



*An Unfolding Vision*







Mississauga  
data © OpenStreetMap

## Foreword

2020 was already an unforgettable year—one that we thought couldn't have gotten any stranger. That was until we met Azadeh. Our story starts on a typical Saturday, in an atypical pandemic. Every weekend since lockdown began, we'd get together on Zoom, to chat about how little we've done, get (slightly) tipsy and, even if just for the slip of an instant, pretend that life was "normal"—whatever normal means now.

It was 8:08 PM. Agustina caught sight of it in the top-right corner of her screen. We were only on cocktail number two: Manon's special 'Cosmic and Tonic.' It was far too early in our line-up of drinks for us to start tripping like we were about to. We were laughing at something Alexandra had said when all of our screens transformed. Simultaneously, a set of numbers began flashing rapidly on a blue backdrop. The screens, the numbers, the colors, all kept moving in a frantic dance—our laptops just about ready to give in. We panicked. Not only had a virus turned our lives upside down, one had now taken over our only portal to the outside world, our digital lives, too. "What kind of damn virus is this?", asked Alexandra, confirming that what we each individually hoped to be a one-off mishap from our out-of-date laptops was in fact a collective phenomenon happening to all four of us.

As if pre-planned, a choreography of pictures, drawings, text and videos unfolded in front of us, each emerging from within the other and disappearing just as quickly. When the flashing stopped, time stood still for what felt like a lifetime. And there she was, emerging from an obscure space hidden in our screens! We blinked, blinded and bewildered by the images we'd just seen, unable to make sense of what—or, who—was now staring back at us. Had someone just gatecrashed our Zoom? We'd heard of such glitches in the folds of digital connections before. But, why ours? The being staring back at us seemed alarmed. She spoke hurriedly, simultaneously tapping on the screen. Her words were unintelligible to our ears. Except for one word she kept repeating amongst all the other sounds, the only that sounded recognisable: *Aazaah-deeh*. We assumed it was her name. Every time she tapped at her screen it felt like her hand

was going to reach through and touch us. The best way to describe Azadeh is perhaps as a cyborg: part human, part machine, and also somehow sacred.

Azadeh left as quickly and as abruptly as she had appeared. One moment she was there, orating at supersonic speeds, and the next she wasn't. In an instant, it was just our four faces back again on Zoom; perturbed, silent, scared. We weren't scared for us, but for this mysterious entity. She had transported the fear she held inside herself onto us, as if by osmosis. Soon enough we found out that a new file had appeared on all of our desktop screens. Manon saw it first. Despite the risks involved, we decided right there and then that we had to open the file. It was at that point that Agustina registered the temporal anomaly: the digital clock at the bottom of the screen was still at 8:08 PM.

Of course, we questioned our sanity, tried to make sense of it all, and wondered if the pandemic had pushed us to the verge of madness. It would be understandable, after all. With such a prolonged quarantine period, we've had very little human interactions for months. Was this really what happened? Or, did we all coincidentally replace one of the ingredients in our 'Cosmic and Tonics' for a hallucinogenic that none of us even know we had? Was this a contemporary version of a mystical experience? Did someone hack us and play a ridiculous joke on us? Or, did an actual future-being journey to our distorted universe?

After months of going through the files over and over again, we began to realize that we might not ever find a logical answer to these questions. Logic is only as great as the human mind. Azadeh's mind must have been something else; something beyond the threshold of our common perceptions. Our ability to grasp her idio-abstractions is extremely limited. We now accept that. Despite this, there is still an inquisitiveness among us that we cannot shake. When Azadeh gave us these coded messages as a digital file, she wanted us to know something. She had a leap of faith in us. We sense the weight of her trust collectively, and we've decided we must share it. What comes of it, we do not know, just as we do not fathom what has



become of Azadeh.

The file's metadata is set to 2130, 110 years from now. What we managed to piece together so far is a collection of pictures and her field diary notes, surprisingly written in Farsi. Despite the fragmented nature of her diaries, we've attempted to stitch together her observations, experiences and emotions after translating some of her notes, the majority of which are either digitally corrupted or incomplete. From what we can fathom, Azadeh might be a researcher, not unlike us; possibly an art-historian, if we can imagine that in 110 years' time in outer space art-historians will still exist.

It seems as though she took a special interest in the work of Rouzbeh Akhbari. Born in 1992 in Iran, Akhbari, one of our contemporaries, uses research-driven approaches to his work. He engages with postcolonial discourses through multilayered projects including storytelling, installations, films, performances and/or sculptures. Through his work he connects with specific geographies and histories to study both political economy and social ecology in order to question relations of power in the making of the world around us, often focusing on architectures of conflict and imperialism. But why is Azadeh, a cyborg from 2130 interested in Akhbari's work?

We've managed to decipher the numbers that flashed across our screens. They were geographic coordinates for two sites in Ontario (Canada) and Khuzestan (Iran), both of which correspond to the locations of Akhbari's site-specific works that Azadeh was analyzing. *The Observatory for Riparian Repose* (2019) is an installation located in Mississauga, near Toronto, where we assume she started her research. Inspired by the *bādgirs*, a cooling system used in hot and humid regions of Iran, Akhbari created a work that invites contemplation of the elements: of wind and water, and perhaps most prominently, of the sun. Approaching his work in 2130, Azadeh discovers only residues of this installation—she merely finds the cement pylons that anchored the towering installation, alongside fragments of ceramic miniatures.

