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sm{art}: Shadi Ghadirian and Sara Rahbar

Art and Design post by Sara Reihani, May 12, 2010 - 1:53pm; tagged art, Iran, photography, portraits, Sara Rahbar, Shadi Ghadirian, textile art, women in art.



*Photographs from Rahbar's 2008 flag series*

(...) Sara Rahbar is a photographer and textile artist who lives and works between New York City and Tehran; her existence in the cultural divide between different nations manifests itself in her work as a fascination with flags and other symbols of cultural identity. Rahbar literally rips these national, religious and cultural boundaries to shreds by deconstructing and then reconstructing American and Iranian flags in combination with textiles heavily laden with cultural connotations - patterns, textures, colors and shapes that invoke the art of the ancient Persian Empire, the contrast between 20th-century Iran before the Islamic Revolution and its existence now as an Islamic Republic. The scraps of fabric and trinkets that Rahbar weaves into the flags are gathered from her travels around Iran. Much of Rahbar's textile work displays her skill and training in fashion design, which she studied before focusing on film, photography and other art forms. Rahbar also doubles as the subject of her own photographs, again combining Iranian tradition and American perception by using a US flag as a hijab or wearing traditional Iranian dress with a ski mask in her series "Love Arrived and How Red".

*An image from Rahbar's 2008 series "Love Arrived and How Red"*

Rahbar was recently featured in Time Out Dubai and Flash Art magazine. In a 2008 interview, Rahbar said her commitment to breaking down barriers and distaste for labels extends to her refusal to self-identify in any way, including as a feminist:

"The last thing I want to do is to take on another label. I care about certain issues and choose to take on certain subjects that are important to me and that I am passionate about. But I feel like all of these labels and names are causing so much separation between us, they create unnecessary spaces and gaps, they cause borders and barriers to go up. And I feel that they play a major role in keeping us divided, and separate. They put into place this mindset, that we are so different from one another. I don't believe in the borders created by the devotion towards a flag, a country, or, a religion. The only thing I want to do with these titles that have created so much separation between us, is shed them."