

**IRAN**

**X**

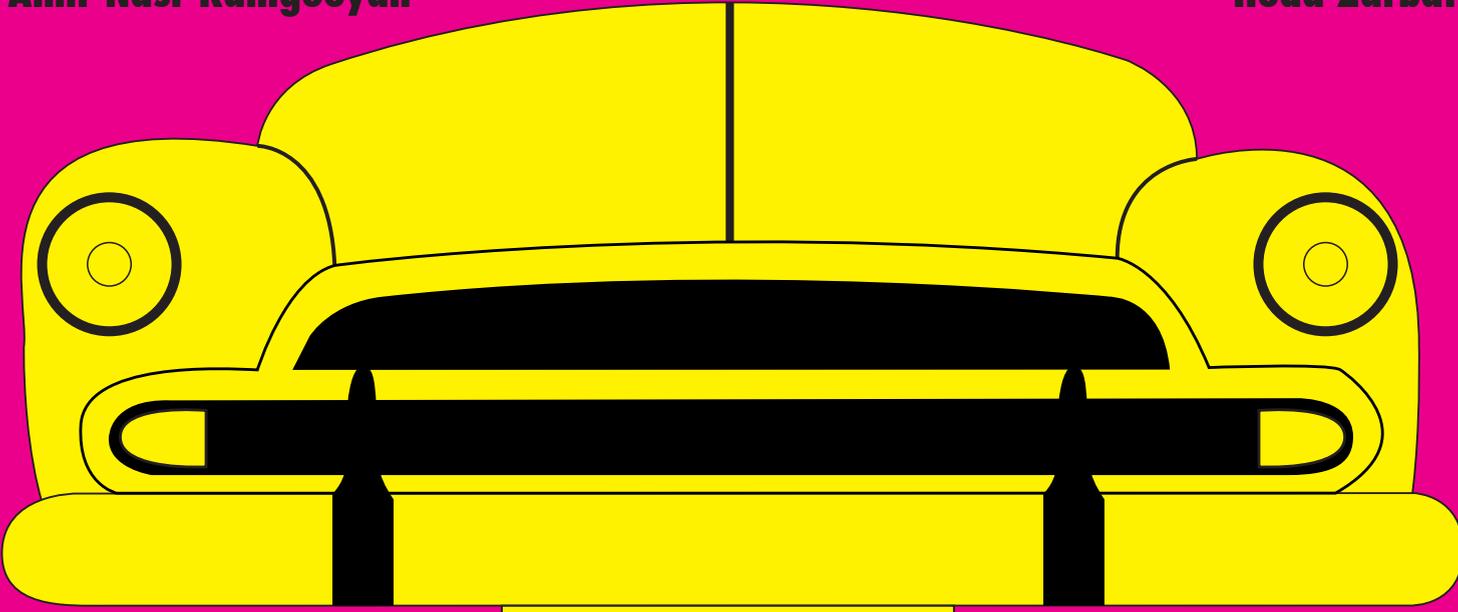
**CUBA**

**Beyond  
the Headline**

**Curated by** Roya Khadjavi

**Sasan Abri**  
**Mimi Amini**  
**Camino Al Eden**  
**(Alex Hernandez and**  
**Ariamna Contino Mendoza)**  
**Ali Chitsaz**  
**Adrian Fernandez**  
**Alex Hernandez**  
**Kamyar Kafaie**  
**Amir Nasr Kamgooyan**

**Maryam Khosrovani**  
**Glenda Leon**  
**Frank Mujica**  
**Allahyar Najafi**  
**Reynier Leyva Novo**  
**Ivan Perera**  
**Behrang Samadzadegan**  
**Leslie Sardinias**  
**Myriam Quiel Tami**  
**Hoda Zarbaf**



**Opening Reception**

Tuesday May 3  
6 to 9 pm

**Press and VIP**

Tuesday May 3  
5 to 6 pm

**Exhibit dates**

May 3 – May 15

**Opening hours**

11 to 6 pm  
Sunday 12 to 6 pm

**Rogue Space Chelsea**

508 West 26th St  
New York, NY 10001

**Panel**

**Framing Art**

Sunday | May 8 | 2-4 pm

How the politics of  
perception  
informs our view  
of contemporary art  
in Iran and Cuba

**Artist talk**

Tuesday | May 10 | 5-6 pm  
Maryam Khosrovani

**Design** Maryam Khosrovani

**For the beautiful people of Iran and Cuba**



## **IRAN X CUBA: Beyond the Headline**

For the first time in the United States, this group exhibition celebrates the diverse works of emerging Iranian and Cuban artists in one place. Forgoing the jargon of headline news, this exhibit reintroduces the often-overlooked dimensions of people, culture, and the artistic vibrancy of Cuba and Iran. With the recent thaw of relations between the United States and its two former adversaries, and with the renewed interest in the discovery of, and travel to both countries, IRAN X CUBA: Beyond the Headline is without question timely and unique.

Iran and Cuba share little in common. Their geographic location, history, language, and religion bare no similarities. However, the one defining event that unites them is the experience of a major revolution in the 20th century, leaving both countries isolated and economically challenged. The Cuban revolution erased religion by force for it had no place in the communist ideology, while the Islamic revolution in Iran enforced it as the main manifest and an umbrella under which all changes in the country were justified.

Years of isolation and economic sanctions have prevented both countries from fully participating in the global economy, but instead of passivity, one finds a positive struggle, a relentless drive to survive, and a tremendous amount of hope. More surprising is that, despite all their limitations and difficulties, both countries have thrived artistically. When I visit Iran and Cuba, despite the visible challenges and restrictions, I see the beauty of the land, the pride of the people, and the history and culture, which permeates every aspect of life. I see the passionate, generous, lively and colorful citizens. I see the creativity and innovative spirit. I see courage and patience, which allows them to fight for their rights with dignity while enduring hardship and roadblocks at every turn.

In recent years, the emerging generation of Iranian artists has started to make their way into the western art world through limited programs, residencies, and the support of art patrons in diaspora. These participations however are limited because acquiring visas to travel is still extremely difficult for Iranian artists.

On the other hand, in Cuba, the visual arts are already globalized as some privileged artists are allowed to travel, exhibit, do residencies, and even live abroad for part of the year. This freedom of exchange however remains a dream for most Iranian artists. I have therefore made it my mission, my manifest to cultivate audiences by representing talented, but under-represented Iranian artists, and to promote and share their works through exhibitions, performances, public programs and partnerships in New York City.

**IRAN X CUBA: Beyond the Headline** is the portrait of a generation of artists who reverberate the turmoil of their cultural background with bold individualism. Independent of genre or style, all the exhibited artists came of age in a period of political and socio-economic challenges, in the aftermath of revolution and continued isolation from the United States. Rather than simply present a western new frontier, the exhibit seeks to showcase the singular work of those who have been unable to speak the language of the expected. With this presentation, I hope to build a playground for both groups of artists to exercise their freedom while signaling the social underpinnings of a complex period in their respective histories. In my white cube, only truth, beauty, color, technique, and subliminal or explicit concepts are the rule of the game. Here I try to demonstrate what happens when the willpower and culture is used to bring us all together. The only possibility of attaining freedom is through the sphere of individual utopia. Freedom unfolds in the realm of artistic play, characterizing the creative impulse of Iran and Cuba's contemporary artists. History has proved that closed societies cannot contain the arts; soon enough artists take the matter into their own hands and create virtual artistic escapes away from the tight grip of authority and the promise of Utopia /and heaven on earth; "The detachment these artists have made has provided them the comfort zone they require to construct their own imaginary world yet they are still influenced by their history, their origin."(Sohrab Kashani)Through satirical paintings, imaginary watercolors, political posters, art installations, and other means, these artists communicate with us on the issues paralyzing their societies. These artists are fully conscious and present, proud of their oeuvre, and excited about the opportunity. They are ready for me to share their messages and their stories through their art.

*Roya Khadjavi*

Since the isolation of Cuba and Iran from the international community, the majority of what the world has come to know and visualize about both countries has been through a touristic gaze. As outsiders, we continue to present non-Western art with a pre-imagined idea of what it should look like. Here, I aim to diagnose the ways in which we make meaning of Iranian and Cuban Contemporary art through an analysis of what I call the "exceptionality narrative". This "exceptionality narrative" situates the work of a select few artists within political perceptions of their countries rather than analyzing it for its art historical, formal and curatorial merit. The popular framing of Iranian and Cuban art as socially defiant is extremely narrow and single-handedly celebrates these artists for their triumph over hardship rather than as members of the international art community. Such framing has its roots in the historical legacies that consider the non-western as an incomprehensible entity. This point of view is greatly informed by the limited knowledge about Iranian and Cuban society that is accessible to us. It is within this limited frame of reference that this art is used as a stand-in to either reinforce or disrupt our formulated beliefs.

Such an attitude assumes that Iranian and Cuban art must be didactic, a tool with which "we" seek reconciliation with "them". If our sole interpretation of Cuban and Iranian art is the taboos that we expect them to address, then we create a problematic distance between caricatured descriptions and the realities on the ground. Edward Said argues that facts receive their importance and meaning from what is interpreted of them, whereby interpretation is too informed by pre-imagined ideas: "knowledge of other cultures is especially subjected to 'unscientific', imprecisions and to the circumstances of interpretation."<sup>1</sup> Consequently, interpretation is a form of making that when codified, becomes commonly accepted truth.

Instead, I implore you to look at the vibrancy, color and animation in this show and question the ways in which your perception has been tainted by misconception.

---

1 Edward W. Said. "Knowledge and Interpretation." *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World*. New York: Pantheon, 1981. 162-163. Print.

2 Hamid Keshmirshekan, "Contemporary Iranian Art: The Emergence of New Artistic Discourses." *Iranian Studies Journal* Vol. 40 No. 3. (2007): 335-366. Web.

