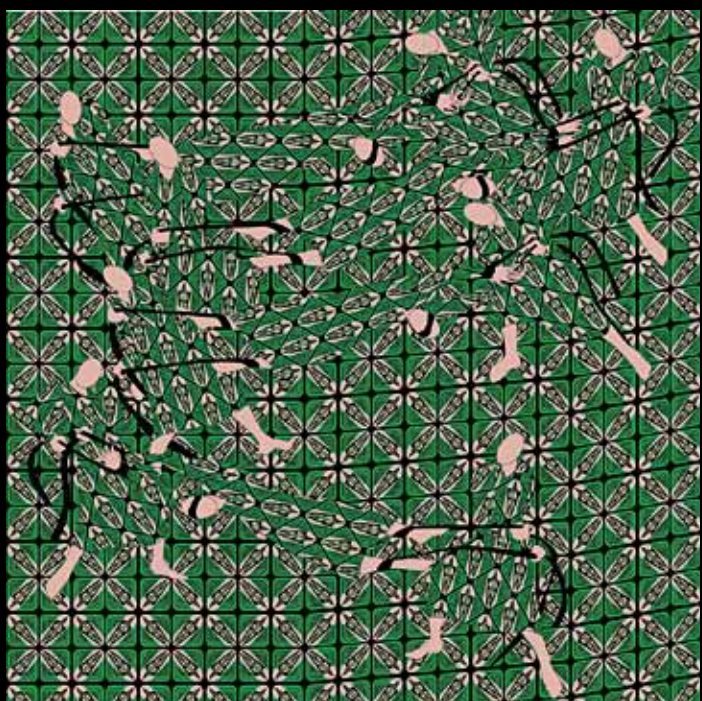
In old Persian miniature the human being is – all the more in a society seized by fundamentalism – part of an 'ornamental order'. There exists no individual view. A great effort is made to try to cover up any ambiguity by means of an illusory surface of repetitive and among each other harmoniously matching patterns. The gaze slides from the curved lines of figures to the curvaceous fir trees, to soft clouds, domes and hills... All surfaces are filled with the vibration of the patterns: a harmonious image of the world, a sign of the divine power and glory. This holy harmony does hide a great potential of brutality though. That which does not submit to this ornamental order cannot be represented and is therefore not existing, it is cast out into the periphery of the unworthy, it is doomed to perish.

Parastou Forouhar

RED is my name, GREEN is my name, 2008

Digital prints

80 x 80 cm (each)





The mothers sing lullabies for their children to sleep in peace. Lullabies are composed to put one to sleep. But the revolutionary songs are created to awaken a Nation, to encourage and to inspire.

A child sleeps in a white cradle on a red floor in the shadow of a green wall, the colors of the Iranian flag, the cradle has a pendulum movement and songs that are not meant for sleep are sung.

Iranian revolutionary songs of the past 30 years, marches that in the last decades were sung in the rigid voice of men only, are now sung in a slow and blunt rhythm of lullabies by a woman.

Songs that speak of pain, blood and uprising, of death and martyrdom of the youth and rebellion, of passion for freedom and a brighter future; away from darkness and despotism.

But the child is peacefully asleep, a long lasting sleep. The revolutionary spirit that was supposed to be awakened has put the child to sleep ...the lullaby is sung and becomes a cry.. and ends up being a deafening shout... .

Now is the time to rise up!

Jinoos Taghizadeh

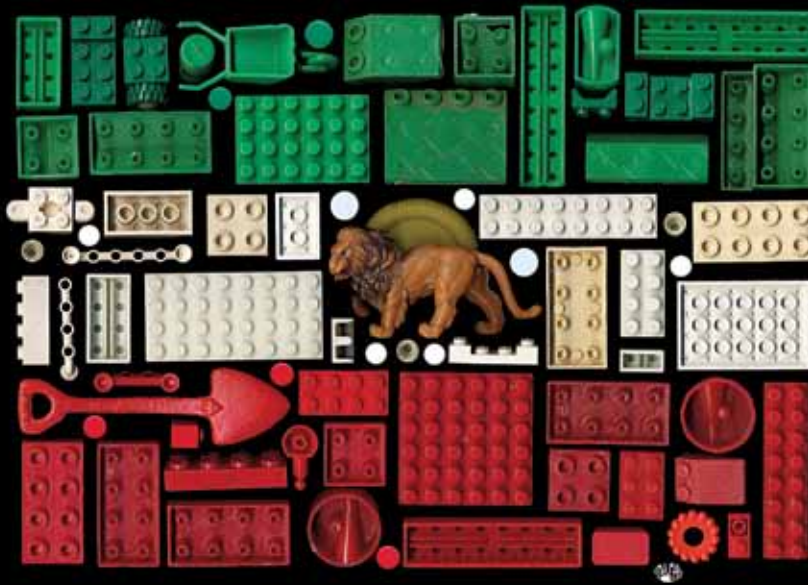
Good Night, 2009

Single channel video

23 min

The flag with lion and sun emblem which is no more recognized as the official flag of Iran, is a part of my set of works called *Heritage* and similar to all my other works, has an ironic and bitter peek at what still exists and what has already been lost. This is *Heritage* with all its true, real, metaphoric, nominative and other probable meanings of it. It incorporates various definitions and viewpoints, dark satire is one of them.

In this set of works, the installation of the trinkets remains a memory of my childhood and is presented as a photo-scan that plays a key role in each and every frame. The trinkets, which our children may one day regard as their own heritage as we did.



Amirali Golriz
Unofficial Flag, from Heritage series, 2011
Digital print on canvas
44.4 x 59.7 cm
Courtesy of the artist

Amir Mobed

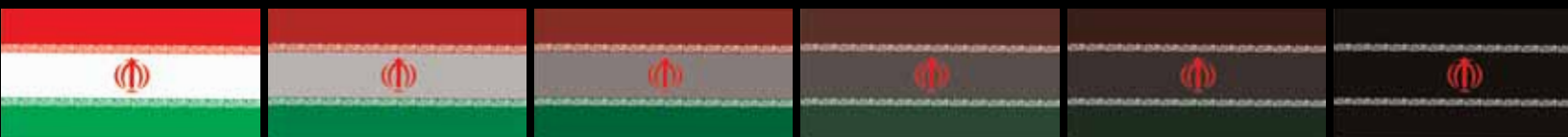
My Land Iran, 2007

Light boxes

38 x 66 x 11.4 cm (each)

The alteration of the Flag of the Islamic Republic is shown in an ironic, symbolic way. The resulting figure of the flag is an image never seen before.

This work could be presented either as a group of printed images showing the gradual darkening of the flag; or as the sole, final image; which is comprehensible even for those unfamiliar with Iran's flag, since there is no country in the world whose flag is totally black.



AKSbazi.com was established in 2009 as a digital installation. An empty digital space was created and photographers of all levels were encouraged to enter the site by submitting a photograph to one of it's many games which are in fact galleries with specifically Iranian themes.

The purpose of the exercise was to try and challenge and reconstruct the established and distorted image of Iran that has been steeped in political propaganda since the Iranian revolution, with the help of it's own people. The digital space of AKSbazi.com did not require photographic prowess, or technical brilliance; it just encouraged images of Iran from all kinds of different angles and eyes.

Like many art projects, what was originally planned and anticipated was accompanied by so much more once the project took off. Not only has AKSbazi.com become a space where Iranians can define their own image away from political stereotypes, it has also become an invaluable archive of life in Iran through the lens of it's citizenry.

Iranian Flag was one of the first games that opened on AKSbazi.com alongside such games as *Kitchen* and *Balcony* designed to show the unseen hidden spaces of Iranian life and psyche.

A single photo game, *Iranian Flag* was a way of both looking at the prolific images of the Iranian tricolour that appear physically in numerous ways in the public spaces in the country as well as addressing the hugely emotive aspect of this item for Iranians who may associate or disassociate themselves with the symbol in the middle of the flag, but never lose their attachment to the three colours.

Afshan Daneshvar, Ali Akbar Mohammad Khani, Alma Sinai, Amirhossein Rahimi, Atabak Tgzd, Aysel Iranmanesh, Babak Salek Iran, Bahar Dashtban, Banafshe Amin, Borna Izadpanah, Delbar Shahbaz, Elahe Abdolahabadi, Fardid Khadem, Farid Bayan, Ghazaleh Bahraie, Haleh Anvari, Hamed Farhangi, Hedieh Ahmadi, Hoda Amin, Hoofar Haghighi, Kasra Rafiei, M Nick Dell, Mahtab Noori, Majid Lashkari, Mehdi Alizadeh, Mehrva Arvin, Mona Shahriari, Mostafa Jafari, Narges Joodaki, Niloofar Lohraasbi, Omid Omidvari, Ramin Sadighi, Sahar Mokhtari, Sara Abri, Sara Reyhani, Sasan Abri, Shaghayegh Fakhrazadeh, Shahram Mirkhani, Shirin Sabahi, Siavash Bakhtiarnia, Siavash Naghshbandi, Siavash Shamdani and Zeinab Salarvand.



AKSbazi.com

Iranian Flag, 2010-11

Slideshow

Courtesy of the artists

This found object: a mass-produced version of the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran was discovered on the ground of Tehran university campus.



Zarvan Rouhbakhshan

Found Flag, 2011

Cloth

67 x 109.2 cm



It's about falling, standing and attempting to survive it all. In the end we are all in exile, we are all just visiting and we all come to this Earth alone and we leave alone. While we are here we try so desperately to belong to something, someone and somewhere.

Metamorphosing and transforming for the means of surviving it all, our foundations are laid, but our houses have been burned to the ground. Building castles in the sky, for a species that cannot fly, brick by limb we tear it down. Thinking that we are moving forward, yet moving backward all along. Qajar woman and golden toys, we wait for dawn.

Sara Rahbar

Flag# 20, 2008

Mixed media textile

157.5 x 89 cm

Green Ladies of My Land is about women's situation and Iranian women's civil rights after the election of 2009 in which women played a major role. This work is a biting satire that challenges the 'Ladies of My Land' fashion show. A festival which by the support of the government and with the aim of spreading the propaganda of the veil was held each year in Tehran. It showed models in western styles but with Islamic covering.

This hank of green colored thread could be that very overcoat from the novel about a poor, young girl who desires to have an overcoat made of squirrel's skin. She loves the pleasant, warm and fine sensational change of skins.

At last she possesses the beauty of the world which she had never thought possible, this happy destiny could be hers, she had never imagined to come true.* "I saw an overcoat hanging on a hook, very soft leather, very fine, very nice, delicate brown, I so loved it that I wanted to kiss it.....perfect security like the sky. This leather for my body which loved it, was like a diamond, and when humans desire something, once they get it they never give it back", says the young girl.

* By the German writer I. KEUN

Mojtaba Amini

Green Ladies of My Land, 2009

Wool

20 x 7.6 cm





Nazgol Ansarinia

NSS Book series, 2009

Printed paper in book format

30 x 21 x 2 cm (each)

Nazgol Ansarinia's work of the past seven years examines the systems and networks that underpin her daily life. Born and raised in Tehran, she trained in design in London before completing an MFA in the US and returning to her native Iran. These multiple trajectories, of geography and approach inform her methods and the subjects of her explorations.

Ansarinia often seeks to reveal the 'inner workings of a social system' by taking its components apart and putting them together again, to uncover assumptions, connections and underlying rules of engagement. Her practice is characterized by an emphasis on research and analysis that can be traced back to her background in design, and engagement with critical theory. Her mode of working covers diverse media—video, three-dimensional objects, found street signs and drawings—and subjects as varied as automated telephone systems, American security policy, memories associated with a family house, and the patterns of Persian carpets. Three series of works from the last three years—*Untitled (Do not give your opinion)*, 2006; *NSS book series* 2008; and, *Pattern series* 2007-09—highlight the uncovering of systems that is at the core of her practice.

This mode of interrogating government-produced text is also reflected in the *NSS book series* 2008, where the artist rearranges the contents of a US security policy document into an alphabetized lexicon to break syntactical relationships and allow new meanings to emerge by drawing attention to the document's limited vocabulary with repetitions and emphases laid bare. She presents the work as a series of four books, with the cover of each book bearing a different arrangement of the visual elements of the US presidential seal: a visual parallel to the treatment of the text within.





Ghazaleh Hedayat

Forgotten Days, 'Gone' series, 2004

Silkscreen on tissue

Size variable

Forgotten Days is a reprint of texts from the Iranian newspapers, published around the 90s, on white tissues. During this period a number of intellectuals, opposition leaders, writers, poets, translators and journalists were assassinated in mysterious ways. This series of suspicious deaths had become known as 'Chain Murders of Iran' or 'Political Assassinations of Iran'. Although there was an official trial of a few agents of the intelligence service, neither the Human Rights Commission nor the colleagues and families of the victims found it satisfactory.

Images of Palestinians throwing stones at armed Israelis have always been omnipresent in the state media of Iran. In 2009, during protests after the rigged presidential election in Iran, the artist collected hundreds of stones that protesters threw at armed militia, riot police and revolutionary guard forces. With electroforming process the artist has plated gold, bronze and silver skins onto some of these stones. Memorial plaques define the year (1388 = 2009) and the place where the stones were thrown.



Mojtaba Amini

Tehran 88, 2009

Stones collected from the city and coated with gold, silver and copper

Size variable



I had no other choice but to portray this blood drip running from the nose of my subjects because I could see that on many faces. In the streets and wherever I looked. I could spot this gaze looking forward and looking at me. This calm scan which invites one to judge. I've been seeing it all, though I know that no face with a drip of blood flowing from its nose, is either beautiful or able to reach its perfection.

Masoumeh Mozaffari

Heat Stroke, 2011

Acrylic on canvas

150 x 100 cm

Behnoush Sharifi

Untitled, 2009

Oil on canvas and digital print on silk

50 x 145 cm

Behnoush Sharifi's works dig at the connection between painting and photography, the relation between representation and expressiveness. These artworks have been shaped both by painting and photography. Photographic works are portraits which have gained a descriptive yet unstable form using the procedure of photography and printing on nets. Paintings are still life images selected accurately and obsessively, and express a representational meaning. Addressing two major subjects pertaining to the history of Art; portrait and still life and changing the medium specifications (shaping photography into realism).

