

## Artist of the month: Haleh Jamali

# Self and Social Identity

By Haleh Jamali

I have always been interested in art. When growing up my whole family was interested in art and as a child I used to draw for hours on end. From the beginning I was always interested in drawing people most of all and when I eventually went to art school the subject I focused on was the portrait. Over the years I've expanded my use of media, and now use video as one of the main media in my work.

I currently work with a wide range of media and techniques including video, painting, mural, photography, installation and performance.

My work often deals with issues of female identity, inspired by images of women mainly from the Middle East. My 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 me, 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". I try to encourage an intimate relationship between the viewer and the subject, and consider how an individual's identity can be constructed in relation to Others, while simultaneously suggesting that the Self and the Other are inseparable.

In my most recent work I focus on how identity is an unavoidable part of our lives from the day we are born. I explore how identity helps us to define key borders and boundaries and what we decide to defend.

I think everything I see and experience influences my art in some way, whether directly or indirectly. My life, my surroundings, society and other artists have influenced me a lot. Some more than others! For example feminist artists and writers have had a great impact on my work either consciously or subconsciously. Virginia Woolf began to explore the inner lives of women and gave credence to their emotions. Forough Farrokhzad, an Iranian poet focused on women's struggles, and many of the issues they faced - and continue to face.

I live locally, having moved here from Glasgow last July. I also work with Sharrow-based Ignite Imaginations as an arts educator, leading and designing community arts projects for various groups based in the Sharrow area and other parts of Sheffield.

My work has appeared in various solo and group exhibitions nationally and internationally. My most recent exhibitions include:

- 7th PFF, Passion for Freedom, London Art festival;
- F for Female, Festival Miden, Festival of Deviant Arts, Geneva, Switzerland;
- Nietzsche Was A Man, Pori Art Museum, Finland ;
- 26th Festival Les Instants Vidéo, Friche la Belle de Mai, Marseille-France;
- That Person Who Is Your Creation, Asian Arts Initiative, Philadelphia-USA;
- Passion for Freedom Festival, Unit24 Gallery, London;
- Facade Video Festival, Old Town of Plovdiv, Bulgaria;
- Finalist Exhibition of Arte Laguna Prize, Nappe of Arsenale of Venice, Italy.

From Nov 2015, I started an artist residency with the Alternator Studio in Liverpool entitled 'Translating the Street'. I spent most of my time at the Iranian K&N Fruits and vegetables shop in Birkenhead living the life of two grocers. Through their tales, I spent my time getting to know them, their customers and their mostly multicultural neighborhood. I then edited two videos, 'Frontier' and 'Crossing the line' using narrative to engage with the viewers and provide an opportunity for them to go beyond what seems the obvious and create their own narrative.

**I accept commissions for portraits and mural paintings. You can also buy my paintings online via my website or at my exhibitions. Contact me for further information:**

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