

# Argentea Gallery

## **A Q&A between Samin Ahmadzadeh & Jennie Anderson**

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### **As isolation restrictions are now being eased, how have you kept yourself motivated during this extended period of lockdown?**

Lockdown has definitely been a strange time for me. I don't remember having to spend so much time at home at any other time in my life and it has been a challenge for me. However, before lockdown I'd already brought a lot of my materials and tools home from my studio so that I could focus on my new ideas of making larger pieces. Learning and experimenting with new techniques to make large pieces was challenging but also motivating. To be honest it was very difficult, but I am very happy to say I managed to make it work. I managed to progress a number of new pieces to a certain point and I can't wait to go back to my studio, proceed with the next stages of the work, and have them completely finished.

### **What's your background?**

I was born and raised in Iran, a country with a very strong cultural background that has definitely inspired my practice.

Having moved from Iran to London in my early twenties, I noticed how people's perceptions of my country – influenced by media – differed from my own. This had always upset me a lot as I always saw it as a very reductive and one-dimensional representation that did not do justice to the depth and richness of Iranian culture and history. I have always had a great interest in personal photographic archives, and I felt that through contemporary representations of my archive I could provide the space for further analysis in social, political and cultural fields. These photographs narrate a private history and represent glimpses of the past and intimate memories, but at the same time, they can also be considered as a public (social) document with wider meanings and a true representation of a certain culture and who we are.

### **Can you tell us a little about your process in creating these intriguing pieces?**

All the works are handwoven. I start by choosing the two or more photographs I would like to work with for a certain piece based on the idea I have in mind. I'm very lucky

to have access to an amazing archive of photographs starting from the 1920s which my family has been collecting and expanding over the years. I then think about the compositions that the pictures can create, and the way different colours and forms can work together. Having decided on the photos and subject, I then choose a weave pattern. Next, I flatten the woven paper, fix it onto birch plywood and cut it to the size and shape I want. The pieces are then varnished several times to produce the finished work. I want to create an object that is itself interesting, which has led me to explore different possible finishes. I feel the varnish and finish of the surface can give the composition a permanence, creating a unique object like many of the archival photographs have themselves become.



Mehri and Fariba (2018)

**It sounds very complex with the potential for things to go wrong at any stage, so what is the motive behind weaving images together?**

Yes, it can definitely go wrong at different stages of the work. It took me a long time and a lot of practice to be able to perfectly fix them on to wood. It is the most difficult and risky part of the process as the whole work needs to be fully soaking wet which makes the paper very fragile and prone to tearing! However, what I have learnt through this process is how some mistakes can actually improve the work. I learnt not to be scared of making mistakes, as sometime those mistakes open up a completely new idea that I can use in my next pieces.

Weaving has a strong tradition in Iranian culture and can be seen in different forms such as fabrics and carpets. Being raised in such an environment definitely influenced me and led me to explore weaving photographs to tell a story. There are endless varieties of weaving patterns, and of course images, which is very exciting and keeps the whole process interesting.



Karun River (2018)

**Your finished pieces are more objects than simply images – almost simple sculptures – what is the reason for fixing the woven images on to wood rather than keep them as a 2d image?**

When I started doing photo weavings my works were all two dimensional and flat paper pieces, but I always felt that something was missing. Although they were all framed pieces, I couldn't see them as a true representation of my artistic vision.

In 2015, I went on a geometry course in Iran, which had a great influence on my work. I've always been fascinated by the geometrical elements used in Iranian architecture and also by the amazing details in all their tiles. As an Iranian, I have been surrounded by a variety of these patterns in my daily life but going on the course helped me understand the science and the complexity of the details behind it all. I then decided to challenge myself with creating my weavings as objects by combining the Iranian creative culture of weaving and tiling. I also started looking deeper into the use of shapes and geometry within my work.



I haven't forgotten (Khanoom) (2017)



Grandfather (2018)

**How does your work comment on current social or political issues? How should viewers consider your work?**

Identity, memory, and the actual process of remembering are important ideas which are behind my work. I focus on personal/family archives to present past experiences and use them as a representation of different cultures and who we are. Having said that, I want to say that although there are definitely a lot of differences between cultures because of where we live, where we come from, and what we have gone through, at some point I think these cultural ideas can change over time and differences should all become less apparent and instead give way to a portrait of a common humanity, which is what I also try to explore in my work.

**What inspired the 500+ piece *Recollection for Reportrait*?**

Since I had started experimenting with the circle pieces, I was imagining it as a large installation where each circle represents a different memory, experience and story. Having it as one large installation made from 500+ smaller pieces allowed me to present a variety of them.

The photographs for this piece are from two separate personal archives from both the Middle East and Western Europe. One is from my own Iranian family and the other one is from an extensive donation of albums by Brighton-based photographer Tim Andrews. I used the circle as a motif to represent unity and harmony. I wanted to combine two different archives to show the blend of cultures and I believe that the shape of a circle suited the whole idea of the installation and the unity between the two sets of family archives (Eastern and Western) that I was using.



Recollection for Reportrait (2016)

**Finally, are there any artists, both historical and contemporary, who have had a particular influence on your practice?**

I have been inspired by many artists using a variety of creative processes who are exploring ways of storytelling in their works, so it is always very difficult to just name a few.

I've always loved the Impressionists, in particular Renoir and his ability to capture the spirit of the time and the people around him. Also, I always follow the work of contemporary artists who are working with found imagery using different processes, John Stezaker being a favourite. David Hockney's large paintings and his use of panels has also been a great inspiration for the new large pieces I've been recently working on.