From another perspective the relation between dark and light (black and white) in the photos and the situation of portraits with objects, has represented a different analytic and critical layer. Painting of a camera in a silhouette in front of the window and beside it, there is a face with eyes turned to white; a sarcastic understanding of blindness or lightness of vision? Everyday objects in Behnoush Sharifi's works have gained a sensational or social meaning, symbol of an incident, and a sweeping review of the spectator between two works of painting and photography make a more repetitive and researched meaning. What is the secret lying within these portraits and their relations with the objects? Faces are dissolving on the nets and have a fading look; and gaining a narrative and semantic weight, the objects make the installation of photos and paintings more pleasant while they question. A bookshelf containing a lock in one of its shelves, a television, a broken mirror and painting equipment, shoe beside the stairs and a map of Iran.

Sharifi's works belong to the present moment and a knowledge relying on awareness, art history and sensitivity. They escape the frameworks and at the same time they benefit from the known capabilities of the art medium, or even change them; and these are not minor gains for a young artist.



Mahmoud Bakhshi

Mother of Nation, Industrial Revolution series, 2009

Tinplate, iron, pacifier, cast-iron meat grinder and oil

100 x 135 x 156 cm

Mother of Nation explores the dependency on oil industry of the third world countries especially Iran (artist's home land). It discovers commentaries about the nation, its deserted solitude, and abundant occupation. Touching upon the oil industry and its political role in the world's economy, oil is also a nurturing Mother to a third world child. The nation, and in this case, an age-old Tehran that has survived multiple histories, can no longer flee to those steps of national refuge. The appearance of the Mother has taken an ugly turn into political prostitution, exploitation and corrupt dependence over a consumer society.

The piece is an assembled sculpture made out of tin plate and metal shaped like a pyramid. There is a pacifier installed in front of a handy meat chopper placed on top of the construction with a pipe in the middle. By turning the chopper handle, oil gets sucked up and comes out of the pacifier pouring down on the steps.



هیچکدام برنده نیستند
none of them is the winner

This video-art is a portrait of myself melting in the black background, while there are some hand writings on the screen, expressing my thoughts, the words are specially expressing the atmosphere of Tehran, the city I live in. In the end I cannot give a clear self portrait to the audience.

Simin Keramati

Self-Portrait, 2008

Video art

7 min 19 sec



Reza Aramesh

Action 72. Korean civilians “suspected of being communists” tied up to poles and blindfolded, with bull’s eyes pinned over their hearts, just before being shot by

South Korean military police firing squad, ten miles northeast of Seoul, April 14, 1950, 2009

Black and white silver gelatin print

124 x 170 cm



Through photography, Reza Aramesh explores the overwhelming deluge of media in the representation of conflict around the world. Working both with iconic war reportage images and photographs from contemporary conflicts in the Middle East, Aramesh begins to alter these images as if he was working with a scene in a storyboard. Background characters are brought into the foreground, prominent figures are scrubbed out. He then recreates and shoots these altered scenes, using non-professional actors, in the opulence of stately homes and places of particular cultural significance. In photography, Aramesh finds a medium with which to meld the socio-politics of the modern world with his interests in the history of art, film and literature.

Reza Aramesh

Action 62. U.S marines guarding three captured

North Koreans, ca. 1950. Exact date shot unknown, 2009

Black and white silver gelatin print

124 x 158 cm



The *Oil Paintings* series is a collaborative video and painting installation created by noted video artist Shoja Azari and painter Shahram Karimi. The seven piece series was inspired by the unforgettable images of the Kuwaiti oil fields that were set aflame during the withdrawal of the Iraqi army in the Persian Gulf War (1991).

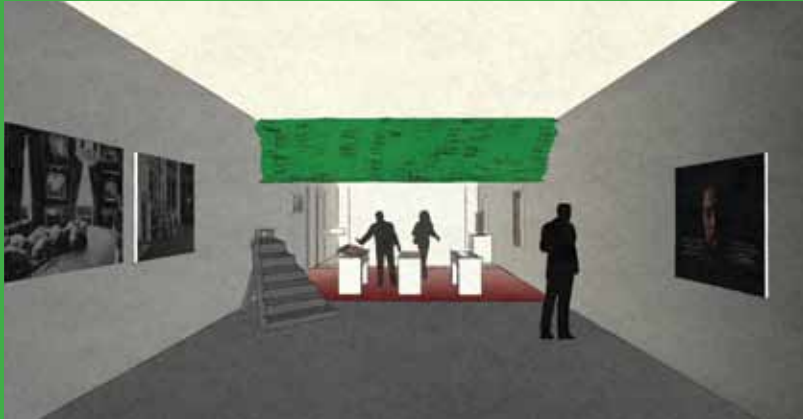
As a team, Azari and Karimi combine their individual art as a video projection onto a painted canvas enhancing the overall perception of the visual experience. The captured moving images, referenced from the documentary film *Lessons of Darkness* by German director Werner Herzog, are mirrored by the painterly landscapes and Persian poems authored by the artist Karimi. The perfectly aligned installation connects the two mediums to produce subtle movements of wind and flames on the desert sand. In a new interpretation of 'history painting' the flat painted surface comes to life suggesting a real time element onto an otherwise frozen moment.

Shoja Azari and Shahram Karimi

The Burning Moon

from the *Oil Paintings* series, 2009

Acrylic canvas and video projection installation



THE POLITICIZED SCENERY

The Politicized Scenery has started at the end of gallery 2, as you are reading this you've walked through it, and passed the second gallery to reach here. One can tell the difference after taking a second look at party people, models, homosexuals, soldiers, prostitutes, sportsmen, police women and finally a rare presence of children. All of these examples belong to a complex and multilayered society but they are unable to show its dynamism and its high and low, these groups are the ones who have had the privilege to be highlighted in the media and their often strong presence has conquered the international art scene accordingly. It is important to mention here that most of this work was produced before the scene dramatically changed in June 2009.

In gallery 3, the black oil drips on a triangular machine which tends to feed a nation, helps to mount the piece which seems to belong to an imaginary industrial revolution (*Mahmoud Bakhshi*). The staged moments are caught in the action scenes from various hostage crises around the world, are re-enacted with characters which look like the usual suspects of past years: The Middle Easterners (*Reza Aramesh*). These are planted like gripping pauses on the way when you turn into a gloomy look of a painting *The Burning Moon* over the oil fields (*Shoja Azari and Shahram Karimi*). A tiny animated character is moving goods from one storage to another, while an atomic mushroom repeats itself behind the distant mountains, and two steps further a blunt gaze of a witness silently vanishes into black (*Hamed Sahihi*).

The three works form an inviting red passage and a hint for what lies in wait; the elements of conflict; stones hand picked from sites in post election clashes, all over Tehran, the paper clipping from a delicate and unsolved serial assassination case applied on paper tissues daringly, and finally deconstructed versions of post 9/11 US security measures sorted alphabetically (*Nazgol Ansarinia*), on a red surface which drags us to a point where we stare at the possible side effect of summer heat stroke (*Masoumeh Mozafari*) and a camera peeping into the street from a window shielded by a transparent yet fading portrait (*Behnoosh Sharifi*).

A tricolored cabinet of curiosity juxtaposes various elements, a found object: a mass-produced version of the flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran discovered on the ground of Tehran university campus (*Zarvan Rouhbakhsan*), an American flag buried in Middle Eastern motifs (*Sarah Rahbar*) besides a slide show of Iranian Flag by nearly 55 photographers (*Iranian Flag Game by AKSbazi.com*), the outdated unofficial flag (*Amirali Golriz*), light boxes fading into black (*Amir Mobed*), an ascendant neon in green on the top (*Leila Pazooki*), an empty shelf for a potential emblem and finally a video of overwhelming flow of blood where the red stands for the Iranian flag.

Violent images of torture concealed in red, green, white and black ornaments and patterns transformed into a struggling ground (*Parastou Forouhar*), on the contrary a mother's lullabies trying to put a baby to sweet sleep turn out to be revolutionary songs (*Jinoos Taghizadeh*).

We are at the end of the show but the play (*Barbad Golshiri*) isn't finished yet, another beginning invites us to walk through the show again. All we've seen are the fragments of a whole, as our exhibition title suggests, nobody can claim to know it all, neither this nor any other show will be complete without a narrative and articulation, yet it is a chance not to be missed.

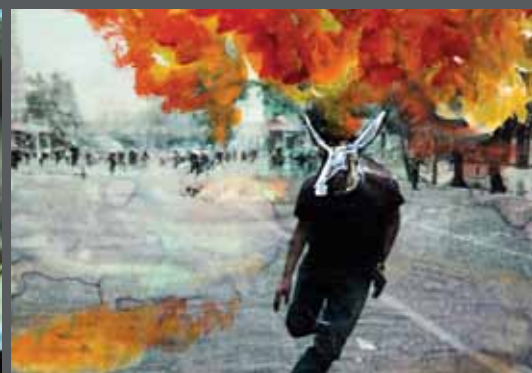
Amirali Ghasemi



Devoid of pitiful moralizing and surpassing fetishistic infatuation with candidly descriptive depictions of human sordidness, the present series entitled *Fictionville* marks a new close proximity to violence for Haerizadeh.

Cunningly and controversially he turns to violate, through gesso and watercolour, actual found photographic media images depicting human suffering and transforms them, sometimes unrecognisably, into imaginary fairytales: humourous, grotesque, satirical, bitter. With spontaneous violent fantasy Haerizadeh applies layers of gesso and bonding, breaks down the apparent integrity of the image, drains away the moral stance, absolves his found canvas of its account of truth and in the Nietzschean sense unmasks all accounts of the truth in order to arrive closer to the truth. It is ruthless criticism in the spirit of creative play and Haerizadeh de- and re-constructs the narrative revealing a new plain of reality, in his own words, "releasing obscure inherent potential." The artist's violent conversion and perversion of one image into another mutates horror into fairytale, neutralises reductive moralising of victim/perpetrator, right/wrong boundaries.

Vali Mahlouji



Rokni Haerizadeh

From the Fictionville series

Mixed media, gesso and photo on paper

21 x 30 cm (each)

Previously an architect and art director of several Iranian films, Ghezelayagh started working with felt in 2004. She feels that it embodies qualities such as simplicity, heft and resilience, which she notices are often disregarded in Iran's march to modernity.

"Making my first designs, and travelling around Iran searching for the best techniques, I came across a display of felt shepherds' capes in a provincial bazaar. They hung inertly, heavily, a reminder of earthy tradition amid the gaudy consumer goods, and were a poignant validation of Joseph Beuys' elevation of felt into art."

Ghezelayagh began designing her own display tunics and capes as felt canvasses on which to express her memories of growing up in Iran. She was born in Italy in 1966, and brought up in Tehran where she lived through the revolution of 1979 and the war with Iraq (1980-88). She found herself heavily influenced by post-revolutionary visual popular culture – particularly its symbols of resistance, protection and martyrdom. Hence, a thousand and one metal keys, crowns, tulips

and images of the renowned Iran-Iraq war hero Hossein Kharazi printed onto metal tags and sewn onto the garments. Ghezelayagh combines these elements with Persian phrases – such as 'Martyrdom is the Key to Paradise' – and the names of military campaigns or the testaments of war heroes, which are silkscreened and embroidered onto the felt.

Like the well-known Iranian artists from the Saqqaqaneh movement of Iranian Pop Art in the 1950s, such as Hossein Zenderoudi and Parviz Tanavoli, Bita Ghezelayagh has sought a new visual language that embraces tradition and modernity through a unique combination of ancient signs, symbols and calligraphy in conceptual art.

Bita Ghezelayagh

Are Bullets the Answers to Flowers?, 2009

Mixed media and metal talisman on felt

114 x 114 cm





Shadi Ghadirian

Nil Nil, 2008

C-print

76 x 114 cm

*To all of the wounded of war:
Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today...
Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace... You may say I'm
a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one Imagine
no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world... You may say I'm
a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one*

'Imagine' by
John Lennon

Iranians after the revolution of 1979, under the leadership of Imam Khomeini were so enamored of his religious and political character that at night they would go to the roof of the buildings to see his picture in the moon. Meanwhile a foreign company built night lights with a picture of the Imam on them. These lamps were distributed to people in large numbers, they loved their leader, and every night they would go to sleep under the soft light of these lamps with the hope of better days. This is that very night light which is still lit.



Mojtaba Amini

Pray for Emam, 2009

Light bulb on wooden stand

10 x 7.6 cm

Mahmoud Bakhshi

Cinema Bahman (All my hopes have vanished...), 2010

Video installation, 1.51 min

46 x 32 x 30 cm



'Bahman' is the eleventh month in the Solar Hijri calendar and the legendary month in which the revolution took place in 1979, Iran. Additionally, it refers to 'Bahman Cigarettes', the most popular Iranian cigarette and a 'Bahman Cinema' in Enghelab (Revolution Square), in central Tehran. This area has hosted many protests before and after the Islamic revolution.

The video inside this box has been named after a part of the song which is based on a true story. It was composed for a martyr warrior Mohammad Jahan Ara during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). He played an important role in liberating Khoram-Shahr city which was occupied by Iraqis for a while. Jahan Ara was killed before the city was liberated. The song retells the story to his comrades as a recital of an elegy.

*"Mammad you were not around to see, the city is liberated
Your comrades' blood...
You are gone and comrades will follow you...
All my hopes are vanished...
Ah, such a pity it is..."*

Pendar Nabipour

Water will not even slide over water, 2010

Glass, plastic, resin, plexiglass and wooden stand

41 x 41 x 151 cm

Courtesy of the artist

This sculpture is based on one of the most common Persian proverbs carrying a socialistic approach. *Water will not even slide over water* is used to qualify a situation which is absolutely calm and to assure that nothing untoward will happen in a forward thinking manner. By incorporating a model of the Azadi (Freedom) Square's memorial tower and miniature figures with the water reaching to 2/3rd of the tower's height, Nabipour tries to illustrate a situation in which everything is ready for explosion, yet no big change happens. The set playfully refers to a mass demonstration which took place on 15th of June, when nearly 3 million people took to the streets in silence and gathered in this Square to protest about their votes and the result of the 2009 presidential election.





