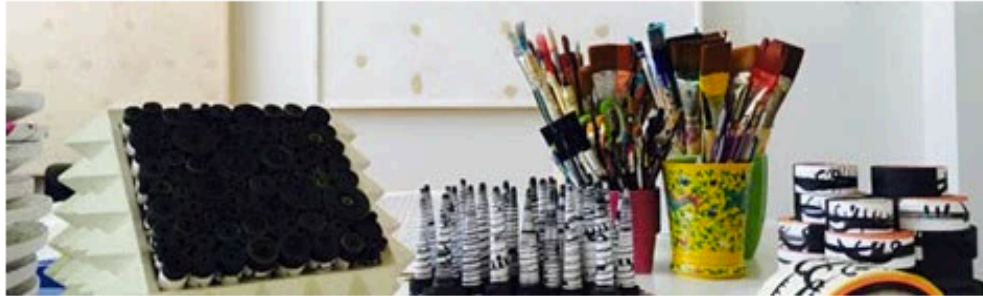


LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Castro, Jan Garden. "In the studio with Hadieh Shafie." *re:sculpt*. (July 2016).

International Sculpture Center
re:sculpt
re:work / re:new / re:view

In the studio with Hadieh Shafie



Hadieh Shafie Studio

Love and passion are secret innersprings that fuel Hadieh Shafie's art and life. Iranian-born American artist Shafie grew up in Iran. She picked up English during two years in London around ages eight to nine. Upon returning to Iran in 1979 with her seven-year-old brother, she found that Iran had changed; at the airport, all she could see was a "sea of black" clothing, and she thought she was in the wrong country. Shafie and her family then lived for four years under repressive laws in Iran before receiving a visa for a family vacation in Austria. This turned into a trip to visit relatives in America and a new life. Shafie finds parallels between her early life and that of Iranian-born Marjane Satrapi, as told in her graphic novel *Persepolis*.



It has taken Shafie decades to develop the elaborate paper, painting, and drawing processes that make her art a unique, passionate mix of Eastern and Western ideas. Shafie embeds the Farsi word for love, "eshgh", inside scrolls or pages that sometimes jut out like crayolas or tiny spikes. Her abstract compositions borrow from Cy Twombly's lines, from Kenneth Noland and other colorists, from Eva Hesse's subtle blurs and



Hadieh Shafie GridCut 12, 2016. Ink, acrylic on hand carved rag matt board

(LovePassion). 30 x 20 in.

shapes, and from Iranian and Middle Eastern scrolls, texts, and art. Each work seems like an unfolding song, and these range in hues, patterns, and styles. The artist's newest project is dipping some rolls partly into darker ink

and then arranging them in unusual ways.

Shafie's inventive processes transform strips of paper into unique handwritten messages that are then variously colored at the edges, rolled, scored, split, or folded, and, finally, tightly grouped and bundled. Her sculpture's compositional strength is the range of ways she shapes individual and collective expressions of "eshgh." Her abstract language is filled with the primary colors that are missing in Iran, and with countless secret repetitions of love – a key word in the poetry of Rumi and poets of earlier centuries. Whether the works are brightly hued, black and white, or a violet shade, each labor-intensive form glows with its own aesthetic and passion.

Her wooden frames may be hearts, circles, or rectangles. The final work variously mounts and orders strips, cones, spirals, and other "pages" into tight compositions. So each frame holds thousands of "pages" that, like the pages in a closed book, the viewer cannot read.

"I am not good at anything else. Being an artist is my calling and I am happy with the work I am doing," the artist tells me. The studio is highly organized with a range of art on the walls and some empty frames for future work. Grids of white cube shelves hold books, paint, and supplies while a giant work table takes the prime spot near large windows and the best light. The high floor provides some views of Brooklyn and beyond.



Hadieh Shafie, Abstract Eshgh, 2015. Ink, acrylic and paper with printed and

handwritten farsi text Eshg (Love, Passion). 14 x 11 in hires.

