

CDYMONSİ

YARAT!

The graphic features a large, abstract composition of overlapping geometric shapes. A central blue triangle points to the right, overlapping a larger red triangle that also points to the right. The background is a solid light blue. The text is positioned on the right side of the image.

Commonist

Contemporary Art
Exhibition

22 September — 22 October, 2012
Baku, Azerbaijan

Afet Baghirova
Aida Mahmudova
Ali Hasanov
Djemma Sattar
Faig Ahmed
Fakhriya Mammadova
Farid Rasulov
Ilkin Huseynov
Leyla Aliyeva
Mahmud Rustamov
Mammad Rashidov
Niyaz Najafov
Orkhan Huseynov
Parviz Jafarov
Rashad Alakbarov
Rashad Babayev
Sitara Ibrahimova
Tarlan Gorchu
Vusal Rahim

Introduction

As a new and dramatically emerging phenomenon, multiculturalism provokes extremely dissonant reaction ranging from unreserved dismay and jackbooted rejection to obscure expectations. Amplitude range of its feelings is very wide.

Unsatisfied Europeans claim multiculturalism policies for the migrants' unwillingness to get assimilated in western societies. Multiculturalism and associated tolerance policy are rates among instability and anarchy reasons. However, multiculturalism is also perceived as the ultimate refuge and salvation for those ones who lost their hope for prosperity and understanding in the countries of their origin. In democratic societies, we realize ourselves through pluralism of opinions, mindsets and insights.

A new Yarat! Contemporary Art Space - implemented project promoted cooperation of 19 artists and represents 19 fundamentally opposite attitudes towards the issues above. The title of the project itself — "Commonist" appeals to the common sense, a broader one than any political dimension. "Commonist" is not simply a national that holds leftist or rightist views in politics, but rather a cosmopolite that has to put up with the altered regulations of human coexistence. A cosmopolite adheres to panhuman virtues in his judgment.

There are lots of definitions of multiculturalism invented by politicians, sociologists, philosophers and writers. Yarat! Contemporary Art Space proposes artistic interpretation of that huge and contradictory phenomenon that addresses everyone.

Ulviya Akhundova

Afet Baghirova



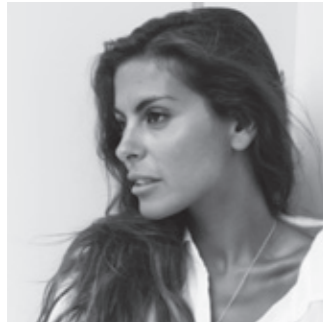
▲ **Afet Baghirova's work uses conflicting visual signifiers and stereotypes, forcing signs into ironic and, at times, unnerving relationships. Her work tackles the confusing reality of an individual's place in modern Azerbaijan and plays with contemporary understanding of the region at a social and cultural crossroads.**

▶ Baghirova's series organized for this exhibition pairs the Muslim veil with body art to disrupt simplistic binaries through aesthetic means. The visual paradigm established by the images is entirely dependent on the viewer's ideological baggage. By composing images of the concealing veil paired with tattoos and piercings peeking from behind the drapery, the compositions present charged symbols that can simultaneously stand for both stereotypical conformity and stereotypical rebellion. For some, the veil functions as a symbol for the continuation of tradition and repression, yet for others it serves as a form of resistance to colonialism and imperialism. Similarly, the piercings and tattoos can simultaneously be understood as an aspect of selected traditions or a form of cultural rebellion. Thus, the interpretation of each work and the identity of tradition and modernity are entirely dependent on the ideological perspective of the viewer.

Essentially, from behind the veil emerges a parody of the entire history of the relationship between the Orient and the Occident. Caught between reformation and retrenchment, the images intimate the countless perspectives associated with the idea of multiculturalism. They offer an ironic portrayal and acerbic critique of the cultural and ideological baggage one carries. The veil and body art often serve as a site for cross-cultural mistranslation. By constructing unique combinations of elements, Baghirova presents new narratives that reorient the gaze and remap visual conversations to show the multivalent ways in which these visual qualifiers communicate.



Aida Mahmudova



Aida Mahmudova's work consistently encompasses aspects of memory and nostalgia. The objects she composes, whether photographs, paintings, or installations, ruminate on notion of 'longing' — specifically, the longing for the memory of a place, rather than the place itself. Her work ruminates on how memory is tied to the debris and the material of a past life rather than simply the locale or context.

Mahmudova's pieces for the exhibition consist of both a painting and an installation. The veiled painting is composed of muted hues and is shrouded in a hazy mist that conveys both actual and fabricated memory. The image is based on a scene constructed from actual elements of old Baku and the Absheron Peninsula. However, it is infused with childhood memories and blurred recollections. The image echoes a sense of longing — the longing for a home to which one cannot return. The installation reconstructs the half-remembered scene of the painting. It literally consists of aspects of Mahmudova herself — her clothes and belongings, as well as objects scoured from around Baku. In the 'total installation', Mahmudova is at both an artist and curator, and literer and trash collector.

Both the painting and the installation attempt to capture that which cannot be completely recalled. They ruminate on the spatial and temporal labyrinth of time, essentially conveying both the impossibility of

'returning home' as well the slow pace of a soviet era of stagnation. The compositions capture the essence of a 'diaspora of memory'. The memories, while based in the native city of Baku, nonetheless unfold through the superimposition of both childhood recollections and foreign lands.

The pieces illustrate that nostalgia depends on the materiality of place: sensual perceptions, smells, and sounds. In an era of rampant technological and urban development, mass globalization, migration, and the growth of richly multicultural environments, Mahmudova's work makes clear that nostalgia for a place is more than a specific locale, and more than merely a desire for a specific context. It is the remembered sensations of the debris of a past life. The compositions explain the mystery of what we long for when we are nostalgic and in that sense limn the delicate compositions.