Photographs of the unrest following the June 2009 elections in Tehran were transmitted to the world in a very small format. This was done to bypass the Internet slow-down instigated by the Iranian government. As a result of their size these digitally transmitted images, of which Pazooki was sent several by friends caught up in the furor, would pixilate when zoomed into. Those outside of Tehran and hoping to make sense of what was going on would have to navigate through these blocked, deconstructed renderings of images.

With this idea, Pazooki has assembled a collection of these images to form a pixilated diary of that time. She has graphically altered the pixilated images to make them aesthetically pleasing, but otherwise these are original shots of the protests that overtook Tehran at that time.

Incredibly, Pazooki was able to show these works at a recent solo show in Tehran. Though such images, in their original legible format, are outlawed, the artist's pixilated versions were shown. She points to the element of double-censorship in these works, in the tiny size that the images were sent in and also the act of enlarging an image into illegibility. The physicality of the works themselves also reflect the difference in comprehension between those within the catastrophe and those outside it, up-close, these are mere blocks of masses, but from a distance the chaos becomes clear.

Leila Pazooki

Pixel Diary, 2009-10

Photograph

120 x 180 cm



Placed on the light box are images of a rooftop in Tehran, taken between 2005-2009. They give a personal yet overall account of the city in those years and work as a backdrop to the events that followed. These images are taken during the summer nights, when the rooftops function as an extension of the private space. These images bear witness to the migrating youth and urban expansion while their daylight quality subtly reflects on the city as a space of reality and projection.

Shirin Sabahi

The Sleepers and the Walkers, 2011

Four colour slides, light box, stand magnifier

A5 Digital print

Ali Zanjani

Tehran# 2, from Counting the Days series, 2011

Digital print

20 x 20 cm

The experience you have in front of you is of the city I live in. It's a free-form snapshot record of what is, without trying to make it look better or worse. I am simply showcasing what I have seen.





When I was only five, my country underwent severe political and social changes, making Hejab (veil) mandatory for women through the Constitution. Only a very limited part of the female body is permitted by Law to be shown in public and mass-media. This censorship is also extended to foreigners.

When I chose photography as a university course, this limitation got further highlighted. I was studying a subject which stressed on image, frame, decoration, pose etc but all we could see were banned black strips on the material we consulted, including foreign magazines. I could only picture the reality in my mind. How could I transcend all that was considered immoral and banned?

Today, perhaps the Internet can help. How to see the Eastern viewpoints in the Western ones, perhaps by attempting to represent this censorship in large formats.

Shadi Ghadirian

West by East, 2008

Photographs

90 x 60 cm (each)





Simin Keramati

Four Elements (Earth), 2006

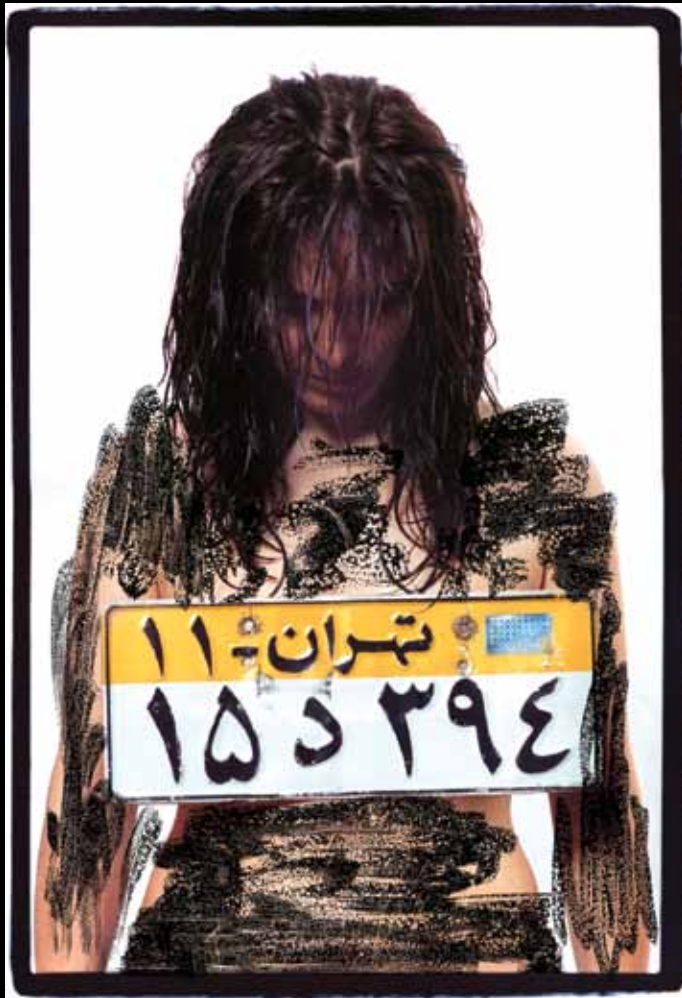
Video art

14 min 23 sec



Inspired by the serial killings of writers and intellectuals in Iran during the years ending the decade of the 1990's, I made the *Four Elements*. This work consists of 4 pieces (4 DVDs), each of them expressing the destructive power of the four elements; fire, water, earth and wind. And in each I have chosen a symbolic way of destruction.





Katayoun Karami

Censorship series, 2004

Analog photography

100 x 70 cm

"If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he would be justified in silencing mankind."
John Stuart Mill

Censorship knows many guises, at least in my Country, Iran. The subtle filtering of the unconscious

self, ends up being the same; suffocating, hurtful and ultimately destructive. Not surprisingly of course, in this realm too, women once again find themselves singled out as a constituency particularly deserving of special attention and zeal.

As I happen to be one of them, I cannot help but voice my own part of this age-long story, however small, insignificant or subjective. A personal voice, that speaks mutely through a series of visual portraits of myself, and someone close to me.

A license plate depicting a number, as if a prisoner, but also a proof of my existence, the physical appearance of which must be publicly denied, at all times, at all cost. How better to protect the dignity of my being, than by having my naked flesh concealed by the crude ink strokes of the cultural guidance official's 'moral values' marker?

Or covered in white plastic sheet, commonly used to protect the sacred white of the holy burial cloth from being spoiled with the blood of our wounds? Conveniently white-washing the crimes that were its source. The private suffering of a woman carefully concealed from the public eye, so as not to spoil the feigned public image of respect and reverence. An extra layer of dark plastic, to make clear that my identity as a woman with opinions and ideas is a mistake in need of correction, to be erased as one erases a misspelt word on paper and then there is that shameful hair of course, ripped and torn, as they rip those street posters that are found not to meet our alleged standards of moral decency.

A woman, double-exposed like a puzzle, divided in many pieces, her uniqueness instantly destroyed, transformed into a toy. Now so easy to take apart at will, by the hands of others. But the jig-saw does not extend to the mind fully which is the sole domain where women can still hold on to their self-determination and autonomy.

These images speak the common language of the place where I live. Portraits of my generation, our common experiences and challenges in life. A generation that has experienced revolution, war, immigration and more. Experiences, any one of which are said to be sufficient to turn a boy into a man, but which are apparently assumed to leave the other sex wholly untouched.

In my own small, personal voice I say: not so. Instead, it's hard, sad and often unbearable.



Amirali Ghasemi

Party Series from Tehran Remixed, 2006

Digital photography

50 x 65 cm (each)

Tehran Remixed is a multimedia journey to Tehran's underground life based on Amirali Ghasemi's documentary photos/videos with a team of collaborators including artists, designers, musicians, DJs; an adventure through the invisible veins of the metropolis. The journey sheds light on different aspects of young social life: from private parties to intellectual chill-out gatherings, from crowded streets with teenage girls waiting for a ride to web surfers beating the invisible roads; typing and showing-off over cams in the dead of night. Through different sights and sounds, this project tries to portray a major part of the Tehrani youth who get lost in their part time wicked and hedonistic dreams.

Tehran Remixed attempts to visualize the other side of Tehran in contrast to the prejudicial images often produced in media on a mass scale. *Tehran Remixed* - like Ghasemi's previous project, *Coffeeshop Ladies* - deals with the concept of public versus private, by flipping through images of mega city's unseen version of social life by means of content, the project uses bright colourful photos, short video clips and music portraying alternative scenes of life which go by, just like any where else in the world. The randomized multimedia interface programmed for the project creates an interactive adventure game, which allows visitors/players to explore Tehran's hidden still and moving images with curiosity by clicking for more and more.

Tehran Remixed is an ongoing photography project by Amirali Ghasemi, started in 2005. This was his response when he encountered recent 'Media' images of his home town Tehran being distorted and pushed toward black and white extremes like the veil and suppression. Exposing a young population who instead of looking towards expanding its social liberty is having fun enjoying the last years of a reformist state in power. *Tehran Remixed* is also an attempt to break through and to experiment with documentary photography and manipulate it in order to tell stories without ignoring people's privacy at the same time which carelessly gets trampled upon with the widespread use of fine art photography in the news and political articles on Iran. This trend is increasing compared to documentary images that can portray everyday life of citizens of Tehran. The multimedia part and the multilayer stories were incorporated in a humble and friendly spirit in order to recreate the moment which is being ignored in the way Tehran is being represented in the media.

In light of the current fashion trends among young Iranian women, this project aims at capturing the aesthetic nuances that shape, reshape and reinvent the identity of the new Iranian girl.

Under the auspices of the Islamic veil, the 'in look' is blond hair, blue, green or grey contact lenses, occasional facial piercing and most importantly, surgical nose which seems to have become a status symbol and fashion must-have among the middle class.

Miss Hybrid can be seen as a make-believe alternative beauty pageant believing that natural beauty is unfair, elitist and outdated, while artificial beauty sparked by an insatiable need to transform into someone else, cosmetic surgery included, can be regarded as a healthy exercise in cultural rebellion and global integration.

Shirin Aliabadi

Miss Hybrid 6, 2008

Lambada print

149.9 x 110 cm





The title *But in your head baby, I'm afraid you don't know where it is*, came from one of the famous songs by Jefferson Airplane, an American rock band formed in 1965. This series includes twelve videos in total, each 1 minute long and plays in a loop.

I framed the LCD so that it looks like a framed painting because for me they are like a still-frame and during this 1 minute nothing actually changes, it seems like a moment frozen in time.

Hamed Sahihi

'But in your head baby, I'm afraid
you don't know where it is' series, 2010

Animation

1 min

Hamed Sahihi

'But in your head baby, I'm afraid
you don't know where it is' series, 2010

Animation

1 min



The distance that has grown within me between that which is here and now and that which was there back then, does not mark a strong border. This distance opens up spaces in between, in which definitions can be reflected and modified. It assures me of a self-image even when I am absent. These in between spaces hold the simultaneousness of nearness and distance, relating them in an alternating process to each other. A method derived through this process is the discovery of parallels in differing structures. It enables me to construct associations that can then be clearly visualized.

To give an example: In old Persian miniatures the human being is – all the more seized by fundamentalism – part of an 'ornamental order'. There exists no individual view. A great effort is made to try to cover up any ambiguity by means of an illusory surface of repetitive and harmoniously matching patterns. The gaze slides from the curved lines of figures to the curvaceous fir trees, to soft clouds, domes and hills... All surfaces are filled with the vibration of the patterns: a harmonious image of the world, a sign of the divine power and glory. This holy harmony does hide a great potential of brutality though. That which does not submit to this ornamental order cannot be represented and therefore does not exist, it is cast off into the periphery of the unworthy, doomed to perish.

An amazingly similar parallel corresponds to the 'new world order' after the 11th of September. It casts a polarizing tendency of transforming differences into hostility and free spaces into occupied territory. Our life has since been enriched by many grotesque images and ideas and by questions that have no answers. As for me: I do not feel obliged to the arguments of 'realpolitik'. They fail under the weight of existential questions. I would just like to comprehend what is happening with the real people and with their real Utopias. Will there be a space for real Utopias in future? Will they settle in the center of our creative processes of developing the world – or will they be pushed away into the periphery with the dreamers and the mad? What importance will the new world order give to Art, and to Art from abroad?

The interest of the Western World in the Art and Culture of the Oriental-Islamic world has increased lately. Perhaps because of the well-meaning idea of deriving knowledge from these alien societies by way of art. But how open is the Western World and how many such Oriental-Islamic characteristics would it take for that other Art to be acknowledged?

The field of intercultural communication is ploughed with clichés and phrases. They serve to cover up the 'blind spots' that threaten to grow rampant. Each effort at intercultural interaction is endangered by its own abuse. Each effort balances between facts and delusion. For me as an artist every place granted to me is accompanied by a feeling of displacement. Swaying between optimistic activism and cynical reservation I realize the gaze that fixes me and the projection that alienates me.



Parastou Forouhar

From 'The Swanrider' series, 2004

Digital photography

80 x 80 cm



Peyman Hooshmandzadeh

Upside-Down, 2003

C-print

40 x 60 cm (each)

Peyman Hooshmandzadeh reports on the everyday life of the Iranian people. He sorts his black and white and colour photographs thematically, showing us his view of the city and its people. At times the viewer cannot be sure whether it is a montage, a game, a peculiar point of view of an extreme situation, or a certain kitsch side of things that invades our world. *Upside-Down* evokes the works of the Austrian, Irwin Wurm, his humouristic approach to formalism and the unexpected relation this creates to the everyday.



Farideh Lashai is better known as an Iranian painter but she has always juggled with varying means of expression. Today she is a storyteller and through animated characters in a four minute video on a canvas set against the background of her paintings, she recounts from the pages of both her own history and that of modern Iran in an atmosphere of fantasy and lyricism.

