

# TWISTS & TURNS

*German-Iranian artist Haleh Redjaian sparks tensions between disparate forms and structures in her quietly-striking and formally dissonant works. As she unveils a new show at Dubai's Gallery IVDE this January, Dorothea Schöne catches up with her in Berlin to discuss towers, textiles and twists...*

With her use of elementary geometric forms and shapes, the employment of grid-like structures and abstract formal language, German-Iranian artist Haleh Redjaian manages to create and modify space, to redefine spatial reception and recognition. We met the artist in her Berlin studio during her preparations for her exhibition at Dubai's Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, opening in January.

*Within the last few months, you have presented your work in various shows and fairs. In Berlin (at Arratia Beer), Frieze New York and in the January show at Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde in Dubai. How has your work developed in the past months and what is new in this exhibition?*

In Dubai I am primarily showing drawings, and some of them are quite large in scale. This large format is new for me, as well as the fact that I am now working in series and diptychs with these graphic pieces. But I am also showing some of my textile works again. Until now, I have solely asked the weavers to make white carpets, onto which I put my design. Now I am working with coloured patterns and designs that I created and had fabricated in Iran.

*You don't only make work 'for the wall', but have also created large-scale installations. Yes, indeed, for the current exhibition, I have designed such an installation based on a building in Tehran, erected in 1971 on the occasion of the 2500th anniversary of the Persian empire. It is a very particular and unique building, and gathering place. Originally, it was called the 'King Memorial Tower', but was renamed 'Azadi Tower' – ('Liberty Tower') - after the Revolution. The tower's uncommon structure inspired me for my installation in Dubai. It is the first time I am dealing with architecture in Iran and with one specific building.*

*Were you inspired by the modernist aesthetic of the tower, or because of it?*

I was inspired by it, because the building has this particular 'twist'. My work is often about the 'turn' and 'twist'. I also like the structure and the grid-like surface of the building – something which is quite similar to my own work. Even back in the 1960s, when the tower was built, each stone was measured and calculated by computers.



Halah Redjaian.  
Photography by  
Franziska Rieder.



For many people, this is quite an emotional building – when you arrive in Iran at the old airport, you have to drive by it.

*In your textile works, you often reveal your raw superimposition of a grid-like, geometrical structure. When creating this additional level of texture, do you aim to add layers to a work or juxtapose aesthetic forms?*

I believe many, if not all of these aspects are present. Sometimes I want to give chaos an order, while in other cases I am trying to 'break' a certain order and structure. For example, in the case of the woven textile works, the structure is always the same, always there. But when I apply my strings, I can't guarantee that it will end up in a perfect shape or form, that the lines will be impeccably straight. Since I am not stitching, but rather pulling strings, I can't base my design on the given structure of the woven textile. I create new images out of things made by machines. The moment I pull the strings, I bend the structure a little bit, which changes my symmetrical design concept. I have to adapt to the fundamental grid structure of textiles - a process I find very fascinating.

*How does colour matter to you? And do you have a colour palette you characteristically use?*

Generally speaking, I work with very few colours - primarily with grey, black and dark blue. I only began working with more colours recently, when I started my textile pieces. After two years of working on them, and going through different ideas and preliminary designs, I showed them in Berlin for the first time in early 2014.