Ali Hasanov



Ali Hasanov's work exhibits the hallmarks of a polymathic practice. He is simultaneously comfortable working with music, video, installation, photography, and performance. Hasanov's creations concretize ideas through constructing interesting and dynamic relationships between individual objects and the overall installation and/or exhibition in which they exist. Often site-responsive, his ventures are architecturally bound and exist as theatrical sculptural projects.

Hasanov's sculptural installation, "Masters", is composed of hundreds of discarded veniki — brooms made of bundled twigs that are specific to the continental region and especially prevalent in post-soviet states. These unwanted and forgotten veniki are amassed and lashed together to form an otherworldly object. The accumulation is composed of items that exist as both debris (discarded objects) and the mechanism for cleaning debris (veniki). The veniki immediately connote street and household work, manual labor, and the process of returning chaos to order or messiness to cleanliness. Hasanov's accumulation exists in a world in which people have discarded their veniki in favor of contributing their voice to the global debates regarding multicultural policies. Yet, in a world where everyone postures as a "Master", very little is accomplished.

The accumulation of veniki visualizes and parodies forms of control and the pitfalls of political posturing. Multiculturalism is often understood as a means of managing diversity and multiplicity within a given society. It identifies masters and minions — essentially, determining who has the authority to conduct (control) the conduct (behavior) of others. Hasanov's work visualizes the absurd state created when populations play political games of power. The aggregated object is not a vague aphorism, but a concrete underpinning of the human labor necessary to constitute a functioning society.



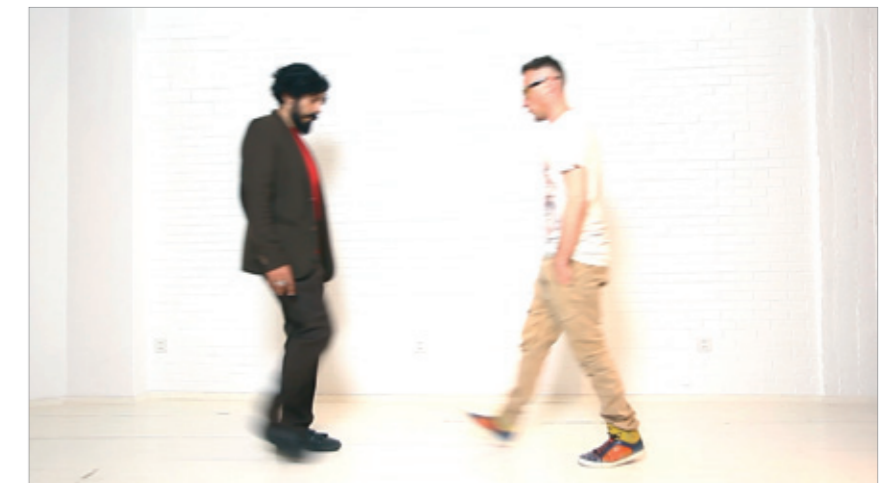
Djemma Sattar



Djemma Sattar's work fuses elegant formal designs with biting wit. Working in sculpture, fashion, and film, Sattar's compositions show unique and unnerving combinations of elegance and terror. Her work includes life-size figures covered in cockroaches or grotesque fluids turned solids, as well as fashion designs that are dangerously seductive.

For this exhibition, Sattar directed the short film, West – East. The film, shot from a camera positioned waist-high, depicts two figures in a non-descript location. The individuals repeatedly enter the camera's frame from opposite sides and attempt to cross the filmic space. However, they are consistently obstructed by one-another. As one moves left, the other moves right. A delicate dance ensues in which both attempt to cross while simultaneously blocking the other — ultimately resulting in repeated obstructions. These obstructions take the form of people and decisions rather than physical walls or barriers.

Using a simple and absurd scenario to which viewers can easily relate, the film visualizes the complicated flux that is multiculturalism. Rather than reducing the concept to a series of binaries such as ruler and ruled, or native and immigrant, the film characterizes multiculturalism as an idea that resides in the decisions of people rather than state policies. It is a constantly fluctuating and always dynamic conversation with multiple voices and directionalities. The visual stylization, non-descript backdrop, and soundless composition allow the film to exist in multiple locales. By transcending political and cultural borders, the short film's highly relatable circumstance is able to communicate in multiple languages and on multiple levels.



Faig Ahmed



Faig Ahmed's compositions conceptually and formally engage in a conversation with both old and new Azerbaijan. Combining the traditional craft of carpet weaving with contemporary sculptural forms, Ahmed's work re-invents long established cultural practices. This approach embraces the incongruencies of the ancient and the modern to address contemporary issues of identity that inform present-day Azerbaijan.

Ahmed's sculpture included in this exhibition, like his work in general, merges cultural difference in a unique and interesting way. The idiosyncratic form consists of both soft and hard elements. While the interior is covered in soft, pliable wool harvested from the countryside, the exterior of the piece is solid, smooth, and glossy, evoking the imagery of the city. The inner realm of the form becomes a plush woolen carpet full of musty smells and natural forms. This greatly contrasts with the sculpture's hard, industrial outer shell that exhibits a sterile and heavily worked quality. A cascade of hues falls from the top of the piece to bring color to the monochromatic form. The sculpture is weirdly seductive on the inside and forbidding on the outside. By showing a series of binaries such as male/female, full/empty, sensual/restraint, etc. it establishes difference within a single object, ultimately showing the differences that make assimilation and integration difficult in a multicultural context.

Azerbaijan is a resoundingly diverse geo-political entity. Ahmed's sculpture, and his work in general, place the Azerbaijani experience in visual terms both austere and playfully. The objects he constructs impress themselves on a viewer's consciousness with a particularly self-effecting ingenuity. In an age of migration, diaspora, and identity issues, the artworks exist as evidence of an era marked by major changes in the everyday. They carry a sense of the past with them while simultaneously repatriating tradition in favor of contemporary developments. The objects do not offer a conclusion or counsel; rather, they visually display a conscious effort to construct an object that is simultaneously ordinary and unique, and irreducibly both 'other' and the 'same'.