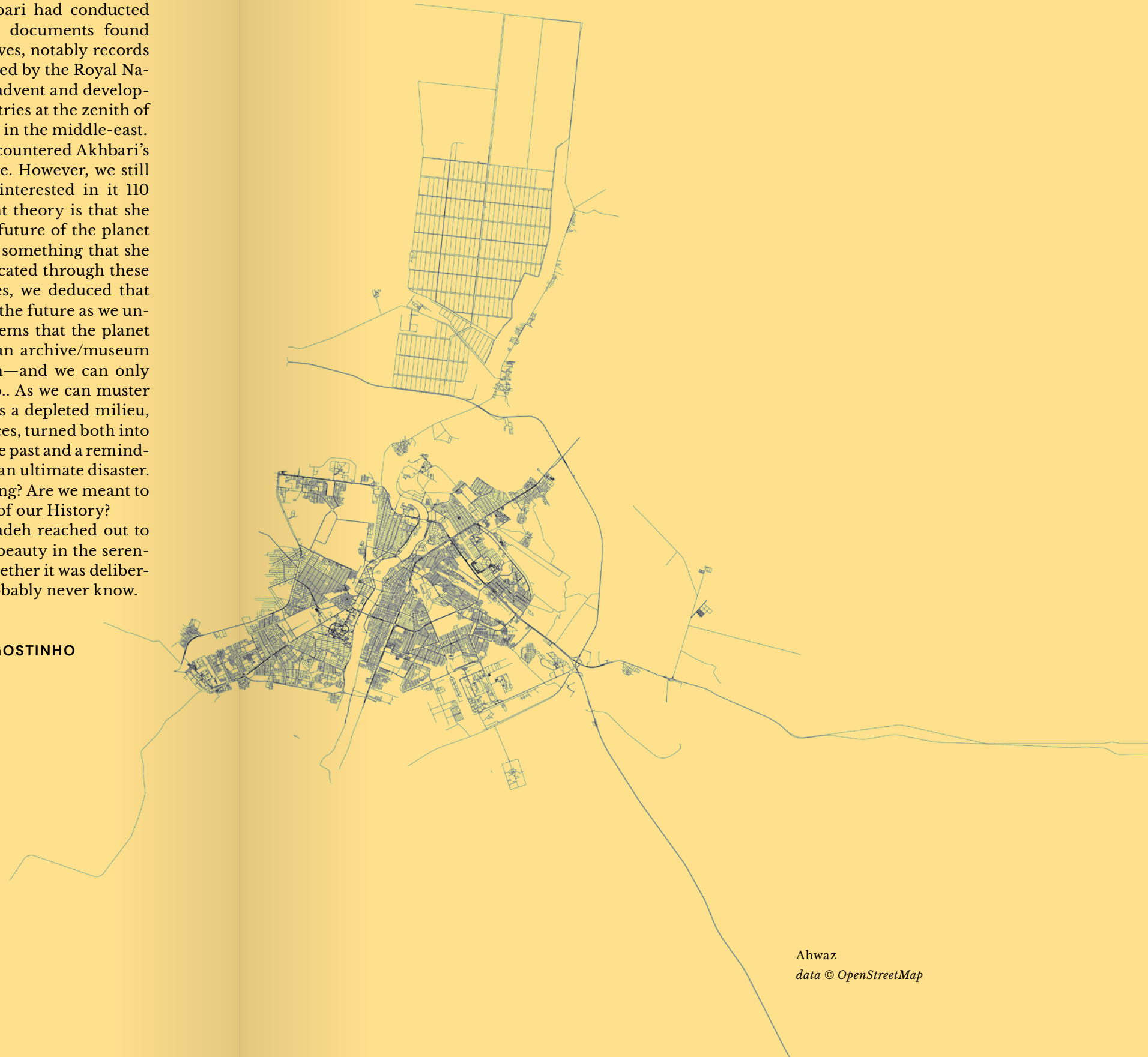
Encountering Azadeh plunged us into an analysis of Akhbari's work and the story told through

the miniatures: a tale of human quest for mastery of weather and time, and a consequent catastrophic toxification. It seems that she knew about the *Observatory* before coming to Earth, and that this work had motivated her to undertake this investigative journey in the first place. Elsewhere, we noticed that Akhbari's other project, *Prizes from Fairyland* (2018), engrossed Azadeh and stole all her attention, even leading her to modern day Iran. Her diary offers an analysis of the context and symbols of this work, consisting of a novel, a film itself based on a performance and multiple installations. Purportedly, all these elements are based on research Akhbari had conducted around recently-declassified documents found at the British National Archives, notably records that were curiously maintained by the Royal Navy's war office related to the advent and development of the Iranian oil industries at the zenith of European colonial endeavors in the middle-east.

We are excited to have encountered Akhbari's work through this experience. However, we still wonder: why is Azadeh so interested in it 110 years from now? Our current theory is that she knows something about the future of the planet that we need to understand, something that she thinks can be best communicated through these artworks. Based on her notes, we deduced that Earth is no longer habited in the future as we understand it to be today. It seems that the planet is primarily maintained as an archive/museum that it is visited for research—and we can only assume—other purposes, too.. As we can muster from Azadeh's notes, Earth is a depleted milieu, emptied of its natural resources, turned both into a site to contain residues of the past and a reminder of the events leading up to an ultimate disaster. Is Azadeh sending us a warning? Are we meant to somehow change the course of our History?

We have no idea why Azadeh reached out to *us*, of all people, but we find beauty in the serendipity of this connection. Whether it was deliberate or unplanned, we will probably never know.

