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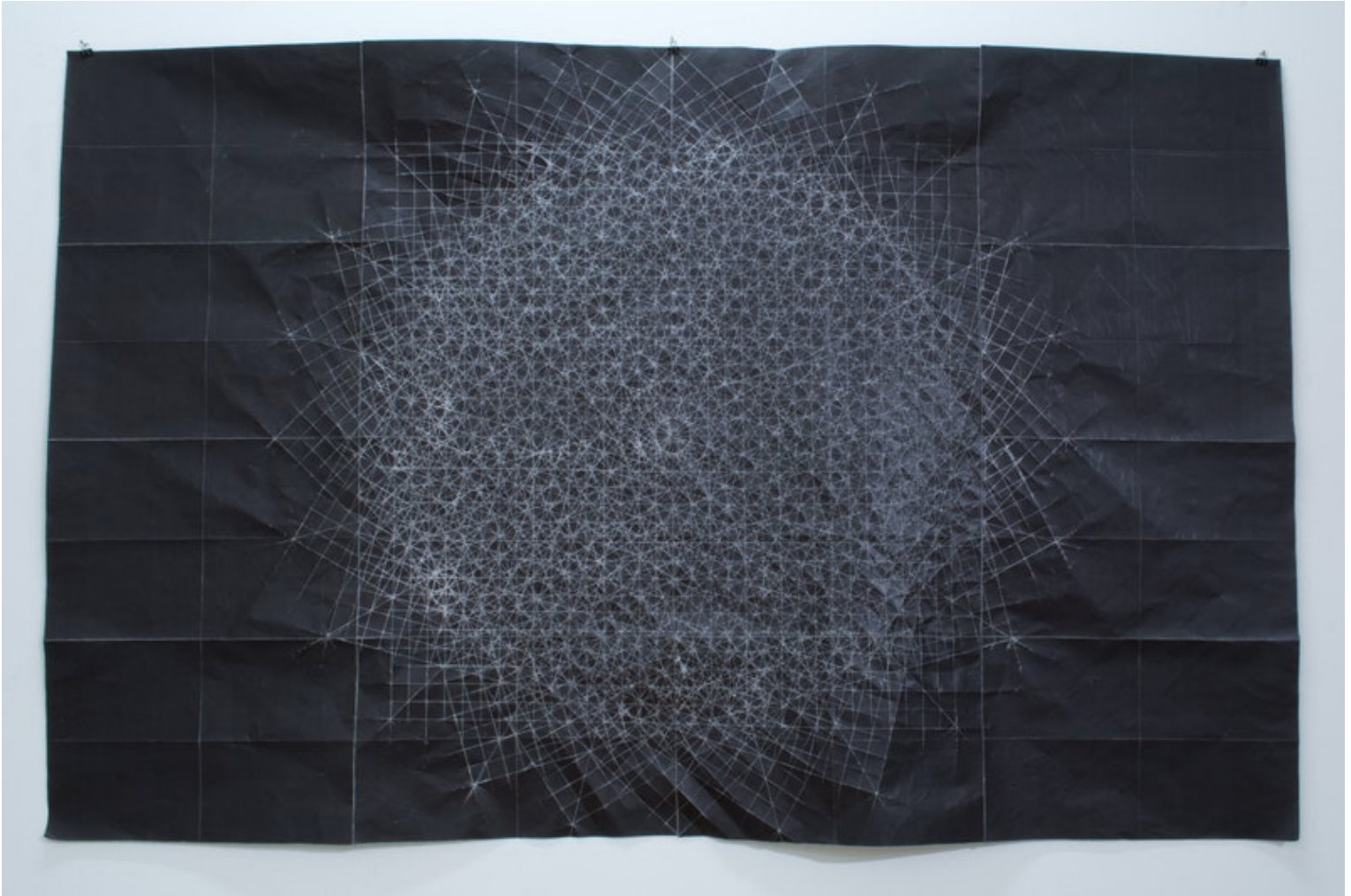
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Yasi Alipour: *As Dreams*

JUNE 2019

By Vered Engelhard



Yasi Alipour, *As Dreams Became History*, 2019. Hand fold, pigmented paper 41 x 64 inches. Edition of 1. Courtesy the artist.

A dazzling 5-by-3-foot work-on-paper, displaying an intricate geometric pattern formed with white lines over black background, greets us on the opposite wall as we walk into the Yasi Alipour's first solo exhibition, *As Dreams*. The pattern is a complex form based on square grids that, when overlapped in various patterns, generate circles on the surface—an enigmatic circling of the square.