I posit that Iranian and Cuban artists must be considered as both contributing to and gaining from the international art scene. Today's art community in Iran and Cuba is extremely active, diverse and especially young, spearheaded by an entrepreneurial and innovative spirit. Pictorial discourse is now a means by which to produce, honor, defend and reclaim identity in these societies, where artists are especially concerned with self-presentation as imbued through image. They are using their art to respond to the changing climate of their country, "alternately challenging boundaries, documenting contradictions or reinterpreting cultural heritage and social realities".<sup>2</sup> *Iran x Cuba: Beyond the Headline* showcases a group of artists that are creating meaning and value in a period of social, political, cultural and economic transformations.

These artists are not illicit producers and their practice not underground. Instead, their visual vocabulary is laced with a sophistication of metaphor and satire. With their language of code, they restore their sense of agency and turn the page on the metanarratives that dominate our worldview. The biggest gap in understanding Iranian and Cuban art is communication and education. The artists I spoke to in Iran and Cuba often felt defeated by a West that seeks to define them. Although the magnitude of their scope does not equate art institutions abroad, their affinity for market pressure is equal to contemporary artists elsewhere. Their concerns are particularly grounded in their lack of opportunity and many of these artists that I had the pleasure of speaking with were most disappointed to be bound by place. In many cases, their incapacity to travel, to participate in exchange programs or receive fellowships to study abroad was most detrimental to their artistic practice. In light of these roadblocks, their desire to stand alongside their counterparts on the international stage is unwavering. It does not suffice to look at Cuba and Iran in the West's image. The lack of direct contact and the ensuing curiosity of life inside these restricted countries have set the stage for metanarrative. Instead, the artists showcased in this exhibition have succeeded at unlearning what is expected of them and foregoing the jargon of front-page news. Their practice is alive and most importantly human, focused on the too often forgotten people, culture and vibrancy of Cuba and Iran.

Layla M. Heidari

# -Sasan Abri-



Born in Tehran in 1984, Sasan Abri is an Iranian photographer and video artist currently based in Tehran. He graduated from Mah-e-Mehr Institute in Tehran in 2005, and continued his studies with some of the master photographers and lecturers such as Bahman Jalali, Hamid Severi and Mehran Mohajer.

In 2008, his work was chosen for Iran's 11th Biennial of Photography. Since then his work has been exhibited in a number of group exhibitions as well as three solo exhibitions in Iran and internationally.

In all of Sasan's projects the city of Tehran has a strong presence, where he focuses his attention on political and social, as well as the architectural influences and elements of the mega polis. In the series: Conjunctivitis and Dormant Yellow series, the heavy presence of urban life and its many destructive effects on the historical and cultural aspects of the city are evident.

Sasan Abri began his career as a self-taught photographer but later developed his talent and passion under the guidance of recognized Iranian photographers. Sasan has mastered unusual cameras such as the pinhole camera and the Polaroid. He especially enjoys working with the Polaroid camera through which he manipulates the final result, both during the process and later at the development phase by experimenting with various chemicals to achieve the desired effect.

## **The Dormant Yellow series**

In the hidden corners of this turbulent and ever changing city that claws and tears its own historic flesh asunder to devour it in the name of progress, leaving nothing but a monstrous creature, a few trees still stand tall.

Trees, often pines, hide something in their shadows as if to protect it. They are guardians of the past; guardians of spaces in the territory of a lost time when there was still art in laying brick upon another brick, yellow bricks dormant in silent uninhabited walls. The pine trees are the main emblem of these houses. They herald from afar that they are surrounding and watching over a building that has long gone to sleep.

Barely breathing, yet still beautiful, with a living identity. You can still hear their sound, the sound of pale yellow. The sound of crows and sparrows, the sound of lightening and relentless rain, the sound of the incessant honking of generations of cars and bulldozers and the battle cry of electrical saws and the thunder of iron and concrete that draws ever closer.

*Sasan Abri*



**Dormant Yellow Series**

Polaroid photography,  
Collage of 9 images,  
all transferred to glass  
Size 24x24 cm | 2016



**Dormant Yellow Series**  
Polaroid photography,  
collage of 9 images,  
all transferred to glass  
Size 24x24 cm | 2016



**Dormant Yellow Series**

Polaroid photography,  
Collage of 9 images,  
all transferred to glass  
Size 24x24 cm | 2016

# -Mimi Amini-

Mimi Amini was born in Esfahan/ Iran in 1977. She received her BA from Tehran University in Painting in 2003.

Her work has been in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Iran as well as in Europe such as Aaran Gallery in Tehran, Thaddaeus Ropac gallery in Paris and Salzburg, Tamen Gallery in Berlin, Verso Gallery in Turino, and Mall Gallery in London.

Multi-disciplinary artist from Persian miniature to abstract painting, sculpture, installation and performance Art. Mimi lives and works in Tehran.



16 spontaneous images representing important events from the past.

Multiple characters living and revolving around an axis of darkness.

## **YOUR DARKNESS FILLS ME WITH LIFE**

-Following a search inward for esthetic discovery in many layers and its juxtaposition with contained content led to printing multiple radiographesque images on acetate.

-Sixteen images printed sixteen times.

-Car accident 16 years ago = Radio-graphic images.

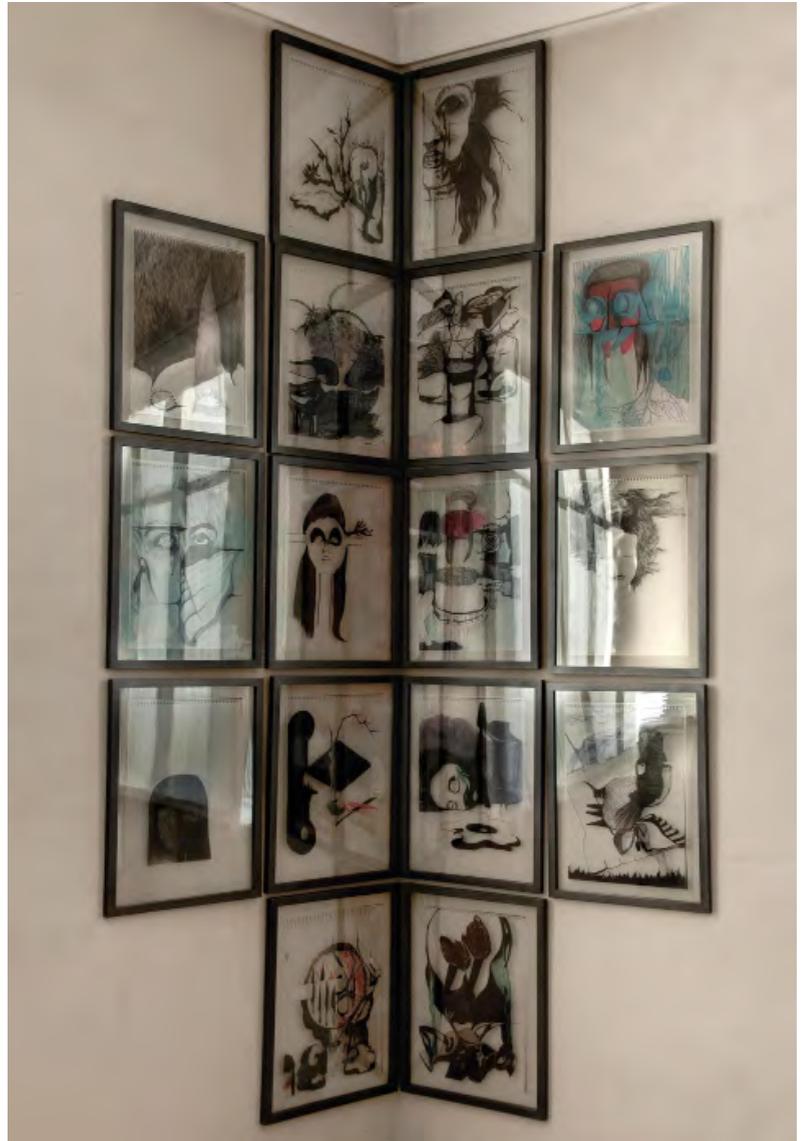
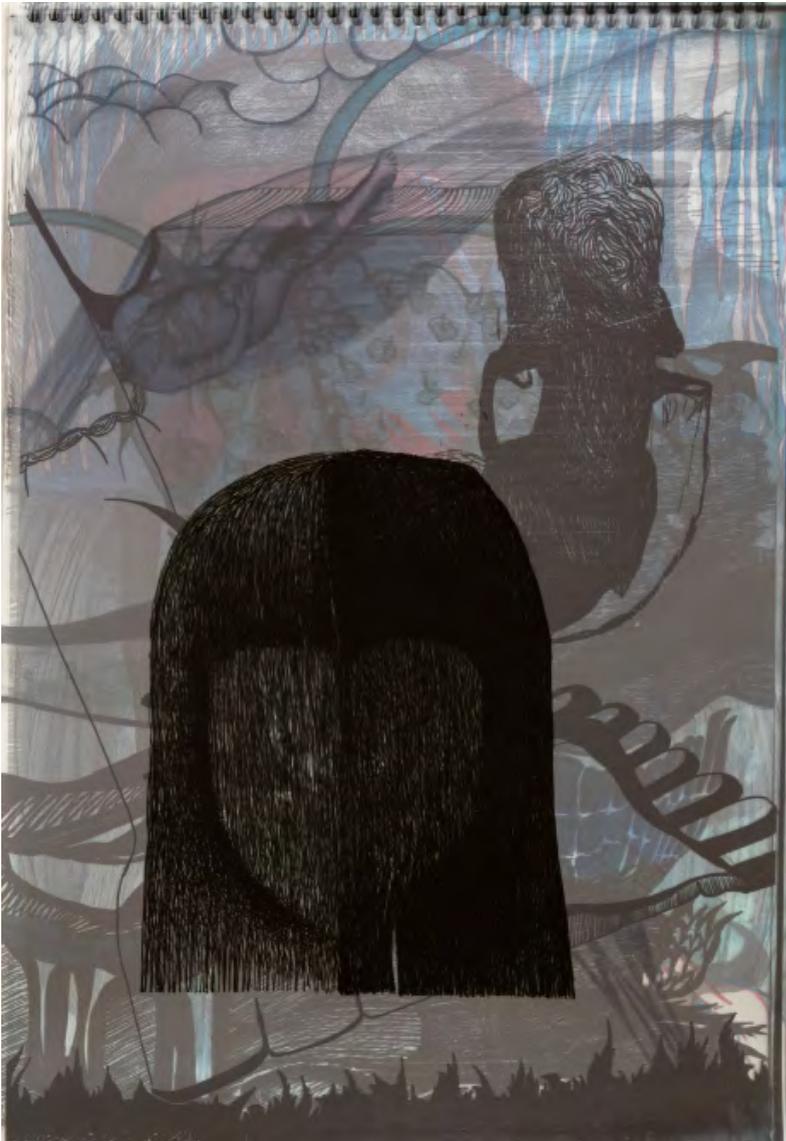
-Rearrangement of sheets will yield infinite new image possibilities.

