

An interview with Fariba Hajamadi

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A. Throughout your artistic career, from a very poetic angle, you have been interested in researching, perhaps deconstructing, cultural transmission and presentation as it is conveyed through institutions; specifically, how these institutions—generally Art museums—select, discriminate, catalogue and exhibit world culture. Is there any purpose in the choice of this subject and research?

F.H. Prior to the work you are referring to, in the late 70's and early 80's, my work dealt directly with the idea of "processing" and organization of information in our modern-day technological society. And more specifically I was working with the ideas surrounding the Western representation of "other" cultures and societies in the mass media. Where I am today in the cycle of my work followed naturally and logically. The museum and historical architecture are parallel sites to my prior concerns, where I continue my recordings and investigations. The photographic images I use in my work come from travelling and roaming around those archives. I take pictures as though taking notes. Later in the studio they act as my memory. My pieces are the end product of reorganizing the artifacts in the recreated architecture of my pictorial memory and overlapping them with the thoughts and associations that occur to me simultaneously. This becomes a reference to the construction of meaning and history around "representation".

A. Considering that you come from Iran, even though your artistic production has been developed in the United States, what sort of implications and responses do you understand that your work has regarding the hegemonic aesthetics and interests of contemporary Western art?

F.H. I think perhaps my work has an outsider's point of view and feeling about it. There is always a play with doubles and double meanings. I think it is inherent in my work that there are many ways of reading and interpretation. Perhaps it is my "different" cultural background that has favoured this kind of perception and constant reference to this idea of multiple and coexisting cultural differences, never believing in homogeny.

A. The manipulation of the photographs you take and your pictorial additions to them in your work inform us already about the suspicion you invest in the photographic "truth" which usually is presented as fact, instead of as what it is, an ideological-cultural tool. Your painting of these photographs, in any case, seems to glamorize the depiction of the

photographic subject, even though your photo-montages expose the fiction of cultural values. How do you see it?

F.H. I think the made up fictional interiors of my work are familiar but never "real"; there is no "truth" in the representation. This is simply the way I chose to tell the story or rather my version of it. My work has less to do with the debate over the factuality of the photographic image and more to do with memory, representational language and its history.

