



UNDERGROUND

So Far, So Close Group Exhibition by
Katayoun Amjadi,
Shirin Ghoraishi,
Ziba Rajabi.

Exhibition Run: Sept 6-26

Opening Reception: Fri, Sept 6, 6-9pm

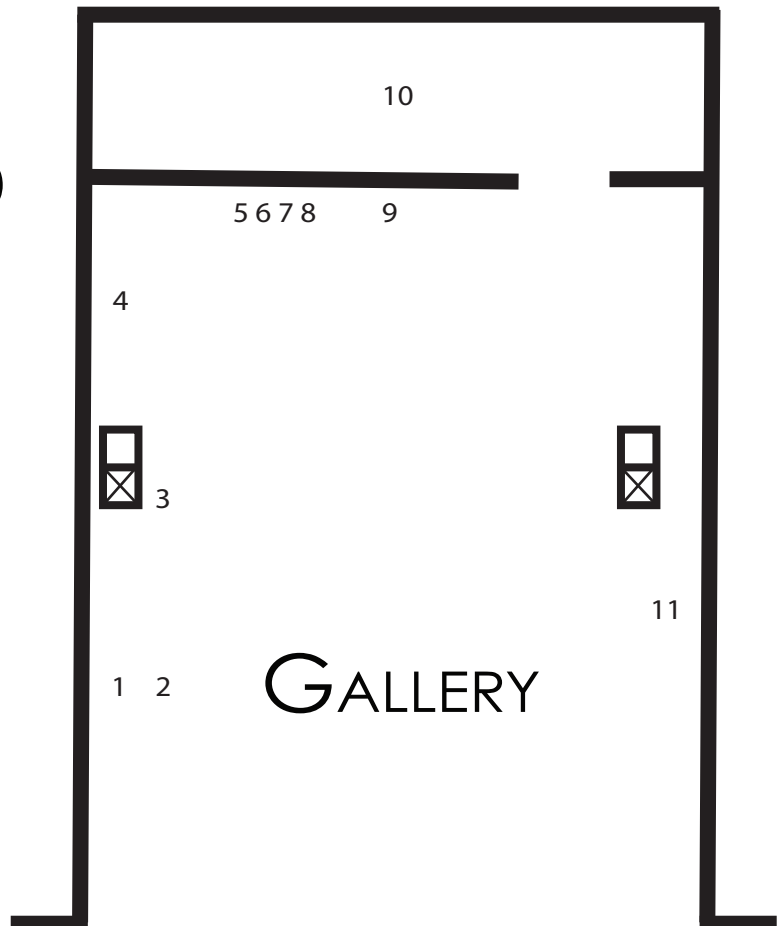
Artist Talk: Sep 6, 7:30-8:30pm Moderated by
Aida Shahghasemi

Gallery Hours: Sat-Tue 1-7pm

Virtual Reality Experience: Sat-Sun 2-5pm

Q.arma Building, Basement Level

1224 Quincy St NE, Minneapolis, MN 55413



1. Katayoun Amjadi
Slow Kills – Aliyah & Bahman
iObject Series, 2024
CMYK Silkscreen Print on Paper
25 5/8 x 19 5/8 in. each
2. Katayoun Amjadi
Under Boots
iObject Series, 2024
Earthenware Ceramics, Iron Decal
approx. 14 x 3 x 3 in. each
3. Katayoun Amjadi
Historical Objects
iObject Series, 2024
Plexiglass, Packages of Alia & Bahman
7 x 7 x 3 1/2 in.
4. Katayoun Amjadi
Bahman Tulipier
iObject Series, 2024
Earthenware Ceramics, Gold Luster
12 x 7 1/2 x 3 1/4 in.
5. Top Left: Ziba Rajabi
Forgot to Fly III
Watercolor Monotype
12 x 14 in.
Published by Amilado Press;
Printed by Nancy Ariza, 2024
\$350
6. Bottom Left: Ziba Rajabi
Forgot to Fly VII
Watercolor Monotype, Pencil
12 x 14 in.
Published by Amilado Press;
Printed by Nancy Ariza, 2024
\$350
7. Top Right: Ziba Rajabi
Forgot to Fly V
Watercolor Monotype
12 x 14 in.
Published by Amilado Press;
Printed by Nancy Ariza, 2024
\$350
8. Bottom Right: Ziba Rajabi
Forgot to Fly V
Watercolor Monotype
12 x 14 in.
Published by Amilado Press;
Printed by Nancy Ariza, 2024
\$350
9. Ziba Rajabi
Forgot to Fly VIII
Watercolor Monotype
12 x 14 in.
Published by Amilado Press;
Printed by Nancy Ariza, 2024
\$350
10. Shirin Ghoraishi
Echoes and Fragments
2024
Interactive Media (VR)
11. Ziba Rajabi
Land of Tulips IV
Watercolor Monotype
12 x 14 in.
Published by Amilado Press;
Printed by Nancy Ariza, 2024
\$350

—— The *So Far, So Close* exhibition explores the complicated experience of displacement from the motherland through themes of space, distance, and memory by Iranian female artists who reside outside of Iran by choice or by force.

