



# The two-face Mirrors of Aref Montazeri

**Aref Montazeri in conversation with Hania Afifi**

I met with Aref Montazeri at his Tehran studio via Zoom, two weeks ahead of his debut solo exhibition in the UAE. Held at the Leila Heller Gallery booth in Art Dubai, *Mirror*, will introduce Montazeri's meticulously fragmented works to the art crowd during exceptionally challenging times on both the economic and political fronts.







Portrait © Aref Montazeri, 2021 Photo Courtesy the Artist

**HANIA AFIFI:**

Why mirrors?

What are you trying to say to the viewer of your work?

**AREF MONTAZERI:**

We always regard the mirror as a reflective device that mediates between the I and the non-I when reviewed through a Lacanian lense. Only when you look at the back of the mirror do you regard it as an entity of its own right. You can say that the mirror regains its autonomy when you view it from behind. I could see how those keen eyes would ponder the physical and symbolic properties of an object so readily available in our homes and so pressed him further.

**HA:**

Is this why you coat part of the mirror fragments with opaque paint?

**AM:**

The navy blue surface is the reverse side of the mirror. I do not coat anything. Since it is already opaque, it does not reflect an image and therefore you will see it for what it is, a mirror.

**HA:**

There is something so poetic about your work. Is anyone in your family an artist?

**AM:**

Funny you should ask. My father is a well-established musician in Iran. He founded Sheida Music Group with Mohamed Reza Shajarian and Mohamed Reza Lotfi and established Aref Music Group with Shahram Nazeri. He plays the kamancheh (a traditional Iranian bowed string instrument) and composes music. He travels worldwide on music tours. My brother is also a musician. Like my father, he plays and composes music. So, yes, I was born into an artistic family.

**HA:**

Did you accompany your father on his tours?

**AM:**

No. As a child I never had the chance to travel with him since I was a student at school and after that I was just preoccupied with life, work and my career. However, he played music for me as a lullaby to go to sleep. I am sure that his music has influenced me on some subliminal level. Today, when I am working, I listen to music. From the early morning until late evening. I design with music, I fabricate with music and fortunately all my colleagues here in the studio also work with music.









Aref Montazeri at Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai in front of his work  
Mirror 14, 2014

*Mirror, reverse mirror, customized polymer, and customized pattern  
with titanium chrome coating, steel 14 parts each 210 x 20 x 3 cm,  
Installation: 210 x 210 x 20 cm*

during the opening of his show "Mirror" on view at Leila Heller  
Gallery until 7 May 2021

Photo Courtesy the artist, Leila Heller Gallery Dubai, New York

**HA:**

Clearly music is part of your life. Can you describe to me how you approach a new project?

**AM:**

There is a criteria set which I consider and study when designing my works. I call them my design apparatus. Those are Narrative; which is arguably the most important, Technique and Material. I don't want to follow the ornamental approach in mirror art that I worked on for five years with Monir Farmanfarmaian. I designed and fabricated over 60 pieces for her studio where we developed knots that can be joined to create magnificent Islamic patterns with mirrors. It was an incredible experience. However, when I began my own studio and designed my own artworks, I wanted to use an approach that was unique to me and which reflected my own ethos. For me, the mirror

always follows Narrative.

**HA:**

So you wanted to develop a fresh approach to this classic art form?