AGUSTINA O'FARRELL  
ALEXANDRA TAVARES AGOSTINHO  
MANON KLEIN  
VICTORIA PAGE

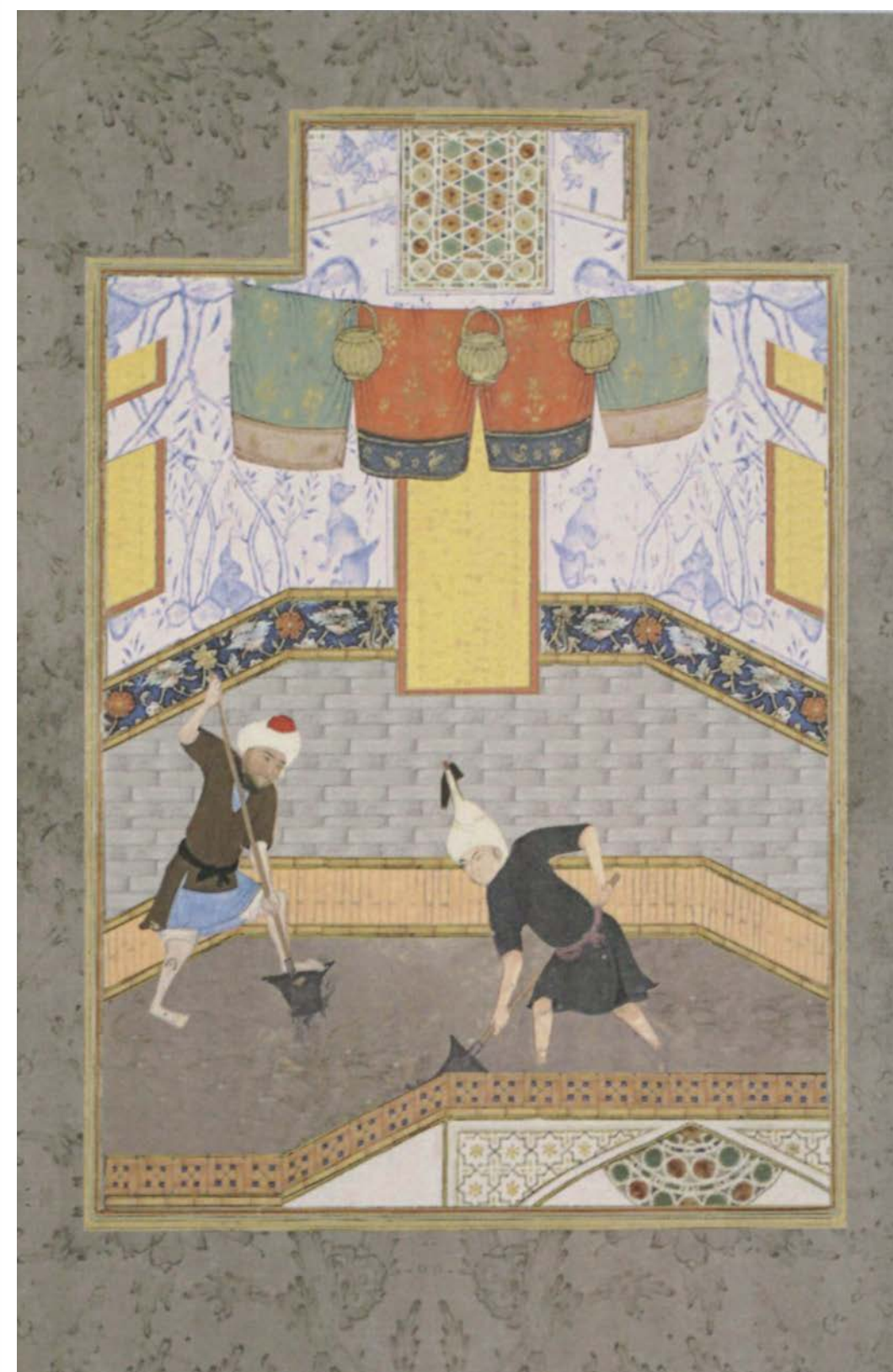
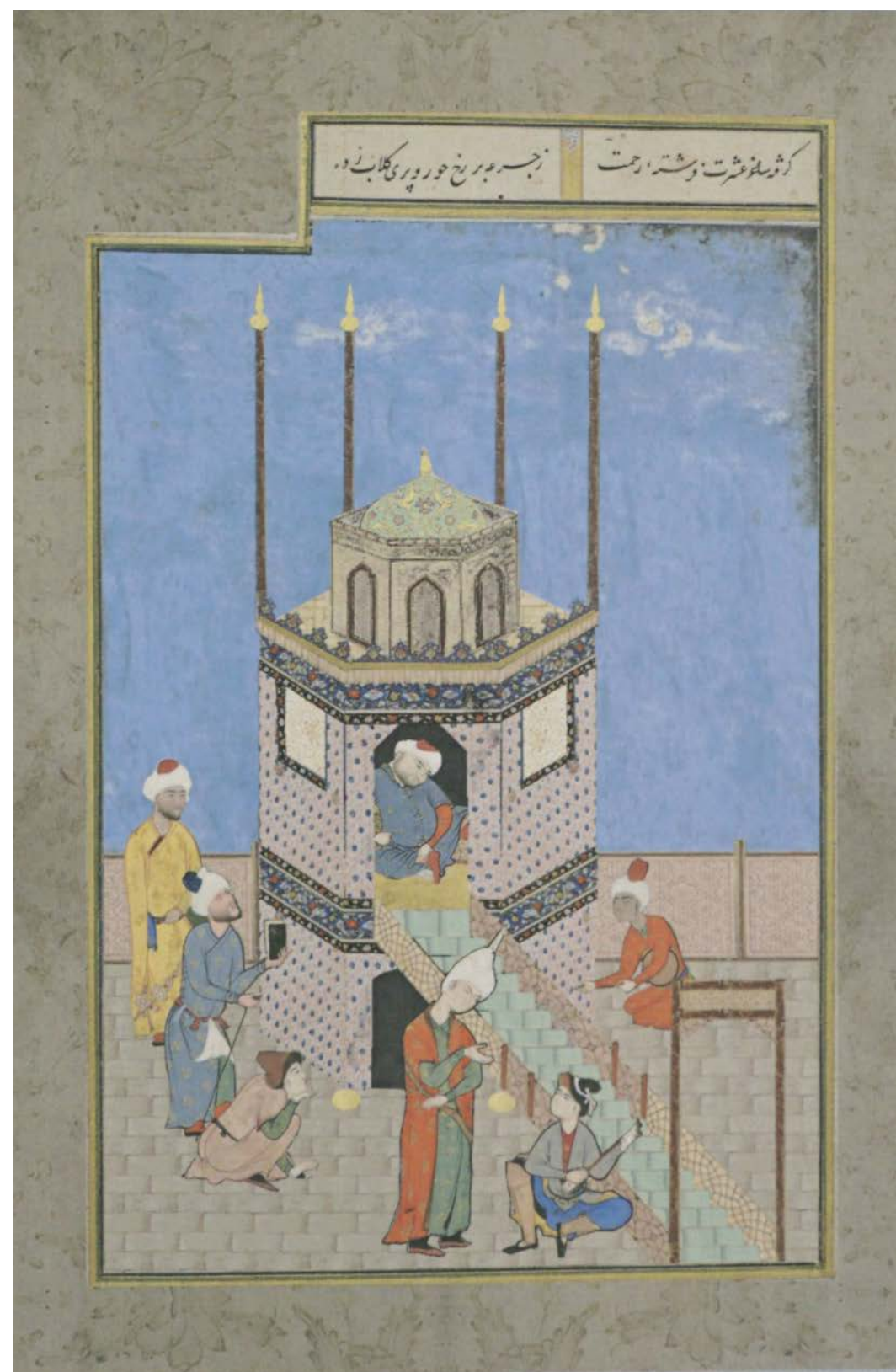