Fakhriyya Mammadova



Fakhriyya Mammadova casts a documentarian's eye on everyday life in contemporary Baku. Her projects, both series and singles, capture the unique, multicultural lifestyle of a highly diverse and rapidly changing urban culture.

The startlingly sensitive, yet highly revealing street photographs propose neither an authoritative nor a critical stance, but rather capture the distinct character of a specific urban environment and the personal relationships that exist within and around the city of Baku. Mammadova's photograph, *Sisters*, depicts the city in one of its many roles: that of unifier. The image shows the long awaited reunion of two sisters. Raised in Baku, but now living in London and Dubai respectively, the sisters are separated by geographical, cultural, and political difference. Their reunion is on the occasion of a henna party in preparation for a family member's wedding. Their dress, accessories, and elaborate presentation acknowledge the public event in which they are participating, but the moment shared is intensely private. The image captures the delicate balance between photographic poise and personal drama.

While the sisters face the camera, confronting the machine's documentary purpose, the tightness of their embrace and the lean of their bodies resonate with an intimacy that acknowledges not only their relationship, but also speaks to the unifying role Baku plays in an era of global migration.

The question, "May I take your photo?", provides Mammadova access to the city and its residents. Her photographs permit a viewer to step into societies and situations, to examine closely and step back, and to consider and comment. They transform a multicultural crossroad into a setting in which the dramatic becomes the everyday, and the mundane becomes the extraordinary. Without pretense or artifice, her photographs actively capture the many and varied personalities of Baku and its people, ultimately displaying an uncompromising and startling picture of a rapidly changing urban environment.



Farid Rasulov



Farid Rasulov's work consistently combines incongruous aspects of art and life to create associations that are both ironic and thought provoking. Working in a variety of mediums, including video, painting, sculpture, and installation, the often hyper-realistic compositions (and hyperbolic artist) speak an everyday dialect, but engage in unique and unexpected conversations.

Rasulov approaches art making as if a surgical procedure. His compositions stitch together aspects of popular culture, history, and tradition, often injected with a substantial dose of humor, to reveal the paradoxes inherent in the everyday.

Rasulov's paintings included in the exhibition consist of produce gleaned from local bazaars and medical supplies specific to the hospital environment. In each picture, spatial organization is balanced amidst the seeming randomness of the compositional elements. Painted in vibrant hues from a birds' eye perspective, one peers down upon these lusciously rendered objects. The form and color of each composition exist in a harmony that balances the elongated forms of the bottles, syringes, and tubes with those of carrots, peppers, and cucumbers. Although seemingly incongruous, both the foodstuff and medicine are aspects related to quality of life that are meant to enter the body — either orally or intravenously.

Absurd and poignant, the paintings speak to the ability of objects to live in harmony, yet the inability of people to peacefully co-exist in a multicultural context. The twenty-first century is the century of mass consumption and satisfaction. It is a century in which taste and appetite have, in general, been quelled. Yet in spite of this satiation, hunger and a lack of adequate medical care remain an extremely important and unfortunate social curse. These needs are generally restricted to specific geo-political borders and, when lacking, encourage a forced migration to areas of plenty. The triumph of what constitutes the everyday in Baku — adequate food and medical attention — is what is lacking in other regions or behind various political borders. The vernacular subjects of Rasulov's paintings, while stripped of affect, nonetheless depict a degree of fecundity. The depiction of plenty ultimately leads one to consider its opposite — scarcity. Thus, the paintings encourage a viewer to consider the multivalent and complicated issues that characterize contemporary debates concerning multiculturalism and the motives behind mass migration.



Untitled. Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm. 2012



Untitled. Oil on canvas, 120 x 90 cm. 2012



"Nardaran wedding." C-print. 2011

Ilkin Huseynov



Huseynov's series depicts local wedding celebrations taking place on the outskirts of the Azerbaijani capital Baku. The suburb of Nadaran, which is situated on the Caspian coast, is unique in its preservation of the indigenous culture and community.

Centuries-old customs, such as marriage ceremonies separated by gender, are still adhered to, meaning that this population contrasts sharply with neighbouring districts, which are increasingly Westernised and progressive. Huseynov's work therefore provides a unique insight into largely outdated but nevertheless persisting urban realities.

Eleven works, which Huseynov took at a local Nardaran all-male wedding ceremony displayed. Traditionally festivities are held in purpose built tents, which are only ever used for weddings and funerals. The juxtaposition of the two pivotal moments of a human lifetime here evoke a sort of a return to the basics of individual and social interaction, that are often overshadowed in the context of a busy and cosmopolitan urban life. Huseynov's installation, contrasting with the environment of a contemporary city surrounding it, provides an immersive setting for the viewer to contemplate different facets of urban existence.



