

# My Voice from Perth

Layli Rakhsha

We often think and speak of the impacts of global situations, natural events and social communications on our relationships, personal lives and where we live. We must consider the best options and approaches to take in order to keep our careers and interests going. Artists may reflect and visualise the changes that inspire their perspectives and impact their creativities. As the editor Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández states, "Artists are expected to challenge the public to think in new and different ways and to inspire intellectual dialogue" (2008, p. 233). Following Gaztambide-Fernández's idea, I suggest that artists can offer communities dialogues that are both subjective and visual, as well as different ways of approaching global and local circumstances and changes with their thoughts, feelings and creativities. They can stimulate us to see and experience what is happening around us in a different way.

In 1999, I left my homeland, Iran, and immigrated to Australia. When I came to Australia, I never considered myself a migrant; I saw myself as someone who wanted to exchange and share cultural ideas, and become an artist. Shortly after arriving, I started studying art and received valuable and effective educational experiences in Australian institutions. Realising that I am a migrant searching for a home, I understood that I could make artworks that are unique, meaningful and negotiable, rather than works that only deal with or speak of my emotions. I realised that I had to become more conscious of what I can offer to the communities: who I am, where I come from culturally, as well as how to be myself and an artist. Studying in Australian institutions impacted my artistic career. It made me consider becoming an artist and continuing my visual research and investigation.

There are many definitions of who is an artist. According to researcher Sari Karttunen:

We use 'artist' quite loosely in common parlance. The term may refer to a person who for a start paints, dances or sings,

either as a job or as a hobby, or even to someone who is simply very skilled at some activity, not necessarily art at all. (Karttunen, 1998, p. 3)

With regards to this statement, I can say that I cook well and sew clothes. I embroider little flowers and make very precise and even stitches. I also print my images on paper perfectly. I can therefore be called an artist since I am very skilled at these activities and what I make can be called art. Another definition of an artist is related to being a "professional artist" who may have an academic qualification in fine arts, is involved in art programs, and continuously develops his or her creativity and ideas (Karttunen 1998, p. 8). If I look at myself using the second

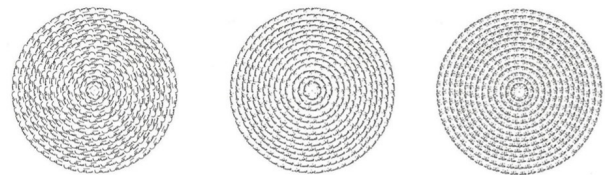


Figure 1

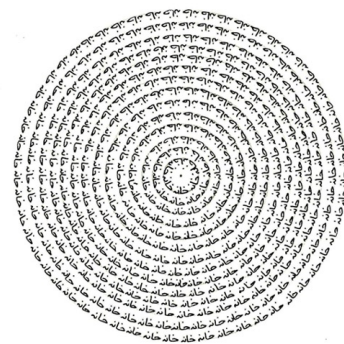


Figure 2

Figure Titles and Information

Figure 1: Layli Rakhsha, since 2012, ongoing project, Mosafer, salek, khaneh (traveller, wayfarer, home), 21 x 13.3 cm each  
 Figure 2; Layli Rakhsha, since 2012, ongoing project, khaneh (home), 21 x 13.3 cm

definition, I can say that I have studied fine arts at different institutions in Iran and Australia and have been practising art since 2006. In this case, I can also be called a “professional artist” (Karttunen 1998, p. 8).

While I was completing my PhD in Fine Art, I arrived at the understanding that I am still a migrant who is continuously searching for a home and exploring the idea of home in public and private places. I have also found myself to be an artist who needs three key elements in order to sustain creativity and an artistic career: compassion, dignity and obligation. Compassion is a method of communication that can create dialogue. Dignity and obligation concern respect, responsibility and moral commitment towards self, others, art and communities. These fundamental elements can be interpreted as modes or qualities of non-verbal communication that play significant roles in developing and shaping my ideas and practice.

