

W O M E N  

CINEMA MAKERS

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INDEPENDENT WOMEN'S CINEMA

SPECIAL EDITIONS

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NATALIE ANASTASIOU
AKIKO NAKAYAMA
ALEXANDRA ROBSON

Someone who is not like anyone, 2007
video loop, 3:00 minutes, color, stereo, for single channel projection

A work by Haleh Jamali





CINEMAKERS WOMEN

SPECIAL EDITION

WOMENCINEMAKERS OFFERS ITS OVER 300'000 READERS INSIGHT INTO THE WORK OF EMERGING DIRECTORS IN THE SHORT FILM AND EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA SECTIONS. WOMEN PRODUCERS, WRITERS, AND DIRECTORS FROM AROUND THE WORLD HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO PRESENT THEIR FILMS TO THE WIDE ATTENTION OF THE ENGLISH-READING AUDIENCE. SINCE 2012 WOMENCINEMAKERS HAS BEEN PROMOTING NEW EXPERIMENTS BY CREATING THE SECTION NINE NEW WOMEN FILMMAKERS THAT AWARDS DEBUTS AND AND INNOVATIVE FILMS. WITH A MIXTURE OF

NEWCOMERS AND ESTABLISHED DIRECTORS, OUR ANNUAL ANTHOLOGY HAS FEATURED MORE THAN 100 ARTISTS, WITH MANY OF THEM COMPETING IN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVALS INCLUDING THE CANNES FESTIVAL, BERLIN INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL, AND THE VENICE BIENNALE. FILM DIRECTORS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN DETERMINING HOW WE SEE OURSELVES AND THE WORLD AROUND US. GENDER OF THE STORYTELLER MATTERS. THE WORLD NEEDS THE CREATIVE ENERGY AND VISION OF WOMEN. JOIN WOMENCINEMAKERS.

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Haleh Jamali

The End of The Beginning

Haleh Jamali

Lives and works in Glasgow, Scotland

Haleh is Glasgow based multimedia artist. She was born and raised in Iran before moving to UK in 2005. After a BA in Painting from Tehran university (2001-2005) she enrolled in the Westminster University in London to study Master in Art and Media. Her graduation video *Someone who is not like anyone* (2007) alongside her other videos has been screened in various national and international arts festivals and exhibitions. Her artistic practice expands from drawing, painting, sculpture, animation, print-making, mural painting, photography to video-making. Her interest in portraiture and narrative stems from a desire to address the social aspects of representation, particularly in relation to the female gender and with a concern for the hidden layers beneath that which is visible. For her, the diversity, versatility, and unrivalled ability of portraits to communicate, make them an enigma. Indeed, my particular concern is to reveal the paradoxes and ambiguities behind the eyes of the portrait subject who tries to communicate emotions, arrest attention, and often express feelings of both attraction and repulsion. In Sep 2014, Haleh trained at Charles H. Cecil Studios for advanced Portraiture Painting using the Sight-size method from life in Florence-Italy and currently working on new series of portraits entitled *Resilience* in respond to women's empowerment movements #MeToo and Time's Up.

The End of the Beginning is a captivating video project by multidisciplinary Iranian-British artist Haleh Jamali: addressing the viewers to explore the different stages of loss and hardship, this stimulating work provide the viewers with such an heightened and multilayered experience: we are particularly pleased to introduce our readers to Jamali's stimulating and multifaceted artistic production.

An interview by **Francis L. Quettier**
and **Dora S. Tennant**
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Hello Haleh and welcome to *WomenCinmakers*: we start this interview with a couple of questions about your background. You have a solid training and after

having earned your BA of Painting from the University of Tehran you moved to the United Kingdom to nurture your education with a MA of Art and Media Practice, that you received from the prestigious University of Westminster, London: how did these experience influence your artistic evolution? Moreover, how does your *cultural substratum* dued to



the relationship between your Persian roots and your current life in the United Kingdom address your artistic research?

I've moved to London in 2005 and decided to dedicate myself to video art. From the painted portrait and expressive-inflected black and white self portrait with lots of tiny details, my work gradually moved towards sparsely populated videos giving more room to viewer to add their own narrative to the work. The course at University of Westminster, introduced me to the video art and Art in theory which ultimately equipped me to think more critically about my work.

It is interesting to go back in time and try to remember the things that have shaped the course that my artistic practice has taken. At the time, I rarely recognised what influenced the way I saw things and respond to them. I was part of a very new experience. it's only when you look back the patterns start to emerge.

