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Reihan Ebrahimi
Garden of Memories

Garden of Memories: Planting New Seeds

In Reihan Ebrahimi's *Garden of Memories*, ceramic petals bloom. Suspended above a platform of earth, they find each other on its surface, the sum of their parts obscured by their fragmentation. This hanging sculpture comes into being through the Iranian-born ceramicist's "archaeological approach" to making and seeing. For Ebrahimi, this aesthetic and intellectual method involves the closing of temporal gaps by bringing elements of the past into the present, regenerating them, and thus placing them into contemporary memories and landscapes. In her practice, she engages with motifs, signs, and iconography from Persian visual cultures across time to counter the historicization of Persian identities in contemporary (art) historical discourses, as well as to explore her own experiences of diaspora as a student in Montreal.

The deconstructed flower motif in Ebrahimi's *Garden of Memories* draws inspiration from classical Persian carpet-making and paradise gardens, both practices dating back thousands of years. Paradise garden design is an architectural-botanical practice which seeks to create lush multisensory, spiritual experiences of outdoor space. Paradise gardens often feature moving water and plant life selected for their fragrance. Aesthetically, Persian rugs reflect the conventions of paradise garden design- they are composed of enclosed spaces structured by symmetrical plans, full of rich flora and fruit tree motifs. Both employ aesthetic conventions to reflect the concept of infinity, specifically the infiniteness of time and Paradise. In classical rug design, symmetrical patterns often end abruptly at the carpet's borders, the sudden break suggesting continuity beyond its finite boundaries. In Ebrahimi's *Garden of Memories*,

the flower motif is fragmented, suspended in space above a floating sample of earth. The suggested pattern is disrupted, held in time like a paused explosion.

The Garden of Memories employs its flower as a diasporic sign, symbolically suspended above land. The flower acts as an icon which, through its prominence across west Asian visual cultures, transcends modern borders, cultural boundaries, and time. In an era of socio-political unrest in the Middle East, the development of its culturally-specific modernities has also remained largely suspended in time. *Garden of Memories* reflects Ebrahimi's exploration of where conceptions of self and home are rooted when home is a distant place fragmented by conflict, and in art historical discourses, Persian identities are consistently relegated to the past. For instance, Western art academia remains deeply concerned with ancient Persia and Mesopotamia, while the media remains saturated with essentializing and orientalist representations of west Asian cultures and identities. Persian excellence is relegated to archives, museums, and textbooks as if such ideals and identities no longer exist. *Garden of Memories* traces a lineage between the unified and dynamic cultures of the past and their living descendants; today, as Ebrahimi explores her location within these dynamics.

The Garden of Memories ultimately questions how history and memory operate differently and how objects and images can themselves remember. How might its petals communicate differently within varying cultural settings? How do ancient images speak differently in a gallery, an image, a home? With *Garden of Memories*, Ebrahimi is not trying to take ownership over entire histories or cultural memories but rather uses her artistic process to communicate with the past and explore her relationship to it. Her archaeological process pulls concepts of written history and personal history together, engaging with both Persian cultural heritage and futurity. Through the act of making, she connects the archived past to a continual and infinite process of being.