43° 35' 20.5656" N

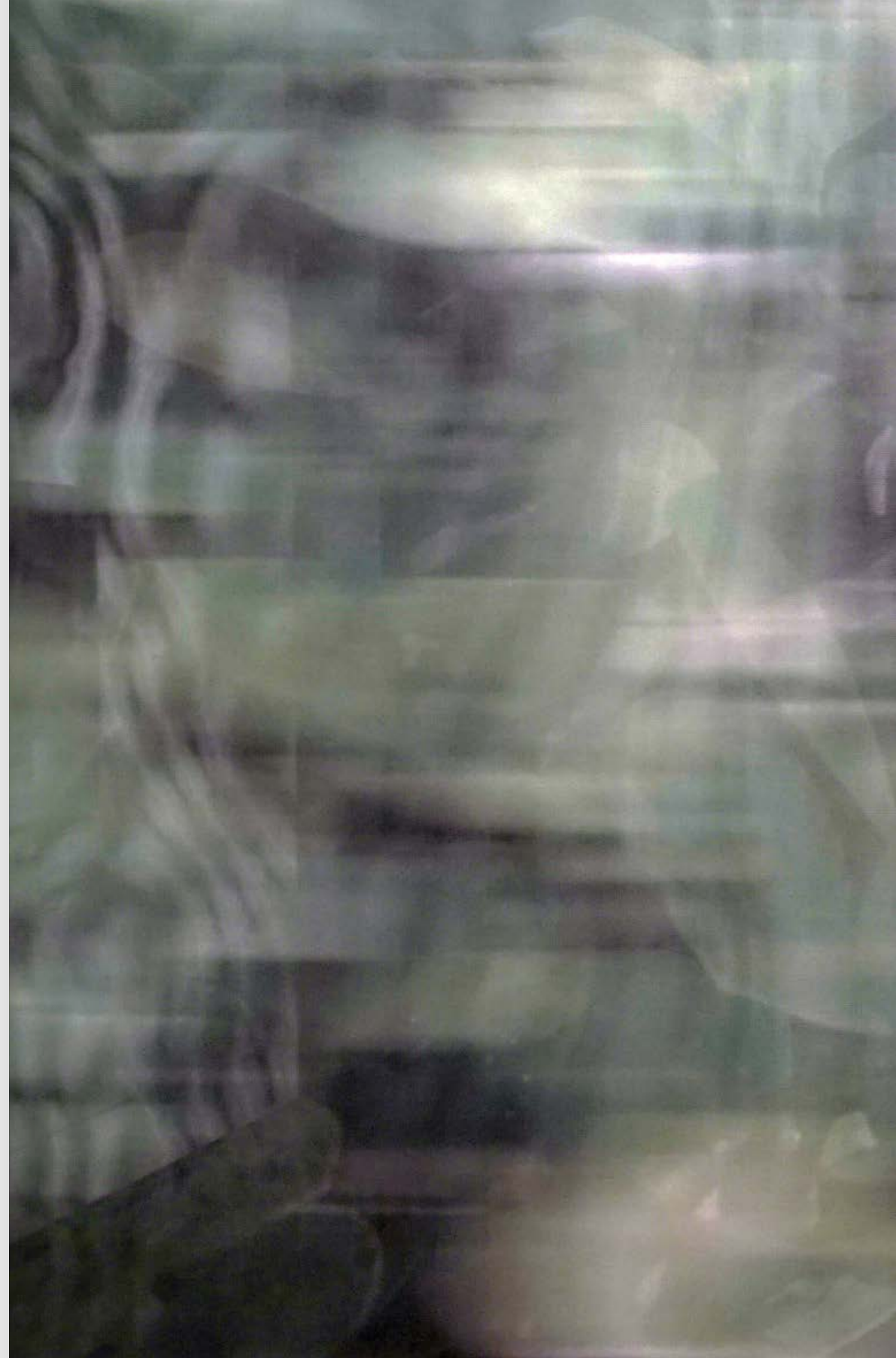
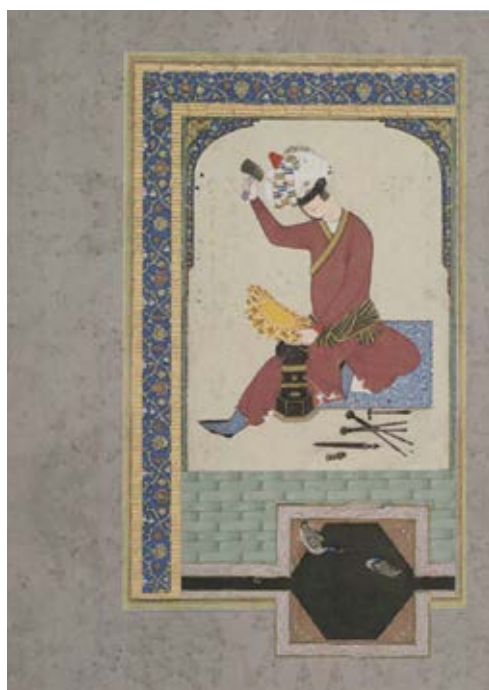
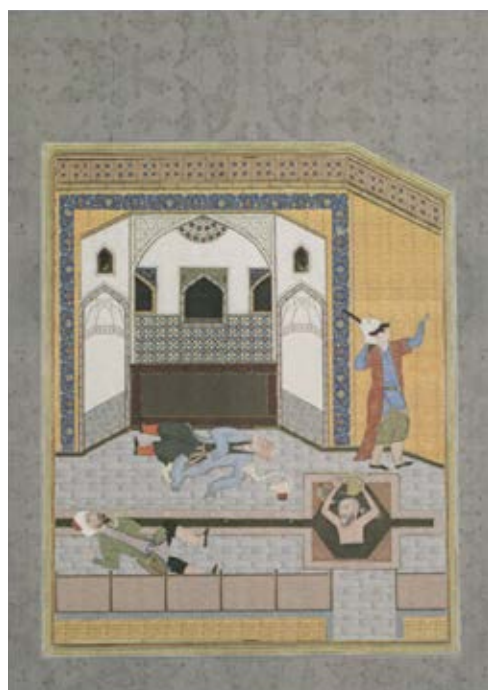
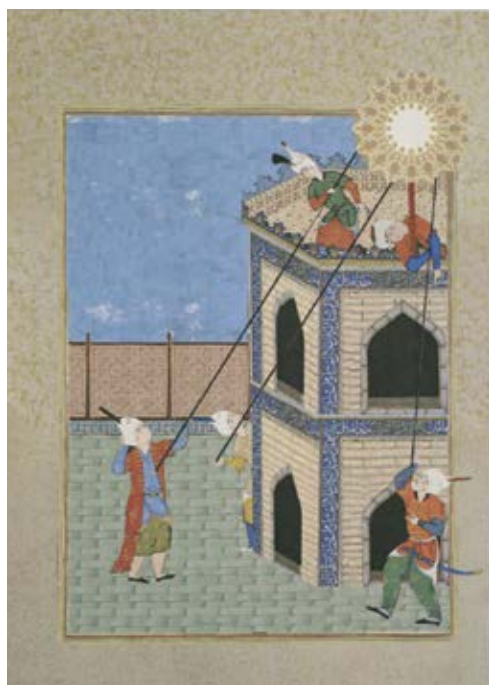
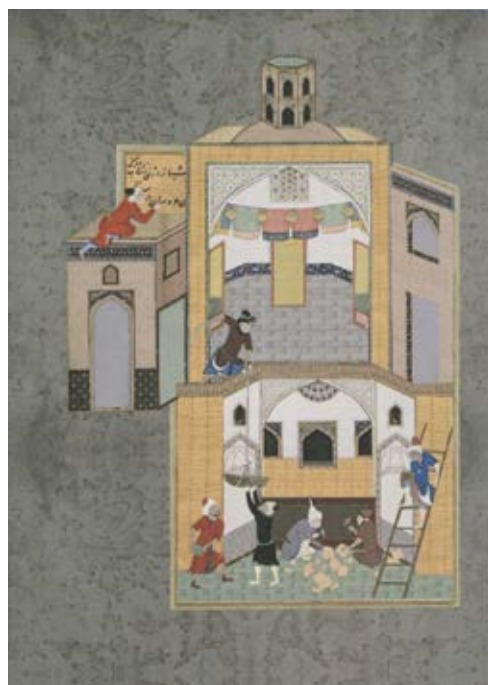
79° 38' 38.8284" W



