

Kollaho Ser, 2021

At the intersection of empiricism and theory, Aidin Bagheri's art explores social behaviour in Iran. His works deal with both visible and invisible elements and structures which work to shape the complexity of Iranian society. Indeed, it seems as if he wants to uncover the hidden through his extensive visual and investigative research. By re-sorting historical information and re-framing social facts, his artistic strategy aims to identify and uncover the hidden and invisible, the examination of which can be understood as a prerequisite for understanding the here and now of Iran, and in doing so, avoiding historical alienation. His art projects can be viewed as visual treatises and essays that question the norms and values of a continuously changing society.

In the project *Sculpture Purging* the artist deals with Tehran's urban space as a repository for memories. In one section of the project, Bagheri depicts a map of missing sculptures which, since the revolution, have for various reasons been successively removed from public spaces, and have thus also been erased from the collective memory. Additionally, in the multi-part ongoing art project *Shahid Gah* – created in cooperation with artist Hamidreza Ali Sani – Bagheri uses primary sources to address the missing and/or erased narratives of women and to explore the problems of contemporary women in Iran within the perspective of certain historical movements. The project title *Shahid Gah* refers to a historical site with the same name in Ardebil – in north-western Iran – where the bodies of male martyrs from the Battle of Chaldiran (1514) are buried. This area has since been transformed into a burial ground with a museum. In a section of his work, Bagheri depicts how women's participation in the Persian army was systematically “unmentioned” by both sides. Both the winners of the war, the Ottomans, and the losers, the Persians, were embarrassed to report that women had fought on the front lines of the Persian troops.

The project *Kollaho Ser* depicts another exploration of hidden structures which, to some extent, reveal to us social behaviour. The title *Kollaho Ser* means secret science and arises from Bagheri's artistic interest in supernatural practices and beliefs, which the artist calls, *The Arcane Culture*.

The sub-project shown here is subtitled *Shabagh* which is the Persian term for a special variety of stone called black jet stone. In the work, there are two black cubes, which the artist calls chandeliers. These black chandeliers are open from the bottom and are each suspended by a cube-shaped metal frame in such a way that one must bend forward to enter them. When you enter, you are enveloped from head to shoulders in the first chandelier and from head to knees in the second. Only then you discover that the interiors of the cubes are decorated with several hundred small mirrors cut into geometric shapes. Texts from twenty-eight reference books on the secret sciences are printed on these mirrors. The mirrors multiply both the texts and the light and thus create an atmosphere in which one feels unbalanced, at least, the

unbalanced feeling occurs when one attempts to interpret the situation rationally and thus read and understand the written texts.

The starting point of the project *Kollaho Ser* is the examination of the jet stone, to which in many oriental and western cultures healing properties have been attributed. If these are to be believed, the stones offer their owners protection from betrayal, spells and turmoil; they promise an open future full of possibility. The shape of the chandeliers is based on such stones. If one pursues the work to its semantic horizon, the work appears to want to open up a new (experiential) space, which seems very strange from a rational perspective, and yet demonstrates traits of a scientific approach. In part, the texts decorating the mirrors carry a scientific explanation of some phenomena and at the same time, by entering the black cubes we enter an unknown world, which, when complemented with the act of bending down, signals a respectful and partly religious action. The prerequisite to being able to experience and understand the space created by Bagheri's work is linked to this affirmation.