Fear is one element of Farideh's life which is expressed through the proposed piece inspired by a 19th century painting by the legendary Iranian painter Sani-ol-Molk. The grand Mullahs from Sani-ol-Molk's paintings come together at a feast, reading Quran and saying their prayers, a rabbit comes to the scene wanting to nibble at their feast and gets thrown away and beaten up as an animal intruding into their field. Restored to life, the characters of the original painting symbolize decades of ideology, doctrine and militarism that seem to be rendered timeless. Holding the Quran in one hand, the Mullahs nonetheless hold the stick of oppression in the other.

Farideh Lashai

Keep your stomach empty; that you mayest

behold therein the light of interior (Sani-ol-Molk), 2010

Sound and projected animation on painting

180 x 200 cm



Ramin Haerizadeh

Men of Allah, 2008

C-print

100 x 160 cm

Night fell and Hossein didn't come. Companions wondered what had happened to him... "Let us go to the city and bathe and look for Hossein". So the five of them stood up and headed towards the city and entered a public bath.

The tales of Hossein Kord Shabestari

Morphed figures fall from the sky, flip and slice themselves into a feast of bare, bloated bellies and bearded faces. At first glance, this grotesque intertwined kibbutz of men's flesh might seem a bit strange to the eye. But in a culture where sexual dichotomy is deeply rooted, going back through the centuries, it is hard to call Ramin Haerizadeh's 'Men of Allah' odd. In a society divided by gender where schools, libraries, public buses and subway cars are genitally categorized, shame is the law of the game and voyeurism the art of the eye.

Tales of Shahed-Bazi (men chasing and praising beautiful boys) are frequented in Persian literature, Divans, and miniatures. In Taziye (Iran's religious theatre of the tragedy of Imam Hossein's martyrdom) men dress in women's array and in Roo Houzi performances men play the role of women. Haerizadeh's fête of cross-dressed semi-naked men stem from his appeal to Islamic symmetrical design, his abundant image repertoire of Iranian visual tradition and his benevolently sinister vision.

These gruesome horrid torsos on black backgrounds might hint at a depressive, dark social circumstance but Ramin's playful compositions and joyous colors make the image contradict itself. They might suggest a hidden or suppressed sexuality but the artist's mischievous irony and uproarious satire saves the figures from falling into a dark Freudian labyrinth. This indigenous contradiction makes Haerizadeh's images go deeper than the surface of mere exoticism.

Sometimes I think of Haerizadeh as the unfortunate Royal photographer of the Safavid era, some 3 centuries before the invention of digital media – who was given a second chance by the gods to be reborn in the late 20th century Iran and deliver us his art.

Here the hair on the artist's legs is used as a stocking. The stockings, with all their sexual and sensual connotation are being replaced by something of a truly different, inconsistent texture and context: the long hair of a shaggy man's body. However, the ironic substitution is not to be seen at first glance, but is discovered on a more precise examination.

Working with the body is unusual in Iranian contemporary art. It is still a forbidden, unthinkable territory. This work is one of the first and rare examples of an artist – especially of a man – who has directly used his naked body in a work of art. The resulting image is innovative, an inseparable mixture of body and costume, male and female, desirable and disgusting.



Amir Mobed

100% Wool, 2007

Digital photography

100 x 70 cm



Shirin Fakhim

Tehran Prostitutes, 2009

Ceramic, mixed media

Life size

Shirin Fakhim's *Tehran Prostitutes* uses absurd and sympathetic humour to address issues surrounding the Persian working-girl circuit. In 2002 it was estimated that there were 100,000 prostitutes working in Tehran, despite Iran's international reputation as a moralistic country with especially high standards placed on women. Many of these women are driven to prostitution because of abusive domestic situations and the poverty incurred from the massive loss of men during the war; in response to Iran's strict religious laws, some even consider the profession as an act of civil protest.



In this installation, Mobed uses real apples, symbols of femininity, and sprays a layer of white color on them. He arranges the apples in two divided spaces. In the first arrangement we can see a row of intact apples with plaited hair, symbolizing the innocent, virgin girls. Second arrangement is a square of cut apples with messed up hair, symbolizing the outraged, raped and abused girls. This installation is referring to the girls who turn to prostitution under the pressure of poverty all over the world, especially in Iran, where the government severely denies their existence.

The first show, held in Arya Gallery, Tehran, was banned on the opening night. At first, anonymous telephone calls threatened the gallery owner. Then the representative of the ministry of Islamic Culture and Guidance came to the exhibition and asked Mobed to eliminate some parts of the installation, especially the bloody tissues. Mobed didn't accept and he was forced to withdraw the whole exhibition. The second exhibition was held, in a new arrangement, in the gallery of Cité des Arts, Paris.

The third edition of the work is now in the collection of Devi Art Foundation.

Amir Mobed

Virginity, 2005

Apples, white paint and human hair

Size Variable



Romina (9) on the day she becomes a woman.

According to Shia Islamic tradition, a girl becomes a woman in the ninth year of her life. In modern day Tehran, convent schools organize a special event to mark this moment, called the *Jashne Taklif*, which means 'celebration of responsibility'. After this event the 'women' have to start wearing the Islamic headscarf (manteau) and start praying daily in school.

After the ceremony, Romina and her classmates play in the schoolyard. They wear 'wings' on their chador, run around like little 'angels', excited at turning into a woman.

Newsha Tavakolian

The Day I Became a Woman, 2007

Digital photography

76 x 94.74 cm (each)



War Memories points towards events that occurred during the Iran-Iraq war and ordinary people who occupied those scenes. These pictures are inspired from my memories as a war photographer but in reality were photographed in my personal studio in 2008. This series belong to a 'social photography' project I've been involved with for the past eighteen years, titled *Iranian Families*.

In the *Iranian Families* collection, I use portraits of people and their apparent appearances to portray the many varieties of stereotypes and how contrarily people behave under different historical cross sections and I extend this trend to the present.

In *War Memories*, I look for opportunities that can cast a different portrait of the people of the time to an audience who might not have seen or heard a version of the documented facts regarding that time.



Mohsen Rastani

Untitled from Memories of the War series, 2011

Digital print

100 x 100 cm (each)



Abbas Kowsari

Women Police Academy, 2006

Digital photography

70 x 105 cm (each)

Every year the Iranian Police Academy celebrates the graduation of female police force with a show of physical maneuvers. The 'exhibition' includes performing martial arts, chasing criminals at high speed, descending buildings with ropes, shooting, dismantling weapons with closed eyes, and military marches, all done with full Islamic cover, the Chador.

There is a certain amount of exhibitionism at work here. Asserting feminine power by imitating the exercises that in a patriarchal society such as Iran, are supposed to be the male domain is perhaps a distorted form of feminism; if men are strong so are we!

It is true that a woman is capable of enduring extreme physical hardships but the same woman's eye-witness account in a court of law is worthless unless there are two women to corroborate her story; equaling one man's statement.

Abbas Kowsari's photographs manage to capture the chauvinistic aspect of the event. As usual, his work is imbued with humanism and combined with sharp observations of the Iranian Society. The cynicism in the series is unmistakable, while the intelligent observer defies stupefaction.



Mehraneh Atashi

Bodiless series, 2004

Digital photography

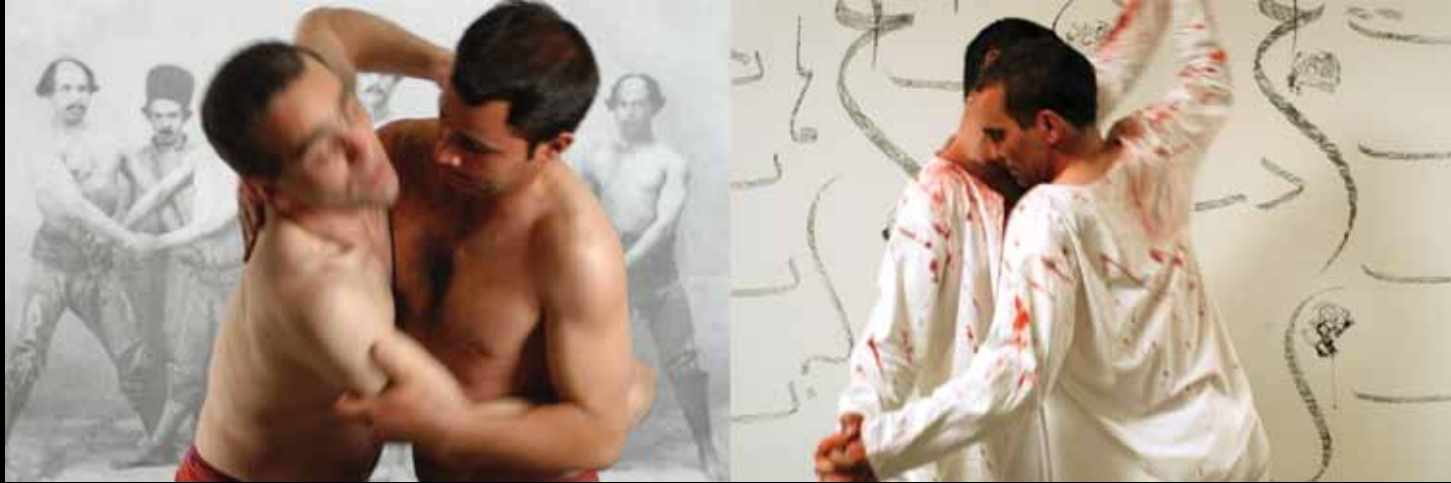
80 x 120 cm

I look at my work as an archive of the self, which allows me to find a method to understand the world around me, and my archive is mostly in the form of self-portraits.

My interest in the self-portrait is two fold: on the one hand I insert myself into a genre and establish a relationship with photography as both a medium and an apparatus, on the other hand, self-portrait is a mode of re-capturing a visual space, an attempt to re-claim a space in the picture plane, hijacked by forces of power, a space within which I am trying to insert myself. I am interested in where these two approaches to self-portraiture collide: photography and power.

Zourkhaneh (from the series *Bodiless I*, 2004) was the beginning of this exercise. This is where religion, tradition, and virility, symbols of the Persian hero, are all mixed. A place like a traditional gymnasium which is dedicated to the development of men's bodily strength to fight.





Sadegh Tirafkan

Sacrifice (a glance to my past), 2004

Video

4.11 min

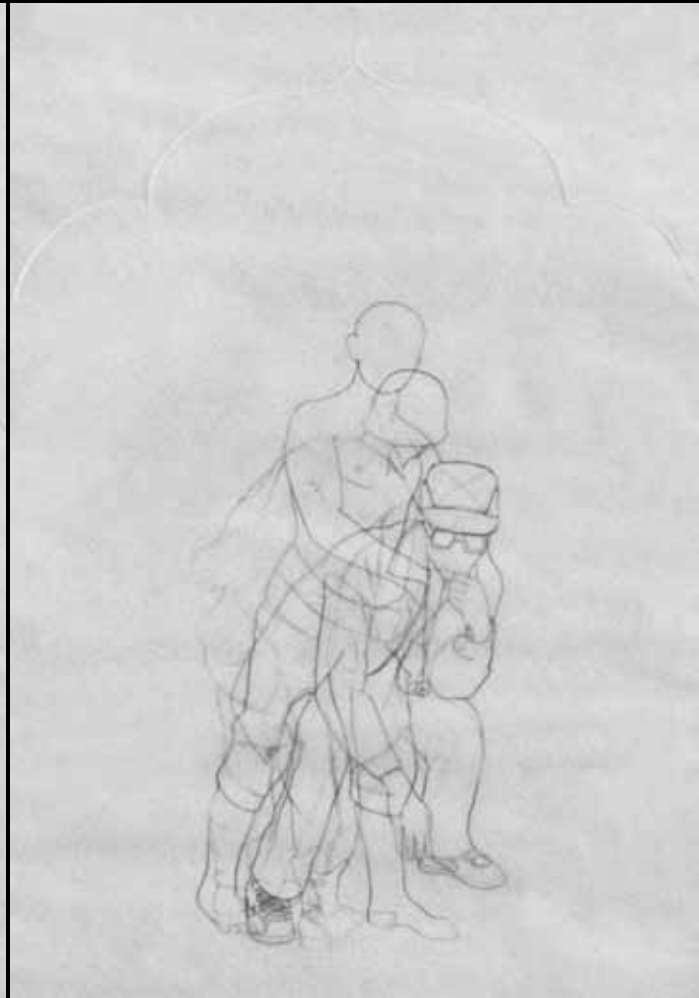
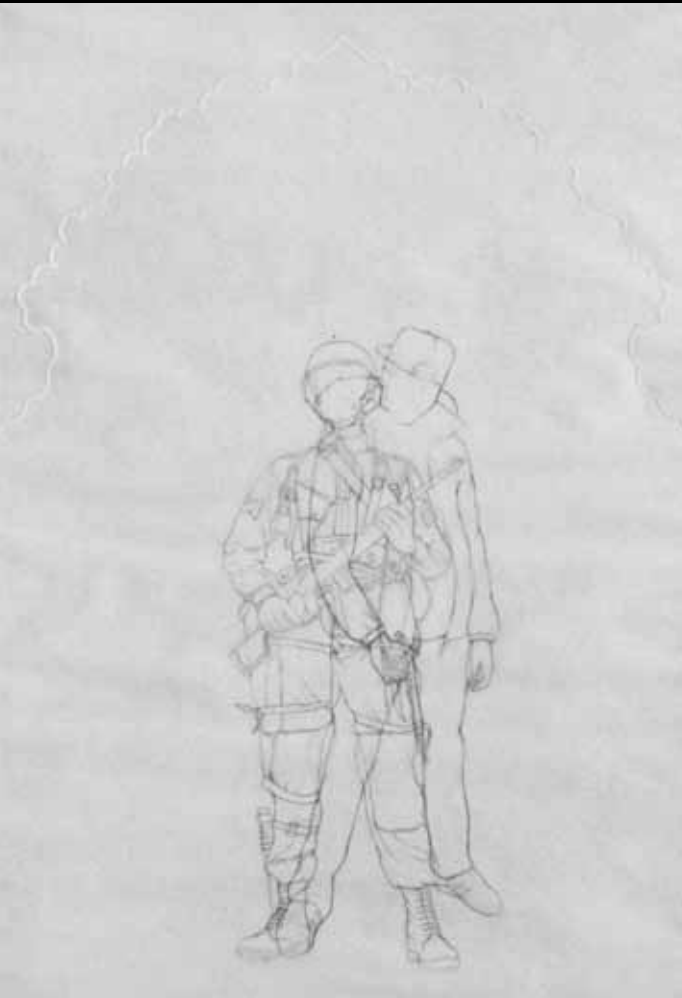
Courtesy of the artist

According to a number of religious texts: Abraham was about to sacrifice his son to convey his devotion to God, an angel offered a sheep as he placed the blade against Ismail's throat.

