

# Quiet Pandemonium

Text by Kevin Jones

Reflections/Refractions, Athens in Flames as Greek Government Approves Austerity Plan. Police Clash with Austerity Plan Protesters (detail), 2012  
Newspaper collage, 40 x 60 cm

If anxiety is the background hum of our existence, Nazgol Ansarinia is listening very carefully. Over the past fifteen years, she has been producing sharp, understated works that turn up the volume on the unsettling.



Reflections/Refractions, Daily Production of Gasoline rises by 10 million.  
Production of Gasoline in Iran Increases by 10 million per day, 2012  
Newspaper collage, 60 x 40 cm

Today's news has the twin powers of making us anxious, yet keeping us hooked. As if the viscous news cycle needed any further demonizing, Ansarinia forces us to look not just at the hypocrisy of objective reporting, but conflates it with an aesthetic device (the mirror mosaic) that glistens with cultural ideology. This sophisticated interplay spotlights how distortion (and distrust) are hardwired into the very act of seeing.



Above: *Mendings (Plates)*, 2012  
Porcelain and glue, Dimensions variable

Right: *Mendings (Pink Mattress)*, 2012  
Mattress and thread, 180 x 54 x 23 cm



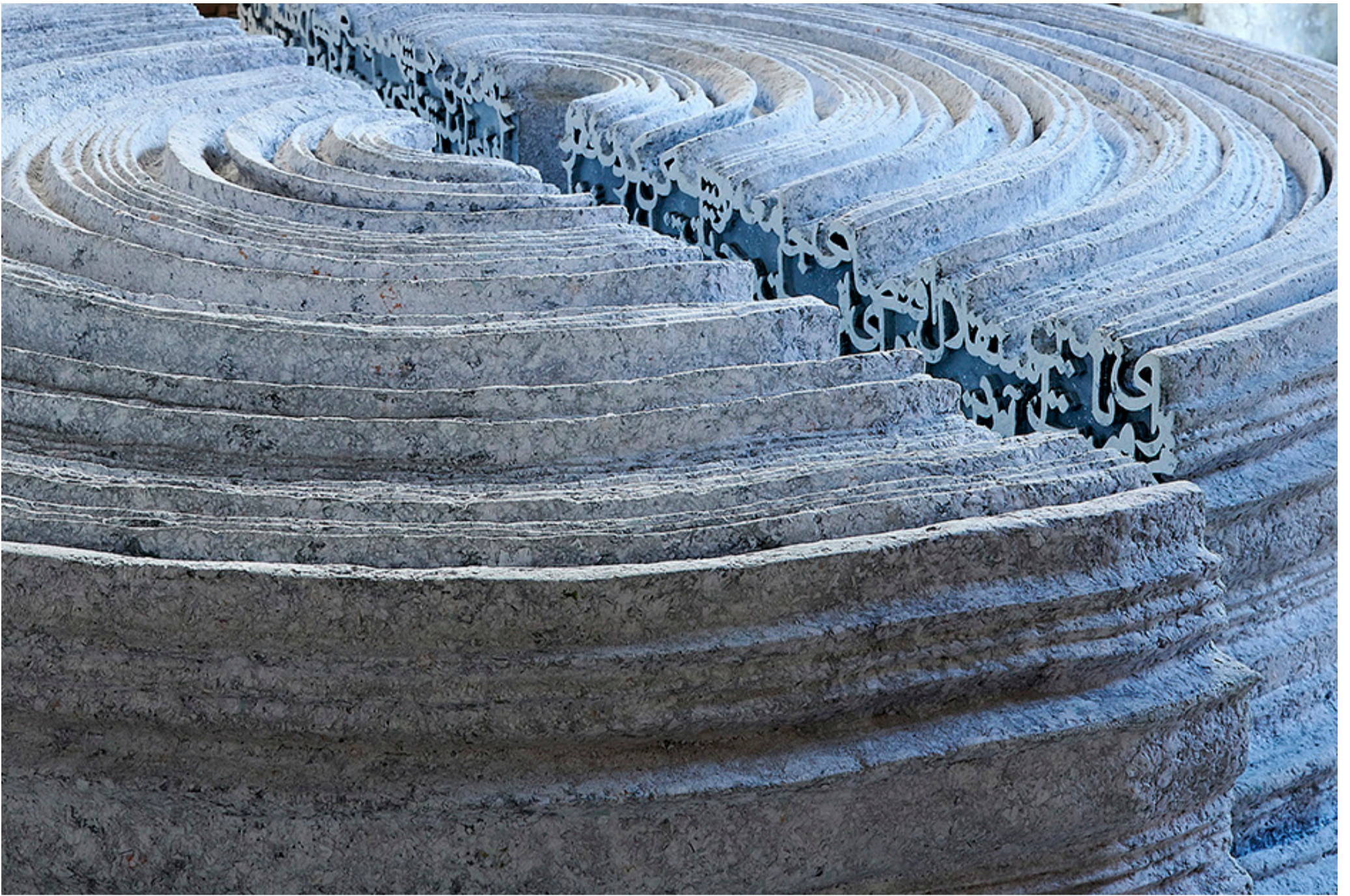
Even domestic comfort seems like a bit of an overpromise in such uneasy times. In the recesses of these mattresses, mirrors, plates, chairs and carpets that blur into the banality of our four walls lurks a mute trauma. The artist brings us nose-to-nose with this distress that is hidden in plain sight. Here, interruption trumps comfort, neurosis bleeds out from the mundane.

