



Kassandra Walter, *I need a break*, 2023, burnt sugar syrup, twine, and sugar crystals.

Reza Rezaï, *Contra*, 2019, Neon pink + argon blue in acrylic housing

collate-contrast

Exhibition Text: Farhad Foroughi & Hooria Rajabzadeh

Kassandra Walters

&

Reza Rezaï

April 1- May 13 | 2023

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collate

The exhibition *collate-contrast* looks at works from two artists who both convey a personal narrative to the audience about their motherland, while engaging in the political and social concerns from their home countries. Although their work is similar in this way, their style and language are very different. The majority of *Kassandra Walters'* works are abstract and making reference to the motherland in her work through the materiality that she employs. Among other ingredients, she uses sugar, a product that is linked with centuries of

agriculture history in Guyana, a direct reference to *Kassandra's* ancestral ties. In contrast, *Reza's* works can be seen as a clear example of conceptual art, a style of visual art in which the nature of things is more important than their form. In his works, most of the photos are pieces of history and are contrasted by graphical elements that represent aspects of pop-culture memories in the Western world.

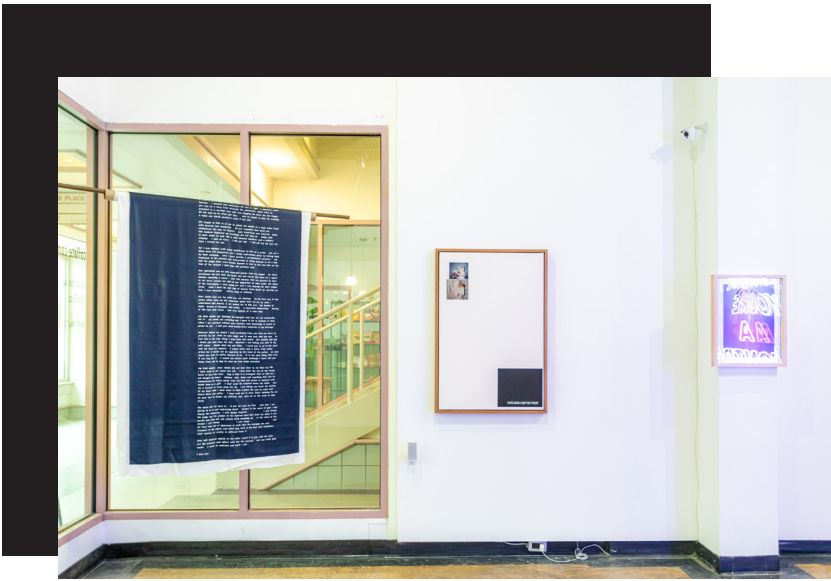


Reza's works are full of references and details that engage the audiences' minds. They stimulate the audiences' curiosity to review the information in the exhibition catalog, read the texts inside the frames, or search for each element's background and context to understand the concept better. On the other hand, Kassandra's works are site-specific and formed in a semi-random manner due to the unpredictable movement of the sugar. The levels of heat and density determine the ways in which her work moves, stands still, or remains

suspended. This process has created a variety of thick and thin strands of a black substance in space that one can stand in front of for hours, look at, and enjoy for its aesthetic beauty.



contrast



Over the past few years, various artists have created work based on Iran's social and political issues. One of the most prominent of these artists is Shirin Neshat. One of the main differences between Reza and Shirin's work is that Reza does not summarize Iran in exotic stereotypes. For example, the suffering of an Iranian woman is not only limited to the Chador or veil for Reza. In his work *Reyhaneh*, he prints the entire letter of Reyhane Jabari to her mother on silk charmeuse lycra and hangs it on a wooden dowel. The wood, if we know that Reyhane was a victim of execution, will remind us of her gallows. Next to this arrangement, he places his inkjet print that depicts photos of Reyhane Jabari's childhood on the upper left corner of the canvas. The placement of an execution victim

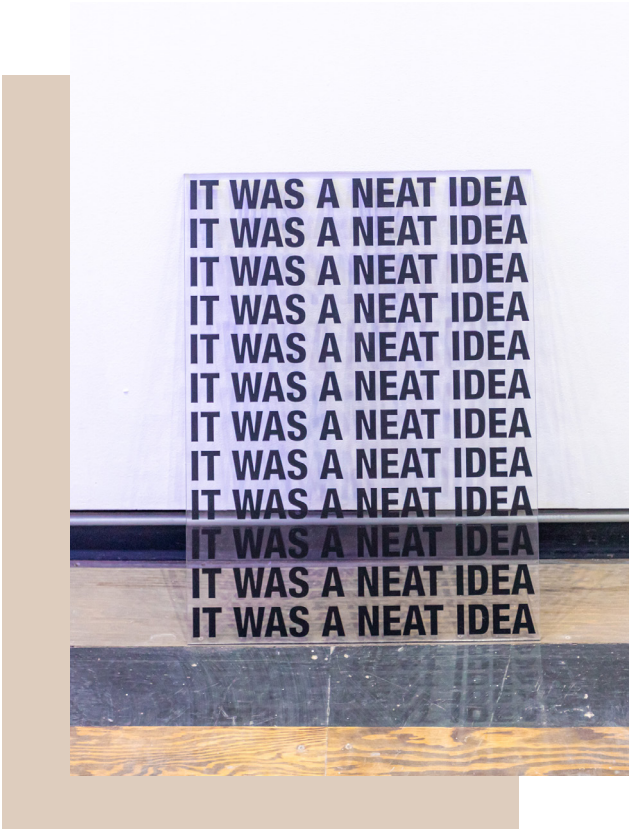
woman's childhood photos brings concepts of bitterness of fate and geographical determinism to mind. These concepts are completed by the sentence written in a black rectangle in the bottom corner of the same work: "You're gonna carry that weight." The joy and freshness of bright childhood dreams in the corner of the frame with black colour and this heavy theme reminds the viewer of the struggle of life. If the audience knows this Beatles song, they will find that it is the name of a recurring line in one of the tracks on their famous *Abbey Road* album.

