

The Political Is Personal

Gita Hashemi: A decade in retrospect

Exhibition Proposal to the Red House

Curatorial Motivation

Perhaps no more than the decades preceding it, the first decade of the Western calendar's twenty-first century was fraught with wars and political disasters. What characterized this decade for much of the Western world, unlike the 80s and most of the 90s, was a resurgence in oppositional tendencies and a renewed sense of urgency in the necessity to make the political personal and to put the body, literally, in the matrix of politics. On the surface, the resurgence and renewal were motivated in part by the "war on terror."

Yet to be dubbed a "world war," the "global war on terror" drew many nations – willingly or bullied – into its unholy military alliances and subsequent turbulent political currents. Wars waged on other people's lands that had been hidden from the screens since the Vietnam disaster was once again brought home as the sheer scale of the "war on terror" demanded massive military investment and recruitment at the expense of the working class and the poor in North America, Europe and Australia. And, once again, countless people took to the streets and to other public arenas to oppose and resist, this time with a deeper understanding that the war being fought "there" was the war that was already won "here" by garnering the public's support and compliance.

The neo-liberal post-welfare state had throughout the previous decades corroded the foundations of the engaged and active citizenry of the 1960s and 1970s as it had demolished the natural environment. The state was now responsive only to the monstrous amphibian of global corporations unrestricted by borders of any kind. There lied the urgency that moved many people into action and activism such that many international institutional art arenas opened their doors to and became proponents of overtly political art.

For over two decades my work has been guided by my reformulation of the feminist principle: The personal is poetic, the poetic is political, the political is personal. Similar to many artists from the "Third World," I have never questioned whether art is political; rather, I have been concerned with the ways in which the political and the personal fuse in art. Deep engagement with contemporary issues, transdisciplinary approach to art production, politicization of aesthetic encounter and creative practice, transcending the limitations of institutional art, and genuine search for more direct relations with the art public have consistently motivated my work.

Exhibition Description

For this exhibition at the Red House, I propose to bring together and remount four pieces created during the last decade, including *Of Shifting Shadows* (CD-R, 2000), *A War Primer* (interactive soundart, 2001), *Post-Coitus* (interactive netart, 2003) and *Ephemeral Monument* (performance and participatory video installation, 2008). The exhibition will also include a new piece, *Utopias In-Progress* (performance installation), to be premiered at the Red House. All of these works

address the political through deeply personal strategies without losing the legibility of the content and intentions.

Of Shifting Shadows and *Ephemeral Monument* glance back at the 1960s and 1970s through the lens of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, a major landmark in my own personal history and one of the most dramatic popular uprisings of the twentieth century. *A War Primer* and *Post-Coitus* explore the 2000s by seeking the roots of the “war on terror” in psycho-sexual and historical dynamics of the United States empire. *Utopias In-Progress* is a meta-work that explores the relationship between art and politics and art and its public in a politicized art world.

I will be remounting some of the works in new ways to accommodate the technical and spatial specificities of the Red House. Below is the plan for distributing the works between the two spaces. Details will be added/modified upon closer consultation with the gallery staff. I will need 3 days to install.

Gulliver Hall

A War Primer

Soundart

Tech requirements: CD (or MP3) player with speakers and/or headphones

Originally programmed in Max/MSP, this interactive live mix audio piece is comprised of four layers of sound that draw from a large pre-existing database of audio files including selective words from webster.com, a young voice reading from a mid-19th century U.S. reading primer, news bites about the U.S. war in Afghanistan recorded from Farsi/Dari-language radios, and a live feed from a microphone placed in the gallery. For the Red House exhibit this piece will be mounted as a pre-recorded soundart.

Post-Coitus

8 prints (60cm X 60cm each)

Originally a netart project, this piece was an iteration of the larger project *Strictly Personal* an ongoing archive of original, collected and appropriated media, including text, images, web pages, video and audio footage, e-mails and chat transcripts. *Post-Coitus* draws parallels between colonial war and the Western/North American male erotic imaginary and between capitalism and heterosexism, with an understanding of colonialism-cum-capitalism as shape-shifting, dynamic phenomena that unfold in material planes and in planes of desire. Aiming to disrupt the normalizing gaze and to push the reader into a productive chasm where the relations and assumptions underlying the contemporary political dynamics are questioned, the work combines visuals, audio and text that remix appropriated material with original content, the latter including direct scans of my own body. For the Red House exhibit, this piece will be mounted as 8 photo collages in print.

Utopias In-Progress

On site performance over 3 days leading to documentation to be installed in the gallery after the performance.

Props: A large table, a few chairs, a desk light

Tech requirements: DVD player and a TV

In this performance I will be stationed in the gallery for set hours over three consecutive days during which I will write on 7 sheets of paper an essay in 7 segments about art, revolution and autonomy.

Gallery visitors may sit and engage in conversation with me while I write the essay. They may also

choose to write their own commentary directly on the papers. At the end of each day the finished segments will be hung on the wall along with pens so visitors can write on the work throughout the duration of the exhibit. The performance will be documented on video and the documentation will become part of the installation.

Nameless Hall

The space has to be darkened.

Of Shifting Shadows

Interactive CD-R

Tech requirements: computer station (Mac preferred) with speakers

Widely exhibited, highlighted and reviewed, this piece is an interactive hypermedia narrative constructed in 48 segments, layered with video, audio, animated text and graphics, including original and reconstructed archival material in English and Farsi. The overall viewing time is between 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The viewer interacts with the piece through the mouse. An exploration in the non-linear movement of memory, *Of Shifting Shadows* speaks to the fragmentary effects of traumatic social events on individual subjectivities and the agency of the individuals in recreating their lives. The work takes its impetus from the 1979 Iranian Revolution, revisited after 20 years through a personal journey in memory and history.

Ephemeral Monument

Single-channel video projection

Tech requirements: DVD player connected to data projector

Originally a performance-video installation created in response to the archives of the library of the Iranian Students Association of Northern California, active from 1964 to 1984. The performance took place and was recorded over 3 days on site at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in San Francisco. In the performance, I wrote in chalk, erased and re-wrote multiple times different selections from a few texts that emerged from and influenced the political, the poetic and the personal dimensions of the opposition to the Pahlavi Monarchy in the years leading to the 1979 Revolution in Iran. I used the material and embodied processes of writing, erasing and re-writing to construct a ritual for re-inhabiting and reflecting upon the past. For the Red House exhibit, the recording of the Yerba Buena performance will be mounted as a single-channel video.