

May Died in June
Borrowed Scenery

CAD Conspiracy Street,
EngheLab
A Revolution Through Books:

Iran 1979-1983

The White Covers

The Late Poem Surrounded by
F r i e n d s

Mom Likes Politics Too

Body Side

M o u t h f u l
The Fabulous Life
and Thought of Ahmad Fardid

Red Love

Security Blanket I and II

Pocket Folklore

When Legacies Become Debts

18 January-30 March 2019

The Mosaic Rooms, London

S W 5 0 S W

Through this series of new commissions, research-based works, and programme of conversations, curator Azar Mahmouidian reflects on the inter-relationship between two generations of artists in the Iranian context. Artistic legacies of the past are also brought to light. Conditions of present-day art production and display, and speculation about how our future experience of the art world will be mediated are also explored.

Mahmouidian reflects on support structures in contemporary art, examining the role of independent artists and curators in artistic production. The programme considers how individuals can create opportunities and support the development of creative practices in the absence of institutional structures.

This exhibition is part of a series of six exhibitions marking ten years of The Mosaic Rooms. *When Legacies Become Debts* is the second of three group exhibitions of contemporary art from Egypt, Iran and Morocco, working with regional institutions and curators. It follows an exhibition by Townhouse, Cairo, in 2018, the series will close with an exhibition in summer of this year by Kulte Gallery (Rabat, Morocco).

Rachael Jarvis,
Director of The Mosaic Rooms

WHEN LEGACIES BECOME DEBTS

18 JANUARY – 30 MARCH 2019

WHEN LEGACIES BECOME DEBTS contemplates personal and collective forms of reliance and liability experienced between different generations of artists and writers.

The exhibition and related events programme centre on intergenerational obligations, personal commitments, intellectual inheritances and volatile destinies. What can be done with the legacies handed down from previous generations? Legacies which are desired or unwanted, reassuring or questionable. Legacies of imagined futures that have taken a detour.

For the past years, the artists featured in the exhibition have refrained from performing the identities and politics expected of them in the international art world, its markets and academics, with regard to their localities. Instead, they have sought to build and expand on their own worlds, drawing their own links and making their own ways to access a sense of internationalism in art. For most of them, living between multiple places, a self-organised attitude and a certain understanding of heterogeneous but intertwined historical conditions, as well as a constant practice of self-positioning and auto-navigation, are at the core of their practices and at times the subject of their works.

Now, one might say, that these artists are gradually coming of age, and as life unfolds, they are also coming to terms with their uprooted identities and contested histories. They revisit their relationships to a recent past – the generation of their parents. A return, perhaps, only to find they had *run away without leaving, or left without getting out*. As if in their attempt to move forward from broken relationships, they

reformulate exits as alternative entry points.

Turning the notion of inheritance on its head, the exhibition suggests an inward excavation that asks how one might inherit oneself. In this respect, it addresses the feeling of indebtedness that legacies impart upon subsequent generations in the form of posterity. With this relationship comes a need to pay back, an expectation to continue what those legacies have triggered and provoked in their wake.

Indebtedness gradually becomes abstract in time and takes mental and emotional form. The question remains: What are the generative or prospective dimensions of such a form beyond the impositions by the current state of the economy in the art-world and beyond? Can indebtedness not only be associated with guilt and fear (and at the other end of the spectrum, optimistically, with love and care), but instead with an indefinable driving force to carry on? A sense of commitment to a certain continuum? How irreparable is the debt, and how irrecoverable are the bonds?

Bypassing the binary of nostalgia and indignation, artists in the exhibition acknowledge ties that are formative and foundational to their practices. They revisit specific artworks, books they grew up with, thinkers, and tropes of the contemporary art world as generational agents for their work.

The exhibition and its integral series of conversations address the mediatory operations of the freelancer, the independent artist and curator, across histories and ecologies of knowledge and practice. It looks at their potential to function as support structures by themselves, rather than simply “representing” a scene. In this sense, the programme points to how, under the circumstances of a precarious and at the same time highly market-driven infrastructural landscape, individuals and things – including books and artworks – themselves achieve a certain agency and become the condition of possibility for creative practices.