In 2015, I developed a project called, A Long Letter to Home, to explore the idea of home and homeland. A Long Letter to Home was developed during my PhD research. It is a collaborative project between myself and a group of people living in Iran, who responded to two questions about home and homeland. The questions asked the participants to consider: what they imagine when they hear the word khaneh (home); and what they imagine when they hear the word vatan (homeland). I made 100 envelopes out of printed images of maps of Western Australia and Tehran. I left a small blank card in each envelope and sent them to my sister and brother in Tehran. I asked them to distribute the envelopes to friends and acquaintances and invite them to collaborate on the project by replying to the two questions. I received 82 responses in total. One of the purposes for making this project was to find out what home means to Iranians who live there and what it means to me to live in Australia, and how my experience of living in Australia has impacted my idea of home. In other words, I wanted to start a dialogue about home. I searched for symbolic clarification and confirmation of the impact of culture on ideas of home and homeland. I do not consider A Long Letter to Home to be a survey; instead this project is a symbolic form of communication and visual research that takes into consideration the role of personal and emotional experiences in describing home and homeland.

Last year, A Long Letter to Home was selected for a collaboration between Google Arts and Culture and the Museum of Freedom and Tolerance (MFT). Google Arts and Culture is an online platform hosting content from more than 2000 of the world’s leading art galleries and museums; in short, it is a central place for digitising and amplifying art collections from around the world. The Museum of Freedom and Tolerance is based in Perth, Western Australia and is a museum with no walls. According to the MFT website, “the museum is designed to dismantle prejudice, discrimination and intolerance across Australia through programs that use art, history, technology and storytelling to promote tolerance and social coherence” (The Museum of Freedom and Tolerance n.d.). Regarding online museums, researchers Zhang Xiao and Yang Deling (2019, p. 2) say that “online museums transform



Figure 3



Figure 4

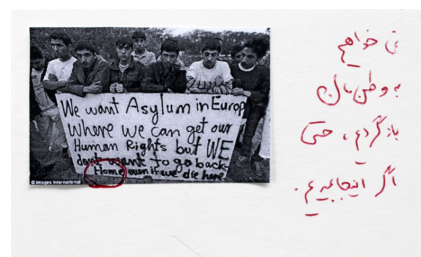


Figure 5

Figure 3: Layli Rakhsha, 2015, A long letter to home

Figure 4: Layli Rakhsha, 2015, A long letter to home (response), 20 x 20 cm

Figure 5: Layli Rakhsha, 2015, A long letter to home (response), 8 x 13 cm.

artworks into resources for cultural knowledge postproduction". A Long Letter to Home is now a resource for education and cultural knowledge. Looking at how my project is presented in a well-designed and digitalised online museum, I feel that I have succeeded in receiving some recognition and in contributing to new cultural information and knowledge in society. It was a great achievement in my career. A Long Letter to Home is now widely available for educational purposes and can be viewed on any screen or device anywhere in the world and can be found as a source of information with a specific URL address:

<[https://artsandculture.google.com/story/layli-rakhsha-a-long-letter-to-home/wAURLwQ\\_SvPN6w](https://artsandculture.google.com/story/layli-rakhsha-a-long-letter-to-home/wAURLwQ_SvPN6w)>.

While social communications are becoming increasingly virtual and limited to social media, I occasionally feel that I am encouraged to stay in a safe, small and protected circle: a circle that has formed around me and gradually become more visible to me. This is a feeling that echoes what the author Andrew Stables says: "we live in isolated bubbles, either as individuals or as communities" (2019, p. 5). I feel that I am becoming more isolated and that my communications are often limited to the virtual. As social and global interactions rapidly increase and change, I am becoming more aware of the distance rather than the closeness between art communities, artists and cultural institutions in a city like Perth.

In 2020, I completed a nine-month residency at the Fremantle Arts Centre (FAC). I started and developed a new project called, Indian Ocean Ceremony, which reflects a symbolic relationship between the idea of home and the Indian Ocean. The initial idea for this project began when I looked through binoculars at a boat on the sea and thought of boundaries, distance, and asylum seekers. We keep hearing that many asylum seekers and children are still losing their lives in the Indian Ocean while heading to a country far away from their homeland, and there are still political negotiations and concerns about people who put their lives in danger by finding a home in this way. For me, hearing the news about the number of illegal boats and people drowned in the water evokes the idea of home and my feelings around it. Many questions are raised, and I try to imagine the experiences that these people would have had in their journey towards a home. I feel that the ocean carries their stories; theirs are stories that echo both sorrow and desire for a home. I do not know how many people have lost their lives on this journey, nor how to express my empathy. Instead, I imagine each small work is an acknowledgement, and that if I make 99 small pieces, I will be able to share my feelings and voice with others.

