

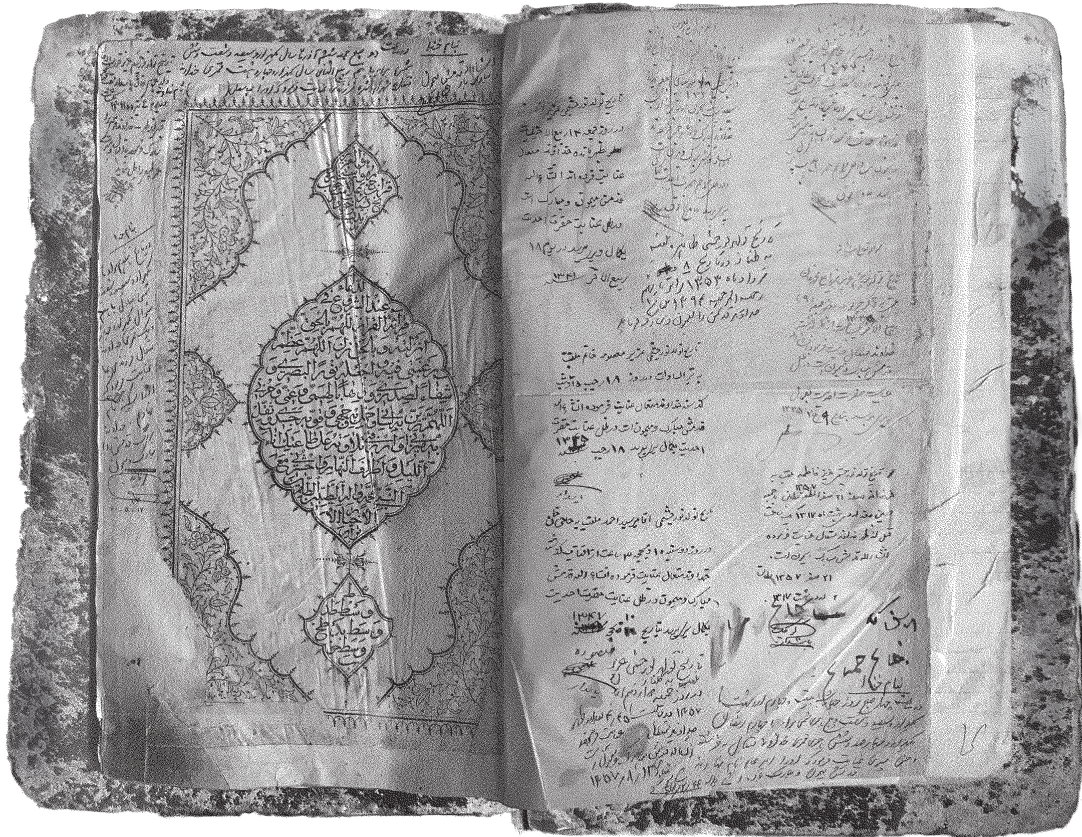
## TANNAZ FARSI





Previous page

Satellite [Fort Bragg/"Mid-East"], 2017  
Screenprint on acrylic, steel  
53 x 14 x 75 in



Study for Weaving, 2020  
Archival inkjet print  
40 x 30 in



Untitled [Security Lights], 2017  
Security lights  
Dimensions variable



Tyranny stops life., 2019  
Rug made in Iran, grit, steel, vinyl,  
archival inkjet print, tulip petals  
120 x 40 x 19 in



BETWEEN HERE AND THERE, BETWEEN PAST  
AND PRESENT: ON TANNAZ FARSI’S ART

By Shiva Balaghi, Ph.D.

The *noqteh*, a small diamond-shaped dot created with the nimble nib of a reed pen, is where the calligrapher begins each line and each word. For her sculptural installation, *The Names-state II* (2018), Tannaz Farsi draws on the Persian *noqteh* to create a modern font for the English language. She uses this font to inscribe the names of Iranian women poets, novelists, filmmakers, artists, educators and activists. The scale of the *The Names* is large, its script angular as it wraps along the gallery walls; the effect echoes kufic calligraphic inscriptions on the walls of classical Islamic architecture. Spelled out in a gold metallic, the names catch the light and cast a shadow on the wall.