WORKS

–1–
HANNAH DARABI’s research on Iranian propaganda books published between 1979 and 1983, offers a look into photographic production in Iran during this period. Her journey through these books leads to the reconstruction of a visual legacy, in the form of a photo-book itself: *Enghelab Street, a Revolution through Books: Iran 1979–1983* (2018). By creating a reciprocal encounter between a selection of photographed spreads of these books, images of contemporary Tehran, family photos, postcards, TV stills, and text cut-ups, the project proposes new timelines and perceptions of a history still in the making.

–2–
Another series of publications called *White Cover Books* began spreading on the streets during the same time as the revolution unfolded in Iran. Mostly published between the euphoric years of 1978–79, they are recognisable by their plain white covers and bold black letterpress titles. They were published in their thousands by various political groups and sold on the street. Chosen and translated in an expediated and intuitive way, they were pirated copies of whatever pieces of literature or theory were in reach at the time. As objects on display here, forty years later, they make visible the urgency with which they were published, distributed and collected.

A fragment of the collection of white cover books indexed by HANNAH DARABI and assembled in the exhibition space by RONAK MOSHTAGHI investigates this urge to collect, and of things that happen to fall into one’s hands in a lifetime. MOSHTAGHI suggests that, going beyond their nostalgic value, this agglomerate is the knowledge one chooses to be exposed to, and that one chooses to surround one’s children with: a library that, though full of hidden obscurities, holds the collected teachings of morals, ethics, history and culture. The visual aesthetic and conceptual language of the books was what a generation continued to build upon – “the ‘culture of

resistance’ whereby certainty, beauty, violence, revolution and death were the main discourses of life.”

–3–
The white cover books are reflected in MOSHTAGHI’s sound installation *Mom Likes Politics Too* (2018), which introduces us to these publications through the memory of three people connected to them in various ways: a writer, a university student, and a *horoofchin* – a letterpress operator in the publishing industry. Their stories are read out loud by speakers from the artist’s own generation.

–4–
In another sculptural installation, *The Late Poem Surrounded by Friends* (2018), MOSHTAGHI evokes the image of the “deathbed”. Here the poem is referred to as if it is a dearly remembered “late wife” or “late husband”. The poem has seemingly arrived at the wrong time; yet it is not left alone, it is cared for. The brick sculpture, which is simultaneously in ruin and in the making, offers a look at the timeliness or untimeliness of narratives and language, where stories are retold through new voices and multiple mouths.

–5–
Borrowed Scenery (2017) and *Mouthful* (2018), two films by SHIRIN SABAH, revolve around *Matter and Mind* (1977), a minimalist oil pool sculpture by artist NORIYUKI HARAGUCHI (b. 1946, Japan) which has been installed at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art since its inauguration in 1977. Over the past four decades, the highly reflective container has transformed into the object of a vernacular ritual: an accidental wishing well that triggered museum visitors to throw coins and other objects into, implying the kind of unintended consequences that can arise from attempting an aesthetic programme – leading with a certain intention, while resulting in a completely different outcome. The project ultimately led to Sabahi inviting HARAGUCHI back to Tehran to oversee the restoration of his sculpture and salvage the medley of objects from the pool. Some of these objects are exhibited in the installation *Pocket Folklore* (2018). The title

“Borrowed Scenery” is taken from *shakkei*, a principle of East Asian garden design whereby a background landscape or an external autonomous element is incorporated into the composition of the given context of the garden.

