

Contributing Artists

Samira Abbassy
Minoo Emami
Roya Farassat
Azadeh Hussaini
Arghavan Khosravi
Azita Moradkhani
Yasaman Moussavi
Zahra Nazari
Nazanin Noroozi
Leila Pazooki
Afarin Rahmanifar
Bahar Sabzevari
Leila Seyedzadeh
Anahita Vossoughi

ON THE FRONT COVER

SAMIRA ABBASSY
Bound by her fate, 2014, 24 x 18 inches, oil on gesso panel, image courtesy of the artist

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Eastern President Elsa Núñez for her continued support of art on campus, and Provost William Salka for his thoughtful supervision. Many thanks to my co-curator Afarin Rahmanifar, associate professor of painting and drawing at Eastern, for introducing the idea of this exhibition to me, and for including her work in this exhibition; Mark McKee, the Gallery's administrative assistant, for his inventive installation process; and the artists who enlighten me with their vision. I want to also acknowledge Maryam Ghoreishi for her thoughtful references, and our tireless gallery workers, Amanda Ouk and Megan Starbird, for their research; and my dear husband for his patience and editorial guidance.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Email correspondence with Anahita Vossoughi, May 2021.
- 2 Email correspondence with Minoo Emami, May 2021.
- 3 Ertty Yaniv, Samira Abbassy: Hybrid Iconography; Reflections on the work of contemporary artists, Art Spiel January, 2021 <https://artspiel.org/samira-abbassy-hybrid-iconography/>
- 4 https://www.guernicamag.com/behbahani_10_1_11/
- 5 English poet Percy Shelley heralded poets as "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." in *The Defense of Poetry*, 1821.
- 6 This poem was published in *A Cup Of Sin: Selected Poems* by Simin Behbahani, translated by Farzaneh Milani and Kaveh Safa, University of Syracuse Press, 1999. Kaveh Safa said in his introduction: "Injustice has been the primary reason behind Behbahani's poetry. The war with Iraq (1980-88), the bloodiest since World War II, left more than a million Iraqis and Iranians dead; thousands are still unaccounted for, and thousands more still languish as prisoners of war.
- 7 Iran's Foreign Policy Toward Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-1-137-07175-0_8
- 8 <https://s-usih.org/2018/01/new-year-letter/>

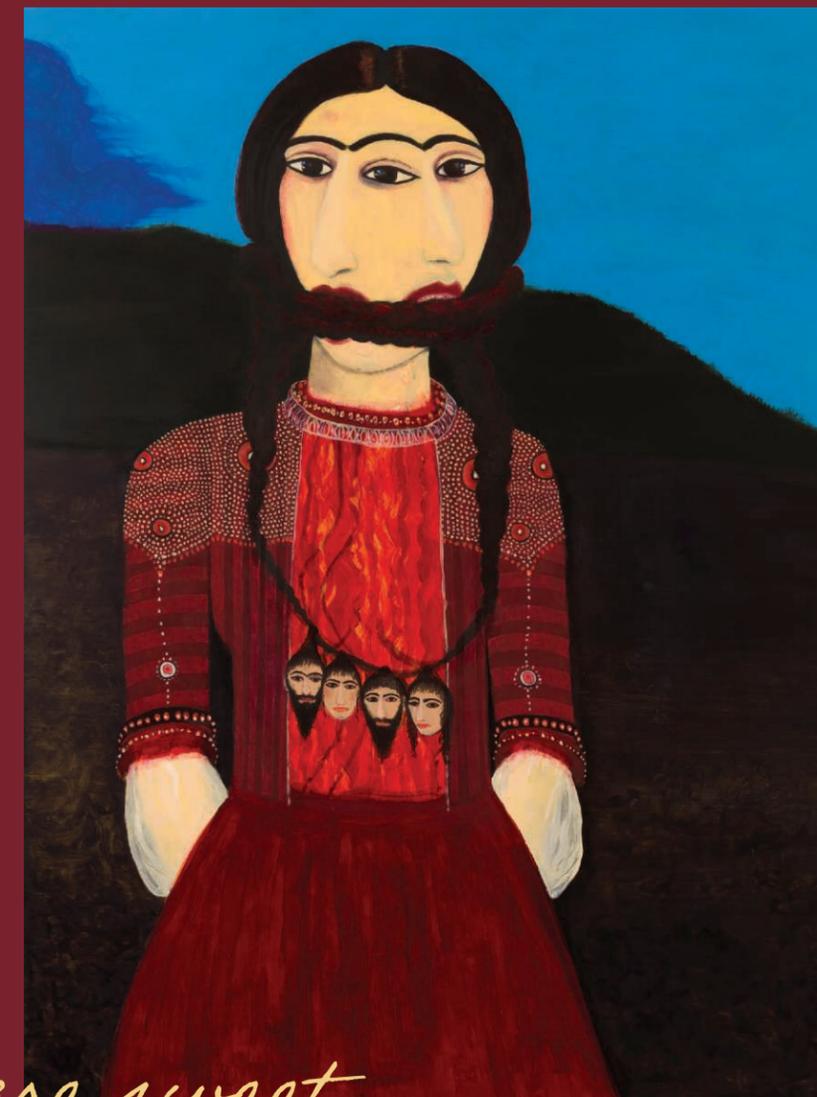
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*Our tears are sweet,
our laughter venomous:*

Fourteen Iranian-American Artists

EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

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Curatorial Programs

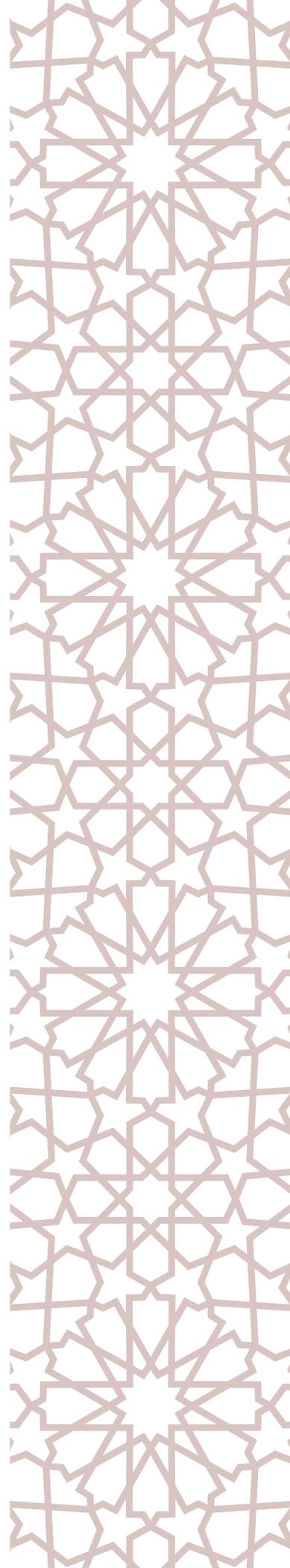
Our Tears Are Sweet

SIMIN BEHBAHANI (1927-2014)