To me the immigration comes with redefining your own identity in the process of acculturation. The first video that I've made was **Someone who is not like anyone**. This work explores the issues of identity among female immigrants, as related to their appearance. During the process of assimilation into multicultural societies, their identities become fluid via choices in lifestyle and clothing. This work has been informed directly by my own experience as an immigrant and the ways in which immigrants' identities are understood by others. By pushing these ideas to an extreme, I suggest the concept of a "dual-self". I emphasize that the construction of an individual's identity is a function of their relation to Others, and indicates that the inseparable Self and Other construct one's social identity. As an artist I had to redefine myself. As a person I had to redefine myself. The process which wasn't easy all the time.





That's how Identity became a recurrent themes in my work.

Two years after I arrived in the London we moved to Scotland to live and work. I started to work at few established galleries where I've had a chance to see work by world class contemporary artist like Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller and many more. But as a video artist my biggest influence is Bill Viola. I was inspired by his large-scale works and the way he draws the viewer into compelling and highly immersive narratives.

Marked out with such captivating multidisciplinary feature, your practice include painting, video, mural, photography, installation and performance, revealing that you are versatile artist capable of crossing from a medium to another and we would like to invite to our readers to visit <https://www.haleh-jamali.co.uk> in order to get a synoptic idea about your artistic production: would you tell us what does address you to such captivating *multidisciplinary* approach? How do you select a medium in order to explore a particular theme?

My passion is telling a narrative. I've used portrait painting, video editing, sound, performance and more so that I can communicate in the most effective way with my audience. No matter what media I used, I would like to create and present work in barren space to eliminate any distractions that would prevent the viewer from fully engaging with the work.

Sometimes I work in specific media for an upcoming exhibition or commission. Or, the image and idea has been in my mind a while and a way to express it in a certain







medium suggests itself. It happened before that I revisit the same idea by both painting and video.

For this special edition of *WomenCinmakers* we have selected *The End of the Beginning*, an interesting video project that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article. What has at once captured our attention of your insightful inquiry into the different stages of loss

and hardship is the way the results of your artistic research provides the viewers with such a captivating multilayered experience. While walking our readers through the genesis of *The End of the Beginning*, would you tell us how did you develop the initial idea and what did you attract of these themes?

In the short period of time few of my friends grieved after their miscarriages and still births. I was pregnant at the



time and felt helpless as a friend in taking away their pain. This work was my emotional response to acknowledge their experience. The frame of the video could be a reminder of how a Fetal ultrasound images look like. I tend to not talk about it much and prefer to leave it open to interpretation.

It explores different stages of loss and hardship. Here we do not enter and leave each individual stage in a linear

fashion. We may spend different lengths of time working through each step and express each stage with different levels of intensity. May feel one, then another and back again to the first one. The five stages are: Turbulence, Anger, Transaction, Floating and Acceptance. Turbulence is when world around you is overwhelming and you feel numb. Anger comes when you realize what happened. Transaction is when you are trying to negotiate your way out of the situation and interact with others. Floating





stage is when your empty feelings present themselves, and you experience everything on a deeper level. Here water has light ripples that moves up and down, side to side at a slow constant pace, and sometimes thrown you about in all directions. Acceptance is about accepting the reality and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality and that life will go on and we must readjust.

We have been impressed the allegorical quality of *The End of the Beginning* and we daresay that your practice seems to reflect German photographer Andreas Gursky's quote, when he stated that *Art should not be delivering a report on reality, but should be looking at what's behind something*. It seems that you aim to address the viewers to evolve from a condition of mere spectatorship in order to unveil the hidden layers beneath that which is visible: are you particularly interested in structuring your work in order to urge the viewers to elaborate personal associations?

I think its a platform to engage the viewers. They can interpret work in their own personal way sometimes close to what I had in my mind and sometimes far away from it. For me, examining the multi-faceted and often complex relationship between the subject and the viewer has been a great interest. 'You can call the viewer spectator, subject or performer! In my opinion they can be all three'. I would love to keep my work open to interpretation so people with all different backgrounds can perceive it differently and add to my work'. I would like to use the power of the visual image in any arts form like paintings and video to ignite imaginations, evoke emotions and create connections.







We daresay that in *The End of the Beginning* sound of the ambience is equally important as the flow of images and we have highly appreciated the combination between images and *the incessant rhythm of the soundtrack*. How did you structured the relationship between sound and the flow of images in your film?