In Indian Ocean Ceremony, I explore the dignity of human beings and how we can visualise the ocean as a path for seeking a home. Each work in this project reflects an image of the water of the Indian Ocean and includes a handcrafted name related to a particular attribute of a human being. Each word also suggests a metaphor for one of the 99 names of Allah.



Figure 6



Figure 7

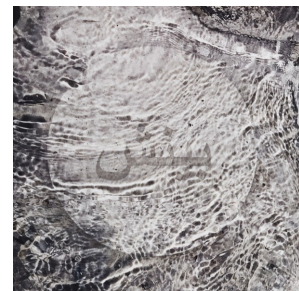


Figure 8

Figure 6: Layli Rakhsha, 2015, A long letter to home.  
 Figure 7: Layli Rakhsha, 2020, Khalegh (Creator), 30 x 30 cm.  
 Figure 8: Layli Rakhsha, 2020, Binesh (Insight), 30 x 30 cm, digital and stencil prints and led pencil on paper, photography by Robert Frith.



The great thing about residencies is that I get to work for a period of time in a studio in an art centre or institution, to focus on a project and to develop my practice. At the same time, I receive feedback and engagement from the institution and have the chance to communicate with the general audience and other artists and curators. In my temporary studio space, I constantly think about the process of thinking and creating, what I can do, what the space contributes to my idea and project, what the local communities expect from me, and how I can get feedback on my project. I consider the studio space to be part of the materials of my project. During each of the residencies I have had, I was able to get in touch with external curators, private gallerists, artists and art organisers to explain what my project is about. I invited them to visit my studio to see the progress of each new work. While at FAC, I contacted eight curators and gallery directors and explained my new project. Some were enthusiastic and expressed an interest in coming to visit my studio, but none of them came during my nine-month residency. I was not wholly successful in introducing my new project and building up my professional relationship with the curators and other artists.

By considering dignity, compassion and obligation in my life and practice, and having achieved some of my goals, I occasionally ask myself: am I a successful artist? The art activist, Paul Klein advises that “to be a successful artist; you need to be distinctive, to get engaged and to make distinctive art” (2013). He suggests that “success is about relationship”. To be distinctive and to make a distinctive work mainly relate to individual practice, knowledge, commitment and experience. I can be a successful artist when I create artworks that reflect me, my ideas and my obligation and commitment to my career. Rather than sitting in my studio and waiting for opportunities to come to me, I like to associate with people who have more experience than me and to seek opportunities for my work to be seen. To be a successful artist is not only about making distinctive artwork but about being engaged in professional relationships with other artists and curators. To be a successful artist can also depend on the way the artist is recognised and evaluated by communities and institutions.

The professional relationships and connections between the cultural and art institutions and the artist are crucial in recognising one as a successful artist. According to Kate Warren, Anthea Gunn and Mikala Tai, “cultural institutions play an essential role in facilitating art projects, supporting artists and presenting the final outcomes” (2020, p. 23). To support local artists, cultural institutions should make closer connections with artists and facilitate their art projects. Offering art residencies and promoting the artists in residence, as well as organising artist talks, are ways of ensuring the connection and relationship between artists, communities and institutions. Nevertheless, I believe that the relationship between art and cultural communities and institutions and artists should become more sophisticated and be less isolated, particularly in a city like Perth. As Edgar Schein says:

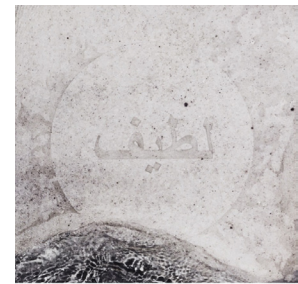


Figure 9

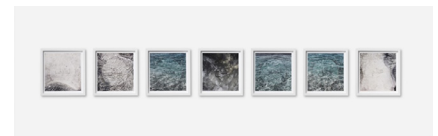


Figure 10

Figure 9: Layli Rakhsha, 2020, Latif (elegant), 30 x 30 cm, digital and stencil prints and led pencil on paper, photography by Robert Frith.  
 Figure 10: Layli Rakhsha, 2021, Indian Ocean Ceremony (ongoing project), 30 x 30 cm each, digital and stencil prints and led pencil on paper, photography by Robert Frith.