-The box arrangement as is creates opacity which impedes the seeing of lower layers.

-A graphic self-reportage of past events.



**Artist Book**  
**16 Pages in Wood Box**  
16 radiographic sheets  
30x40 cm each | 2015



**Artist Book Deconstructed**

16 radiographic sheets  
30x40 cm each | 2015

# -Ali Chitsaz-



Ali Chitsaz was born in Tehran, Iran in 1979. He has studied at the Azad University of Tehran and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has exhibited prolifically in Iran in solo and group exhibitions. He has shown internationally in London, Dubai, Athens, Cambridge, Chicago, and New York.

Chitsaz is a bad boy painter; he approaches materiality in his paintings with a ham-fisted irreverence and a transgressive sense of humor. He reconciles the difference in approaches to painting between his native Persian culture and of his adopted home in America— which would be creating an image in terms of the former and the materiality and surface of the painting in the latter. Chitsaz engages with both “how” and “what” to paint. Using the forms of Human figures, portrait, still life and landscape Chitsaz employs a process of painting with his hands to achieve joyful and intoxicating compositions.

Iraqi planes bombarded us from the sky,  
Basijis and guards fucked us below,  
Mullahs sucked our blood and sacrificed  
our loved ones,  
Only because they had seen our Imam's  
picture on the moon!  
In all this mayhem and chaos,  
We got lost, we went nuts!  
Nausea became our state of being,  
Escape the desired way to fly!

When I say these words out loud,  
People say: *"Say no more! You make us  
sad, you are too cold!"*  
So I paint it all with vampy red and vibrant  
gold.  
They all say now: *"Oh wow How bold!"*  
I choose paint.



Utopia day1 | Utopia day 2

Acrylic on canvas

112x152cm each | 2016

# -Camino Al Eden-

**Ariamna Contino and Alex Hernández**



## *The Path to Eden*

The young couple, in their early 30s, fuse their artistic skill with a social and political awareness. For *The Path to Eden*, Contino created expansive, dazzlingly beautiful landscapes of delicately hand-cut paper to represent the major drug corridors in Latin America. The layers of meticulously cut, cocaine-white paper represent the complexity of the drug industry, with Cuba as a natural corridor. On smaller cut-outs by Contino, Dueñas has printed abstract and colorful images, which evoke line graphs and statistical data charting the drug markets and resulting deaths.

Alex Hernandez received his BA from the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, Havana in 2004 and his MFA from Instituto de Arte, Havana in 2010. Hernandez has participated in many solo and group exhibitions in Havana, the US and Europe and his work was exhibited at Havana's 12th Biennial in 2015.

Ariamna was born in Havana in 1984. She received her BA from the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, Havana in 2004. She has exhibited in Cuba and in Havana's 12th Biennial in 2015.

The statistical graphs of drug trafficking found on the internet, in newspapers and magazines, are used to produce this group of abstract works.

In this body of work we create new maps and new forms using public information.

The main idea is to produce a very attractive image with an enhanced degree of ambiguity. In these works we explore the relationship between art and its social function.



**Militancy Estética**

Growth rate of coca cultivation in the Andean region.  
45x60 cm



**Militancia Estética**

Growth rate of the cocaine production and the paramilitary group in South America.  
35x35 cm



**Militancy Aesthetic**

Drug-related murders  
35x35 cm | 2015



**De la Serie Militancia  
Estética**

Narco executions according  
to the different organizations  
60x60 cm | 2015



**Militancia Estética**

Rate eradicated and cultivat-  
ed land in Central America  
60x60 cm | 2015

# -ALEX HERNÁNDEZ-



Alex Hernandez is a painter and a multi media artist whose work investigates themes of status, privilege and hierarchical structures within society through images of pristine pools, manicured lawns, sleek homes and country clubs. He is influenced by a wide range of artists including David Hockney and Richard Diebenkorn. Hernandez's flattened and simplified images create atmospheres that are dreamlike and often times eerily void of human life. He received his BA from the Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes San Alejandro, Havana in 2004 and his MFA from Instituto de Arte, Havana in 2010. Hernandez has participated in many solo and group exhibitions in Havana, the US and Europe and his work was exhibited at Havana's 12th Biennial in 2015.

This series of etching on glass explores the idea of perception as a symbolic element.

The shadows cast by these pieces refer directly to the elements of the collective memory and how it is constructed overlapping historical and cultural events.

This body of works brings together a group of drawings of the city that are displayed as shadows, giving them a certain atmosphere of timelessness.

Club houses, port view, buildings belonging to the other political processes etc...



**SPECTRUM** | Glass engraving  
60x40 cm | 2014



**SPECTRUM** | Glass engraving  
60x40 cm | 2014

# -Adrian Fernandez-



Born in Havana, Cuba, Adrian Fernandez studied visual arts at the San Alejandro Fine Arts Academy (2004) and later at the Superior Institute of Arts (2010) in Havana.

He trained at The Ludwig Foundation of Cuba and New York University, Tisch School of the Arts, Special Programs, from 2010 to 2012 in documentary photography and film making.

I am very much interested in the world of images and how through them, reality, or the possible realities are conformed and perceived. In the Requiem series, I take as incentive 20th century Cuban postage stamps, which symbolically show part of our history and idiosyncrasy. Working on a printed image gives me the possibility to revisit the national past on the basis of the aesthetic, cultural, social or political paradigms of a certain period. These pieces seek to establish connections between the present Cuban identity, its future projection and the archetypes of the past. In this way, each work is an attempt to understand and question our reality based on the image that has been constructed of it. The figures are designed to establish links with and references to a variety of shapes. When I'm working with them I can always recall mechanical element, pieces of a puzzle, but at the same time they can relate to monuments, pedestals, they can also associate to human figures in certain postures with banner or weapons.

But objectively they are nothing, they are all incomplete, unfinished that's why they can't define a recognizable shape.

That is why the name of this series is " Monument to the incomplete man".

One can see that in every case the shape interrupts the two male figures in the background, one related to industry and development and the other to agriculture and land. They, in a way, represent the idealized past conception of the new man, however, in this case they appear obstructed by these constructs which interrupt their past, interrupt their viewing as a whole... and at the same time generate a new profile, one that is not definite, fragmented and yet needs to be completed...



**Monument to the Incomplete Man**

Photography, mixed media  
60x40 cm | 2015

# -Kamyar Kafaie-

Kamyar Kafaie was born in 1979 in Tehran. He is a self-taught artist who enjoyed drawing before he could read or write. His early work was on almost every page of his textbooks, where he drew caricatures of his teachers, friends and classmates. He grew up in a family where creativity was appreciated unlike his school where math and science were the focus. His major artistic influence through out his life has been his father.

Kamyar left Iran for California in 1999 to attend University, where he studied Animation. In 2011, he visited Iran and started to paint again. In 2013 he moved back to Tehran and began his artistic career.

His first solo exhibition was held in 2014 at The Kargah Honar Gallery in Tehran.

In 2015 he joined Aaran Gallery and participated in a group exhibition.



My paintings touch on different subjects ranging from history to current social events. I like creating scenes in my paintings where I can tell many little stories all at once. I use intense colors and use them in a way to create a balance. The unusual characters in my paintings are born in my personal sketchbook where I sketch in free style with pen or pencil. These imaginary characters flow and evolve from painting to painting creating a connection between my works. I try to remain as "un-academic" as I can when I paint. I don't think there should be any rules in art and creativity. My naïve art style is a perfect background to show in a fun and humorous way the social and economic difficulties my people experience in their daily life. Rather than sulk in sadness, I turn these emotions into colorful narratives filled with satire capable of literally making my characters jump off the canvas and grab the viewer!



**Parkway**  
Acrylic on canvas  
60x80 cm | 2015



**Basement**  
Acrylic on canvas  
60x80 cm | 2015

# - Amir Nasr Kam- gooyan-



Amir Nasr Kamgooyan was born in Tehran in 1982. He received his BA in Graphic design from The Tehran Moaser Academy and his Masters degree in Graphic Design from Soureh University in Shiraz. He was always interested in printmaking, mainly photo silk printing and photoengraving. This special interest led him to pursue various printing techniques.

Through a lengthy process of engraving and etching, he transfers his drawings on to steel. His first solo exhibition was in 2012, titled "Capturing Friction" at Shirin Gallery in Tehran followed by his series "To 13 Hertz" in 2014. He has participated in various group exhibitions in Iran and abroad and was a finalist in the Magic of Persia competition in 2015.

