

# SELECTIONS

ARTS / STYLE / CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD AND BEYOND

#36



THE CREATIVE ISSUE

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## A DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST

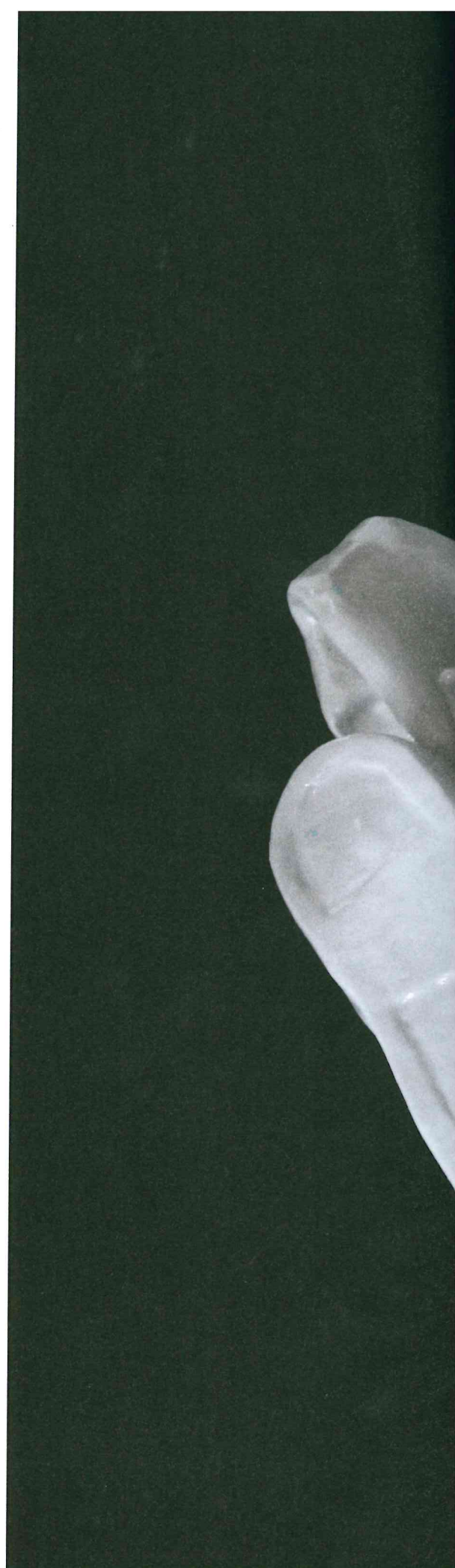
Iranian artist **Reza Aramesh** is in constant dialogue with artists from the past, using traditional media to address contemporary topics

by Corinne Martin

Iranian-born, London-based contemporary artist Reza Aramesh confronts violence and oppression around the world, and examines how mass media portrays conflicts and their consequences through his politically charged sculptures, photographs, installations and performances.

Aramesh is currently preparing large-scale monumental works for an upcoming exhibition at the Leila Heller Gallery in Dubai. "Reza's work has always been influenced by the space that it is shown in and one of the first conversations we had speaking about this show was about scale," explains Alexander Heller. "One of the things we can expect to see in Reza's upcoming show is very intense imagery and the scale and material are very monumental. The entire exhibition will be very dramatic. When an artist properly masters the space, the art really takes over within the space and with Reza's exhibition, it's going to play like a giant stage. The sculptures are going to take over in a complete way and the space just adds to their monumentality."

Aramesh sat down with Selections to discuss the importance of scale, site-specificity, the archival nature of his work and his dialogue with artists of the past.