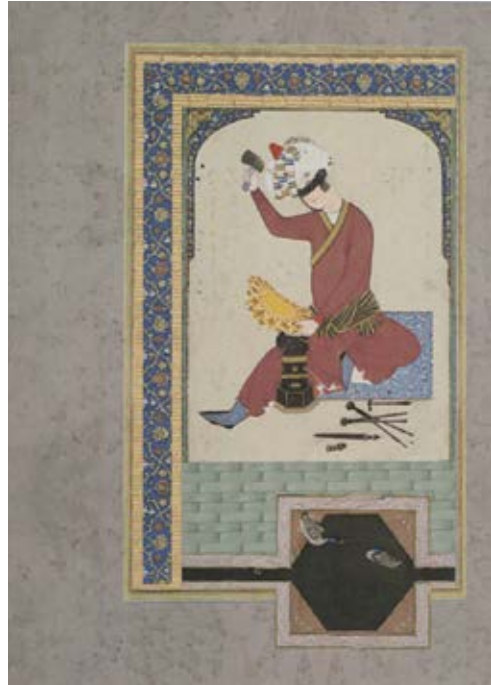
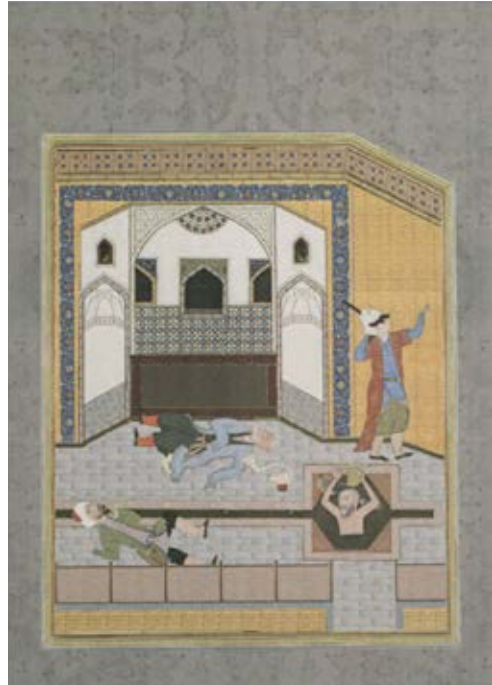
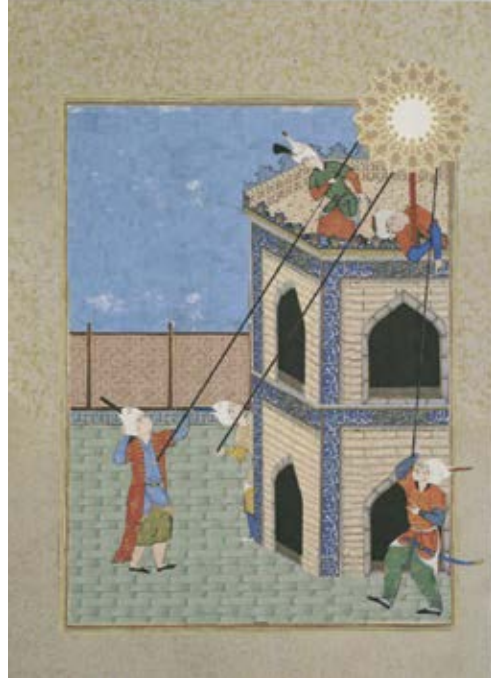
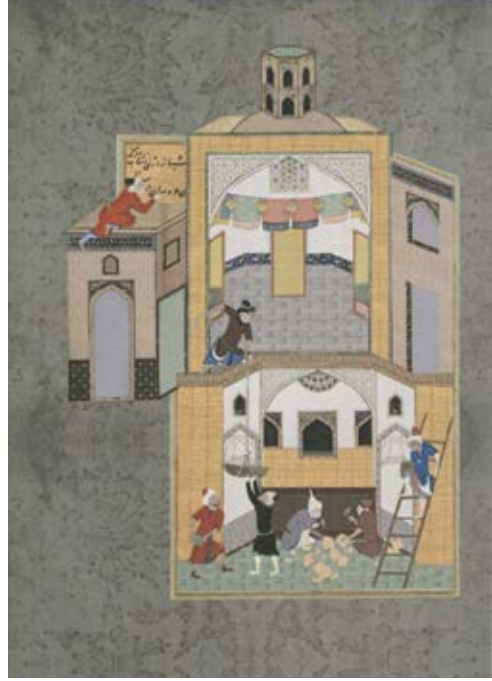


