If we do not pay more attention to the role of art and artist in our society, we run the risk of not noticing how much more effective and happier we might be if we allowed the artist within ourselves to emerge explicitly and consciously. (2001, p. 83)

Furthermore, to rephrase Klein's statement on success and relationship, I would say that success is about communications and connections; it is about a professional, respectful and sustainable relationship between artists, curators and art organisations. I feel that the connection between artists and institutions is getting smaller and becoming more negligible in Perth. Self-evaluation or personal judgement does not suffice for an artist. The more artists are acknowledged publicly and within institutions, the more diverse the artists and artworks that are offered to the community will be.

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Dr Layli Rakhsha is an academic and artist born in Iran. Her research and works often reflect the idea of home. She explores how a home can be defined by personal experiences, feelings and emotions, social and cultural relationships, and attachments to a particular place. In her current project Indian ocean ceremony, Rakhsha explores the greatness and dignity of human beings and how to visualise the ocean as a path for seeking a home. Rakhsha completed her PhD at Curtin University- Western Australia in 2019, and she has presented several papers at national and international conferences. Rakhsha is currently a sessional academic lecturer at Curtin College. She lives and works in Perth, Western Australia.

IMAGE GALLERY

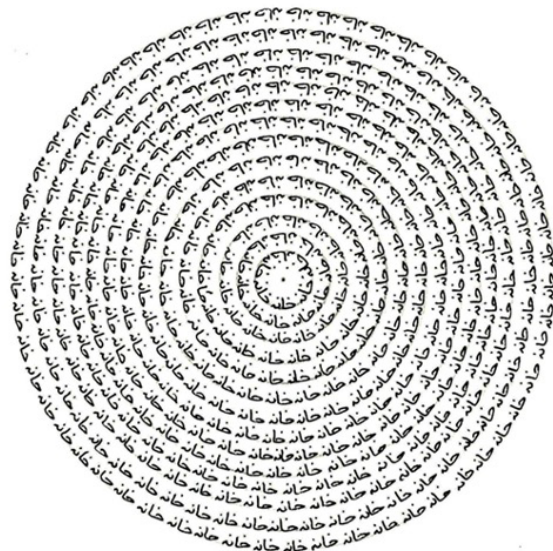
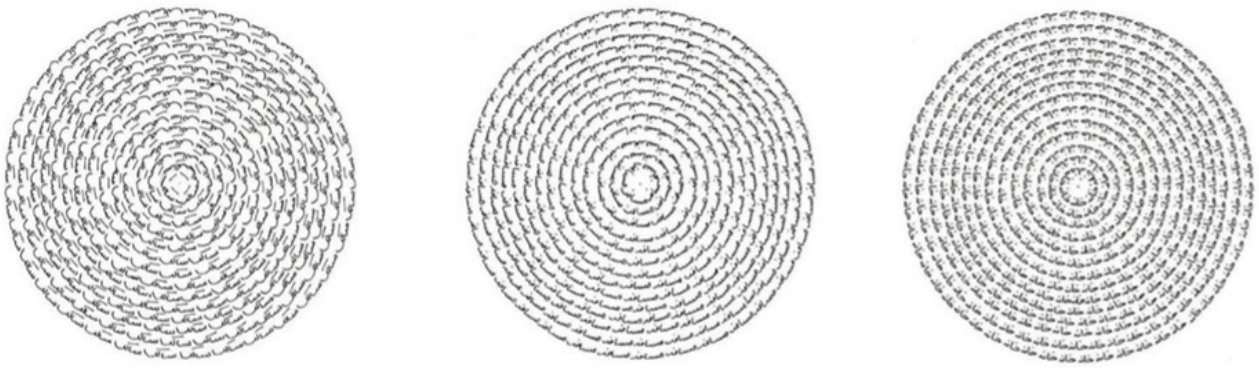


