



Buffalo Arts Studio

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Gallery hours: Tuesday - Friday 11-5; Saturday 11-3

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Permit #3811

Soheila Esfahani and Hye Yeon Nam: *Somewhere In Between*

January 15 - March 12, 2011

Opening Reception

Saturday, January 15, 2011

7-10 p.m.

Artist talks @ 7-8 p.m.



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Soheila Esfahani

Hye Yeon Nam



Soheila Esfahani: “Poems, Pallets, Patterns”

Iranian-born, Canada-based painter Soheila Esfahani melds the seemingly disparate formal elements of modern Western abstraction and traditional Persian calligraphy to produce outwardly visceral yet highly reflective compositions. Rather than strictly adhering to the rigid set of twelve principles outlining the proper use of proportion, strength, flatness, descent, etc., in the decorative printing of poetic verses, the artist has incorporated them loosely (e.g., elongating and jumbling quotes and abandoning the straight line while keeping a harmonic distribution of colors and negative space), lending her own aesthetic inclinations to create dynamic, personal works based on her experiences of being an immigrant. While Persian script typically employs sacred religious texts like the Koran as architectural adornment for entrances to mosques, shrines, and extravagant homes (the purpose being to provide the worshiper with a pictorial memory of the divine texts), in Esfahani's work, “the mystical concepts of transformation, spirituality, and alchemy manifest through the meaning of poems by Persian poet Rumi.” A 13th-century theologian known for his tolerance of all religions, races, classes, and ethnicities who promoted everyday activities such as music, dance, and poetry in one's spiritual journey toward love, Rumi's writings have been translated into several languages and celebrated across many nations and cultures, and are therefore fitting source material for works deeply rooted in identity and cultural transformation. Esfahani's paintings incorporate topographical forms, building calculated confusion through contrasting colors and the layering of identical pigments of various viscosities; like letters handwritten in invisible ink, they provide autobiographical visual clues for the viewer. Camouflage motifs and ink blots connoting war and Rorschach tests further address this emotional chaos and internal struggle; other works blend tranquil, atmospheric backgrounds akin to abstract expressionist painter Rothko with vibrant, energetic forms reminiscent of Pollock, which dance fluidly across the canvas communicating peace and oneness. Esfahani's installations integrate delicate and translucent materials like mylar, glass, outlined and cut-out shapes, and clear paint to emphasize the beauty and instability associated with bridging cultural gaps; her sculptures utilize raw materials such as recycled shipping pallets gilded and laser-etched with elaborate Middle Eastern patterns, simultaneously glorifying the metamorphic process while subtly questioning the authenticity of commodity exchange. Thus, encompassing a liberal but cultivated style that embraces the ancient and the contemporary, the spiritual and the secular, the ornamental and the utilitarian, Esfahani's work is an amalgam of contradictions that elegantly captures the human condition.



Soheila K. Esfahani grew up in Tehran, Iran, and moved to Canada in 1992. She received her BA in Fine Arts from the University of Waterloo and her MFA from the University of Western Ontario. She was a semi-finalist for the 2004 New Canadian Painting Competition through RBC Investments and the Canadian Art Foundation. Esfahani's work is represented in public and private collections including the Canada Council's Art Bank. She works from her studio at Kitchener's artist-run center, Globe Studios. www.sheila.ca

Hye Yeon Nam: “Singularis”

Korean-born artist Hye Yeon Nam's works, though largely based on her individual circumstances of moving to the United States, are universal in their exploration of cultural expectations, social anxieties, body image, and the boundaries between public and private space. *Wonderland* (2008; cover image) is a surreal video in which Nam wanders the sidewalks of NYC's Times Square, dazing indifferently at passersby who all seem to be walking in reverse. As if caught in a dream or having momentarily awoken from one, she glides, somewhat awkwardly yet deliberately, through the unsuspecting crowd. Even after the viewer discovers the artist's editing trick (it is actually Nam who is walking backward with the video played in reverse), what remains truly remarkable and uncanny is her ability to navigate one of the largest tourist areas in the world without so much as brushing up against another human being; the artist's keen awareness of her body moving through space and the fact that others are so aloof and unaffected by her bizarre movements heighten the overwhelming sense of loneliness. The utterly minimal work, while lacking any semblance of emotion, conflict, or climax, nonetheless succeeds in epitomizing the inevitable feelings of curiosity, amazement, confusion, and isolation that result from significant cultural transitions. While Nam's own vulnerability is portrayed in *Wonderland*, the gaze is turned back on the viewer in *Please Smile* (a reworked version of *Pointing at Me*, 2006; upper right image), a motion-sensitive interactive robot that makes gestures such as finger pointing in response to viewers' facial expressions. The work enables the viewer to empathize with Nam's struggle to adhere to Confucian ideals regarding women's role in society, as well as her experiences with prejudice and ridicule upon arriving in America. She explains, “The space of being neither here following correct rule nor there following incorrect rule is precisely what I try to convey”; that Nam has selected neither a Korean nor an English title for her exhibition, but the Latin *Singularis* (“Solitary”) instead, further suggests this displacement. *Self Portrait* (2006; bottom image) is a series of four videos in which the artist performs mundane tasks (eating, walking, drinking, and sitting) with unusual difficulty. By willingly subjecting herself to public humiliation and exposing her limitations and frustrations in witty and poignant ways, Nam tackles her adversity head-on, discovering solace and proving that “art can be a question, an argument, a proposal, a resolution, and, ideally, a nirvana.”



- Cori Wolff, Exhibitions Curator

Hye Yeon Nam is a digital media artist working on video and installation in Atlanta and NYC. She is a Ph.D. candidate at Georgia Institute of Technology and holds an MFA in Digital Media from Rhode Island School of Design. Nam's art has been showcased by Times Square, Eyebeam, The Tank, and DUMBO Arts Festival in New York; SIGGRAPH 2008; CHI 2010; The Lab in San Francisco; and several festivals in China, Ireland, UK, Germany, Australia, Denmark, and Switzerland. Her work has also been broadcast on the Discovery Channel (Canada) and featured in *Wired* and *Makezine*, among other publications. www.hynam.org