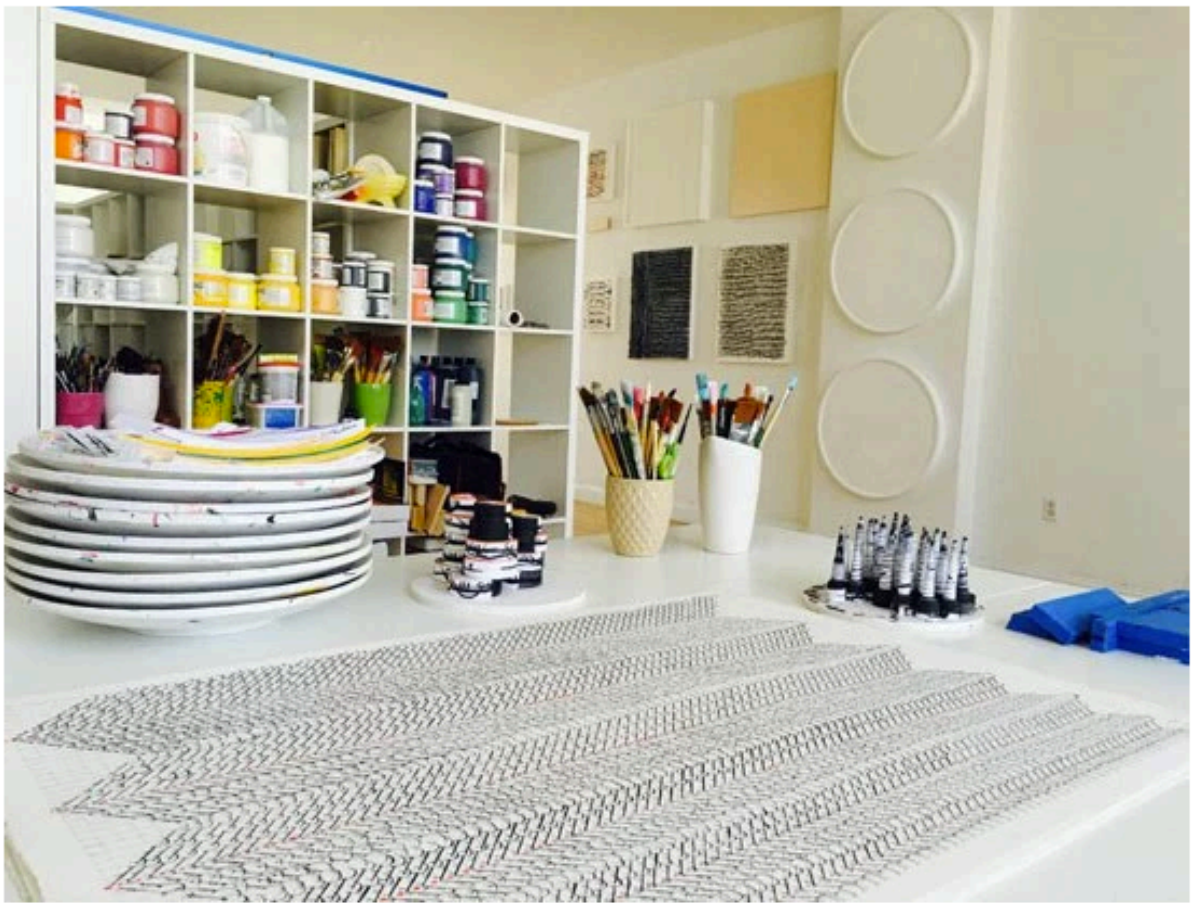


Hadieh Shafie. Seven Colors Stripes, 2016. Ink, acrylic and paper with printed and handwritten farsi text Eshgh (LovePassion). 14 x 11 in_hires.

"Initially my medium was oil paint and canvas. I arrived at Pratt in the spring of 1993 to attend graduate school. Loans covered most of my tuition, room and board but very little was left for other expenses. The first year in Brooklyn was financially extremely difficult. I lived on coffee and cigarettes and my desire to be independent didn't allow me to seek help from my family. "Even with my part time work at the library, which earned me something like \$70/80 per week, after a short few months and still struggling to pay for basic needs, I had to let go of oil paints and canvas. I simplified

my materials to paper and ink. I traded a few hours of work in the small on campus art supply shop for a stack of damaged Fabriano paper and ink. My very first "Eshgh" drawings were made on that stack of paper. The switch from painting on canvas to drawing with ink on paper required the elimination and simplification of the forms I had used in my paintings. And so what remained from that process was text."

"I zeroed in on the word love, because inherent in its meaning are so many complexities. On a personal level I had fallen deeply in love for the first time soon after my arrival at Pratt, and then very quickly had experienced rejection for the first time. Both were new and devastating and alienating experiences that turned me inward emotionally and made me seek a better truth by turning toward poetry. I felt that the word "Eshgh" was heavily used in poetry but it did not exist in how people treated each other. Especially looking at what was happening in my mother land Iran. So writing it in a simple form and repeating it became a personal mantra to find and express its meaning visually both on a personal and political level."



Hadieh Shafie Studio

Shafie's focus on making art began even earlier: "An early memory of touching paper was when I was around six years old and pressured my dad to buy me a "grown up's" sketch book. I remember insisting on the thickest one. Later, I would sit on the steps of our apartment building in Tabriz, Iran and tear out the pages of drawings i had made that I didn't like out of the sketch book so that what remained would be perfect."

Shafie holds an MFA in imaging and digital art from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, and an MFA in painting from the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. Shafie has been the recipient of grants from the Kress Foundation, RTKL and MSAC Individual Artist Grant (2010 and 2008) and the Mary Sawyers Baker awards from the William G. Baker Jr. Memorial Fund (2009) and Franz and Virginia Bader Fund (2011), and the 2012 Space Program of The Marie Walsh Sharpe Foundation. Her work has been included in a number of exhibitions in the United



States and abroad, including: The Jameel Prize traveling exhibition presented at The Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Institute du Monde Arabe, Paris; Casa Arabe, Madrid; Cantor Arts Centre, Stanford University; and the San Antonio Museum of Art in Texas. Shafie's work is in the following public collections: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK, The British Museum, London, UK, The Alford Collection of Contemporary Art, Winter Park, FL, The Sheldon Museum of Art, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, The Farjam Collection, Dubai, UAE, The Salsali Private Museum, Dubai, UAE, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and The Brooklyn Museum, Brooklyn, NY.



Shafie Hadieh Spike 1(Telesem Series), 2012. Ink, acrylic and paper with printed and hand written Farsi text Esheghe 'Love'. 12 in_hires

By [Jan Garden Castro](#)