

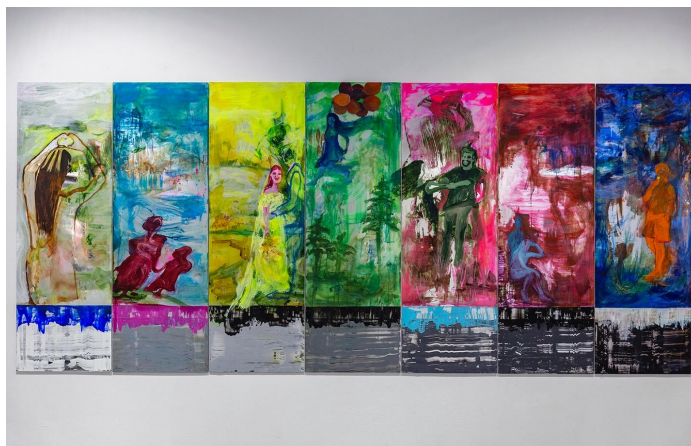
ART SPIEL

Reflections on the work of contemporary artists

DECEMBER 20, 2022 BY ART SPIEL

Saba Farhoudnia: Reflection at Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning

In conversation with Adèle Eisenstein and Saba Farhoudnia



No Signal, 2022, acrylic on acrylic mirror sheet, 7 panels, 48×16" ea., 48×112". Photo: Farzan Ghasemi

Reflection, the solo show of Saba Farhoudnia in Jamaica Center for Art & Learning, highlights the cruel and tragic practice of so-called “honor” killing, by way of individual stories which give the victims their voice back, and shed a light on this reality for far too many women, girls and LGBTQ+ (taking at least 5000 lives annually per the United Nations Population Fund). The ensemble of individual panels and stories welcomes the visitor into a colorful and intriguing landscapes. Adèle Eisenstein, the curator of the show, says that the layers of paint reveal a reflective surface, which delivers a direct message to the observer—this might have been you. While dishonor killing is the most extreme end of the spectrum, the subject addressed also touches upon and exposes stratified layers of gender-based violence.

Adèle, what is your curatorial vision and background for this exhibition? How did you come to work with Saba Farhoudnia?

The background of my life and studies all contribute to the way I curate. Alongside training in various art forms from the time I was a child, I also studied both natural and social sciences – my degree is in psychology (following studies in neuroscience), and I’ve also been an activist since adolescence. I think of myself as a world citizen, having traveled widely and lived in many parts of the world, living within and between cultures and languages. I generally like interdisciplinarity, working between mediums and genres, and especially working site-specifically.

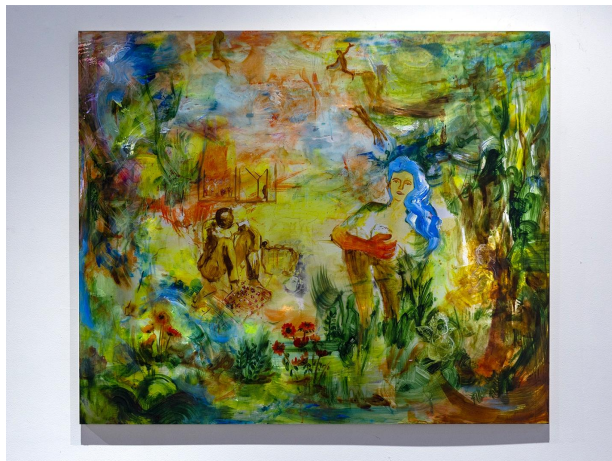
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I met Saba about four years ago, and we have been in an on-going dialogue about art, life, and politics, and we continued and intensified that conversation as she developed the ideas around this body of work. The subject is deeply and intimately important to both of us. I really hoped that I could evolve the best context around this new body of work, especially in building bridges into community. I encouraged her to work with community organizations working with immigrant diasporas and also with gender based violence.

Saba, what is your mission with this new body of work, and how did you come to it?

I have always been interested in the social narratives in my works: the relationships between individuals in society, and how constructed identity, like gender, can affect these relationships. I started to work on dis-honor killing a year ago: it was another way to review the role of gender in my works, as it unfortunately continues to happen every day, all over the world.

During Covid lockdown, the only human I could see was my own reflection in the mirror. Thinking of these victims and looking at myself in the mirror made me imagine with sorrow that each of us could be a victim of “honor” killing if we had been born in a different family. This was the seed that made me offer viewers of my paintings the same feeling when confronted with the subject of gender-based violence: the viewer can find the reflection of their own face between my brushstrokes. Both Adèle and I wanted to raise the voice of the victims, to give them back their names, and to raise awareness.



The Opacity of Truth, 2022, acrylic on acrylic mirror sheet, 40×48". Photo: Farzan Ghasemi

Can you guide us through the show, presenting a couple of pivotal works?

