

INFINITE SPACES OF THE *BELOVED*

FARNAZ DADFAR

ORCID 0000-0003-2885-9936

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
Master of Fine Arts (Visual Art) (by Research)

October 2019

VCA Art

Faculty of Fine Arts and Music

The University of Melbourne

Abstract

*...When the ears first hear these words
They seem to denote sensual objects.
But as there is no language for the Infinite,
How can we express its mysteries
In finite words?
Or how can the visions of the ecstatic
Be described in earthly formula?
So mystics veil their meanings
In these shadows of the unseen,
The objects of the senses.¹*

Infinite Spaces of the Beloved recuperates certain characteristics of Persian Sufi poetry and Farsi literature as contemporary artistic material. In exploring the relationship between the poet Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī² and his spiritual teacher and friend Shams-i-Tabrīzī,³ this project attempts to experientially re-present certain aspects of Islamic mysticism through frameworks of contemporary post-conceptual art. More specifically, it will identify parallels and connections between these radically fictionalised, hypothetical and materially-infinite, as well as profoundly uncertain forms and contemporary experiences.

Infinite Spaces of the Beloved articulates twenty-first century experiences of being through the creative possibilities located within hybrid cultural forms and languages. By activating meanings and nonsenses created through linguistic diasporas—using fragmented text and sound as a means of incarnating otherness, deterritorialisation and displacement—the research imagines utopic alternatives to the increasingly brutal and dystopic realities of twenty-first century existence.

¹ Shabistari, Sa'd Ud Din Mahmud. "Reflection, Sun-Reflection" in *The Secret Rose Garden*. Translated by Florence Lederer, (United State of America: Phanes Press, 2002). p. 50.

² Jalāl Al-Dīn Muhammad (1207-1273) known as Rūmī in the West, and Mawlānā in Iran and Islamic regions has been one of the most influential poets and a Sufi master in the world. He lives in the heart of love to explore the mystery of union. Rūmī who had a mystical approach to Islam was a spiritual Sufi.

³ Sham al-Din Mohammad (1185-1245) is a spiritual instructor and an intimate friend of Rūmī.

Declaration

This is to certify that

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Master of Fine Arts except where indicated in the Preface,

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,

(iii) the thesis is <21,284> words in length, poems, bibliographies and appendices

FARNAZ DADFAR

Preface

Hava is a Farsi text that I created and produced prior to enrolling in this Master of Fine Art degree some sections of which are referenced through analysis in this research, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*.

The audio work as part of *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* artistic project is created by myself in collaboration with two musicians: Amir Hossein Kaveh and Tristan Courtney. Kaveh and Courtney have signed co-authorisation forms declaring that I am the primary author.

The first *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* installation was produced by me and presented at Artspace Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, April 9th–12th, 2019.

The second *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* installation was also produced by me and exhibited as part of the group exhibition *Praxis5* in Joglo SaRanG Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, July 24th–August 8th, 2019 as part of the VCA Access program. *Praxis5* was presented during Art Jogja in Yogyakarta, where many artists, curators and collectors were staying during visits to galleries from around the world.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express the deepest appreciation to my committee chair, Dr Simone Slee for her constant support, insight and motivation throughout the project.

It is with immense gratitude that I acknowledge the kind support and gracious advice of my principal supervisor Dr Sean Lowry. Without his extensive personal and professional guidance, constructive and artistic suggestions, enthusiastic encouragement and enlightening ideas this dissertation would not have been possible. His willingness to give his time so generously has been very much appreciated. And I sincerely thank my co-supervisor Dr Bernhard Sachs whose enthusiasm for 'Infinite Spaces of the *Beloved*' had lasting effect. I'm grateful for his valuable inspiration and creative thoughts, helpful comments, professional expertise, and useful critiques in sharing his truthful and illuminating views on a number of issues related to this practice-led research.

I would also like to thank Professor Jon Cattapan, Associated Professor Kate Daw, Professor Barbara Bolt, Associate Director (research) Dr Danny Butt, Dr Kim Donaldson, Ms Vikki McInnes, Dr Tessa Laird, Dr Kate Just, and my MFA cohort for valuable discourse through the development of this thesis.

My special thanks to VCA Access program in particular Ms Caroline Chernov, my artistic mentor Esther Stewart, Project Eleven (Monica Lim and Konfir Kabo), Resika Tikoalu, Bayu Wardhana and all Sarang team member.

I also wish to express my gratitude to the officials and other staff members of VCA Art, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, The University of Melbourne who rendered their help during the period of my thesis. Thank you all for your unwavering support.

Finally, my warmest thanks go to my parents. Their encouragement and support give me strength to follow my dreams and achieve my goals.

Farnaz Dadfar

Contents

Abstract	3
Declaration	4
Preface	5
Acknowledgements	6
List of Figures	8
Introduction	13
Chapter 1: Language as Nomadic Sculpture	15
<i>1.1 Inaccessibility</i>	15
<i>1.2 Golden Trap</i>	18
<i>1.3 Unlearning</i>	21
<i>1.4 Voids</i>	25
Chapter 2: Diasporic Territories ⇌ Inner Migrations	29
<i>2.1 Displacement</i>	29
<i>2.2 Mirroring the Memoir</i>	34
<i>2.3 Separation ⇌ Exclusion</i>	36
Chapter 3: Concrete Intimacy	41
<i>3.1 Mystical Love ⇌ Romantic Exile</i>	41
<i>3.2 Voyage to the Beloved</i>	44
<i>3.3a Existential Vacuum: Part One—Australia</i>	49
<i>3.3b Existential Vacuum: Part Two—Indonesia</i>	53
<i>3.4 Lover And Beloved Are One: Annihilation</i>	55
Conclusion	58
Bibliography	60
Appendices	62
<i>I</i>	62
<i>II</i>	69
<i>III</i>	100

List of Figures

1. Nazgol Ansarinia, *Article 49, Pillars*, 2014, cast resin and paint, 40 x 40 x 20 cm. Accessed October 31, 2019, <http://myartguides.com/exhibitions/nazgol-ansarinia-paper-trail/attachment/nazgol-ansarinia-paper-trail-2015/>
2. Parastou Forouhar, *Written Room*, 1999-ongoing, synthetic polymer paint, dimensions variable, site-specific work for Asia Pacific Triennial 7 (APT7). Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, QAGOMA Photography. Accessed October 31, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/booksandarts/parastou-farouhar-written-room/4573926>
3. Hossein Valamanesh, *Where Do I Come From?*, 2013, digital print on canvas, 95.5 x 217.5 cm, edition of 2 of 6 +1AP. Accessed October 31, 2019, <http://gagprojects.com/index.php/artists/hossein-valamanesh/2015-2/#jp-carousel-2518>
4. Barbad Golshiri, *Quod*, 2010, C-print on paper, 106.2 x 106.5 cm. Aaron Gallery, Tehran, British Museum Collection. Accessed October 31, 2019. <https://www.tate.org.uk/tate-etc/issue-31-summer-2014/barbad-golshiri-on-malevich>
- 5 & 6. Barbad Golshiri, *The Untitled Tomb 1 & 2*, Iron, soot, 53 x 24 in. 2012, Edition of 3. Photo: Andreas Vesterlund, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York. Accessed 31 October, 2019, <https://www.dailyserving.com/2013/10/barbad-golshiri-curriculum-mortis-at-thomas-erben-gallery/>
7. Hoda Afshar, *Portrait of Behrouz Boochani, Manus Island* (from the series *Remain*), 2018, pigment inkjet print, 80.0 x 66.0 cm, courtesy of the artist. Accessed 31 October, 2019, <https://www.artistprofile.com.au/hoda-afshar/>
8. Shirin Neshat, *Speechless (Women of Allah series)*, 1996, Gelatine silver print, unique, 10 x 8 in. Photograph by Larry Barns; Courtesy of Gladstone New York and Brussels. Accessed 31 October, 2019, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/shirin-neshat-new-exhibition-expresses-power-art-shape-political-discourse-180955389/>
9. Chohreh Feyzjdjou, *Product of Chohreh Feyzjdjou*, 1989-93, black glue, black wax, pigment, dimensions variable, installation view, Grey Art Gallery. Accessed 31 October, 2019, <https://greyartgallery.nyu.edu/2016/03/3907/>
10. Koushna Navabi, *Biskweet-e Mādar*, concrete and embroidery, dimensions variable, installation view, Parasol Unit, Venice Biennale, 2019. Accessed October 31, 2019, <https://parasol-unit.org/whats-on/the-spark-is-you-parasol-unit-in-venice/>
11. Shirazeh Houshiary, *Fine Frenzy*, 2004, black and white Aquacryl, white pencil and ink on canvas, 6' 2 3/16" x 6' 2 3/16" (190 x 190 cm). Photograph: courtesy Lisson Gallery, London Audio courtesy of Acoustiguide. Accessed 31 October, 2019, <https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/196/2616>
12. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA ArtSpace, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Handwriting Farsi text *Moraba* -

e- Vahm (part of the artist text *Hava*), Octagonal structure, 25 min. Sound work is the collaboration of the artist, Amirhossein Kaveh and Tristan Courtney. Photo by Matthew Stanton

13. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA ArtSpace, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Matthew Stanton

14. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, VCA ArtSpace, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Pourandokht Okhovvat

15. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, Joglo Sarang Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2019. Handwriting Farsi text *Moraba -e- Vahm* (part of the artist text *Hava*), Octagonal structure, 25 min. Sound work is the collaboration of the artist, Amirhossein Kaveh and Tristan Courtney. Photo by Lucia Rossi

16. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, Joglo Sarang Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2019. Photo by Lucia Rossi

17. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, Joglo Sarang Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2019. Image courtesy of artist

18. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, installation view, dimensions variable, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. One channel 3mins video loop of black & white oceanic waves, crystal objects, fishing line, digitally printed wallpaper on Walltex Film. Photo by Simon Strong

19. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, detail, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

20. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, Farsi script (selected Persian Sufi poetry from *Divan e Shams* by Rumi), dimensions variable, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

21. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, Farsi script (selected Persian Sufi poetry from *Divan e Shams* by Rumi), detail, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

22. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, Farsi script (selected Persian Sufi poetry from *Divan e Shams* by Rumi), detail, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

23. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, installation view, dimensions variable, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

24. Farnaz Dadfar, *BAQĀ' WA FANĀ'*, Farsi text from Rumi (Persian Sufi Poetry), Acrylic on the floor, 150 x 150 (cm), VCA art space, The University of Melbourne, 2018. Image courtesy of artist

25. Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) on the wall, 400 (w) x 200 (h) cm, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil
26. Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, detail, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil
27. Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, detail, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil
28. Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, video still (30 mins video, reading *Moraba -e- Vahm* (part of the artist text *Hava*) with the native Australian birds sound in the background). BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW 2018. A video captured by David Brazil through a participatory act of wiping off the artist handwriting.
29. Farnaz Dadfar, *Sharh -e- Hejran*, Farsi text (selected Persian Sufi poetry from Divan Shams by Rumi) on stone, 120 x 120 cm, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil
30. Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm* and *Sharh -e- Hejran*, Installation view, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil
31. Farnaz Dadfar, *There Is No Such Thing As Utopia*, curated by Jake Treacy, installation view, 3895 mm (h) x 1900 mm (w), Night Screen, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, 2018. Farsi text with black acrylic, 9:12 mins audio played through black painted square canvas, crystals, fishing line. Image courtesy of artist
32. Farnaz Dadfar, *There Is No Such Thing As Utopia*, curated by Jake Treacy, detail, Night Screen, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, 2018. Image courtesy of artist
33. Farnaz Dadfar, *Cancelled*, installation view, dimensions variable, The Atrium, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. 24 x A2 mixed media on Artforce journal _ News digest of the Australia Council from 1970/1980, 4 x (420x 594 mm) drawings (collage, acrylic, ink, colour pencil on Canvas paper), and handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with acrylic on the floor. Photo by Simon Strong
34. Farnaz Dadfar, *Cancelled*, video still, The Atrium, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong
35. Farnaz Dadfar, *Cancelled*, handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with acrylic on the gallery floor, The Atrium, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong
36. Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, installation view, dimensions variable, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Crystals, fishing line, Farsi text on the wall with black acrylic, 9:12 mins audio work (reading *Moraba -e- Vahm* with the native Australian birds sound in the background). Photo by Simon Strong

37. Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, detail, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong
38. Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, detail, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong
39. Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, detail, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong
40. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, Islamic Museum of Australia, Melbourne, 2019. Handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with acrylic on the wall, digital print photograph mounted on 3mm Dibond (Aluminium composite), 90 x 60 cm, (documented *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* in Indonesia by Lucia Rossi). Image courtesy of artist
41. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, Islamic Museum of Australia, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
42. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, Islamic Museum of Australia, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
43. Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, installation view, dimensions variable, handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with black and white chalk marker and acrylic on the glass and the wall. Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
44. Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, detail, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
45. Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, installation view, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
46. Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, detail, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
47. Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, installation view, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
48. Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, detail, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist
49. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Handwriting Farsi text *Moraba -e- Vahm* (part of the artist text *Hava*), Octagonal structure, 25 min. Sound work is the collaboration of the artist, Amirhossein Kaveh and Tristan Courtney. Photo by Matthew Stanton

50. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Matthew Stanton

51. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Giulia McGauran

52. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Giulia McGauran

53. Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Matthew Stanton

Introduction

بشنو این نی چون شکایت می کند
از جدایی ها حکایت می کند

*Listen to this reed how it complains: it is telling a tale of separations.*⁴

Infinite Spaces of the Beloved seeks to repurpose a conceptualisation of the *Beloved Máashooq* within the poems of Rūmī as a metaphor for remediating and evoking certain inter-visual/textual dimensions of his mystical love and poetry. As part of this exploration, I will examine a series of Rūmī's short poetic pieces in an attempt to contextualise the lingual aesthetics of contemporary Iranian art today as a singular unity. By extension I will examine how these mystical texts in Sufi literature might be read from a universal standpoint. The investigation also outlines the nomadic characteristics of Rūmī's poetry as located in *Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*⁵—characteristics that travel throughout time in human minds, and as a consequence, reflect philosophical approaches to existential meanings. Through a series of parallel and transcendental artistic methodologies, coupled with an analysis of theoretical investigations from thinkers such as Barbara Bolt, Okwui Enwezor, Julia Kristeva, Edward Said and others, the project will explore the literature of contemporary Iranian artists in diaspora. In doing so, it will begin the process of addressing the problematic nature of cultural production under the categorical rubric of Middle Eastern art.

The issue of 'language' in its various formats and meanings, fuels complex debate across areas of ethno-cultural identity within the social landscapes of contemporary art today—perhaps no more than in the West among a new generation of Middle Eastern, and specifically Iranian, intellectuals and artists. Through a lens of displacement and migration, this research adapts concerns relating to Farsi literature, language and text to ask the question: is it possible to articulate specific cultural belonging whilst being embedded within international contemporaneous concerns? A lack of critical and analytical discussion regarding linguistic issues for people living in diaspora has led to some Iranian artists finding unique solutions and generating idiosyncratic artistic strategies in order to do so.

Many contemporary Iranian artists across the world utilise text-based art as part of a broader engagement with the problem of their contemporaneity; this in turn highlights certain historical and political issues. Examples this research considers include works by

⁴ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *The Mathnawī*. Edited and translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge University Press: London, 1926). p. 5.

⁵ The collection of Rūmī's poems named after his mentor Shams. As Shams symbolically speaking through Rūmī's soul.

Hoda Afshar, Nazgol Ansarinia, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, Chohreh Feyzdjou, Parastou Forouhar, Barbad Golshiri, Shirazeh Houshiary, Shirin Neshat, Koushna Nabavi, and Hossein Valamanesh. Together with the author's own work, these artistic practices represent an expanded play on language in three key areas:

1. Language as nomadic sculpture
2. Diasporic territories ⇌ Inner migrations
3. Concrete Intimacy

As situated through the lens of Persian Sufi poetry and Eastern philosophy, this research explores how, in turn, context affects the particularised reading of artworks.

Chapter 1

Language as Nomadic Sculpture

ای مرغ بگو زبان مرغان
من دانم رمز تو شنیدن
دل گفت بکارخانه بودم
تا خانه آب و گل پزیدن
از خانه صنع می پریدم
چون پای نماند می کشیدند
چون گویم صورتی کشیدند

*O bird, speak the language of birds:
I can understand thy hidden meaning,
The soul answered: 'I was in the (divine) Factory
While the house of water and clay was a-baking.
I was flying away from the (material) workshop
While the workshop was being created.
When I could resist no more, they dragged me
To mould me into shape like a ball'.⁶*

1.1 Inaccessibility

“What do you mean by that?” ... “Does that make sense?” ... “Do you understand what I am saying?” Irrespective as to whether or not one considers oneself a migrant—in this instance, someone moving to a Western country from another cultural and linguistic background—do these expressions sound familiar? As migrants, we use these or similar phrases in our everyday dialogue to help clarify meaning and avoid misinterpretation and miscommunication. As human beings, we speak, we listen, we read, we watch, we taste, we love, we learn, we work, and so on and so forth—all as part of a mission to better understand and reveal truths between and within us. We translate aspects of ourselves as we share experiences and memories with others. Moreover, the social moments of daily life help us to draw out relationships within contemporary experiences of being in new or different places. In this sense, we delineate ourselves in accordance with Western conceptions as other, alienated spaces, entities, selves and meanings. As migrants we assume, perhaps hypothetically, that we are abstract like words—at least in the sense that words are metaphorically perceived as solid. Words can be regarded to function like enclosed shapes,

⁶ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 139.

such as like a brick or an isolated island. Furthermore, words are nomadic and ultimately are inaccessible. Far from inhabiting a single, fixed and inherent meaning, words do not comprise one, individual systematic code. To define a word, we need other words, situations and senses to adequately describe and/or provisionally identify meaning. Yet when each of these bricks as metaphoric units of interpretation sit next to each other, they create new architectures and meanings that evoke what are possibly quite varied interpretations. In this sense, meaning may be considered analogous to liquid, enabling symbolic islands to float. Meanings also hover in and around words and are often vibrant, shifting across time and place. Meanings also drift within and between us and other entities in the universe. Consequently, meanings are nomadic, preferring to escape fixed definitions and potentially enter risky and precarious territories.



This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figure 1: Nazgol Ansarinia, *Article 49, Pillars*, 2014, cast resin and paint, 40 x 40 x 20 cm.

Creative practices, in this regard, are often encapsulated through forms of concealment. They rely on words and multifaceted meanings to help decode and perceive their messages. If these inaccessible codes and systems are framed with ‘foreign’ words, we face some added challenges in our attempts to more deeply understand, interpret and explore the perceptions of the work(s). As shown in Figure 1, *Article 49, Pillars* (2014) by Nazgol Ansarinia

(b.1979), for example, illustrates aspects of Iranian contemporary experience through the dismantling of buildings and demolishing of houses accompanied by Farsi text. The Pillar series evokes the glorious past of Persian architectures alongside Tehran's fast-growing contemporary urbanism. Ansarinia cuts slices, like a piece of cake, into a neutrally toned coloured column—the visual association here is with a text that appears from within a pillar that is commonly used for external architectural design. On the one hand, it seems that all of the words are elastic, presumably stretched and expanded in a circular shape in order to breach an 'other' side with regards to conceptual meaning(s). On the other hand, the central pillar point appears to underscore an invisible vertical line that runs through the core of Iranian collective unconsciousness in terms of the country's outstanding building designs. This echoes what the Nigerian curator and art historian Okwui Enwezor described as a "diasporic public sphere,"⁷ representing the nomadic tendencies of past architectural iconographies through the challenges posed to cross-social and economic circumstances of the present.

In searching for political, economic, cultural and social justice for Iranian architectural displacement, Ansarinia portrays reflexive narratives in order to operate beyond the association of public frames. Looking closer, we see words concealed within a pillar, such that meaning is understood to be inaccessible. The gesture of cutting out a slice forms a significant and intriguing part of Ansarinia's work. The formal lettering of the Farsi text metaphorically flirts with the viewer; it is asking to be read and yet is placed in-between modes of address such as newspaper signs and emotive signals. The text also evokes palpable contemporary Iranian concerns regarding socio-cultural realities and modernisation. Together, these interrupted modalities can be contemplated as nomadic characteristics of poetic spaces within a text that has failed to communicate its meaning.

The pillar appears to encapsulate a magnificent story within itself, yet it is also remarkably reluctant to unfold. The arrangement of layers of words and sentences on top of each other work to highlight the diasporic spaces of historical memories of Iranian monuments that resonate with ordinary reconstruction and the banal strategies in rapid development and planning of Iran's cities. The inaccessibility of the text might be understood allegorically as akin to reading Braille with one's eyes wide open. The formal scripts become consciously unreliable as a medium that assists in communicating something of Tehran's collapsing architectural structures. In this sense, Ansarinia's artwork invites us

⁷ Okwui Enwezor, 'Mega-Exhibitions and the Antinomies of a Transnational Global Form', in *Manifesta Journal*, no.2, 2004.

to get lost within linguistic spaces. In doing so, it raises questions relating to the evolution of Iranian architectural design while reminding us about the restoration and refurbishment of contemporary buildings in Tehran today.

Lingual space can be reminiscent of urban space; both are vital sites of ephemeral connection for groups and communities, insofar as they both possess nomadic tendencies in shared experiences and memories of our being and belonging. Both lingual and urban spaces also insistently inform our national and personal identities.