Figure 1: Layli Rakhsha, since 2012 ongoing project, Mosafer, salek, khaneh (traveller, wayfarer, home), 21 x 13.3 cm each, handwriting with ink on paper, photography by Layli Rakhsha.  
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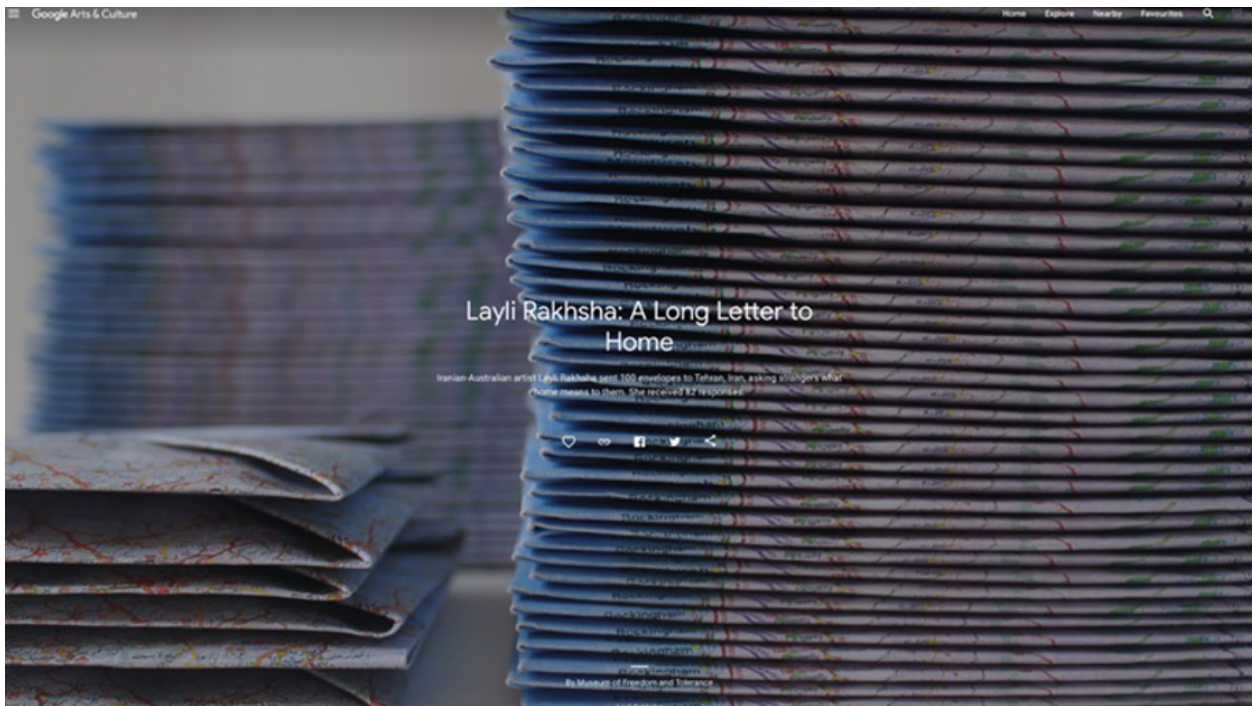
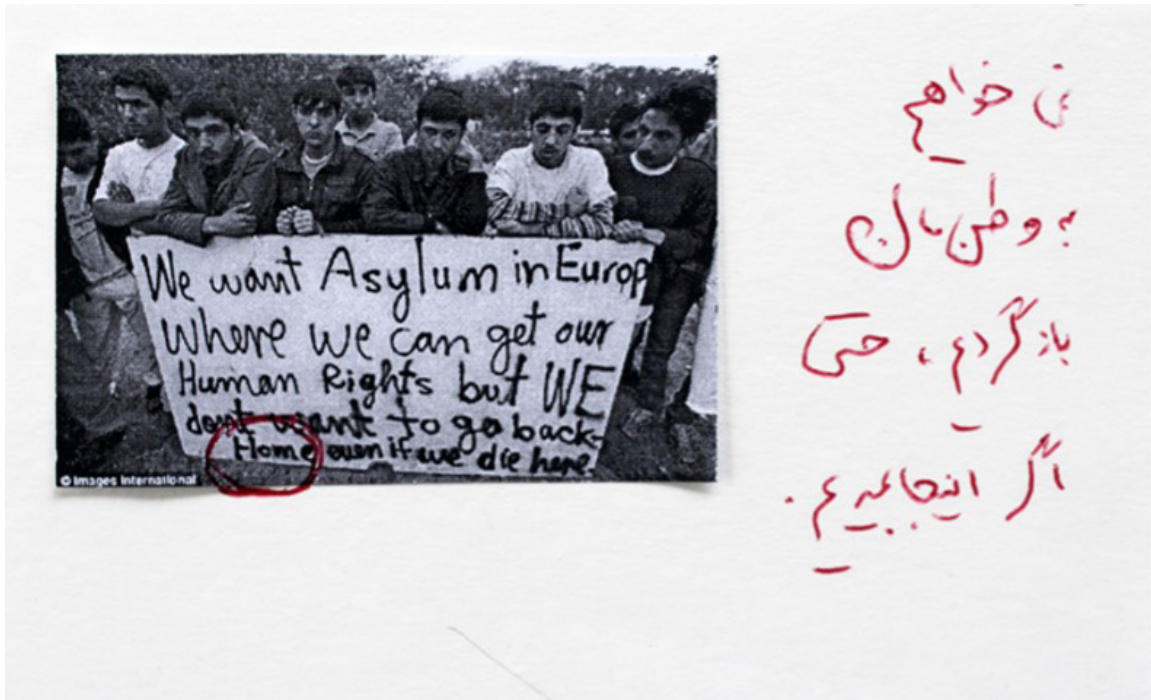
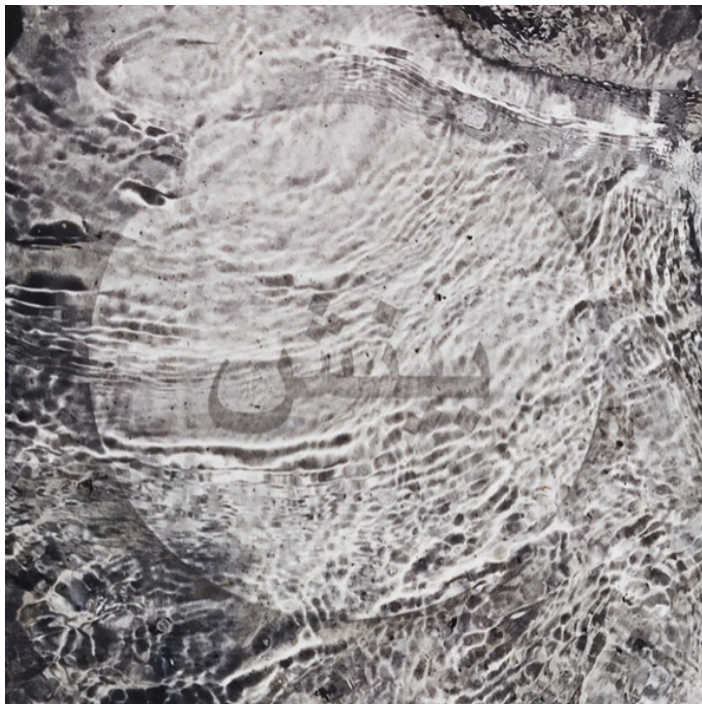