When the viewer enters the gallery space, they will see themselves reflected within each work, as well as seeing each work in dialogue with the others. All of the victims have been silenced – but as Saba painted them, giving them back life, she has also placed them in relation with each other – and the gallery reverberates with their voices. Their stories and background information can be found through QR-codes.

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The first two small works are etched into black Plexiglas, which function as a black mirror, revealing details overlooked. The black square on the right is intimately in dialogue with the installation, comprised of the dual portrait of two sisters painted on canvas, with the hidden portrait of their father – and executioner – on the back, revealed only through the Mylar sheet.

While this is a recent story from Texas, the next piece reveals just how ubiquitous this horrific crime has been throughout the entire history of humankind. *Tarquin and Lucretia* refers to the famous painting of Titian, and it seems like we are doomed to keep repeating this history – until we recognize it and make a conscious effort to change it.



Installation view: Dis-Appear like Dis-Honor, 2022, acrylic on canvas, site-specific installation with reflective mylar and cord, 40×21"; Tarquin and Lucretia, 2022, acrylic on acrylic mirror sheet, 48×40". Photo: Farzan Ghasemi

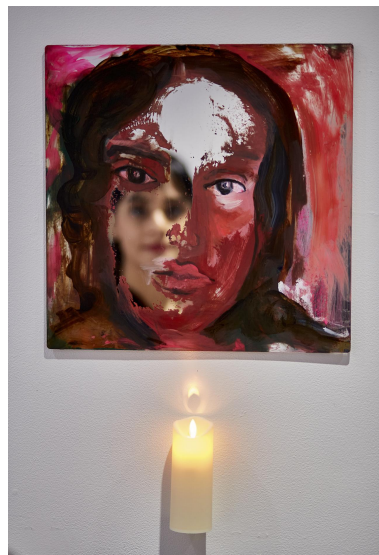
No Signal is a monumental seven-panel work that takes the form of TV color bars, representing media censorship. Each panel reflects a moment in the life of a victim – and these are all such otherwise pure and innocent love stories. Many viewers comment that the palette is so bright and colorful — where there is so much death and devastation in the subject matter, Saba has given back life and vitality to those who had their stories cut short.

The final series also provides the viewer with a space to rest and meditate, while paying respects to three Iranian young women, all murdered in the last year, before their lives could really begin. None of these individuals were really so far away from any one of us. If we feel that proximity, maybe we will be prompted to do something, to finally change the course of history.

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Reyhaneh Ameri, Negin Sheikhi, Romina Ashrafi, 2022, acrylic on acrylic mirror sheet, 15.5×15.5" ea. Photo: Farzan Ghasemi



Reyhaneh Ameri, 2022, acrylic on acrylic mirror sheet, 15.5×15.5", with the reflection of Saba Farhoudnia. Photo: Arash Adibi

Adèle Eisenstein is an independent curator, writer, arts administrator originally from NY, who lived in Europe, primarily in Budapest, for over two decades. She completed studies at the University of Rochester, University of Paris – Sorbonne, New School – Parsons School of Design, and School of Visual Arts. In Budapest, she worked for the Balazs Bela Film Studio; then for a decade at the Soros Center for Contemporary Arts – Budapest; C3: Center for Culture & Communication. A founding editor of Central European contemporary art journal: *Praesens*; served on the editorial board at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest; currently editor of the RomaMoMA blog for ERIAC: European Roma Institute for Arts & Culture in Berlin. Curated numerous exhibitions and events around Europe, and in NY. In 2018 was Program Director & Curator at NARS in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. She has written, translated and edited numerous art catalogues, and hundreds of articles. Former Chair and Board member of Amnesty International Hungary, and a Founding Board member of the NYC Real Estate Investment Cooperative, working to secure permanently affordable commercial space for and with local communities in the five boroughs. Currently Grants Manager at LMCC: Lower Manhattan Cultural Council.

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Saba Farhoudnia was born in Tehran, Iran in 1987, in the midst of war. Saba's paintings are monumental in scale and explore the challenges facing the human condition. Saba merges the art of drawing, painting, language, and verse, through brushstrokes, geometric forms, calligraphy, and gestural marks to evoke drama, pain, humor, and beauty. The forms are intended to plumb the depths of the grotesque and elevate the humor in beauty. Her work explores humanity poised on a precipice: facing an insecure present and an uncertain future. Saba received a BFA and MFA from the University of Science and Culture in Tehran, Iran, and a second MFA in Painting from the LeRoy E. Hoffberger School of Painting at MICA in Baltimore. She is an alumna of the AIM fellowship program at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, and awardee of the QCA Queens Arts Fund (QAF) New Work Grant in 2022. Saba lives and works in NYC.

Saba Farhoudnia: *Reflection* William P. Miller Gallery

Jamaica Center for Arts and Learning

161-04 Jamaica Ave., Jamaica, NY 11432 Curated by: Adèle Eisenstein

December 2–23, 2022

Monday-Saturday, 10am-6pm



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<https://artspiel.org/saba-farhoudnia-reflection-at-jamaica-center-for-arts-learning/>