On View

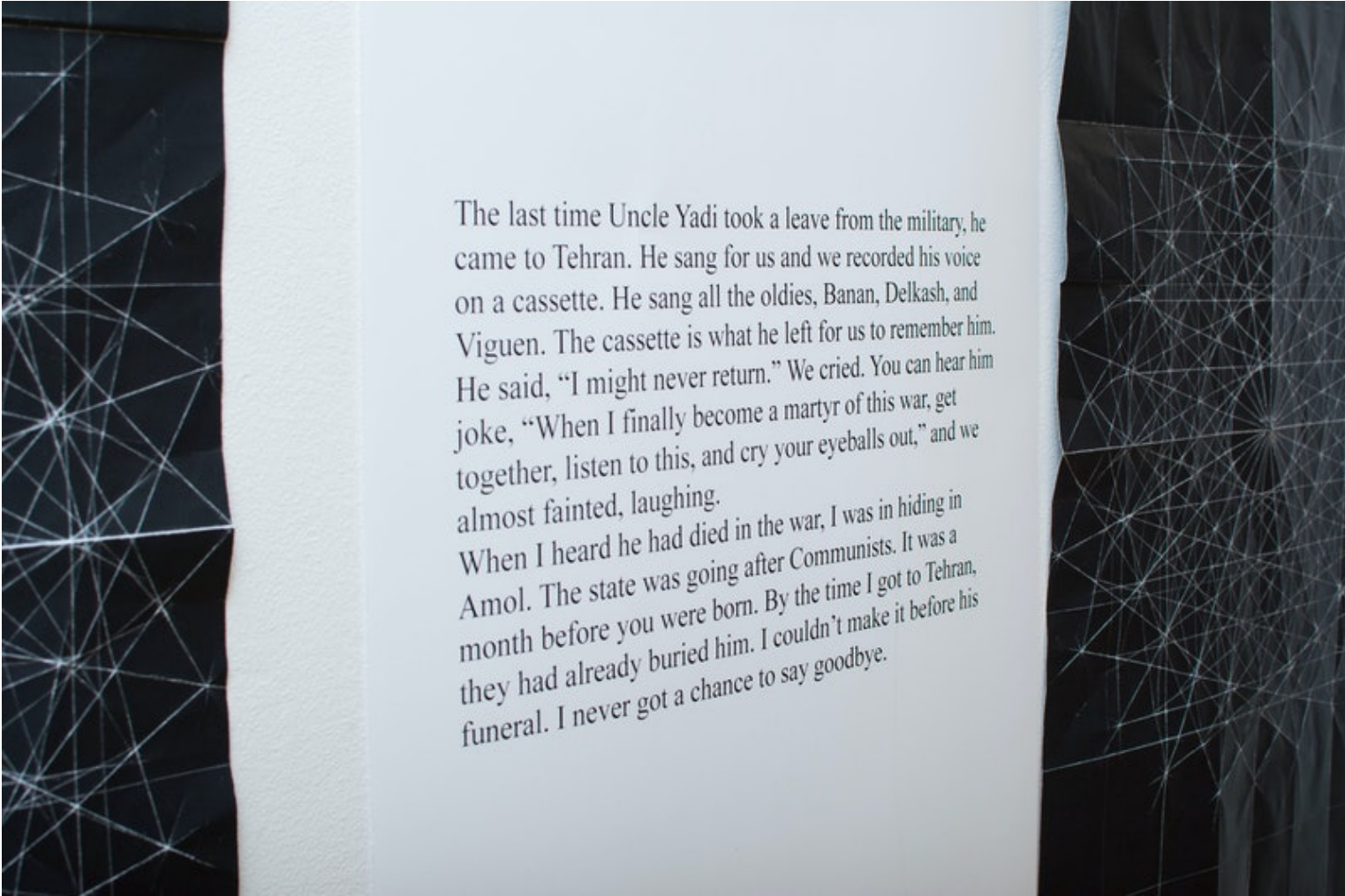
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A closer look at the work reveals that the white lines are not drawn, as they first appear, but are rather the result of hand folding. Pieces of A3 tabloid-size paper are printed all black on a commercial inkjet printer, which the artist then folds and stretches back in very intricate patterns, reminiscent of the longstanding tradition of Islamic geometric abstraction. Here, the act of folding is a sort of mark-making by erasure, inscribing the paper with a trace that gives the otherwise flat work a subtle volume. Alipour's original hand-folding technique exists somewhere between sculpture and photography, where an inkjet generated monochrome is only imbued with light

after its printing, in the artist's sculptural mark-making gesture of bending and breaking the image with her own touch. In each bend of the paper, when pressing the two sides of a fold, Alipour stretches it just enough to take a line of black ink away, carving the monochrome with a geometric pattern one fold at a time.



