

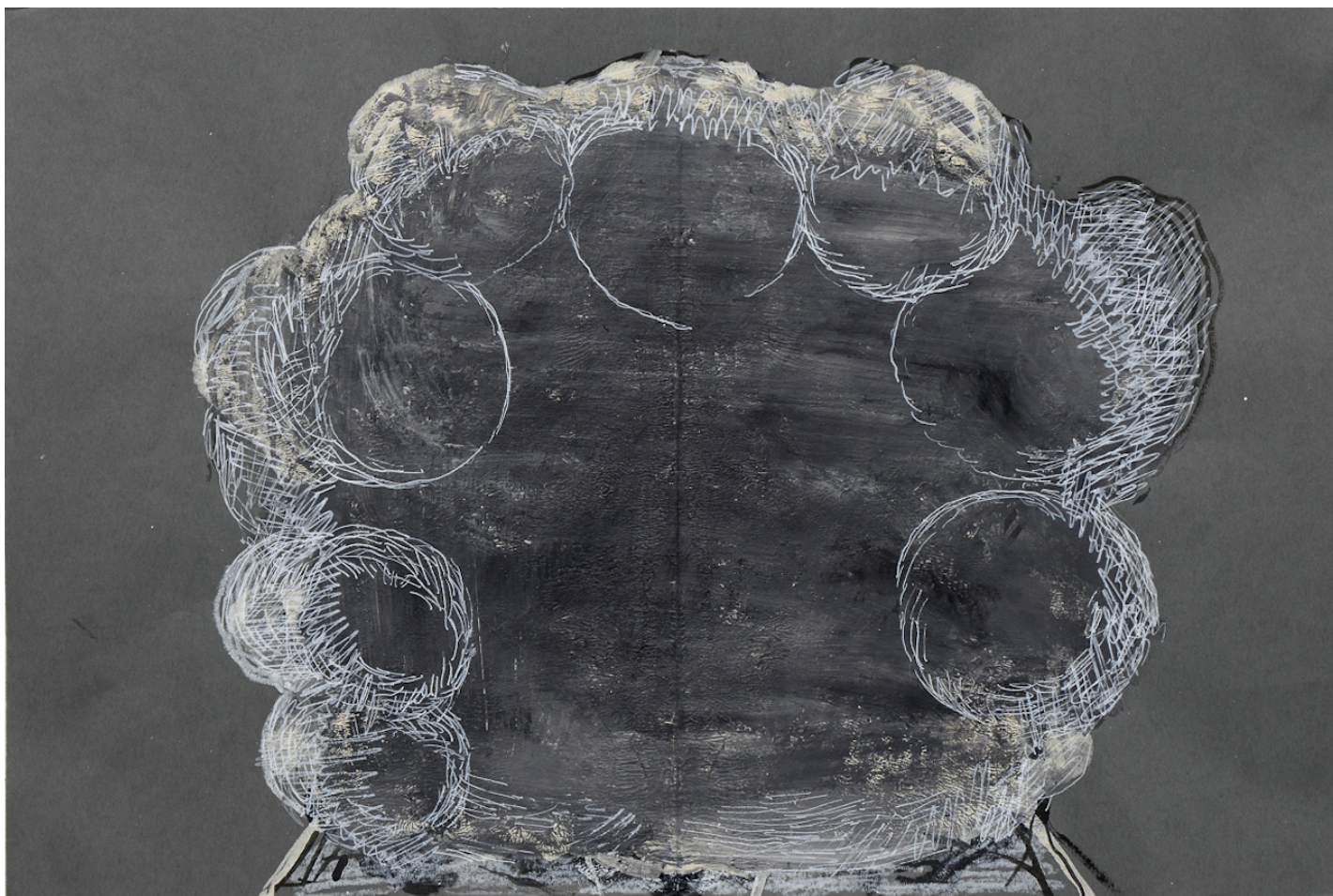


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ARTICLES

Rorschach Inkblots Conjure Up Themes of Loss in Iran

Negar Mortazavi | May 4, 2015



“Carousel” (2014), acrylic and marker on paper (photo by Orestes Gonzalez)

It’s not so easy for Iranian-American artists to portray their hyphenated identities. The two countries have spent the past three decades as staunch enemies, disconnected from each other. Now the US and Iran have recently started talking to each other, trying to

resolve a nuclear dispute. That might seem like a purely political issue but it has had its effects on the art scene.

With [Iran news](#) dominating the headlines, the Americans have become curious about the people who live in Iran. And art, naturally, is one great way to learn about a people. [Iranian art](#) has generated new interest and many artists have been showcased across the US over the past two years, from legendary sculptor [Parviz Tanavoli at Boston's Davis Museum](#) to Tehran-based artist [Monir Shahroudy at the Guggenheim Museum](#) in New York.

Iran-born, New York-based artist [Roya Farassat](#) is a new addition to this list. Her work was recently included in an exhibition that travelled [from the Queens Museum to the Taubman Museum](#) in Roanoke, Virginia, and her paintings of women in veils and welded steel wall installations have been shown in numerous solo and group shows across the US and abroad, including art fairs in New York, Miami, Dubai, and Kuwait. Her current solo exhibit [Chaos, A Mind of Its Own](#) at Shirin Gallery in New York features paintings inspired by Rorschach inkblots. Made with an instinctive love for detail and symmetry, Farassat's works on paper reveal multiple layers of paint, building up to rich surfaces that transform into something haunting and turbulent. Initially, what seems to look like an accidental spill matures to a ghostlike explosion that rises like smoke and leaves debris of delicate stains, linear lines, and thickened shadows.



Roya Farassat at her studio (photo by Orestes Gonzalez)

In speaking about her work, Farassat describes a feeling of loss and melancholy, as a reaction to the violent crimes against the innocent, in particular the misuse of power in the Middle East and the crisis with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Two series in particular, *Turbulence* and *Contained*, convey such sentiments through a careful balance of abstraction and representation. In describing her process, Farassat writes that her approach to the Rorschach inkblot “has been to spill or apply paint with a brush on one side of a folded paper, press and reopen to discover biomorphic forms that resemble humans, animals, and plants. I repeat this process multiple times, each time crafting it with more deliberate brush strokes until it develops into looming landscapes that glorify violence and concurrently expose us to emptiness and uncertainty.” “My work is always changing in form,” Farassat says. “It finds its beauty in the grotesque, and humor in the most absurd.”

Raised in Iran, Farassat’s art is influenced by a culture and tradition that she feels embraced a distorted sense of reality. She describes how her restrained upbringing has had a great influence on a body of work that embodies issues such as female identity,

oppression, and isolation. In her sculpture, “The American Dream,” a briefcase in the shape of a house is welded to a chain that connects to a diamond shape made of rods of steel. “This sculpture reminds me of the time I left my birth country,” she says. “And with that came the understanding that the world is in constant change, and life is a temporary gift.”



Installation view of ‘Roya Farassat: Chaos, A Mind of Its Own’ at Shirin Gallery, New York (photo by the author for Hyperallergic)

[Roya Farassat: Chaos, A Mind of Its Own](#) *continues at Shirin Gallery (511 W 25th St, Chelsea, Manhattan) through May 9.*

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