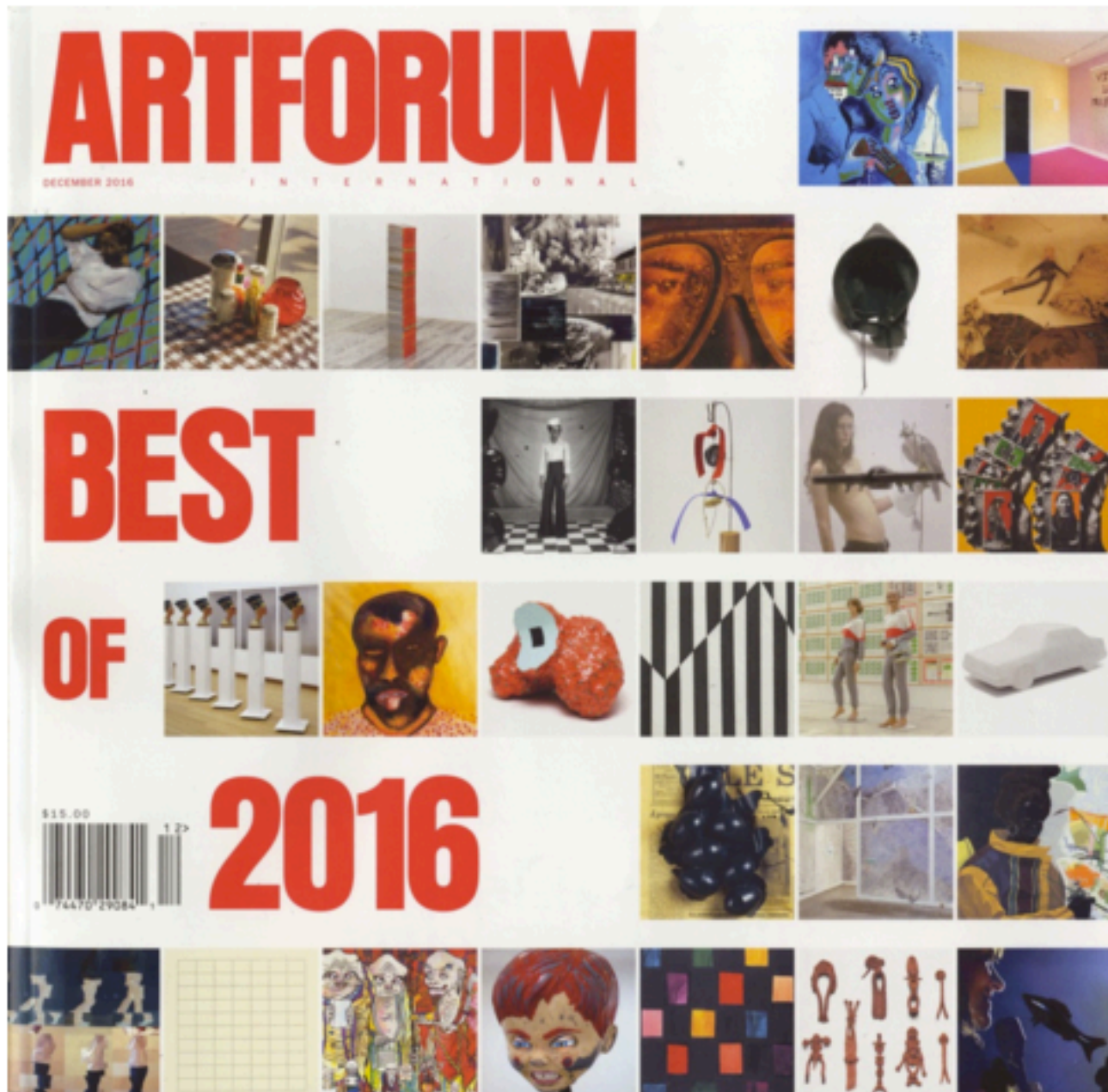


LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

"Reza Aramesh Ab-Anbar." *Artforum*. ( December 2016).



TEHRAN

## Reza Aramesh

AB-ANBAR

Reza Aramesh uses fine craftsmanship to engage with such pressing issues as the sublimation of violence by contemporary media. In his recent exhibition “At 11:57 am Wednesday 23 October 2013,” he presented photographs, marble heads, and vases that had been hand-made following ancient Greek methods, then fired in a kiln in Iran. The show’s title refers to the precise time of the British tabloid the *Daily Mail*’s publication online of an article reporting a beheading, believed to be an honor killing, that took place in Afghanistan. A couple who were having a love affair were reportedly kidnapped, beaten, and killed by the woman’s family. This event became the starting point for Aramesh’s two new series “Study of the Head as Cultural Artifact” and “Study of the Vase as Fragmented Bodies” both 2016–. Although the title of the first evokes an art school exercise, it looks deep into the history of Western culture to reflect on our centuries-long fascination with sculpted heads. Perhaps it has something to do with Medusa, the mythical gorgon who was decapitated by Perseus. The motif has been interpreted often through the centuries, by such masters as Caravaggio and Bernini, among others. Like the monster’s brutally severed head, the portrait bust detaches the head from the body, albeit replacing the gore with a focus on the elegance and verisimilitude of the depiction.

Aramesh directly addressed the sublimation of horror in three marble heads displayed on wooden platforms designed by the artist. *Action 163*, *Action 164*, and *Action 165* recalled displays in antiquated cases such as might still be found in darker corners of a museum, except there was no glass separating us from the object, just the frame. Subtle exhibition lights were allowed to glide directly along the milky surface of the sculptures. All three heads were male, graceful, and attractive, but blindfolded—reminiscent of an earlier marble sculpture by the artist, *Action 137: 6:45 pm, 3 May 2012, Ramla*, 2014, depicting a man with a T-shirt over his head and pants pulled down. The heads end abruptly just below the Adam’s apple with a cut revealing the roughness of the stone.

In another room, Aramesh presented photographs of plaster heads, similarly blindfolded, lying on a bed of sand against a blank background. The fact that we cannot identify the location, that the photographs could have been taken anywhere, suggests how ubiquitous the feeling of insecurity has become today: An atrocity could be happening on our doorstep.

A third room contained vases set on plinths, turned upside down and thus deprived of their function. Their painted surfaces showed male subjects visibly in distress, but we could not see the threat they were facing. Some of the men kept their hands above their heads, others behind their backs; one vase, *Action 1962*, shows a man being dragged by his feet. Like other figures Aramesh depicts, he is fragmented, terrified, a hollow human being deprived of love or pleasure. There are so many like him today.



Reza Aramesh, *Action 165, Study of the Head as Cultural Artifact*, 2016, hand-carved Carrara marble, 17 3/4 x 10 x 10". From the series "Study of the Head as Cultural Artifact," 2016–.

—Sylvia Serafinowicz