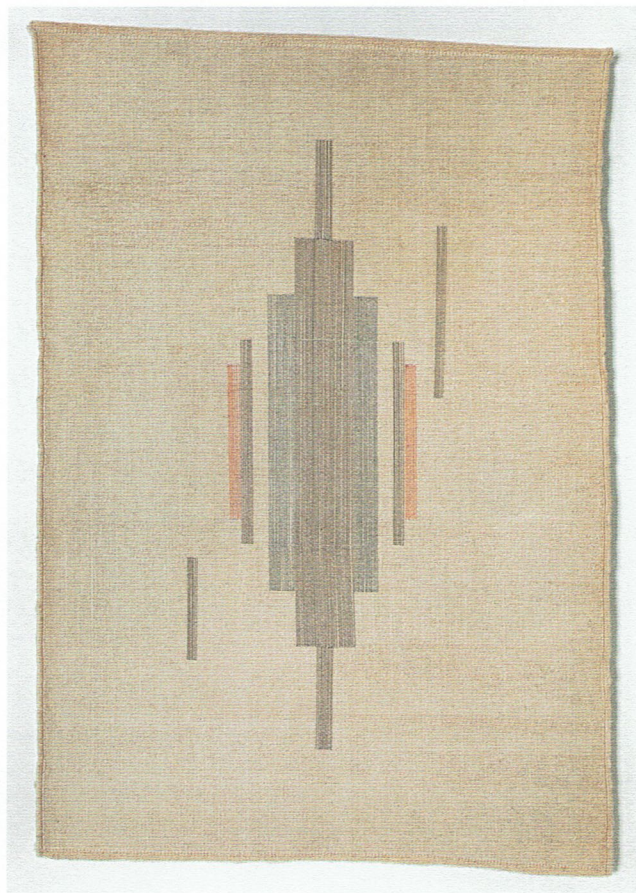
Getting into working with textiles was a lengthy process – there were preliminary designs, the ordering of samples, trying to translate my ideas into prints, but I simply could not find myself, my concepts or my ideas conveyed in the right way. Then I came across the carpet weaving tradition from the south of Iran – in Kerman. Every region in Iran has its own style and manufacturing process. In the south, they have a very refined style with fine weaving structures, which functions almost like paper for me. I was able to imagine my forms and shapes applied on these textiles. I ordered white carpets from a family-run manufacturer – which was something incredibly unusual and probably quite absurd for them. They kept asking me if I was certain, and in the beginning even asked for pre-payment, worried that nobody would buy the white carpets. Now I send them my pre-designed patterns, and they are much more at ease, and even see it as a nice change to their standard designs.

*Your aesthetic is quite Modernist and parallels some Western modes – the most prominent being Bauhaus design. Do you allow such references, or consciously take inspiration from those sources?*

I absolutely see these parallels. Of course I grew up with the aesthetics of the Orient, which at times can be very baroque. But in the 1960s and 1970s, there was also a strong modernist influence in Iran, particularly in architecture. There are regions in the north, where many buildings obviously reference Le Corbusier. [Queen] Farah Diba was a great fan of Bauhaus. Maybe my interest in the formal language of Modernism stems from this. Then again, I grew up in the West, and its canon also shaped my aesthetic approach. In addition, some North and South American artists speak to me very strongly, Agnes Martin, for example. Her ideas and approaches have been valuable for me. I am also fascinated by mathematics, of which geometry is an integral part. Circles, triangles and squares are certainly something global.

*Your cultural background is obviously a very mixed one. You consider yourself more a global citizen than Iranian or German – actively rejecting labelling as either/or. Yet your recent work shows very obvious characteristics of an Iranian cultural heritage.*

I guess when I started out, I was really rejecting the national or regional labels. But ultimately, those two sides of my personality always come back up and merge somehow. This is what identity is constituted of. Even if you are 'only German',



Untitled (CV\_VI) (2014)

moving from the south to the north may lead you to realise that there is more than one German cultural identity, for example. But I am certain that there are people with far more defined identities.

In my case, I would say that I do have an identity, which I simply cannot put into words. Allowing this topic to enter my artistic practice was a starting point, and after allowing it to happen once, it happened again, just as once-rejected sentiments like nostalgia, memory, etcetera have entered my practice, too. Some memories just gain more prominence upon reflection. What was really important for me was that I could prove myself as an artist with works that were not strictly linked to my cultural background, before I could begin working with this topic.

*If you had to name two to three topics or aspects that your work is based upon, what would they be?*

Light – transparency – repetition. I need repetition. Some artists may draw wild circles and cross them with lines – I would get lost in such a formal language. I need repetition, structure and order, which I must also be able to break. **HBA**

**Halah Redjaian is showing in 'Nice Drawings' at Gallery Isabelle Van Den Eyde from 12 January to 19 February [www.ivde.net](http://www.ivde.net)**





'Untitled' (CV\_V) (2014) (All images courtesy of the artist)