Leyla Aliyeva

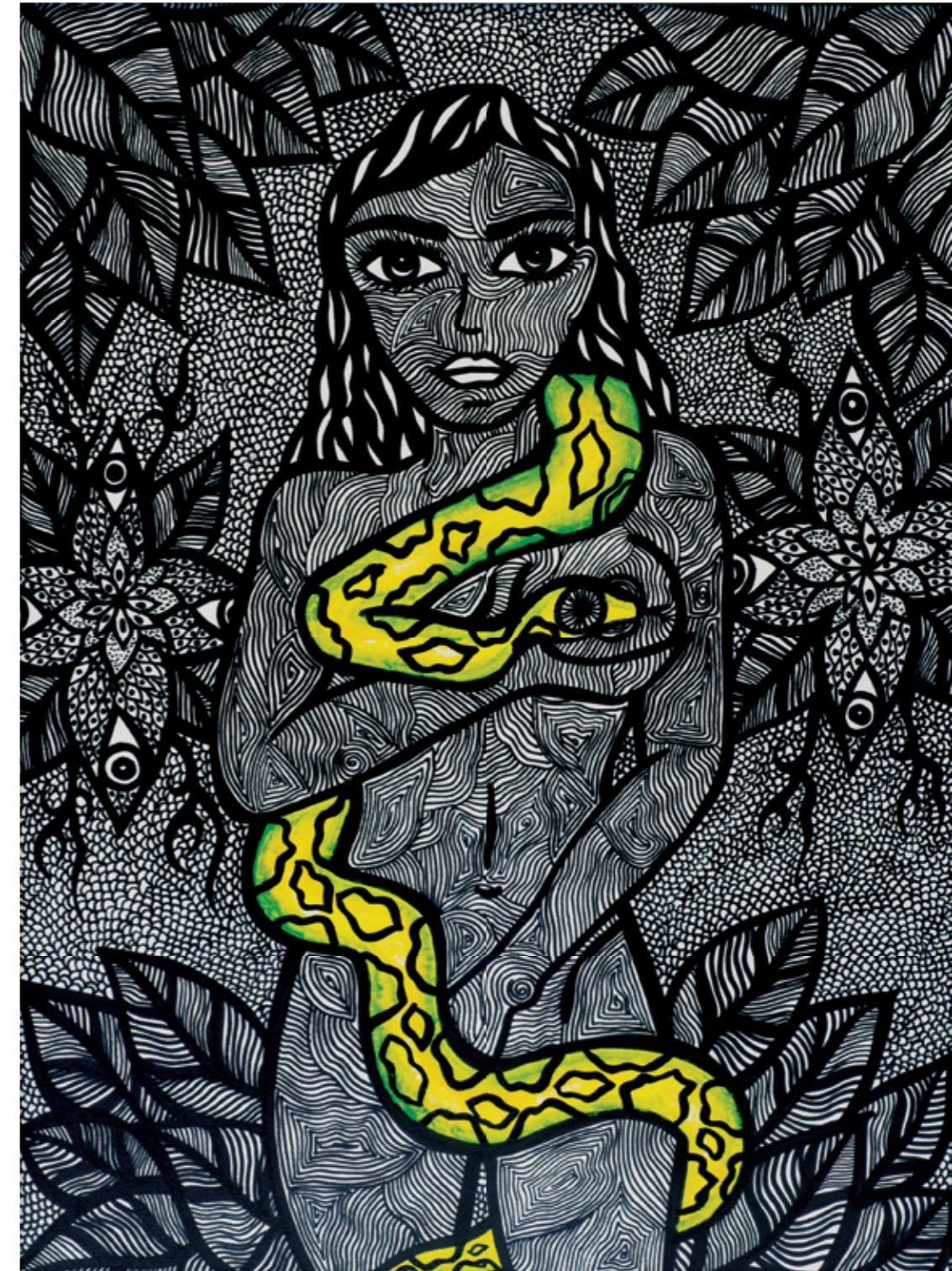


Leyla Aliyeva is a graduate of the MA programme in World Politics at Moscow State University of International Relations. In 2007, she established Baku Magazine published in Moscow in Russian and recently launched in collaboration with Condé Nast as an English-language quarterly publication.

As an artist herself, Aliyeva's pen-and-ink drawings are indicative of her diverse heritage. Featured in the first issue of Baku Magazine, these highly personal illustrations show the importance of art in Leyla's day-to-day life, whether as patron, or as an avid fan, or as a means of self-expression. She is also founder of the IDEA (International Dialogue for Environmental Action) campaign established to promote public awareness of environmental issues. She is also General Co-ordinator of the OIC Youth Forum on Intercultural dialogue. Her artworks are in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in Baku.

The graphic works of Leyla Aliyeva merge a poetic lyricism and the malleable language of Azerbaijani miniatures and often serve as illustrations for her own poetry.