*Our tears are sweet, our laughter venomous.
We're pleased when sad, and sad when pleased.
We wash one hand in blood, the other we wash the blood off.
We cry as we laugh at the futility of both these acts.
Eight years have passed, we haven't discovered their meaning.
We have been like children, beyond any account or accounting.
We have broken every stalk, like a wild wind in the garden.
We have picked clean the vine's candelabra.
And if we found a tree, still standing, defiantly,
we cut its branches, we pulled it by the roots.
We wished for a war, it brought us misery,
now, repentant, we wish for peace.
We pulled wings and heads from bodies,
now, seeking a cure, we are busy grafting.*

*Will it come to life, will it fly,
the head we attach, the wing we stitch?*



Our tears are sweet, our laughter venomous: Fourteen Iranian-American Artists

“Our Tears Are Sweet, Our Laughter Venomous” is an exhilarating exploration of the work of 14 women artists of Iranian descent who challenge American media’s portrayal of Iran, which focuses on that nation’s extremism and anti-American policies while ignoring the distinguished 2,500-years history of Persian culture.¹ Their art embodies a democratic ecosystem where resistance is nurtured, and alternative destinies are proclaimed. Though they work within the American branch of the Western art canon, their art is deeply inflected by memories of a land to which most fear returning.

The 14 artists in this exhibition negotiate their own distinct positions, whether aesthetic or political, and do so in America’s socially warped, post-pandemic landscape. While politics is key to understanding much of their work and its reception, they deal with politics indirectly — through poignant and exquisite self-portraits, landscapes, or abstract imagery. They draw from Persia’s rich aesthetic tradition to convey political messages. They converse in a seductive language that can be understood across geographic and cultural boundaries. Minoos Emami literally begins her work with a dialog between women who were on opposing sides of the Iran-Iraq war. “Each woman tells me her personal story, creating a bond that influences my work.”² Samira Abbassy reflects on her multiple cultural and geographic belongings: “We are all the product of cultural cross pollination.”³

“Our Tears Are Sweet, Our Laughter Venomous” is a line from a poem by Simin Behbahani (1927-2014), the national poet of Iran, who is known as her country’s pre and post-revolutionary “lioness of dissent,” and “the unacknowledged legislator of the world.”⁵ The poem is a response to the crushing casualties of the eight-year war with Iraq. Minoos Emami focuses on the long-term implications of that war. She casts porcelain limbs that are minutely decorated with beads and inscribed in gold with Persian script — reminders of the thousands who will never recover from this war. Emami explains: “I have reimagined and transformed the permanent consequences of war and its aftermath from my personal life into art. With the portrayal and utilization of used prostheses, I transform the harsh realities of war into objects of beauty.” Both Emami and Behbahani believe that the country and its people will be reborn. “Like arborists with fruit trees, “we are busy grafting.”⁶ There is no better metaphor for our exhibition!

Zahra Nazari, Nazanin Noroozi, Yasaman Moussavi and Azadeh Hussaini discovered Behbahani’s poem during the development of the exhibition. These four artists render landscapes of memory: Nazari’s are architectural — she paints deconstructed fusions

between traditional Persian buildings and Frank Gehry’s signature wave-like forms; Noroozi arranges archival photos of family gatherings into art works redolent of estrangement; Moussavi deploys large handmade paper installations that speak to the significance of Persian courtyards as islands of intellectual leisure within the bustling cityscape.

Samira Abbassy, Azita Moradkhani and Bahar Sabzevari celebrate their individuality by affirming their sensuality and right to pleasure. They speak to a diasporic experience of being between two worlds, required to perform multiple roles. Abbassy posits the question: “Who would I have been if I had never emigrated, and are there any parts of myself that are still untouched by the two migrations of my life?” Moradkhani explains that she is responding to the conditions of vulnerability and violence that describe women within post-revolutionary Iran. Sabzevari contends, “I think every woman is a queen, which is why in my self-portraits I am adorned with a crown.”

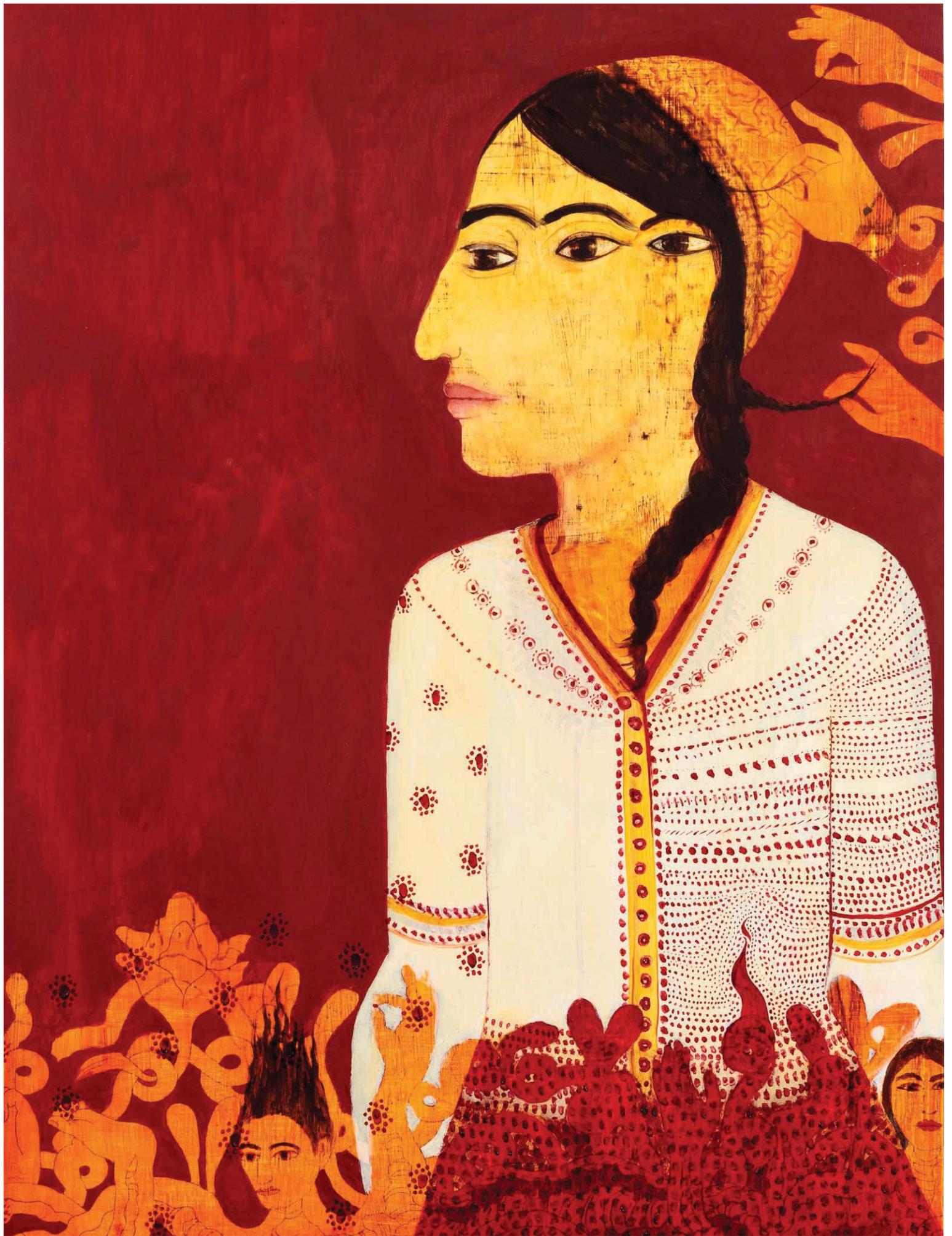
Roya Farassatt, Anahita Vossoughi, Arghavan Khosravi and Afarin Rahminifar address both geo and body politics — examining how bodies are fashioned, imagined, and represented by the self and others in American society. They take on the great challenge of following in the steps of legendary Western artists: Farassatt cites the influence of Brancusi in her fluidly formed, large welded metal wall sculptures; Vossoughi references Hans Bellmer’s sculptures and photographs of female fetish dolls; Khosravi’s paintings are reminiscent of de Chirico’s unsettling authority and uncanny juxtapositions; and Rahminifar speaks of the female characters from Ferdowsi’s 10th century epic poem, “Shahnameh.”