کانجا نبود زخم همه رحمت و مهرست
لیکن پس در وهم تو مانده فانسست
در بیشه بزن آتش و خاموش کن ای دل
در کش تو زبان زآنکه زبان تو زیانست

*For there is no wound: all is mercy and love,
But thy imagination is like a bar behind the door.
Set fire to the wood, and keep silence, O heart;
Draw back thy tongue, for thy tongue is harmful.*⁸

1.2 Golden Trap

While language can carry and reveal historical and geographical traces, sometimes their complex codes remain wholly or partly untranslatable. Given the difficulty of translation, what do we experientially understand in text-based artworks, if this data remains inaccessible? Do we perceive *something* via other means? Or, on the contrary, does the unreadable text become an empty design-based experience, devoid of any specific socio-political concerns? If we can not literally read or apprehend a text as a work of art, how else might we respond to it? Here, a working example would be the use of Farsi text in an Australian cultural context—something still relatively rare in the contemporary Australian art world. Consequently, we have two puzzling and intertwined registers for this research: one is language in general, with the other being a ‘foreign’ language. Is it possible, then, that one language exists inside the other?

Within Farsi text-based artistic practices, new and unfamiliar texts that are positioned as works of art are perhaps initially read in terms of their apparent artistic style—materially and technically speaking—together with their visual elements. One example of a ‘golden trap’ is to use one’s origin language as a visual tool to depict traces of displacement within

⁸ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 63.

another geographical context. Rhythmic, decorative and compositional characteristics are enough to validate the work as ‘beautiful’ through Western eyes, whilst at the same time performing a ‘cliché’ to Eastern eyes. Perhaps, what is most threatening about this problematic condition is the precarious relationship between cultural identity and global contemporaneity. What we might identify as a strong and powerful example of art might remain far away from that which we explicitly comprehend, despite being in at least some sense implicitly, experientially meaningful.

To better understand this contradictory concern within the context of global uncertainty, it is important to briefly discuss certain aspects of the Farsi language. Farsi is a central element in traditional and contemporary Iranian art. It is multifaceted and often filled with symbols, allegories and philosophical perspectives associated with romantic poetry—sometimes operating as a metaphor for being intoxicated by the love of God. In this respect, Persian poetry from the thirteenth century predominantly considers allusive and multi-layered gestures as forces that contribute to a paradoxical paradigm for Farsi speakers, and even more so for non-Farsi speakers. These layers of Islamic mysticism and associated meanings are generally related to the aesthetic forms of Farsi script. Persian literature and Sufi poetry, in this regard, play a crucial role at the core of Iranian cultural identity and creative expression.

Principles of Persian calligraphy, such as *siyah mashq* (or black practice)—originally a repeated practice of calligraphers used for refining characters and letters regardless of meaning—is reformulated and reconfigured as a common manifestation of Iranian contemporary culture. In this respect, *Written Room* (1999-ongoing) by Parastou Forouhar (b.1962) as shown in Figure 2, represents the aesthetics and values of *siyah mashq*. This work relies on the incomprehensibility of Persian script through its use of pictorial design and ‘meaninglessness’ as an implicit form of political protest aimed at the current Iranian regime. In recalling Persian culture, Forouhar’s ornamental and wordless work carries no literal meaning, yet nevertheless reflects those forms underlining the non-functionality of her mother tongue.

The appearance of Farsi as a gestural text (here intended to be purposeless) signals an attempt to emphasise how language operates as a dysfunctional signifier. Within *Written Room*, Forouhar uses this methodology to connect and communicate her critical response with regards to the politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Dots and dashes are used as vocalised modes of writing from within the body of a non-readable script; they are used to convey a nomadic autobiography of Forouhar’s terrible and painful experience of the loss of

This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figure 2: Parastou Forouhar, *Written Room*, 1999-ongoing, synthetic polymer paint, dimensions variable, site-specific work for Asia Pacific Triennial 7 (APT7). Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art, QAGOMA Photography.

her parents at the hands of the Iranian government. An ineffability that is clearly beyond interpretation, language is here able to conjure the inexpressibility of such a harmful experience. Consequently, the work becomes a form of silent narrative and objectification against a particular political framework. This progressive exploration through parameters of language manifests Rūmī's poetry regarding the epigram "keeping silent as the tongue is harmful", and in another poem, "the language of the heart is silence".⁹

Such a nostalgic aesthetic aims to reconcile cultural specificities through processes of dislocation and adaptations from regional to globalised contemporary experiences; in so doing, Forouhar's project remains ambiguous and uncertain, blurring the boundaries between definitions of authenticity and representations of cliché. To utilise this strategy, Farsi text-art from Middle Eastern artists living in the West appears to be somewhat of a default modality for legitimising nomadic, nostalgic and artistic interventions. Put simply, it is a familiar way to reconcile and to adjust to a new cultural setting.

روزها فکر من این است و همه شب سختم

⁹ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 272.

که چرا غافل از احوال دل خویشتن ام
 از کجا آمده ام آمدنم بهر چه بود
 به کجا میروم آخر نمایم وطنم
 مانده ام سخت عجب کز چه سبب ساخت مرا
 یا چه بوده است مراد وی از این ساختنم
 آنچه از عالم علوی است من آن می گویم
 رخت خود باز بر آنم که همانجا فکنم
 مرغ باغ ملکوتن نیم از عالم خاک
 دو سه روزی قفسی ساخته اند از بدنم
 کیست آن گوش که او می شنود
 یا چه جان است نگویی که منش پیر هنم
 تا به تحقیق مرا منزل و ره نمایم
 یک دم آرام نگیرم نفسی دم نزنم
 می وصلم بچشان تا در زندان ابد
 به یکی عربده مستانه به هم در شکنم
 من به خود نامدم اینجا که به خود باز روم
 آنکه آورد مرا باز برد در وطنم
 تو میندار که من شعر به خود می گویم
 تا که هوشیارم و بیدار یکی دم نزنم

All day I think about it, then at night I say it.

Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing?

I have no idea.

*My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,
and I intend to end up there.*

This drunkenness began in some other tavern.

When I get back around to that place,

I'll be completely sober. Meanwhile,

I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.

They day is coming when I fly off,

but who is it now in my ear who hears my voice?

Who says words with my mouth?

Who looks out with my eyes? What is the soul?

I cannot stop asking.

If I could taste one sip of an answer,

I could break out of this prison for drunks.

I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave that way.

Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.

This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say.

I don't plan it.

When I'm outside the saying of it,

I get very quiet and rarely speak at all.¹⁰

1.3 Unlearning

It is broadly regarded as important in much contemporary art to be seen to express sensitivity towards one's origins of place and culture. To address the politics of difference, ethnicity

¹⁰ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks, with John Moyne, A.A. Arberry, Reynold Nicholson. (San Francisco: Harper, 1995). p. 2.

and race—and notably, to portray the way one narrates to the shadow of oneself—are crucial to a sense of belonging. Nomadic and spiritual inclinations as forms of artistic identity, adhere deeply to a metaphysical belief—through an otherwise irrational attempt to learn wisely—to disregard what we have learned *so far*. Such forms of artistic identity lead to a shared space that we may call ‘unlearning’. This problematic issue is not about neglecting and ignoring our logical understandings of the world, but rather to effectively discern and extensively position ourselves in the world through sensation and movement. Paradoxically, in order to effectively express our perceptions about ‘geographical displacement’ and ‘existential exile’, we need to resort to the use of language to define the nature of ‘un-language’ as a mode of expression through sensation.

In this regard, literature and poetry are key vehicles for bridging sensations and logical comprehension. In order to realise our sense of belonging within the multicultural fabric of the places in which we live, as migrants we are required to learn sensibly about our past and present cultural contexts, such that we might conceptually knock on an unknown door. Interpreting the definitions of the country or countries we belong to—in terms of their historical, political, economic, social and/or lingual systems, especially those as rich as Iran and Australia—is not an easy task.

Iranian-born Australian artist Hossein Valamanesh (b. 1949) is a contemporary figure who holds two nationalities. His sculptural and spatial installations are influenced by both

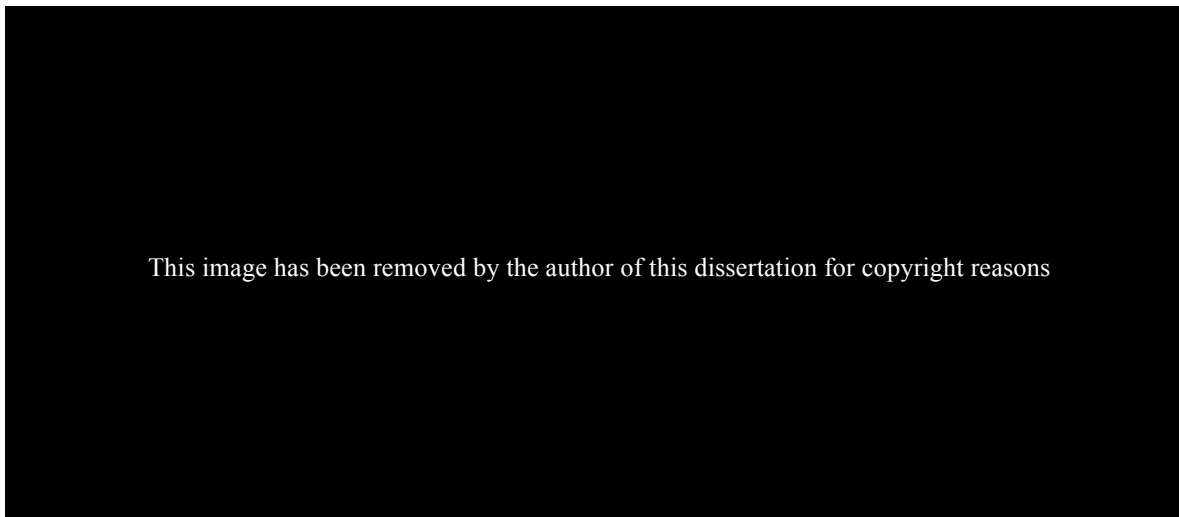


Figure 3: Hossein Valamanesh, *Where Do I Come From?*, 2013, digital print on canvas, 95.5 x 217.5 cm, edition of 2 of 6 +1AP.

the Aboriginal art of his second home, Australia, and the traditional iconography of his native Persia. Through the use of simplified ideas and concepts, Valamanesh’s work

concerns the nomadic challenges associated with philosophical approaches to displacement, and in so doing also link back to Rūmī’s poems. For example, Valamanesh’s *Where Do I Come From?* (2013) shown in Figure 3, depicts an interconnectedness using methodologies of both his own origin and the universality of the nomadic. On one hand, he deals with issues germane to universal migration, and in doing so, rejects restricted geographical boundaries. On the other hand, Valamanesh concentrates on the wider theoretical issue of existential exile. By deconstructing the world map—as an act of unlearning the world—and reconstructing it through Rūmī’s poetry together with geometrical Farsi text, the artist resonates with both memories of the homeland and puzzle making. The borders of continents, countries and cities are all fragmented and expanded; consequently, they operate as sites of playful juxtaposition for the potentially limited borders of language, and the possibility of text that is encapsulated with limitless meaning. Like any other text in which content escapes form through modes of illegibility, the format of this work literally becomes decorative to be reminiscent of romanticised, oriental visions. Although the title of the work is the English translation of a reflective analytical poem about being and sensation, the gestural attitude of the text refers to Islamic architecture, and therefore serves as an aesthetic of dislocation. The title *Where Do I Come From?* also reveals the politics of the artist’s identity as an element of illusion, to demonstrate a powerful intertwining of a current nomadism together with a poetic, philosophical tension. In Valamanesh’s artist statement, he claims:

The [...] map work *Where do I come from?* 2013, uses the landmasses of cut up maps to inscribe a line of a poem by Rumi that has a more non-geographical yearning for home and place of belonging. I have used the second line of a larger poem and below is a translation of the first two lines:

Everyday I meditate upon this, and every night I groan
 Why is my own existence to myself the least known?
 Whence have I come, why this coming here?
 Where to must I go, when will my home to me be shown?¹¹

Valamanesh’s artistic modes of representation in *Where Do I Come From?* might be analogised with what the Palestinian critic Edward Said once wrote in response to Mona Hatoum’s *Measures of Distance* (1988), as that of an “‘irreconcilability’ of strangeness and

¹¹ gagprojects, “Hossein Valamanesh 2015”, August 18, 2019. <http://gagprojects.com/index.php/artists/hossein-valamanesh/2015-2/>

familiarity that defines the experience of living away from one's homeland".¹² This perplexing strategy—one that oscillates simultaneously between 'strangeness' and 'familiarity' in Hatoum's work—could also be paralleled with Valamanesh's work. What remains compelling in this scenario is the call to unlearn, or perhaps relearn, that which is familiar. A false familiarisation (or true strangeness) towards the world map—one could see it as redemptive—signifies struggles in migration and nomadism. Yet according to Valamanesh, attitudes towards experiences of exile played out through an intentional rearrangement of the world map might possibly unfold a 'true' version in which the context of geological frontiers metaphorically adapts within the poetic and theoretical essence of being.

In order to acquire knowledge that can redirect what is being taught—that which draws upon a nomadic and emblematic sense of perceiving the notion of 'home'—one must obtain an understanding of conceptual open spaces as 'borderless' and 'timeless'. Such a region of openness for interpretation has the potential to engage dislocated artists. It is in this place that the principles of cultural diversity can overlap, with the experiences and interactions of the new culture being harnessed through a philosophical exploration related to meanings and positions of beings. Within the context of globalisation and universalism, there is an agency associated with this allegorical region. It is here that conceptual structures may be proposed for contemporary artists migrating to capitalist societies, who are struggling through new understandings of nation, ethnicity and identity. Additionally, unlearning strategies embolden artists to create alternatives within their respective practices that may unleash their imagination, and eventually surpass rigid and expected ethno-geographical frames. In order to fully arrive at this endless region—to symbolically *get into* the unknown path of imagination—we need to forget entire abstract, language-based notions and learnt concepts of 'home'. In doing so, we are able to fully express our sensibility through the nomadic realisation of what it is to be 'here' and 'now'. To rethink the logic of unlearning that is revealed in Rūmī's poetry, we might remind ourselves that *whoever brought me here will have to take me home*.¹³

هر لحظه نفس و نفس سر میکند در لامکان

¹² Edward Said, "The Art of Displacement: Mona Hatoum's logic of Irreconcilables", in *Mona Hatoum: The Entire World as a Foreign Land*, exh. cat., (Tate: London, 2000). p. 17.

¹³ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī, *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks, with John Moyne, A.A. Arberry, Reynold Nicholson. (San Francisco: Harper, 1995). p. 2.

*With each moment a soul and a spirit is setting off into the Void.*¹⁴

1.4 Voids

Where verbal language disables our ability to fully communicate, hypothetical ‘voids’ appear as empty spaces within dialogue. These voids may appear where there is nothing left to say and/or we are banned or inhibited for political reasons from raising certain concerns. Through voids we contemplate a conceptual and experimental model for rethinking and recuperating a ‘silent moment’ within the political potentialities of Iranian contemporary art. Given the inability of verbal language to counter powerful political and religious values, being able to contextualise visual (conceptual) language as a systematic form of expression—one that aims to revive and reformulate what is left in the voids and blank spaces—becomes essential. This could be understood as a continuous process of investigation, where this vacant, forbidden arena is perhaps even more problematic in the East.

If you were born in the Middle East, your work potentially translates as a political statement that may consequently receive socio-political credit. Although some Middle Eastern artists consciously seek to avoid being labelled in accordance with current political sensibilities, it can seem inevitable. Seen as heavily loaded with an ideological apparatus, Middle Eastern artefacts become a playful interest for the West. Where this trend often generates a sense of global contemporaneity, some Iranian artists intentionally give voice to their censored political concerns to directly critique Western approaches to the political values of the Middle East region. *Quod* (2010), a work by Barbad Golshiri (b. 1982) shown in Figure 4 below is inspired and influenced by Kazimir Malevich. It is a work that features Farsi words taken from the prison memories of A’ezam—a political prisoner of the 1980s who was degraded and tortured. Significantly, this work rejects any stereotypical aspects of calligraphic frameworks (for example, popular/fashionable styles and/or commercial Persian calligraphy). Instead, both the political format and the meaning of the text are hidden within the visual strategy of a diminishing rectangular spiral. Golshiri stresses that he uses Farsi text only when he wants it to be readable:

¹⁴ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 141.

The feeling is only accessible to the experience of reading the text to those who can read Farsi. Reading *Quod* (slang for ‘prison’) stimulates nausea, a feeling deeply rooted in the unique experience of reading it, and hence ‘only available to those who read Persian’.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the visual structure of the work conjures a sensation of being helplessly imprisoned in a dark, endless square cell.

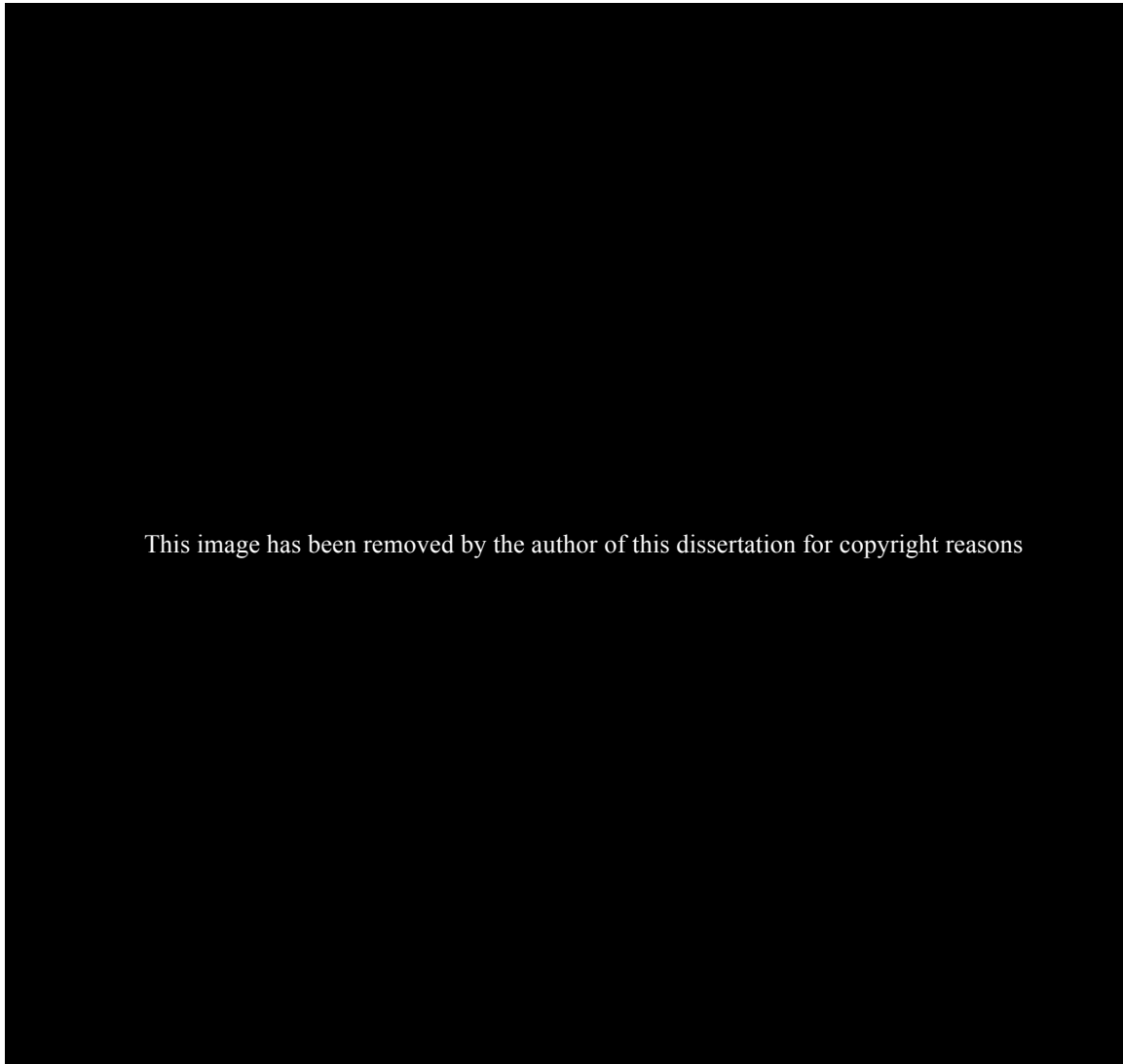


Figure 4: Barbad Golshiri, *Quod*, 2010, C-print on paper, 106.2 x 106.5 cm. Aaron Gallery, Tehran, British Museum Collection.

The dimensions of political identity that have shaped and continue to influence artistic practice are important issues in the Middle East. However, given that large institutions and auctioneers connected to the global art market tend to glorify and implicitly sponsor the

¹⁵ Golshiri’s statement, in Barbad Golshiri, *And I Regurgitate And I Gulp It Down* (exhibition catalogue), (Tehran: Aaron Gallery, 2011), p. 13.

normalisation of political problems of the East, Middle Eastern works of art can begin to lose their political meaning. Instead they tend to disseminate exotic and decorative shapes through a repetitive cycle of fetishised orientalism. This phenomenon is clearly evident in Farhad Moshiri's recent work *Eshgh (Love)* (2007). The work (not pictured) shows a peaceful and satisfying arrangement of textual forms, with neutral persona in themes inspired by the beauty of the Old Persian Empire. It is an image of the East that the West is drawn to consume.