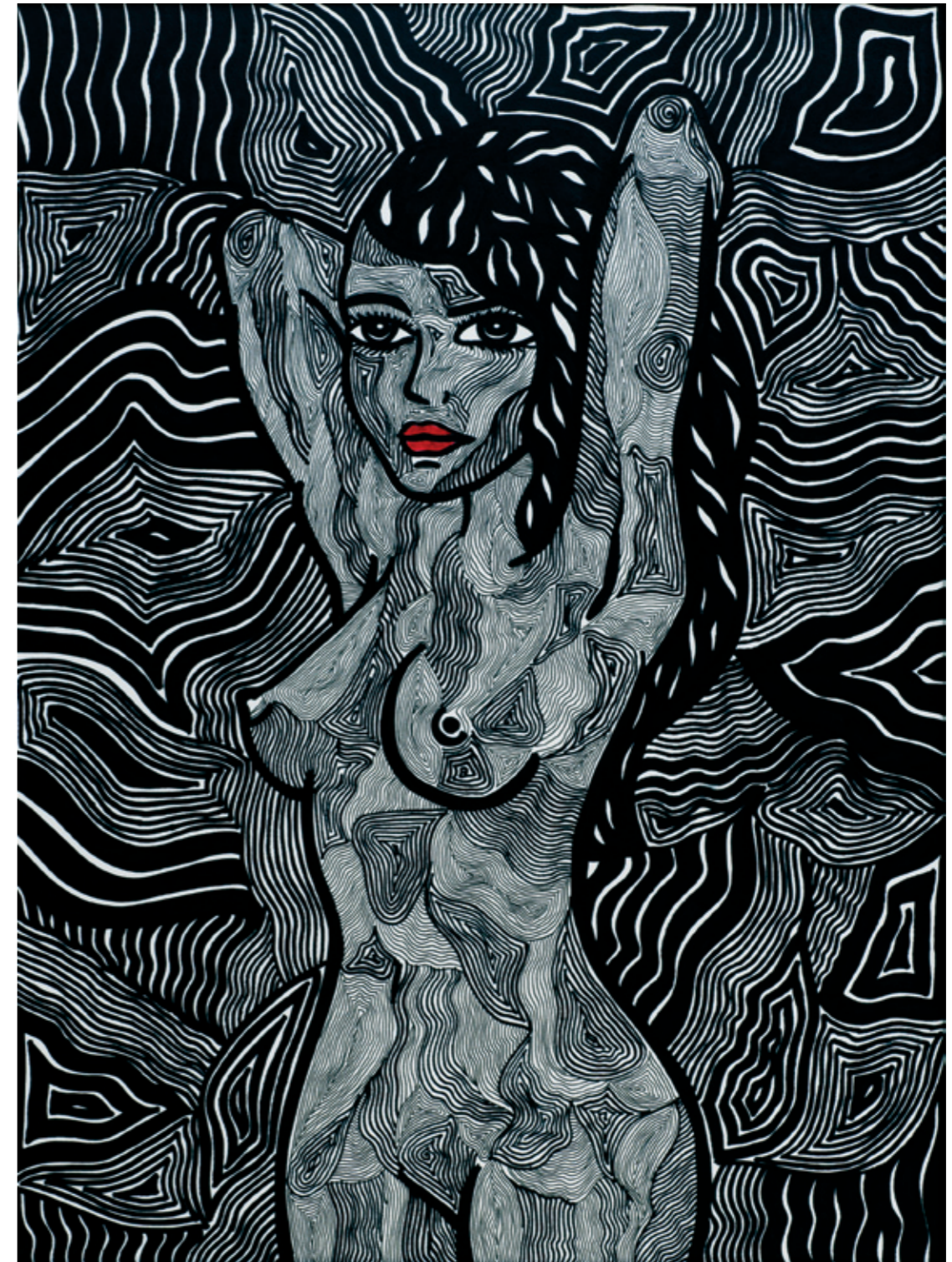
The expressiveness of her work originates from the interaction of an elegant drawing style and the smoothness of line, the subtle ornamentation of dimensional compositions in which the mood is set by the colour palette – in some it is bright and decorative, in others it is more monochromatic. The patterned imagery in the miniatures beckon the observer to a surreal world of fantasies and dreams, of an idealised, fairy-land existence where lyrical images of Oriental beauties come to life, at times refined and subtle, at other times dramatic and expressive. Her graphic works also resound with themes of love and passion, and are similarly marked with sensuality and expressiveness.



Untitled. Mixed media on paper. 77 x 56 cm. 2012



Untitled. Mixed media on paper. 77 x 56 cm. 2012



Mahmud Rustamov

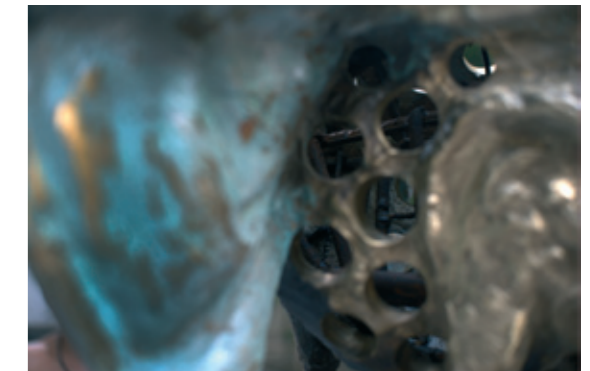


▲ Mahmud Rustamov's sculptures, ranging from multimedia assemblages to bronze castings, consistently fuse a complex series of incongruencies that problematize fixed meaning. His works, whose forms often evoke the strange and the surreal, exist outside of a specific, representational strategy.

▲ Rather, the objects are constructed from a series of absurd combinations. This visual incongruence essentially uses strategies of the comic — coopting objects to perform a role that is not generally theirs to play.

Rustamov's sculpture, Whirlwind of Multiculturalism is a collection of incongruous parts cast in bronze. At its top is a flying figure with fingered feet, wings, and jet engines. Fabric-like ears rise out of a head stitched with the teeth of a zipper. The face — a cast of Rustamov's own visage — is covered by the remnants of a gas mask. A breathing tube stretches from the mask, wraps around a gear, and ultimately serves as both a pedestal for the assembled figure and the turbine for the whirlwind that is multiculturalism. At the sculpture's base, significantly, is the most ironic of objects — the cast of a shovel (the ultimate Duchampian readymade).

The assembled and cast objects — much like multiculturalism itself — present a delicate balance between the things themselves and the sculpture as a whole. The multiple aspects of the piece exist as objects, pieces of the external world. Their provocative thingness refuses to be assimilated to the mechanism of representation. Yet they are pieced together to function as part of an entire artwork. Ultimately, they stand as something in between, the interval between the everyday object and the artwork. Like multiculturalism, the sculpture presents a delicate balance that exists between the multiple and unique identities of the objects, and a whole and integrated artwork.



"Whirlwind of multiculturalism."
Sculpture. Bronze, wood, 2012

Mammad Rashidov



Mammad Rashidov's work is formed through an arduous struggle with recalcitrant materials. In each sculpture, the physical and material resistance of glass must be simultaneously embraced and conquered. Constructing objects out of sharp fragments consists of both an aggressive hacking or breaking of the material, coupled with a reparative and assembled process. This sense of struggle both electrifies the work and gives it a unique sense of presence.

Rashidov's sculpture for this exhibition consists of twelve glass structures of various colors, shapes, and sizes. The surface of each structure is worked through, eviscerated, and slashed. However, it is the space between the constructions that is charged and pulses with a nervous urgency. It is a space one can almost touch. There is a sense of instability inherent in the work created by the interplay between the empty spaces between the structures, and the materiality, density, and weight of the abstracted figures. The outcroppings are hauntingly mysterious to the point that one wonders if they even exist. They skirt the line between being and nothingness. The entire composition is full of emptiness — solid but dissolving into a colorful transparency. The overall effect of the composition is heightened by the disjunction between the vivid materiality of the work and the emptiness that surrounds its individual parts.