The last time Uncle Yadi took a leave from the military, he came to Tehran. He sang for us and we recorded his voice on a cassette. He sang all the oldies, Banan, Delkash, and Viguen. The cassette is what he left for us to remember him. He said, "I might never return." We cried. You can hear him joke, "When I finally become a martyr of this war, get together, listen to this, and cry your eyeballs out," and we almost fainted, laughing. When I heard he had died in the war, I was in hiding in Amol. The state was going after Communists. It was a month before you were born. By the time I got to Tehran, they had already buried him. I couldn't make it before his funeral. I never got a chance to say goodbye.

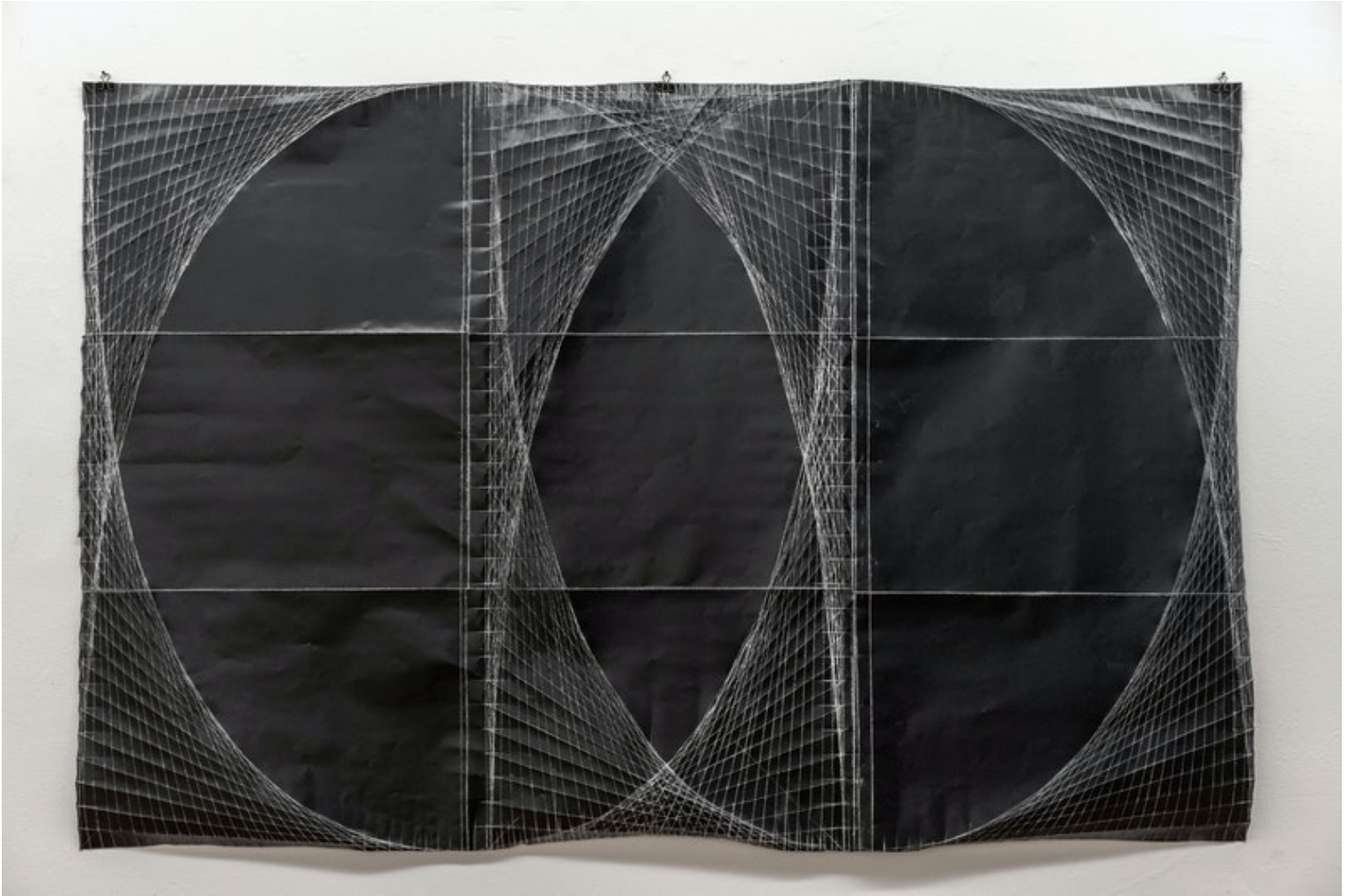
Yasi Alipour, "Memory #48," *As Dreams Became History* (detail), 2019. Diptych: text: ink jet print, hand fold, pigmented paper 33 x 20 inches each. Edition of 1. Courtesy the artist.