In his art Kamgooyan deals with the opposing forces of nature and technology. The interplay of these two worlds; the highly advanced technological versus the organic and primitive is fascinating for him. He likes to discover the unlimited borders of nature while he works in the confines of technology. In his art work he examines whether by referencing the past one can reach out into the future. Present day apprehensions over the fate of the planet and the environmental and ecological disasters resulting from technological abuse are among his chief concerns. "There should be solutions for many of these problems if we look carefully into the past and create sustainable technologies to allow for better treatment of nature." In his playful images he creates landscapes that are narratives of historical as well as his own life experiences.

## **We shouldn't ignore the power of denial.**

Schlegel wrote: "Nobody ever painted so truthfully as [Shakespeare] has done the facility of self-deception, the half self-conscious hypocrisy towards ourselves, with which even noble minds attempt to disguise the almost inevitable influence of selfish motives in human nature."

The human mind has a fantastic capacity for self-deception. It is easy for us to deny—man has a natural tendency towards inversion. Projecting his inherent vice, he imagines himself in the safe position of an innocent, and points his finger to others. What begins as a joke, turns into a lie, and one lie leads to another, and before long, the truth is turned on its head! Man wakes up one morning and finds himself in the middle of a road, far off from the truth, a way he has supposedly chosen "in his right mind." For many, total oblivion is a good way out, but for the few who still hope to make the trip back, a reminder might awaken in them a sense of longing which through self-disclosure, will show them the path to the truth.

Considering reality, it would appear that things are happening by chance. Chance is, by definition, something that has no discernable or observable cause. But this is only the surface. The mystery that lies beyond is what fascinates me. The scientific attempt to discover this mystery, leads to more mystery, which makes it even more exiting—I am intrigued by this mystery, the continuation of which guaranties the fascination. If the parts of a work are put on the border of connection and disconnection—to itself and others—a constant oscillation will occur. This oscillation will create an in-between zone, which is the juxtaposition of the finite and the infinite, chance and determination, the concrete and the abstract; the perception of which is up to the viewer's imagination. Time capsule is a continuation of my earlier series, and deals with the same questions. During the process of preparing this work, however, I took an interest in certain traditions of scientific illustration, and consequently, I started collecting scientific books from the past centuries and studying their illustrations. A scientific illustrator is capable of depicting the outside and the inside simultaneously, and even reconstructing the forgotten points as curious and meticulous details. Therefore, scientific illustrations, unlike photography, can be unrealistic. The work is consisted of two parts:

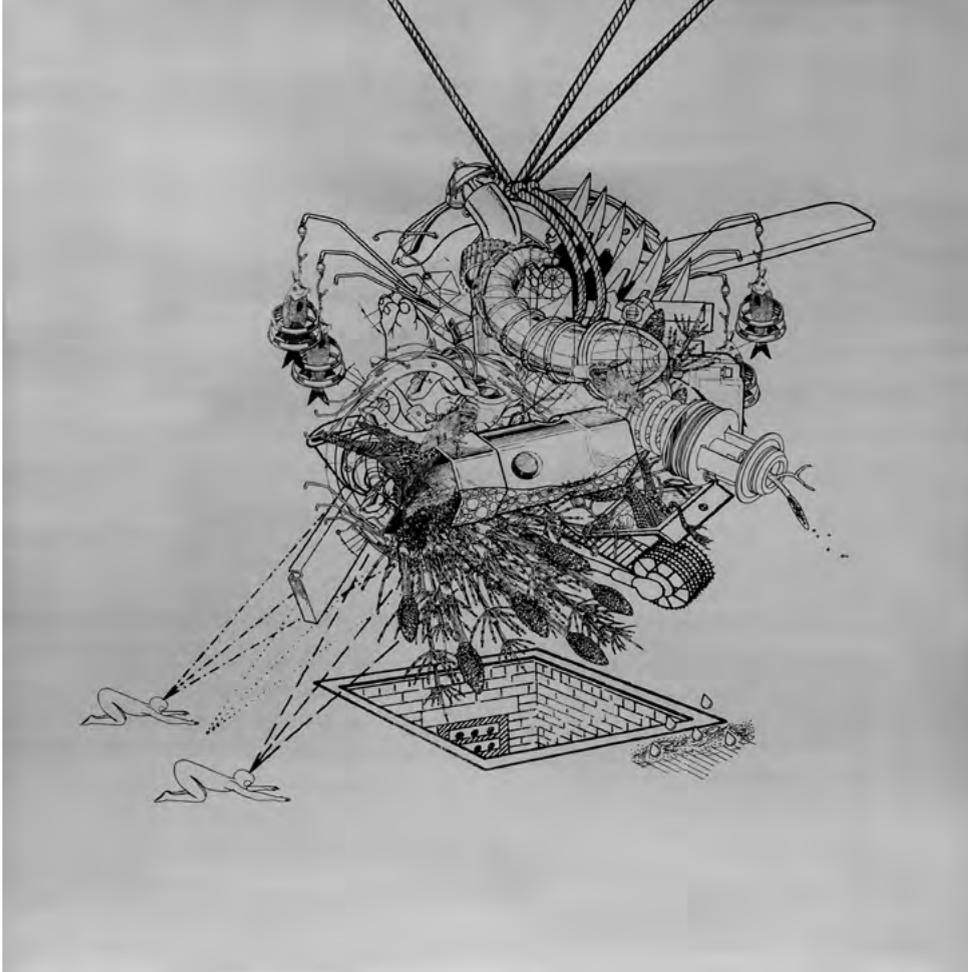
1. A cone-shaped, wall-mounted volume 2. Three book-like volumes on a shelf.

The cone-shaped volume is inspired by Dante's *Inferno*, only here it is inverted. Dante's hell is a giant cone, with its apex in the middle of the earth. It consists of nine circles of suffering. When the viewer looks into my inverted cone, he/she sees an illuminated picture (an illusion?), and he/she becomes part of the work. Just as a reader might identify with various inhabitants of hell after visiting their circles, and thus, become a companion of the pilgrim and Virgil in their journey. Finally the books complete the equation. The books with magnifying glasses are symbolic. Although the internet offers the fastest way to information, something precious seems to be lost, i.e. depth. Modern man is like someone on a Jet Ski, zipping along on the surface of the water, quenching his thirst for excitement. Before that, however, he used to dive into the deep waters, in search of pearls of great value.

*August Wilhelm Schlegel, Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, trans: John Black.*

