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Going Glocal In A Paykan

By Katrina Kufer

<https://www.harpersbazaararabia.com/art/artists/going-glocal-in-a-paykan>



Always one for a bit of intellectual play, performance and video artist [Anahita Razmi](#) is garnering attention for her body of work that highlights identity and gender issues through the lens of national, cultural and artistic appropriation. Reworking past and present popular culture into a contemporary Iranian context, *The Paykan Project* is yet another example of Razmi's subtle, playful take on "glocalisation." However, this work runs deeper, serving to reveal poignant observations and raise awareness of the double-edged sword of mobility and today's migration crisis.

In a reversal of a historical trajectory, *The Paykan Project* documents Razmi's drive from Iran to Germany in a second-hand Paykan, a car rarely found outside of Iran. Following a tasking two-month journey, the results are a mixed-media installation consisting of 38 framed documents and an 11-hour video loop that accompany the physical vehicle which is on display.

Razmi speaks with Katrina Kufer about her 2010-11 project currently on show at the Staedtische Galerie Nordhorn exhibition *Woanders*, focused on mobility and its inherent, albeit overlooked, implications and dilemmas.

Katrina Kufer: Your work delves into East/West connections, or "glocalisation", with great subtlety and (art) historical references. Can you tell us what specifically influenced *The Paykan Project*?

Anahita Razmi: First and foremost I simply really, really wanted to own a Paykan! I am in love with that car, this everyday object, that is so linked to the economic, political and social history of Iran. The Paykan originates from the British Hillman-Hunter car model, so it had once made a journey from Europe to Iran. At the time, the journey had a very different context: the UK and Iran were working closely together, and trade and travel were possible – at least for the elites. After the Revolution, Chrysler sold the licenses to produce the model to Iran, like that the Paykan became the most common car in Iran. I was very interested in doing that journey the other way round at a very different time: from Iran back to Europe. See if it was possible or, what circumstances would make it impossible.

KK: What was the experience like of driving the Paykan from Iran to Germany? Physically, mentally and/or conceptually?

AR: The journey, from buying the car in Tehran to arriving in Germany, took a whole two months. As a non-resident buying a car in Iran was not possible, furthermore in 2010 and 2011 tougher sanctions on Iran had been implemented, which made the export impossible. You see, I was confronted with multiple impossibilities. I needed lots of patience, detours and help from people in Iran and elsewhere, as well as the right spare parts, as the car had several breakdowns during the long journey. The biggest help was my boyfriend who joined for the whole trip. We both until now have a sort of emotional relationship with that vehicle...

KK: As a German artist with Iranian roots, were there any objective/self-reflective elements as the car changed geographical positions?

AR: In the video which is shown together with the car, one can be part of an 11-hour journey from Tehran to Germany. It's a very personal work in the sense that the viewer joins my boyfriend and me in the car and is forced to listen to our boring conversations. It's a too long, not very exciting road movie with not very exciting protagonists in a very slow car... I like to keep the elements of the work true and simple: the car is the car, the road is the road, the paperwork is the paperwork. While the references of the project are manifold, none of its elements are just a metaphor for something else.

KK: What is the importance of showing *The Paykan Project* and participating in an exhibition like *Woanders* right now?

AR: The exhibition is dealing with different notions of travel: travel as an artistic influence, strategy and necessity. I feel that the Paykan, now more than ever, might be seen as a symbol for the limits of free travel. The restrictions of travel and trade when coming from specific countries. The impossibility to travel. With a German passport these limitations are not often felt, but with an Iranian or other less fortunate one, they are everywhere. We live in times where thousands of people are prevented violently from traveling across borders. I feel it's important to make visible the circumstances that make stuff like that possible. The connections, the disparities.