An exploration of the relationship between form and content is threaded through Farsi's art. "It's important to me that my work engages with social and historic structures," she explains. "I build upon historic forms to create visibility and to extend the scope of ideas into the future." Farsi recasts historic tropes of Islamic art into contemporary meditations on her own positionality as an artist and as an immigrant. This impulse marks a shift in her artistic practice, a turn to the personal, an ongoing creative reflection on her own experiences as an immigrant living in an attenuated space between Iran and the United States, between here and there, between past and present.

Farsi's artworks are part of an ongoing dialogue, a probing search for new perspectives on fundamental questions. During an exhibition at Linfield Gallery, her sculpture *Names* was hung above a floor installation titled *Units of Movable Earth* (2017). The movable garden features 1000 species of tulips growing from bags of earth. Farsi researched the specific kinds of tulips that grow in the wild in Iran. The tulip also gestures to the history of the Ottoman Empire, where the flower was originally cultivated, the bulbs stimulating trade routes and cultural flows across Europe and Asia. In contemporary Iranian culture, the red tulip has a deep resonance. Used by poets to signal Marxist ideology, it became a prevalent image in protest posters. In Iranian revolutionary iconography, the tulip connotes a leftist ethos and becomes a metaphor for the spilled blood of those lost in political upheaval. *In situ*, the piece takes on even more layers of meaning. The tulips become a floral tribute honoring those creative Iranian women whose names the artist rendered into a modern calligraphic inscription.

Script takes on various guises in Farsi's art. In her 2017 piece, *Satellite [Fort Bragg/"Mid-East"]*, maps of Fort Brag and the Middle East are screen-printed onto acrylic and steel and then words associated with immigration are cut out from the surface. Carved gaps appear in the capital letters that spell out

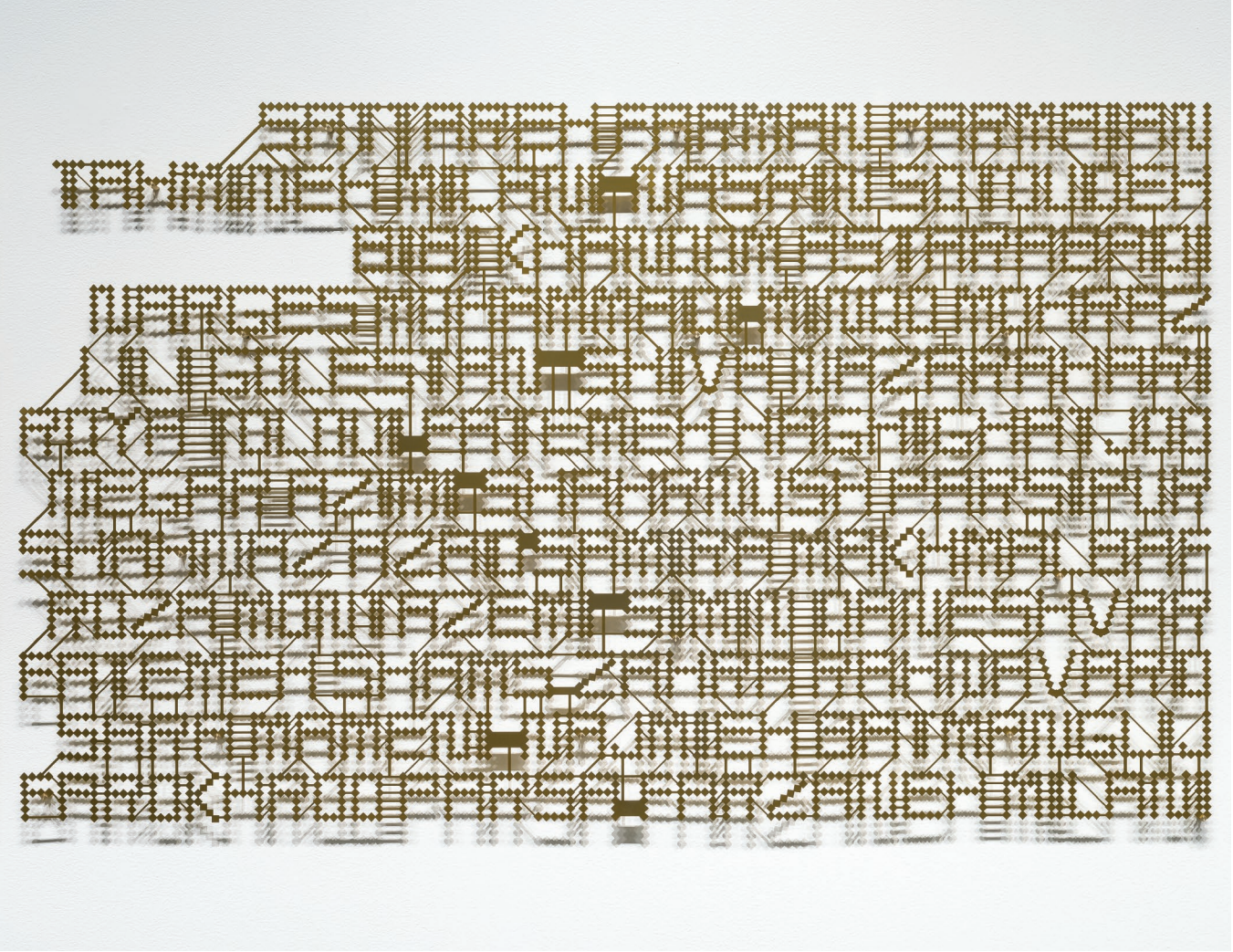
words like colonist, pioneer, invader, settler, migrant, and refugee. Farsi used a thesaurus to find variations for the word immigrant. "It shows the language we use to talk about how bodies cross borders. Depending on who is using and categorizing the words, some are positive and convey strength, while other words have negative connotations that can erase personhood," she explains.