In the tragic story of Sohrab and Rostam from the *Shahnameh*, *Book of Kings* by Ferdowsi: Rostam realizes that he has killed his own son in battle, a son, he had never seen before the day of their encounter. Rostam holds his son, drenched in blood, empowered with raw emotions of love and loss.

In the Shia sect, a branch of Islam, on the anniversary of Hussien's (grandson of Prophet Mohammed) death and martyrdom, followers wound themselves with metal machetes, offering their blood in his honor and memory.

Sacrifice is my artistic interpretation of the emotional impact these stories have had on me since childhood.



Although he is accomplished in sculpture and installation, Ala Ebtekar has returned time and again to his initial passion of drawing and painting. With meticulous attention to conceptual intent and physical execution, he deconstructs and reconstructs time, space and history, creating an organic, hybridized visual narrative fertile with infinite interpretations. He is as much influenced by the mythology and folklore of his Iranian heritage as he is by the legends and lore of hip-hop culture. The figures in Ebtekar's work inhabit a space where past and present collide, and frequently emerge from the boundaries of old book pages and from the austere vastness of large pieces of paper, like parables from another time. Yet, the surprise of seeing a modern combat helmet and rifle bandolier in the midst of traditional armor, or the silhouette of a tank overlaid with sword wielding soldiers on horseback, prompts a pause. The past and present mingle in a complex dance of ideologies, allegories, and consequences. Ebtekar imagines this world with a measure of grace and civility, the latent conflict frozen in the moment, with its participants wearing expressions of calm and resolve, as if they knew how history would be written all along.

Ala Ebtekar

The Absent Arrival, 2006

Graphite and acrylic on paper

42 x 29.7 cm



Samira Alikhanzadeh

'The Double' from the Family Album series, 2010

Digital print, acrylic and mirror fragments on board

120 x 150 cm

*I carry inside myself my earlier faces
as a tree contains its rings.
The sum of them is me.
The mirror sees only my latest face
while I know all my previous ones.*
Tomas Transtromer

Old family albums arouse my imagination. They take me to times when they were considered 'new days', but now?

It has been a while since I engaged with old photographs and these faces. I know some of them but they are mostly strangers to me. In the language of imagery, through visibility and non-visibility, through the sense of being and absence, I confront them in each photograph and communicate with their eyes and their gaze.

Mirrors help us step into each other's world; I greet them through the passage of time. But I get lost looking into bulging mirrors; I stand in front of them and can't find myself. Just like being in old mirror halls, I am lost in between reflections of images.

What began as an obsession with windows and light sources in interiors became the main element in my initial works and has stayed with me till present.

Taking the position of an observer, I create an overlay of window-like openings to the interiors within my composition, and introduce human figures and forms as part of the cold and grey atmosphere within my impression of a society filled with deeply satirical contrasts reflected by my use of blues, purples and greens.

Human figures and forms, mainly of children, girls and wedding images of brides and grooms in the form of found photographs render the passage of time as a melancholic truth yet they also express the humour found in most old photographs reflected by hair and dress styles of the day: just as our photographs would be found amusing by their viewers in the not too distant future.

By applying shards of mirror I created a marked though incomplete presence of the viewers within the framework of my composition. They in turn become a part of the composition and possible descendants of the subjects, looking into a past, or perhaps like me, satisfying their voyeuristic urge to enter the lives and memories of generations gone by.



REFLECTIONS OF A COMPLEX SOCIETY

Passing the atrium, a shrine celebrates a non-violence icon; a hand shoots clouds of color from a gun; and a contemporary miniature woman, perhaps Van Gogh's love, pierces her eye while as she looks in a mirror. These are clues for a curious spectator towards the adventure that resides on the second floor.

After crossing the bridge we confront small rectangular mirrors that cover the eyes on a family portrait; what stories do they hide (*Samira Alikhanzadeh*)? Moving along, one sees line drawings of masculine figures in a variety of costumes (*Ala Ebtekar*), competing with photographs of sportsmen and soldiers (*Mehraneh Atashi and Mohsen Rastani*). A triptych reveals bodies practicing traditional sports and an epic fight turning into violence (*Sadegh Tirafkan*), while a staged maneuver is set, organized by the State Women Police Academy, climbing down ropes in their Chadors, or striking a pose on the board of a vehicle for the camera of a journalist (*Abbas Kowsari*).

The odd combination of hair and apples, cut and tousled with a pile of blood stained tissues (*Amir Mobed*), mirrored by caricatures of working women with exposed bodies transmitting waves of disgust and pity (*Shirin Fakhim*). A photo sequence narrating the story of girls in an elementary school where they learn a fact, that the borders of public and private domain can be contradictory (*Newsha Tavakolian*).

Lustful and groundbreaking, two self-portraits (*Amir Mobed and Ramin Haerizadeh*) confront the illuminating canvas where a playful white rabbit messes up with clerks' assembly over their teeming feast (*Farideh Lashai*).

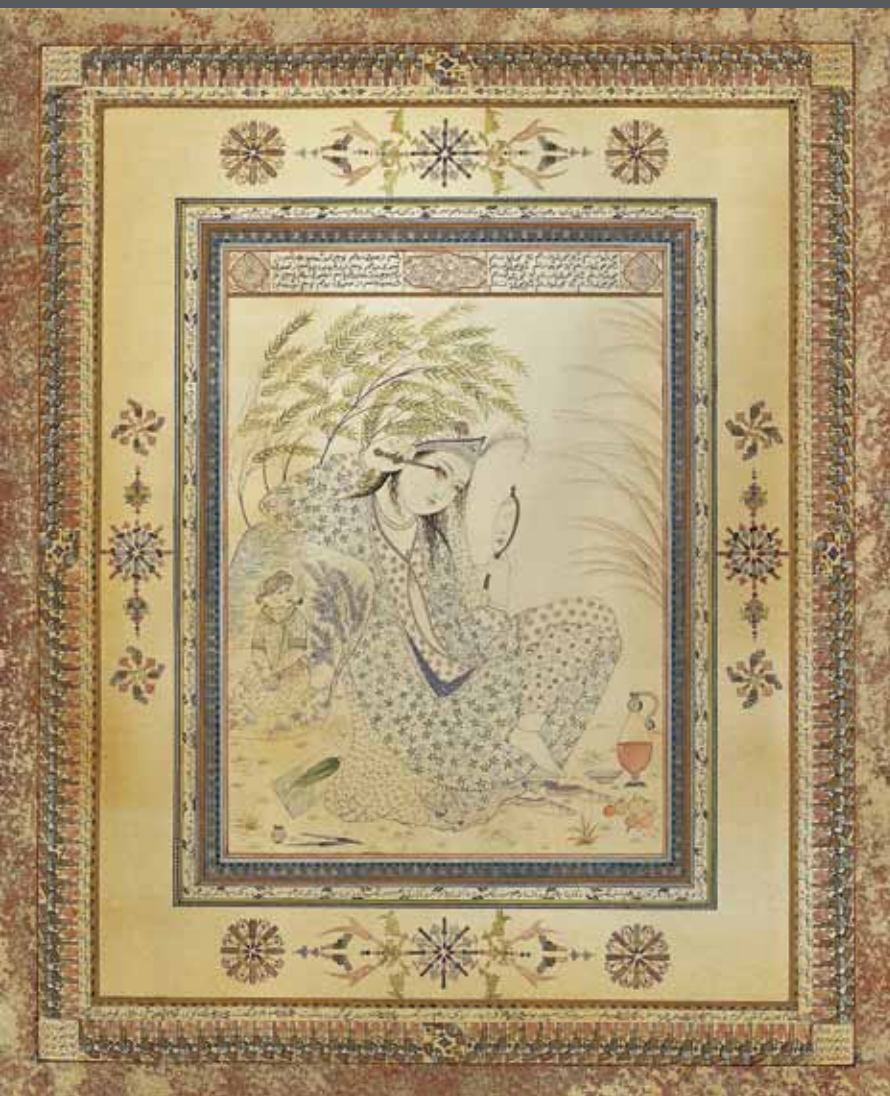
More outlandish representation of the self lies ahead, playfully revealing the dark humour, one uses the displacement of ideological dress-code and contrasts in scale (*Parastou Forouhar*), the other captures the wandering body of a photographer into a heart-to-heart exchange with an alien space (*Peyman Hooshmanzadeh*).

We face women protesting for what they claim silenced their voices in a homogeneous yet distinguished fashion. One of them takes the liberty to violently use a marker on her photographs and censor her models (*Shadi Ghadirian*). The other sits patiently waiting for her sad destiny (*Simin Keramati*). Finally in a double act of self-concealment and exposure a woman holds a license plate as a suspect and as a sign of her existence (*Katayoun Karami*).

On the other side of this wall are photographs which take us into the daily life of Iran - a photograph of a girl with a nose job, fake hair and coloured lenses (*Shirin Aliabadi*). Private house parties which attract the eye of a Euro-American journalist who sneaks into households for that unique alternative story that makes his fortune but is it the whole picture? Who are these people and does anyone care (*Amirali Ghasemi*)? Two animated paintings borrow a metaphoric presence of a helicopter as a sign of surveillance and a threat of a shadowy whale oddly floating close to the shores of an industrial resort (*Hamed Sahihi*).

Four slides in a light box demonstrate brain drain among the revolution's generation (*Shirin Sabahi*). The opposite wall bears colourful photocopied images from the web and the satellite media coverage of Iran's presidential election and the turmoil that followed and the pixilated moment from a peaceful rally in protest (*Leila Pazooki*) render different tactics to block the message of censorship. Finally a model of Tehran's signature monument sunk halfway in water with its people wondering what has really happened to their demands at the end of the day? Will anything change at all?

A devoted guard holds position as one continues to the end of the room with an embroidered felt like shield, guns face each other in a battlefield where tulips innocently bloom, the embroidered Persian sentence on the felt shield reads, *Are Bullets the Answer to Flowers?* Behind the headless guard is an elevated light bulb that irradiates the portrait of the late founder of the Islamic republic. Then a sudden appearance of a bloodied army knife on a shiny dining table competes with the discovery of an empty cardboard cinema inside a cigarette box.



This piece is inspired by Reza Abbasi's painting that shows a beautiful woman using kohl in her eyes and looking at herself in the mirror. On the cushion, on which she leans, is an image of a man who is giving her a look of love, as he fills his bowl with wine. But in *Vincent, Reza and Me* the beautiful woman from Abbasi's painting has turned into a painter who is blinding herself with a knife. Her own reflection in the mirror is threatened by this scene and shuts its eyes.

Her knife looks like a paintbrush and the clouds in the painting resemble the ones in Van Gogh's. It is said that in the past when a miniaturist refused to follow the king's order, either the king would make him blind or the miniaturist would make himself blind. This subject is finely revealed in Orhan Pamuk's book, *My Name is Red*.

In the painting, Van Gogh with his ear cut, looks at the woman with a feeling of surprise or even sympathy. The border has decorations, which on a closer look reveal guns decorated with flowers and leaves – the gun that Van Gogh killed himself with. All the motifs in the work are drawn and decorated with guns and bullets covered in blood.

Various poems of Forugh Farrokhzad are written repeatedly on all sides of the painting, for example,

*I couldn't, I couldn't anymore
That spring and that green delusion
I cried the whole day in the mirror
Which pick, which climax*

All the catastrophes that are revealed with beautiful decorations in this piece show the contrast of our souls and our surroundings. This work is a conversation between Van Gogh, Reza Abbasi and me as an Iranian woman artist in no man's land.

Farah Ossouli

Vincent, Reza and Me, 2010

Gouache on cardboard

67 x 55 cm

Kamrooz Aram

Gun Drawing, 2007

Ink on paper

57.2 x 76.5 cm

The body of works in *Revolutionary Dreams* series and specially this particular drawing of the smoke from the gun is about the romanticization of revolutionary action. Sometimes this romantic view of revolution is from people who have no direct relationship to revolution or violence. Other times the revolutionary dreams fail to achieve their goals. So in a way it is also about a kind of failure... though this particular work is more about the romanticization: the beauty of the dream.





The background of the shrine is a mosaic of handwritten text in various languages, including English, Hindi, and Gujarati. The text is densely packed and covers the entire wall behind the figures.





I started working on *Ready to Order* project in 2007, which was inspired by public shrines as well as martyrs of the Iran-Iraq war. These shrines constructed as boxes contain photographs of martyrs surrounded by lights, flowers, mirrors and things that I believe were important to them. They mimic the Immamzadehs, shrine-tomb of the prophets and saints, where pilgrims flock to pay respect and mourn.

In Tehran, there are giant martyrs' portraits painted on the sides of the buildings by propaganda artists. They are often surrounded by iconic objects and visual metaphors which talk about the importance of their sacrifice and their journey to paradise as heroes. At the same time, the government says that there are sixty million people who live in Iran as 'live martyrs'. I decided to create my own icons for these 'live martyrs', with flashy lights, surrounded with objects of their dreams.

I wanted to make portraits of non-political characters whose popularity has endured and remained unchanged through various political upheavals. For this project, I began working with close friends, family and famous figures like Googush (singer) and Tahkti (a champion wrestler).