51°30'29.9"N 0°08'10.7"W

'I was right from the beginning then,' he said, 'Hamid never told me that I'm being set up to purchase his nephew's art.'

By the time I was re-strategizing how to proceed with my request, he excused himself to grab a second drink. I was still working on my first; in fact, I'd barely touched it since his arrival.

'So, what is it that you do exactly?' He asked upon his return.

'Right now, I am working as a research assistant for an older friend in Iran. He hired me to help him think about the material and spatial dimensions of an ancient and unnamable demon!' That sentence came out very awkwardly. I don't even know why I worded it that way.

He was momentarily taken by surprise and was no longer smiling. 'Didn't Hamid mention you're a student?' he asked.

I knew right away it wasn't a good start before he even finished asking his question. I explained that I was indeed a student and followed with an apology for the lack of clarity. I remember exchanging a few sentences about University of Toronto and my hope to develop a piece of Ficto-Criticism in order to finish my degree.

He was curious to hear more about my research topic. Since I hadn't developed any concrete questions or theses, I decided to tell him a story instead. I had to come up with something on the

51°30'29.9"N 0°08'10.7"W

spot. Something that made sense but also something that would inspire him enough to do the job that Sabzeghabaei needed him to do. I ended up offering a twisted version of a narrative I had read a day prior to our meeting in Negarestani's *Cyclonopedia*. My manipulated version differed only in its strategic exaggerations and a fabricated connection to the request I reserved to introduce at the end of the anecdote.

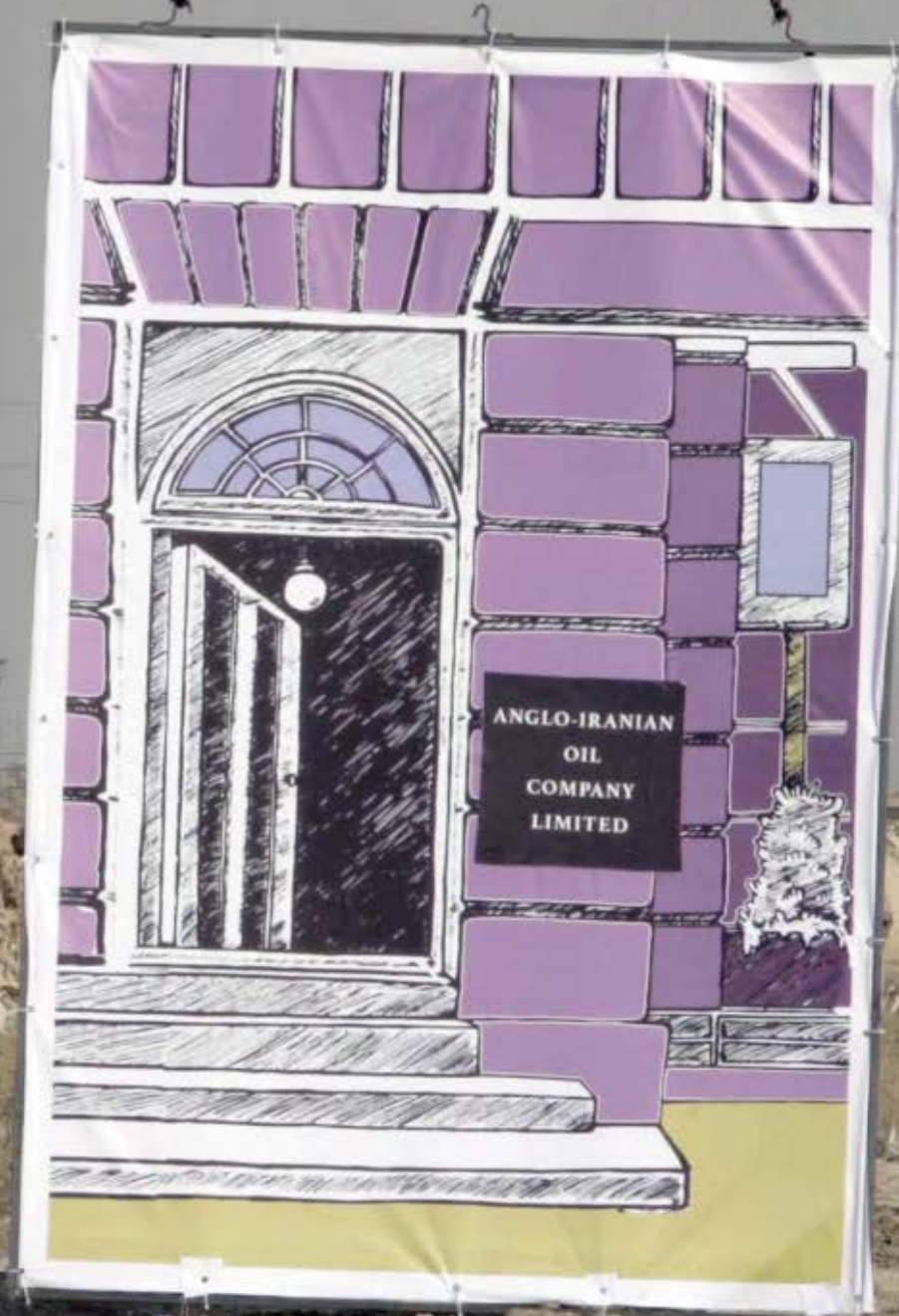
'Historians gravitate toward different theories and variations of the accounts narrated about the unnamed and supposedly demonic entity that I mentioned earlier. One unifying thread that most of them agree on is the connection between the events of Susa's massacre in 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the very first documented interactions with this creature. At that time, the capital of the Elamite Empire, the city of Susa, which is now just north of Ahvaz, was sacked and razed to the ground under the auspices that a vast black creature had surfaced there. The idea was to contain the substance before further outward spillage. The horrific genocide that followed was entirely based on the belief that any one coming in contact with the oozing substance is automatically complicit in its evil, and is to be eradicated without hesitation. Ashurbanipal, the commander-in-chief of the encroaching Assyrian army and this demon's self-proclaimed