Figure 5: Layli Rakhsha, 2015, A long letter to home (response), 8 x 13 cm, drawing on paper, photography by Layli Rakhsha.  
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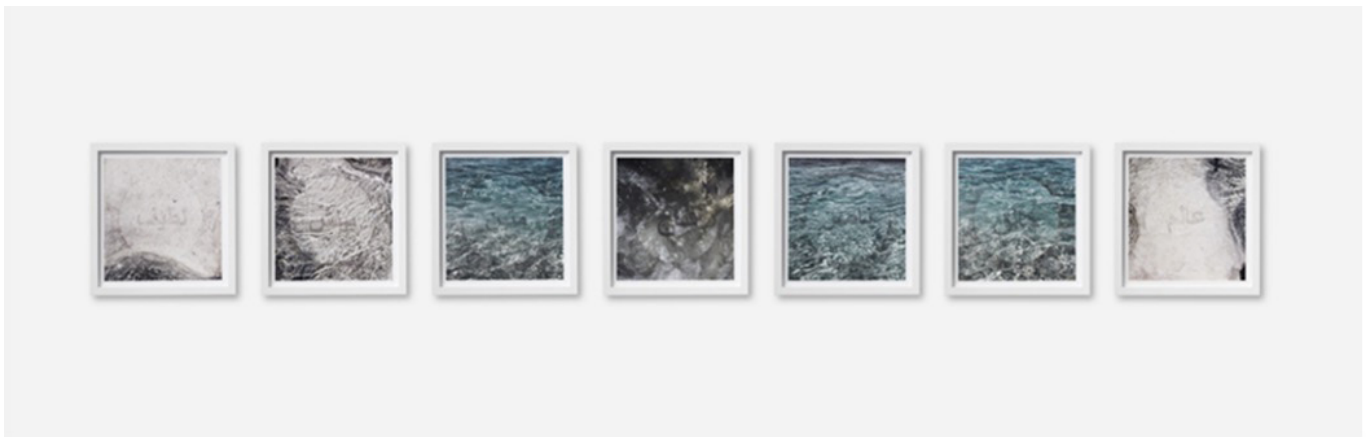


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