Even though these artists have resided so far from their homeland for years, they feel so close to it, and distance has not diminished their love and care for it. Through the Persian language and Iranian culture, a part of their existence is defined by where they are from, regardless of where they take these temporal bodies. Meanwhile, they embrace and value their borderless life journey and cherish experiences that they have had as a result of a deliberate choice to live abroad and the opportunity to explore the unknown. Throughout years of living in the United States—despite how the politics of this country have treated them—they have grown to develop a sense of belonging to this land, creating a community with like-minded, colorful people and trying to make a temporary home out of it until it becomes permanent—if ever.

—— Centered around themes of low-art and high-art conversation; diasporic identity through the lens of history, memory, and nostalgia; storytelling via iconography and symbolism as means of communication; and the power of representation, *Katayoun Amjadi's* interdisciplinary work spans through ceramics, installation, video, sculpture, writing, and social activism. While her work is a commentary on current global concerns, it further looks for historical traces of the human condition and probes the relationship between past and present, tradition and modernity, and the many types of identity woven through our collective history.

The work presented in the *So Far, So Close* exhibition, collectively titled *iObject*, is from *The Things We Bring* series. *iObject* consists of four panels of silkscreen prints flanked by two wall pieces. In front and to the side of this iteration of the work are several displays of ceramic pieces and collected artifacts.

As a series, *The Things We Bring* explores how the objects we keep when moving as an immigrant or while living in diaspora are signifiers of culture, ethnicity, and history; they become touchstones to our past, of places we no longer inhabit yet want to keep close. Objects we choose with care are the culture bearers, the storytellers. They keep one's history vibrantly present while being foundational for the conception of a new life in a new and often challenging world.

As part of this series, Katayoun is presenting

story of two souvenirs that she brought with herself to Minneapolis from Tehran and Jerusalem.

There is a sense of pride in the word “national”—national heritage, national cuisine, national flower, etc. In *iObject*, two seemingly insignificant nationals are the subject of Amjadi's study: two ordinary cigarette packs picked up from newsstands in Tehran and Jerusalem.

Tobacco, like any commodity, is layered with associations, meaning, and history. Originally native to the Americas and introduced to the old-world through European colonialism, it is now part of a global economy and all that comes with production at that scale. However, the aspect of tobacco that interests me currently is the intersection of brand identity, national identity, and nostalgia, infused with a little irony.

Alia is the national cigarette of Palestine, but ironically, it is sold and is popular in Israel. It is a Palestinian product that has been appropriated by the Israeli population, yet carries the colors of the flag of Palestine. In Arabic, Alia means “exalted” or excellent/exceptional. In Hebrew, Aliyah is seen as the act of rising, as in ascending to Jerusalem. In modern history, as one of the most basic tenets of Zionism, Aliyah has come to mean the return of Jews of any nationality to Israel, a “birthright” to gain citizenship in Israel. Alia has a sense of disbursement across multiple countries and cultures, some in direct conflict of contested land.

Bahman is the national cigarette of Iran. In Farsi, Bahman means “snow avalanche” and is also the eleventh month in the Persian calendar, the month of February in the Gregorian calendar. Bahman is the month of the 1979 revolution, toppling Iran's historical monarchy and replacing it with the present-day Islamic Republic of Iran. In a sense, Bahman of 1979 is considered the origin of the Iranian diaspora, as many Iranians migrated to other nations at this time. So, at the same time, Bahman is the product of the Islamic Republic of Iran; it references the revolution and the consequent dispersal of Iranians into a state of diaspora and has embedded in it a sense of nostalgia for pre-revolutionary Iran.

iObject presents two national flowers along with the cigarette artifacts. Both flowers gather the sense of nationalism and nostalgia, yet each are appropriated by opposite sides of the same conflict.

The tulip has long been a symbol of love, belief, and passion, and in Iranian culture, it represents the advent of spring as well as the symbol of martyrdom. The tulip's symbolism in Persian mythology can be traced back to the love

story of Shirin & Farhad in sixth-century Iran. The commoner Farhad loved Princess Shirin but had nothing to offer but his pure heart. Given a challenge by the king, who abhorred the thought of his daughter marrying someone beneath her noble birth, Farhad labored moving mountains to win Shirin's love. When it was clear he would complete his task, he was deceived with false news of her death and threw himself from the cliffs in anguish. According to the legend, scarlet red tulips grew from the land where Farhad's blood fell.

