Almost all of us are suckers for books about suckers. What’s not to like? They flatter our lofty conception of ourselves — no chumps are we, with our wits about us and our nose for baloney as fine as a butcher’s — and they satisfy the secret part of us that delights in gossip and gogglies at audacity.

Jennifer Senior

BOOKS OF THE TIMES

In “The Confidence Game: Why We Fall for It . . . Every Time,” Maria Konnikova provides a modest compendium of outrageous deceptions, with cameos from Ferdinand Waldo Demara Jr., a serial impostor who performed 19 surgeries aboard a Canadian naval ship (he was not, needlessly to say, a doctor); Giafira Rosales, an art dealer who trafficked in fakes so impressive they duped the president of New York’s oldest gallery; and Victor Lustig, a self-invented “count” who twice sold the Eiffel Tower to investors, claiming it was soon to be destroyed for parts.

But the real purpose of Ms. Konnikova’s book is not to rehearse a history of the con. Rather, as she explains in her introduction, it is to explore “the psychological principles that underlie each and every game, from the most elementary to the most involved, step by step.”

And this is precisely what she delivers: an anatomy of the scam. Ms. Konnikova’s first chapter attempts to explain the psychology of both the grifter and the mark; from there, she spends a chapter on each station of the double-cross, starting with the put-up (the process of identifying the perfect victim), then moving along to the play (seducing the victim), the rope (pitching the scam), the tale, the convincer, the breakdown and so on, detailing the psychological mechanisms that both hoaxer and hoaxee engage. It’s a Via Dolorosa of ensnare-

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The Personal, the Political, the Dead

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The Confidence Game

Why We Fall for It . . . Every Time

By Maria Konnikova

340 pages. Viking. $28.

Global/Local 1960-2015: Six Artists From Iran

An untitled painting by Shiva Ahmadi at Grey Art Gallery at New York University.

Time decides. When an exhibition scheduled for the winter slot at Grey Art Gallery at New York University wasn’t ready, a replacement had to be found, and “Global/Local 1960-2015: Six Artists From Iran,” set for a future date, was moved forward. If there was a scramble to pull it off, you’d barely know. Oragnized by the gallery’s director, Lynn Gumpert, the show looks great, thought through, with the improvisatory lift that adrenaline can provide.

One thing that made the switch doable was having some of the art already in hand. In the 1960s, the gallery’s founding patron, Abby Weed Grey (1902-78), traveled to Iran, loved the new art she found there, bought it up and gave it to N.Y.U. As a result, the Grey has the largest holdings anywhere of work by one of the show’s six artists, Parviz Tanavoli, widely considered Iran’s leading modern sculptor, and outstanding examples of paintings by his brilliant but unlucky colleague Paramarz Pilaram.

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Holland Cotter

ART REVIEW

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To these two modernists Ms. Giampert has added a fascinating figure of a recent generation, Chohreh Feyzijaddy, who died at 30 in 1961. Ms. Feyzijaddy hasn’t yet registered on New York’s radar, though she may well do so now. Finally, bringing the show into the present are three young artists — Shiva Ahmad, Barbad Golshiri and Shahpour Pouyan — born decades and political worlds away from the pre-revolutionary Iran that Ms. Feyzijaddy knew.

Contemporary art in Iran has always been politically fraught. When Mr. Tanavoli began making sculptures, he had few local models to follow. The tradition of sculpture in Persia had effectively ended in the seventh century with the arrival of Isomophic Islam. Even with sculptures’s return in the secularized 1920s, the question was where to go with it: Should new art be national or international, local or global?

With Iran emerging from a long winter of Western domination, artists were in the mood to shape a distinctively native aesthetic. At the same time, many of them had visited Europe and wanted to stay at least partially in the global swing. Mr. Tanavoli’s answer to these dual demands was synthesis, and you can see him sorting it out. His 1982 “Figure and Hand” suggests a stack of bazaar-bought pots and pans with a Surrealist overlay. A decade later, in his well-known piece “Beehive,” he seems