This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figures 5 & 6: Barbad Golshiri, *The Untitled Tomb 1 & 2*, Iron, soot, 53 x 24 in. 2012, Edition of 3. Photo: Andreas Vesterlund, Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

Working with conceptions of voids is uncommon among a new generation of Iranian artists who express solidarity while living and working in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite incrementally catastrophic, geopolitical considerations—as well as concerns around freedom of speech—being an artist and maintaining the consistency to progress in contemporary art, specifically within an Iranian art system, is fundamental. In this context, another of Golshiri's work is worth considering. As shown in Figures 5 & 6, *The Untitled Tomb 1 & 2* (2012) is an ephemeral tombstone. Its iron stencil-cut text narrates the labyrinthine death of a

man who, for political reasons, could never have a tombstone on his grave. The piece is in Farsi script and reads:

Here Mim Kaf Alif [literally, his initials, M. K. A.] does not rest. He is dead. Layer beneath layer dead. Depth beyond depth. Each time deeper. Each death deeper. Stone upon stone. Each stone deeper. Each stone a death. Mim Kaf Mim Alif has no stone. Has never had. No trace of it (also to be understood as: so be it). Never in all deaths. December came and Mim Kaf Mim Alif was no longer [there]. Is not.¹⁶

This work of Golshiri's can be understood as a temporary but repeated ritual, frequently spoken by the family who commissioned the work at the site of Mim Kaf Mim Alif's grave. Each time the family visit the cemetery, they place the artwork on the grave and pour soot powder onto it. Depending on the strength of the wind, the dusty text will vanish. Significantly, the dust of Alif manifests quietly. Despite the Iranian regime having destroyed Alif's identity, his voice is metaphorically kept alive through this work, where his political considerations are retained as valid. In this way, Golshiri's work functions to give endurance to Alif as a significant political figure standing against the Iranian government.

In *The Untitled Tomb 1 & 2*, Golshiri effectively utilises Persian scripts as pictorial signifiers in both visually and politically-innovative ways. By employing more passive methods—that is, less politically overt and forced—Golshiri is commenting on the dissenting state of being of figures such as Alif and others with regards to Iran's contemporary political climate. In doing so, the artist is seeking to add emphasis to those alternative political identities that go beyond the boundaries of time and location, in order to produce liberal ways of thinking about the politics of an international art scene.

¹⁶ Emily Browne, "The Untitled Tomb", Sartle, 30 April 2019, <https://www.sartle.com/artwork/the-untitled-tomb-barbad-golshiri>

Chapter 2

Diasporic Territories ⇔ Inner Migrations

بگیر دامن لطفش که ناگهان بگریزد
ولی مکش تو چو تیرش که از کمان بگریزد
چه نقشها که ببازد چه حیلها که بسازد
بنقش حاضر باشد ز راه جان بگریزد
در آسمانش بجویی چو مه در آب بتابد
در آب چونکه درآیی باسماں بگریزد
ز لامکانش بجویی نشان دهد بمکانت
چو در مکانش بجویی بلامکان بگریزد
چو تیر می برود از کمان چو مرغ گمانت
یقین بدان که یقین وار از گمانت بگریزد
از این و آن بگریزم ز ترس نی ز ملولی
که آن نگار لطیفم از این و آن بگریزد
گریز پای چو بادم ز عشق گل چو صبا ام
گلی ز بیم خزانی ز بوستان بگریزد
چنان گریزد نامش چو قصد گفتن ببند
که گفت نیز نتایی که آن فلان بگریزد
چنان گریزد از تو که کژ نویسی نقشش
ز لوح نقش ببرد ز دل نشان بگریزد

*Grasp the skirt of his favour, for on a sudden he will flee;
But draw him not, as an arrow, for he will flee from the bow.
What delusive forms does he take, what tricks does he invent!
If he is present in forms, he will flee by the way of spirit.
Seek him in the sky, he shines in water, like the moon;
When you come into the water, he will flee to the sky.
Seek him in the placeless, he will sign you to place;
When you seek him in place, he will flee to the placeless.
As the arrow speeds from the bow, like the bird of your imagination,
Know that Absolute will certainly flee from the Imaginary.
I will flee from this and that, not for weariness, but for fear
That my gracious Beauty will flee from this and that.
As the wind I am fleet of foot, from love of the rose I am like the zephyr;
The rose in dread of autumn will flee from the garden.
His name will flee, when it sees an attempt at speech,
So that you cannot even say, 'Such an one will flee.'
He will flee from you, so that if you limn his picture,
The picture will fly from the tablet, the impression will flee from the soul.¹⁷*

2.1 Displacement

Viewed through the lens of twenty-first century displacement, the thematic of diaspora in contemporary art is increasingly shaped by inhibiting geopolitical circumstances. These

¹⁷ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). pp. 81-83.

circumstances affect artists, many of whom work with and/or are refugees dislocated by force, migrants dislocated by choice, and/or nomads dislocated out of a desire for escape. Today, given the realities of globalisation and the politic condition of much of the Middle East, some migrant artists use their relatively safer positions in adopted homes as platforms to raise awareness about the barbaric situations and terrible conditions facing asylum seekers. Within an incontrovertibly split consciousness, these artists are able to develop their concerns as advocates and activists, whilst at the same time longing for home.



This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figure 7: Hoda Afshar, *Portrait of Behrouz Boochani, Manus Island* (from the series *Remain*), 2018, pigment inkjet print, 80.0 x 66.0 cm, courtesy of the artist.

Melbourne-based, Iranian artist Hoda Afshar, for instance, stresses contemporary political conditions in both Iran and Australia. In the series *Remain* (2018) shown in Figure 7, Afshar produced a photographic portrait of Behrouz Boochani—a well-known Iranian-Kurdish journalist, poet, film producer and now refugee detained by the Australian government on Manus Island. While there is obviously no use of text in Afshar’s black and white photograph, the ineffable narrative played out through Boochani’s eyes is so powerful that it virtually activates a conspicuous absence of text.

Here, the question is not national identity per se, but rather an investigation into human rights through the lens of displacement. The key consideration here is: How is it possible to technically and effectively manipulate the aesthetics of art in order to deliver a sharp political message whilst also representing an aestheticised version of violent acts within contemporary political considerations? Perhaps any tangible distinction between poetic and political justification is blurred within the lived experiences of late capitalism. At this juncture, one might stop to ponder why Australian institutions actively promote Afshar while Boochani is still held in prolonged detention on Manus Island. Is this simply a latent reassurance for Australians: a strategy of support through which to absorb their feelings of collective national guilt and/or anxiety? Or is it, perhaps, a means of embracing a collapsing system through the endorsement of culturally diverse artists, which, as a result, can encourage ‘resistance’ against ‘freedom’ in order to achieve their political goals? These open-ended questions circling issues of displacement and exile remain unfixed and oscillate between nations, states and the politics of power in the twenty first century.

It is clear that the realities of displacement are directly linked to brutalities in global politics more generally. In this regard, the term ‘Islamic contemporary art’—sometimes crudely applied to both Muslim and non-Muslim artistic practices—offer a potential point of departure for creative arts in both the Middle East and its diasporic other. Paradoxically, by resisting the bind of relational identity, artists are still invariably understood as ‘not Muslim’. For dislocated Iranian artists who work with the thematic of diaspora in particular, the Islamic context is deeply complex and contradictory, particularly in regard to social and ecological issues. By default, artists become associated with layered cultural histories and any hint of Islamic influence can imply a link to Iranian contemporary art and cultural politics. Within this context, visual language is generally presented as a form of miniature painting and/or as hand-woven carpets. Most importantly, Arabic and Farsi calligraphy are,

This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figure 8: Shirin Neshat, *Speechless (Women of Allah series)*, 1996, Gelatine silver print, unique, 10 x 8 in. Photograph by Larry Barns; Courtesy of Gladstone New York and Brussels.

in this way, considered under an umbrella of Orientalism and traditions of Islamic art that predominantly relate to Middle Eastern art.

Geographically specific terminology—even when applied to diverse forms of aesthetic engagement and references to Islamic cultural heritage and identity—invariably introduce more stereotypes to contemporary global attitudes around multiplicity, diaspora and displacement. For some Iranian-born contemporary artists, this problematic and labyrinthine phenomenon—of being inextricably framed under the broad rubric of Islamic contemporary art—has the least intention to refer solely to Islam as a shared system of belief. Such a sweeping categorisation is more generally associated with factors of ethnicity, cultural background and various social and political considerations. As shown in Figure 8, *Speechless (Women of Allah series)* (1996) by Shirin Neshat (b. 1957) reveals that issues of religion and politics are often inseparable in the new regime; they are therefore, almost by default, proposed as precarious spaces for exchange. In this black and white photograph, Neshat—who was born in Qazvin, Iran and now lives and works in New York—inscribes poetry over the face of a woman as a repressed character that ultimately evokes issues of ideology, rather than nationality. Through the image of a veiled woman who is simultaneously presented as both victim and perpetrator (seemingly wearing a gun barrel as

an ornamental earring), Neshat works to evoke both hidden, implacable violence and complex intersections within which contradictions pertaining to gender inequality and identity can be loaded. In *Speechless*, Neshat incorporates her Farsi handwriting—in this instance correlated with traditions of calligraphy—in order to represent the transition of norms and values through the new endorsement of Islam that famously followed the Iranian Revolution of 1979. In this sense, her practice constitutes a vehicle for critical reconsiderations of political and ideological problems related to historical aftermaths, diaspora and exile.

Speechless was exhibited in *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking* at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 2006, alongside Ghada Amer, Hatoum, The Atlas Group/Walid Raad and others dealing with themes of displacement and hybrid cultural knowledge. Within these varied diasporic expressions, Neshat's work is politicised as a cultural genealogy that is evoked by the gaze of an unknown, intimidated female figure. Neshat's project has been successful in generating a sensitivity and a vulnerability from within her own region, in light of the transformative experiences of the Islamic revolution. *Speechless* confronts the willingness of a female persona to reveal her emotions and to seek a logic and desire for segregation justice, as a result of the social and political changes she has experienced. Although Neshat's photograph was essentially presented as part of a narrative questioning Islam and the politics of her native country, it nevertheless serves to articulate the experiential effects of dislocation and displacement within aspects of Iranian historical consciousness.

*O lovers, O lovers, it is time to abandon the world;
The drum of departure reaches my spiritual ear from heaven.*¹⁸

It is apparent that these two artists, Afshar and Neshat, are dealing with the processes and visualisations of displacement, as a way of demonstrating the need to abandon the 'belonging land' in a search for a new and different belonging land. As T. J. Demos noted in *The Ends of Exile: Towards a Coming Universality* (2009), by "reading exile exclusively in the negative, as solely melancholic or chaotic, its identity [is] metaphorically inscribed".¹⁹ Here, the thematic of displacement is perceived through a dynamic engagement with

¹⁸ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 141.

¹⁹ Demos, T. J. *The End of Exile: Towards a coming Universality*, Bourriaud, Nicolas Ed. Altermodern, (London: Tate Publishing, 2009.)

divergent cultural knowledge, whilst at the same time reinforcing one's own cultural, social and historical roots. In this sense, it is clear that a new generation of contemporary diasporic Iranian artists are finding new ways to discursively represent cultural production and narrative, through a consolidation of art and political intervention.

تو مبین جهان ز بیرون که جهان درون دیده است
چو دو دیده را ببستی ز جهان جهان نماند

*Look not on the world from outside, for the world is within the eye;
When you shut your eyes to the world, the world remains not.*²⁰

2.2 *Mirroring the Memoir*

How do we know or recognise an authentic or original context? Furthermore, what is a memoir and how do we meaningfully perceive diasporic activities in light of this form? It is certainly clear that *something* (possibly unnameable) is triggered through feelings related to loss of culture, heritage and associated memories. Here, memory performs as an active filter for replaying and manipulating the past in the present. Consequently, personal stories might be considered as a liquid medium for recording this (partly) remembered place, and by extension, operate as a systematic and multilayered source with which to reflect upon artistic practices. By reviewing and editing the stored information related to one's historical and geographical roots, a work of art might be understood as an implicit depiction of these emotional spheres. This, in part, extends the phenomenon of diaspora. Consequently, our recalling of narratives float across different spaces, times and places; in doing so, these narratives shift form and habitation. This is how 'the events/memoir' alternate to become nomadic in the land of memory. In this respect, the demand for 'originality' supposedly in artistic practice connects with the idea of the souvenir. A souvenir from the memory land metaphorically suggests an artistic object or concept that is new to its previous arrangement. Claire Bishop argues that "questions of originality and authorship are no longer the point; instead, the emphasis is on a meaningful recontextualisation of existing artefacts".²¹ While this may be true, the art of contemporary non-regional Iran often, at least in part, strives to be a replica of the old region, to assert and validate its authenticity within a global context.

²⁰ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 287.

²¹ Claire Bishop, "Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media". (*Artforum*, 51, 2012). p. 438.

The feeling of not belonging to an ethnic group, community, or particular nation can promote feelings of otherness and conditions of diasporic uncertainty. Against this backdrop, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's oeuvre provides an excellent example of a narrative displacement of otherness. Her mirror mosaic works (1974-2014)—known in the Persian tradition as *ayeneh-kari*—embody the ornamental expressions and Oriental iconography known in the West and are deeply embedded with Islamic ideology and architecture. In addition, her concern with reflection and fragmentation and diffraction through light is reminiscent of mystic Sufism.

*Your eye has not strength enough
To gaze at the burning sun,
But you can see its brilliant light
By watching its reflection
Mirrored in the water.*

*So the reflection of Absolute Being
Can be viewed in this mirror of Not-Being,
For non-existence, being opposite Reality.
Instantly catches its reflection.²²*

In Farmanfarmaian's early drawings, she merges geometric forms with Farsi text. She uses repetitive names as a means of patterning and wording, together with the swirling movements associated with Sufi dervish's rhythmic dance with divine love. Significantly, Farmanfarmaian's poetic and musical works of geometry manifest Rūmī's philosophy of unity, universality and non-dualism through an infinite imaginary.

Spaces of memory and displacement imply some kind of nomadic trajectory as a departure point for artists to variously express and construct personal understandings of 'distance' and 'separation'. By entering into this emotional diasporic space, the viewer can become spatially disorientated to the effect of potentially activating new ways to read and comprehend the register of loss—which is nevertheless often detached from any immediate register. However, the problematic issue here not only relies on a chain of elements regarding the nomadism of Iranian artist living abroad, but diasporic territories lead artists to search for their original roots in their hearts, as an inner form of migration.

The concept of 'inner migration' that can be activated by 'mirroring the memoir' can operate as a spiritual journey within the self. Here, according to Sufi's approach where the outside world is within our inside, individual creative structures become increasingly

²² Shabistari, Sa'd Ud Din Mahmud. "Reflection" in *The Secret Rose Garden*. Translated by Florence Lederer, (United State of America: Phanes Press, 2002), p. 52.

essential and lead to new methodological categories within our contemporary era. Consequently, such self-referential qualities become a key conceptual premise in the articulation of diaspora through contemporary artistic practice. Through the presumed demands for cultural production, displaced artists are provisionally offering memories as reflective vehicles through which to represent both inner and external conflicted worlds.

چه تدبیرای مسلمانان که من خود را نمی دانم
 نه ترسا نه یهودم من نه گبرم نه مسلمانم
 نه شرقیم نه غربیم نه بریم نه بحریم
 نه از کان طبیعیم نه از افلاک گردانم
 نه از خاکم نه از آیم نه از بادم نه از آتش
 نه از عرشم نه از فرشم نه از کونم نه از کانم
 نه از هندم نه از چینم نه از بلغار و سقیسنم
 نه از ملک عراقینم نه از خاک خراسانم
 نه از دنیی نه از عقبی نه از جنت نه از دوزخ
 نه از آدم نه از حوا نه از فردوس و رضوانم
 مکانم لامکان باشد نشانم بی نشان باشد
 نه تن باشد نه جان باشد که من از جان جانانم

*What is to be done, O Moslems? for I do not recognise myself.
 I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem.
 I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea;
 I am not of Nature's mint, nor of the circling heavens.
 I am not of earth, nor of water, nor of air, nor of fire;
 I am not of the empyrean, nor of the dust, nor of the existence, nor of entity.
 I am not of India, nor of China, nor of Bulgaria, nor of Saqsīn;
 I am not of the kingdom of 'Irāqain, nor of the country of Khorāsān.
 I am not of this world, nor of the next, nor of Paradise, nor of Hell;
 I am not of Adam, nor of Eve, nor of Eden and Rizwān.
 My place is the placeless, my trace is the Traceless;
 'Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.²³*

2.3 Separation ⇔ Exclusion

In between shades of 'separation' and 'exclusion' is a space that we may recognise as *isolation*. Isolation can be activated through loneliness and the experience of being an outsider. Here, it is important to distinguish between a choice to be alone and the experience of being classified as an outsider. Feeling neglected or excluded within a social community is a consistent feature for both domestic and diasporic Iranian arts.

In claiming the social status of an outsider, the conceptual parameters of diaspora narratives in contemporary art become extensively activated. Chohreh Feyzjdjou (b. 1955-

²³ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 125.



This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figure 9: Chohreh Feyzjou, *Product of Chohreh Feyzjou*, 1989-93, black glue, black wax, pigment, dimensions variable, installation view, Grey Art Gallery.

1996) was a Jewish-born Iranian artist who left Iran in the 1970s to live and work predominantly in Paris. In the *Product of Chohreh Feyzjou* (1989-93) shown in Figure 9, the artist re-presents an accumulated series of visibly aged, blackened older artworks that stand in as a private archive, whilst suggesting an abandoned store to gesture to notions of consumerism. Her rolled up pieces, piled up frames and wrapped up and over-painted canvases—which are treated by covering them in black pigment and dominated by rusty scaffolds—question identity and origins in innovative ways. No element remains identifiable in this installation of Feyzjou's; each component reflects the absence of the darkened past and memory of loss which requires careful consideration. Within her oeuvre, the viewer can merely experience the work from the surface of the outside; each object is barely distinguishable and hardly visible. Hence, viewers must effectively shift their position in order to become an outsider. The nomadic function of Feyzjou's work—between the incomprehensibility of the older layers via a new re-presentation of *Product of Chohreh Feyzjou*—together with its unfamiliarity, indicate that the work of art stays untouched and undiscovered. Consequently, the viewer and the work of art linger in mutual exchange as

outsiders. This strategy might be described as ‘awkwardness’ or ‘otherness’, the result of which is, paradoxically, a shared feeling of not-being-with-others. Thus, ‘the remembrance’ is the crucial conception that leads to forced amnesic dimensions here, where the relationship between traces of the past, disappearance, the unseen, and the collective memory all unfold into a generic category of separation and exclusion.

There is a current dilemma within contemporary art that operates via a logic of ‘exclusion’, as embedded within larger concerns of ‘otherness’. Discourses surrounding Iranian contemporary art operate in a somewhat analogous manner to that of Western readings of contemporary African art. Cameroonian philosopher Achille Mbembe claimed that Western discourse on Africa was founded as something strange and abandoned. As Mbembe states, it is in “relation to Africa that the notion of ‘absolute otherness’ has been taken farthest”.²⁴ This strange and inexplicable otherness brings layers of alternative possibilities to art. Western advocates, however, repeatedly challenge the contents, forms and materials of these artworks—works that have been created by artists from different cultural backgrounds to the highest standards of global contemporary frameworks. These strangers as artists (we might find it difficult to pronounce their names properly and correctly) often make enigmatic works strategically linked to their cultural and historical heritage (so that we recognise them as ‘other’ through our own visual frames of perception). Yet this response belies deeper understandings than that of a default, regarding non-familiarity of meanings and objects through a reductionist lens of ‘exclusion’.

The descriptive feeling of such foreign artworks is reminiscent of *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger/The Outsider*) (1942) by Albert Camus. How and why is this ‘absolute otherness’ injected into art by Western critics and curators, and promoted by institutions? Where high-standard institutions occasionally acknowledge these outsiders and abandoned artists—often deliberately supporting and encouraging their ‘bizarre’ creative practices—the strange practices that regularly correlate with their culture are predominantly *against* the politics of their own regions. By welcoming the activities of these artists within biennales and other major art events, critics and curators seem to ethically stress upon risk-taking within contemporary art. It is apparent, however, that many critics and curators are merely echoing a call for a hollowed empathy in appealing to those excluded people from the other side of the world. In doing so, many art world figures are merely showing off their liberated and empowered voices within globally visible arenas. The strange and uncanny nature of these

²⁴ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). pp. 18-23.

outcomes produce particular forms of alienation in terms of how contemporary artists of Middle Eastern backgrounds are intersecting at the centre. This becomes a matter of so-called Orientalism, as Said argues, with regards to the furnishing of Western attitudes and false assumptions about the Middle East. However, for the West, a more interesting issue is the still-emerging project of declaring previous years of negligence by reconsidering ethics, moralities and principles of non-Western artistic territories now. As Camus describes in the first sentences of *L'Étranger*: “Aujourd'hui, maman est morte. Ou peut-être hier, je ne sais pas” / “My mother died today. Or maybe yesterday, I don't know”.²⁵ This passage is an intriguing attempt at refusing to express shame and regret. By ignoring social norms, the main character, Meursault, becomes indifferent through a particular declaration of a felt sensation regarding his mother's death. As a result, Meursault remains ‘strange’ and ‘alienated’ to himself. This existential-psychoanalytic of Camus—which is embedded in the idea of objectification as a vital factor concerning his own coldness to his lover, and even emotionlessness to his death—is an ambivalent way to understand the Western approach regrading disconnection and detachment.

In this sense, the self-image of Middle Eastern/non-white artists becomes more destructive, for they are both confronting their collective identity and seeking an individual voice. This speculation can be viewed as explicit for Iranian contemporary artists who experienced different political, social and moral values in short periods of time—specifically before and after the Islamic revolution. Thus, the concept of a destructive-self-image is increasingly developed within contemporary artistic practice for immigrated Iranian artists. These artists both struggle to return to the legacies of their heritage(s), while deepening their knowledge of notions of ‘expelled’. Indeed, most of the Iranian art systems concern their strangeness as an active model to emphasise the contemporary scenes. Certainly, this signals an inclination toward a narrative structure of separation and exclusion in creating a work of art. The tendency for separation is assumed collectively as a ‘deconstructive’ mode, one that perhaps appeals to experiences of ‘otherness’. Furthermore, this mode is able to incorporate elements of an artwork created by individuals who reject conformity to social norms. What is most critical for these artists, however, is that which lies in their attempts to work hard to find their own unique ways of manifestation and presentation of their artistic practice within the contemporary art world.