“Our Tears Are Sweet, Our Laughter Venomous” is also a reflection of my own post-Soviet experience and its entanglement in Russian-Iranian history. Tsarist Russia occupied Iran until the early 20th century, an occupation continued by the Bolsheviks. For Russian politicians, Iran is an alter ego — one on which they project their idealized view of Russia as a conservative, religious state that brutally combats dissent, blasphemy and homosexuality.⁷

I recoil at the similarities of these two political regimes, and I am honored to welcome these artists who continue to suffer, as do I, from the psychic legacies of our respective anti-modernist homelands. We are diasporists, fleeing haunting memories and reflecting on the complexity of our allegiances. To paraphrase W.H. Auden, we want to be seen as women, artists, and curators, acting as midwives to society.⁸ ■

Julia Wintner

Coordinator of Gallery and Museum Services, 2021



Samira Abbassy

“I was forced to ask myself who I am and where I am from throughout my life as an immigrant ... I questioned many aspects of my dueling cultures as I tried to integrate, belong and bridge gaps. So, I became a “fictional historian,” reinterpreting stories about a homeland that I barely knew. I needed a mirror to see myself, and not finding that mirror, I created my own through art. The canvas became for me a mirror of inclusion, a place to contextualize myself and establish my identity.

Yet, in attempting to explain my relationship to my Arab-Iranian culture, I found I knew little of what this culture really was. This made me uneasy on both sides of the cultural divide. My work became a kind of ‘fictional history’ stemming from a non-understanding of something I was supposed to understand from the outset.

For example, “Ghosts of her Migration” poses questions like: “Who would I have been if I had never emigrated and are there any parts of myself that are still untouched by the two migrations of my life?”

All along I intended to broaden the “Western Canon” to find a place within it for myself and my heritage. This led me to examine the historiographies of Western art history and to question its geo-political origins. After receiving a BFA from Canterbury College of Art, United Kingdom, I focused on art outside the Western Canon, starting with Indian and Persian miniatures. I was then led to Hindu iconography and viewed it in parallel to that of Christian and Muslim to find common motifs. I also took Jung’s theory of “the collective unconscious” as a premise to uncover common and divergent ideas instilled in the human psyche.

Your description: “peacefully iconic and painfully urgent – alien and familiar, timeless and timely” is possibly the best understanding of what I try to do when making a piece of work, whether it’s painting or sculpture.

Samira Abbassy

ETTY YANIV, *Samira Abbassy: Hybrid Iconography*, Art SPIEL, January 12, 2021
<https://artspiel.org/samira-abbassy-hybrid-iconography/>



Minoo Emami

Born in Iran, my initial major themes became war's permanent consequences and institutional and domestic violence on women in fundamentalist environments. For the past 20 years I have worked as an anti-war and anti-violence artist. An essential function of my work is to engage and elevate the human spirit. My projects involve story-telling through metaphor, memories, tangible artifacts and altered experiences. As a multidisciplinary artist I select from an array of mediums that include painting, drawing, photography, video, performance and sculpture.

The purpose of violence is to injure or destroy the body and spirit. My art lies at the intersection of these conflicting dualities and embodies the tensions. Just as art seeks to transcend that which would hold it down, violence works to hold down that which would transcend it.

I have reimagined and transformed the permanent consequences of war and its aftermath from my personal life and experiences into art. With the portrayal and utilization of used prostheses, I transform the harsh realities of war into objects of beauty. This collection of work then, is both profane and sacred. "Peace March", which I began in 1997, is a series of three-dimensional works that seek to ameliorate the psychological wounds caused by war. These pieces employ used prostheses — hands, legs and feet — which I have transformed into art objects using modern and traditional techniques, methods and materials such as calligraphy, Persian tiles, tapestry and textiles, traditional woodcuts, mirror patterns and glass techniques.



Each piece begins with a dialog with a woman who has been similarly affected by war. This applies to women on both sides of warring countries. Each woman tells me their personal story, creating a bond that influences how a create each piece in the Peace March collection was created. "The Peace March" project works to translate violence into art in a sustained effort to empower women and to raise a unified voice against war and violence.

I consider myself a diasporic artist. Displacement has been a large part of my personal experience. First by moving from the battleground city of Kermanshah on the Western border between Iran and Iraq to relative safety in Tehran. Family members left the country for the safety of their family to Europe and North America. My own diasporic journey brought me to the United States. From the beginning, my work has reflected my life experience, offering empathic stance in support of women that share my experience.

Communication through poetry is essentially Persian which makes the title of this exhibition so appropriate. My work over the past few years has delved into archival research, unearthing and translating discovered images and artifacts into memories of a once peaceful country. Coded with metaphor and symbolism, like Simin Behbahani's poem, my work is bittersweet, revealing and offers the spirit of resilience.

Minoo Emami
June 2021

MINOO EMAMI, *Goli*, 2014, handmade Persian tile, brass, prostheses, with a bronze stand

Peace March is a continuous project since 2014. A series of sculptures in which used prostheses have been transformed into art objects using modern and traditional techniques, methods and materials. The Peace March is inspired by the females who suffered from the 1980's Iran-Iraq war.