The composition essentially mimics the gallery space itself — viewers wander through the space in close proximity to one another, but rarely touch. Viewers are various shapes, colors, sizes, and dispositions. Everyone exists in the same space. It is the space between each person that is electrified. Rashidov's 'figures' perhaps express the state of the human condition in a multicultural context. They are uneasy, quietly desperate, and alienated. They do not touch one another and exist in a world that is detached and alone. The figures are thinned, stretched, fragile, and tense. They are boiled down to a bare minimum and imply a relationship to the contemporary, anxiety-ridden discussions concerning the state of multiculturalism and the people caught in the middle of a political, social, and ideological debate.



Niyaz Najafov



Niyaz Najafov's paintings capture the abject humor that informs daily life in a multicultural context. Rather than establishing cultural binaries, or espousing politically correct utopian notions of a globalized socio-cultural condition, his paintings capture the chaos that informs the modern human condition in the midst of cultural turmoil.

Painted in a 'cruel' or 'rough' realism with a muted palette and heavy brushwork, the images convey a contemporary era witness to an explosion of visual imagery and an implosion of clearly defined cultural identity.

Najafov is part of a generation marked by encounters with military violence, intimidation, and political upheaval. The characters he depicts are, similarly, those of disfigured and distorted bodies, subjected to the violence of life and cultural fragmentation. The compositions range from the monstrous to the ridiculous, consistently ruminating on the misshapen, exaggerated, and abjectly caricatured figure.

Both multiculturalism and the abject are defined by their play with boundaries: transgressing, destabilizing, and transforming. The abject body remains a body of flesh and blood, course and comic, that violently transgresses social codes and cultural values.

The horrific non-sense of the imagery contained in Najafov's paintings encourages a viewer to simultaneously scream and laugh. The imagery scratches away at politically correct state policies to show the subversive undertow of the abject in the contemporary. Ultimately the paintings capture the world with equal strokes of amusement and dark humor.

"Pyramids"
Oil on canvas, 145 x 190 cm, 2012



"Coca-Cola"
Oil on canvas, 100 x 190 cm, 2012



"The secret of red aftafa"
Oil on canvas, 100 x 190 cm, 2012



Orkhan Huseynov

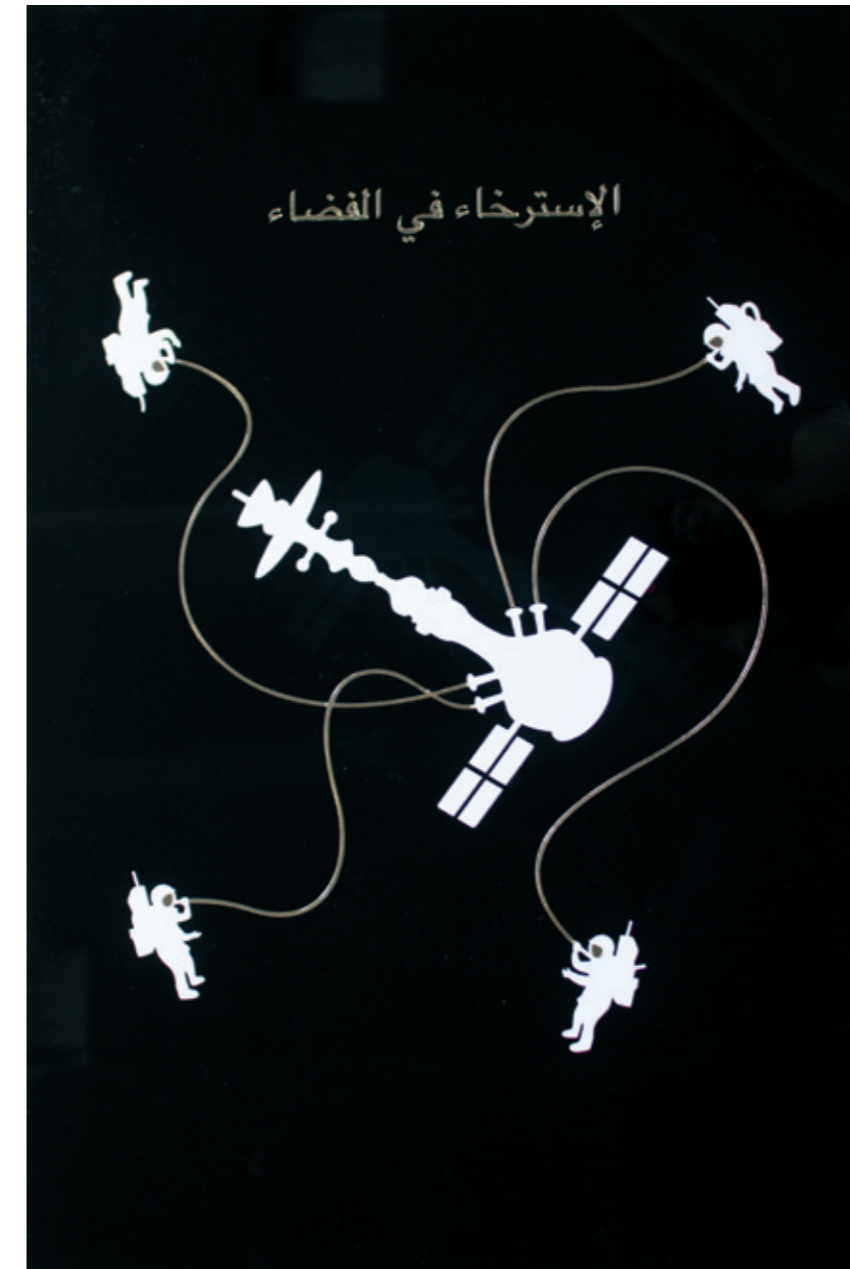


Orkhan Huseynov's work encompasses a wide variety of media, including video, installation, and Plexiglas designs. A pervasive theme within this multifaceted practice is the mapping of specific aspects of the Azerbaijani experience and culture. This cultural charting is consistently infused with a strong degree of wit and humor that affectionately colors the unique incongruencies that characterize the experience.

