

Attempts at Cultural Transfer - Anahita Razmi



In her work Anahita Razmi deals with both political and social issues, ones in fact that are often related to Iran. Within the framework of a series entitled "Frischzelle" (Live Cell) the Kunstmuseum Stuttgart is staging the first individual exhibition of the video and performance artist to be held in a museum. It will be on until 3rd March 2013.



Anahita Razmi has a special relationship with the homeland of her father. She connects with it on the level of a stranger, as she explains, "Somebody who is on the outside, but who at the same time finds herself in some kind of indefinable relationship with this alien place."

As the daughter of a German mother and an Iranian father the artist has in the meantime decided to take on the task herself of projecting this relationship in her work - using all kinds of approaches and often coming up with astounding results. Most of the time the focus is on the question of what happens when everyday objects, actions and familiar images and sounds are transplanted into a different cultural, as well as aesthetic, context.

It is these semantic shifts and their consequences that often form the basis of the artist's works that are being exhibited in Stuttgart.



Driving back to Germany in a Paykan

Although the Paykan is the most common and most inexpensive car in Iran, they are only ever rarely seen outside the borders of the country. For *The Paykan Project* the artist bought a used Paykan in Teheran and it took her two months to get the car back to Germany. The journey itself took one month, before that however she went through a whole month of bureaucratic wrangling, trying to get a permit from the authorities to take the car out of the country .



[Enlarge](#)

The car is now of course part of the installation, along with a total of 38 different documents, all in frames and with official stamps and approvals. For the installation in Stuttgart the documents have been hung in a line along a wall, reminiscent of an ornamental frieze with their artistic, yet incomprehensible, lettering. The return to Germany is documented with sequences from 11 hours of video recordings.

One sequence shows the artist sitting on the front passenger seat of the car, taking off her headscarf just after crossing the border of this almost hermetically sealed off country. The landscape passes by and at some point the beloved scenery of their destination seems to be on the travellers' minds for somewhere between Teheran and Stuttgart, while the two of them are chatting, we hear the comment that the landscape looks like that of the Black Forest.



Harmless arsenals

In the artist's latest video, *Arsenals*, we see her in close-up, blowing smoke out of her mouth, all in slow motion. The perception of the viewer may be somewhat confused, as he or she does not see how or what the protagonist is inhaling. The background music is familiar - it is the music from those showdown scenarios in Hollywood films.



[Enlarge](#)

It guides the viewer's powers of association in the right direction - the exhaled wisps of smoke soon conjure up the image of gun smoke. This feeling of uneasiness however is soon dispelled the moment the viewer realises that the collection of blackened, ominous looking objects in the dark twilight of the presentation room are nothing but harmless, oriental water pipes.

Over the rooftops of Teheran

The use of found footage containing image, text or sound from well known films is also an integral element in the artist's work, the same goes for the re-enactment of earlier performances of well known colleagues. An example of this would be Razmi's video installation *Roof Piece Teheran* that is based on the *Roof Piece* performance that was staged by Trisha Brown in New York in 1971. In it we see 12 monitors showing images of figures on roofs. One after another they systematically create the movements of a choreography way up above the streets of the city.

It was with this work that the artist, as she said herself, wanted to venture into modern-day Iran. Modern dance does not exist in Iran, it is banned, just as any performance is in a public space. In order to carry out such a risky undertaking in a country like Iran that is constantly under surveillance, everything had to be done in

secret. Things went well and the project came off, even if it was on an additional level of reception.

Frieze Art Fair 2011 - Anahita Razmi

Teheran is, as we know, not New York and inevitably we start to think of the images that went round the world of those women who, under cover of darkness, shouted their protest from the rooftops of Teheran when the country was in turmoil in 2009. For Anahita Razmi art is a means of making a statement .

It was only for the video *White Wall Tehran* (2007) that the artist had to let somebody else take over the directing for a short time. Razmi was stopped on the street by Iranian Revolutionary Guards because she had been filming them shortly before. In order to erase the part of the film with the guards, one of the guards filmed the inner white wall of their headquarters over the original for 27 seconds. It is these 27 seconds, along with accompanying noises that can be heard from outside, that constitute the film. Despite the erasure the film is a statement.

Frischzelle_17 – Anahita Razmi

Kunstmuseum Stuttgart

15 Deczember 2012 – 3 March 2013

Catalog: Frischzelle_17 – Anahita Razmi

Ed. Kunstmuseum Stuttgart

Text: Simone Schimpf

German/English, 2012

36 pages, 15 illustrations, 21 x 15 cm, 5 Euro