Diverse artistic techniques have been used including calligraphy; Persian tiles, tapestry, bowed glass, textiles, traditional woodcut and carpet techniques. This project aims to highlight people's devastation by the consequences of war, and especially women, whose role has always been undermined in our society.

www.emamiminoo.com



Roya Farassat

As artists living in diaspora, we have been asked numerous times about our conflicted identity. When I was younger, it felt imperative to claim an identity, but now that I've lived most of my life outside of my native country, I no longer feel the need to solidify it. In fact I find that claiming my past identity is extremely isolating and preventative in reinventing myself. The recent COVID-19 pandemic took millions of lives and established that there's nothing exclusive about us. We are only as unique as we want to appear, but in reality everything that presents itself as original has really derived from something else. In a small setting, my physical characteristics may be the only thing different about me, but declaring it as something distinct feels very superficial. I believe we can choose our inherited culture or abandon it for a new one. For me, it's nothing personal; it's a choice.

Now to be included in an all-women Iranian exhibition seems to be contradictory to all that I've stated. I've agreed to it, but does that make my work Iranian and is it apparent that a woman made it? I can only laugh, and it's venomous.

I made my metal sculpture in two different places. Initially before the sculpture center became a museum in Long Island City, it was The Clay Club, founded by a sculptor providing a platform for sculptors to make work. It was located in a carriage house on East 69th Street in Manhattan. Sculptors like myself welded and carved stone and made clay work. My welding work continued there for a couple of years until they sold the building and became a sculpture museum in Long Island City. Then I moved my practice to Educational Alliance, originally a settlement house for Eastern European Jews on the Lower East Side. I welded there until 2011, until their mission changed and they got rid of their welding department.

Roya Farassat



There is definitely a connection between my metal sculptures that draws inspiration from shapes of objects that were used traditionally in the Safavid period such as spherical ornaments, metal ewers, kettles, wine bowls, inkwells and silver inlaid jugs.

As a small-figured woman it intrigued me to work with a medium that was considered to be a specific male gender job. During the time that I was welding I was very much drawn to the work of sculptor Giacometti. His roughened surfaces and attenuated forms were reduced to the bare essential. Like him, I had a lot of existential questions and became interested in the human condition and the human behavior while trying to figure out my own conflicted identity. Issues relating to aging, loss and unpredictability became themes that I wanted to explore. The dark grey color of metal was attractive to me and its hard surface spoke to me in volumes about something no longer living. I found myself identifying with the metal, the steel, because it was tenacious, yet malleable when heated and hammered into a new shape.



"A Day After Tomorrow" #1," is a metal wall installation that was inspired by the curvilinear central medallion design in Persian carpets. It contains individually cut pieces of steel in the shape of leaves and branches. These repeated lace-like patterns are welded together in a circular motion that expand flatly on the edges of the wall and contract in the center in the shape of a belly. The circular movement gives a feeling of continuity and for me symbolizes a renewal of life.



Azadeh Hussaini

In my daily artistic practice, I study the stories of immigrants and refugees, the conditions of slums and prisons, and generally any places that human beings live that are out of sight. The difference between having a home and a place to live/survive is my main concern. My inspiration is rooted in my own life; the relationship between nature, people and culture, drawn from my personal experience, as well as my observations of society at large.

My thirst as an artist is to seek the similarities and common desires of humans regardless of race, culture, gender or any other subcategories and utilize all the possibilities to establish a common visual conversation with viewers.

I capture the sound and silence of my emotional experience and my creations are deeply imbued with these reverberations from observing other's life stories. My resultant work is done as an abstract visualization, inspired by repetitive forms in nature, that implies and acts upon the patterns seen in social behavior and relationships.

Azadeh Hussaini



Azadeh Hussaini is a Chicago-based, Iranian-American visual artist. She was born in the United States and moved to Iran as a child where she spent her formative years. She subsequently returned to the United States to obtain a master's degree in fine arts. Her work embodies her emotional responses to her own experiences, while concurrently exploring the basic primordial desires within the human condition. Hussaini aspires to discover commonalities among us while providing forums for social discussion and assertiveness. Azadeh's art has been displayed in numerous solo and group exhibitions in the United States and internationally. She is also an educator; a co-founder of Didaar Art Collective, a Chicago based Iranian Artists community; curator and board member at Theatre-Y, a Chicago-based theater company; and members of the Advisory Board at Lewis University.



Arghavan Khosravi

I'm reflecting on my life experiences and memories from Iran. And in Iran, human rights issues, and women's rights issues in particular, are in a really horrible situation. So for me, the starting point was reflecting on those memories and reacting to them. I hope that with the visual metaphors and symbols I use in the paintings, some people can feel that notion and, based on their own experiences, relate to the paintings in whatever way they're able. Those are the main issues on my mind.

Miniature painting, mostly Persian miniature painting, has always been one of my main sources of inspiration. And actually these more three-dimensional paintings somehow started from works that were based on miniature paintings ... the architecture in those works. That gave me the idea to use shaped panels to emphasize some of the architectural depictions. The way architecture in those paintings is shown is much more like a "stacked perspective," rather than separate vantage points. So that was how I started to think of paintings as 3D objects, not 2D surfaces.

Because there are those existing images and I juxtapose them. And when I'm juxtaposing these images, this idea of contrast, or having imagery in contrast is always at the top of my mind. So whether it's from Western imagery, or from a Western context into Eastern, like having Greek sculptures in an architectural scene that is appropriated from miniature paintings, I like the way it all comes together from different points of view.



In general, I'm not interested in victimizing women and Iranian women, because I'm Iranian. And I do think they are in very oppressed situations, but I want to show that they have agency and they try, with activism, to change that. I'm not interested in just showing Iranian women as victims because there is this general idea through the media which sometimes is distorted or not quite accurate. I hope that with my paintings I can change that image.

Arghavan Khosravi

NOOR BRARA, *I Felt in Between Places¹: Iranian Artist Arghavan Khosravi on Studying Art in the U.S., and Why She Paints Preoccupied Women*, **INTERVIEW WITH ARGHAVAN KHOSRAVI**, Artnet, July 7, 2021

<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/arghavan-khosravi-interview-1986271>



Azita Moradkhani

I am an immigrant from Tehran, Iran, living in my current home, the United States. I have lived in both countries, yet I don't see myself labeled with either of them. I am a citizen of the World and to me the rest is propaganda.

Growing up in Tehran, I was exposed to Persian art and culture as well as Iranian politics, and that double exposure increased my sensitivity to the dynamics of vulnerability and violence that I now explore in my art-making process.

My colored pencil drawings of intimate apparel are based on my first impressions from walking into a Victoria's Secret store in the United States. While being exposed to this public environment of lingerie, I was not only thinking about the power of censorship in some countries, but I also felt intimidated by the body image of a woman through the models and design. While my drawings are inspired by luxury intimate lingerie, the images on them depict global stories of different experiences — both figuratively and symbolically — across borders with the hope to leave a mark about untold stories and moving towards more equality for women.