The central motif of the contemporary Iranian flag depicts four petals of the tulip combined with a sword representing the five pillars of Islam. Ironically, the tulip has more recently been associated with resistance against the current Iranian regime, the same regime that, since 1979, has employed tulip imagery in its own propaganda art. The mythology of the tulip and its appropriation across time, even just within Persian culture, has meant that what it signifies shifts with each iteration from love, to the arrival of spring, from rebirth to the blood of a lover, or the blood of soldiers and innocent civilian martyrs.

The poppy is associated with the grain goddess Demeter, and with its narcotic properties inducing painlessness, slumber or death. The poppy has journeyed across time, history and place as a symbol of the fragility of life, resilience in survival, yet also as the blood of Christ. More recently as a remembrance of those lost in war. In particular it is deeply connected with the trench warfare in the poppy fields of Belgium in World War I. The poppy is also the national flower of Palestine and is associated with a connection to the land, and the bloodshed endured through the Israeli occupation.

—— Fascinated by technology and its role in our world today, **Shirin Ghoraishi's** research-based work involves science, technology, and interactive media, that centers around themes of space, memory, real and unreal, and the experience of living in between.

Her virtual-reality interactive work presented in the *So Far, So Close* exhibition delves into the interplay between reality, memory, and dreams, exploring how the psyche navigates these realms. It examines concepts of intentional and incidental forgetting to elucidate the mechanisms of our brain and neurotransmitters in the process of forgetting.

Through this work, the boundary between the unreal and illustrations blurs, transforming into memories that can be recalled. In this interactive installation, Ghoraishi sources the imagery from vague memories that might have been made by her

own mind or a reminiscence of the past. The artist instructs the audience on how to experience the work and then leads them through the installation. After experiencing the work, the audience exits the installation. This work of art is purely based on memory and the illusion of self, space, and time, highlighting a lack of certainty. Ghoraishi's aim for the audience is to doubt and question our reality: what is an illusion, and what is a memory from the past? What information is structured, and what part of reality is altered? And how do we navigate it?

In *Echoes and fragments*, Ghoraishi explores the fragile relationship between memory and forgetting, drawing from her research on psychological defense mechanisms. Memory is not just a repository of our past; it is a fluid, often selective narrative that can be shaped and reshaped by time and emotion. Her work delves into the idea that forgetting, whether intentional or incidental, is not just a loss but sometimes a necessary process to protect the self.

The virtual reality medium allows participants to step into this liminal space. In *Echoes and fragments* interactive installation, upon wearing the VR headset, audiences are enveloped by the vastness of the ocean—a representation of the subconscious where memories of home and displacement float. The ocean is both comforting and overwhelming, symbolizing the depths of emotion that come with leaving behind the familiar.

As they turn away from the ocean, participants find themselves on a subway train a transient, in-between space. This train represents the journey between past and future, between the known and the unknown. It is a place of movement without a clear destination, much like the experience of migration. The time within the train is limited, emphasizing the fleeting nature of memory and the reality that we cannot choose what we hold onto.

As the train journey ends, Ghoraishi leads the participants into darkness, representing the uncertainties and the aspects of memory that are intentionally or incidentally forgotten. She asks them to remove the headset, bringing them face to face with their own reflection in a mirror. This final moment is a poignant reminder that as immigrants, we are shaped by what we remember of our past and what we have had to forget. The mirror reflects not just the self but the ongoing negotiation of identity rooted in a homeland that feels both near and far, remembered and forgotten.

Through *Echoes and fragments*, Ghoraishi invites the audience to experience the emotional landscape of an immigrant, where memory and

forgetting serve as both a burden and a defense. It is a journey of holding onto fragments of the past while forging a new sense of self in an unfamiliar world, ultimately revealing how our memories, shaped by time and circumstance, define who we are.

—— Working primarily with painting, drawing, and installation, **Ziba Rajabi** reconciles her relationship with where she comes from, Iran, and where she currently resides, the United States. She draws inspiration from Iranian architecture, book art, and Persian calligraphy to inform her compositions. In this series of works exhibited in the *So Far So Close* exhibition, through watercolor monotypes, she created prints, employing verses from Pop songs by Iranian female singers who lived and worked in exile after the 1979 revolution. The medium of printmaking metaphorically adds another layer of distance, while art and music bridge this gap and shorten this distance. During the 80s and 90s, the Islamic regime banned pop music, and the only art and music allowed were war propaganda. The only sources of Iranian dance music that would bring joy to birthdays, weddings, and parties were the smuggled tapes and VHS from Iranian artists in exile. Growing up in that era, she owes the happiness of their festivities and parties to these artists in exile. These works are an ode to them.