When installed across from *Untitled [Security Lights]*, a series of eight security lights hung in a row on a gallery's white wall, *Satellite* takes on a new dimensionality. Farsi found the lights to have a sculptural and authoritative quality. In the glaring light, the cut out parts of letters of *Satellite* become a portal for light and shadows. The dialogue between the two artworks creates a striking visual narrative of presence and absence.

Script takes on new form in Farsi's installation piece, *Tyranny stops life* from 2019. A handwoven Persian carpet is rolled and wrapped in a golden sheet embellished with a self-portrait showing her hand holding flower stems. On the gallery floor surrounding the piece, we find dried red tulip petals and black grit is used to calligraphy the Persian sentence: "Tyranny stops life." The ambiguity of the artwork is underlined by its bilingual voice—its title a translation of the inscription.

One can trace an archival bent in Farsi's artistic practice, even when her works don't feature texts. *Points of Departure* (2017), a geometric steel sculpture arranged across the ground, appears to be a play on spatial design, a modernist reinterpretation of *Arabesques*. The ideas behind the sculptural installation came to Farsi when she read art historian Gülrü Necipoğlu's book, *The Topkapi Scroll: Geometry and Ornament in Islamic Architecture*. A study of a Timurid scroll found in the collection of the Topkapi Palace Museum Library, the book features images of the 114 geometric patterns for wall surfaces and vaultings. Farsi was inspired by the book's exploration of the boundaries between ornament and representation. Her own reinterpretation of the scrolls appears as a contemporary sculpture, a work of perceptual quality. The piece retains a formal incompleteness. "The pattern for this form is in itself a segment," Farsi explains, "and the coded history of the drawings can suggest multiple narratives of the social life of those objects such as site, labor, and innovation."

These notions undergird several of Farsi's recent artworks. Drawing on historical form, using experimental materials, and refashioning texts in her art reflect layers of meaning. The notion of incompleteness, the reiteration of openings and ellipses, the play on light and shadows suggests the artist is probing the lines between the seen and unseen, the spoken and unsaid. Farsi delves into the furtive in-between spaces in the American cultural landscape.



*The Names-state II, part 1 of 4*, 2018  
Steel, paint  
36 x 60 in

The creative tensions of belonging animate a current work in progress, *Weaving* (2020). Farsi is laboriously refashioning a written document into a woven tapestry. The artwork is based on a photograph that a cousin took of her grandfather's Quran in their ancestral home in Iran. "I wanted in some way to think about our own family's history in relation to immigration. It feels like there's a distinct break, that a part of who we were is being lost," Farsi says. The cherished family heirloom in Iran became a photograph that was sent to the U.S. and then was transformed again into a handmade object by the artist. "It is so easy for immigrants to not have a past in the U.S.," she says softly. "How do we keep our stories from disappearing? There is so much erasure, so many silences inherent in immigration. I think about how art can be a means of witnessing and contesting the silence."