Its fetal heart sound. Its a sound produced by the heart of a fetus as detected by electronic fetal monitoring. This relate to what inspired me for the piece. The combination of the image and sound works together. Sound here is the background noise for the world I've created and invited the viewer to look at it or be part of it. I like to have a constant sound that absorbs other sounds to wash away distraction. For 3:15 minutes I am inviting the viewer to be part of an experience. Viewer might not distinguish this as a fetal heart sound and that's fine. Sound or absence of sound in my work is to engage the viewer and to allow me to tell my stories.

We have deeply appreciated the way *How Someone who is not like anyone* work explores the issues of identity among female immigrants, as related to their appearance. Over the recent years many artists, from Martha Wilson to Carolee Schneemann have explored the relationship between the culture's expectations about what women are supposed to be: what could be in your opinion the role of artists in our unstable, everchanging contemporary age? Does your artistic research respond to a particular cultural moment?

I think artist could remind everyone how arbitrary our value system is. They can break down all the stereotypes to gender. I think by challenging these stereotypes, artist could create new representations and inspire change through their creative work. I've been asked many times that I consider myself as a feminist.







Feminist artists and writers have had a great influence on my work either consciously or subconsciously. In a way, my approach is equal to some feminist thinkers by seeking a dialogue between the viewer and my work through the inclusion of women's perspective. I've been inspired by Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir and Forough Farrokhzad to name a few. Virginia Woolf began to explore the inner lives of women and gave credence to their emotions. Simone de Beauvoir depicted the women's struggles in claiming their independence. Forough Farrokhzad emphasized on the role of women within a restricted society and questioned the concept of Self. I believe my scope of feminism has broadened over the years, and I am trying to distance myself from stereotypes that place individuals in groups.

Not to mention that these days almost everything, from Maurizio Cattelan's 'The Ninth Hour' to Marta Minujin's 'Reading the News', could be considered political, do you think that *How Someone who is not like anyone* could be considered a political work of art, in a certain sense? In particular, do you think that your being a woman provides your artistic research with some special value?

To me it's a very personal piece. Its about my own journey, adjustment to a new society and culture as well as changes in identity and concept of self. Migration has three phases. Before migration, relocation and after migration. This piece is more about last stage; Learning about social and cultural differences and trying to integrate into host community. Here clothing is symbol of this acculturation phase and its multiple level.

I would rather to be called an artist rather than a woman artists but I wouldn't make these works if I was a man. I



explored issues of representation and identity from my own perspective as a person and as an artist. Me being me informs my practice. I think its subconscious and not really a choice.

We have been impressed with the the way *Maximum Ex-posure* explores the grammar of the language of body language: how do you consider the relationship

between the necessity of scheduling the details of the performative gestures and the need of spontaneity? How much importance does play improvisation in your process?

I think there is a correlation between set choreographed and spontaneous movement. Improvisation can have a great impact on choreographed pieces. Improvisation



gives the performer the freedom to move spontaneously by creating creative movement and responding to sound and space around them or even to a set of related rehearsed actions. Improvisation explores the body's shape, different levels and dynamics.

With improvisation you allow expression of the performer's self to enter the process of making a video. In this particular

piece I've collaborated with the performer in many levels. I was lucky to work with such an amazing performer artist, Monica De Ioanni. For us Improvisation developed our imagination and ability to expand our ideas. I found set movement that I really likes for the piece through improvisation.

Before leaving this conversation we want to catch this







occasion to ask you to express your view on the future of women in contemporary art scene. For more than half a century women have been discouraged from producing something *'uncommon'*, however in the last decades there are signs that something is changing: as

an artist particularly interested in the social aspects of the representation of female gender, how would you describe your personal experience as an unconventional artist? And what's your view on the future of women in this interdisciplinary field?



I think imbalance of gender representation within the arts still is an issue but there is a massive improvement.

There are many women artists garner prestige by considering the challenges, risks, and opportunities

inherent in the art market and become both the commercially and non-commercially successful.

For many years' artists have tackled the social construction of gender by using their work to question the relationships

between gender and society. To me, most society and culture create gender roles but navigating from those restrictions can become an art in itself. It can encourage artists to become more creative and innovative in overcoming obstacles. I think its a coping mechanism.

I think women still are under-represented but a shift may be occurring, driven by women who have taken the control of some of the biggest art institutions. It has been long and hard struggle but things are changing however slowly.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Haleh. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?

I have few projects which I am working on at the moment. I am working on new series of portrait painting entitled Resilience in respond to women's empowerment movements #MeToo and Time's Up. I am also working on a new video piece which is in very early stages but coming together.

An interview by **Francis L. Quettier**
and **Dora S. Tennant**
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