The home itself is an untrustworthy place, a site as much of absence as presence. In *Living Room*, it's as if absence has somehow become corporal. The home is like a spectral body—walls bearing marks like scars on a shriveling plaster skin, the puffs of dust like lungs heaving a dying breath. The foreclosing haze is as impossible to interpret as it is to shake. The residue of nostalgia? A hysterical embrace? The halo of some domestic carcass? Ansarina has abandoned us to a place of unsteady psychology, where every surface is an eerie fulcrum of the lived and the forgotten.



*Living Room (still)*, 2005  
Video projection, colour, 6, mins

Excerpt Link:  
<https://vimeo.com/408362719>



Above: *Article 43, Pillars* (detail), 2019

Below: *Article 43, Pillars*, 2019  
Paper paste and cardboard, 90 x 120 x 120 cm

One Ansarinia hallmark is her talent of layering conceptual complexity into works that are aesthetically precise. Carved into *Pillars* are deeply critical currents—the insidious reach of the state into the domestic realm, the cyclical anxiety of economic booms and busts, the disconnect between state and citizen, the dubious gesture of ostentatious appropriation. Yet the work’s sharpness, its frankness belie not only its nuanced social commentary, but also its incredibly wry humor. A calm yet biting criticism spirals through every pillar, engaging us in a game of revealing and hiding, of legibility and indivisibility.



The wittily titled *Private Assortment* conflates paranoia and color-coordinated consumerism. In spite of tackling a weighty subject –the looming fear of impending flight that haunts the denizens of unstable zones (and where is not an unstable zone today?)—the work is enticingly clever yet deeply disturbing. Playing with encryption, claustrophobia and surveillance, *Private Assortment* subtly makes us feel we are always being watched.



*Private Assortment, Metal Chair, 2013*  
Mixed media, 50 x 46 x 80 cm



*Private Assortment, Metal Chair (detail), 2013*



Watching is what Ansarinia does best. And she seems to relish toying with our vision, manipulating our own right to look. In this most recent, site-specific work, she inverts her gaze. From outward observation of the dynamics of the urban space, she turns inward to her own home. Adrift in nostalgia (for a sun-drenched childhood pool), angst (at the life-milestone of establishing a home) and a heightened material sensitivity (blue pigment is soaked into the plaster), the artist once again tugs us in multiple directions. Visceral yet critically distant, sensitive yet controlled. If one work conjures what it would be like to be inside Ansarinia's mind, this is it.

*The Inverted Pool, 2019*  
Concrete, metal, pigment and plaster  
600 x 360 x 300 cm  
Installation view at Argo Factory, Tehran, Iran, 2020

## Video: *The Inverted Pool* walkthrough with Nazgol Ansarinia

A journey through Nazgol Ansarinia's large-scale, site-specific work *The Inverted Pool*, commissioned for her first solo show at Tehran's Argo Factory in January 2020.

Link: <https://vimeo.com/410908561>