Throughout the show, we see different versions of these patterns on surfaces of various sizes, mostly derived from the tabloid-size matrix. One could think of these as 'conceptual readymades' of the newspaper, where both the scale and the printing technique can be traced. Indeed, newspapers play a very important part in Alipour's work, as she is concerned with the status of the press as both a means of recording history and a social coping mechanism. This can be seen in the ambitious work that occupies the whole first room of the show, *As Dreams Became History, Iran 1979-1989: A map, A Fortune Telling Fold, A Second-Hand Oral History* (all works 2019). The first wall of this room is made of diptychs of 20 by 33-inch inkjet prints, which she calls "memories."

On the walls, we see a part of what is clearly a larger collection: *Memory #9*, for example, sits between *Memory #51* and *Memory #3*. These, we learn, are second-hand memories collected in Alipour's oral history project. Born in Tehran in 1989, at the close of the decade of the Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War, the artist asked Iranians from her generation to submit secondhand memories about the tumultuous decade before their birth they recall hearing from family or friends. A selection of the memories is printed out for the right panels of the diptychs; the left panel features the stretched-out and folded papers with concentric geometrical patterns. As we read stories about parents going to war or being interrogated in prison ("nothing special"), and

tales of illegal wine-making, or playing cards or weaving to distract from political and economic turmoil, the whirling geometry of the fold stands there untouched. The abstractions appear to stand in for the great force of history, keeping these perspectives together in a single vanishing point.

We then come close to the dazzling *As Dreams Become History* (2019)—another large folded paper—we notice a deck of cards placed in front of on a pedestal. These cards, we discover, are made from a near-identical version of *When Dreams Become History*, which is cut into equally sized pieces and inscribed on the rear with the secondhand memories. The deck is to be read as a book of divinations, an act that is reminiscent of the Iranian vernacular practice of reading poems by the late Medieval mystic Hafez as one's fortune. Alipour's version is an experimental historiography project, and the audience is invited to pick a card, read it as one would read a fortune, and then find its place in the giant fold. The fold behaves again like the very presence of history, subsuming our relationship to others' stories into an opaque scheme of things.



Yasi Alipour, *Untitled, To Fakhri Garakani*, 2019. Hand fold, pigmented paper, 31 1/4 x 48 inches. Edition of 1. Courtesy the artist.

The second room of the show displays a more playful collection of folded papers from the series “Untitled/To Fakhri Garakani,” in which Alipour experiments with both shapes and the ink patterns on their surface. Hung alongside these are also six hand-written works titled *The Letter, Reading 1-6*. The works consist of erasures of a copy of letter to John F. Kennedy, dated December 15, 1961, found at the Princeton University archives, and signed by Fakhri Garakani, Alipour’s grandmother. In this letter, Garakani gifts the president a portrait of Pope John XXIII “made of silk embroidery with total working hours of 32,000,” for the occasion of Christmas. She explains this portrait is part of a series of “International Figures,” which includes a portrait of Mahatma Gandhi that the Shah of Iran brought on his visit to India, and expresses her hope that the portrait would bring analogous diplomatic and career success in the U.S. Read as both an ironic critique and sincere wager, Garakani’s letter demonstrates the multifaceted intentions of a diplomatic “gesture of goodwill” in the face of an imperial power. Through re-writing by hand various versions of this letter, where different sections are omitted, Alipour deconstructs the underlying sociopolitical currents around it and attempts to find her own place as an Iranian artist in the United States, albeit in the form of poetic justice. These playful folds along with the letters remind us that writing history is also a matter of trial and error.

For going beyond the contradictions of grand historical narratives of nation-formation, Alipour

proposes a collective micropolitical strategy. In the search for an intergenerational and international social mechanism for historical construction, the artist asks us to relate to each other as contemporaries. Encouraging us, specifically, to take these various interpretations from Iranians 'then' to the experience of our 'now' in the United States. If a new history must inaugurate a new calendar, a new way of ordering time that applies to the past as well as the future, Alipour proposes we begin by giving recycled memories the weight of historical facts, using them thus as divinations. Let this secondhand oral history become your political oracle.

Contributor

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