



'Wrap Me Up In You'

by

Nargess Hashemi

Private preview: January 11 from 7:30 PM

The exhibition will run from January 12 until February 04, 2010

An exhibition supported by Ruinart

Family gatherings can be isolating experiences. They can remind us how dissimilar we are from our families, and often leave us feeling that they inhabit a world quite different from our own.

In her second solo show in Dubai, Iranian artist Nargess Hashemi explores the coupled feelings of endearment and frustration she has about her own family. In this series of drawings 'Wrap Me Up In You', Hashemi reproduces scenes of familial gatherings that she has photographed in the past year. In a departure from the emotionally charged recollections of her childhood, presented in her last show at B21, 'Stories From the Boudoir', Hashemi explores recent events – capturing at once the domesticity and normality of these scenes and their odd disconnection from Iran's current reality.

The images recreate scenes from engagement parties, wedding photographs or impromptu gatherings. Each drawing is composed entirely of black lines on transparent paper. This hollow image is then laid onto lavishly decorated wrapping paper – swirls of pastel flowers or an abundance of silver glitter that flashes in the light. Instantly a mood that is half-romantic and half-tacky overtakes the images, with each background carefully selected to work with the composition and capture its jovial, sentimentalised perfection. Hashemi even folds the paper in the manner of a wrapped present to emphasise the ceremony of the occasion and of the original photograph.

We sense the artist's distance from these scenes and share in her role as a removed observer of this close-knit group of people. She refers to her family as 'traditional' in their ways – explaining that custom binds each of them into a set path of aspiration; searching for marriage and the perfect Iranian wedding to follow.

The works reflect on a framework of kitsch tradition that she feels her family, and many families in Iran, are embedded in. The garish motifs and the wholesome smiles on their faces, appear ritualised. Smiles seem replicated between photographs and different people, while wedding ceremonies (right down to the makeup of the bride and the accompanying props of a fairytale wedding) are meticulously reproduced time and time again.

Yet these works have a darker subtext to them. Many were photographed in the weeks leading to and during the mass uprisings in Iran in the summer of 2009. Hashemi herself was involved in these demonstrations but family pressures obliged her to step from the street and into one such engagement party. No less than five weddings took place in her family around the time of the protests.

The works here present a section of society wholly removed from the caustic scenes of protest in Tehran. Instead, we see a family anesthetised by tradition to the realities going on just outside the door. As if by adhering to the prescriptions of society, her family does not just get by in the face of oppression, but cuts itself off from a stifling reality and turns to a safer, insular world.

In Hashemi's works, we sense a country subtly divided. While many are primed for change, others remain snared in a slumber of tradition. But beyond Iran, the works stand as a poignant reflection on the placating blanket that custom offers all of us. To not question, to follow headfirst into a framework that has been passed from generation to generation, is to relieve ourselves of the responsibility of change. In these images, made suffocating by the overbearing smiles and abundant kitsch, we glimpse a comfort zone – accessible to all who are willing to live amid store-bought sentimentalism and pseudo-romantic wrapping paper.

About Nargess Hashemi:

Nargess Hashemi was born in Iran in 1978. After studying at Azad University in Tehran, she has had several solo shows in Tehran including at Mah Art Gallery and Aaran Gallery, and has exhibited in group shows in the US and France. 'Wrap Me Up In You' represents her second solo show in Dubai with B21 after 2008's 'Stories From The Boudoir'. She lives and works in Tehran.

About B21 Gallery

Located in an industrial area near the centre of Dubai, B21 Gallery opened its doors in 2005 with the founding objective to discover young promising contemporary artists from the Middle-eastern region. Under B21's tutelage, a new generation of artists began to attract the attention of adventurous collectors and curators, as well as prestigious institutions. Providing a platform for Middle-Eastern contemporary art, B21 has showcased an intense and innovative program of exhibitions, publishing of a catalogue for each. Represented artists include: Shahriar Ahmadi, Reza Aramesh, Fereydoun Ave, Lara Baladi, Bitra Fayyazi, Shadi Ghadirian, Ramin Haerizadeh, Rokni Haerizadeh, Nargess Hashemi, Khosrow Hassanzadeh, Nadine Kanso, Afshan Ketabchi, Jeffar Khaldi, Farshid Maleki, Sabah Naim, Leila Pazooki, Hani Rashed, Arnaud Rivieren, Jinoos Taghizadeh, Shantia Zaker Ameli.

For more information, artist bio, interview and/or hi-res images, please contact Tessa de Caters at tessa@b21gallery.com or + 97 1 (0) 4 340 39 65

Al Quoz 1, street 6, near the Courtyard, opposite Spinneys warehouses. Sat-Thu 10am-7pm; Fri closed.

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