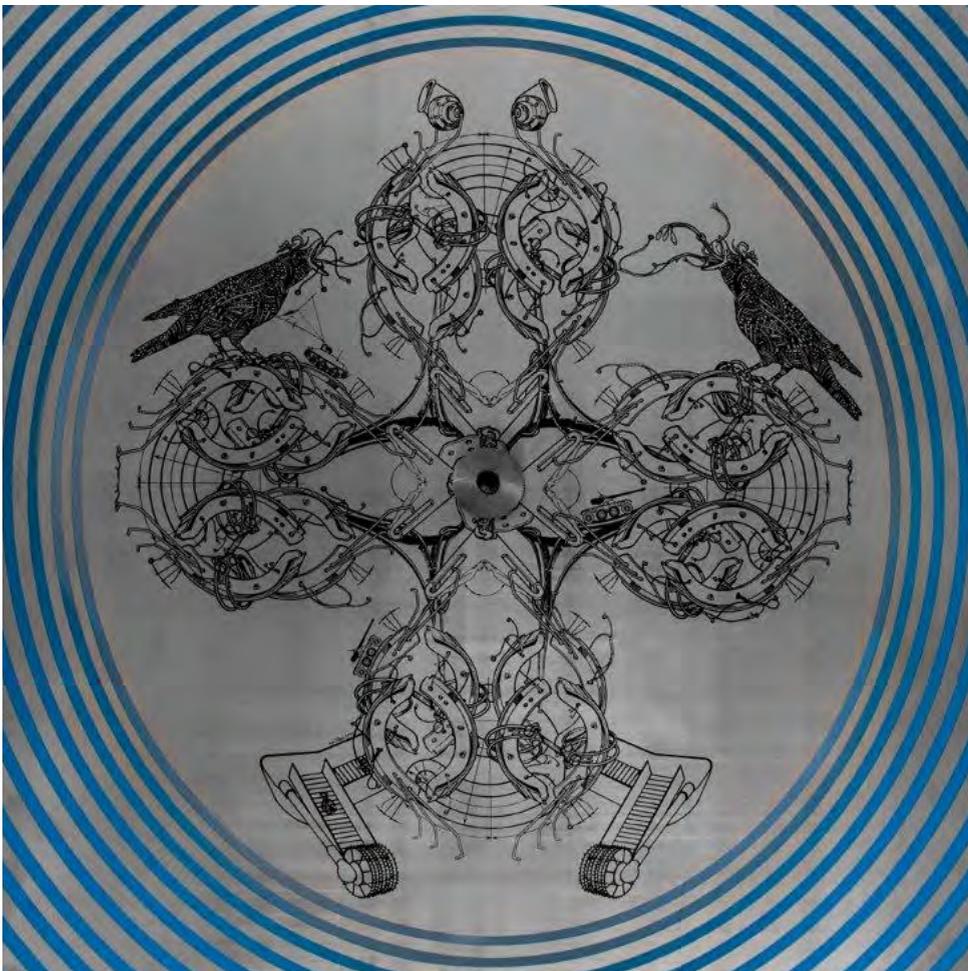


**Time Capsule Edition 2 of 3**  
Metal plastic wood glass paper  
220x175cm | 2015



**Untitled**

Photo engravings on metal  
52x49 cm | 2014



**Untitled**

Photo engravings on metal  
96x96 cm | 2014



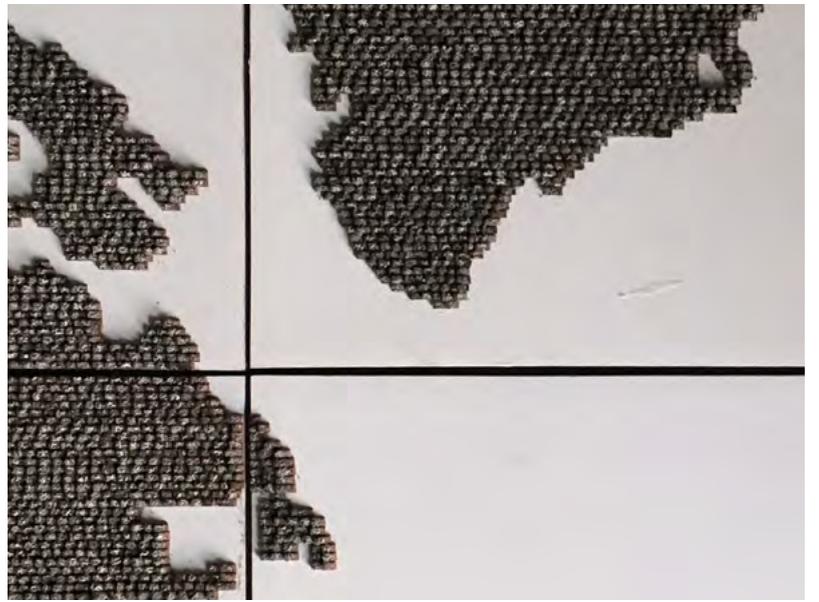
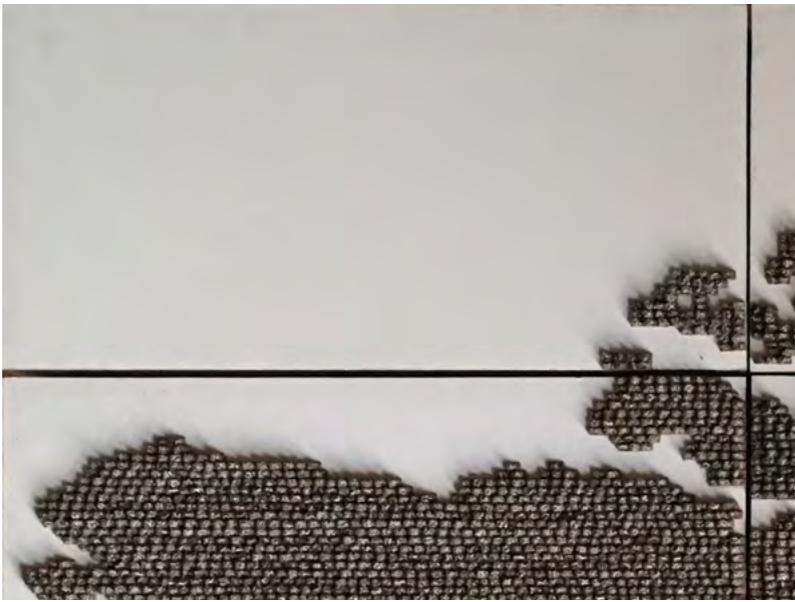
# - Maryam Khosrovani-

Born in Tehran in 1981. Maryam received her Masters degree in Art Direction and Graphic Design in 2011 from ESAG Penninghen (*Julien Academie*) in Paris where famous artists such as Matisse and Louise Bourgeois, Rauschenberg, Duchamp graduated from. She grew up in an art loving family who frequented many great artists including Farideh Lashai who was her first major influencer. In her artwork, Maryam focuses on her ongoing interest in the duality of female identity. She tries to overcome the barrier of her culture and communicates in a global language to a wider audience through a fusion of digital codes.

As a graphic designer she uses a concept-oriented approach and illustrates her ideas in non-linear narratives. The significant absence of ornaments and unnecessary detail in her work effectively portrays her perception and expresses her vision. Maryam has gained her experiences working with graphic designers such as Reza Abedini, SARL LM Communicuer, and Michel Bouvet's graphic design studio.

Maryam's exhibition "*Incubus, Succubus, Pendulus: The Secret Rules of Gravity*" at Aun Gallery / Tehran in 2012, rewarded her with many praises from the press and the public. Since then her work has been shown in galleries in Tehran.

Maryam currently resides in New York where she works as an artist and graphic designer preparing for her solo exhibition in Brooklyn in the fall of 2016.



## Entropy

Burned matches  
on multiple wood panels  
112x290 cm | 2016



## Entropy

Burned matches  
on multiple wood panels  
112x290 cm | 2016



# -GLENDA LEON-

Cuba born and Madrid/Havana based artist, Glenda León has exhibited widely and internationally. Her works have been showcased at the Cuban Pavillion of the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, SITE Santa Fe Biennial, 2014, and several Havana Biennials. She has participated in various museum group shows such as MART, Rovereto, Italy; Rochechouart Museum of Contemporary Art, Rochechouart, France; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, Canada; Centre for Contemporary Art Laznia, Gdansk, Poland; Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA; CCA Wattis Institute, San Francisco, USA; Bronx Museum, NY, USA; Badischen Kunstverein, Karlsruhe, Germany; City Art Museum Ljubljana, Slovenia; The Mattress Factory, Pittsburgh, USA; and Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Rhode Island, USA. Glenda has also had many solo exhibits worldwide including at Galería Senda, Barcelona, 2014; Chateau des Adhemar, Montellimar, France, 2013; MagnanMetz Gallery, New York, 2012; Galerie Pierre-François Ouellette Contemporain, Montreal, Canada, 2010; Le Plateau Espace expérimental, Paris, France, 2007.

She received her BA in Art History in 1999 from the University of Havana and an MFA from Academy of New Media Art in Cologne, Germany in 2007. Her works are in museum collections including the Centre George Pompidou, Musée des Beaux Arts de Montréal and the AGO in Toronto. She is also the author of many essays featured in prestigious books and publications, including the book *La Condición Performática* (Pinos Nuevos, La Habana, 2000), translated into French by Éditions Nota Bene, Montreal in 2010.

## **Seeing is something absolutely spiritual.**

*Albert Hofmann*

There is an ignored sense of longing for freedom and for belonging to the world.

Sometimes art can be a reflection of this state, of this intrinsic power hidden for so long. I mean the power of imagination, of living and belonging, of being in harmony. I believe that art should ring like an alarm and force us to become more aware in the world. Art should make us see it as if we were experiencing it for the first time, from the privileged eyes of a child.

I am interested in the interstice between the visible and the invisible, sound and silence, similar and different, the ephemeral and the eternal.

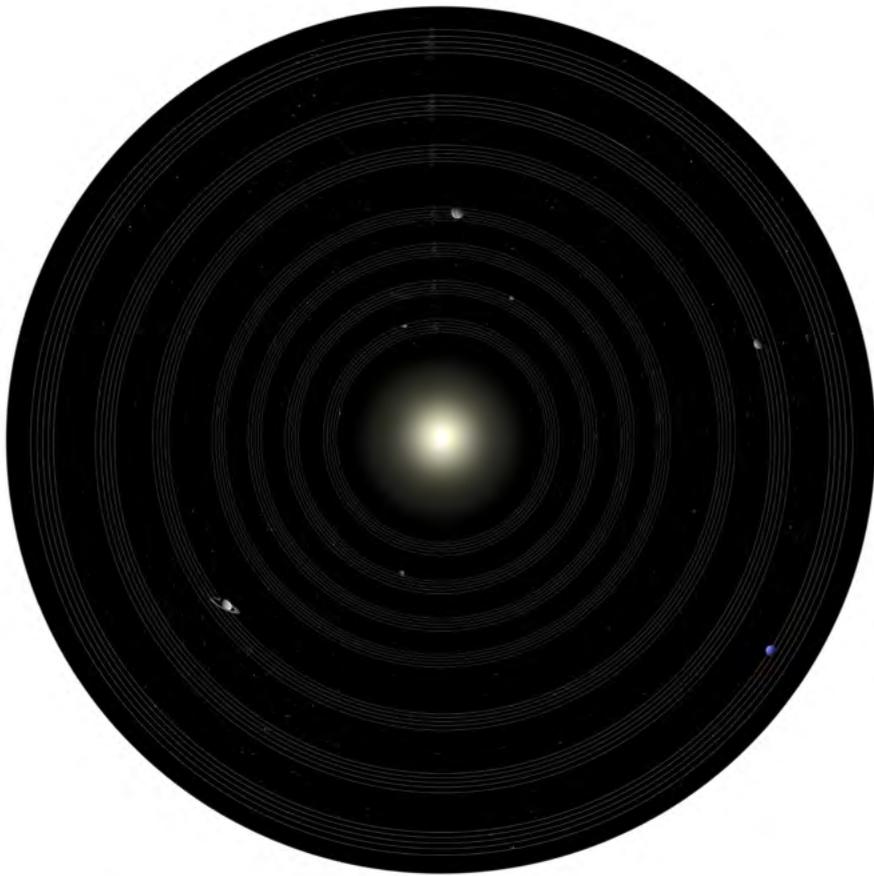
Like magic, art is an act of transformation, which can simply turn a coincidence into reality. For me the modifications I made to my work are the touch of magic, making possible things that coincide.

I build artificial landscapes for the thought.