**AM:**

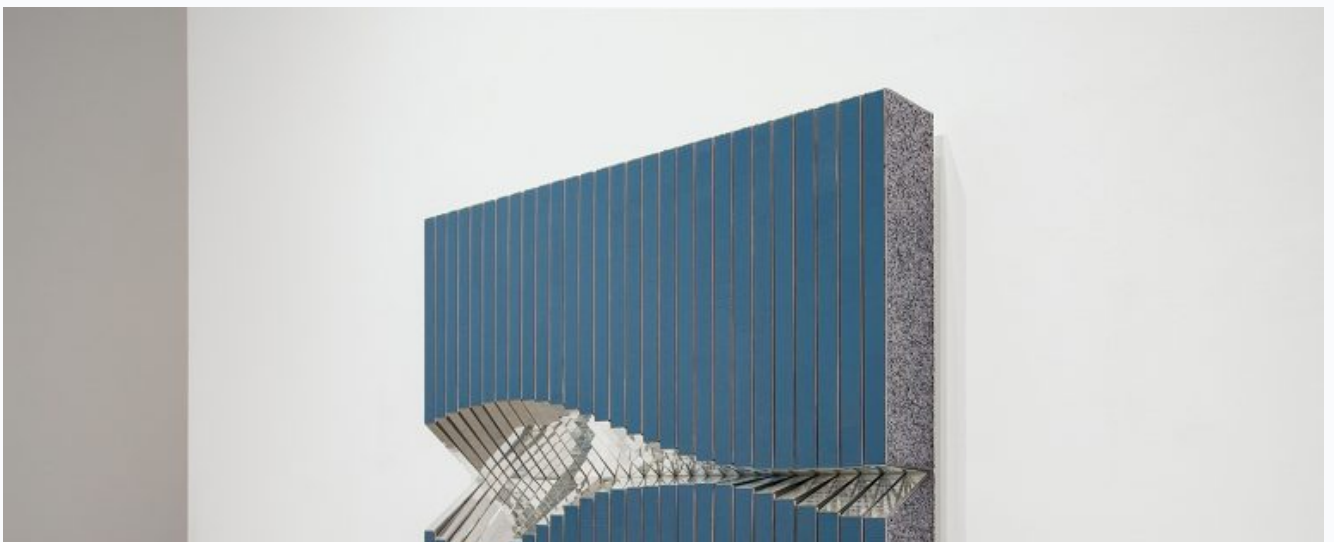
I was not keen to follow on the traditional forms that we have in our mosques and palaces. My outlook on mirror art is different to that in my native land. I know there is a trend across the Middle East to connect all artistic endeavours to cultural, social and even political elements so that an artist becomes defined by their geography. But I don't have such reading of artworks. I believe that artists create works from within to express their own thoughts and ideas. I also believe that art has always responded to a global condition which is why I do not want to be identified as an Iranian artist or a Middle Eastern artist or even a Tehranian artist. I am a contemporary artist.

**HA:**

So, you don't think that Art should have a cultural identity or is it only the case for your own artwork?

**AM:**

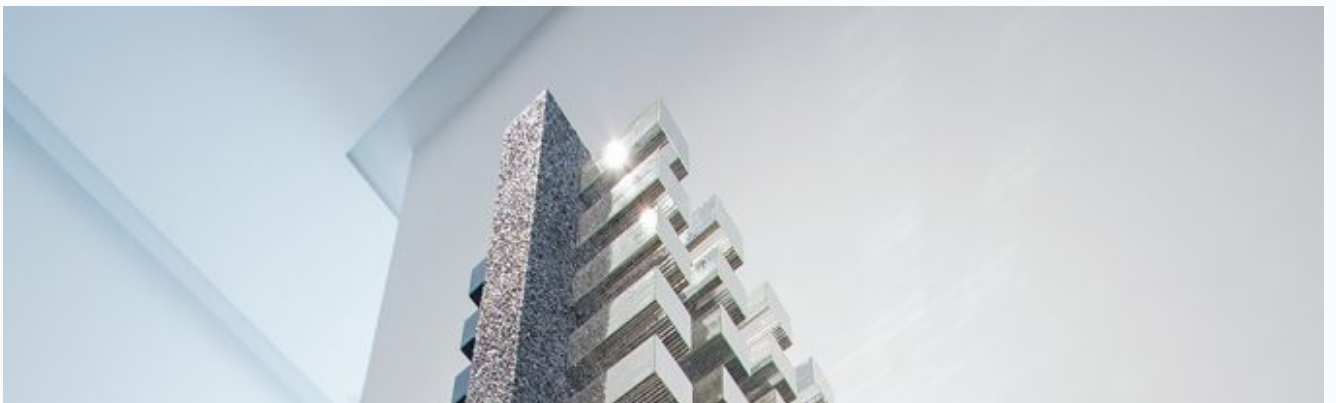
No its only for my artwork. I want to detach my artwork from the traditional pattern mirror art. My designs are universal, and they do not succumb to a particular cultural identity. There are many artists who recreate the traditional forms and try to update them, and they are creating amazing artworks.