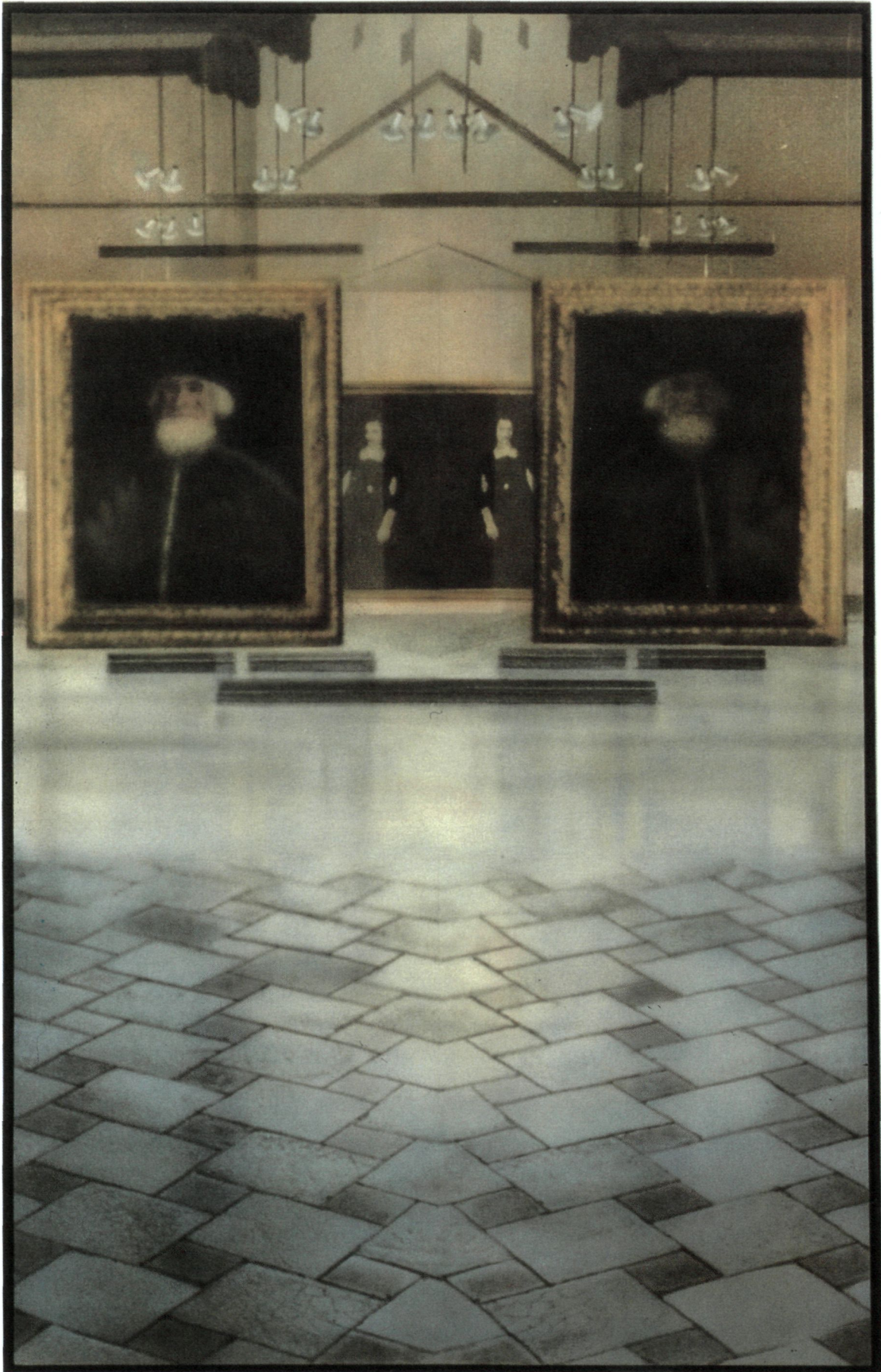
A. During your trip to the Canary Islands for the exhibition *Displacements: Aspects of Identity and Culture* (which I curated for the C.A.A.M.), you took some pictures of different rooms and exhibits at the Museo Canario (the anthropological Museum of the Canary Islands). Particularly, in one of the pieces you showed in your last exhibition in New York, you seem to be interested in the *guanche* skulls. Why? And also, how do you conceive the relationship between these skulls and the architecture of the ceiling you photographed at the crypt of the Grossmünster Cathedral in Zurich and the Middle Eastern floral carpet at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon?

*F.H. The visit to the Museo Canario was a fascinating experience. For me it strongly represented what I mean to convey through my depiction of the artifacts organized in our institutions. This place dedicated to a culture that once was and was destroyed. The skulls and a few other remainders is all that is left of the *guanches*. Around these skulls historians have constructed a history. We interpret pictorial and other representations much the same way as the archeologists and historians. We also construct a history around them. The piece I made was my offering and burial for the skulls of the *guanches*, with Heaven above and flowers below.*

A. Do you think that the extermination of the *guanche* people by the Spanish conquistadors could serve as an appropriate metaphor for the selective, cleansing, leveling and homogenizing effects of the hegemonic and globalizing Western culture and of some Western postmodern currents?

F.H. Certainly we can say that. And we can also think of their remains as an impossibility of complete hegemony. I believe Western culture is globalized but not digested by every culture. I think we will continue to see much cultural and political opposition to such homogeny.

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Central piece of the triptic: Fariba Hajamadi. "An abrupt victory of a mirror that no longer reflects a single image". 1989.
Oil & emulsion on canvas. 77 1/2×149 inches overall.

Fariba Hajamadi. "By passion the world is bound. By passion too it is released". 1989. Oil & emulsion on canvas, 64 x 100 inches.