31° 19' 5.9772" N

48° 40' 14.232" E







# OIL EXTRACTION IN IRAN — ATTEMPT AT A TIMELINE

1901	British businessman William Knox D'Arcy obtains an oil concession agreement from Mozaffaredin Shah, allowing the UK to explore and exploit the oil resources of southern Iran for 60 years. <i>I recognized their portraits on cups of tea in the beginning of Akhbari's video.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Change of signage on all the emblems of the AIOC to the National Iranian Oil Company ones</li><li>• Embargo and blockade from British government</li></ul>	2003	Earthquake killing approximately 40,000 people > <i>Coincidence ?!</i>	
1908	Discovery of a vast oil field in the province of Khuzestan. <i>Where I am now!</i> / Winston Churchill, → First Lord of the Admiralty of the United Kingdom in 1911 → used the expression “a prize from fairyland beyond our wildest dreams” (Kinzer, 2003) to describe the oil found in Iran. / <i>On the surface these are like beautiful words and poetry—but this is how humans hid their violence—through beauty.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A refinery starts to be built in Abadan (Persian Gulf).</li></ul>	1953	Coup engineered by the British and US intelligence services—Overthrow of Mossadegh government	2012	European Union boycott of Iranian oil exports
1909	Foundation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). Based in London, it was the first company to exploit the oil reserves of the Middle East.	1954	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• AIOC becomes the British Petroleum Company (BP)</li><li>• A new agreement fairly divides the profits between NIOC and a multinational consortium, a holding company called Iranian Oil Participants Ltd (IOP) and British Petroleum), five US companies, Royal Dutch Shell and Compagnie Française des Pétroles <i>Perpetual operations of rebranding and yet always greed and violence.</i></li></ul>	2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Floods across the country &gt; <i>It definitely feels that the Earth warned humans more than once</i></li><li>• US accuses Iran of attacking oil tankers in the Gulf</li><li>• Bloody November: an increase in fuel prices provokes protests nationwide and calls to overthrow Iranian leader Ali Khamenei. Started as peaceful protests but spread quickly and massively. I can't find the exact number of deaths. Sources contradict each other:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>× Iranian Interior Ministry: 200–225</li><li>× Amnesty International: 304+</li><li>× The international news organization Reuters: 1,500</li></ul>Approximately 7,000 were arrested.</li></ul>
1914	By buying a majority of the company's shares, the British government takes direct control of Iran's oil industry.	1973	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Shah announces that the consortium's 1954 oil agreements will not be renewed in 1979, when they were due to end.</li><li>• New agreement: The operating companies of the Consortium for the Promotion and Sale of Iranian Oil are dissolved. NIOC was doing the job and was now responsible for the production, processing and sale of Iranian oil.</li><li>• the oil price quadrupled and Iran used its revenues for modernization, industrialization and militarization programs.</li><li>• De-stabilization of the Iranian economy—inflation</li></ul>	REFERENCES CITED	
1933	APOC concludes a new concession contract with Iran in 1933	1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Islamic Revolution + strikes within oil fields—rise of the Islamic Republic</li></ul>	2019-2020 Iranian Protests, 2020, 2019-2020 Iranian protests. from <a href="https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%932020_Iranian_protests#cite_note-10">https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2019%E2%80%932020_Iranian_protests#cite_note-10</a>	
1935	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Persia is renamed Iran</li><li>• APOC is renamed the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC)</li></ul>	1990	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Earthquake killing approximately 50,000 people &gt; <i>Is the Earth revolting?</i></li></ul>	Abrahamian, Ervand, 2008, <i>A History of Modern Iran</i> . Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-82139-1.	
1947	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Law of 22nd October instructs the Iranian government to review the concession of the Anglo Iranian Oil Company</li><li>• Rise of the Iranian nationalist movement led by Mohammed Mossadegh</li></ul>	1995	Total US economic embargo against Tehran (Concerned by Iran's quest for nuclear arms)	Abrahamian, Ervand, 2013, <i>The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations</i> . New York: The New Press.	
1951	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mohammad Mossadegh becomes Prime Minister</li><li>• Parliament votes the nationalisation of the oil industry</li><li>• Creation of the National Iranian Oil Company—now the sole owner of Iranian oil for the government</li></ul>			History.com Editors, November 13, 2009, “Earthquake Devastates Iran.” <i>HISTORY</i> . <a href="https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/earthquake-devastates-iran">https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/earthquake-devastates-iran</a> .	
				Kinzer, Stephen, 2003, <i>All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror</i> (Wiley).	
				Shafiee, Katayoun, 2018, <i>Machineries of Oil: an Infrastructural History of BP in Iran</i> . Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.	
				Witton, Trevor, 2016, “The Concession and Oil in Iran: the Evolution of a Concept.” <i>Journal of Energy &amp; Natural Resources Law</i> 34, no. 4: 455–60. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/02646811.2016.1211433">https://doi.org/10.1080/02646811.2016.1211433</a> .	