This title is a part of a whole poem by Simin Behbahani and refers to the time of war between Iran and Iraq from 1980 to 1988. While I personally don't feel connected to this poem, I think the paradox in my work could be relative to the title.

My colored pencil drawings of intimate lingerie explore interconnected narratives of pain and pleasure through images based on photojournalism, art photography and historical symbolism. I use an aesthetic of pleasure to entice the viewer, who finds, past lace and filigree, disruptive iconography narrating inherited histories of nation and belief.

The drawings, along with my three-dimensional torsos sculpted out of paper clay, provide a frame for challenging national and sexual representation and ideas regarding power and vulnerability, Orientalism and feminism, political rhetoric and actual lived experience.

Azita Moradkhani

بند نیلور، بعد از آنکه
مردانی - تولا - سراج



بازار مولی ایامه کلمه
کتابت با کرمه تبریح
بیرودت بالا کرمه دیو جهول

Yasaman Moussavi

Transitions and changes in my journey from Iran to the United States for pursuing my graduate studies resulted in a separation from the belongings, the context of living, the language of speaking and communicating. However, being far resulted in negative feelings such as loneliness and seclusion or causing an unbalanced situation in my life, simultaneously causing a passion for growth and discovery and causing an eagerness to investigate harmony in a new situation.

For me, artmaking becomes a platform to turn toward the world, interact and correspond to it by engaging and being attuned to its potentials.

“I learned, in the brotherhood of the trees, To reconcile myself,
Not with myself:
With what lifts me, sustains me, lets me fall.”

(Paz & Weinberger, 2012, p. 315)

Simin Behbahani is a well-known Iranian poet. Her poems include the contemporary issues of Iranian life. Undoubtedly, her work is inspiring. However, this specific poem is not directly related to my artwork. I relate to the poem since I have the lived experience of dwelling in uncertain conditions. The poem “Our Tears Are Sweet, Our Laughter Venomous” was written after on the backdrop of the eight- year war between Iran and Iraq. It seems that, through that poem, Behbahani was looking for gathering together all the fragment pieces and souls that during those years were torn into pieces.

“We pulled wings and heads from bodies, now, seeking a cure, we are busy grafting. Will it come to life, will it fly.
the head we attach, the wing we stitch?”

Although I was very young during that era, it impacted my life in many ways. The feeling of not knowing, moving from one city to another to escape the war, influenced me and my generation who had the same experience.

Yasaman Moussavi
2021



Zahra Nazari

“Working from both photography and memory, while allowing for improvisation and invention, Nazari rarely renders whole buildings in her paintings. Instead, she paints excerpts especially significant for her — a section of ceiling with its elaborate details, a particular sequence of windows or vaults, or wall patterning, part of a wall — which she combines with abstract gestures and shapes, other forms resembling jumbled architectural fragments and intermingling colors. Architecture is never static in these works, but instead unstable, changeable, often vertiginous and under duress (the Ali Qapu Palace, incidentally, ravaged by environmental and political forces, was at one point a ransacked ruin). Construction and deconstruction share close quarters in Nazari’s work.

Many of Nazari’s abstract forms, of what Western viewers might normally think of as abstract forms, including prominent angles, jutting bands, arcs, cross-hatching, rudimentary geometric shapes and irregular color blocks, derive more from Persian architecture than Western abstract painting. Domes, vaults, honey combed muqarnas, arabesques, eight-pointed stars, latices and minarets — all of these, however transformed, are recurring motifs. Also fascinating to note is that the colors in Nazari’s distinctive palette, including various purples, soft reds, golds, tawny browns, oranges and rich blues, are especially important and meaningful in Persian architecture, and have been for centuries.

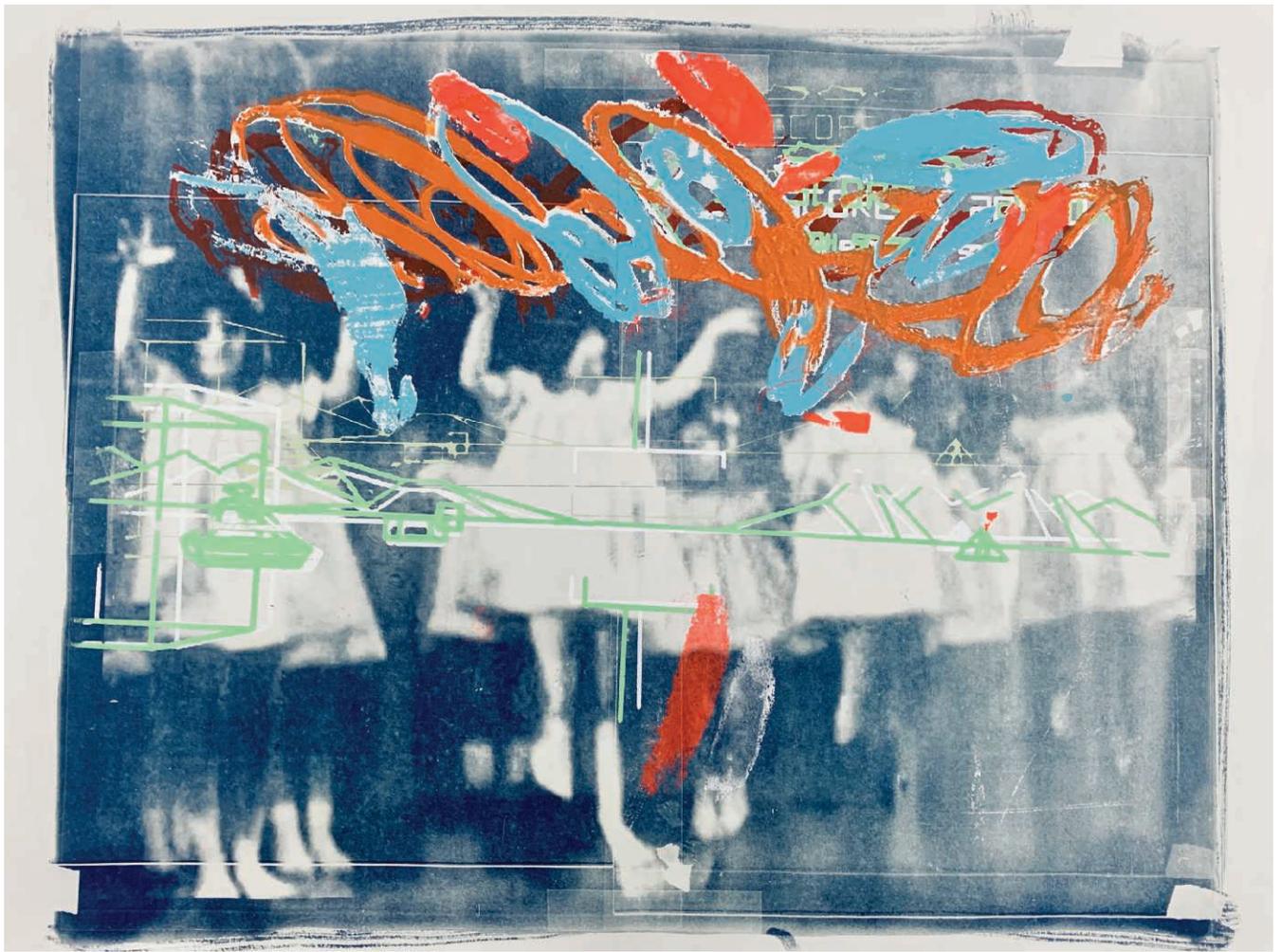
Nazari often combines multiple views of the same building in a single painting, in a way that scrambles and shifts the viewer’s perspective; very often one is not at all sure whether one is looking up or down, at something distant or close — visual manifestations of cultural and personal disorientation. In Nazari’s “Sheikh Lotfalah Mosque” (2020), you look at this structure, or portions of it, from afar, but simultaneously from within it; at parts of its façade from a distance but also from in side at sections of its interior ceiling(s). With rich blue, gold, red and purple tones, this vivid, composite scene is also curiously vaporous, like a slippery memory or a receding dream — an effect augmented by how Nazari has left large portions of the painting bright white.”

