

Los Angeles

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Samira Yamin and the Craft of Consciousness

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In the heart of the Arts District of downtown Los Angeles are dozens of strange, derelict-looking warehouses, seemingly quiet. Inside one of these large warehouse building is a the shared studio of Samira Yamin, a young Iranian-American artist who's intricate artwork has been catching the eye of the art world recently. Her studio is clean and white, with tall drafting tables, lots of light and countless books. Images of war-torn countries, books on colonial paintings of the east, and Time Magazines can be found in neat stacks all around her white-walled space. The room exudes a balance of energy -- such clean white walls and all white working space, skylights and creaky, painted-wood floors help to calm down the chaos of the inherently intense content of Yamin's fascination.

On the walls of her space, there are post-it notes organizing everything; some with illegible scrawls, symbols, numbers, and images in different stages of her mental and physical deconstruction. Around her studies and scribbles, there are also well framed and lit pieces of her older Geometries series. They sit so perfectly on their walls, delicately lit, uninterrupted by anything else near them -- they almost seem like relics of something. Yamin's work often evokes a feeling of memento.

As an Iranian-American, Yamin, like many children of the Iranian diaspora, have struggled in their search for a solid concept of identity. Straddling a minimum of two cultures, two continents and two histories, children of the Iranian diaspora are inherently in a unique place. Yamin has grown up in Los Angeles, and found her heritage and cultural placement in Southern California as inspiration for anthropological study throughout her life. That fascination with cultural anthropology fuels her art practice today.

Yamin's parents were part of a generation that was very politically active in Iran and the US before the 1979 Revolution, then went back to Iran after the Revolution, and then came back to the U.S. just as the Iran-Iraq War was beginning, she said. "Their generation took many different routes to get wherever they are now, often illegally crossing borders in the middle of the night, or seeking asylum as refugees, or filing for immigration to various European countries, Canada and most recently Australia. Los Angeles does have, however, the largest population of Iranians outside Iran."



Samira Yamin

L.A. has a large Iranian/Persian population. It is sometimes lovingly referred to as Tehrangeles, of course, a portmanteau eliding the California city with Tehran, the capital of Iran. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution left many families displaced, former Iranian nationals and their descendants moved to the Los Angeles metropolitan area; it is the largest such population outside of Iran. The intersection of Westwood Boulevard and Wilkins Avenue is now officially recognized by the City of Los Angeles as "Persian Square."

With such a large Iranian/Persian community in Los Angeles, there of course is a pool of creativity that has grown out of a common cultural heritage, but Yamin admits that she doesn't see it in her generation as much as other past generations. "As far as an Iranian artistic community goes, I think the days of gender and ethnicity-based communities may be passing, in the same way that we no longer have movements in the arts either, though I can't quite articulate why," she says. "I definitely know other Iranian artists, and I participate in academic conferences, etc. that deal with specific issues facing the Iranian community (the arts being a facet of a larger political and cultural investigation) but I can't say I feel closer to any particular community than another. Most of the people I grew up with are creatively inclined in some way, whether writing, music or the visual arts. Even my lawyer sister studied art and printmaking as an undergrad."



Persian Square, Los Angeles

Samira attributes some of her keen insight in her art practice to growing up in the bustling sprawl of L.A. with a somewhat separated viewpoint, like an observer -- and thanks to her early exposure to the art and gallery environment through her education. Her work infuses science and anthropology into intricate artworks. Sitting in her white-walled studio space she muses over fluid dynamics, the systematic order of things and scintillating scotomas, fascinated by the way in which things exist and interact. Some of which has greatly influenced her latest body of work on exhibit at the **Craft and Folk Art Museum (CAFAM)**, as part of the two person exhibition entitled "Displacements: The Craft Practices of Golnar Adili and Samira Yamin."



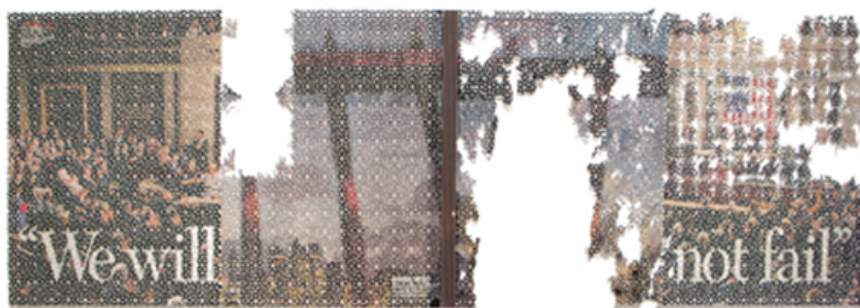
Installation view at CAFAM's "Displacements: The Craft Practices of Golnar Adili and Samira Yamin"

In the past three years, since finishing her MFA at University of California, Irvine, she has received great attention from major museums and galleries in Southern California. She even had a solo exhibition in the project space of the Santa Monica Museum of Art (SMMOA) last year, called "We Will Not Fail."