*Shiva Balaghi, Ph.D. is a cultural historian, author. She is a senior adviser to the provost and president of the American University in Cairo.*





#28, *Topkapi*, 2017  
Steel, powder coat  
240 x 5 x 288 in



*Units of Movable Earth*, 2017  
1000 species tulips (*Humilis Violacea*, *Linifolia*,  
*Turkestanica*, *Clusiana Chrysantha*, *Eichleri*, *Orphanidea*  
*Flava*, *Schrenkii*, *Polychrome*, *Clusiana*), soil, vinyl  
Dimensions variable

## TANNAZ FARSI

*b. 1974. Lives and works in Eugene, Oregon*

*2014 Hallie Ford Fellow*

Tannaz Farsi's configurations of objects and images address the complicated networks around the conception of memory, history, identity, and geography. Drawing from cultural objects, feminist histories, and theories of displacement evidenced by long-standing colonialist and authoritarian interventions into daily life, her project-based works propose a different means of representation regarding non-western subjects and objects that obstruct singular and conventional means of identification.

Her work has been exhibited at venues including SFAC Galleries, San Francisco, California; Portland Institute of Contemporary Art (PICA) and Disjecta Contemporary Art Center, Portland Oregon; Pitzer College Art Galleries, Claremont, California; Tacoma Art Museum, Tacoma, Washington; the Urban Institute of Contemporary Art, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, Wilmington, Delaware; and The Sculpture Center, Cleveland, Ohio. She has been granted residencies at Bemis Center for Contemporary Art, MacDowell, and the Rauschenberg Foundation among others. Her work has been supported through grants and awards from the Oregon Arts Commission, National Endowment for the Arts, University of Oregon, and the Bonnie Bronson Fund.

**Hallie Brown** was born in 1905, outside of Tulsa, in Indian Territory that would become the state of Oklahoma. She supported herself as she earned a bachelor's degree at East Central University and taught in Oklahoma before her parents moved their family to rural Oregon. In 1935 Hallie married Kenneth W. Ford and together they established Roseburg Lumber Company in the midst of the Great Depression.

Hallie Ford was drawn to art all her life, specifically the accessibility of artmaking. She took classes with the painter Carl Hall at Willamette University in Salem, and painting became a central part of her life. Her philanthropy established and supported key Oregon visual art museums and universities.

After Hallie's death in 2007, The Ford Family Foundation's Board of Directors honored our co-founder by establishing a Visual Arts Program. The first element of this program was the Hallie Ford Fellowships in the Visual Arts, awarded since 2010. Through these unrestricted fellowships, we seek to make significant awards to visual artists who have worked to establish their voice and craft.

Another of our goals is to help support the ecology that builds connections and capacity in the visual arts community of our state. As the Fellows become the focus of exhibitions throughout the world, they bring more attention and support to their Oregon peers. We are certain that Hallie Ford would be pleased to see how both individual artists and the visual arts community in Oregon have flourished since the establishment of this program in her honor.

We could not be more excited each year to bring new Hallie Ford Fellows into this family, and to share their work with you.

*Anne C. Kubisch*  
*President, The Ford Family Foundation*

The Hallie Ford Fellowships are the flagship element of The Ford Family Foundation Visual Arts Program. The Foundation commits to an ongoing relationship with our Fellows through exhibition support, convenings, and professional development opportunities. In addition, the Visual Arts Program offers grants to visual artists for unanticipated career opportunities; supports artists-in-residence programs in Oregon and nationally; brings curators and arts writers from outside the region to Oregon for studio visits and community dialogue; commissions arts writing and publication; supports exhibitions, catalogues and other forms of documentation for Oregon artists; and awards grants to enhance exhibition spaces.

The Foundation is pleased to partner with the Oregon Arts Commission, University of Oregon, Pacific Northwest College of Art (PNCA), Portland State University, Reed College, Portland Institute for Contemporary Art (PICA), Creative Capital, Native Arts and Cultures Foundation, United States Artists, and the artists and visual arts organizations of our state.

The Ford Family Foundation was established in 1957 by Kenneth W. and Hallie E. Ford. Its mission is "successful citizens and vital rural communities" in Oregon and Siskiyou County, California. The Foundation is located in Roseburg, Oregon, with a Scholarship office in Eugene. For more information about the Foundation and its Visual Arts Program, visit [www.tfff.org](http://www.tfff.org).



## VISUAL ARTS PROGRAM

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*Untitled [Security Lights], Satellite [Fort  
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*The Names-state II, part 1 of 4*: Courtesy the  
artist and San Francisco Arts Commission  
Galleries, San Francisco, CA

*Tyranny stops life.*: Courtesy the artist and  
Ditch Projects, Springfield, OR

*Study for Weaving*: Courtesy the artist

*#28, Topkapi, Units of Movable Earth*:  
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