My fascination with Gandhi began before the revolution. I was around fifteen years old when I first read about him and how he changed the world with his words and a spinning wheel. To me, he is a teacher and a thinker, rather than a political figure.

In 2011, I visited India to make a work on Gandhi. I created a temple to pay my own respect to Gandhi, a shrine to his ideas, words and his spinning wheel.

Translated by Eugenie Dolberg

Khosrow Hassanzadeh

The Gandhi Project, 2010-11

Mixed media

286 x 254 cm



Moth to a flame is part of the *Chemical Hysterical* drawing series. As the title suggests, the drawings from this series take on questions and ideas of how to reveal the figure as a psycho/emotional being, and how to depict 'a state of being' rather than attempt at making an objective portrait of the figure.

I use self-portraiture as a way of examining and defining myself in a constantly shifting cultural context, as well as a means of examining 'the self' rather than merely being myself. These drawings have also been a vehicle of experimentation with the language of drawing, questioning assumptions and short cuts taken to depict the human form. They are an effort towards depicting all the intangibles of the human experience: the psychic, emotional, biological, biomythical and the autobiographical.

Seemingly specific, the figures are actually archetypal, not literally 'my' self. They are 'the Self' from inside out; how it feels to be 'me', (or more to the point) how it feels to be human. Their specific identities help uncover elements of a more universal self.

The use of Arabic calligraphy in some of the drawings, works as a cultural signifier, quoting classical Arabic song titles by the legendary Egyptian singer Um Kalthoum. The writing is, at times, deliberately illegible to convey half developed thoughts or the internal monologue, or a means of implying cultural misunderstanding where language and meaning disintegrate into pattern.

These drawings evolved through a series of experiments by tracing overlaid images of my own with borrowed imagery which then developed into using selected images on an overhead projector.

More specifically in *Moth to a flame* the themes in the drawing are imprinted in the fragmented patterns of the dress, showing butterfly, feather and doily motifs. The main body of the skirt shows a fragment of a scene from the mythical martyrdom of the Imam Hussain taken from another body of my work 'the eternal war' series.

Samira Abbassy

Moth to a Flame, 2009

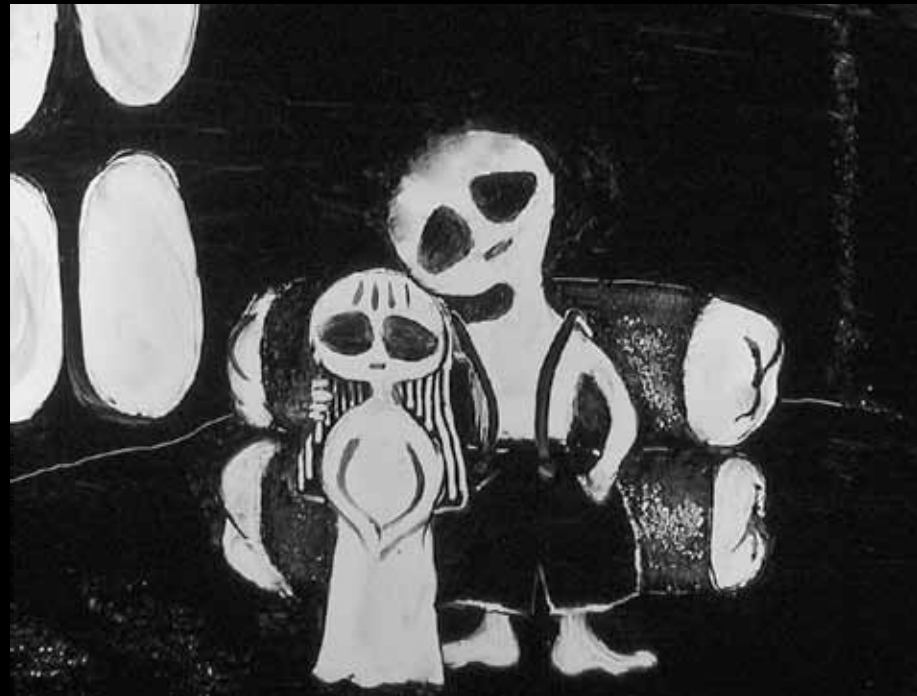
Charcoal on paper

111.8 x 76.2 cm

Elham Doust Haghighi draws the viewer's attention to a story she heard from an old lady:

"There was a time in the city of Qazvin, when most of the people were illiterate, there were a few literate men who would read the prayer books for others. But in the cemetery the customary rule was to make prayer bags. These bags were made of sheep testicle skin. The literate read the prayers, sentence by sentence and blew the words into the bags. Then they hung the bag on their walking stick, and went to sell them in the cemetery."

Inspired by the tale, Doust Haghighi narrates an animated story of a prayer-seller, through the eyes of his son and daughter.



Elham Doust Haghighi

The Flight (Parvaz), 2004

Short animation

2 min 57 sec



Alireza Dayani
Untitled, 2009
Rapid on cardboard
100 x 70 cm

Alireza Dayani
Untitled, 2009
Rapid on cardboard
90 x 240 cm



I regard the world around me as completely unrealistic. For me, every person and every object is concealed beneath a false identity. Truth appears only when I approach my imagination.

I like observing people around me, their relationship with their surroundings and combine this with my imagination. The world is full of objects and associations, some beautiful, some ugly.

In painting, when imagination is mixed with reality, it marks the beginning of a never-ending realm which depicts the rarest and the most irregular phenomena in a completely fluid and influential manner.

Mostly I work with a roller pen or black ink on cardboard. Some scenes here are inspired by mythology, with legendary creatures such as griffins, appearing alongside arcane and mystical symbolism.

It is true that Iran and the current situation of my society have had a profound effect on my interpretation of my surroundings. Often my works critique thoughts and beliefs of groups that influence the general public. I hope that by continuing to do so, I will be able to alter the current situation and people's point of view.





Shroud animation is created from the images of my paintings and attempts to reveal the hidden and the invisible. It explores the idea of absence and presence and was inspired by the *Veil of St. Veronica* by Spanish painter Francisco de Zubaran (c.1635).

I have used the veil to reveal the breath. The narrative of the film explores the relation between image and imagelessness, life and death and what emerges is elusive and evasive.

Shirazeh Houshiary

Shroud, 2007

Digital animation

53 inch LCD screen

5 min 53 sec in loop

Ghazaleh Hedayat

Tight or Loose Hair, 2010

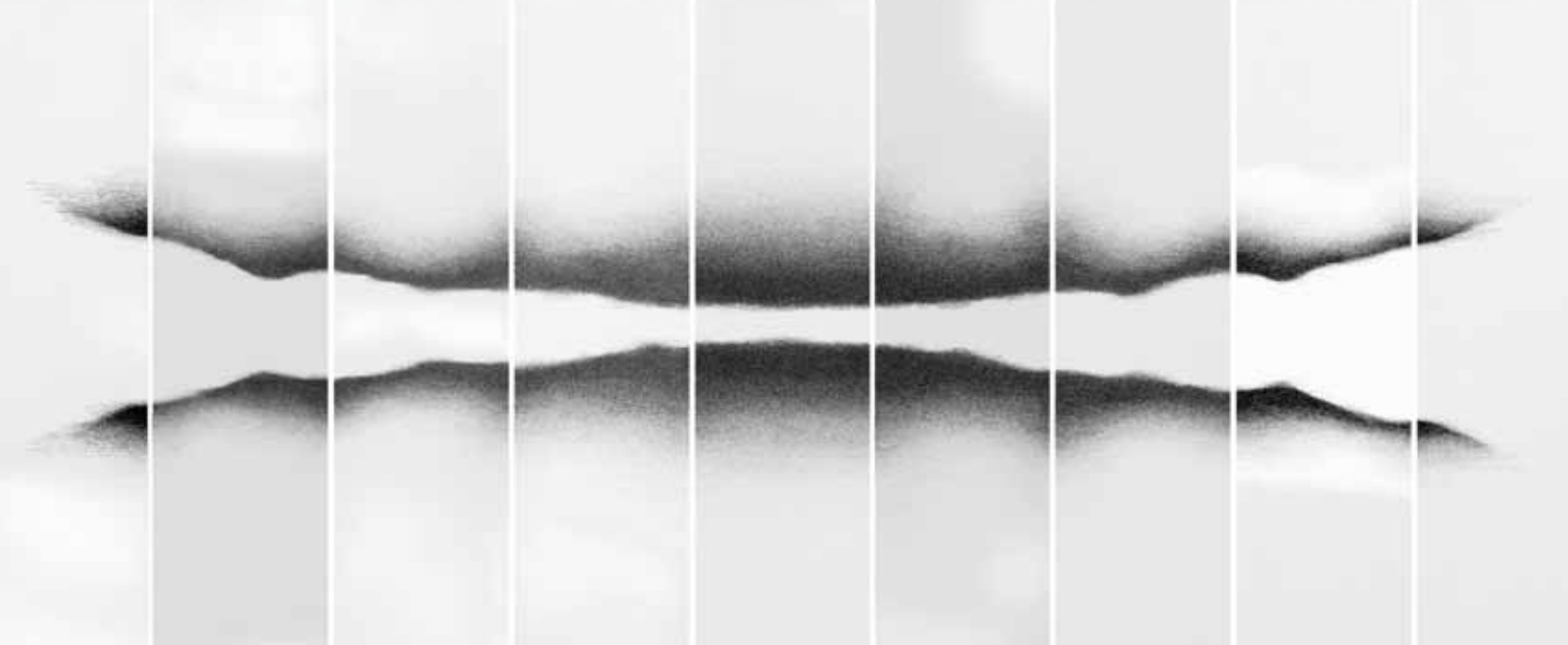
From the Strand and the Skin series

Hair and embroidery hoop

46 x 46 cm

In the beginning of *the Strand and the Skin* series, lack of two elements in photography captured me. The first was the immediacy of taking a picture and the second, not feeling the sense of touch. How could I manipulate the briefness of taking a picture? How could time be stretched out? How could one of the human senses be represented within a picture without it actually being present? Also the silenced body has always been with me therefore I have used my own: my skin, my throat and my hair. Via these works, can I hear the sound of my body? Can I allow it to be exposed, to be touched?





Golnaz Fathi

Untitled, 2011

Pen on canvas

180 x 48 x 6 cm (each)

This series of work with pen on canvas is inspired by the technique of *Shiah Mashgh* or Black Practice. This is a calligrapher's warm-up exercise, repeating letters over and over again until the white paper is entirely covered with black ink. For me, this is the most artistic part of traditional calligraphy and best suits the spontaneity of my painting. I started to go against all rules that I had learned for years. These gestures, both of rhythm and form – fascinate me. My work contains no written text, but forms that are meant to be looked at with pictorial eyes, allowing viewers from all countries the same interpretative freedom that occurs at the moment it is created. It can't be read with the eye alone, but must be understood with imagination and read by the heart.

While looking at the work, one can almost retrace the movements of my hand, making uncompromising gestures and attempting to capture on canvas a moment in thought, word, sound or a story – that translates into a line.

One can also read them as a visual meditation or a form of prayer, where the layering speaks of the process and the rhythmic passing of time. They are black and white, without colour, because the lines speak for themselves.

I said: "To the point of Thy mouth, who taketh the way?"

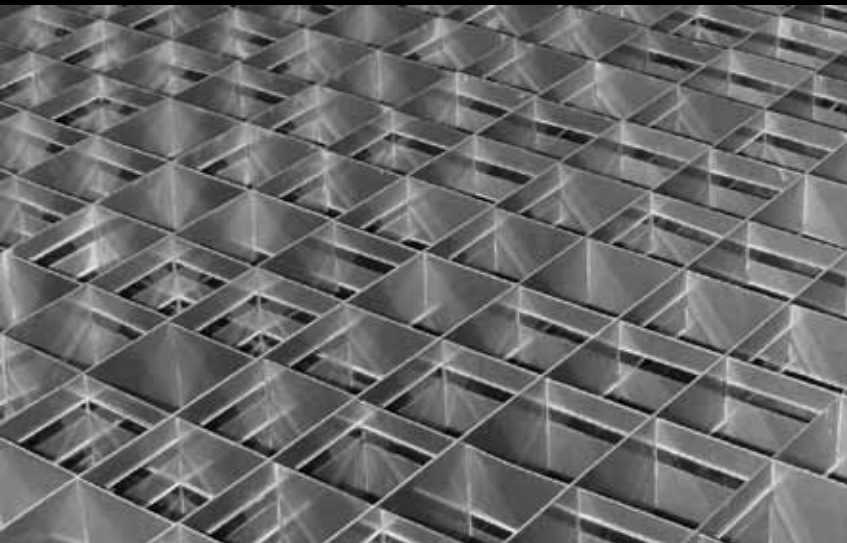
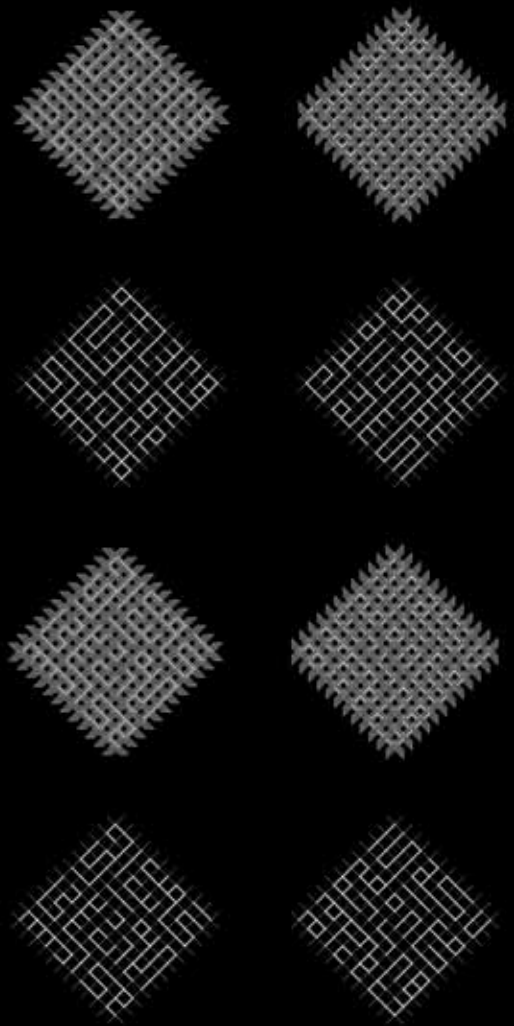
He said: "This is a tale that to Subtlety-knower, they make."