Her past works are imbued with the aesthetic sensibility of Islamic textile patterns, sacred geometries and journalistic fervor. In cutting into the Time Magazine pages and the images of war, Yamin was able to create a distinct object and narrative that gave insight into not only the system of the publication, but also into contemporary history as it unfolds. Redefining the images of war, Yamin uses the geometric design to create a new object; impossible to separate from one another, much like the implication of the words and images combined create in the magazine.



Geometries II



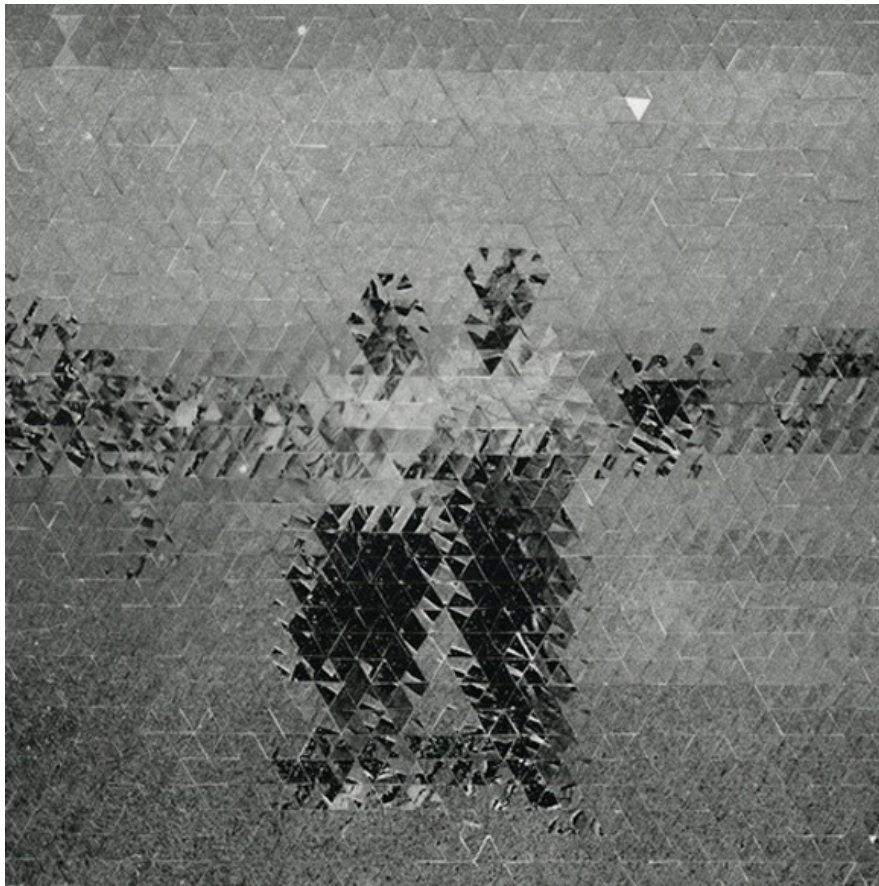
We Will Not Fail, from SMMOA's "We Will Not Fail" Project Space exhibition

Her new work pushes and pulls on similar aesthetics, and hints of similar feelings of separation and isolation. The works on view at CAFAM are re-configured images of her grandparents in their youth. She said that even though much of her work has to do with loss and death and war-torn Middle Eastern countries, until she lost her grandmother, she had never really experienced a personal loss like that. She grew up on a different continent than them, and because of that separation, Yamin explores these photographs as she also relates to a visual disruption she suffers from during migraines,

scotomas. In the same way that a scotoma can disrupt a person's visual field, photographs can feel disruptive to memories as well. A photograph is a form of communicating information via imagery, but it lacks something that human memory doesn't quite know how to deal with, feeling.



Scotomas, 2014. By Samira Yamin. | Image courtesy of CAFAM.



Scotoma (Still from video), 2014. By Samira Yamin. | Image courtesy of artist.

Yamin's Scotoma series explores that dissonance between information and sensation. A much more personal series of works by Yamin, she replicates a beautiful and abstracted kind of visual scotoma with images of her grandparents' lives in Iran. Employing an intricate cutting technique, like her Geometries series, Yamin distorts acetate photographs, which are then placed inside frosted light boxes and illuminated using cut and displaced mirrors. The viewer not only gets a sense of what a scotoma is really like, if they've never experienced one, but they also get a glimpse into the deep roots of memory and loss, and in turn, a glimpse into the artist.



Scotomas, 2014. By Samira Yamin. | Image courtesy of CAFAM.

This new body of work -- though visually very different from her previous works -- circles around similar issues of identity, loss and dissonance, on a much more personal level. Yamin has many other analogous series in mind for future projects; she is specifically enamored with the science of fluid dynamics right now. Though her meticulous style of cutting and re-defining images may be a very hands-on practice, her work only lightly leans on the idea of craft. The work on display at the CAFAM, alongside the work of Golnar Adili fill the minds of visitors with larger abstract concepts and visually enticing objects and images about Iranian-American identity and life.

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Top Image: Scotoma (Still from video), 2014. By Samira Yamin. | Image courtesy of artist.