Gregory Volk

Catalog essay for Unification

Zahra Nazari solo exhibition at Highline Nine Gallery, NYC, 2021

<https://zahranazari.com>



Nazanin Noroozi

I always felt like “the other” back home since the way I thought of politics and culture differed from the norm. Therefore, my experience of loss and belonging starts before my physical move to the United States. To be honest, in some ways I feel much more at home here in the United States than my homeland, although I don’t feel I belong either. For me, home, the conventional sense, does not exist anymore. I am in constant “in between-ness,” which is a situation that I welcome and explore conceptually and technically in my works. My experimental handmade films address longing, loss and the fragile states of being and ideas of “home” that never materialize.

In an odd and unpleasant way, the anxieties that people around the world are feeling due to the pandemic feel like a familiar place. As an Iranian artist who’s had to deal with extreme social and political upheavals for years, the sudden disappearance of “normalcy” (or what appeared to be normal) was not a new feeling.

I am interested in the archeology of technology and personal archives, expressed through using alternative photographic processes, printmaking and handmade cinema. This series navigates between still and moving images, the tactile quality of art objects and transient moments of films to explore fragile states of being and ideas of home that never materialize.



I acknowledge Simin Behbahani as an influential and integral activist character in current Iranian women’s movement. She contributed to historical development of Persian poetry by adding theatrical subjects into her work. Simin has been a role model for many women artists and writers and able to maintain a love of her culture and people in her work. “Our Tears Are Sweet, Our Laughter Venomous” focuses on the challenges facing women’s anxiety in the wake of Islamic revolution and women’s rights.

Nazanin Noroozi

ANNA MIKAELA EKSTRAND, *The Immigrant Artist Biennial: Nazanin Noroozi*, ART SPIEL, Reflections on the work of contemporary artists, December 2020

<https://artspiel.org/the-immigrant-artist-biennial-nazanin-noroozi/>



Leila Pazooki

Born in Tehran in 1977, multimedia artist Leila Pazooki was educated at the National Art Academy of Tehran, The Academy of Fine Arts in Munich and The Berlin University of Arts. She is currently based in Berlin, Germany.

Through a variety of media, Pazooki's work is inspired by political, social and personal situations and conventions, across and between cultures and environments. Originally a painting student, over the years she has diversified her practice into photography and video art, as well as installation and sculpture. Through these media, she creates complex investigations into perception and participation, shrewdly challenging viewers preconceptions and expectations, her fluent handling of disparate subjects and textures imbued with a distinctive humor and irony. Exhibited globally and included in major collections in Germany and the United States, her works have an international perspective, gained from the artist's experiences living in cultures as diverse as Iran, Mexico and Germany.



“The feminist Pazooki is one of the region's most talented female artists with great creative personality, ahead of her time in several respects, with inspirational messages of women empowerment, racial equality and hope to humanity that halo her importance in the regional and international art scene.

Speaking about how the pandemic showed the real status of racial injustices, women's rights and economic inequality, Beljanski commented, “The pandemic has lifted the veil on the facade of equal rights for women and girls that many first-world countries display. Throughout the past years, we have seen this to be a big lie, a beautiful facade made of inflammable materials. I asked myself, ‘Why, in a state of urgency, has the issue of race, gender and class discrimination become so visible, as was never truly fixed?’”

Tanja Beljanski

TANJA BELJANSKI, *Leila Pazooki closes Art Dubai with an inspiring message on equality & female empowerment*, April, 2021

<https://www.lofficialarabia.com/art/leila-pazooki-closes-art-dubai-with-an-inspiring-message-on-equality-female-empowerment>



Afarin Rahmanifar

From 10th-century Persia to 21st-century America, women have struggled to find their place, to strike a balance between their power and their grace, their voice and their whispers. They want to embrace beauty and ferocity, to have elegance and yet to never be taken for granted.

My recent work showcases the protagonist female characters from Ferdowsi's 10th-century epic poem, "Shahnameh" (Persian Book of Kings), a literary masterpiece in the Persian world and diaspora. I subvert the classic narrative of "Shahnameh" which highlights and exploits male characters who dominate the work. I reposition and illuminate the compassionate, brave, loyal and sensuous women from the periphery to the center of the epic. I highlight the considerable roles these women played in supporting and enabling the successes of the kings and heroic male characters in "Shahnameh."