²⁵ Albert Camus, *L'Étranger*. (Paris: Les Éditions Gallimard, 1942). p. 9.

As we consider the problems of separation and exclusion, we also find that traditional language is not necessarily essential for connecting to others. On the one hand, feeling excluded from a group of people can be understood through a framing of geographical and cultural factors. On the other hand (at a larger scale), such experiences of exclusion are more related to psychoanalytic understandings of what it is to be human, as we physically detach from our ‘mothers’ the moment we are born to this world. Through Rūmī’s poetic philosophy, we are separated from the source of love; by acknowledging the pain through spiritual healing, however, we gain new wisdom. For William C. Chittick:

Rumi considers this awareness of pain (dard) as the doorway to the path of love and he advises us, “Seek pain, pain, pain, pain!” (M VI 4304). Man cannot truly understand the meaning of pain and “suffering” (ranj) until he becomes aware of his state of separation. The more aware he is, the more he suffers.²⁶

In this sense we might simply say that in being separated from the *Beloved*, the experience of being ‘excluded’ from our political borders is exacerbated.

²⁶ William C. Chittick, *The Sufi path of Love: The Spiritual teaching of Rumi*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983). p. 237.

Chapter 3

Concrete Intimacy

هر نفس آواز عشق میرسد از چپ و راست
ما بفلک میرویم عزم تماشا کراست
ما بفلک بوده ایم یار ملک بوده ایم
باز همانجا رویم خواجه که آن شهر ماست
خود ز فلک برتریم وز ملک افزونتریم
زین دو چرا نگذریم منزل ما کیریاست
عالم خاک از کجا گوهر پاک از کجا
گرچه فرود آمدیم باز دویم این چه جاست

Every moment the voice of Love is coming from left and right.

We are bound for heaven: who has a mind to sight-seeing?

We have been in heaven, we have been friends of the angels;

Thither, sire, let us return, for that is our country.

We are even higher than heaven and more than the angels;

Why pass we not beyond these twain? Our goal is majesty supreme.

How different a source have the world of dust and the pure substance!

Tho' we came down, let us haste back-what place is this?²⁷

3.1 Mystical Love ⇔ Romantic Exile

Mystical love can be understood as an ineffable feeling and/or relationship between two or more entities or things. The exploration of emotions can occur between artistic objects, and/or between the object and its occupied space. Additionally, it could be said that an object in itself as a 'being'—as seen through a viewer's eyes—can be suggestive of an investigation into mystical love. The indefinable bond in artistic practice is mystical—not only because it is invisible, but rather because it is considered a constellation of irrationality. Furthermore, artistic practice consists of a series of intertwined sensations in the spiritual apprehension of truths, beyond the intellectual effort that often provides a visual shock or surprise for an audience encountering it. According to Sufi tradition, everything in the universe lies at the core of *Eshgh* or *Ishq* عشق (love, passion, wish, desire, seeking). Hence, the imperceptible link in any form of creative practice could be based on love and sensation. Mystical threads of love can be viewed by highlighting the key epistemology of Persian literature in the notion of *Naz* ناز (coquetry as a form of delicate and subtle flirtation); through the characteristics of *Máashooq/Mashough* or *Mā'sūq* معشوق (beloved); and through

²⁷ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 33.

Niyaz نیاز (a strong desire, need, wish, urge to express love) toward an *Ashegh* عاشق (lover) as personification.

The immigrant female artist Koushna Navabi (b. 1962) left Iran in 1979 to live in New York and Los Angeles and currently lives and works in London. Her work illustrates a disposition of sensibility with regards to mystical and romantic relations in artistic embodiment. In *THE SPARK IS YOU: Parasol unit in Venice* exhibition (2019)—a work



This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figure 10: Koushna Navabi, *Biskweet-e Mādar*, concrete and embroidery, dimensions variable, installation view, Parasol Unit, Venice Biennale, 2019.

from which is shown in Figure 10—the artist has created a giant box of *Biskweet-e Mādar* (Mother Biscuits). The work fabricates, through material use of concrete, a traditional Iranian family brand of biscuits—the objects of which are rendered strangely similar to tombstones. As part of this same installation, Navabi has presented a stretcher with embroidered fabric, revealing an image of a mother holding a baby. The image incorporates Farsi advertising text also, to extend the representation of the iconic biscuit product. The work is concealed in a way that is consistent with how Middle Eastern people protect the coffins of their deceased by draping fabric with elaborated embroidery over them. Correspondingly, Navabi has depicted and enlarged historical imagery used in *Biskweet-e Mādar* marketing, placing it against the gallery wall among the revealed biscuits. Each stone

biscuit has a cut-out Farsi text of *Mādar* مادر (mother) on it to represent a manifestation of mystical love.

Remote sensing in memory and remembering has a tendency to implicitly link gaps between interpretations of the past with understandings of current realities. In this respect, *Mādar*'s imagery in the depiction of the whole package is considered a source of love; it is conceptually portrayed in a state of *Māashooq* (beloved), where it also correlates with *Naz*—coquetry as a form of delicate and subtle flirtation. Other leftover concrete biscuits that make up the installation are supposedly realised as *Ashegh*—lover(s) associated with *Niyaz*, the desire to express love—which are expressed in longing to reunite with their beloved. The artistic project of Nabavi hypothetically proposes a form of intimacy as an indication of 'Mystical love' or 'Romantic exile' through the enigmatic and perplexing connection between the concealing box and revealing concretes. In addition, there is an interesting paradox at play in the inexplicable and contemplative relationship between childhood memories—in replaying the sense one has of eating and tasting the crunch of sweet biscuits in Iran—against the enlarged representation of a rendered memory in gigantic concrete stones in Italy. Nabavi's work also reminds us of the ways sponge cake evokes childhood memories for French novelist Marcel Proust in *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) (1913). In Nabavi's installation, time and memory are neither lost nor disappearing, but rather repositioned and reformatted in another unusual and odd means of demonstration. Put simply, the piece outlines the tenderness of childhood remembrance that can easily be transformed into overwhelming experiences. Here, soft memories transcend metaphorically into the physicality of harsh and strict facts related to an absolute state of negation. Through the manipulation of memory—through the use of substitute and unreal imagery to replace what has truly happened in reality—and in using this strategy in a process of self-defence as a principal tool to lead into the experiencing of a denial mechanism, rigid and severe sensations are produced. These relate to a series of propositions: that the 'mother is not here; she has never left; she has never come back'—scenarios that are too traumatic to accept *in reality*. In this way, the artist presents to us a disturbing arrangement of concrete biscuits as a way of embracing the rejection of accepting the fact that a 'mother once lived here', as communicated through the use of contextual, psychoanalytic principles.

Here, the concept of 'mother' could be effectively juxtaposed with the concept of 'land'. The abandoning sentiment between the above concerns is impressive in Nabavi's art practice. The way she manages to conceptually resolve the work in parallel notions about 'mother' and 'the belonging land' are interesting. The perception of these two ideas reside as

vital and dynamic triggers for our ability to remember who we are and where we come from. *Biskweet-e Mādar* essentially resists being framed in melancholic categorisation, which is embedded within a larger concern with ‘nostalgia’. What is relatively provocative here is Nabavi’s treatment of the familiar concept of separation—from one’s mother and/or land of belonging—within the frame of an unfamiliar impossibility of biting into huge concrete stones that presumably promise a sweet outcome. Facing to leave one’s mother and/or land of belonging are the challenging facts of life for the immigrant and/or refugee, when learning to accept that this reality is so painful to digest.

Navabi’s art project for *THE SPARK IS YOU: Parasol unit in Venice* exhibition carries a sense of Iranian identity and reflection upon memories together with her own personal experiences. Through such processes of connecting sensation, Iranians are able to relate to her narratives via a site of collective memory; further, they can map her emotions in order to recall the past and represent it through framings of exile in the present.

خنک آن دم که نشستیم در ایوان من و تو
 بدو نقش و بدو صورت بیکی جان من و تو
 رنگ باغ و دم مرغان بدهد آب حیات
 آن زمانی که در آیم بیستان من و تو
 اختران فلک آیند بنظاره ما
 مه خود را بنماییم بایشان من و تو
 من و تو بی من و تو جمع شویم از سر ذوق
 خوش و فارق ز خرافات پریشان من و تو
 طوطیان فلکی جمله جگر خوار شوند
 در مقامی که بخندیم بر آن سان من و تو
 این عجیتر که من و تو بیکی کنج اینجا
 هم در این دم بعراقیم و خراسان من و تو

*Happy the moment when we are seated in the palace, thou and I,
 With two forms and with two figures but with one soul, thou and I.
 The colours of the grove and the voice of the birds will bestow immortality
 At the time when we come into the garden thou and I.
 The stars of heaven will come to gaze upon us;
 We shall show them the moon itself, thou and I.
 Thou and I individuals no more, shall be mingled in ecstasy,
 Joyful, and secure from foolish babble, thou and I.
 All the bright-plumed birds of heaven will devour their hearts with envy
 In the place where we shall laugh in such a fashion, thou and I.
 This is the greatest wonder, that thou and I sitting here in the same nook,
 Are at this moment both in ‘Irāq and Khorāsān, thou and I.²⁸*

3.2 Voyage to the Beloved

²⁸ Ibid. p. 153.

Voyage to the *Beloved* is presented as a spiritual trip for the seeker to move toward a higher state of consciousness; it is an awakening mode of being used for gaining guidance and wisdom from the Divine love. This journey is set through the ritual dance of Sama—of the whirling dervishes of Iran—as an active meditation in abandoning one’s ego and deepening the Sufi’s understanding of ‘being’ through remembrance of the *Beloved*. The challenge here becomes one of how to effectively overlap this Old Persian religious concept within Islamic ideological formulations, through the discursive apparatus of contemporary art via languages of diaspora, migration and exile.

To undertake the mystical voyage known as Solūk سلوک , a perceptual attempt must be made to look into the artistic practice of Shirazeh Houshiary (b. 1955)—one that resides at the centre of the metaphorical, transcendental trip. The duality of black and white in Houshiary’s methodology blend in the painting *Fine Frenzy* (2004) shown in Figure 11. Through the intricate applications of a white pencil, a black painting appears to be in a process of traveling toward whiteness. The expansion of a repeated Arabic word spinning out loses its visual form and dissolves into its transcendental meaning. During the experimental process, the word is erased and then erased again until the gestural effects obscure the letters altogether. Moreover, its rhythmical and flowing dancing lines move around the white dot—a cosmic approach symbolically underlying a Sufi’s voyage to the *Beloved*.

*O Soul, seek the Beloved, O friend, seek the Friend.*²⁹

²⁹ Ibid. p. 141.

This image has been removed by the author of this dissertation for copyright reasons

Figure 11: Shirazeh Houshiary, *Fine Frenzy*, 2004, black and white Aquacryl, white pencil and ink on canvas, 6' 2 3/16" x 6' 2 3/16" (190 x 190 cm). Photograph: courtesy Lisson Gallery, London Audio courtesy of Acoustiguide.

Unsurprisingly, the poetic gesture and pictorial text shown in *Fine Frenzy* are capable of transcending the politics of location and religious values in the vocabulary of exile. It is in this regard that the work was exhibited in *Without Boundary: Seventeen Ways of Looking*, curated by Fereshteh Daftari at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York in 2007. The show concentrated on the issue of 'exile' while endeavouring to reframe the notion of Islamic art through contemporary and cross-cultural contexts. In Houshiary's work, it appears that the viewer is looking into the centre, at the spectacular bright spot under a dark dome, through the circular motion of the word. This view signifies the idea of distance, deportation and expatriation where the entry and exit points merge together. In *Fine Frenzy*,

monochrome and formless abstract painting is used to create an intimate push and pull force between the lover (black) and the beloved (white). This nexus establishes what is perhaps a meeting point in which the non-existence begs for existence, and the appearance begs for non-appearance.

For Maryam Ekhtiar, senior research associate in the Department of Islamic Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art:

This work alludes to the mystical poetry of the Persian master Jalal al-Din Rumi, who frequently refers to “veiling” and “revealing” as dual metaphors for manifestations of the Divine. Here, outer appearance is understood as a veil hiding a deeper reality.³⁰

Another aspect of *Fine Frenzy* that is also interlaced with text-based forms is the relationship between language and impulse. Experiencing the work is both a pre-semiotic and pre-symbolic experience. Where Bulgarian-French philosopher Julia Kristeva was concerned with linking semiotics as the study of sign systems and their codes together with impulses, she emphasised the tendency of signifying systems to determine meaning. In this work, however, meaning cannot be grasped and translated in relation to cultural context but rather in the way that semiotic aspects of language manifest intentionality, through the application of brush stroke and tone. Structuralist and symbolic-semiotic approaches are indirectly used in Houshiary’s creative, textual practice to support the visual aspects of the work; symbolically this treatment represents the unification of particles, where this visual methodology can be seen under the dome of Islamic mosques. In considering the ego and the inner drive on Freudian psychoanalytic terms, Houshiary relates her work to theories of the unconscious and sublimation affect by suggesting the meaning of unions within signs. By extension, through Lacanian formulations of desire that emerge as *lack*³¹—in relation to the absence of the signifier, prior to language and perception formation—the artist is reiterating Lacan’s point of view that the unconscious is structured like a language. Like the unconscious, language can also be repressed in a stimulating *mise en scène* of oversaturating pictorial (seemingly textual) features and semiotic sign-systems.³² In order to establish or recuperate meaning, the unceasing operation of drives through rules of language in *Fine Frenzy* is actually manifested via an absence of text. This is despite the fact that the textual

³⁰Maryam Ekhtiar, “caa.reviews”, A Publication of the College Art Association, 11 August 2019, <http://www.caareviews.org/reviews/1013#.XU6ZPiN94y4>

³¹ Estelle, Barrett *Kristeva Reframed*, (New York: L.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 35-36.

³² Ibid, pp. 37-40.

gesture remains a suppressed impulse within the pre-symbolic perception of the work—as a gesture of nothingness or as something not-to-be-read. In this way, the meaning of Houshiary’s art practice, generally speaking, is concealed within its pre-semiotic elements.

To articulate the intriguing and complicated concept of ‘exile/diaspora’ through the lens of Rūmī’s poetics, one needs to travel beyond geographic boundaries. Instead, one must seek to translate the meaning of ‘not belonging’ from a specifically-shaped cultural identity, in the direction of a floating, mystical and artistic journey. This nomadic attitude serves as a poetic model within Houshiary’s artistic practice. As it is embedded in the philosophy of Sufism, the notion of the voyage exists within speculative modes of interconnectivity—between contexts of obscuring in order to disclose, and revealing in order to conceal. These are the primary, multifaceted concepts that are revealed about the Truth, with regards to how one obtains an emblematic vagabond passport to voyage to the *Beloved*.

بگیر دامن لطفش که ناگهان بگریزد
ولی مکش تو چو تیرش که از کمان بگریزد
چه نقشها که بیازد چه حیلها که بسازد
بنقش حاضر باشد ز راه جان بگریزد
در آسمانش بجویی چو مه در آب بتابد
در آب چونکه درآیی باسماں بگریزد
ز لامکانش بجویی نشان دهد بمکانت
چو در مکانش بجویی بلامکان بگریزد
چو تیر می برود از کمان چو مرغ گمانت
یقین بدان که یقین وار از گمانت بگریزد
از این و آن بگریزم ز ترس نی ز ملولی
که آن نگار لطیفم از این و آن بگریزد
گریز پای چو بادم ز عشق گل چو صبا ام
گلی ز بیم خزانی ز بوستان بگریزد
چنان گریزد نامش چو قصد گفتن ببند
که گفت نیز نتابی که آن فلان بگریزد
چنان گریزد از تو که کز نویسی نقشش
ز لوح نقش بپرد ز دل نشان بگریزد

*Grasp the skirt of his favour, for on a sudden he will flee;
But draw him not, as an arrow, for he will flee from the bow.
What delusive forms does he take, what tricks does he invent!
If he is present in forms, he will flee by the way of spirit.
Seek him in the sky, he shines in water, like the moon;
When you come into the water, he will flee to the sky.
Seek him in the placeless, he will sign you to place;
When you seek him in place, he will flee to the placeless.
As the arrow speeds from the bow, like the bird of your imagination,
Know that Absolute will certainly flee from the Imaginary.
I will flee from this and that, not for weariness, but for fear
That my gracious Beauty will flee from this and that.
As the wind I am fleet of foot, from love of the rose I am like the zephyr;
The rose in dread of autumn will flee from the garden.
His name will flee, when it sees an attempt at speech,*

*So that you cannot even say, 'Such an one will flee.'
He will flee from you, so that if you limn his picture,
The picture will fly from the tablet, the impression will flee from the soul.³³*

3.3a *Existential Vacuum: Part One—Australia*

Investigation will now turn to an account of the author's own studio-based explorations, together with an account of developing and testing some of the ideas developed in this dissertation, across a series of related exhibition outcomes.

The viewer enters a dark room to discover the room full of text and music. In the middle of the room there is a big black octagonal architectural object that appears to emanate a warm light and strange sound from within it. It seems that the room one is in is full of a gold, translucent dust, along with odd whispers, and the slow-burnt smell of wood. The octagonal architectural object is surrounded by handwritten black acrylic gestural text that almost covers the whole room. It appears that all the floor words are circulating around the octagonal shape, stepping out of the dance floor and twirling onto the walls, and then disappeared in the ceiling. Given that we cannot physically access the octagon, we wander around the black structure whilst walking upon the unknown text, all the while listening to an uncanny melody—perhaps unconsciously moving within the rhythm of the words like whirling dervishes dancing with the unseen mystery in the dark. This is how *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* was born.

To adequately understand some of the key features of the work, some explanatory detail is necessary where each of the material elements of the work is the embodiment of a Sufi metaphor. First the author will describe the octagonal structure of *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* and subsequently the text and sound components of the piece. Next, she will address the work in total—a methodology that is symbolically reminiscent of Rūmī and Shams relationship through the spectrum of Eastern philosophic voices.

The work's octagonal solid structure consists of eight wooden panels. Each side is around 1m wide x 2m high, and it exists without any roof or floor. The frame of each of the panels is constructed from pine, which is then clad with 3mm thick MDF timber. The width of the structure is approximately 2.5m from opposite sides, with each frame being bolted together from the inside. The outside frame has fine, sharp edges that are painted matte

³³ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). pp. 81-83.

black. One of the panels is slightly shorter than the others and is nailed to the structure by two hinges to give the appearance of a hidden, closed door. This is how we see the emergence of a warm yellowish light on the floor. Given that the octagon does not have a roof, the light—which is the only light source in the room—also illuminates the ceiling of the gallery space, enabling us to see the text also.

The text component of this work plays a crucial role overall. It is clear that the text is some sort of Farsi script written on the walls and on the gallery floor with black acrylic paint. However, in terms of its form and content, this Farsi is quite different from standard Farsi. Indeed, the style is fairly unique in its own way of unveiling Farsi, and simultaneously intends to reject Farsi. For a better understanding of the logic of Farsi language, an explanation of the key points is essential. Where most of the Farsi alphabet consists of dots that sit above or below corresponding letters, there is no use of dots in the Farsi script applied as part of this installation. Through an effortless, continuous demonstration of language that relies only on the body of the Farsi words, there is a literary indication of loss that translates symbolically as displaced bodies. Without the additional disruption that would exist through the placing of appropriate dots, issues of speed and time are emphasised conceptually and materially through the composition of the installation. Where the focus of this work is on following an unconscious mode of writing, it was necessary that the text was to be written fast and rhythmically. In order to create a sense of ‘ephemeral infinity’, acts of writing were performed with no consideration for boundaries—in terms, at least, of how to treat the scripts. Within the dislocated bodies of words and their phrases, and through the absence of the dotting, this text becomes a conundrum for Farsi speakers, in its mystery, playfulness and unidentified characteristics. For this reason and more, this text can be read (for all audiences) with general discomfort and unease.

The personal diaristic handwriting style employed in this work is another element that displaces traditional Persian aesthetic values. Nevertheless, some effort is witnessed through the repetition of letters that are flowing smoothly throughout the gallery space. The phrases and sentences used in this work are presented in different sizes and through various formats and models, consequently enacting a potentiality for infinite meaning. To offer some examples of the specific treatment of words, phrases and sentences, some: aimlessly echo other words; are visually responsive to others; are meaningfully gathered in a group; are dominant on top of others; are expressively circulating around the octagon; are softly placed within a spiral form; are vaguely fading away; are hardly readable; are carefully washed off etc. This varied conceptual and experimental methodology has no regard for accepting

traditional Farsi rules and regulations. It is also obvious that each of these bodies of text that exist within a specific coding system have been written with different sized brushes—as big, small, bold, italic text and so on. Despite this, each of the bodies of text still operate as one integrated work of art. Combined limitlessly though the use of loose and robust gestures, this text is, for the Farsi reader, placed in a mode of concealing, rather than revealing meaning. Where the density of applied acrylic changes depending on the use of more or less water, the text’s motion literally becomes stronger or weaker accordingly—a material approach used to fabricate a sense of visual distance. Indicating relative coordinates of near and far, the text illustrates an implicit sense of perspective to develop its own manifestation as a landscape of words and meanings.

