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PRESS RELEASE

The Task of the Mythologist

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Anahita Razmi

CARBON 12 is delighted to present *The Task of the Mythologist*, Anahita Razmi's sixth solo exhibition at the gallery, including an intervention by artist Peyman Shafieezadeh.

In his canonical book *Mythologies* (1957), Roland Barthes analyzes how myths are constructed through signs and symbols. Focusing on Western popular culture, he considers how "modern myths" are produced through everyday words and objects. For her sixth solo exhibition at Carbon 12, Anahita Razmi builds on this philosophical premise to explore global power structures embedded in both our material and virtual worlds. For Razmi, symbols such as the fingers-crossed emoji, a Turkish talismanic shirt, or a '90s Britpop emblem hold unstable meanings, shifting with context and use. It is precisely the act of deconstructing these layered meanings that illuminates their significance, what Barthes describes as "the task of the mythologist." Razmi takes up this task materially, combining, morphing, and transforming cultural references across media to trouble systems of value and generate complex understandings.

As part of her ongoing *Talismanic Polarities* series (2021–present), unique Islamic talismanic shirts are pinned with buttons reading "YES," "BUT," "NO," and "AND." While earlier iterations featured pop-culture references or political slogans that contrasted with the historic textile backdrop, here Razmi complicates the reading of that backdrop itself. Is it historic? Was it found on eBay? Does it belong in a museum or in a Turkish bazaar? The answer lies not only in the object's physical appearance but in its mediation. Razmi draws on the words "YES," "BUT," "NO," and "AND," essential words that build narrative arc according to a piece of writing advice published online in 2015. "Without conflict, there's no story," the article begins. By foregrounding these semantic framing devices, Razmi incorporates tools of interpretation into a renewed reading of an object that sustains multiple and even conflicting possibilities.

A new work, *ΘΑ SIS* (2025), takes greater liberties in actively transforming meaning, only to destabilize it further. A series of Oasis band T-shirts, signifiers of '90s masculine rock mythology are densely covered with evil eye appliqué, notably supplanting the "Oa—" so that only "sis" remains. At one level, the emblem mutates into a nod to feminine kinship. At another, the merchandise becomes yet another commercial product, albeit with a different slant. The evil eye, a symbol found across many Eastern cultures and intended to protect against envy, misfortune, or harm caused by a jealous gaze, has been incorporated into amulets for over 5,000 years. Yet it is also a kitsch object, just as likely to appear on a graphic T-shirt or as an emoji in a group chat. Does Razmi revise a signifier of Western masculinity into one of Eastern femininity? Or does she comment on the commercialization of feminism? Is the tone empowering or glib?

For Razmi, context and framing are everything, and the gallery, along with the frame of contemporary art, is no exception. Through this lens, familiar signs and symbols can be encountered anew. Some are found objects, while others are shaped by Razmi's hand, but within the exhibition space they are held in equal

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suspension, inviting fresh attention. Here, the task of the mythologist becomes the task of the artist, reconfiguring systems of meaning so that their rich complexities come into view.

-May Makki