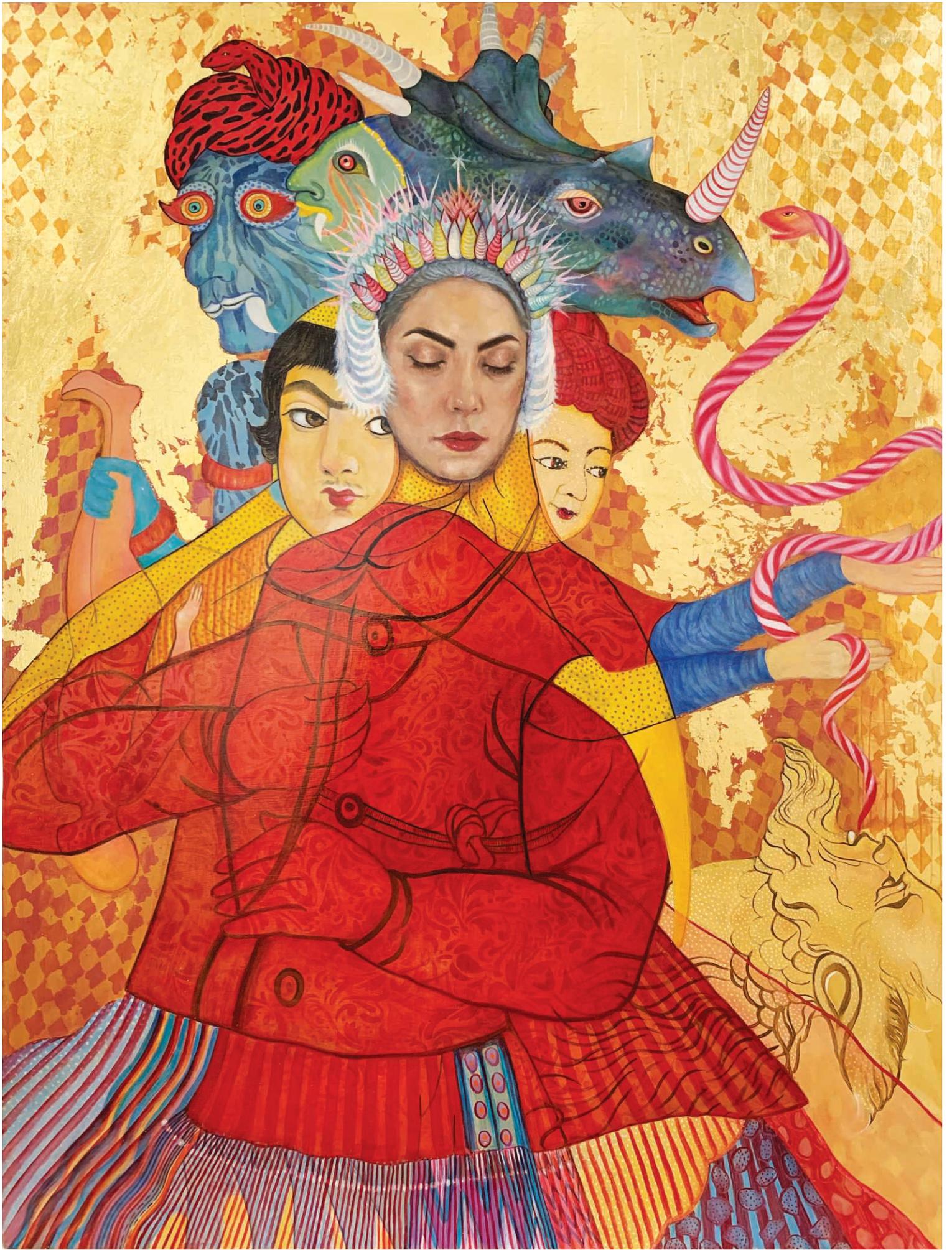


I grew up in Tehran and later lived in the United States in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian Revolution. My work is an expression of my life's journey, integrating Persian heritage and 21st-century Western experiences. I take great interest in investigating women's historic roles involving works of poetry to amplify contemporary women's voice, power and identity. The mystical tension, chromatic energy of Persian miniature painting, spiritual creatures, fragmented body parts and poetic scripts in my work reflect the challenges I faced while adjusting identity in my new life.



I take my journey toward my present identity as an Iranian-American woman through these concepts: "Separation" from what one has been a part of and "Belonging" ... to that which is different. "Appearing" then "disappearing" then "reappearing" again. I strive to show the female body as a vessel moving through this journey, taking in new experiences for the mind to process. The intellectual and emotional parts of the self are changed through the act of Separation; the changed self belongs both to the past and to the present.

Afarin Rahmanifar



Bahar Sabzevari

“Golden Age” (2020), a reference to former Persian achievements, shows us Sabzevari with shut eyes, wearing a voluminous red robe. On her left arm, a long red and white striped viper rises, about to strike, while on top of her head we find two demons on the left and a gray rhinoceros with a protuberant horn on the right. On both sides of the artist’s head is a face from traditional Persian painting. Here, too, viewers have the sense that the artist is determined, quite literally, not to see the antagonistic forces surrounding her. It is a measure of her strength as a painter that this mixture of the sharply realistic and the imaginatively surreal (yet also faithfully painted) convinces us of a psychic reality that we would be well to take note of, in light of the skill and emotional reach of the imagery. We are living in a time of extraordinary eclecticism, but Sabzevari remains close to her classical ties. The show is particularly interesting as an example of a gifted artist making intelligent use of the past. Sabzevari is a painter of genuine historical achievement and her conceit of demons jumping out of her head makes her a psychically transparent artist of today. We hope that her insightful mixture of tradition and personal investigation, done so well in this show, continues in the future.

Of the “Crown Series” Sabzevari says, “I think every woman is a queen, which is why in my portraits I depict a crown . . . My personal story, my experiences in life and my lucid dreams all inform what the crown eventually morphs into.” Drawing from Persian mythology and her love of animals, the crowns can be writhing with colorful, fantastical creatures and deities, as well as figures from Persian literature.

Sabzevari’s self-portraits also explore her own personal stories. The first thing you notice is her gaze — steady and unflinching, though more curious than confrontational. “A direct gaze is considered rude in Eastern culture, especially for women,” she explains. “The women in my work are trying to express their courage and boldness, declaring visually that they are not afraid of being seen or judged. In exchange, the gaze is non-judgmental and draws the audience closer, inviting them to discover the painting and the idea behind it.”

Bahar Sabzevari

JONATHAN GOODMAN, *Bahar Sabzevari: Gaze and Glance*,
<https://brooklynrail.org/2020/10/artseen/Bahar-Sabzevari-Gaze-and-Glance>