I said: "Wine and the religious garment, are they not the ordinance of the religious order?"

He said: "In the religious order of the Pir of the Magians, this work they make."

Each of the four verses was executed in Banai Script* shaping a separate square tablet. Shiny horizontal steel lines within the grid reveal these four tablets but deciphering each verse of poem is only possible by positioning the viewer at one corner of the grid. At any corner two tablets at two different heights can be seen, one legible and the other illegible.

*Banai is a purely geometric script, which has a code-like appearance, consisting of horizontal and vertical lines, it can be considered as a system of codes for Persian calligraphy.



Zeinab Shahidi Marnani

The Point, 2008

Brushed steel, shiny steel, wood

90 x 90 x 84 cm

Courtesy of the artist



My work is driven by the fantasy of what my life would have been like had I not left Iran as a child. This fascination with my birthplace is a fascination born not out of intimacy but out of detachment. I wonder how the ravages of war and revolution would have imprinted themselves on me. I shuttle between an intense glorification of this existence and a complete horror of my own naïveté. I develop the narratives of this fantasy life through different sculptural mediums, including metal and chain as well as light and shadow.

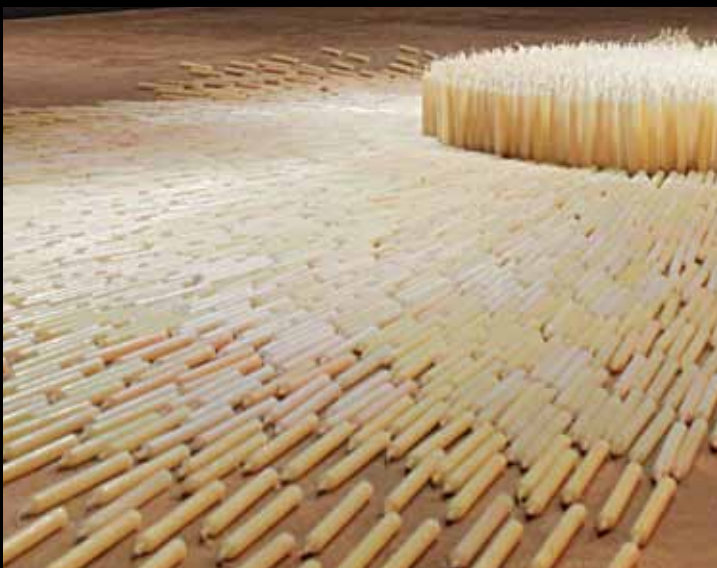
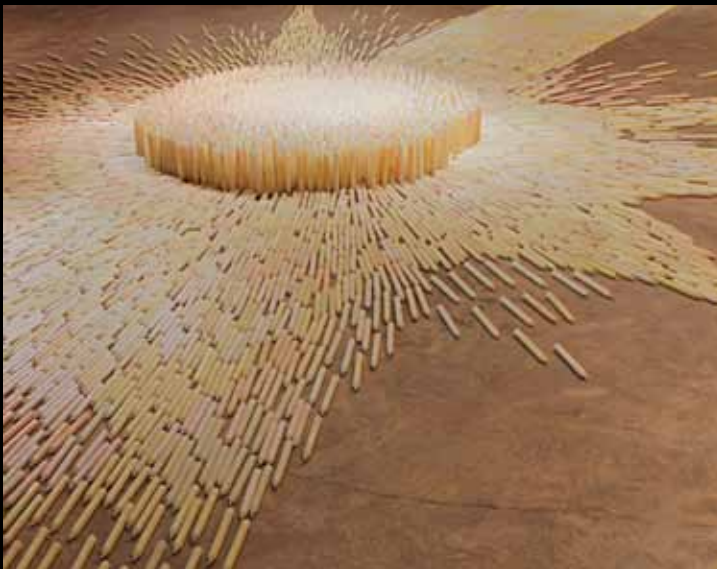
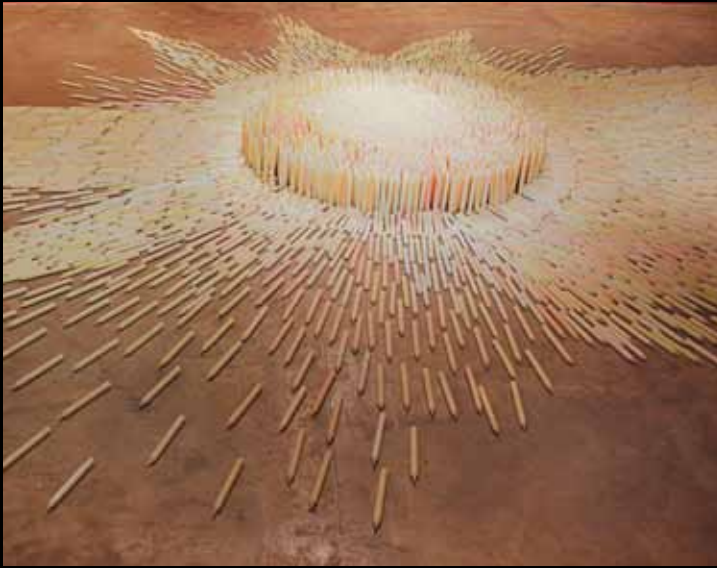
In *Poppy Garden*, I draw upon the arabesques and vegetal designs of Persian carpets. Within this structure I use and transform traditional symbols to represent the people and events which were absent from my life. Tulips and skeleton keys symbolize Iran's wartime martyrs and veterans. Poppy flowers sprouting hypodermic needles as stamen represent Iran's heroin consumption. I hand-cut these images into woven polyethelene, a material used in the construction of refugee tents, and illuminate the material with light.

Afruz Amighi

Poppy Garden, 2007-09

Pe-cap and plexiglass

272 x 195.5 cm



The first version of the candle installation was made for the Third New Media Exhibition in Tehran. It was part of a series of site-specific projects that were conceived as a challenge to the traditional definition of a sculpture – a rigid object on a pedestal. These installations mostly focused on their interaction with visual elements in a space.

From 2000 to 2007, Mobed created these installations and environmental pieces both indoors and in public spaces, including *Mushrooms* (2002), *Angels* (2003), *Candles* (2004) and *Reeds* (2004-05) in the Sculpture Garden of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts. Some of these installations were characterized by altering familiar spaces and giving them a totally new character through repetition of visual elements.

In later projects, social and political statements began to acquire a more important role. They were made of materials such as plaster, iron and clay as well as candles, fruits and human hair. Many of his installations have an ephemeral or changing nature due to their forms and materials.

Amir Mobed

Candles, 2004

Candle installation

Dimension variable

Timo Nasser

Sphere (VI), 2008

Plaster cast on painted wooden plinth

19 x 25 x 19 cm

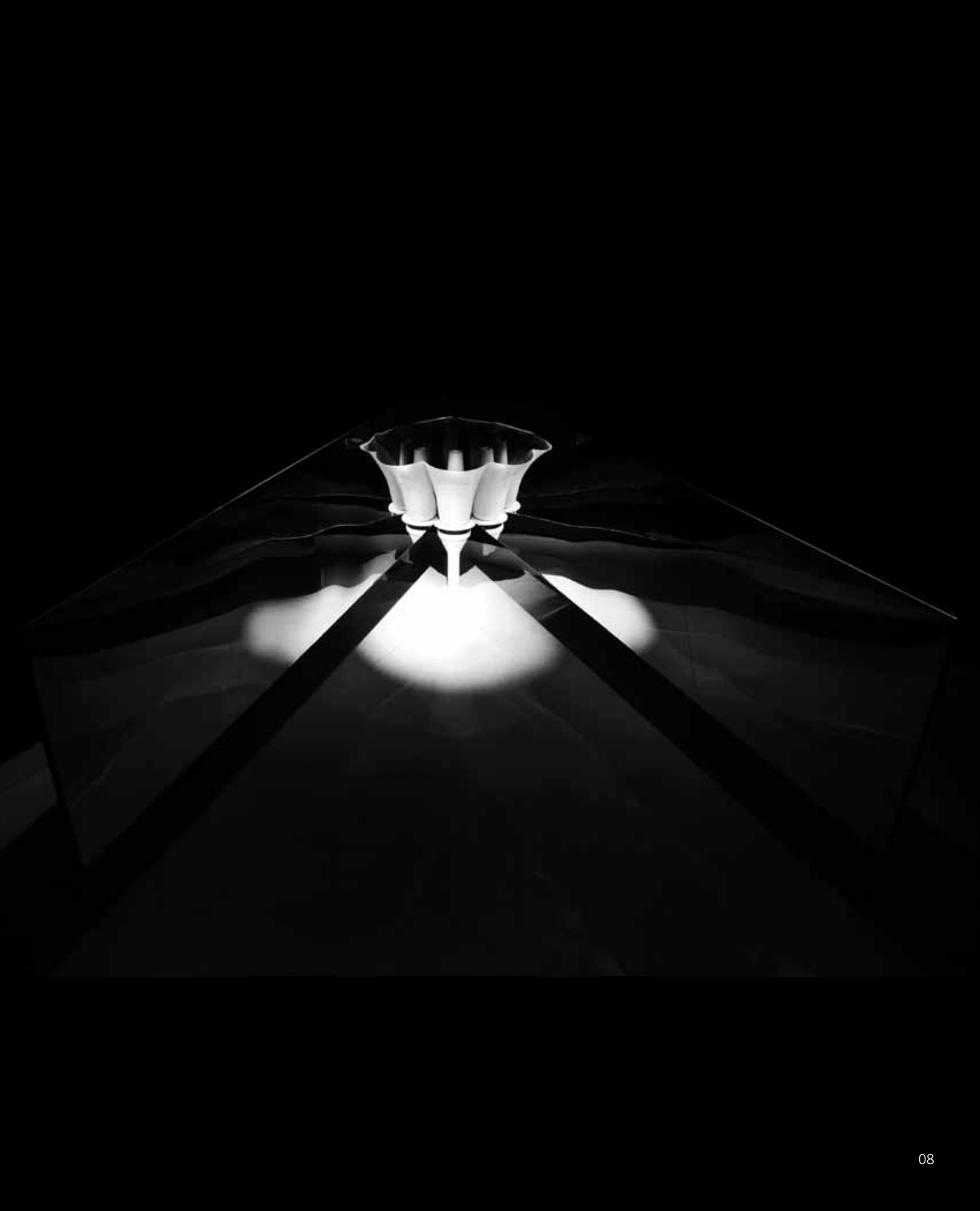


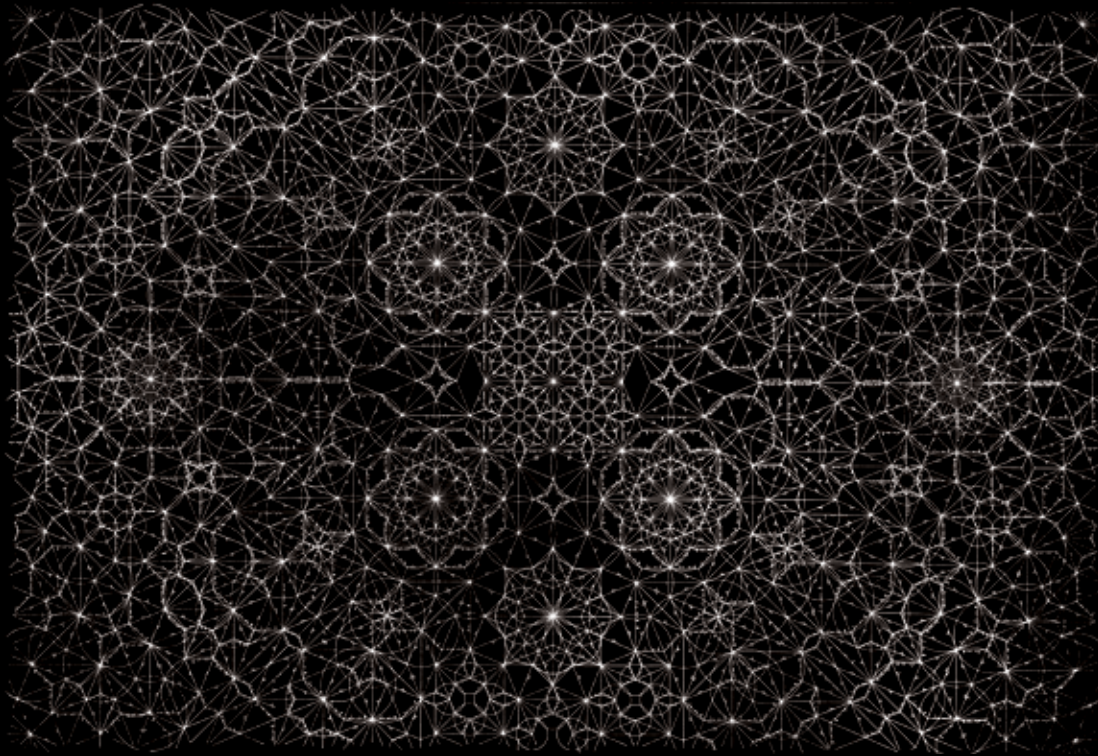
Timo Nasser first began working as a photographer, moving later into drawing and sculpture. *Sphere* is from a series of works whose complex shapes are based on Islamic ornamental elements. Rather than create their sculpted void - as is the case with *Muqarnas* - they fill up and form a closed body, finite as opposed to infinite, full rather than empty, on a reduced scale rather than monumental, 'Spheres' integrates the plinth in the work in order to create a context of visibility, detachment and mysterious existence.

