The Future of Iranian Theatre

From September to December 2017 Zoya was Magic of Persia's CURATE ARCHIVE online resident. You can view the entire archive here. CURATE ARCHIVE is an online residency programme open to artists/curators/cultural practitioners across the globe, which aims to operate as a dialogical structure to enunciate possibilities and impossibilities of working with 'archive'. This project intends to provide opportunities for a re-presentation of its extensive archive through an online platform and within a curatorial approach.

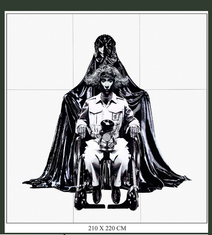
Artist Statement

Aligned with oral history traditions, my curatorial approach to the archive, The Future of Iranian Theatre, is a collection of singular, interdependent stories that are experienced privately with distant strangers across multiple mediums. The amplified, recorded and/or mediated voice focuses and repositions sound. Audio recordings enhance our contact with the past, momentarily dislocating us from the here and now. Images like paintings, drawings, and photographs can evoke other similar visual sensations from our subjective or collective (read: shared) histories. The linearity of an account marks it chronologically. Some texts are shaped by their function, and some historical contexts have (in)formed (aesthetic) ways of generation and production. The memories of theatre artists are inserted into the existing archive, thusly building a dialogic scaffolding for theatre and visual art networks. The Future of Iranian Theatre newly maps artistic lineages across disciplines and fields enabling connections and encounters. Can the interplay between audio, image, and text invent a new kind of reality that challenges projections cast by the drama of politics moving towards the utopian potential of a telematically connected society?

Interview with Siavash Talaei

I am Siavash Talaei. I was born in 1980, in Tehran. After getting my bachelor's degree I moved to Italy, in order to pursue a masters in "New expressive languages in contemporary Art at " Accademia di Belle Arti-Florence.

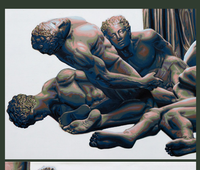
I graduated from the academy in 2014. Currently I live in Iran. The main characteristics of my art works have motionless and static themes and appear in a statuesque frozen space.
My drawing technique consists of illustrations and drawings of the surrounding environment, museums objects, artworks and Historic sites. This process takes a long time and during this period I usually take notes documenting my personal perceptions of artworks. The next stage of my process has some common elements with performance art. I try to set up my ideas and illustrations together in different arrangements. Afterward I draw a painting of the result of the installation or sometimes I just leave it as is. So I would say my work is a result of incorporating, compiling and adapting several artworks. The symbolism and ambiguity of my works may reflected in this process.
I have three artworks entitled "The All-seeing eye". Each one comes after the other with two years distance.


210 X 220 CM

The first artwork was created in 2010, which consists of a set of recreated images, taken from real images of victims from chemical bombings in Sardasht. During that period I tried to avoid direct engagement with historical and political issues in Iran, therefore I applied characteristics of an unromantic style by extracting figures from their primary context and reproducing them in a style which conveys emotional indifference. That period coincided with the beginning of my research on characteristics of totalitarian art and art of fascism.

140 X180 CM

The second work, created in 2012, was based on a painting by John Singer Sargent, an American painter dated 1889, which is currently stored in Tate museum. The painting is based on Ellen Terry's portrayal of Lady Macbeth. Initially I drew a simple figure very similar to Hecate, the Greek goddess, and eventually I altered it to resemble the three witches in Macbeth. In the end I decided to create a derivative work based on Sargent's painting. Ellen Terry's performance in Macbeth was of great interest to me: the mixture of insanity, madness and self-awareness and how the painter drew the iconic image of this destructive, guilty character several times. I had always been interested in Shakespeare's dramas, especially theme of violence. On the other hand, I consider anti-violence to be a quite important theme in art. The ways in which moral decline was prevented in Iran was of interest as well.



In 2013 I drew "The All-seeing eye 3". My mind was deeply involved with questions related to war and at the same time I was completing a memorial of the Holocaust, which I had started a year before. During that period my attention concentrated more and more on shamanistic performances, which in my opinion reached its climax, particularly in the works of Joseph Beuys.
Something else that I was researching during that time was, rituals in Indian dance practice.
I doubted that I could realize such a painting by 2014, because over time my works were developing in a way that was quite distant from the outside world. But in the end I decided to place a priority on what art means me.
As a final word I could say, slowly and over time, my artistic vision of contemporary art has turned to past civilizations art, and I am actually trying to know myself better through them in order to better understand my inner-self, to make it visible in a way or even to interpret it if it is possible.

Upon first glance I was awestruck by familiarity and strangeness of the figures in "The All-seeing eye" series. The figures in all three works illustrate the very principles in which dancers attempt to create onstage. Although the figures are immobile there are dynamic, elastic elements evoking presence that are typically only expressed in live performance.

Classical Indian dance is performed to express vibrations of the universe to the audience. Energy drives these vibrations and is actually a form of dance at subatomic levels. In Classical Indian Dance Philosophy consciousness is called "Shiva". The entire universe is a manifestation of Shiva which evolves towards its essential and final destruction. These dance movements serve as preparation for the next creation and enables a person's soul to reach the supreme consciousness. An audience is reminded how human beings are capable of change and most importantly inspired to go beyond what is humanly possible.

Fantasy is staged as existing in the future, but it stems from a desire for what could happen in the present. Desire is a feeling of being, existing between states: the familiar and unfamiliar, the conscious and subconscious, the known and unknown. We are all protagonists in our story, conscious and unconscious of figures that represent who we ought to be or who we want be.
-Zoya Sardashti