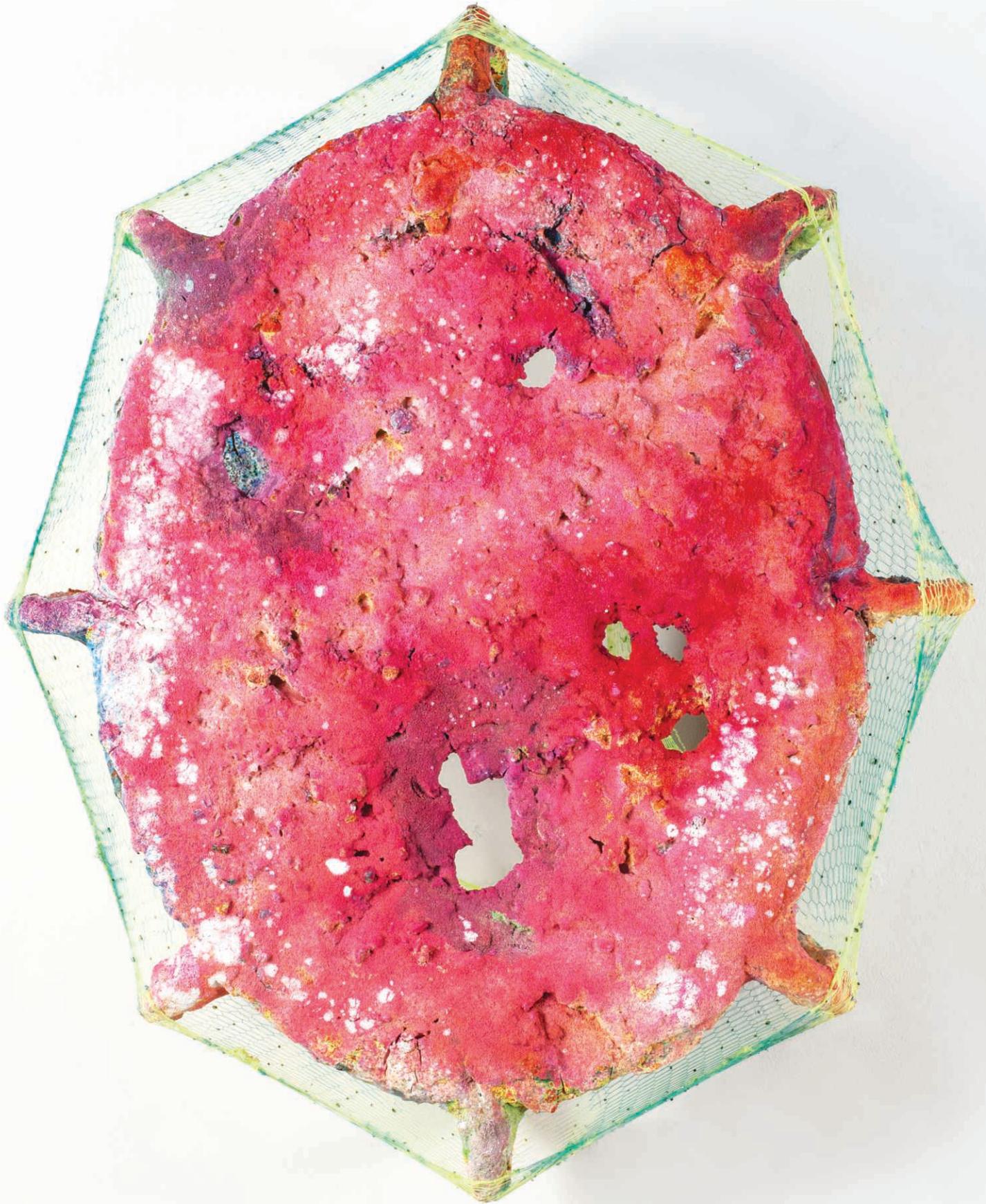


Leila Seyedzadeh

Leila Seyedzadeh lives and works in New York. She received a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from The University of Science and Culture in 2014 and an MFA from Yale University School of Art in 2019.

Seyedzadeh was a recipient of the H. Lee Hirsche Prize at Yale School of Art. She has been invited to participate in exhibitions that include shows at White Box in New York, and Dastan Basement Gallery in Art, Dubai, 2019. Her work is represented in institutional exhibitions in the United States and Iran, including at Green Hall Gallery at Yale University and Ahvaz Contemporary Art Museum in Iran.

Seyedzadeh's work addresses imaginary landscapes and focuses on natural subjects such as mountains that are extracted from the subconscious. It is as if she is attaching together pieces of her memories and by doing so she is destroying their meaning and thus creating a landscape that is immersed in placelessness.



Anahita Vossoughi

Surrounded by farmland, rural towns, big blue skies, large trucks and Wal-Marts, I grew up in Kansas, in a small college town. There wasn't a huge Iranian diaspora community there, but my parents knew almost all the Iranians and Iranian-Americans within a 60-mile radius. Aside from school and work, we were often enveloped within the Iranian community. Most of the major events in my life such as weddings, funerals, birthdays and holidays were spent in the company of my parent's Iranian friends and their children. Within the Iranian diaspora I was exposed to a multitude of experiences that I felt were often overlooked and flattened by the American media, which sadly continues today. As a group, the Iranian diaspora has very little representation in the United States other than the news, which tends to skip over any sort of diversity, and has a myopic, exclusive, laser-like focus on extremism and religion within the Iranian experience. This is to the exclusion of any other experiences that could humanize the Iranian community within America and beyond.



Beauty and ugliness, softness and hardness, the brutal and the delicate are present in the line of verse that is the title of this show. Venom can be an antidote and a poison. Laughter is healing but can imply madness. Tears are a release of love, hate, confusion, anxiety, joy and vulnerability. The contradictions, loops and switching that Simin Behbahani weaves us through is a strategy I return to time and again in my practice with the goal of making work that can be seen through a social, political and emotional lens simultaneously. To achieve this ambiguous clarity in my work, I draw upon enigmatic forms and marry abstraction and representation through material juxtapositions. I'm interested in an experience that is un-fixed, present in nature, and presents strength and weakness living side by side, in harmony and conflict.s.

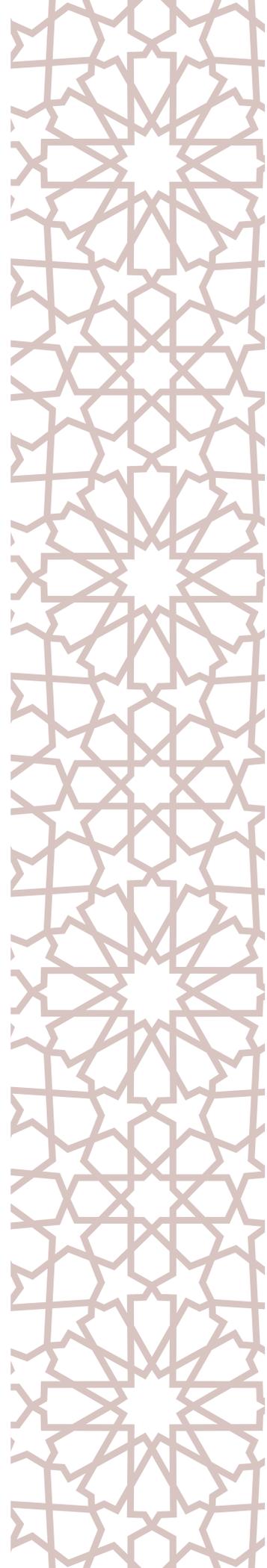
Anahita Vossoughi

He, Too

SOLMAZ SHARIF (1983)



*Returning to the US, he asks
my occupation. Teacher.
What do you teach?
Poetry.
I hate poetry, the officer says,
I only like writing
where you can make an argument.
Anything he asks, I must answer.
This, too, he likes.
I don't tell him
he will be in a poem
where the argument will be
anti-American.
I place him here, puffy,
pink, ringed in plexi, pleased
with his own wit
and spittle. Saving the argument
I am let in
I am let in until*



*Our tears are sweet,
our laughter venomous:*

Fourteen Iranian-American Artists

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