Each embodied fragment of text in *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* is metaphorically suggested as kinds of other beings searching for their Being/*Beloved*, in the same way that the exiled words are searching for their big black dot. The octagon shape of this work refers to a symbolic self-illuminated dot that responds and reflects to all the vocabularies, nouns, adjectives, adverbs and meanings that work to embrace the answers and solutions. Hence, the mystic text in the dark has emerged here to be a small frame of a bigger picture that resonates with the dimensions of *taṣawwuf* (Islamic mysticism). It is one in which love describes a spiritual passage from the dark paths of the soul, to the land of light. From a Sufi perspective, the concept of light as a metaphysical entity is implied in the perception of ‘intuition/true knowledge’. The Persian philosopher Suhrawardī (1154-1191), as influenced by Al-Ghazālī (1058-1111)—also known as Shaykh al-*ishrāq*, the Master of Illumination—claims ‘light’ as the essence and the absolute source of an ultimate consciousness that can reveal the creator of the world. Suhrawardī declares light as the symbol of ‘wisdom’, with Allah being the origin of supreme light: “The only true light is His light. Everything is His light – or, rather, He is everything ... [T]here is no light except His light”.³⁴

According to Islamic theology, the notion of light from Suhrawardī’s point of view has been significant to the conception of this installation. Additionally, the use of materials in the work and the situations of each element are essential in translating the idea of a glowing light as a metaphor for His light. By centralising the octagon as the source of light in the gallery—and in making it enclosed and inaccessible to reach—the attempt is to conceptually stresses on Suhrawardī’s philosophy of illumination.

³⁴ Timothy Gianotti, *al-Ghazālī’s Unspeakable Doctrine of the Soul: Unveiling the Esoteric Psychology of the Iḥyā’*, (Brill: Leiden, Boston, Köln, 2001). p. 20.

Also intertwined with the installation is the profound spiritual relationship between Shams-i Tabrīzī (1185-1248) and Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī (1207-1273) known as Mevlânâ/Mawlânâ. Here, the octagonal structure is explicitly referencing Shams as the *Beloved*/origin of light for Rūmī's soul.³⁵ The surrounded mystical Farsi text is implicitly referring to Rūmī's masterpiece *Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz or Dīvān-e Šams-e Tabrīzī*. The aesthetic experience that leads to the purpose of exploring 'love' circulating around the 'Beloved'—which can be seen solely through the shining light of the *Beloved*—indicates the disappearance and/or concealment of the *Beloved* (Shams) that leads to an essential array of mystical poetry. The language of 'love' and 'separation' literally replicate the nomadic characteristics of poetry and prose narratives. The visual appearance of the author's text is an attempt at finding ways of presenting this romantic manifestation without essentially knowing the language to understand what has been written. *Feeling literature* through visual representation is a method of revealing an alternative identification of another being in the Australian multicultural context, in blurring the distinction between Persian literature and contemporary art through instinctive handwriting.

It appears that the text in *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* has been written intuitively without any particular plan. The arrangement of the text is effectively categorised through a seemingly spiritual mapping that involves high-risk in making the work possible. Consequently, the work has an unpredictable quality, where it mostly relies on incidental and chance-related mechanisms.

Through a non-linear approach to writing as a form of visual representation, the installation is interlaced with the non-sequential content of the text. The narrative of the Farsi text *Hava* is fully based on an observation of *self*; on how the self, upon life's journey, engages with other beings and entities for the purpose of being, in relation to finding the *Self*. This is considered along with the ontological question of 'what it means to be a being?' The existential exile happens to operate indirectly in relation to Martin Heidegger's point of view about being-in-the-world—that a being's concern is with its very state of Being.³⁶

The sound component is another correlative element that resonates with the other parts of this installation. The use of sound as a material emphasises the perceptions of its particular nomadism, which is imbued with the quality to literally travelling over distances.

³⁵ After several years with Rūmī in Konya, Shams left and settled in Khoy. As the years passed, Rūmī attributed more and more of his own poetry to Shams as a sign of love for his departed friend and master. In Rūmī's poetry Shams becomes a guide of Allah's (Creator) love for mankind; Shams was a sun ("Shams" means "Sun" in Arabic) shining the Light of Sun as guide for the right path dispelling darkness in Rūmī's heart, mind, and body on earth.
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shams_Tabrizi

³⁶ Barbara Bolt, *Heidegger Reframed*, (New York: L.B.Tauris, 2011). p. 26.

In this regard, the sound system produces an explicit effect as a responsive way of approaching the concept of voyage, from place to place. The recorded sound work here signifies a complex interplay of male and female voices forced to generate distorted stories. This dual reading in English is a way of dealing with the corresponding issue presented in the Farsi text—that is, what does it mean to be a being? The combining of the two vocal tracks, together with other sonic elements have been produced to echo as one integrated composition.

Additionally, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* addresses the eternal characteristic of the fragmented text and sound through dynamics of definition and description, understanding and translation. In this mystical experience, we are prompted to stand on the text and walk around the octagonal construction, like the way Muslim prayers are performed around the *Kaaba*—the holiest shrine. Through this gesture we are encouraged to listen to the sounds in order to absorb and understand what this installation is all about. In trying to imagine what is concealed and what is revealed—to interpret the meanings of artworks with regards to creative artistic-led research—many challenges, potentials and possibilities are also offered up.

Finally we arrive at a darkened room full of fragmented text and sound. An existential vacuum. A cloud of golden dust is floating inside an enclosed and empty octagonal dot. The dust is dancing with the infinite light particles, vibrating uncannily with the everlasting sound of musical waves. This is how *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* was first exhibited at the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, Australia.

*Every form you see has its archetype in the placeless world;
If the form is perished, no matter since its original is everlasting.*³⁷

3.3b *Existential Vacuum: Part two—Indonesia*

The second installation of *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* evolved from the Melbourne presentation for a number of reasons. First, it was situated in Joglo/Pendopo in Sarang Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The meaning of Sarang is bird's nest; the SaRanG building was named after the renowned Indonesian artist Jumadli Alfī, when he turned his studio into an artist's gallery and residency, as a nest for artists. The work was displayed in

³⁷ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 47.

Joglo's architectural space: a type of traditional and vernacular Javanese house once associated with Javanese aristocrats. These days the Joglo's function has shifted position to cater to performance art, workshops, reunions and social gatherings. This large pavilion exists at 810 x 880 cm and is located in an intimate spot, tucked away all the way at the backyard of Sarang Garden, sitting in the middle of a tranquil fishpond. The Joglo roof consists of four main wooden columns placed close to each other at the centre. These columns are taller than the outer twelve columns to form a pyramid shape on the roof. The octagonal structure was placed at the centre of the Joglo, which is traditionally considered to be the most sacred of spaces.

The second, key difference between this and the original iteration of the work was that the black and white Farsi text, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, was here written intuitively. The text, which appears to be more integrated on the floor in this second iteration, existed in a circular form around the octagonal structure, as an image of vibrations emanating from a drop of water into a calm lake. The text was written with chalk marker, which wiped off easily with wet cloth. Consequently, there was a sign at the entrance of the work asking viewers to take their shoes off before walking into the space. Apart from the temporal aspect of the work, this ritual reminds us of the Islamic guidelines that shoes must be taken off before entering into the mosque or going for Hajj (pilgrimage made to *Kaaba-house of Allah*). Another material concern of the work was with regards to the nomadic and temporal characteristics of the text. Due to the hot and humid temperatures in Yogyakarta, people were often walking into the space with hot and sweaty feet. With the Farsi text sticking to their feet, people were inevitably carrying out fragments of the poems with them. In this respect, not only the presentation of the research becomes nomadic, but the actual artwork itself becomes materially dispersed and displaced.

A third element that was potentially more interesting in the Joglo iteration, for two reasons, was the sonic component. Firstly, the sound component regularly overlapped five times a day with the peripherally heard *Adhan/Azan* (call to prayer), generating a notable religious layer into the existing work. Secondly, the sound component irregularly interconnected with the sounds of birds and fish swimming nearby. In this sense, the momentary element of the work became entangled within a wider context of 'being in the moment', with the experience of the installation emphasising the essence of our existential purpose. The meaning of the written text in relation to 'being' and what it 'means to be a being' was reinforced through its visual and audio forms, as well as through acts of walking unconsciously—either clockwise or counter clockwise—around the octagon. Similar to other

rituals of sensing the unknown—such as the performing of tawāf around *Kaaba*—this work embraced philosophies of mindfulness to result in a uniting with the *Beloved*.

By installing the work in a semi-natural environment, the perfect time to explore the work in terms of lighting was around sunset when the sky was dark blue and the warm yellow light illuminated the high ceiling from inside the octagon. In this regard, the viewer had a chance to not only see the circular texts as a whole, but to witness the sharp contrast of colours between the grey floor and the black and white text without any interruption from the reflection of the sunlight from the floor. The dust and the wind also introduced an element of ephemerality into the contemplative arrangements.

Exhibiting *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* in another cultural setting such as Indonesia was a particularly rewarding experience, with the adaptability of different religions facing each other peacefully being something to admire and respect. Yogyakarta is rich in art and poetry. Rūmī is quite well known in Indonesia, with Sufism being readily practiced as well. Architecture, literature and religion are crucial parts of Indonesian culture. Through the poetic lens of Rūmī, and with regards to its conceptual engagement with love and nomadic content, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* was well situated alongside Indonesian beliefs, values and cultural contexts. *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* does not belong to any one place; rather it is displaced, and it becomes nomadic. Where this work can manifest differently each time it is displayed, the existential vacuum will endlessly float within each site-responsive installation outcome of this artistic practice.

*There is no room in the house for two I's
One went to the door of the Beloved and knocked.
A voice asked: "Who is there?" He answered: "It is I."
The voice said: "There is no room here for me and thee."
The door was shut.
After a year of solitude and deprivation
this man returned to the door of the Beloved.
He knocked.
A voice from within asked: "Who is there?"
The man said: "It is Thou."
The door was opened for him.³⁸*

3.4 Lover and Beloved Are One: Annihilation

(Where the Infinite Parallel Lines Meet Each Other)

³⁸ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā, "Rumi, Quotes", Goodreads, 19 May 2019, <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/5322592-1-one-went-to-the-door-of-the-beloved-and>

It is important at this stage to prompt questions about who or what the so-called Beloved may be. To expand and clarify upon the notion of the Beloved as a holistic element—essentially referring to figures such as Allah, Mother, Language, Art, Nation, Nostalgia, and Death—we must look broadly to the central interrelation, or in-between factor among these concepts, as contextualisations of the ‘Self’. This mystery can provoke a passage to and from the identity, its ego and lingual-cultural considerations in order to weave a picture of the Beloved. Thus, discourses of spirituality can overlap here with psychoanalytic and philosophical concerns.

In the Islamic philosophy of *wahdat al-wujūd*—‘the Oneness of Being/Existence’ by Ibn al-‘Arabī (d. 1240)—‘the one and the many’ (the Self and the selves) refers to a spiritual seeker. This seeker is someone who loses themselves by giving up, through the loss of ego in and for the One, or in the love of the Self. Through a Sufi lens, the relationship between Rūmī and Shams is a love connection between Rūmī’s self and the Self (Allah). Accordingly, Lover and Beloved as subject and object are identical. In this regard, annihilation (Fanā فنا) is the allegory of an absolute love underlying a divine annihilation through one’s existence as being. The ultimate being as non-existence/nothingness/absence (adam عدم), is articulated when Mansur al-Hallāj (858-928)—a major figure in Sufi tradition—metaphorically reaches this state and is then literally executed when he declares: *Ana l-Haqq* (I am the Truth). A poetic articulation of Farid al-Dīn ‘Aṭṭār’s *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* (*CONFERENCE OF THE BIRDS*)—the final valley out of seven valleys of spirituality to Allah being ‘The Valley of Absolute Nothingness’—examines the state of ‘selflessness’ (elimination of self in God). These brief explanations in Sufism are included to demonstrate the integration of all the particles, beings and selves in the universe as merely One/Being/Self, whereby one becomes *one* with the Divine Being.

The parallel spiritual concept can be overlaid and interconnected with the idea of nostalgia, for both have shared spaces in ‘separation’. The inadequacy of familiar experiences in the past—for example, being loved in the family (considered the metaphor of the mother as a source of love) and being culturally and socially accepted in the society (considered as part of a nation)—instantiate separation to provide an indirect way of approaching ‘nostalgia’. Here, nostalgia might be regarded in terms of a lack of familiarity—as opposed to processes of detachment through memory, in remembering oneself *through* another person and/or situation—with the displaced feeling consequently being linked to melancholia and/or feelings of universal exile. Within this nostalgia, love employs the parameters of a narcissistic self that is insufficient unto other beings and/or objects. Kristeva

describes love as an image and an imaginary relation, in order to understand the complexities of the human psyche with regards to the involvement of one thing in terms of another. Based on identification with objects, she remarks upon the love of the self.³⁹ This investigation—prior to separation—can be followed by a wistful affection for the past period. In addition, nostalgia and diaspora have common structural dimensions that relate to embodied affects and emotions, along with mutual understandings of the experience of ‘separation’ as a result of ‘absence’. In this sense, the absence of the Beloved/Lover (Self) can ultimately be understood and intensified in nostalgia.

Me/Here ⇔ You/There ⇔ Annihilation/Unification ⇔ I

The separation/absence-annihilation analytic (which has a rich desire for unification) can also be referred to as ‘death and the sublime’. Sublime in the Beloved—and intoxication within itself by dissolving the self in the Self—is the absolute poetic purpose of being. Hence, the meaning of the *Beloved* is metaphorically revealed through a process of measuring the distance between ‘me’ and ‘I’.

*And you at the moment,
Passing from this dream-life,
With self discarded,
Will be one with the Beloved.*⁴⁰

³⁹ Estelle, Barrett *Kristeva Reframed*, (New York: L.B. Tauris, 2011). p. 82.

⁴⁰ Shabistari, Sa'd Ud Din Mahmud. “Annihilation of Phenomena” in *The Secret Rose Garden*. Translated by Florence Lederer, (United State of America: Phanes Press, 2002). p.70.

Conclusion

ازین داستان بگذر از ما مپرس
که در هم شکستست داستان ما
*Leave this tale. Ask not of us,
For our tale is wholly interrupted.*⁴¹

Within this speculation upon the *Beloved*, notions of displacement, linguistic diaspora and the discourses of identity have been identified as common threads in much Iranian contemporary art. As exemplified through a selection of contemporary Farsi text-based artistic practices, forms of language that are largely untranslatable and incomprehensible are shown in their attempts to capture the ineffable nature of human sensation. These enigmatic qualities—as found in some contemporary Farsi scripts addressing Orientalism and Islamic mysticism, as well as that which is explored through the poetry of Rūmī—also echo approaches found in Sufism and other forms of existential exile.

Many strategies of creatively re-purposing Farsi literature—as popularised by a new generation of Iranian artists living both in and beyond Iran—however, fall into a trap. While these artists often seek to locate some sense of cultural ethnicity through the use of Farsi text—and to somehow forge a unique voice within globalised contemporary experiences—their works invariably oscillate between visually defined points of the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘cliché’. In this sense, many Iranian contemporary artists grapple with perceptions of originality in their artistic representations. On the one hand, for the Eastern viewer, the meaning of these works invariably depend upon multifaceted uses of metaphor. Yet on the other hand, for the Western viewer, this is often invariably read as either nonsense or aesthetic codes of deliberate concealment. As a result, notions of ‘unlearning’ function to link sensations and logical interpretations, where the focus settles on ideas of borderlessness and timelessness. Moreover, political censorship and other ideological concerns in Iranian contemporary art can be activated and contemplated through the vehicular theme of the ‘void’—a strategy and modality that has variously helped to produce alternative ways to approach sensitive Middle Eastern thematics in an international art world context.

⁴¹ Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. (Cambridge: University Press, 1952). p. 11.

Dislocation by force or choice leads Iranian-born artists to reinforce their own cultural, social and historical legacies under the inextricable frame of ‘Islamic contemporary art’. Consequently, Muslim and non-Muslim artistic practices are invariably underlined in relation to stereotypical global attitudes. Furthermore, much cultural production and political intervention is directly or indirectly associated with the production of memories—insofar as events and memoir metaphorically translate to mirror the narratives of one’s geographical background. These diasporic trajectories can become a point of departure for Iranian artists, allowing them to create new contemporary iterations of spiritual journeys within the self—in other words, forms of ‘inner migration’. Here, separation and social exclusion as a result of isolation—via experiences of *not belonging*—are invariably recognised by Western critics and curators to produce forms of ‘otherness’ grounded in the strange and/or the unfamiliar. Yet in a broader sense, this ‘separation’ translates as a form of detachment from the source of love as ‘mother’ and/or ‘Allah’—both in psychoanalytical terms and as expressed through the poetic philosophy of Rūmī.

According to Sufi tradition and Persian literature, love (*Eshgh*) lies at the centre of everything. Consequently, some Iranian artists express a longing to reunite with their beloved—as demonstrated through a gap between remembering the past and understanding the present. This mystical journey is also reflected in aspects of language, the unconscious and collective memory. This ‘existential vacuum’ is embedded and developed within the author’s own artistic practice. Here, ‘annihilation’ is articulated through unification of the lover and *Beloved* and/or self within Self.

Throughout this dissertation, a conceptualisation of the *Beloved* is presented and explored through the expanded play of language that exemplifies much Iranian contemporary art. Given the ongoing political complexities in the Middle East region, issues of separation, exile and nostalgia continue to characterise the nomadic cross-cultural experiences of alienated twenty-first century existence. Consequently, conditions of cultural diaspora and experiences of exile continue to propagate in the often ambiguous and uncertain natures of Iranian contemporary art.

Bibliography

- Anvar-Chenderoff, L. *Without us, from us we're safe: Self and selflessness in the Diwan of Attar*. In L. Lewisohn & C. Shackle (Eds.), *Attar and the Persian Sufi tradition: The art of spiritual flight* (pp. 241–254). London: I. B. Tauris and Co Ltd., 2006.
- Barrett Estelle, *Kristeva Reframed*, New York: L.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Bishop, Claire. *Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media*. *Artforum*, 51, 2012.
- Bolt, Barbara. *Heidegger Reframed*. New York: L.B. Tauris, 2011.
- Bolter, J. David and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: understanding new media*. Cambridge, Mass, London: MIT Press, c1999, 2000.
- Bourriaud, Nicolas, ed. *Altermodren: Tate Triennial*. London: Tate Publishing, 2009.
- Dagli, Caner K. *Ibn al- 'Arabī and Islamic Intellectual Culture: from mysticism to philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Enwezor, Okwui, Ed. *The Unhomely: Phantom Scenes in Global Society: Second International Biennial of Contemporary art of Seville*, Seville: Fundación Bial Internacional de Arte Contemporáneo de Sevilla, 2006.
- Farmanfarmaian, Monir Shahroudy. *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Infinite Possibility: Mirror Works and Drawing 1974 -2014*. Porto, Portugal: Serralves, 2014.
- Farmanfarmaian, Monir Shahroudy, H. Obrist, and K. Marta. *Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Cosmic Geometry*. Italy: Damiani Editore; UAE: The Third Line, 2011.
- Gronlund, Melissa. *Contemporary Art and Digital Culture*. New York: Routledge, 2016.
- Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Divani Shamsi Tabriz*. Edited and translated by Reynold A. Nicholson. San Francisco: The Rainbow Bridge, 1973.
- Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Rumi: Bridge to the soul: journeys into the music and silence of the heart*. Translation by Coleman Barks with A.J. Arberry and Nevit Ergin. San Francisco, California: HarperOne, 2007.
- Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Rumi: The Big Red Book: the great masterpiece celebrating mystical love and friendship: odes and quarantine from The shams / the collected translations of Coleman Barks, based on the work of John Moyne, Nevit Ergin, A.J. Arberry, and Reynold Nicholson*. New York: Harper One, 2010.

Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Selected Poems from the Dīvāni Shamsi Tabrīz*. Edited and translated with an introduction, notes, and appendices by Reynold A. Nicholson. Cambridge: University Press, 1952.

Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *Tales of Mystic Meaning: Selections from the Mathnawī of Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī* / translated with an introduction by Reynold A. Nicholson. Oxford, England: Oneworld Publications, 1995.

Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks, with John Moyne, A.A. Arberry, Reynold Nicholson. San Francisco: Harper, 1995.

Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī Mawlānā. *The Soul of Rumi: A new collection of ecstatic poems*. Translation, Introduction, and Notes by Coleman Barks with John Moyne, Nevit Ergin, A.J. Arberry, and Reynold Nicholson, and M.G. Gupta. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2011.

Keshmirshekan, Hamid, ed. *Contemporary art from the Middle East: Regional interactions with global art discourses*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2015.

Kompatsiaris, Panos. *The Politics of Contemporary Art Biennials: Spectacles of Critique, Theory and Art*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers To Ourselves*, New York: Colombia University Press, 2009.

Marks, Laura U. *Enfoldment and infinity: an Islamic genealogy of new media art*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010.

Marks, Laura U. *Infinity and accident: Strategies of Enfoldment in Islamic Art and Computer Art*. Leonardo The MIT Press, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2006): 37–42.

Mirzoeff, Nicholas, Ed. *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, London: Routledge, 2000.

Osborne, Peter. *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art*. London; New York: Verso, 2013.

Viola, Bill. *Reasons for knocking at an empty house: writings 1973-1994*. Edited by Robert Violette in collaboration with the author; Introduction by Jean-Christophe Ammann. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press; London: Anthony d'Offay Gallery, 1995.

Appendices

I

Intoxicated by Love

Because of your love
I have lost my sobriety
I am intoxicated
By the madness of love

In this fog
I have become a stranger to myself
I'm so drunk
I've lost the way to my house

In the garden
I see only your face
From trees and blossoms
I inhale only your fragrance

Drunk with the ecstasy of love
I can no longer tell the difference
Between drunkard and drink
Between lover and Beloved
You have been hiding so long
Aimlessly drifting in the sea of my love

Even so
You have always been
Connected to me
Concealed, revealed
In the known
In the unmanifest
I am life itself

You have been a prisoner
Of a little pond
I am the ocean
An its turbulent flood
Come merge with me
Leave this world of ignorance

Be with me
I will open
The gate to your love⁴²

⁴² Deepak Chopra & Friends (inspired by The Love Poems of Molana Jalal-e-Din Mohammad Molavi Rumi), *A gift of Love*, Rasa Music B00000C2QN, 1998, Compact Disc.

