

Sheida Soleimani: Ghostwriter

16 March - 13 May 2023

Opening reception | Thursday 16 March 6-8pm



Edel Assanti is pleased to present Sheida Soleimani: *Ghostwriter*. Following the work's debut at Providence College Galleries, Providence, and concurrent with a presentation of *Absolute Powers* at Philadelphia Academy of Fine Art, Philadelphia, the show explores her family's history of migration through compelling photographs enveloped by a wall drawing.

Soleimani's constructed photographs of figures and objects, against collaged backdrops, critically engage with geopolitics often exposing the deeply concealed power relations and networks that shape policy. *Ghostwriter* is a more intimate analysis of these forces, exploring the personal implications of political systems enacted at the level of the body.

For the first time, Soleimani turns her camera inwards to explore her family's history of exile from Iran and the transference of the notion of home. The series of tableaux images 'ghostwrite' her parents' life tracing their time living in Iran as pro-democracy activists and the conditions that led to their displacement to the United States. Intertwined by a mural based on her mother's drawings of her childhood home, the exhibition interweaves the complexities of social-political context with visceral personal experiences.

Casting her parents, *māmān* and *bābā*, as protagonists, two portraits symbolically recount the memories surrounding Soleimani's mother's home and the unfolding of their urgent departure as Iran's regime tightened its response to dissent. Evocative of how these recollections were passed down to Soleimani as a child at home, each figure sits in a ruptured domestic setting composed from layered images. Their faces are

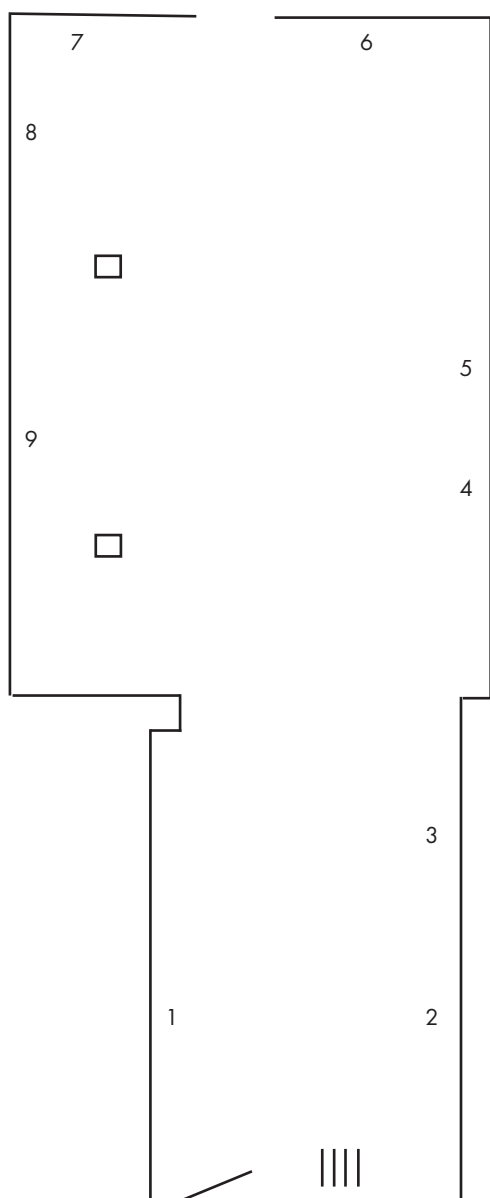
shielded by paper masks made necessary due to their enduring fears of persecution.

In this patchwork of perspectives, as if echoing the volatility and incoherence of memory, patterning inspired by an ancient Persian game of Snakes and Ladders is discernible. Tiles overlap photographs that capture remnants of her mother's family home in Shiraz and drawings she made to translate her harrowing experiences. The game board iconography resonates across Soleimani's images alluding to the chance, risk and reward involved in the process of her parents' journey.

The precarity of movement is felt acutely in *Khoy* and *Panjereh*. Both conjure *māmān*'s imprisonment in solitary confinement for a year following her first attempt at exodus. While *Panjereh* is a skewed image of the cell, *Khoy*, the name of the prison in north west Iran, considers her survival strategies. Through cell bars, created from a shredded photograph of the prison entrance, *māmān*'s arm emerges grasping a small eastern bluebird. Lines of poetry, written during her incarceration, describe a disregarded and caged bird. More than forming an analogy with her experiences, the bird references *māmān*'s dedication to animal rehabilitation, a practice she took up in America in lieu of being able to work as a nurse.

These caregiving skills have, as with her recollections, been passed down to Soleimani. As custodian of these sensitive stories, *Ghostwriter* begins a retrieval and creation of the artist's family lore. While specific and personal, the work, in its collapse of space and time, speaks to the wider phenomenon of migration and the enduring effects of Iran's regime.

Sheida Soleimani (b. 1990) received her MFA from Cranbrook Academy of Art in 2015. Recent solo exhibitions include *Negotiators*, Kunsthaus Photoforum Pasquart, Biel, CH (2022); *Ghostwriter*, Providence College Galleries, Providence, USA (2022); *ILVA*, Castello San Basilio, Pisticci, Italy (2022); *Lever of Power*, Silver Eye Centre for Photography, Pittsburgh, USA (2021); *Hotbed*, Denny Dimin Gallery, New York, USA (2020); *Medium of Exchange*, Southern Utah Museum of Art, Utah; CUE Art Foundation, New York; Cincinnati Contemporary Art, Cincinnati and Atlanta Contemporary, Atlanta, all USA (2018-2019). Selected group exhibitions include *Rising Sun: Artists in an Uncertain America*, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, USA (2023); *Eyes on Iran*, Roosevelt Island, US (2022); *A Trillion Sunsets*, ICP, New York, USA (2022); *Immune Project*, Living Art Museum, Reykjavik, Iceland (2022); *Denunciation!*, ACC Gallery, Weimar, Germany (2021); deCordova Biennial, deCordova Museum of Art, Lincoln, USA (2019); *Ecologies of Darkness*, SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin, Germany (2019). Soleimani lives and works in Providence, Rhode Island.



1. Sheida Soleimani, *Safar*, 2022, Archival pigment print, 61 x 45.7 cm, 24 x 18 in. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs

2. Sheida Soleimani, *Crying Quince, Laughing Apple*, 2022, Archival pigment print, 61 x 45.7 cm, 24 x 18 in. Edition of 5 plus 2 artist's proofs

3. Sheida Soleimani, *What a Revolutionary Must Know*, 2022, قلیخ زای یادف, Archival pigment print, 101.6 x 76.2 cm, 40 x 30 in. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs

4. Sheida Soleimani, *Khooroos (rooster) named Manoocher*, 2021, Archival pigment print, 152.4 x 111.8 cm, 60 x 44 in. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs

5. Sheida Soleimani, *Noon-o-namak (bread and salt)*, 2021, Archival pigment print, 152.4 x 111.8 cm, 60 x 44 in. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs

6. Sheida Soleimani, *Field Hospital*, 2022, Archival pigment print, 101.6 x 76.2 cm, 40 x 30 in. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs

7. Sheida Soleimani, *Behind the Door*, 2022, Archival pigment print, 101.6 x 76.2 cm, 40 x 30 in. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs

8. Sheida Soleimani, *Khoy*, 2021, Archival pigment print, 61 x 45.7 cm, 24 x 18 in. Edition of 5 plus 2 artist's proofs

9. Sheida Soleimani, *Panjereh*, 2022, Archival pigment print, 152.4 x 111.8 cm, 60 x 44 in. Edition of 3 plus 2 artist's proofs