Lyrics used in this series of watercolor monotypes presented in *So Far, So Close* exhibition are chosen particularly from pop songs by Leila Forouhar, an Iranian woman singer who fled to the United States in the 1980s. In this specific song, which was released in 1994 in Los Angeles, she pictures two birds in a foreign garden to metaphorically articulate her experience in exile: *we couldn't fly so much so that we forgot how to fly*. In these songs, while the lyrics bear a deep sense of sorrow, they incorporate upbeat dance music. This contrast in meaning and expression has influenced the visual decisions in these works, primarily the color palette. This series of monotypes are products of a collaboration with Amilado Press and were printed by Nancy Ariza.

خیلی دور، خیلی نزدیک نمایشگاه گروهی است از هنرمندان زن ایرانی که به انتخاب یا به اجبار خارج از ایران سکونت دارند. آثار هنری ارائه شده در این نمایشگاه حول محور تجربه زندگی خارج از مرزهای فرهنگی و سیاسی ایران می‌گردد که از دریچه مفاهیمی مانند دوری، جدا افتادگی، و خاطره این موضوع را بررسی می‌کنند.

با وجود این‌که این هنرمندان سال‌هاست دور از وطن زیسته‌اند، اما این واقعیت خدشه‌ای بر علاقه و اهمیت‌شان به سرزمین مادری وارد نکرده‌است و تو گویی بخشی از وجودشان از بنیان با زبان و فرهنگ ایرانی شکل گرفته است. این‌که این کالبد فانی را کجا بپرند تأثیری بر هویت فرهنگی‌شان ندارد. با این حال، در برهه‌ای از زندگی این هنرمندان تصمیمی آگاهانه بر ترک مملکت و روبرویی با ناشناخته‌ها گرفتند و اکنون امکان زندگی‌ای بی‌مرز و تجربیات ارزنده حاصل از آن انتخاب را ارج می‌نهند. در طی سالیان متممادی زندگی در ایالات متحده، علی‌رغم تجربیات ناخوشایند از سیاست‌های این کشور، این هنرمندان به مرور حس تعلقی به این سرزمین جدید پیدا کرده و از میان مردمان همفکر که از گوشه گوشه این کره آبی به گرد هم آمده‌اند جامعه کوچکی برای خود دست و پا کرده‌اند و در تلاشند که خانه‌ای موقتی اینجا بسازند، شاید که دائمی شود—اگر بشود.

Katayoun Amjadi is an Iranian-born, Minneapolis-based artist, educator, and independent curator. In her work, she often considers the sociopolitical systems that shape our perceptions of Self and Other, such as language, religion, gender, politics, and nationalist ideologies. Amjadi blurs these boundaries and creates an off-balance, hybrid style that is slightly acerbic and a little bit tongue-in-cheek. Her art probes the relationship between past and present, tradition and modernity, and individual versus collective identity, and simultaneously seeks to spur discussion about our place in the temporal arc and the interwoven roots of our histories. Amjadi holds an MFA in ceramics and sculpture from the University of Minnesota Twin Cities and currently teaches in the Art Department at Normandale Community College in Bloomington, Minnesota. Her work has been exhibited in several group and solo exhibitions nationally and internationally, including at the Minnesota Museum of American Art, Rochester Art Center, Weisman Art Museum, South Dakota Museum of Art, Des Moines Art Center, University of St. Thomas, Public Functionary, Beijing Film Academy, Karlsruhe Art Academy, and Haftsamir Gallery among others. Selected fellowships include MCAD-Jerome Emerging Artist (2020/2021), Artist Initiative Grants from the Minnesota State Arts Board (2015/2019), and Creative Individual Grant (2024).



Katayoun Amjadi is a fiscal year 2024 recipient of a Creative Individuals grant from the Minnesota State Arts Board. This activity is made possible by the voters of Minnesota State Arts Board, thanks to a legislative appropriation from the arts and cultural heritage fund.

Shirin Ghorashi, an Iranian-born artist based in Minneapolis, explores the intersections of space, psychology, power structures, technology, and science. Educated at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and holding a Master's degree in Visual Art from the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Shirin's practice as both an artist and curator challenges and redefines the boundaries of perception and reality.

Ziba Rajabi (b.1988, Tehran, Iran) received her MFA from the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, and her BFA from the Sooreh University, Tehran, Iran. Her primary practice is focused on painting, drawing, and fabric-based installation. She is the recipient of the Jerome Foundation Mid-Career Artists Fellowship and the Artist 360 Grant, a program sponsored by the Mid-America Arts Alliance. Her work has been included in a number of exhibitions, nationally and internationally, such as Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; AR, CICA Museum; South Korea; Masur Museum; LA; 21C Museum, AR; Aaraan Gallery, Iran; The II Platform, UK, among many others. She has been an artist in residence at Vermont Studio Center, Terrain Residency, and Anderson Ranch Arts Center.



This exhibition is supported by the Twin Cities Iranian Culture Collective and the Minnesota Humanities Center.