Barbad Golshiri	
Narcissus Echoes	
Aplastic play, 2009-10	
Stainless steel, mirrors, megaphone (horn loud speaker)	
250 x 175 x 100 cm	
Courtesy of the artist and Aaran gallery	

A cutout of a megaphone built into the short end of a protruding v-shaped mirror appears as a multi-petalled flower in 'Narcissus Echoes'. On drawing closer, one witnesses a remorseful confessor - the artist - who has gone through numerous *répétitions* only to become another descendent, a new echolalic agent of the ideology.

"Malignant narcissism that can be found in dictatorships renders socio-political diversities unanimous. Torture is not used to extract truth and information; it is a tool used to impose a cluster of truths; the tortured dissidents usually profess their love for the System, offer their apologies to Him and confess that they've become aware of His wisdom. Remember Bukharin. Months of imprisonment, absolute detachment from the outside world, a situation in which one begs to be interrogated, with physical and psychological torture that reduces the confessor to an echo of the system, repeating exact words and phrases, becoming echolalic; it is here that 'Narcissus Echoes'. Confessors are put through numerous *répétitions* to become descendents of a system that does nothing but repeat itself; constructing new echolalic unanimous agents. *Répétitions* prepare them for premieres, televised confessions, identical show trials that are bitterly mordant, with predictable and repetitive words uttered by interchangeable persons. The confessors *faithfully* quote the state media – television functions as a truth-referent, the successor and substitute to the opium of the masses and its Pastors – pretending to own the words they utter and believing in the truth that is revealed to them in their solitude, where no alien thoughts can penetrate."





Timo Nasser

One and One#16, 2008

White ink on black paper

95 x 130 cm

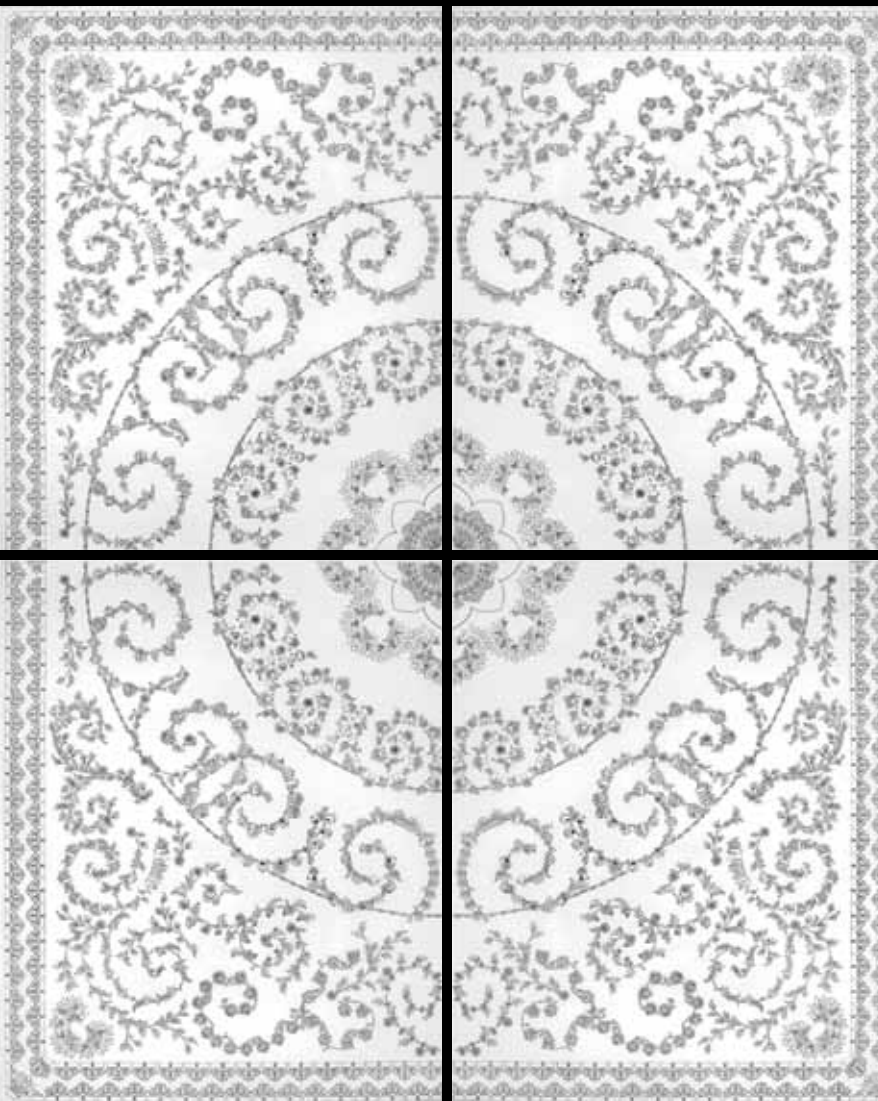
The drawings from this series are rendered on a black paper with white ink. The base of these drawings is an ornamental shape of triangles with circles measuring the sides of these triangles. The structures thus represented are repeated, virtually to infinity, to build a *Muqarnas*. This repetition of gesture and mathematical formulae intensifies the experience, as it does in the case of the act of praying. In the Islamic culture, letters have correspondent numbers and significations, thus producing symbolic meaning beyond representation. It is this overcoming of the shape through its meaning that Nasser draws his inspiration from.

Nazgol Ansarinia's work explores the perceptions of systems and patterns in our immediate environment. Celebrating the mundane, she investigates how the subconscious is numbed by the routines and repetitions of everyday life. Ansarinia works in a variety of media, including print, drawing, installation and film, the nature of her work determines what she uses.

While the artist's earlier work centers on her home town, Tehran, exploring the notions of systems within this urban setting, her recent work reflects on the romantic impressions of the patterns associated with the Persian carpet.

Traditionally, Persian carpets draw their imagery from the organic world in Persia. Nazgol reinvents these designs, offering delicate drawings on paper that depict a contemporary view of her Country, now known as Iran. At a casual glance these intricate renderings seem like ornate floral motifs, but upon closer inspection they reveal fragments of everyday life within Iran – rows of marching soldiers and girls in school uniform.

While the imagery refers to the complexities of the sociopolitical structure of contemporary Iran, it also pays heed to the classical reverence within carpet design. The *Untitled* works within the Pattern series, are black and white large-scale drawings that appear like a traditional Persian carpet from a distance. *Untitled I* (2007) consists of still images and simple depictions of realities that Ansarinia had come across in Tehran, *Untitled II* (2008) introduces movement and action within the scenarios and *Untitled III* (2009) depicts a dramatic plot, where one single incident causes the swirling of entangled events around it.



Nazgol Ansarinia

Untitled III, 2009

Digital drawing and ink on tracing paper

111.2 x 90.5 cm (each)



Iman Afsarian's paintings are largely set in interior spaces where the interior space is consistent with that which is internal and subjective. Just as the interior implies an external public space – history and society – inner reflection moves beyond the personal interests and obsessions pertaining to particular spaces and objects – inviting us to take that step beyond. The paintings may be devoid of living figures but there are traces of human activity everywhere; traces of mental investments; history is not absent in them.

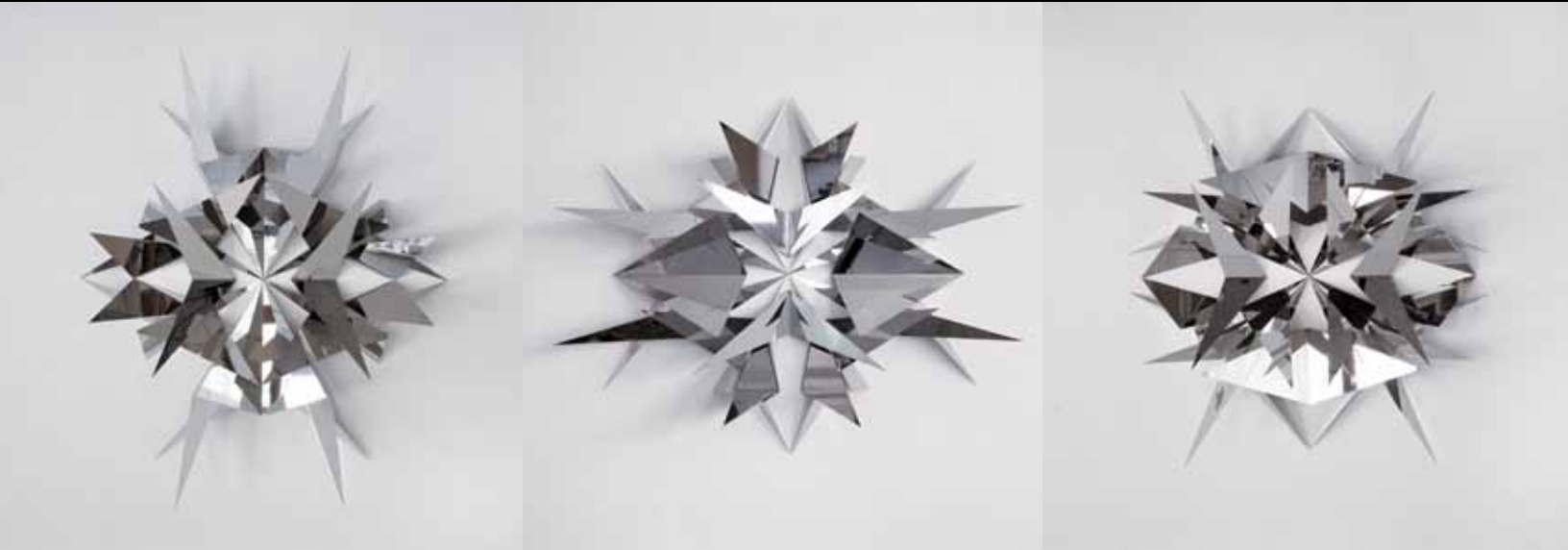
In Afsarian's paintings, instead of the onslaught of the process of development or modernization on an untouched and innocent pre-modern domain, we are in fact dealing with the substitution of one form of city dwelling with another form of urban family life. Therefore, any immediate sense of nostalgia in this case will inevitably stand in conflict with itself for we cannot at every stage of history, simply miss and pine for the previous stage that only differs from its successor in terms of time and appearance. In Afsarian's paintings, we do not deal with any kind of 'root', 'authenticity' or 'origin' – these spaces and objects cannot serve to set up a system of hierarchies and authentic/fakes, simply because they themselves can in no way be regarded as the 'authentic' versions of anything. What we see in these images does not portray 'tradition' in the strong sense of the word; rather, they create an image of a period of modernization in Iran with all its hopes and dreams and aspirations and failures.

Iman Afsarian

Untitled, 2011

Oil on canvas

160 x 104 cm



These sculptures are inspired by the ornamental corbel elements from the 11th century Islamic architecture. *Muqarnas* encircles a space and shapes its void. This architectural style uses five basic shapes in a resulting pattern, which can continue endlessly without ever having to repeat itself.

Nasseri's structures represent the celestial universe referring to the idea of infinity. The works attempt to confront this infinity through a fragmented image of the world and its viewer. Made of stainless steel, Nasseri's works are shown emanating from the surface of a wall.

Timo Nasseri

Glance# 1, 2, 3, 2009

Polished stainless steel

56 x 66 x 10.5 cm (each)



DEPARTURE FROM FORM

Speaking of Iran, sophisticated ornaments, geometric design in architecture, floral motifs on hand woven carpets and Persian calligraphy come to mind; well, they are present here too. Surprisingly contrary to the title there is a spurting rush of mirrors casting back immediate lights inspired by Islamic architecture from the 11th century onwards. Muqarnas is a pattern that can be continued endlessly without ever repeating itself. Further on the drawing's repetition of gesture and mathematical formulae intensifies the experience, as is the case with the act of praying (*Timo Nasserî*). A painting in veristic manner keeps the viewer wondering at a frozen moment with a casual glance ahead, the design lying on a platform surface suggests ornate floral motifs, but upon closer inspection they reveal fragments of everyday life (*Nazgol Ansarinia*). Celebrating the mundane, the subconscious is numbed by the routines and repetitions of..... a multi-petalled flower which is a result of the reflection of a sliced megaphone on a flouting v-shaped mirror appearing to throw mesmerizing words and psychopathic yelling of the artist (*Barbad Golshiri*).

A splash of potential source of light dominates the main hall (*Amir Mobed*), the gaze zooms back on a hypnotizing polyptych, two apocalyptic ovals painstakingly crafted and inspired by the technique of *Shiah Mashgh*, a meditative result of repeating letters over and over, until the white nearly vanishes in black ink (*Golnaz Fathi*). A black dot grows to a circle, walking parallel to the exploding blaze of candles waiting to be lit, an embroidery hoop appears solo on the red wall covered with silvery hints on dark hair (*Ghazaleh Hedayat*).

An unusual hanging garden unfolds itself in the shadow cast on the wall with the forbidden fruits of dope, hypodermic needles, tulips and skeletons (*Afroz Amighi*). The grid of right-angled plates of steel puzzle, with 4 points of entry abstrusely concealed in a 4 verse poem by *Hafez Shirazi* is encrypted with *Banai*, a purely geometric Persian script which has a code-like appearance consisting of only horizontal and vertical lines (*Zeinab Shahidi Marnani*). The adjoining area spreads itself as a big solitary cell silently exploring the relation between image and imageless, life and death and what emerges is elusive and evasive (*Shirazeh Houshiary*).

As the absence of human figures in early Iranian classical motifs slowly faded centuries after Islam took over Iran, they reappeared in miniatures which were especially an art of the court, curtained from the eye of the public. The constraints on the depiction of the human figure dimmed and complemented its path secretly, eagerly absorbed by the artists in various ways displayed in the last quarter (*Alireza Dayani, Samira Abbassy and Elham Doust Haghighi*) and continue on the way to the next level (*Khosrow Hassanzadeh, Farah Ossouli and Kamrooz Aram*).

Amirali Ghasemi

THE ELEPHANT IN THE DARK

CURATED BY AMIRALI GHASEMI