Reza Rezaei, *Reyhaneh*; 2019, Inkjet print on silk charmeuse lycra.

Reza Rezaei *Untitled (for)*; 2019, Inkjet print on canvas,

We can see this pattern in his other work as well. The artist adds a humorous and absurd aspect to his works by adding symbols of popular culture to documentation and historical photographs. For example, in another inkjet print titled Devil in a New Dress features an image of Khomeini (the religious leader of the Iranian regime during the 1979 revolution and after), and the number 666, which is associated with Satan in pop culture, on a red oval sticker placed on Khomeini's face.

In the work Let's Party like it's 1979, a sticker has hidden most of the framed print. Only the upper part of the photo can be seen, with some raised hands that give us the impression of people dancing. The faces and bodies of the dancing people are hidden behind the sticker. The sticker is "SMPTE color bars" (the vertical, colored rectangles that used to be continuously displayed by televisions during non-broadcast hours). Overlaying a picture of people with their hands up on a black background is like censoring a picture of a party. The Islamic Republic has always censored the hair and body of women and well as the imagery of dancing and use of musical instruments due to religious strictness. Therefore, in this work, the artist in a way has censored the mullahs who have been ideologists and executors of censorship in Iran for more than 44 years. From another perspective, this work can be seen as a use of sarcasm to address the dead-end religious censorship in media (television, radio, newspapers, etc.) in Iran, in which no one buys the narration of the government.



Reza Rezai, Neato; 2019, Vinyl on flame finished clear acrylic.

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Kassandra Walters, *Alma*, 2023, burnt sugar syrup, tumeric.



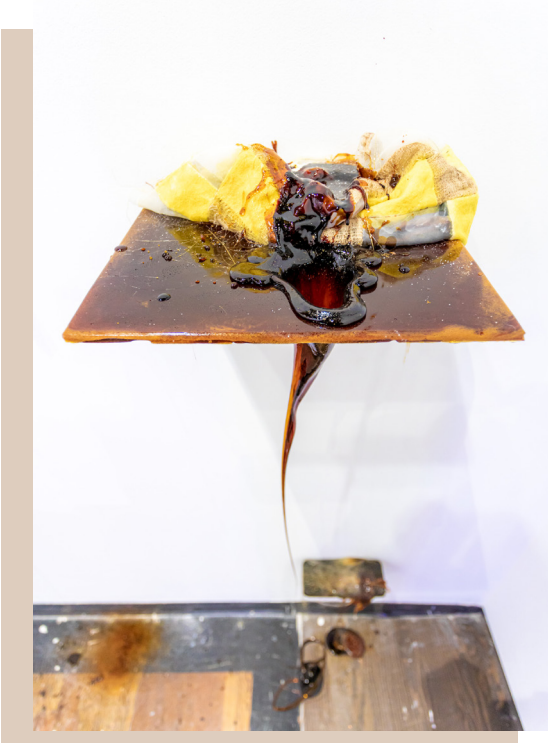
Meanwhile, on the other side of the exhibition, Kassandra does not express the pain of her motherland through detailed narratives, but instead leaves the stories buried and hidden in sugar particles. The history of sugarcane cultivation in Guyana, and more generally in many tropical countries from Africa to Asia, South and Central America, is linked to centuries of slavery, colonialism, and movements of farmers and workers. White, refined sugar is commonly consumed in daily life, but in Kassandra's work, the sugar is a burnt coffee colour

due to the heat given to it. It is poured from the plates mounted on the wall and from one plate to another like the history of sugarcane farmers on these lands, whose suffering has been passed through generations.

In addition to these installations, Cassandra has used sugar and tumeric to paint her grandmother's face directly on the gallery wall at the scale of 66 x 46 inches. The pose and mood of this portrait is reminiscent of Victoria portraits in the 19th century, and its color is similar to monochrome photos of the same era. Although, she makes the same references to homeland in her use of material, there is divergence in the portrait of her grandmother to her other work. Where her other works, like *Cascade* and *I need a break*, use a coded

language of diaspora and rely more heavily on the materiality to tell their stories Cassandra opts to connect audiences directly to her ancestral ties by giving viewer a realistic depiction of her family lineage.

contrast



This exhibition is unique and valuable, as it offered a profound insight into global issues through the lens of artists who possess a deep personal connection to the regions of the ancestry. This connection enabled them to avoid an orientalist perspective, instead offering a genuine understanding and narration of the historical and social contexts of their motherlands. As a result, their artworks were able to reflect an innovative visual-conceptual language.

Kassandra Walters, *for my family*, 2023, burnt sugar syrup, gauze, textile, vinyl.