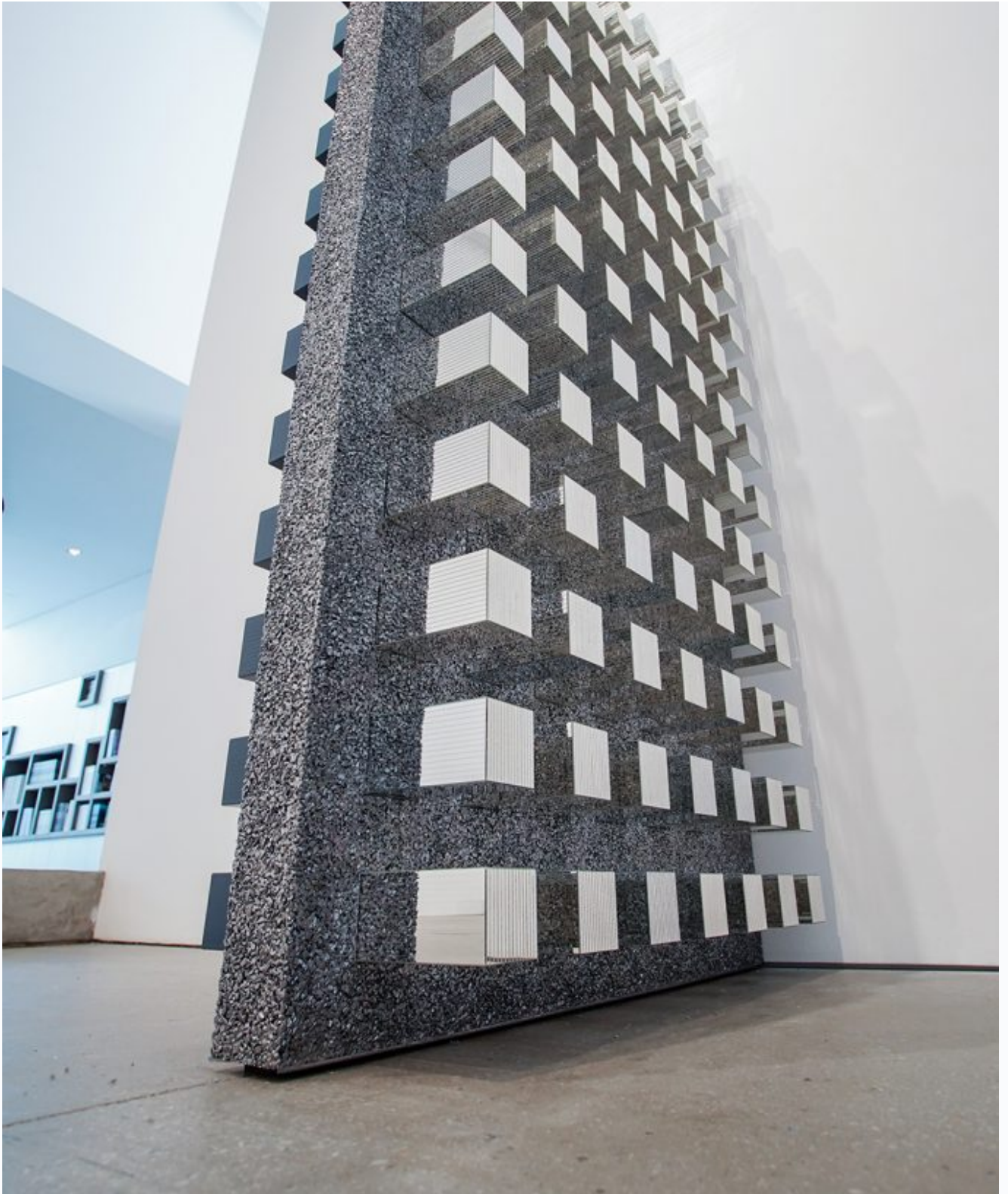






Aref Montazeri, *Mirror 5*, 2014 Mirror, reverse mirror, customized polymer and customized pattern with titanium chrome coating, plexiglass 115 x 115 x 14 cm





Aref Montazeri , Mirror 6, 2014

Mirror, reverse mirror, customized polymer, and customized pattern  
with titanium chrome coating, steel

203 x 105 x 35 cm

**HA:**

So you want to disassociate yourself from the dominant Islamic art aesthetic



celebrated by Iran and prefer to be connected to pre-Islamic Persian art?

**AM:**

I think art-making is personal. What connects the artistic practice of one era to the next is the technique in realising ideas. But the ideas themselves are specific to the time they have been conceived. I know that what I am saying may sound a little absurd, but I don't see a link between the past, present and future in art practice besides the technique. The ideas are very much of the present and not influenced by the past nor will they affect the future.

*Montazeri's strong stance against artist labelling by nationality or region, prompted me to push him further to describe his working process.*

**HA:**

Fair enough, let's revisit your personal approach to art making for which you designed unique tools. Can you walk me through the steps.

