



THEORY OF SURVIVAL: FABRICATIONS, A PROJECT BY TARANEH HEMAMI

by Alangoo

October 16, 2014

As showing support for art-to-wear is in ALANGOO.com's DNA, we were happy to embrace this exciting project, by Taraneh Hemami and had a quick chat with her. Learn more and make sure to attend the Oct 18th event if you are in San Francisco area.

ALANGOO: What is the mission of this project?

Taraneh Hemami: The ultimate mission of *Fabrications* is to invite artists and audiences to engage with the complex histories and stories of the Iranian revolution. The project aims to draw attention to the contested histories of dissent in Iran as well as to explore the connections and affinity to freedom movements across the world. Using the space of the gallery as a much needed space for dialog and art as a vehicle to ignite conversation and participation, the project brings together artists and activists for a creative exchange around issues that have defined and shaped our lives, and yet rarely enter into our everyday existence.

The presentation as a pop-up bazaar serves to break the traditional white box display of a gallery to create a more familiar setting for audiences, luring them closer to examine the offerings in the different booths, while raising their curiosity about the iconography and histories embedded within the objects. It entices the viewer to purchase, own, take away, a part of this history, to disperse and distribute, to wear or hang in a private or public space, and by doing so becoming active participants in connecting these tokens of a not so distant past with the present day.

ALANGOO: How and when did you come up with the idea? What was your inspiration?

Taraneh Hemami: The project was born out of my love and admiration for Persian architecture in general and the amazing bazaars in Tehran and Isfahan in particular, the endless pathways, the magical light, the glitz of the gold, the dazzle of the patterns of fabrics, the aroma of spices, and the hum of the bustling crowds. The bazaar as a public space of gathering fascinates me, as it brings a diverse group of people together in a space for commerce and leisure, interacting within close proximity, watching, examining, haggling, negotiating, drinking tea, telling stories. In *Fabrications* I am also drawing parallels between art markets and bazaars, looking at the tension of presenting work with controversial or political content in settings that value art primarily as merchandise for trade.

ALANGOO: What was your criteria selecting the presented artists? Are all the artists based in the U.S.?

Taraneh Hemami: I have invited artists whose practice and projects already toy with some of these ideas, and are colored by history and activism. Every participant, from artists and writers to scholars and activists, have brought their own unique perspectives, curiosities, attachments and obsessions to reflect on the common and conflicting narratives and histories we share.

Fabrications has begun in the Bay Area, working with 12 California based artists. There are, however, plans in the making, to exhibit in major cities across the US, Canada and Europe at public and educational institutions, wherever there is a large Iranian population. Each time the project will invite local communities of artists and scholars to be involved in further investigations and explorations, to discover and create connections with the histories and stories that the project uncovers and collects through the project's growing archives.

ALANGOO: How was the reaction and feedback of non-Iranian visitors to the bazaar?

Taraneh Hemami: The exhibition has been embraced by the non-Iranian communities in the Bay Area, as well as become a temporary space of gathering for the Iranian community. We have had several events that have brought diverse communities together. The interest has been overwhelming, and the engagement very real. We have had the opportunity to conduct smaller workshops with a number of scholars to engage the participants in conversations and dialogue, while collecting personal narratives with a special focus on the critical years between the CIA Coup and the aftermath of the Iranian revolution.

ALANGOO: What was some of the obstacles you guys faced to implement the idea?

Taraneh Hemami: The usual suspects: funding and support. This pilot phase of the project has been made possible primarily through grants awarded by Creative Capital, a NY based arts organization, as well as the support of many local arts agencies and of course the generous support of Southern Exposure gallery. Financial support from the Iranian community has been lagging behind as I believe there is a hesitation in our community to fund art in general and anything with a political tint in particular. I hope after this first phase of the project, there will be more support to make the traveling pop-up bazaar a reality.

ALANGOO: Which one of the designers showcased art-to-wear?

Taraneh Hemami: Approaching their projects in very different ways, many artists have created wearable products for the bazaar. In his booth Failure, Amir H. Fallah tie-dyes women's black scarves and chadors to forge a connection between the sexual and freedom movement in the west and what became the symbol of the Islamic Revolution, devised as a revolt against the western objectification of women. Audiences are encouraged to try out and purchase these now acid-worn, pattern-filled fabrics. Haleh Niazmand creates a series of elegant women's apparel for her shop 2Die4 that are embedded with dissident iconography borrowed from ephemera collected by her father. They highlight the irony and possibly the blasphemy in commodification of what was once revered and sacred. Taravat Talepasand's Islamic Youth project alters the iconic illustration for the 1990 Sonic Youth album Goo with two contemporary Iranian women wearing scarfs and smoking cigarettes to cover her t-shirts, tank-tops and sweaters. *Theory of Survival* Souvenir shop offers a series of tote bags and powder coated aluminum necklaces of revolutionary slogans and imagery. For his booth Dozd Bazaar/Bootleg Identities, Hushidar Mortezaie uses his father's personal archives of his activist years to stage a critical tableaux of "dismembered and disremembered" heroes of the past, presenting wearable objects from soccer jerseys to blood stained men's white shirts filled with imagery and text borrowed from various ephemera of the past.

ALANGOO: Was this the first time you launched this project and if so, what are your future plans?

Taraneh Hemami: This is the first time we are presenting the project as a bazaar, however *Theory of Survival* has been exhibited with the archives and publications at its center with Bay Area artists Ali Dadgar, and Ala Ebtekar, Shadi Yousefian and Termeh Yeghiazarian, and the performance group Darvag at The Lab as well as with international artists Reza Aramesh, Gita Hashemi and Leila Pazooki at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts in 2008. I have also presented the archives of dissent as hand crafted and manufactured objects at Luggage Store gallery in 2013 in the exhibition Resistance, with beaded curtains and quilts, glass assemblages and sculptures as well as the manufactured objects that I have included in *Fabrications*' souvenir shop.

As for future plans, we are collecting narratives from the Iranian community, working towards a publication with California Institute of Integral Studies as part of our California Humanities Community Stories project. A web component to the project where an extensive and layered historical timeline invites audiences to share personal narratives is in the works. And we are looking for the right venues to recreate the bazaar at new locations, working with artists, artisans, activists, architects and audiences to add their voice and vision, objects and wares to the spaces of dialog and commerce.