**Permanence**

Lambda print  
78x118.7 cm | 2012

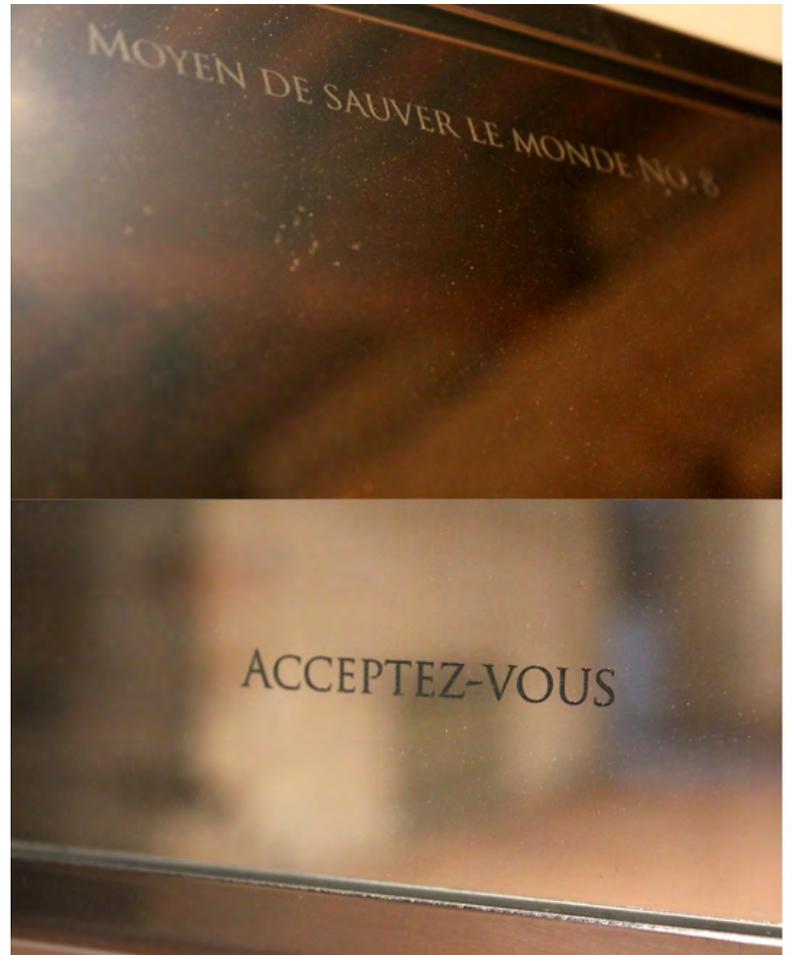


### Music of the Spheres

Digital print on acrylicplexi-  
glass light box

69.9 cm diameter edition

1/3,2 AP | 2011



### Way to Save the World n. 8:

Accept Yourself | Laser engraved mirror

50.2x40 cm | 2012

# -Frank Mujica-



Born in Pinar Del Rio, Cuba, Frank Mujica received his Bachelor of Fine Arts from the San Alejandro Academy of Fine Arts in Cuba in 2004 and his Masters of Fine Art from the Superior institute of Art in Havana, Cuba in 2010. Mujica has exhibited at Zona Franca at the 12th Havana Biennial, Cuba and the ZONA MACO Contemporary Art fair in Mexico in 2015 as well as the Ludwig Foundation of Cuba in Havana in 2010. He has been part of many group exhibitions in Cuba, the USA, and Europe.

He is the award recipient of The Art Lovers Award at LINEART 2011 Art Fair in Gent Belgium in 2011, and the first award, Salon Habana, Chinese Traditions house, Havana, Cuba in 2005. Mujica resides and works in Havana. His drawings belong to his Diary series, a huge body of work made of small drawings (graphite on paper). He has been working on these series almost daily for the past 5 years. All the sketches come from a combination of plain air sketches and his memories. Mujica likes to work from memory. With the idea of creating a diary.

The landscapes are interpretations of real places around him. He thinks of them as an inventory. They offer him the possibility of studying his own work and using them as a source of ideas for his large paintings.

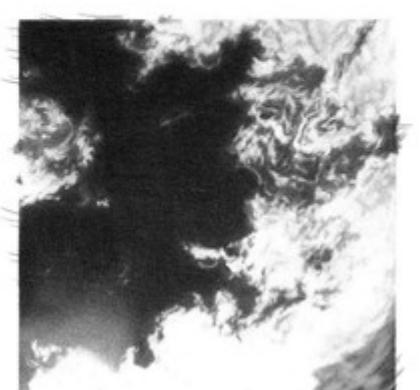
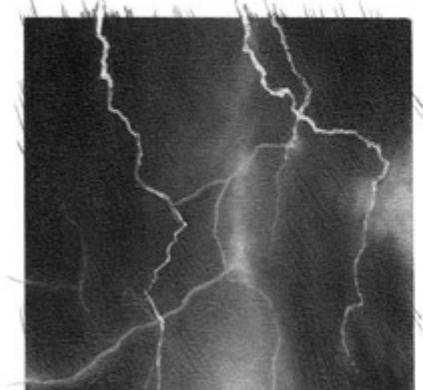
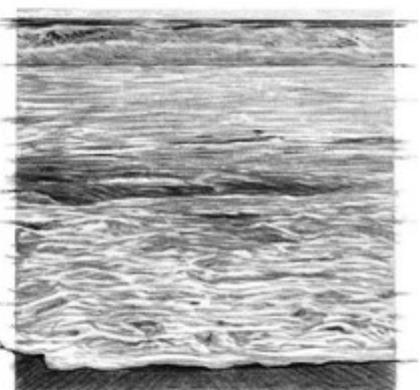
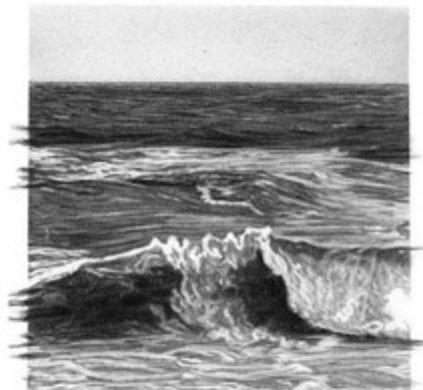
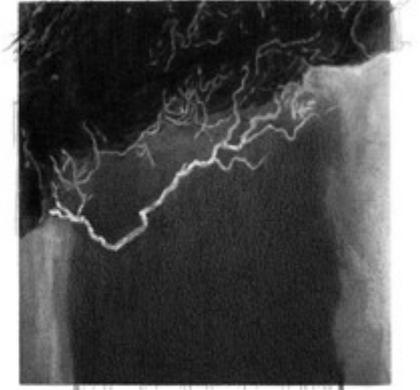
These small drawings are technically very fine works often mistaken for photographs. The 10x10cm format allows the sketch to float in the middle of a large square paper like a stamp which is then dated at the bottom of the page.

I believe that landscape is not as simple as it has lately been judged. Many artists throughout the history used this genre as an important way of representation; and still today it challenges those who decide to plunge into its course.

I consider the research on this field very attractive from a visual art point of view.

At first I try to understand the essential elements of the genre and the challenges it brings to today's audiences; trying to build then an artwork that proposes and develops a new and particular way of looking, judging and valuing, without denying the cultural tradition behind.

Learning to observe, learning to recognize are the cultural codes which determine our regard. Learning to break away without denying but enriching them; is to learn how to elaborate a landscape from an unusual perspective. This is therefore, how one must show a unique work of art just when the daily viewer doesn't stop to see it.



**Diaries** | Graphite on paper  
10x10 cm each on 40x40cm paper  
2013

# -Allahyar Najafi-



Since 2000 when he was a Graphic Design student, Allahyar Najafi, engaged in various fields of fine arts namely visual arts and music compositions.

As a freelance graphic designer and composer he has done numerous interesting projects and currently focuses on video art, short films and animation.

Najafi worked on many video projects for different TV channels in India while pursuing his higher education. He obtained his Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design from C.K.P Bangalore in 2006. While in India he experimented with printmaking, photography and music compositions.

In 2012, Najafi returned to Iran where he pursued painting and video art as well as music. He lives in Rasht , a city in the north of Iran far away from the capital.

The story that you narrate is similar to installing colored glass on the windows of your house. Whatever is out there, whatever is moving, you get to see the colored glass and the darker or lighter shadows behind it. The story that you tell is not about the depth of life, it's a recounting of the passage of life. Your story is a patchwork of sub-stories, petty stories that not a lot of people care to tell.

The two and half dimensional imagery that are sold at the corner of the streets tell their own tale as well. One winks, the other one jumps from the wolf to the tiger and from the tiger to the eagle while another shows the depth of the forest. The final image is similar to what you see behind your colored windows. You see "what" you want to see. And there is no particular reason for it. And it's not even necessary to explain it. It's your story, the wink of the other, or the story of another one, a patchwork just like life. Each part exists for a reason.

By using lenticular prints, commonly found anywhere in the world, and using oil as my chosen painting technique, I have tried to create the "fourth wall", an "Alienation effect" which has been a determining factor in Persian Painting.

The use of these prints creates a distance between me and what I look at. The final image is alien and my way of looking at the world in whole.

*Allahyar Najafi*



**Pusa Caspica** | Oil on lenticular print  
140x140 cm | 2015



**Untitled** | Oil on lenticular print,  
120x90 cm | 2015



**Holy Cow** | Oil on lenticular  
print | 120x90 cm

# -Reynier Leyva Novo-



Reynier Leyva Novo was born in Havana in 1983. He graduated from the José Antonio Díaz Peláez Experimental Art Center in 1998, and the San Alejandro School of Fine Arts in 2003. He attended Instituto Superior de Arte, Havana from 2004-2008. Novo was the Chair of Behavior Art directed by Tania Bruguera in 2007. He has exhibited both in Cuba and abroad in Liverpool, Vienna, Portugal, Spain and the US. Reynier Leyva Novo was the only Latin American artist chosen to exhibit at the Latin American Pavillion of the prestigious 54th Venice Biennial. He lives and works in Havana.

