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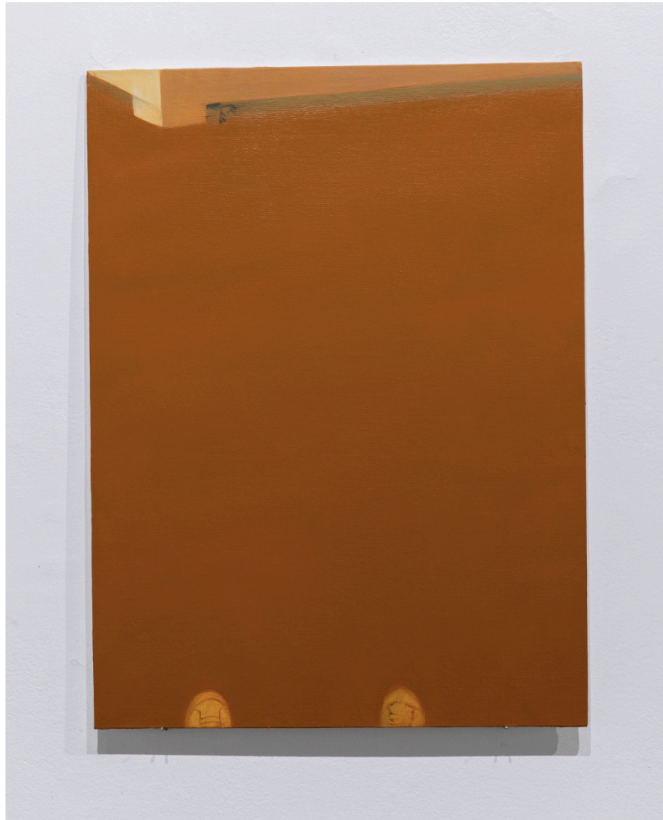
One day in my room, 2021, Acrylic on coffee filter, 92 x 92 in

Artist Spotlight with Sara Rahmanian

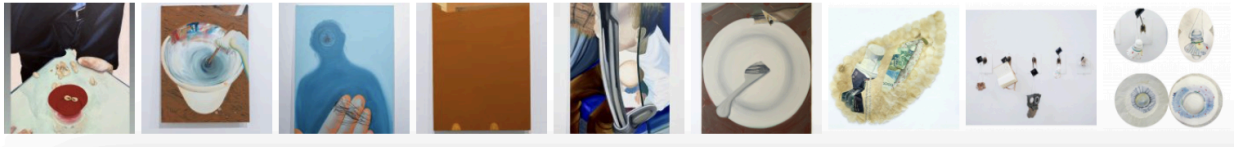
Posted: Jun 10, 2021

ArteEast is pleased to present an interview with artist Sara Rahmanian as part of our Artist Spotlight series.

Sara Rahmanian (1993) is an Iranian artist who completed her degree in Painting from Tehran's University of Art, and subsequently immigrated to New Haven to obtain her MFA at Yale University (2021). She had a solo show with Delgosha Gallery Tehran in 2017 and has exhibited her work globally, most notably in shows at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde and The Mine in Dubai, and Delgosha Gallery, Nak Gallery and Vartan Gallery in Tehran. In 2019 Rahmanian created a public mural in collaboration with Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, and Hesam Rahmanian at Reem Central Skate Park in Abu Dhabi. She is the 2020 recipient of the Yale School of Art's Dean's Critical Practice Grant, and was awarded the *Rose of Lidice* medal from the Czechoslovak Foreign Institute in 1999.



Three Legs, 2020, Acrylic On Canvas, 24 x 18 in



ArteEast: Can you tell us about your work in general and the main themes you return to in your practice?

Sara Rahmanian: In my work, I challenge my audience to contemplate the ordinary and mundane aspects of life, employing the first-person point of view in my paintings so that viewers can experience the emotions of the protagonist.

Using visual strategies of defamiliarization, my works evoke a heightened sense of awareness of our surroundings. In isolation, I think about and question the relationship between reality and the perception of melancholic contemporary life. I approach situations from an alternative viewpoint that could perhaps appear unorthodox to rational viewers but which is 'natural' to me. Sometimes the works are influenced by the figurative aspects of languages in general, in my case the focus is of course on the Persian (Farsi) and English languages. Persian (Farsi) could be seen as the queerer of the two since it has no gender in its grammatical structure. This further extends my imaginative approach to the banality of life through a non-binary lens. It could be stated that the memories and imaginations which nourish my inspirations are the cornerstones of my drawings.

I seek to raise for the viewer the same questions I ask myself: how do you/I perceive our environment? What is my/your relationship to it? What on earth is this melancholic world we are living in?

AE: Could you elaborate on your shift from painting to creating object-based installations?

SR: Painting for me is a laboratory for observing, in which I can engage the emotions. It's a subjective process. But because everything does not boil down to emotions, and nothing is absolute, I was not satisfied with 2D surfaces. I wanted to explore the multiplicity of perspectives that a 3D medium could offer.

Through my studio process, I started to engage with objects that I had used or had discarded; things that were unwanted. I also identify with these unwanted materials or banal objects on a personal level. As a woman who was raised in a patriarchal society, and now, as a Muslim immigrant in the West, I have often felt that my identity as a woman or Muslim immigrant, has often been looked at from an essentialist point of view, be it as a sexual object, an invisible person, or an unwanted individual, etc.

In using objects in my practice and creating installations, I want viewers to observe these materials from the multiple angles and perspectives available to them. I incorporate used coffee filter, old socks, and other such things as materials to be reconsidered by the viewer.

AE: You moved to New Haven from Tehran to pursue an MFA at the Yale School of Art. In your experience, how does the art world climate of these two cities differ? What are some of the challenges you faced in the U.S. in comparison to Tehran?

SR: I don't have a "real" experience of the art world in the U.S. since my only experience so far has been attending an elite MFA program. Because I am still quite new here, any comment I make about the context today in the U.S. could turn out to be premature. The point I am trying to make is that my immigration and integration have coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic, which has greatly affected my experiences in America.

AE: What and who are some of your major creative influencers, and why?

SR: The work of Anna Operheim and a few other Russian and Polish female surrealists and post-war artists (Alina Szapocznikow, Toyen and Emila Medková) who worked under Hitler's reign during the Nazi era have proven to be very inspiring to me. I find it quite fascinating how their imaginations shined through their work and came to the aid of other women who were living under oppression and repression, and whose own imaginations were restricted. Their imaginations and paintings functioned as a kind of shelter, they served as a means to an end.

AE: How have you been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic? Once the global pandemic subsides, do you have any shows or projects coming up in 2021 and 2022?

SR: I really believe that it is not an overstatement to claim that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted every soul across the globe, and that I am no exception. I was in the second half of the semester of my MFA, and like everyone else, I was confronted with many adverse unforeseen circumstances. The pandemic brought the world to a sudden halt and just about everything had to be re-evaluated. Death lost its usual meaning, and I felt myself closer to its vicinity. At the same time, all of a sudden, life became more valuable to me and this mitigated the vacuum in my work. The loneliness and isolation that was imposed on me influenced my work a great deal. It was also a good challenge for me to reevaluate materials that were interesting to work with in a small space, which I believe was a long stride towards me continuing to grow as an artist.

As for my future projects, my work will be featured as the inaugural exhibition with the Across Project based in Milan, Italy in June 2021. I am also currently part of two group exhibitions, *She Came to Stay in Rome*, at Andrea Festa Gallery in Rome and *In Paradise of Shadows*, at Lyles & King in New York City which closes July 2, 2021.