Such projects have employed actual maps, digitally recorded national dances and tea drinking ceremonies, as well as reconstructed and surveyed the distinct and amusing situations that emerge when 'east' meets 'west'. Huseynov's series of Plexiglas designs composed for this exhibition chart the unique experience of 'Muslims in Space'. The terrain plotted in the series, like space itself, is a new frontier which remains largely unmapped. The Plexiglas compositions not only exhibit Muslim astronauts and Arabic script, but also shatter the pervasive image of an 'astronaut' as a western construction. The piece presents a series of instances in which a selected tradition is placed into a new context. Thus, one is able to examine certain ideas from a new and interesting angle. The series essentially establishes a visual fulcrum around which various issues regarding religious practice can be seen in a different context — specifically, how to determine the direction and time of prayer if one is circling the globe.

Beyond recontextualizing selected traditions, the theme of identity, both secular and religious, is at issue within the series. In a 'space' without boundaries, the homogenizing impulse that frequently places origin as a defining factor is shattered. What happens when geopolitical borders and worldly conflicts are left behind? And, can an individual maintain their cultural and religious identity from afar? In a multicultural, global community immersed in a process of constant movement and migration, how does one address the rift between a human being and their native place? By locating the 'Muslims in Space', the location farthest from a native land, Huseynov presents a selected tradition in a new and fairly uncharted context. Thus, the piece encourages one to actively consider the complicated and complex motivations and unique combinations that occur when selected traditions and cultures are reoriented and recontextualized.

"Muslim astronauts."
Plexiglass, 90 x 60 cm, 6 pieces, (fragments). 2012



Parviz Jafarov



Parviz Jafarov's paintings depict the world through flattened swathes of bold color and notable absences. By distilling scenes to their basic elements, and employing a style that consists of stark outlines, abrupt angles, skewed perspectives, and unmodulated hues, the compositions depict the world in profile.

Essentially, the images reduce socio-cultural identity to its most fundamental and stereotypical signifiers to capture the incongruencies that characterize the everyday.

Jafarov's painting, A Man with a Bagpipe, is a visual rumination on the saying 'Öz musiqisini çalmaq!' (literally, 'To play your own music'). The composition depicts a man wearing a kilt and playing a bagpipe. His dress, countenance, and cultural attributes position him as a generalized 'west'. However, the geographical site that he occupies is depicted as an essentialized 'east' — branded by a hookah, carpets, and a view of a mosque in the background.

The entire composition seeks to both essentialize and re-orient orientalism by reversing the fantasy. Instead of depicting an 'other', the image focuses on a refusal to assimilate and shows objects and people out of place. Integration is illustrated as impossible. Visual and auditory clashes are writ large in a scene that includes signifiers of multiple cultures that cannot exist as a harmonious multicultural environment. The sound of the bagpipe and the call to prayer implied by the minaret clash rather than harmonize. The costume of the gentleman and the décor of the site are jarring rather than balanced. Thus, the cultural signifiers Jafarov depicts exist individually rather than in a synchronize and melodious whole.

"Man with a bagpipe."
Oil on canvas, 170 x 155 cm. 2012



Rashad Alakbarov



Rashad Alakbarov's work has consistently established a play between the authentic and the counterfeit — pitting perception against reality. Using light and shadow as his principal medium, Alakbarov shapes the non-space that accompanies a work of art.

Rashad Alakbarov: "To them, I said, the truth would be literally nothing but the shadows of the images."
— Plato, *The Republic*

Simultaneously manipulating both the visible shadow and the conceptual shadow, the constructions call attention to the notions that inform a viewer's understanding of art itself. The 'shadow' of a work of art (according to Mario Perniola) is that which exists beyond aesthetic value or commodification. It exists alongside the work and its artistic-communicative operations. These shadows accompany each and every experience of art — trauma, disgust, splendor, and appeal. In Alakbarov's work, the shadow, both literally and theoretically, is thematized. The shadow serves as a medium for addressing both what one sees, and how one sees in a multicultural, postmodern environment.

Alakbarov's piece, *Music, Kebab, Sport*: Three changes in the canon of Europe, consists of a single stone appended with an academic text. The boulder, when placed under exact lighting, projects a textual shadow reading 'Music, 'Kebab, and 'Sport' — three universal elements of the human condition. The 'ancient stone' is framed as an authentic, archeological discovery of great historical significance. Thus, an intricate and counterfeit narrative is constructed around a fake discovery. The piece essentially plays with shadow — the visual shadows projecting universal human characteristics, and the conceptual shadows that accompany (and exist alongside) a viewer's experience of the work. Ultimately, the object presents viewers with an aporias — a paradox — in which universal elements of 'being human' are simultaneously framed as an intricate forgery.



Rashad Babayev



Rashad Babayev's work consistently balances a formal investigation of color and form with a conceptual examination of language and meaning. In his paintings, multimedia assemblages, and installations, hue is paired with language and symbol. This results in a consistent play between formal and conceptual elements.

Babayev's piece Import x Export uses this strategic play of form and language to explore the variety of stereotypes and preconceptions that inform one's view of a multicultural, globalized society. The piece consists of a product, packaged and labeled for consumption. The varieties or flavors of this canned good are distinguished by the symbols affixed to the cans' exteriors. These cans are subsequently arranged according to a banal, supermarket display and are ready for consumption. The piece essentially presents heavily loaded symbols as classifiers/labels for a consumer product that is being exported and imported on a global level. Yet, it is the viewer that determines the identity of the product hidden behind the label. Rather than supplying a product, the cans supply a label and consequently return meaning to the viewer.