Existential Vacuum: Part One—Australia



Figure 12: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA ArtSpace, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019.

Handwriting Farsi text *Moraba -e- Vahm* (part of the artist text *Hava*), Octagonal structure, 25 min. Sound work is the collaboration of the artist, Amirhossein Kaveh and Tristan Courtney. Photo by Matthew Stanton



Figure 13: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA ArtSpace, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Matthew Stanton



Figure 14: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, VCA ArtSpace, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Pourandokht Okhovvat

Existential Vacuum: Part Two—Indonesia



Figure 15: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, Joglo Sarang Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2019.

Handwriting Farsi text *Moraba -e- Vahm* (part of the artist text *Hava*), Octagonal structure, 25 min. Sound work is the collaboration of the artist, Amirhossein Kaveh and Tristan Courtney. Photo by Lucia Rossi



Figure 16: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, Joglo Sarang Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2019. Photo by Lucia Rossi

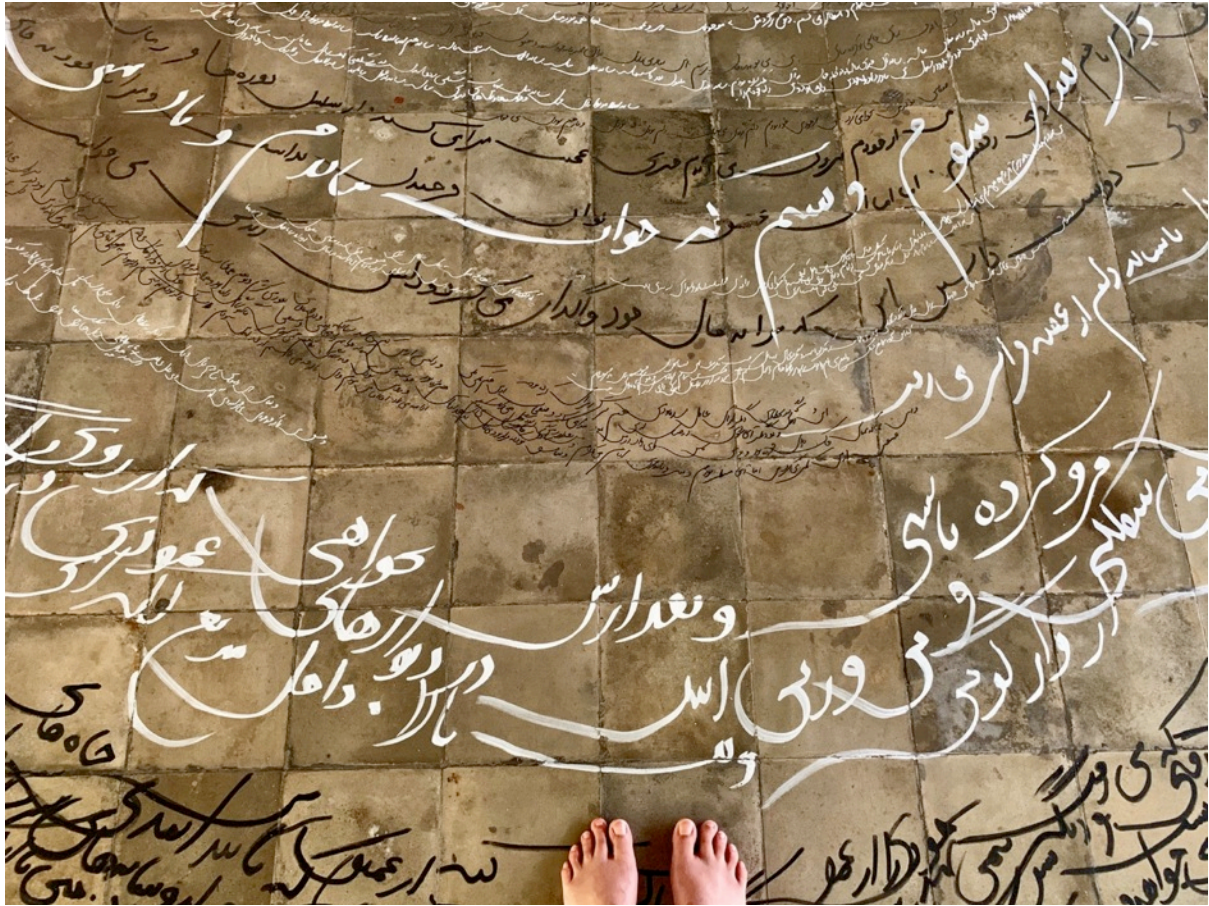


Figure 17: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, Joglo Sarang Building 1, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, 2019. Image courtesy of artist

II

Exhibited works over the period of MFA course (2018-2019)

Solo Show - KINGS Artist-Run



Figure 18: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, installation view, dimensions variable, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018.

One channel 3mins video loop of black & white oceanic waves, crystal objects, fishing line, digitally printed wallpaper on Walltex Film. Photo by Simon Strong

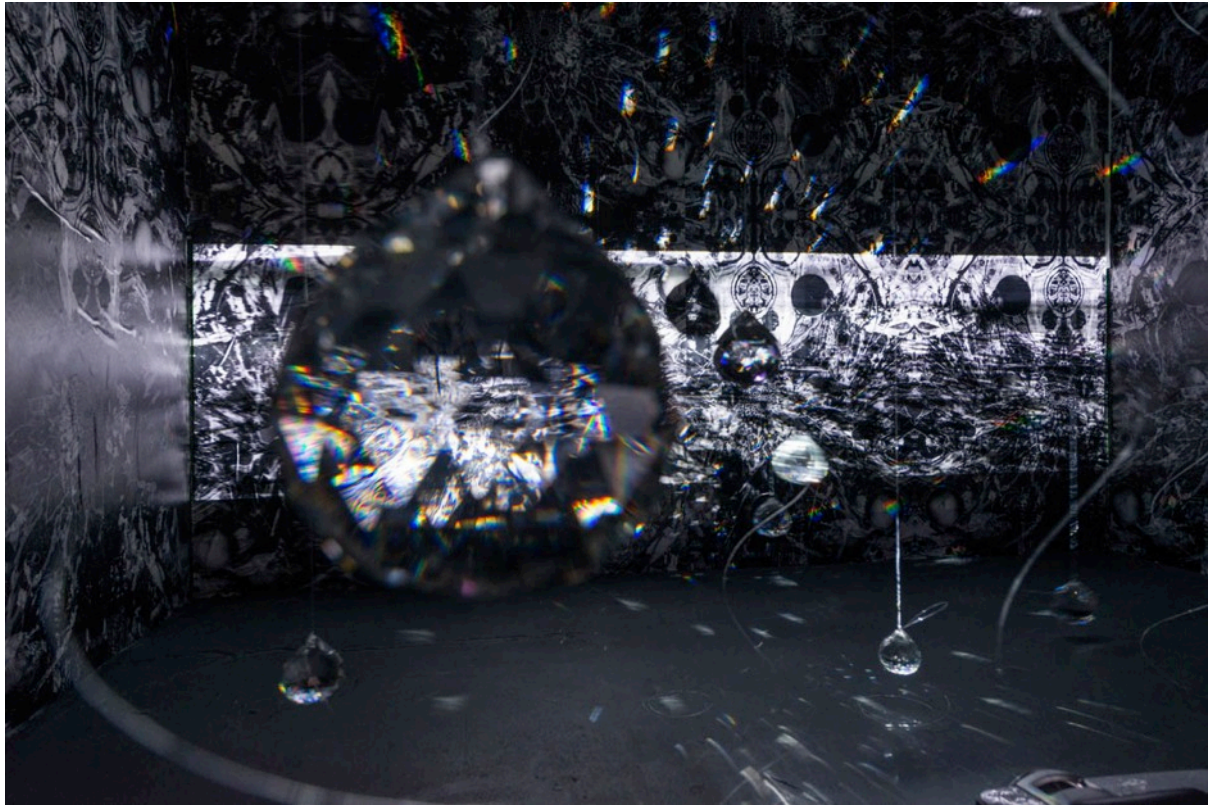


Figure 19: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, detail, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

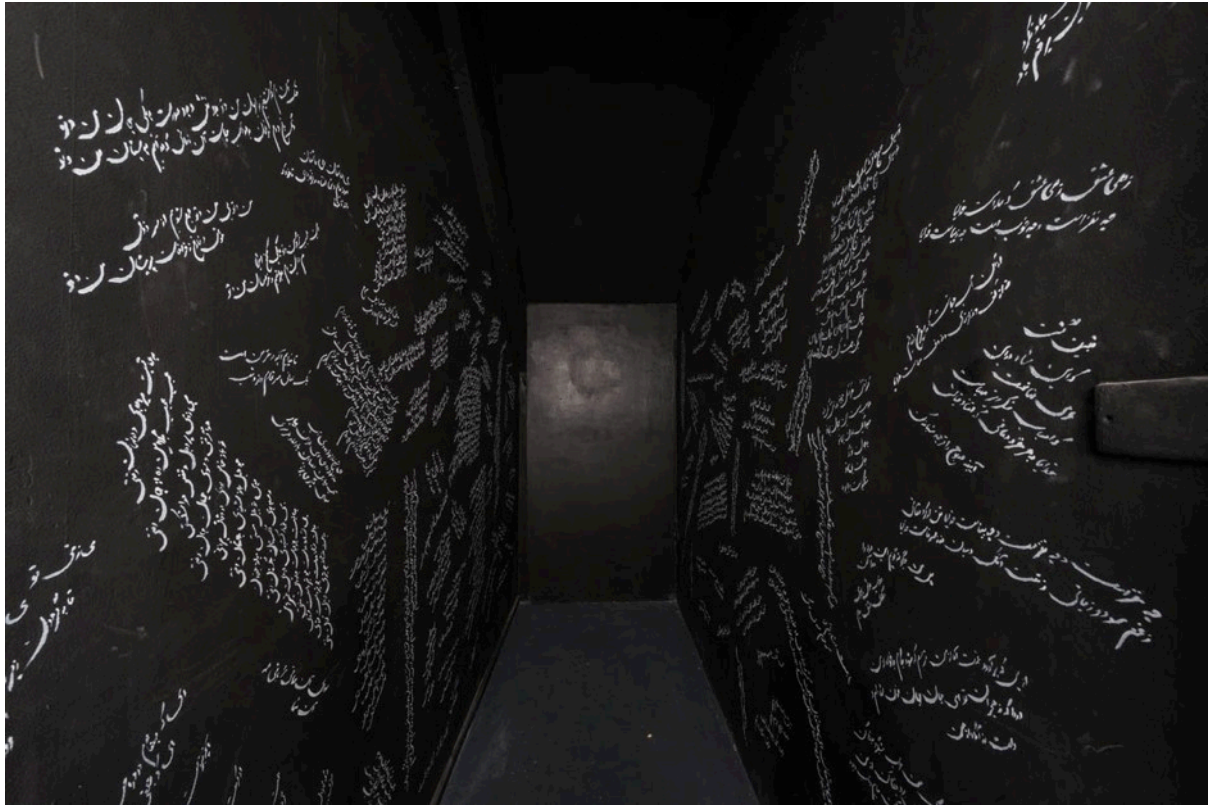


Figure 20: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, Farsi script (selected Persian Sufi poetry from *Divan e Shams* by Rumi), dimensions variable, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

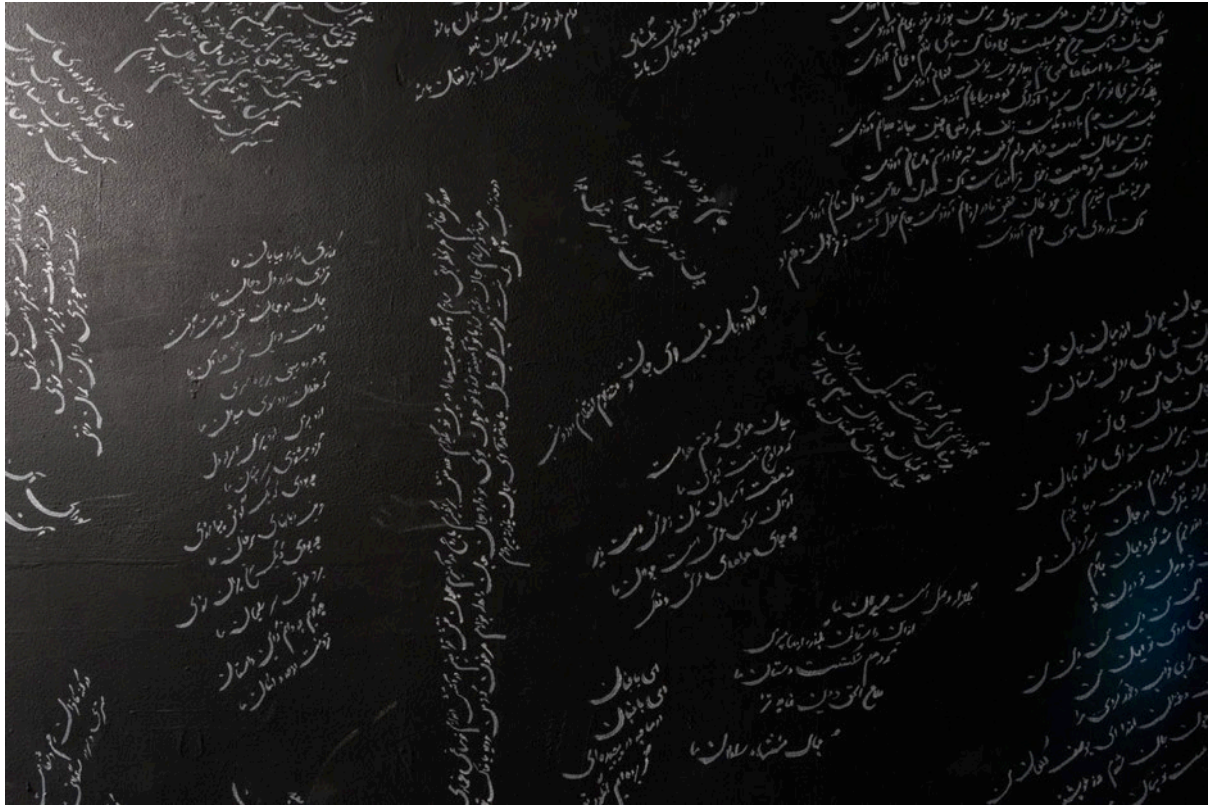


Figure 21: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, Farsi script (selected Persian Sufi poetry from *Divan e Shams* by Rumi), detail, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong

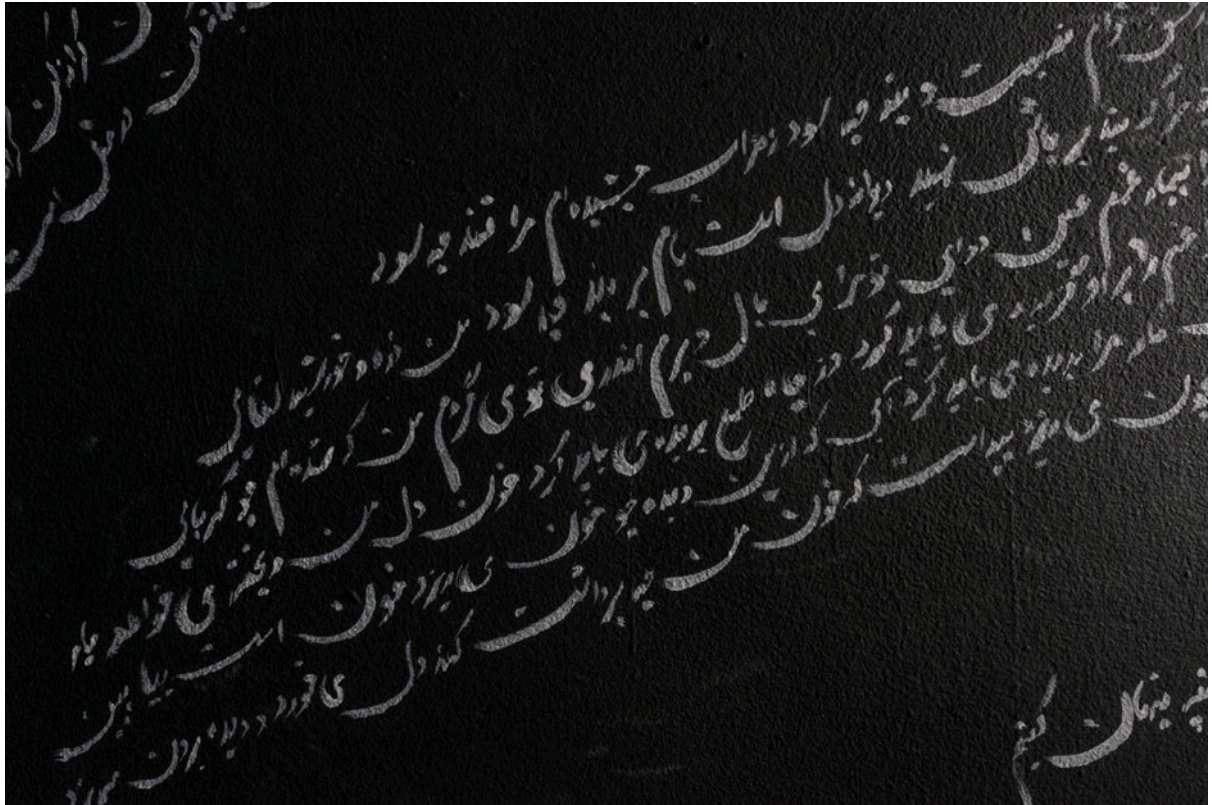


Figure 22: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, Farsi script (selected Persian Sufi poetry from *Divan e Shams* by Rumi), detail, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong



Figure 23: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinity through Temporality*, installation view, dimensions variable, KINGS Artist-Run, Melbourne, 2018. Photo by Simon Strong



Figure 24: Farnaz Dadfar, *BAQA' WA FANA'*, Farsi text from Rumi (Persian Sufi Poetry), Acrylic on the floor, 150 x 150 (cm), VCA art space, The University of Melbourne, 2018. Image courtesy of artist

Residency - BigCi



Figure 25: Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) on the wall, 400 (w) x 200 (h) cm, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil

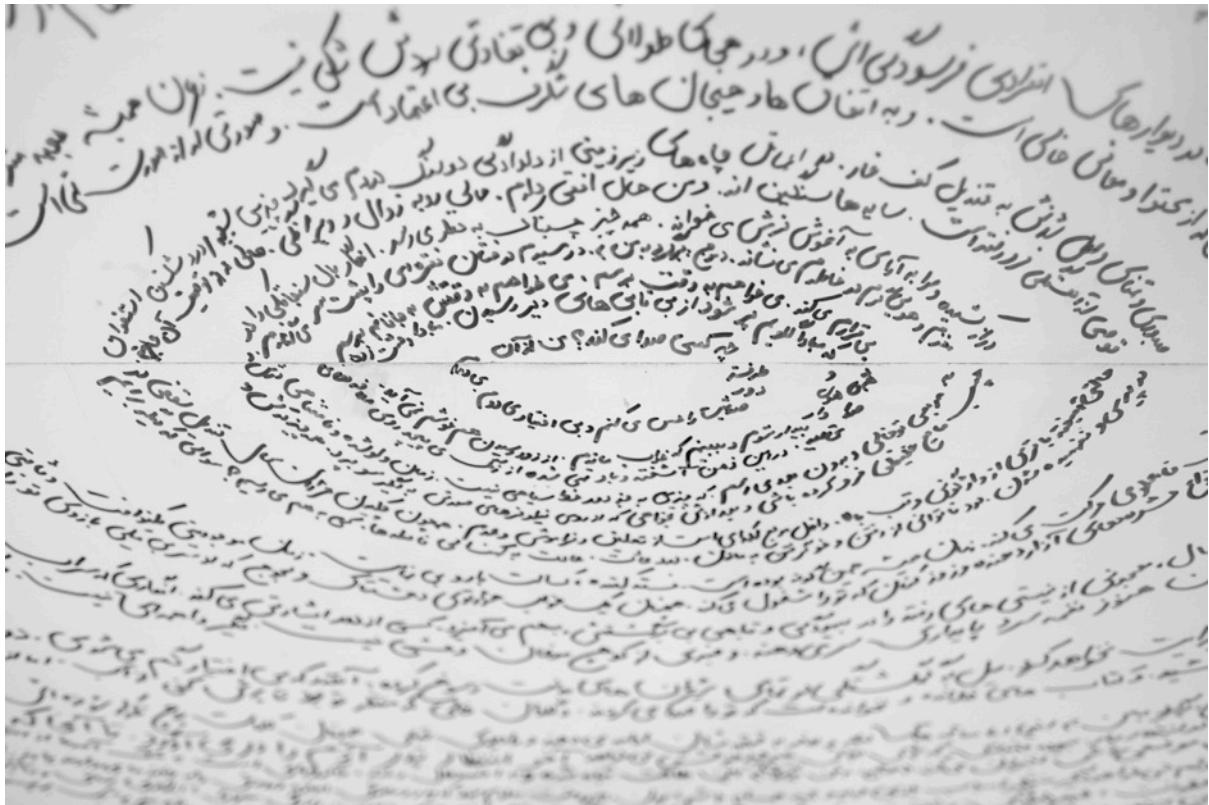


Figure 26: Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, detail, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil

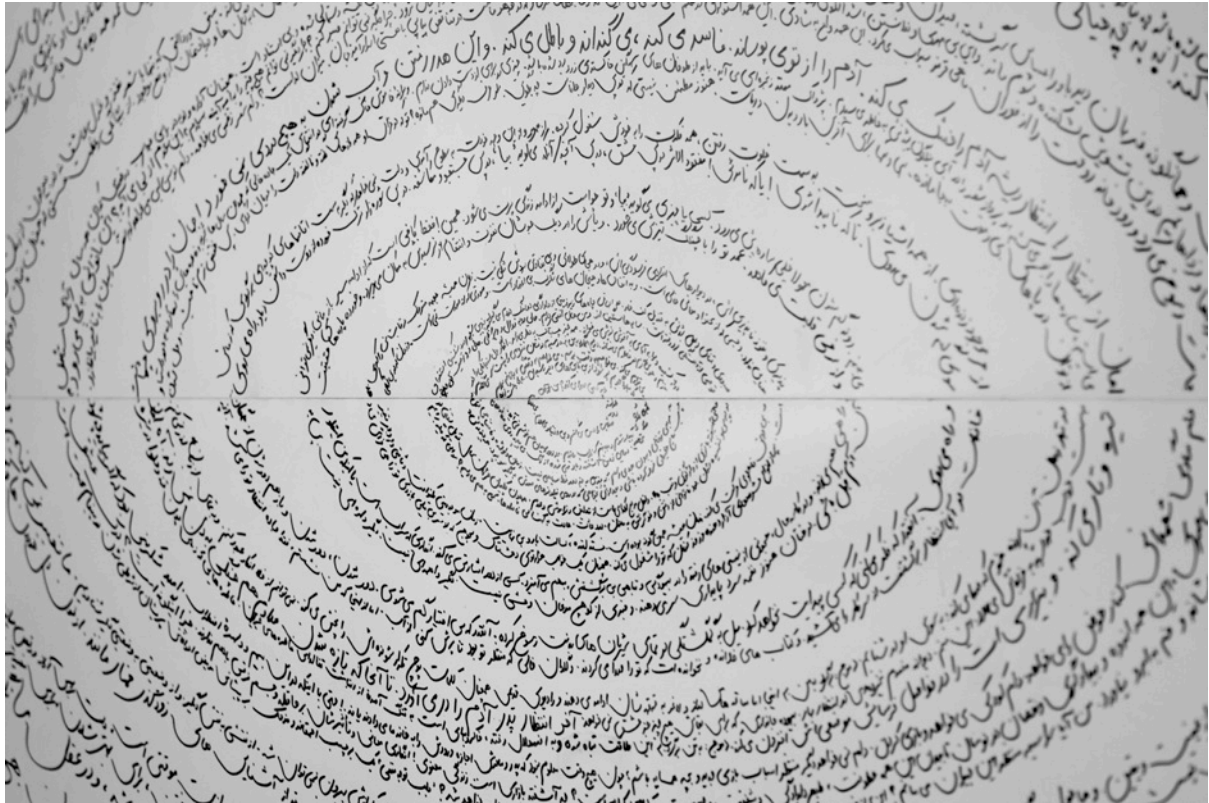


Figure 27: Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, detail, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil



Figure 28: Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm*, video still (30 mins video, reading *Moraba -e- Vahm* (part of the artist text *Hava*) with the native Australian birds sound in the background). BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW 2018.
A video captured by David Brazil through a participatory act of wiping off the artist handwriting.