–6–
The Fabulous Life and Thought of Ahmad Fardid (2015), a documentary written and directed by HAMED YOUSEFI (in collaboration with ALI MIRSEPASSI), explores the legacy of Iranian philosopher AHMAD FARDID (1910–1993). FARDID, who was also an avid public speaker, considered himself an intellectual crusader fighting to halt the rising Western influence in Iran. The self-proclaimed philosophical spokesperson for the Islamic Republic, FARDID constructed a mystical and “spiritual” political philosophy that strove to deliver Iran from the culturally “de-basing” and spiritually “dehumanizing” experience of Iranian modernity. Under the conspicuous influence of German philosopher MARTIN HEIDEGGER, FARDID called for the recovery of modern Iran to its Islamic roots, a project fuelled by his concept of *Gharbzadegi* (“Westoxification”), which would quickly become a buzz-word in Iranian critiques of the modern, secular West. The film features extensive interviews with Fardid’s former colleagues, associates and students, as well as scholars of modern Iran, and uses rare and previously inaccessible footage of FARDID’s debates featured on Iranian television. More broadly, the film presents a comprehensive intellectual history of modern Iran, from the post-Constitution (1906) to the post-Islamic Revolution period, through a figure whose obscure philosophical path remains largely absent from prevailing conceptions of the rise of political Islam.

–7–
The photographic series *May Died in June* (*Azar Bahman Tir Khordad Mordad*) (2015–2017) by HADI FALLAHPISHEH hints at the tropes of identity-based artworks which heavily dominated the Iranian contemporary art scene of 2000s (in the aftermath of the state’s open border policy, which saw the Iranian art scene enter into global art markets and institutions). FALLAHPISHEH invites

friends to wear clothes from his personal wardrobe and spend time with him. The series is composed of “back-staged” shots of this visit, in which sceneries and bodies spoil interpretations and interrupt readership, questioning the ability of representations to convey truths. Such revisiting of one’s own wardrobe for FALLAHPISHEH is also an act of opening up the door to see “what one has to wear tomorrow”.

–8–
In a newly commissioned work, *Body Side* (2019), ALI MEER AZIMI investigates the disappearance of a group of urban sculptures and monuments in Tehran that went missing around spring of 2010. The work brings together materials, either found or made by the artist, to develop a fiction-theory, correlating the history of urban monuments and their origins in Tehran’s old Arsenal to the birth of reverse engineering. The detective story unfolds into an exploration of a “bio-topology” in which certain things from the surface of the city are devoured by an ancient algorithmic organism. The piece comprises a publication, *Like Bees Working in a Bubble Hive*, and an audio installation, with contributions by DIRAR KALASH and KONSTANTIN SCHIMANOWSKI, located in a transitional spot on the staircase of The Mosaic Rooms.

–9–
In another new commission, *CAD Conspiracy* (2019), MAHAN MOALEMI and BAHAR NOORIZADEH collaborated together to develop a visual-essay. In the three-channel video, the installation shots of contemporary art exhibitions serve as an entry point into reflections and speculations on the politics of documentation, the history of representational technologies, and the future of empirical perception in relation to developments in machine vision. The realities of uneven circulation, accessibility and mobility in the art world meet political fictions based around how emerging technologies might transform not only our perception of the given reality but the very fabric of empirical reality itself.

THE MOSAIC ROOMS

CONVERSATION
Tuesday, 26 March, 7pm FREE
That Which Tomorrow Was Not: Legacies of an Anti-Western Revolution

CONVERSATION
Thursday, 7 March, 7pm FREE
Differentiating Languages

CONVERSATION
Thursday, 14 March, 7pm FREE
Pocket Folklore

BOOK LAUNCH
Thursday, 14 March, 7pm FREE
Pocket Folklore

BOOK LAUNCH AND TALK
Thursday, 28 February, 7pm FREE
Rebirth of Adab: Revisiting Persian Aesthetic Theories with the Englishlab Street, Revolution Through Books: Iran 1979–1983

CONVERSATION
Tuesday, 19 March, 7pm FREE
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CONVERSATION
Saturday, 23 February, 2:30–4 FREE
CAD Conspiracy: Accessibility, Recognition in Contemporary Art

CONVERSATION
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