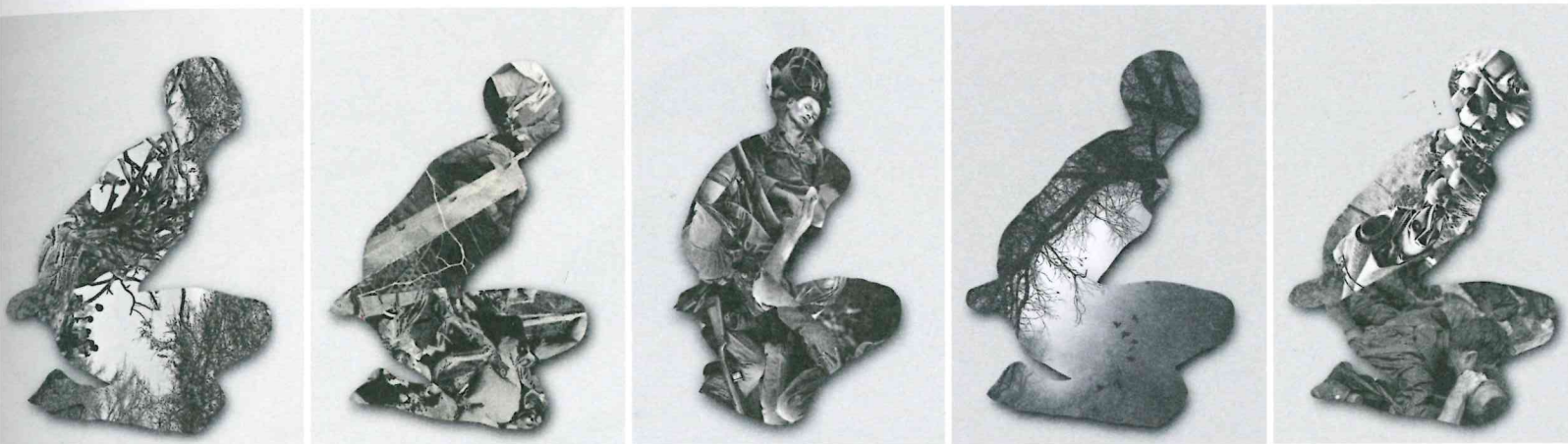


**Reza Aramesh, *Action 147***  
*Friday April 25, 2003 at*  
*07:55, 2015, hand sculpted*  
*porcelain on charred wood*  
*plinth, 17 × 61 × 60cm*









above left to right: Reza Aramesh, *Action 143-1*, 2014, 30 x 21.5cm

Reza Aramesh, *Action 143-14*, 2014, 30 x 21.5cm

Reza Aramesh, *Action 143-16*, 2014, 30 x 21.5cm

Reza Aramesh, *Action 143-3b*, 2014, 30 x 21.5cm

Reza Aramesh, *Action 143-9*, 2014, 30 x 21.5cm

**Corinne Martin:** Do you feel more connected to your life in London or your childhood in Iran?

**Reza Aramesh:** I am Iranian. My studies were in London. I am based in London and my studio is there, but I travel quite a bit. The Middle East is a place that I relate to and love naturally because of my childhood. There are certain places where you can relate to the smell of the air. For some people it is the sea — for me it is the desert. So here I feel very much at home.

**CM:** Is working with the space a crucial part of your method?

**RA:** My method of working is about visualising the work and the space around it. When you are working with a gallery on the scale of Leila Heller, you are competing with museums, therefore it becomes very important how the exhibition is structured. So for that reason, I am hoping that spending time in Dubai would enable me to get to know the space more and hopefully come up with works that would fit scale-wise in the whole structure of the gallery.

**CM:** Can you tell us about one of your site-specific works?

**RA:** I made a piece in Dubai two years ago which was called *The Vessel of The Soul*. It was in an industrial building in Al-Quoz, on the border of the labour camp and where the galleries start. It was a site-specific sculpture and it would not have worked anywhere else at the time. The sculpture was based on a reportage image of a young person from Ramallah crossing the Israel-Palestine border. The sculpture was based on the idea of border crossing. It was made from marble. The entire space was painted black and the sculpture was placed in the middle.

**CM:** What is the reason you used marble as a medium?

**RA:** I am an artist that is engaged in a dialogue with other artists with similar ideas from the past. I remember a particular exhibition that I saw in London at The National Gallery that was beautifully curated 17th century Spanish polychrome sculptures that were found in churches. I fell in love with these works and decided that I wanted to be involved in a dialogue with these artists using the same medium but addressing contemporary issues.

**CM:** What ideas are you looking to explore in your upcoming exhibition?

**RA:** I was looking at my work and realising that I work quite a bit with archival material, things that have happened in the past. All my work has a number and a title, which is usually the title of the event, the date and time in which it took place. This has a very archival quality to it. I am interested in looking at what happened in the past and understanding that looking at it today becomes fiction. By removing the past from where it was, it becomes something else, you have fictionalised it. This idea is becoming more evident in my work. ■

opposite page: Reza Aramesh, *Action 145*  
Friday April 25, 2003 at  
07:55, 2015, hand sculpted  
porcelain on charred wood  
plinth, 15 x 63 x 56cm

opposite page background  
top: Baghdad 2003, 06

opposite page  
background bottom:  
Tomm W. Christiansen