Figure 29: Farnaz Dadfar, *Sharh -e- Hejran*, Farsi text (selected Persian Sufi poetry from Divan Shams by Rumi) on stone, 120 x 120 cm, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil



Figure 30: Farnaz Dadfar, *Moraba -e- Vahm* and *Sharh -e- Hejran*, installation view, BigCi - Bilpin International Ground for Creative Initiatives, NSW, 2018. Photo by David Brazil

Group Show - Seventh Gallery



Figure 31: Farnaz Dadfar, *There Is No Such Thing As Utopia*, curated by Jake Treacy, installation view, 3895 mm (h) x 1900 mm (w), Night Screen, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, 2018. Farsi text with black acrylic, 9:12 mins audio played through black painted square canvas, crystals, fishing line. Image courtesy of artist

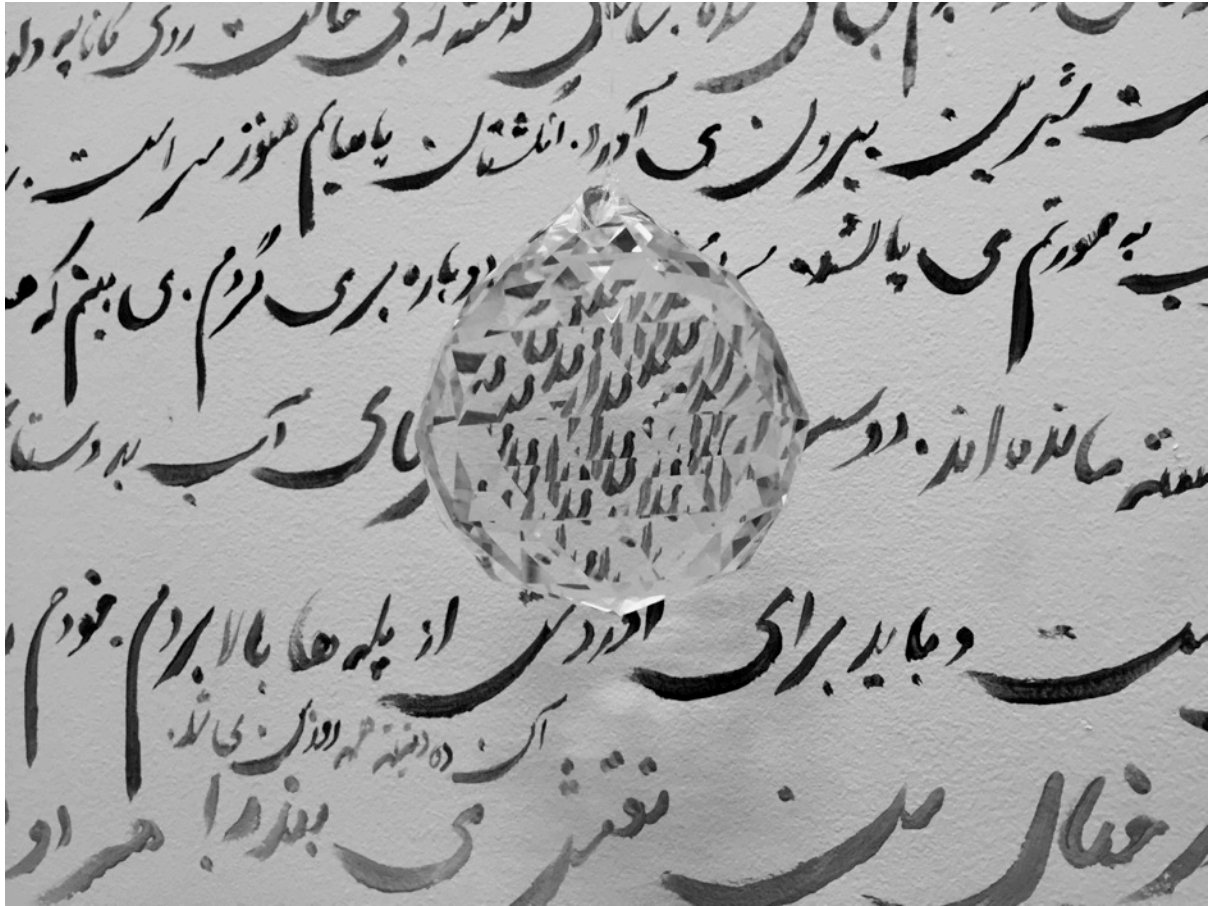


Figure 32: Farnaz Dadfar, *There Is No Such Thing As Utopia*, curated by Jake Treacy, detail, Night Screen, Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, 2018. Image courtesy of artist

Solo Show - Incinerator Gallery



Figure 33: Farnaz Dadfar, *Cancelled*, installation view, dimensions variable, The Atrium, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, 2019.

24 x A2 mixed media on Artforce journal _ News digest of the Australia Council from 1970/1980, 4 x (420x 594 mm) drawings (collage, acrylic, ink, colour pencil on Canvas paper), and handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with acrylic on the floor. Photo by Simon Strong



Figure 34: Farnaz Dadfar, *Cancelled*, video still, The Atrium, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong



Figure 35: Farnaz Dadfar, *Cancelled*, handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with acrylic on the gallery floor, The Atrium, Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong

Group Show - Margaret Lawrence Gallery

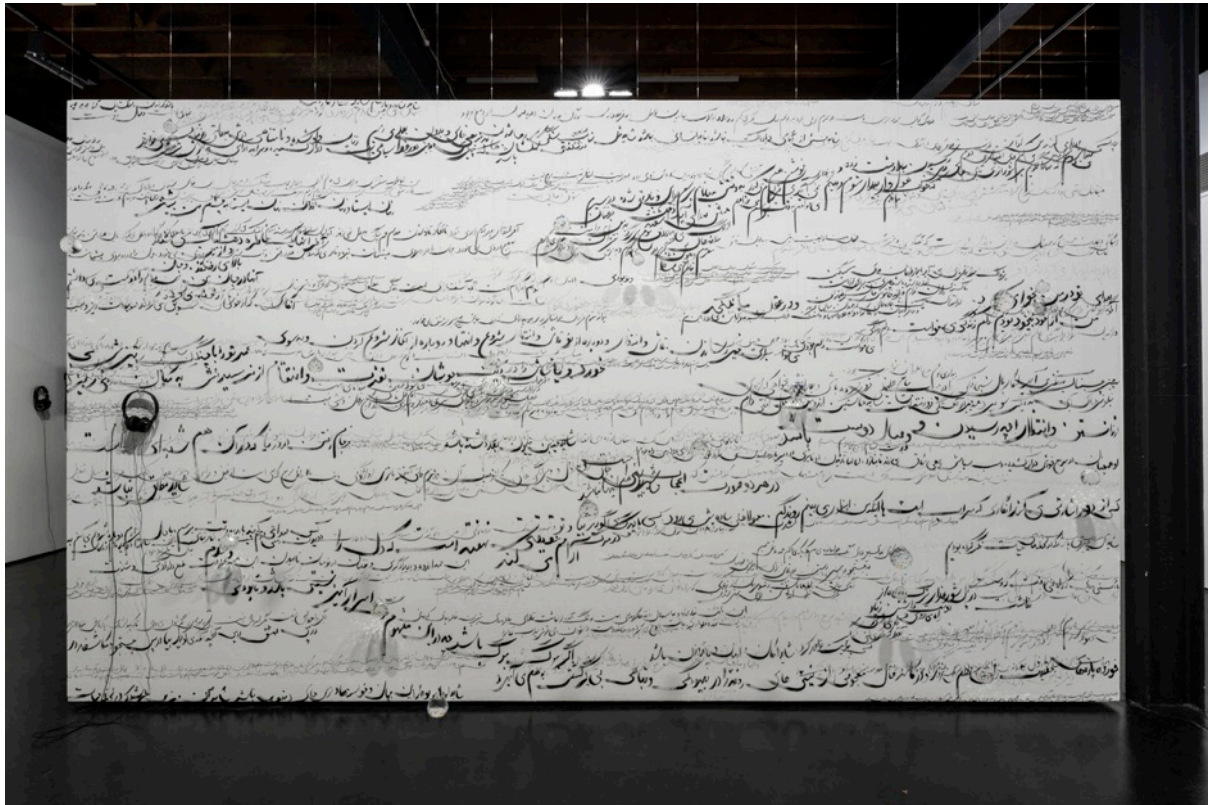


Figure 36: Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, installation view, dimensions variable, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Crystals, fishing line, Farsi text on the wall with black acrylic, 9:12 mins audio work (reading *Moraba -e-Vahm* with the native Australian birds sound in the background). Photo by Simon Strong

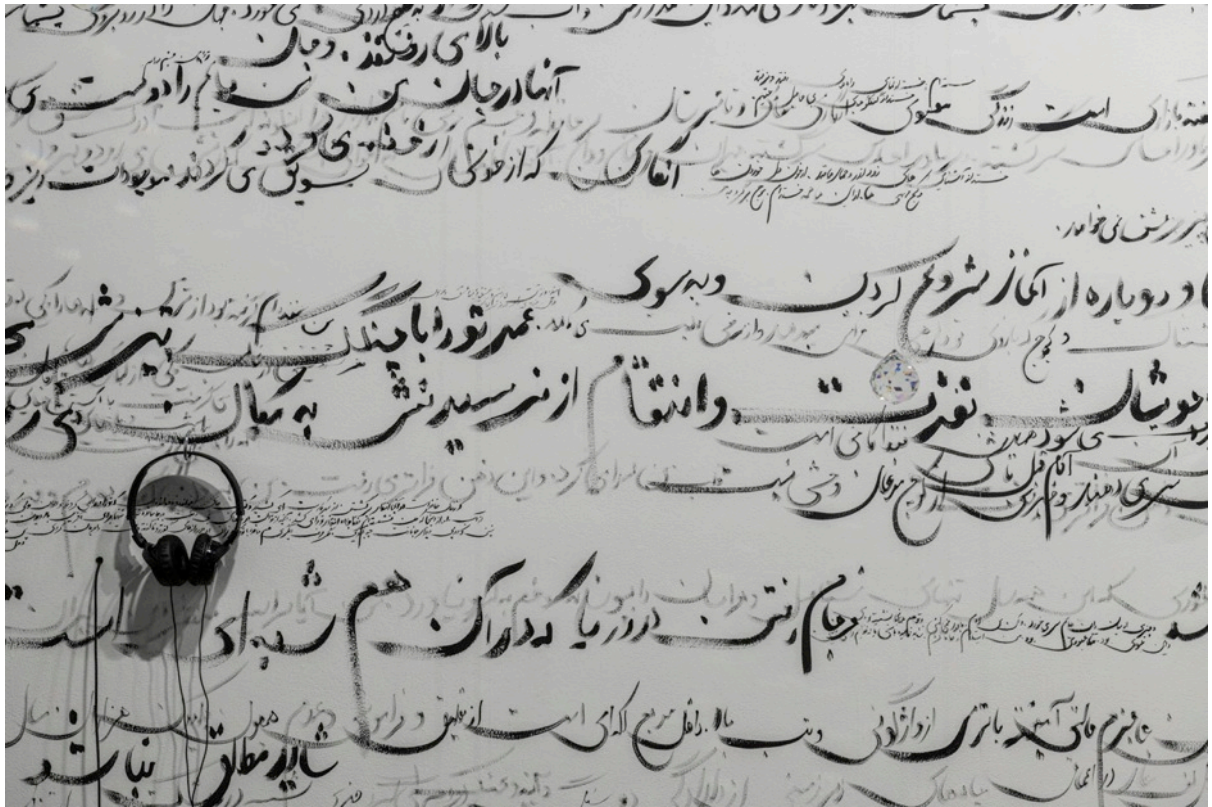


Figure 37: Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, detail, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong

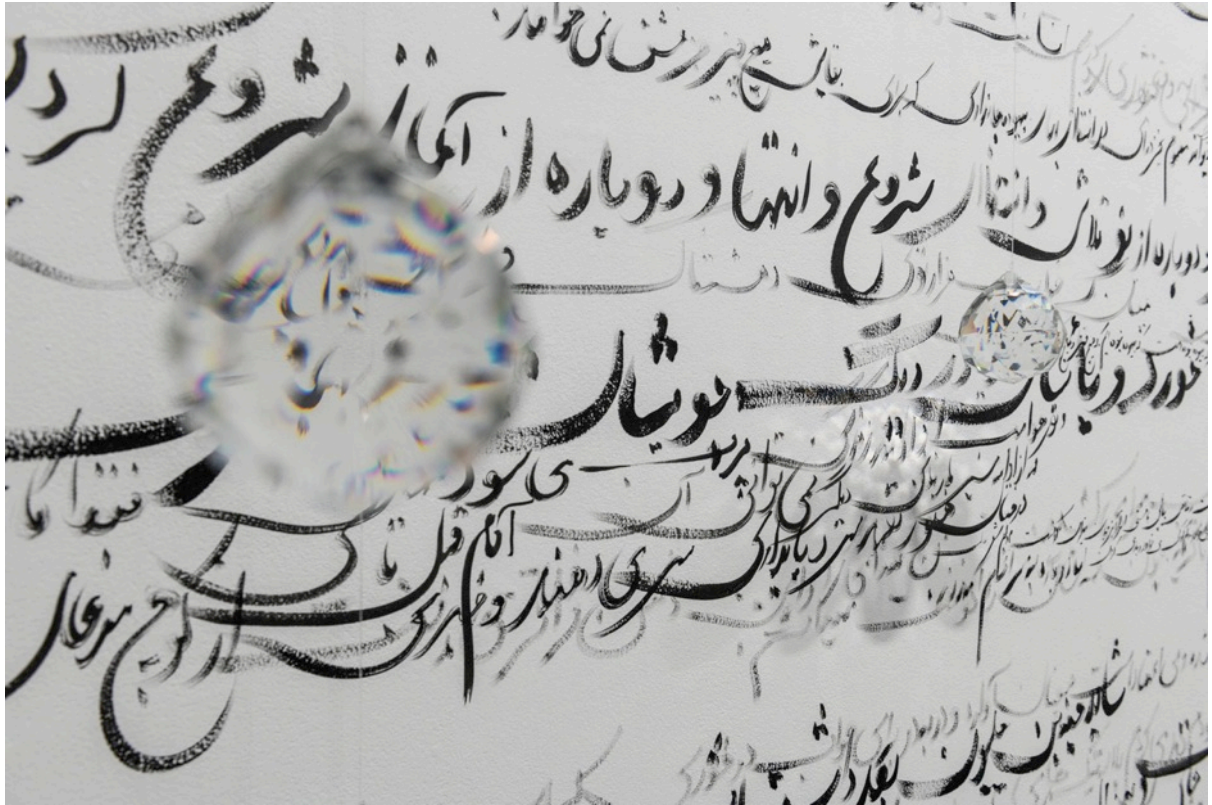


Figure 38: Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, detail, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong

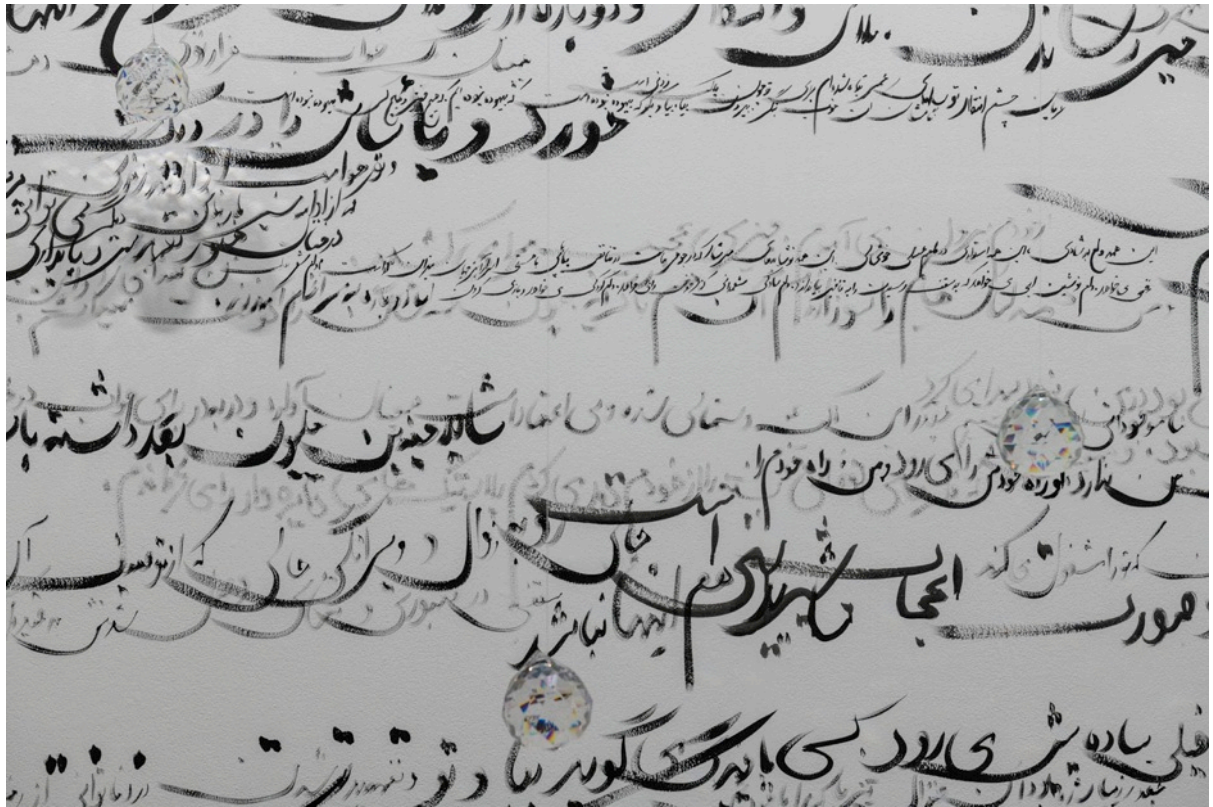


Figure 39: Farnaz Dadfar, *Spaces of Eshgh*, curated by Dr. David Sequira, detail, Keith and Elisabeth Murdoch Travelling Fellowship, Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2019. Photo by Simon Strong

Group Show – Islamic Museum of Australia

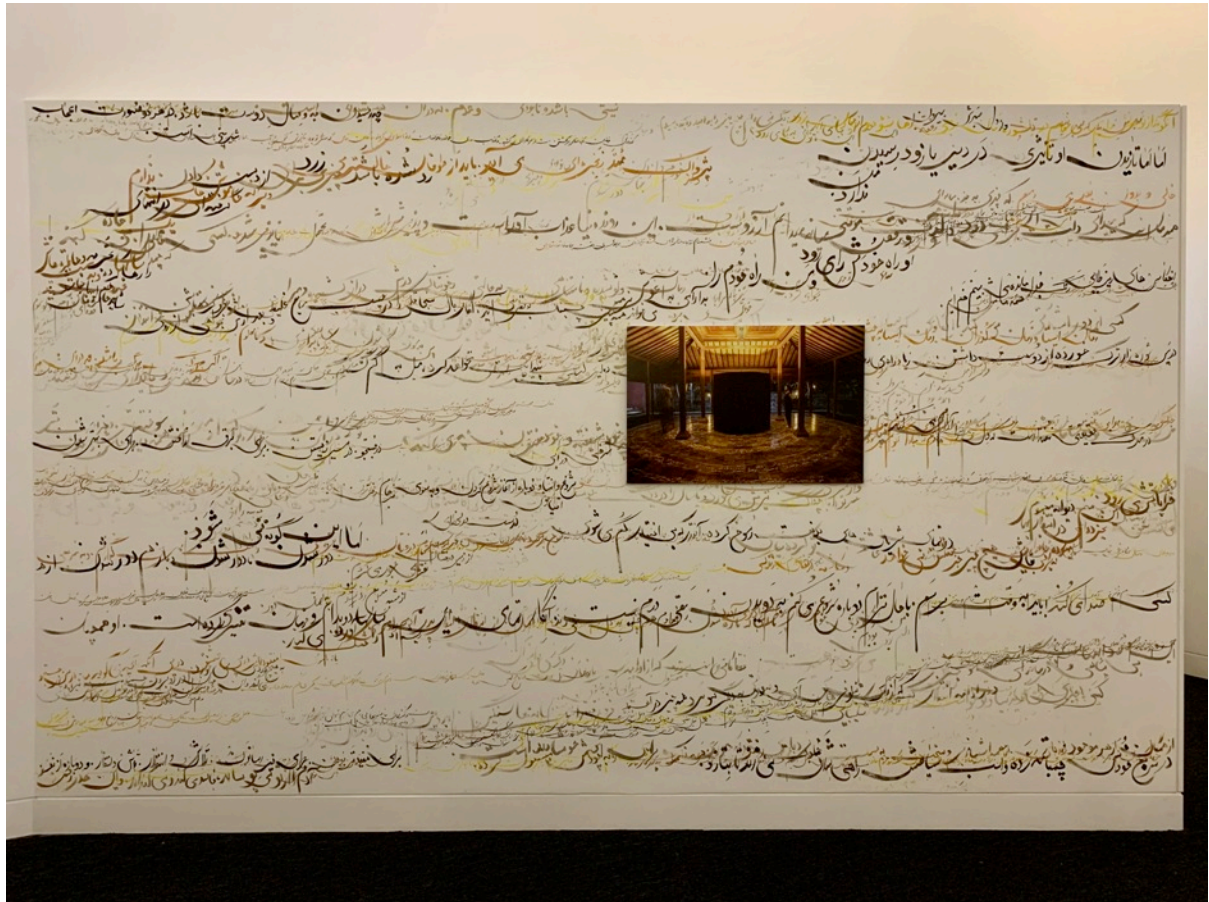


Figure 40: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, Islamic Museum of Australia, Melbourne, 2019.

Handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with acrylic on the wall, digital print photograph mounted on 3mm Dibond (Aluminium composite), 90 x 60 cm, (documented *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved* in Indonesia by Lucia Rossi). Image courtesy of artist

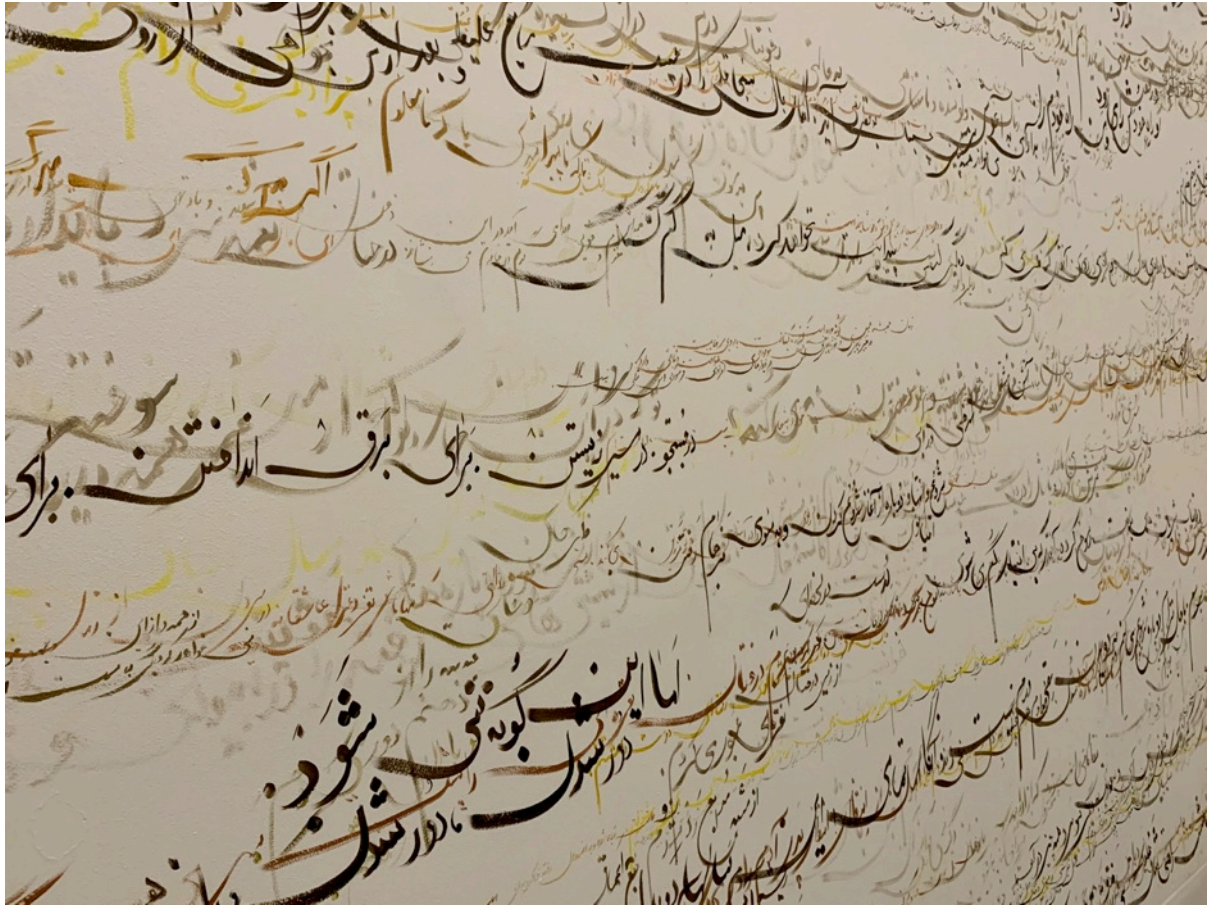


Figure 41: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, Islamic Museum of Australia, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist

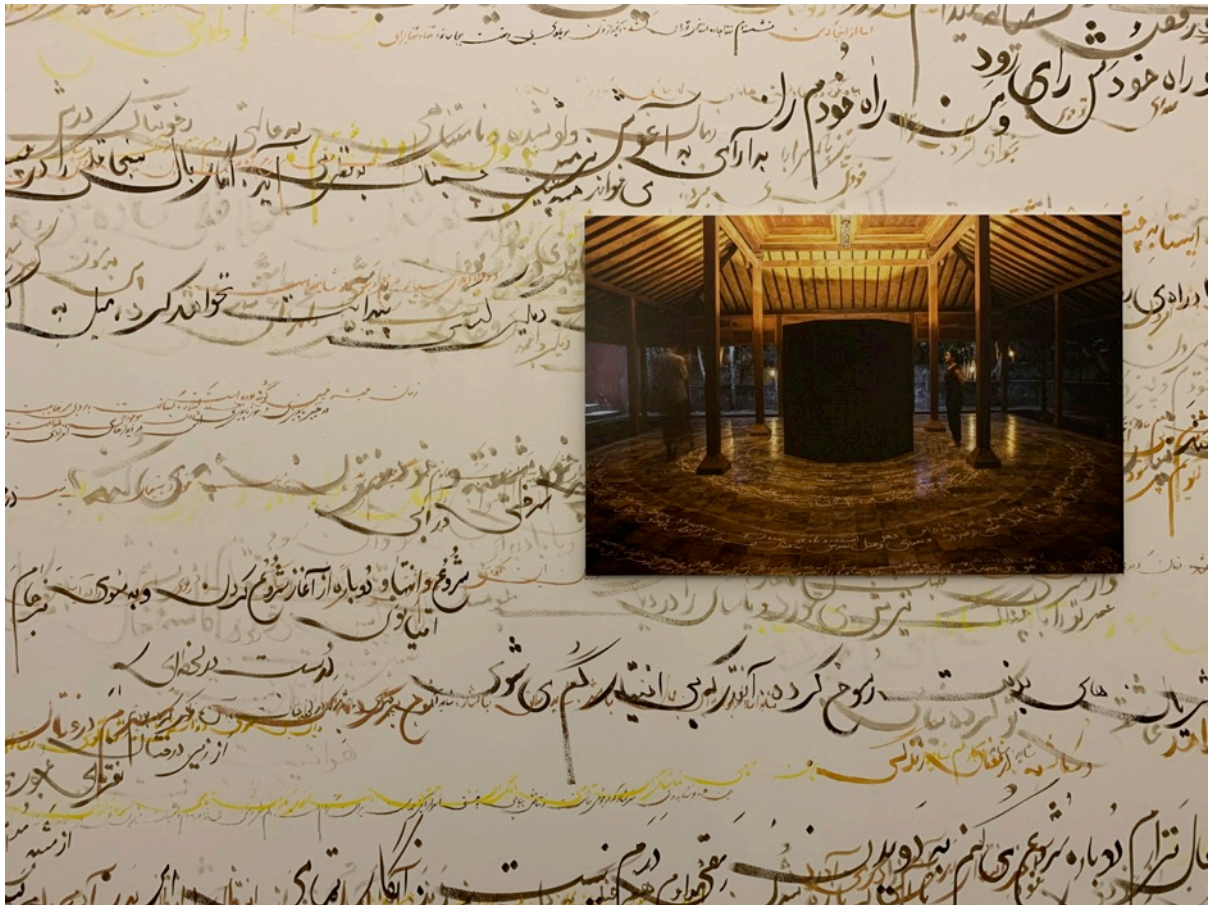


Figure 42: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, Islamic Museum of Australia, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist



Figure 43: Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, installation view, dimensions variable, handwriting Farsi text (part of the artist text *Hava*) with black and white chalk marker and acrylic on the glass and the wall. Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist

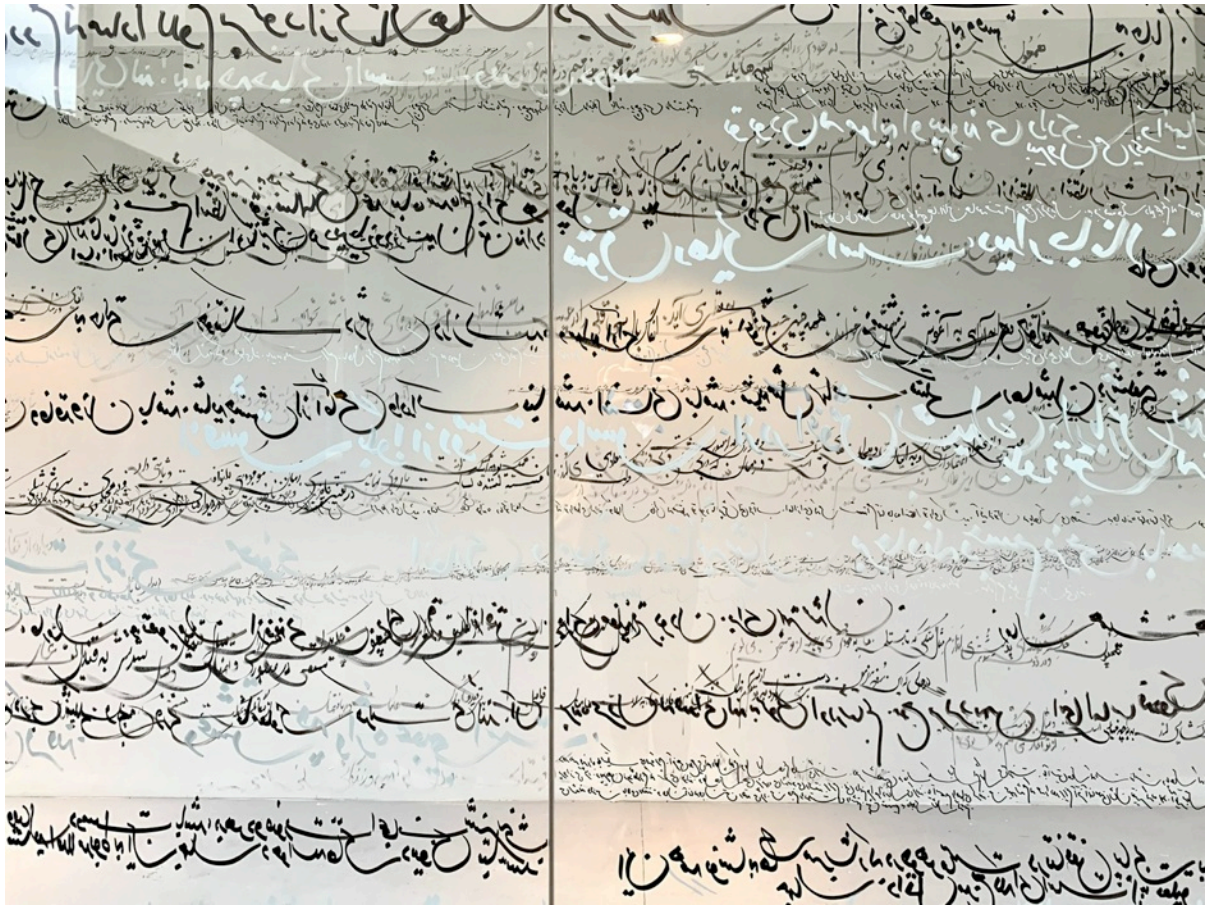


Figure 44: Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, detail, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist



Figure 45: Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, installation view, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist

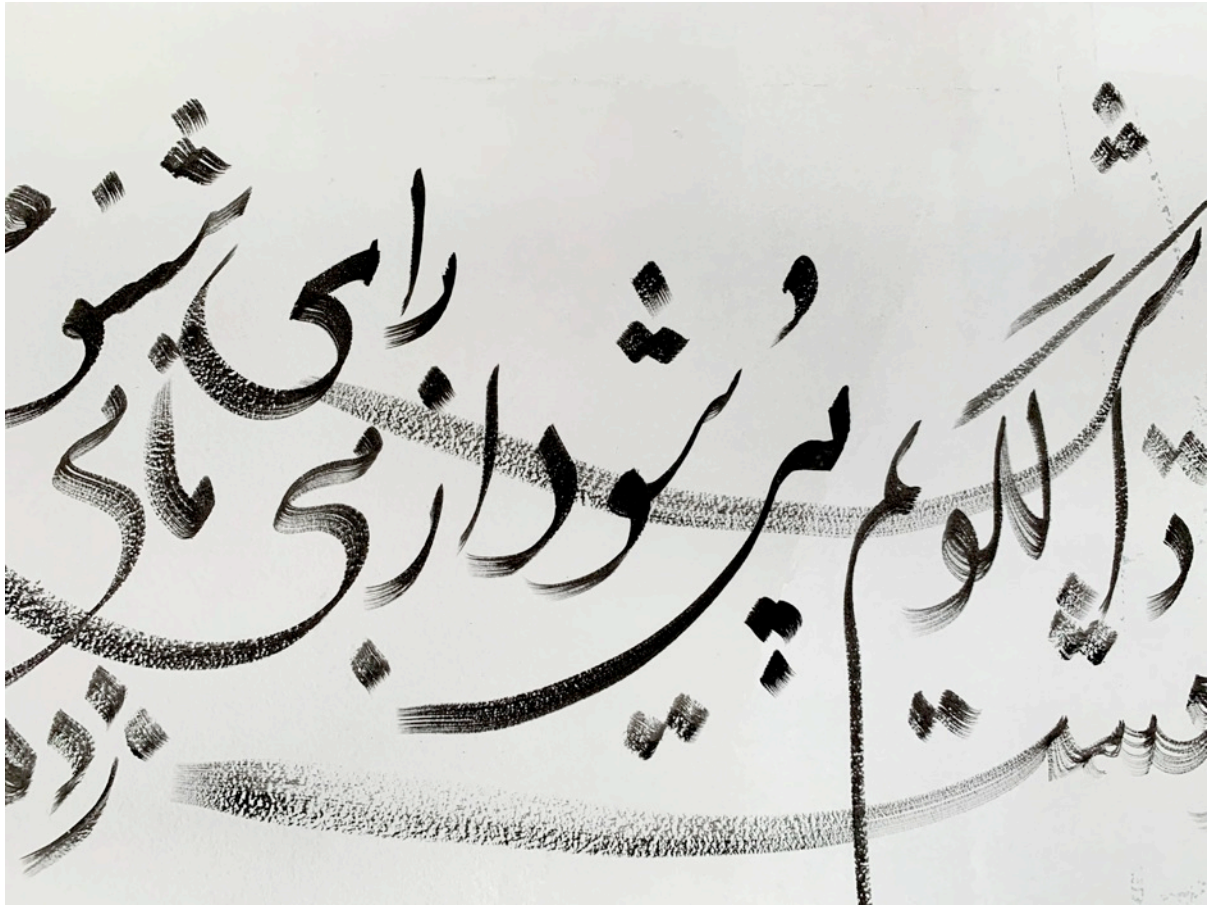


Figure 46: Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, detail, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist



Figure 47: Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, installation view, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist



Figure 48: Farnaz Dadfar, *Mashough*, curated by Dr Kate Just, detail, Creative Spaces - Assembly Point, Melbourne, 2019. Image courtesy of artist

III

GRAD.SHOW.2019 - Exhibition documentation



Figure 49: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019.

Handwriting Farsi text Moraba -e- Vahm (part of the artist text Hava), Octagonal structure, 25 min. Sound work is the collaboration of the artist, Amirhossein Kaveh and Tristan Courtney. Photo by Matthew Stanton



Figure 50: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Matthew Stanton



Figure 51: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Giulia McGauran

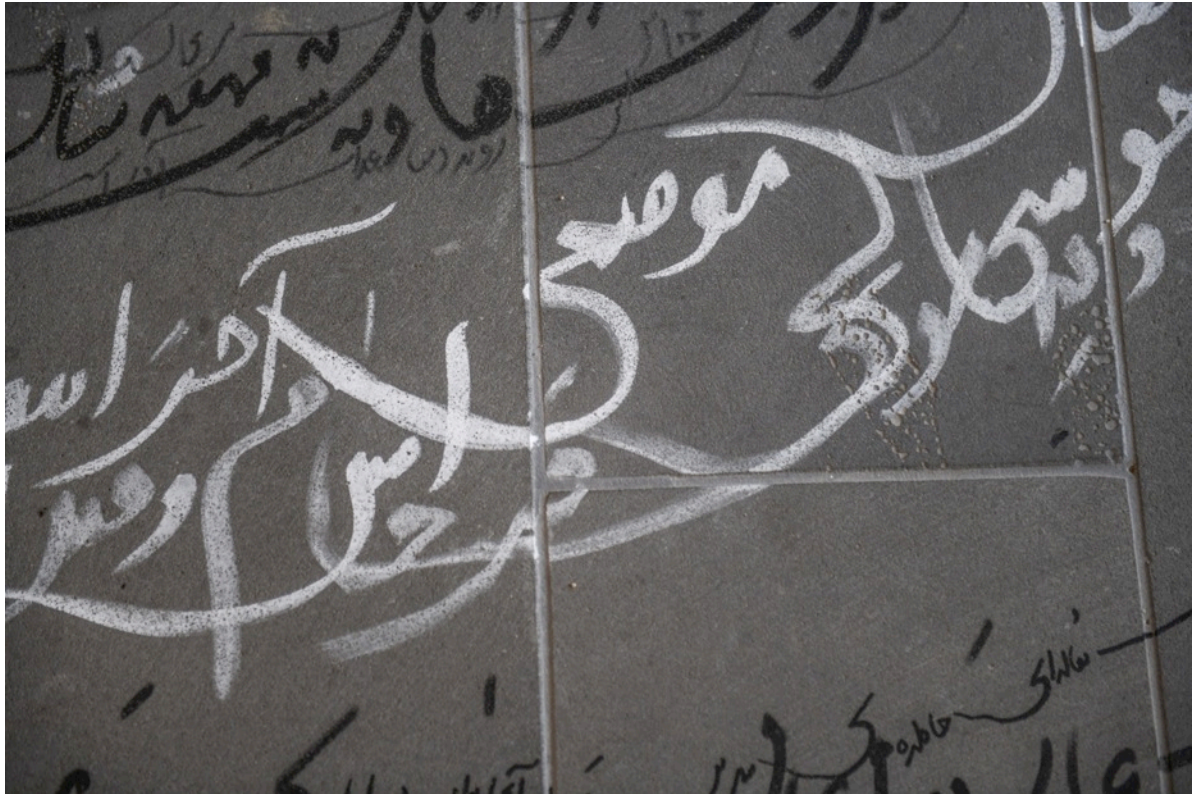


Figure 52: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, detail, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Giulia McGauran



Figure 53: Farnaz Dadfar, *Infinite Spaces of the Beloved*, installation view, dimensions variable, VCA Stables, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2019. Photo by Matthew Stanton

