

ART AND CULTURE FROM THE MIDDLE EAST AND ARAB WORLD

AA: Initially, I felt as if I were in a period of mourning.

AYK: And now?

AA: Once Trump became president, I was ready, as were tens of thousands of others, to break out from that feeling of paralysis.

AYK: What do you think Middle Eastern artists living in the US need to do about this?

AA: All artists have a role to play, but it's not by virtue of being an artist that you're automatically going to have a political position.

AYK: Has your art changed as a result?

AA: I've shifted from inanimate architecture to, all of sudden, people. Figures are entering my work.

AYK: What does this mean?

AA: I think it represents the proximity of what's happening, right here, in my city. So that's a shift that's been very real for me.

AYK: Have you thought about moving elsewhere?

AA: No. I feel an obligation to change things where I am, and where I'm from.



read more on page 132

afruz amighi
#aboutamerica





Ramin Haerizadeh, *Still Life, King and Queen Younger* 2011
Paper collage, acrylic and ink on canvas, 170 x 141 cm
Image courtesy of private collection

SILVER LININGS

Following the cancellation of the much-vaunted TMOCA tour to Berlin, **Arsalan Mohammad** finds *A Heritage Transposed* moving centre stage.



Neda Saeedi, *Duration of Building Sky from Grand Mosalla Tehran to Willy Brandt Airport Berlin*
Drawing series, ink on card

The much-anticipated exhibition of art from the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art's exhibition failed to materialise as promised last December at Berlin's Gemäldegalerie, spawning much confusion, speculation and no little disappointment. Berlin museum officials hinted at issues on the Iranian end, which prevented the artworks from leaving the country. Others have claimed that the pre-show publicity backfired, with the eulogies to the pre-revolutionary era causing consternation in some quarters of the Islamic Republic. It is not the first time that this has happened and this final delay seems to have stymied the show indefinitely.

Nevertheless, the citywide programme of events intended to complement the exhibition has, for the most part, gone ahead. Berliners are curious about Iran. Older locals remember a time when

East German art addressed isolation and austere regimes. Younger folk here respond to hipster exoticism, the lure of the 'other' and the pleasingly rebellious nature that permeates much of the contemporary art coming from Iranian practitioners. All these qualities – or perhaps attributes – are visible in *A Heritage Transposed*, showing at Berlin's Box Freiraum art space, a converted stable in the ex-GDR east of the city. Curated by former Leila Heller Gallery director and advisory board member of the Kunstverein Munich, Anahita von Plotho, the show brings together work by 11 artists, who are either of Iranian origin or have a connection with the country.

The complex, quixotic character of Iran itself is intriguingly perceived, refracted and reflected within this hall of mirrors, with 11 perspectives – paintings, sculptures, drawings, installations and videos



Anahita Razmi. *How your Veil can Help you in the case of an Earthquake (lesson 1-8)* 2004
Video, 4 mins 55 seconds
Image courtesy the artist and Carlon12.

– that approach political and personal positions on today's Iran. The exhibition reverberates with energy, a spectrum of angles spanning raw, animated outbursts of dark cynicism to brittle charm. The latter comes courtesy of honorary Iranian, Belgian Wim Delvoye, who has long been active in the country. His *Rimowa Classic Flight Multiwheel* (2014) takes a whimsical look at local artisanal traditions, etched onto an unremarkable wheeled aluminium suitcase. The work was executed by artisans in Isfahan and makes a pleasant commentary on the synthesis of the old and the new, the functional and the ineffable.

At the other end of our spectrum lies a typically coruscating piece by Ramin Haerizadeh, that chuckling *enfant terrible* of the art scene who, along with his brother Rokni [also represented here, with the sinister *The Day Of The Last Judgement* (2009)] and arch-conspirator Hesam Rahmanian, has been injecting his cocktail of black humour, anger and

cynicism into the rump of the contemporary Iranian art scene for well over a decade now, safely ensconced in Dubai. In an anarchic collage of imagery, *Still Life, King and Queen Tomato* (2011) takes the legacy of the former shah and his wife and roasts it into something rotten. The shah plays tennis with tomatoes, juices spattering like the blood of his enemies across the image, whilst the elephant head glued rudely over the head of the former empress references the Iranian play *Shahre-Ghesseh* (another recurring theme in the Haerizadeh brothers' work, again, also visible in Rokni's video installation in the show), rendering her impotent, fake and rather absurd.

Less pungent, but no less forceful, is a video piece by German-Iranian multimedia artist Anahita Razmi, *How Your Veil Can Help You In Case Of An Emergency (Lessons 1-8)* (2004). Razmi makes droll, loaded works that invoke that odd mix of affection and satire so characteristic




Wim Delvoye, *Rimowa Classic Flight Multiwheel 2014*. Embossed aluminium. 80 x 53 x 35 cm
Image courtesy the artist and Galerie Perrotin.

of many diasporic Iranian artists. Inspired by a severe earthquake that took place in Bam in December 2003, Razmi channels an air stewardess's safety demonstration in taking us through a 'survival' technique using one's chador. Puckishly sending up the chador while ironically repurposing it as a functional, useful item, she silently creates an intriguing dialogue in the viewer's mind. Razmi is also behind a (failed) documented attempt, represented by a framed letter to the Tate Britain, requesting the loan of a Donald Judd to be installed (intentionally) incorrectly, in lieu of the aborted TMOCA Berlin show. Razmi invites the Tate to consider how deviating from the proscribed manner of installation might serve as an impetus to re-evaluate Judd's work, and its minimalist incursion into its environment.

Meanwhile, a firmly tangible link between Iran and Germany comes with Berlin-based Neda Saeedi, whose *Duration of Building Sky from Grand Mosalla Tehran to Willy Brandt Airport Berlin* (2013) is a series of exquisite,

minimal ink drawings that draw parallels between the Tehran airport and the never-ending saga of the benighted Berlin airport, the latter being years behind schedule and seemingly suffocated amid construction and corruption issues.

It's axiomatic that understanding strengthens between hostile nations when cultural assets are shared and used as a means of expressing histories, experiences and common human aspirations, as well as a good dose of humour, romance, fear and poetry. Berlin may have lost out on the TMOCA exhibition but in projects such as *A Heritage Transposed*, a valuable and thought-provoking insight into the complex, textured soul of contemporary Iran has been more than adequately summoned. 

A Heritage Transposed ran from 14 December 2016–25 February 2017 at the Box Freiraum, Berlin.