Understood in tandem with the concept of multiculturalism and the commercialization of culture and religion, the project becomes infinitely more complex and compelling. Delivered with a notable level of humor and sarcasm, the fake consumer products have the potential to force viewers to confront their own assumptions, stereotypes, and prejudices. One becomes aware of their cultural baggage and perspective when contemplating the product that lies behind a symbol of a moon and star, or a cross. Ultimately, the cans transform from an internationally distributed product to function as 'containers of assumptions', encouraging viewers to examine their individual points of view.



"Import-export". Mixed media. 2012



Sitara Ibrahimova



▲ Sitara Ibrahimova's photographs capture the human experience beyond political or geographical borders, often alluding to forms of historical and collective memory. Her images focus on emotive instances conveyed through an individual's facial expression or pose, or expressed by a fragment or an absence. The compositions capture the poignant moments that characterize the everyday and encourage viewers to construct a narrative around each dramatic composition.

▲ Ibrahimova's series of photos collected for this exhibition similarly seeks to both capture and convey the challenges and complications associated with historical and collective memory in the Karabakh region. The project consists scenes of Ağdam, a now abandoned town that exists on the border of multiple political, cultural, and social groups. Through notable absences, the images convey the hope, tension, loss, and uncertainty that occur at the point where multiple socio-cultural identities meet. The photographs present glimpses of life slipping away from both law and order. A street or a building, cropped from the urban surroundings, renders the space depicted as nondescript. However, the metaphorical play between the pavement and the wall transform the images from scenes of passage into those of blocked escape. The compositions visualize a geopolitical conflict that is ironic, touching, playful, oppressing, and domineering. The border here functions as a zone of both withered dreams and

human potential. It exists in stasis and silence, waiting to return to a state of vitality and habitation.

With the assistance of jazz pianist Isfar Sarabski, the photographs were presented as an event at the opening of the exhibition. The combination of Ibrahimova's compositions and Sarabski's improvisations staged a spectacle that not only sought to recreate the experience of the original encounter, but also to allude to the uncertain position of both actual and remembered events. Collective memory often operates to locate and reify a group or a national identity. During periods of crisis and instability, appeals are often made to collective memory, which, while negotiated by individuals, cannot be manipulated, changed, or regulated. The images captured by Ibrahimova draw on individual memory and display the divergent and unique perspectives that characterize perceptions of a region that exists on the border of multiple cultural and political identities.

"The Edge". Video, music performance.
Part 1: Ağdam occupied territories of Azerbaijan/Lost In Karabakh.
Photography: Sitara Ibrahimova, music: Isfar Sarabski



Tarlan Gorchu



Tarlan Gorchu's work often addresses forms of communication, both linguistically and visually. His projects range from barcodes to calligraphy, and linguistic play to literature. This focus frequently situates the printed book as a primary source of information and a repository of world knowledge. For Gorchu, the book functions as a powerful and paradoxical emblem associated not only with what one knows, but how one understands.

Gorchu's piece Revelation of Book consists of roughly eighty books — a selection from a much larger project addressing the contemporary state of literature. The artist designed the covers of the manuscripts, but the titles and authors are canonical figures from world literature including Dostoevsky, Kafka, etc. The collection includes books from four categories: classic literature, Nobel Laureates, contemporary writers, and anthologies of national literature. The viewer is invited to sit, read, and engage with the collection of world knowledge. However, upon opening a book, one immediately discovers that the pages are blank. The historical and cultural knowledge bracketed between the covers and stitched by the binding is erased.

The artwork essentially restages a post-apocalyptic library situated after the death of diversity and a dearth of multiculturalism. It allows viewers to experience the shock and devastation that occurs when borders are closed and exchange is censored. Gorchu's work is participatory and theatrical. It engages in a tactile and shocking strategy to break the catharsis and visual fatigue that often accompanies the viewing of art. With a biting sense of wit and an ironic cynicism, his work uses aspects of the theatre of the absurd to combat contemporary apathy and inhibition.



"Relevation of book." Mixed media. 2012



Vusal Rahim



Vusal Rahim's work captures the people of Azerbaijan as if they were characters in a play. Working in graphic design, video, photography, and set design, his pieces convey personalities and lifestyles with a degree of theatricality and presentation that is reminiscent of dramatic theatre. The artworks often employ unique points of view (from high above or far below) that are both jarring and enticing.

Rahim's piece, Black woman, composed for this exhibition consists of both an installation and a film. The installation takes the form of a theatre set which reconstructs the environment of the kitchen. The kitchen is a non-descript domestic space. Its ordinary nature allows it to exist as an average kitchen that one would expect to find in a typical Azerbaijani home. The installation allows a viewer to move about the kitchen and participate in the domestic space. Essentially the viewer becomes the performer within an artist-designed stage set. The film playing in the space of the kitchen captures the perspective of one who spends much of their life in the kitchen. Filmed from a 'Point-of-view' or 'subjective camera' angle, the film documents the life of a woman from her perspective.

Thus, viewers become voyeurs and take on the life of the invisible protagonist. Through the invisible woman's eyes, we are able to share in the process of cleaning, washing dishes, preparing tea, etc. We adopt the ordi-

nary, domestic life of the female figure. Throughout the film, our role changes according to the scene and the situation. Through the woman, we become a mother, a sister, and a wife. The repetitive, everyday domestic tasks and role-changes become a means of understanding and experiencing the life of another.

The first person narrative of the film and the recreation of the domestic space communicate by mimicking the natural behavior of moving and looking. We are consequently able to experience the life of an individual, Azerbaijani woman. Her life is a singular experience that speaks universally. The clever use of the 'subjective camera' angle tells an individual's story while simultaneously conveying the emotional subtext of the invisible protagonist. What becomes clear in the countless tasks and multiple roles we adopt through the woman is that her life is a life lived for others.



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Not all works in the exhibition are illustrated in this catalogue.

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