

Trans/Planting was curated by Gita Hashemi and Taraneh Hemami, and coordinated for A Space by Gita Hashemi.

A multidisciplinary exhibition, **TRANS/PLANTING; CONTEMPORARY ART BY WOMEN FROM/IN IRAN**, brings together nine artists whose works engage the problematics of nationality, history, gender and sexuality through diverse practices ranging from photography and painting to installation and digital media. Challenging the stereotypes and misconceptions, the artists delve into the uneasy and interrogative relations that bind the subjectivities, the multiple identities, of the woman from/in Iran to her homeland(s), to the past-present/here-there continuum. They integrate the richly metaphoric language emblematic of the Iranian arts as central to their conceptual and disciplinary concerns, thus opening the exhibition space to layered readings. Characterized by contradictions and multiplicity of meanings inherent in art as self-examination, Trans/Planting displays the artists' intimate and provocative explorations in contemporary culture and politics.

The relations between the female body and the Islamic cultures' obsession with concealment form a major theme in this exhibition. Unidentifiable naked women in **Aaram Bayat's** photographs, their heads cropped or covered, confront the viewer's gaze to raise questions about the status of the female body as site of her identity. The women in **Shadee Ghadirian's** meticulous photographic reconstructions of the late-19th century Iran appear in the fully-covered style of the period, but their careful poise is destabilized by the presence of historically incongruent objects, the effect alluding to the

retrogressive laws that govern the lives of women in today's Iran. Seen through key holes installed in three wooden boxes, **Termeh Yeghiazarian's** back-lit photo transparencies of her own body parts mutilated by pins and wire, comment on the interior/exterior dichotomies created by social and cultural oppression. **Aylene Fallah's** intricately woven giant braid/rug stands as a reminder of the physical/spiritual duality contained within the body, and, for the informed audience, gestures to a symbolic deBance of the mandatory hijab.

Engagement with concepts of displacement and exile form another thematic thread in Trans/Planting.

**Haleh Niazmand's** richly textured paintings mimic scientific representations of wounded skin to allude to the spiritual wounds inflicted by the experience of displacement. **Kendal Kennedy's** installation with mirrors and lights signifies the split realities informing the immigrant's psyche and history, and creates an economy of meaning established by the interplay of surface and reflection, the tension between reality and illusion. **Gita Hashemi's** narrative multimedia CD-ROM gives voice to three women who tell stories about their lives in Iran and in Canada in a complex weaving of archival history and poetic reflection that invite the viewer to question the relations between fact and fiction in both history and memory. **Taraneh Hemami's** obsessively sewn journal pages and remnants of her art works of the past twenty years chronicle the life spent in exile and stand as witness to her spiritual quest for filling the void created by that experience. Trans/Planting also includes the late **Chohreh Feyzdjou's** only piece that has survived bureaucratic entanglement in France after her death. While Feyzdjou's painted fabric roll documents her own personal history and struggles, its presence in this show is a highly ironic and apt comment on the particular battles facing immigrants in their host

countries.

These readings and classifications are but narrow, simplified interpretations. Although the curatorial concepts guiding this exhibition focused primarily on the poetic delivery of the political, all of the artists display rigorous engagement in formal dialogues within their disciplines. The strength of this exhibition is rooted, precisely, in their ability to transplant social issues of particular concern into the realm of universal art.

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