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ArtReview

Meriem Bennani



New Worlds, Old Problems

Farideh Sakhaeifar *You are in the war zone.*

Trotter & Sholer (with KODA), New York 18 March – 17 April

Responding to a question in an interview from 2020, the New York-based Iranian artist Farideh Sakhaeifar said, ‘My generation, those born in the 80s, lived our whole lives in fear of the U.S. attacking Iran. I don’t remember a day I woke up, and it didn’t cross my mind; this nightmare is an undeniable companion of us.’ This tone sets the mood for *You are in the war zone*. Images bleed into each other – whether in the exhibition’s title work, her series of 2016–17 gelatin silver prints depicting everyday New York, onto which she has inscribed drawings of scenes from the Syrian civil war, or in *When pulling down a statue, a chain works better than a rope*, a 2021 collage of destroyed statues around the world.

One gets the sense that Sakhaeifar’s intent is to show, through intense layers, the effects

of conflict and, in turn, violence. The small, everyday lives of people living through violence are enlarged and centred, giving space to a forced reckoning for all encountering the work. The careful, circular arrangement of the work creates a narrative force that maximises the gallery’s only room, and it is surprising how much ground – both in range and media – the show covers in eight sets of artwork.

Sakhaeifar’s striking video *Halabja, 1988* (2018) energises the room. Through a screen installed on a seemingly rough black wall with a powdery white feel and illustrations of bodies in lifeless positions that together mirror scenes from the desert in some of the photographs in the show, the film shows a choreographed dancer whose movements animate the space in the video, her flowing dress creating a

trajectory that draws the viewer in as much as does the voiceover.

The star of the show is surely *Mute* (2019) – an eight-by-six-foot digital print under glass set on rebound carpet that, like the wall, has illustrations of dead bodies on it and acts like a coffin carrying a corpse. Placed at the centre of the room, the print depicts concentric rectangles filled with repeated shapes of war symbols – soldiers holding guns, warplanes, missiles – surrounding a collage of images with dead bodies, some in an arid land, some by a wall, some of animals even. There are drawings on the glass as well, and the way it reflects light constantly pushes away while drawing one in. This is how Sakhaeifar, while employing mute horror as artistic strategy, is able to speak loudly.

Yinka Elujoba



Mute, 2019, Chemetal metal laminate, soil, digital print on rebound carpet, 183 × 244 cm.
Courtesy the artist