**AM:**

I develop a concept for a collection of say 14 pieces. So, I create a narrative or idea then think of the technique and explore the materials. Once the collection is completed, I start a new one. I don't like repeating the same idea. For example, this collection that I am showing at Leila Heller Gallery was inspired by my own past. When I was 15, my parents were getting a divorce and when my mother left the family house, she left a few items behind. I was missing her so much that when I yearned to be with her, I would put on the clothes she left behind and ponder the reflection in the mirror; feeling her presence and hearing her voice talking to me. For a long time, I never spoke of the incident as you can imagine the stigma associated with wearing women's clothes in a culture with strictly defined gender boundaries. However, I came to embrace this memory as it made me realise that your reflection in the mirror can be of something beyond yourself. And I loved this capacity of mirrors, to create a parallel fact which is as real as what is being reflected and yet as close as possible and at the same time completely different. So, as you can see how the Narrative in my work is not formed by geography, but rather by a very personal and psychological experience.



Aref Montazeri at Leila Heller Gallery, Dubai during the opening of his show "Mirror" on view at Leila Heller Gallery until 7 May 2021

Photo Courtesy the artist, Leila Heller Gallery Dubai, New York







Aref Montazeri, Mirror 4, 2013 Mirror, reverse mirror, customized polymer, and customized pattern with titanium chrome coating, plywood 4 parts each 160 x 21 x 21 cm Installation: 160 x 208 x 21 cm

*After this fascinating revelation, I decided to lighten our discussion and learn about some of his favourite things.*

**HA:**

Who is your favourite artist?

**AM:**

I like Pierre Soulages, CY Twombly, Nigel Cooke and Julie Mehertu and for sculptors, I really admire Tony Cragg's work, whom I met in person. I found him to be a kind and inspirational human being.

**HA:**

So, you can derive inspiration from other artists?

**AM:**

Absolutely.

**HA:**

Favourite Museum? Favourite artwork? Favourite Writer? Favourite city?

**AM:**

MOMA; Embodiment of 'Um' by Takashi Murakami; Allen de Botton; Monte Carlo because everything is so neat. But if I want to live somewhere when I want to retire, I would say Beaulieu-sur-Mer in the South of France.

**HA:**

Where does Aref go when he wants to think?

**AM:**

My studio

**HA:**

Indoors or Outdoors?

**AM:**

Outdoors

**HA:**

Cityscape/Landscape/Seascape?

**AM:**

Landscape







Aref Montazeri , Mirror 8, 2016

Mirror, reverse mirror, customized polymer, and customized pattern  
with titanium chrome coating, plywood

175 x 140 x 28 cm

**With this light note, I thanked him and his studio assistant Parsa Hashamipoor for their time and the virtual tour of the studio. Then I sat at my desk and reflected upon his words. Montazeri contemporarised the ancient Mirror Art whose output can be seen in many of the harams, palaces and mosques of the Safavid and Qajar eras across ancient Persia. Whilst they cut and shaped the reflective mirror surface into bedazzling geometric patterns that ornate the halls and ceilings of their most prized buildings, Montazeri cuts and manipulates both the reflective and reverse sides of the mirror to create stand-alone sculptures that can be admired and reflected upon for their own narrative, materiality and conception technique. The mirror has always had two faces and Montazeri artworks remind us of this reality. His visual aesthetic is indeed universal and cannot be traced to his cultural heritage, but there is no doubt in the fact that he is a young contemporary artist who grew up in Tehran and learned the ancient techniques of mirror cutting and placement from the old Persian masters.**

9  
SHARES



## CURRENT EVENTS WORLDWIDE

JULY, 2021 [<](#) [>](#)

SELECT THE CITY

ART FAIRS

13 - 30  
MAY - JUL

### ENA SWANSEA GREEN LIGHT

Ben Brown Fine Arts London, 12 Brook's Mews London W1K 4DG

06 - 28  
MAY - AUG

### Brigitte Lustenberger, An Apparition of Memory

Christophe Guye Galerie Zurich, Dufourstrasse 31 8008 Zurich Switzerland

24 - 24  
MAR - JUL

### STRUCTURES OF RADICAL WILL, JO BAER, BÉATRICE BALCOU, MARION BARUCH, STANLEY BROUWN, ANDRE CADERE, KAPWANI KIWANGA, SOL LEWITT, FRANÇOIS MORELLET, ROBERT MORRIS, YVONNE RAINER