Reynier Leyva Novo was the only Cuban artist chosen to exhibit at the Latin American Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennial. Behind a man bun, laid-back attitude, and youthful flair, Reynier Leyva Novo is a leading Cuban conceptual artist, whose work is deeply rooted in the weight of history and politics—literally. Here he works on paper reacting to Communist iconography. The Novo Anniversary Collection, a series of silkscreen posters reflect on political propaganda in the context of the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Revolution. One of the most popular images shows a series of hawks flying, and the word "Silencio" below. Novo's explanation is that young people in Cuba are tired of hearing about the embargo, about imperialism, and about sacrifices they must make for socialism. "They gave us wings" Novo Said, "but they did not allow us to fly. We want fewer political speeches and more silence". Novo's work is stripped down to its essence, reminding us that the basis of ideologies can be just as abstract as his art.



**PA' LA CALLE**



**Chupa**



**Long live the Heroine**



**Silencio!**

# -Iván Perera-



Ivan Perera was born in Havana, Cuba, in 1993. In 2012 he finished his studies in visual arts at the provincial art school Eduardo Abela, San Antonio de los Baños, Cuba. That same year he won a prize in the national student lounge in Havana. In 2013 he began his studies at the ISA (University of Art in Cuba). His first solo exhibition entitled "Ibid" was shown in 2013 in Havana.

He has participated in various workshops with German artists through Alanus University of Bonn. In 2015 he participated in the Havana Biennial through various exhibitions and projects such as Casa Nuestra. Perera's work has been exhibited in Cuba, United States and Germany.

I am interested in speculation as part of the presentation of the structure of History, time as a model of value, and the analogy of meaning among various general concepts and daily gestures.

As a human creation, History is presented in a way where personal interests and power prevail.

Human being generates knowledge and emptiness is produced by its absence. The point of connection between knowledge and emptiness creates a third logical state with a perfect logical function under the pattern of presentation of art. I hope my work is an example of this third state.



**Inert Daily**

Book, 365 images | 20x28 cm | 2013



**S/T De la serie: Textum Reductio**

Cordón tejido con hilos extraídos  
de 24 libros de Filosofía  
24x20x5 cm | 2013

# -Myriam Quiel Tami-



Born in Germany in 1974, Myriam Quiel Tami is a German- Iranian artist based in Tehran since 2009. She studied Painting at the Academy of Fine Arts in Dresden and graduated in 2003.

Her paintings are inspired by installations she arranges in her studio, a kind of still life in which she combines different objects such as trash, puppets, packages, plants and withered flowers as well as blurred shapes and abstract patterns. In her work there is no story to follow just associations by a flood of images surrounding us in our modern life.

Myriam started her work as a freelance artist in 2004 in Berlin and continued her career exhibiting in different galleries in Germany. In 2007 she travelled to Iran searching for her roots, and decided to stay. Since 2008 she shows her work in Iran and abroad.

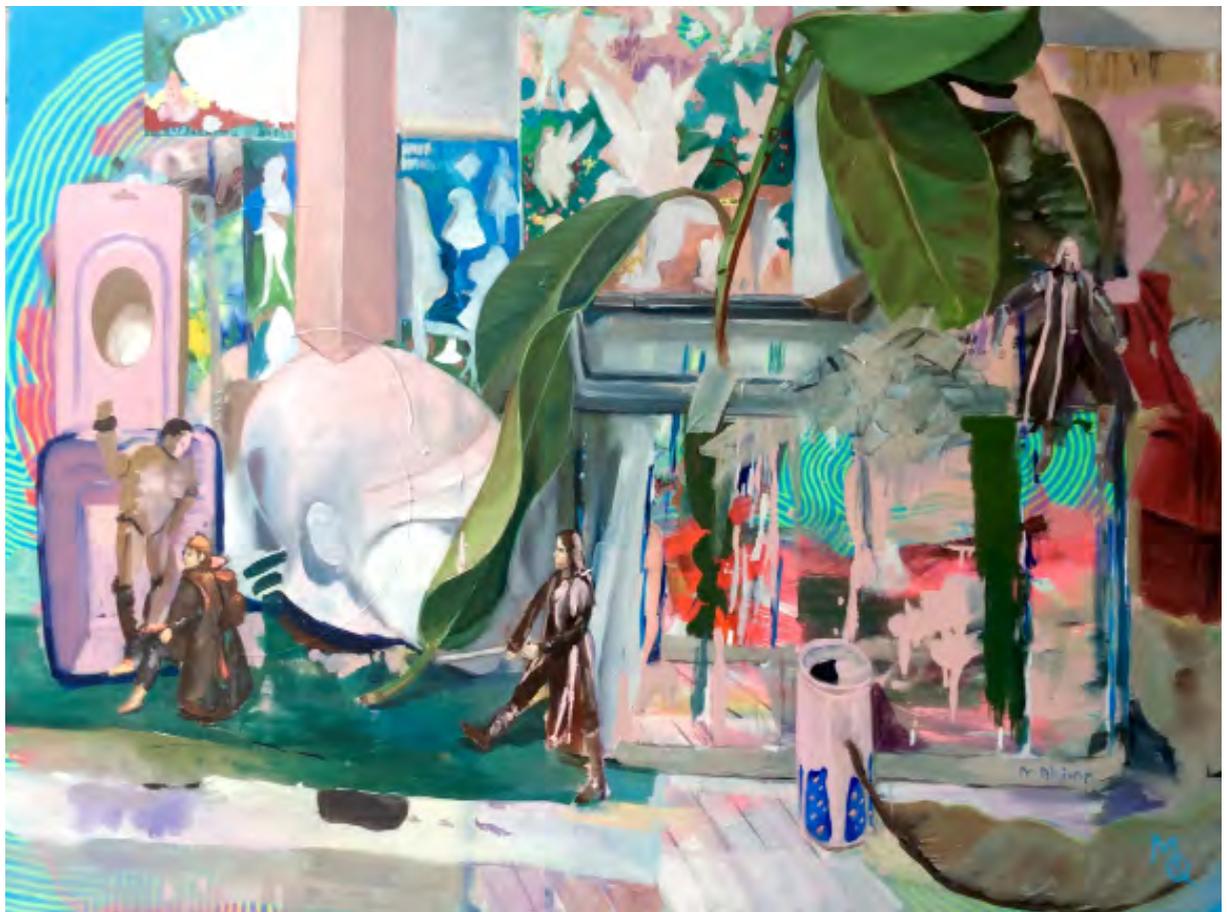
Her works are part of the collections of:

Willy Brandt Haus in Berlin, Germany, Collection of 19.-21. Century Museum Kassel, Germany City Museum Oldenburg, Germany as well as various private collections. In 2007 she won the Public Insurance Award, (Förderpreis der Öffentlichen Versicherung): Art Foundation, City Museum, Oldenburg, Germany and in 2003 was awarded the best Graduate Prize from Dresden Academy of Fine Arts ,Germany.

Myriam Quiel's paintings are depiction of fragments of the circumstances she lives in. She combines certain impressions of her daily life with insignificant objects to express her feelings and her state of mind.

The question is always about reality, and how she confronts the realities of her life. The objects that she paints are familiar and in combination create collages that reflect her experiences. She does not attempt to tell stories through her paintings, but rather keeps her stories hidden and well covered, leaving the audience free to make their own interpretation. She paints Still Life, chaotic and out of focus, unsteady and indefinite. The fragments of the paintings are meticulously chosen and placed next to each other, but the final work has an unfinished quality, like a never ending story. By destroying and rebuilding, she offers a status quo. Her intension is not to search for harmony but to show the unsteadiness of our times. By using trash, discarded toys, withering plants and finally by distorting them, she creates the effect of time frozen. The unfinished state of everything interests the artist, leaving open structures for her to continue painting.

Her Still Lives are an artificial world, snap shots of the flood of images that surround us, in other words, leftovers from daily life stories. She stabilizes abstract patterns in contrast to blurred shapes and draws the gaze of the viewer to her environment, an inanimate world, with commonplace objects, that questioning the permanency of life and its realities.



From the series **Still life**  
Oil on canvas  
90x120cm each | 2015



# BEHRANG-

# -SAMADZADEGAN

Behrang Samadzadegan was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1979. He received his BFA from the Tehran University of Arts, and his MFA from TTU (Tehran Tarbiat Modares University).

His work ranges from highly symbolic pieces to sculptures made of stuffed-toys arrangements, to drawings and paintings and installations that restage ritual or historical narratives. A critic and curator, Samadzadegan writes regularly for art journals and newspapers in Iran and has organized numerous exhibitions incorporating works by fellow artists.

Behrang's work questions the legitimacy of normative values and systems of authority, and attacks the sanctity of cultural attitudes toward politics, religion, sexuality, art history, and education. In his paintings and sculptures, he also examines cultural and social identity through found sources in literature, Chinese toys, photographs, and commercial illustrations. Through them he reveals the ways in which the history of colonialism, the civil rights movement, and totalitarian politics inform understandings of Iranian society.

Behrang appropriates texts from a variety of writers including Walter Benjamin, Haruki Murakami, Carl Gustav Jung and many Iranian literary texts as well from more popular sources such as the comic series Adventures of Tintin. He currently lives and works in Tehran. He is a guest professor at Tehran University of Arts and Aria Art Institute, where he has a lot of fun teaching his students. They all aim to make big changes in the future!

## On Heading Utopia

By Liz Maugans, Zygote Press Executive Director

Samadzadegan's work explores themes of social and cultural identity through the possibility (and impossibility) of the "images" he constructs. The translation of imagery, the concepts conveyed as well as the ones lost in the interpretation, is a major topic of exploration for Samadzadegan.