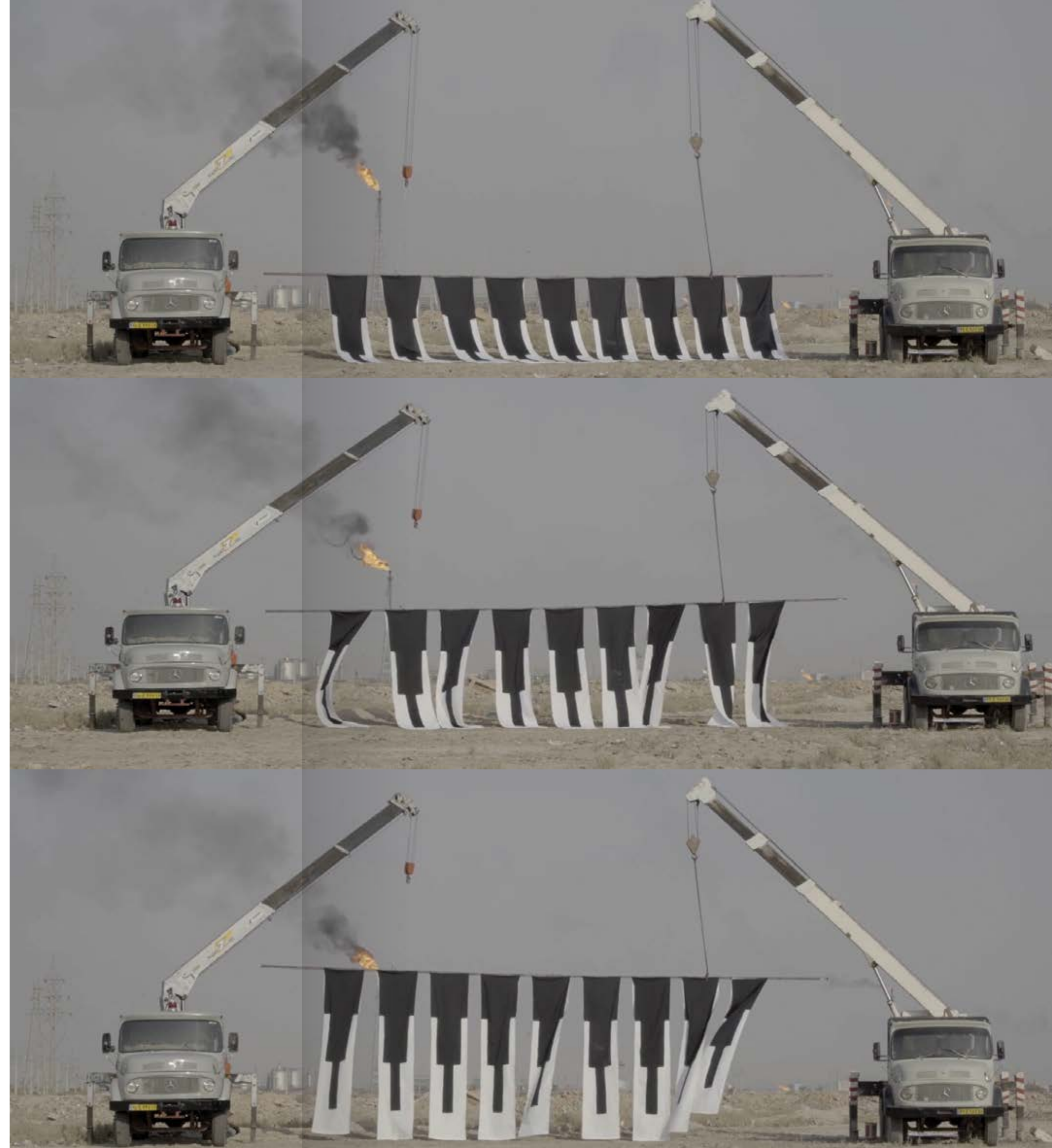














## COLOPHON

### ARTIST

*Rouzbeh Akhbari*

### CURATED BY

*Agustina O'Farrell*

*Alexandra Tavares Agostinho*

*Manon Klein*

*Victoria Page*

### ARTISTIC DIRECTION

*Luísa Santos*

### GRAPHIC DESIGN

*Raquel Guerreiro*

### PRINTING AND

#### BINDING

*Ondagrafe*

### LIMITED EDITION

OF 20 COPIES

### ONLINE VERSION

#### AVAILABLE ON

[www.4cs-conflict-conviviality.eu/resources](http://www.4cs-conflict-conviviality.eu/resources)

## ROUZBEH AKHBARI

(b. 1992, TEHRAN)

Rouzbeh Akhbari (b. 1992, Tehran) is an artist working in video installation and film. His practice is research-driven and usually exists at the intersections of storytelling, critical architecture and human geography. Through a delicate examination of the violences and intimacies that occur at the boundaries of lived experience and constructed histories, Akhbari uncovers the minutiae of power that regiments the world around us. He holds a BFA in Sculpture and Installation from OCAD University and a graduate degree in Visual Studies from University of Toronto's School of Architecture, Landscape and Design.

## *The Fold(s)*

*The Fold(s)* is a curatorial project composed of four books operating as four individual exhibitions. Under the artistic direction of Luísa Santos, *The Fold(s)* was developed in the context of the Seminar in Curatorship by the MA and PhD students in Culture Studies of The Lisbon Consortium, Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidade Católica Portuguesa.

Project produced in the frame of The Lisbon Consortium, Faculty of Human Sciences, Universidade Católica Portuguesa and the European co-operation project *4Cs – From Conflict to Conviviality through Creativity and Culture*, co-financed by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union.



4Cs - From Conflict to Conviviality  
through Creativity and Culture



Co-funded by the  
Creative Europe Programme  
of the European Union



CATOLICA  
FACULDADE DE  
CIÊNCIAS HUMANAS

LISBOA



