

ROSE ISSA PROJECTS

PRESS RELEASE

Farhad Ahrarnia: *Canary in a Coal Mine*

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Until the 1980s, British coal miners would take a caged canary with them underground. Because the bird sings most of the time, if the oxygen level dropped or any dangerous gases were emitted, its silence meant its death, and was an early warning system.

The phrase “canary in a coal mine” refers to someone who can detect signs of trouble and danger – someone whose sensitivity makes them vulnerable. The sentiment is an appropriate title for Farhad Ahrarnia’s work: the idea of the caged canary, singing in the depths of the ground, while shovels unearth treasure, digging into the fabric of life.

Ahrarnia was born in Shiraz and lives between his hometown and Sheffield. In this second solo show with Rose Issa Projects, he re-examines the idea of cultural constructs as ideological “stitch ups”. For *Canary in a Coal Mine* he has created larger-format works that combine embroidery, digital photography, sewing needles, silver-bronze shovels and dustpans. For example, “Ballet Pars” references a period in the 1970s when Iran was exporting dancers to the New York City Ballet. “Beautiful is the Silence of the Ruins” pays homage to the Hollywood icons whose films were dubbed into Persian, and were therefore intrinsic to Persian cinematic culture and experience. (Today, most American films are considered culturally intrusive and viewed with suspicion in Iran.)

Through the act of appropriation and needlework, Ahrarnia explores the various tensions that arise when contemporary Iranians attempt to negotiate and reconcile their own sense of deep-rooted tradition with the force and consequences of modernity. The engravings and reliefs on his silver dustpans refer to the pre-Islamic history of Persepolis, Mesopotamia, and Pharaonic Egypt. Similarly, the pointed tips of his silver shovels, like the needles on his embroidered panels, encourage viewers to dig into their own past in order to rediscover the many layers of history and life beneath.

This exhibition is accompanied by an illustrated catalogue edited by Rose Issa, with essays by Pippa Oldfield, Sara Raza, Lutz Becker and Christopher de Bellaigue.

For more information, visit www.roseissa.com.