"My work is based on the idea of translation and how things are codified, particularly Walter Benjamin concepts of translation and Nietzsche's ideas of mediocrity as they relate to the facts of aesthetics," Samadzadegan explains. "A search for the truth sometimes results in mediocrity. The translation from understanding shifts as I embark in the media that is new to me: printmaking. Historically, this medium is about publishing knowledge as a result of the enlightenment age. This circle of translation from fact, truth, document, images, aesthetic and now printmaking, are all mixed and judged in the scope of art. Art is always cursed with beauty, even when there are painful narratives and ideas. When pain continues, art and poetry can also. Add to that, a changing and completely different cultural context-therefore the beauty reigns and the pain never can truly reveal itself."

Offering insight into the challenges of image-making, he continues, "Many of the works, especially the prints, don't convey any of the content of aesthetics or beauty. They are all information about historical facts appropriated from the contemporary society that I am living in. They are changed to a different metaphoric language of image-making, thus they don't directly inform the audience and things are lost in translation. These are the disabilities of an image."



**Checked Utopia**  
Watercolor on cardboard  
85x105cm | 2016



**Hard-Boiled Wonderland**  
Watercolor on cardboard  
85x95 cm | 2016

**Sol Lewitt by the Side  
of Utopia**

Watercolor on cardboard  
85x105cm | 2016



**Utopia a Expel Knowledge**

Watercolor on cardboard  
55x75cm | 2016



# -LESLIE SARDINIAS-



*Image Credit: Bob Krasner Photography*

Born in 1974, Leslie Sardinias graduated from the National School of Fine Arts in Havana (1994), and from Parsons The New School for Design in New York (2000) with a Master's degree in Design and Animation. After living in Europe for several years, Sardinias returned to New York, where he continues his investigative work in painting, animation, and design. He has participated extensively in both solo and group exhibitions, among the most notable being the VII Florence Biennial in 2001, where he received the Lorenzo de Medici Award. In 2012, Sardinias' animated video *Watching You* was displayed on billboards in New York's Times Square. The artist has been exhibited solo *Aguas Malas* his project focusing on painting and drawing at the 8TH Floor Museum in New York in 2014 and *La Comunidad* at El Museo de Arte Colonial in Havana, Cuba, in the occasion of the Havana Biennial 2015. His works are part of numerous important collections internationally, including the Spanish Royal Collection, the Alex Rosenberg Private Collection, and the collection of the Arte Viva Foundation. His work has been exhibited at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Havana, Cuba; the Angel Museum in Segovia, Spain; the Casa Lamm Collection in Mexico City, Mexico; the Deposito Bagagli Musei Vaticani in Rome, Italy; and the Shelley and Donald Rubin Private Collection.

This work explores the loneliness experienced by "balseros" (rafters) as they struggle to navigate the treacherous waters between their past (Cuba) and their future (Miami). Through this mixed media work, Sardinias creates an imagined world located within the 90-mile expanse between Cuba and the United States, where tragedy frequently takes place—much of it lost or forgotten. Within this abstract realm Sardinias evokes the hopelessness that can accompany striving for a dream and the agony of the journey towards it. Through *Naufragio* viewers are thrust into a voyage seen from the "balseros'" point of view, experiencing its uncertainty. This painting maps a celestial region, which elicits personal, cultural and political consequences.

Rather than recount the conflict between Cuba and the United States in 1994, which led to massive emigration from the island, this work instead pays tribute to those who risk everything in pursuit of a better future. The exhibition is also a poetic tribute to the sea, simultaneously an archetype of hope and opportunity, as well as isolation and despair. From Odysseus' travels and Hemingway's time in Cuba, to the artist's own family and their arrival to the island from Europe during World War II, the accumulated mythos of the sea provides fertile ground for the project's theme.



**Nafragio (Shipwreck)**

Acrylic, enamel and ink  
on polyester fabric  
165x114 cm | 2014



**Ghetto**

Oil, enamel, acrylic  
Svarovski crystal on board  
36.5x28 cm each | 2015

# -Hoda Zarbatf-

Hoda Zarbatf is an interdisciplinary artist currently living in Toronto. Hoda was born in Iran and relocated to Canada in 2008 to complete an MFA. She began exhibiting her paintings nationally right after entering her BFA at the University of Tehran. She has successfully created and showed several series of large paintings, as well as site-specific video and large-scale photo installations in the Middle-East and North America.

Hoda's work has been mainly concerned with gender issues interconnected with the ideas of memory and longing. Throughout, Hoda has sought to make narrations of intimacy alongside solitude. Her work has almost steadily been a reflection of the complexities of social, emotional, and gender identities.

Zarbatf has attended various group shows in Canada as well as the USA. Hoda has exhibited her latest sculptural pieces in solo shows in Tehran, New York and Toronto in the past few years.

Born in Tehran amid early years of the Islamic Revolution and war, Zarbatf's imagination has been influenced by the age-old folklore narrations of her childhood. These stories, in conjunction with her layered and one-off experiences, have formed a whimsical visual language that streams in her work. Zarbatf's sculptural pieces are made intimately and meticulously in her Annex studio in Toronto.



Composed, Reshaped and hand-stitched, my sculptures are made up of recycled knick-knacks, pre-owned clothing, abandoned furniture and orphan dolls. The use of pre-owned wearable and textile in my work – along with practicing the traditional folk act of stitching and patching – has helped me bring a palpable level of intimacy to my work.

Collecting the abandoned pieces of clothing or house items, which have at some point been intimately in touch with the human body, and marrying them artistically in my art, is rather an attempt to reconnect with the past and to bring back the lost intimacy. I try to capture the body in the instant it is exposed – whether it is pain, pleasure, blood, a baby or other physical or conceptual bodily discharges. These soft forms created from pre-owned textiles, also project vulnerability while evoking motion. The used materials in my work, are not only representative of past experiences, but also reminiscent of lost innocence. My artistic practice borrows its identity, both in form and concept, from the unity of the dichotomies. In my making, I often put together the contrary to achieve the optimum: giveaway and invaluable, pappy and concrete, old and new. Stitches that are both controlled and disorderly unify the soft materials to solid furnishings, creating large figurative sculptures that evoke feminine tropes and bodily dysfunctions. Above everything that happens in my work, there is always (self) portrait of a woman enduringly exposed and in solitude. I make the female figures in different roles or states of being; whether she's vulgar, maternal or cartoonish, she is nevertheless engaged in a lively act of releasing and exposing. And this sacred act is what defines her and puts her in a position of reverence.



### **Vaginal Rapture**

Old Furniture, Recycled clothes, Found Objects, Fiber Stuffing.  
(Machine and Hand-stitched)  
222x116x118 cm | 2014



**The Mistress, her Baby and  
the Ejaculating Unicorn**

Wood, found Objects,  
Recycled textiles, Pre-owned  
Toy parts, Fiber Stuffing  
(hand-stitched)  
41x64x30 cm | 2014



### **An Awkward Birth**

Recycled Clothing, Crochet-Socks, Old doll parts, Fiber Stuffing, Printed found image, Used Furniture ( Fully hand-stitched)  
36x73x36 cm | 2014

# -Roya Khadjavi-



Roya Khadjavi is an independent curator and cultural producer based in New York. She has largely focused on the work of young Iranian artists working both in Iran and beyond its borders, seeking not only to support their artistic endeavors but to facilitate awareness and cultural dialogue between artistic communities. In 2014, Khadjavi co-curated *Portraits: Reflections by Emerging Iranian Artists*, featuring emerging artists born, raised and educated in Iran, followed by *Between Invitation and Intrusion: A Conversation in Form* (2015). Most recently, she organized the warmly received *Strappa: Dialogue and Performance* (2016).

Since 2008, she has actively led exhibition committee efforts around the art of the middle east for institutions including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim Museum and the Asia Society, where she sat on the steering committee of the critically acclaimed exhibit *Iran Modern* (2013). Khadjavi co-founded the Institute of International Education's Iran Opportunities Fund, and currently serves as president of the board of New York-based non-profit *Art in General*. For her pioneering efforts to advance, support, and promote international education she has been honored with the Women's Global Leadership Award by the Institute of International Education, and an Order of Academic Palms (*Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Palmes Académiques*), by the French Minister of Education.



**-Layla  
M. Heidari-**

Layla M. Heidari has earned her BA in Middle East Studies and Art History from Brown University.

Her curiosity for the arts is foremost informed by her fascination with translating ideas into visual content. Her Honors Thesis Framing Iran:

How Politics of Perception Inform Our View of Iranian Contemporary Art explored the ways in which popular misconceptions about contemporary Iranian art are rooted in an everlasting orientalist framework. Her research pieced together an ethnographic study of the Tehran art scene in August 2014 with art history, art criticism and political theory.

Layla served on the Student Creative Arts Council at Brown and has held internship positions in the art world at both Leila Heller Gallery and Kreemart. She is currently an Associate Media Planner at Digitas LBi in New York City.

I would like to thank the artists for lending their immense talent with great enthusiasm to this exhibition and for trusting my vision.

I would like to thank *Nazila Nobashari*, the owner and executive director of *Aaran gallery* for her guidance. Without her help in Tehran this exhibition would have been much more difficult to organize.

I would like to thank *Maryam Khosrovani* for all her hard work on the beautiful design material and for spending numerous days reworking my edits into the catalogue.

I would like to thank *Leily Soleimani* for her outstanding work in promoting the exhibition in the press, media, and with art institutions.

I would like to thank *Jovana Stokic, Layla Heidari, Nazila Nobashari, Gabriela Rangel, Glenda Leon and Behrang Samadzadegan* who so kindly agreed to be on the panel *Framing Art: How the politics of perception informs our view of contemporary art in Iran and Cuba*.

Finally I would like to thank my beautiful daughter *Layla Heidari*, who accompanied me on my trips to Cuba and Iran, helped me with the selection, wrote the exquisite and very informative essay, and came up with the final title of the show.



**Roya Khadjavi**

**RK Art & Design , LLC**

Roya.khadjavi@gmail.com