



Sahand Hesamiyan's *Forough* in the Conservatorio di Musica. 2016. Cardboard and Gold Leaf. Variable dimensions.

INDEPENDENT EXHIBITION: THE SPARK IS YOU
PARASOL UNIT IN VENICE
 CURATED BY ZIBA ARDALAN

THE SPARK IS YOU, London's Parasol unit exhibition in Venice stages the collective practice of nine Iranian artists tackling questions global and local in the Conservatorio di Musica. Curated by the London foundation's founder, artistic and executive director Ziba Ardalan, the exhibition's mission is anything but incidental: "The historical role of Venice and its interaction with the East is known to all of us," says Ardalan. The show thus takes its name from Iran's tradition of Persian verse. "When the idea of an exhibition focusing on the work of contemporary Iranian artists in Venice became a reality [...] I searched for a title and it was incidentally then that I looked into my trusted notebook," she adds. "I found on one page the yellow highlighted sentence: 'The Spark Is You', which probably comes from Rumi's poetry [...]. It was natural to use 'The Spark Is You' in homage to our fabulous poets." Moreover, the line exemplifies "what the Persian culture of [Ardalan's] childhood was about—warmth, interconnectedness, respect and care for others. Iranian people used to be the bright light in that part of the world."

The exhibition features Y. Z. Kami's slippery paintings of people and Koushna Navabi's enormous concrete biscuits and their tombstone foreboding, to the video

works of Morteza Ahmadvand and Mitra Farahani. Sahand Hesamiyan's *Forough* is in one open courtyard and Navid Nuur's *The Tuners* in a second. Different media are set in symphony to accrue more significance than the sum of their parts.

The building's grand hall stages work from Siah Armajani and Nazgol Ansarinia—artists living on opposite sides of the world and spanning an age gap of 40 years. At the exhibition's heart sits the late Farideh Lashai's multimedia installation *When I Count, There Are Only You... But When I Look, There Is Only a Shadow* composed of 80 prints from Goya's renowned engravings *Los desastres de la guerra*. Goya's figures are removed while a soundtrack of Chopin illustrates their fleeting reappearances, a kind of audio-visual synaesthesia.

Ardalan hopes that the foundation's Venice presentation—and its sister exhibition in London—will redress Iran's international reputation and encourage conversations beyond the exhibition itself. "During my extensive research, I realised that younger people around the world often equate Iran with terrorism and threats," she says. "It then became even more important to introduce the audience gently to something about the beauty, value and sophistication of our culture. This is, of course, only a humble effort, but I hope art lovers will visit this exhibition and in turn engage and spread something positive about Iranian culture. We badly need it, but also in these uncertain times the world needs it, even if it is a drop in the ocean." EW