

In part through the support of the Dr. Malakeh Taleghani Endowed Graduate Fellowship in Iranian Studies, I was able to complete my Master's Thesis exhibition which included a set of three stop motion animations entitled *Ashura*, *Parakandegy (Dispersal)*, and *Displacement*, and an accompanying large scale sculpture, *1979-1985, A Monument (or Nothingness)*.

These works expand and reconstruct notions of longing and loss, while marking the instability of one's relationship to 'place' and identity particular to Iran. The works confound expectations by creating a more complex conversation through symbol, ritual, tradition and documented history. By disorienting and challenging the viewer, the project defies narrow and crudely defined categories and classifications of the Iranian identity. My practice expresses the cannon of the transnational, hybrid and post-colonial strategies; and continually negotiates with the viewer, while surviving in the spaces between official and personal histories. In these works, memory does not represent nostalgia or a romantic affinity to the past, but rather, a dynamic and fluid system of reconstructing and/or articulating what is lost. My intention is to resist what continues to be obliterated amongst the pressures of conforming to a misunderstood image of history and contemporary reality of Islam and/or Iran by circumventing binaries, suggesting new territories, and unearthing lost stories.

In my animation the concept of time is used not only to explore a relationship between

past and present, but a non-linear and collapsed concept in which the past and present have come together in order to create an “un-real” reality. Therefore the animation is a deliberate mix of real and un-real; fake and genuine. For example, *Parakandegy (Dispersal)* is an attempt to reconstruct a lost history. A pair of hands smashes open a pomegranate to expose its seeds staining themselves in the process with an image of the execution of two of my cousins. The destruction of the pomegranate (a historical symbol for Iran) represents my own attempts to understand my parent culture from my removed state as an emigrant living in the US. It is also a reference to the violence that occurred in the aftermath of the revolution; a point reinforced by the subsequent staining of the hands, and the dispersal of the seeds in response to these violent acts.

The sculptural component of the project serves as a visual representation of both the positive and negative aspects of my parent culture and identity. The double “Heech” (or Nothingness) is a special symbol in the Sufi tradition representing the desire for unity of man and God, or wholeness. The form also references the work of influential Iranian sculptor, Parviz Tanavoli, whose neo-traditionalist Saqqa-khaneh movement encouraged artists to utilize symbols drawn from familiar Iranian religious and folk traditions. It is comprised of 7,500 beads representing individuals executed by the Islamic Republic from 1979 to 1985 (the date I emigrated); with two of these beads representing my cousins. The sculpture is a monument to those executed in a political campaign of forced silence pursued ostensibly in the name of religion. In this respect, the fragmentation of the calligraphic form relates to a kind of profaning of

religion with politics, a literal breakdown of the word. It also becomes a symbol for the fragmentation of the Iranian population as a result of this repression. Carnelian beads commonly used in tasbeih rosaries further associate the sculpture both with the Islamic tradition and the act of counting.