FONDATION CAB Brussels, RUE BORRENS 32-34 1050 BRUSSELS BELGIUM

06 - 12  
FEB - DEC

### A FIRE IN MY BELLY

Julia Stoschek Collection Berlin, Leipziger Str. 60, 10117 Berlin

ONLINE

### The Botanical Mind

Camden Arts Centre London, Arkwright Road London NW3 6DG

ONLINE

### Huma Bhabha, Unsuspected

David Kordansky Gallery LOS ANGELES, 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. Los Angeles, CA 90019

ONLINE

### KEITH EDMIER Her Soul

Petzel Gallery New York 456 W 18th Street, 456 W 18th Street New York, New York 10011

ONLINE

### Mattia Bonetti, Murano

DAVID GILL London, 2-4 King Street St. James's London SW1Y 6QP



ONLINE

## Barnaby Barford: TRUTHLIESFEARLOVE

Click [LEARN MORE LINK](#)

📍 DAVID GILL London, 2-4 King Street St. James's London SW1Y 6QP

## Zachary Armstrong, Bag of Candles

📍 Faurschou Foundation Beijing, 798 Art District, NO2 Jiuxianqiao Road P.O.Box 8502, Chaoyang District Beijing, China 100015

## UPCOMING EVENTS

AUGUST, 2021



### Zachary Armstrong, Bag of Candles

📍 Faurschou Foundation Beijing, 798 Art District, NO2 Jiuxianqiao Road P.O.Box 8502, Chaoyang District Beijing, China 100015

ONLINE

### Barnaby Barford: TRUTHLIESFEARLOVE

Click [LEARN MORE LINK](#)

📍 DAVID GILL London, 2-4 King Street St. James's London SW1Y 6QP

ONLINE

### Mattia Bonetti, Murano

📍 DAVID GILL London, 2-4 King Street St. James's London SW1Y 6QP

ONLINE

### KEITH EDMIER Her Soul

📍 Petzel Gallery New York 456 W 18th Street, 456 W 18th Street New York, New York 10011

ONLINE

### Huma Bhabha, Unsuspected

📍 David Kordansky Gallery LOS ANGELES, 5130 W. Edgewood Pl. Los Angeles, CA 90019

ONLINE

### The Botanical Mind

📍 Camden Arts Centre London, Arkwright Road London NW3 6DG

06<sup>12</sup>  
FEB DEC

### A FIRE IN MY BELLY

📍 Julia Stoschek Collection Berlin, Leipziger Str. 60, 10117 Berlin

## SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

So you will be always up to date with the latest news about our magazine,  
our worldwide selection of events and the Contemporary Art scene.

☐ I agree to receive this newsletter

**SUBSCRIBE NOW!**



xibtmag















## TWITTER

### Tweets by @xibtmag



 XIBT Contemporary Art Magazine Retweeted



MGC

**Marian Goodman Gallery**

@MarianGoodman

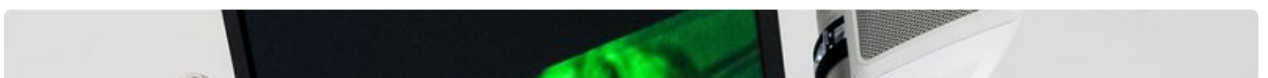
“I believe that one gift of art is that perception is challenged and new observations can be made.”

—[#DaraBirnbaum](#), [@xibtmag](#)

Click to read: [buff.ly/3nCfkTO](https://buff.ly/3nCfkTO)

[twitter.com/Primary\\_Info/s...](https://twitter.com/Primary_Info/status/1374759277718597637)

[https://twitter.com/Primary\\_Info/status/1374759277718597637](https://twitter.com/Primary_Info/status/1374759277718597637)





[Embed](#)

[View on Twitter](#)



PUBLICATION LISTED IN THE ITALIAN PRESS REGISTER BY THE SASSARI COURT OF LAW WITH REGISTRATION NUMBER 447/2017.

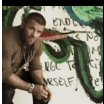
*EDITOR IN CHIEF: ALICE ZUCCA*

## SUBSCRIBE TO OUR NEWSLETTER

☐ I agree to receive this newsletter

**SUBSCRIBE NOW!**

## RECENT POSTS



Bjarne Melgaard and the Lustfulness of Loneliness

JUNE 25, 2021



On loop: Michel Blazy and Enzo Mianes

JUNE 23, 2021

CHECK ALL THE

# CURRENT EVENTS

AND DON'T FORGET TO FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

*SO YOU WILL BE ALWAYS UP TO DATE WITH OUR LATEST NEWS*

