

Souvenirs from Limbo

A fistful of sand

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Theory 3: Syntese

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2022-2023

Introduction

Different aspects of natural phenomena have always been interesting to me, including changes in forms and types of materials. Such as transforming igneous rocks in a volcano or shaping new valleys with flash floods. Also, on a geological scale, moving continents due to plate tectonics, volcano, and earthquake. Even the destructive dance of a tornado from a poetic vision. But the effects of these powerful natural phenomena on the earth and in our life, as small species of life on this planet, have been more interesting for me. Sometimes these forces have been very destructive and terrific, which in some cultures is known as tribulation and punishment of gods. Still, the effects that these phenomena have on a human being from a psychological view need more thinking. For example, people from different cultural and geographical regions may react differently when they see a volcano, such as fear, excitement, pride, and happiness.

When we talk about the cultural and geographical region and their effect on our understanding of natural phenomena, we often find out that people don't know how these natural disasters form and what physics principles are behind them. The main part of our understanding is related to the connection between our inner and outer worlds, which is understandable for us from their signs and tokens. For example, hearing the noise of running water for thirsty people in a desert could be a massage thirst quencher or a psychological effect of darkness resulting from a solar eclipse which makes it scary for some people and considered a punishment from God in the ancient era or the eruption of a volcano that Australian aboriginal people regarded as the devil's voice hidden in it.

Apart from physics laws, superstition, and fairytales, something that makes them unique are their presence in people's daily life in a specific region which causes people to talk about their source and even think about how to harness their power for a particular purpose. Being exposed to these phenomena for a long time and waiting for them to happen prepares their mind to make a story for interpretation into a known experience. Based on my understanding, the more formidable the event was, the people's knowledge would be far from reality and closer to superstition.

Another aspect of the interpretation of natural phenomena by a human is probably repeating them on a different scale. Apparently, everything in this world is a frequent repetition of forms and events on different scales. To understand this reality, just enough to compare the connection of different neurons in our brains with the galaxy clusters in the universe or a strange similarity between our eyes' pupils and planetary nebulas.

Mevlana (Rumi) (1207-1273) expresses this fact in a beautiful poem:

You are not a drop in the ocean; you are the entire ocean in a drop.

The dynamic nature of natural phenomena and the metamorphosis of a landscape by them and, as a consequence changing the earth's surface after millions of years is a resemblance of changes in people's psychological and personality characteristics during their lifetime. For example, cracking the earth's crust due to an earthquake or forming an island by a volcano is evidence of the earth's dynamic nature. Something that frequently happens in everyone during personality development. Some parts of these changes result from a

connection with the external environment that may cause transformation or transmutation of intrinsic personality. However, these two are inseparable from each other or completely connected.

Sometimes reason and goal of a phenomenon are obscured, but there is no doubt of its dynamic relationship with a chain of other related phenomena. I have used a process in most of my designs and made collages from different waste materials and secondhand parts. Parts that can carry memories in the shape of scratches, stains, dents, bumps, and even smells and sounds. In some way, it is an ad-hoc or dynamic mechanism from mixing various hand-made forms. Assemble other pieces together and involve the user in the process of becoming not to the final product made for a specific purpose.

I just got to know Jean Tinguely, Swiss sculptor, and I found him inspiring. He is best known for his kinetic art sculptural machines that extended the Dada tradition into the later part of the 20th century. As he believed that humanity's reliance on technology was absurd, he just had to make artwork that revolted against that.



Jean Tinguely, 'méta-matic no. 10, 1959. collection stedelijk museum Amsterdam, c/o pictoright amsterdam, 2016

From my point of view, changing the form and perception of something we have encountered at the first stage challenges our understanding of being right or wrong. In fact, the main goal of this process hasn't been defined. The only important thing is the event and ongoing process, which is some kind of self-dadaism in satirizing modern products. That is,

using scraps from modern life products that each one of them is a reminder of an action or reaction in a product that ends up with a new goal.

The fist

Products I am trying to build (which I call improducts), challenge, and even sometimes satirize the applicability of a product. For a user, they maybe look like the movement of some connected parts. I combined these parts together and trans-mutated their applicability. Products that have been made to make a point of hesitation in the pace of modern lifestyle. It looks like the user is experiencing a ceremony with familiar stuff but performing with the traditions of people from different cultures and countries. This contradiction between ordinary things and unpredictable and obscure movements puts the user in a situation to interpret these products in another language. (Improduct 1: Saghi, Improduct 2: Chemli)



Improduct 1: Saghi



Improduct 2: Chemli

Being unrepairable is one of the criticisms of these ad-hoc mechanisms because everything relies on using prefabricated and thrown-away parts and pieces. Therefore, finding a part that complements this process is sometimes complicated and even impossible. For this reason, as I explained in BB2, after arriving in Norway, I was impressed by the close connection between people and nature. I tried to build a repairable cycle by mixing nature into this mechanism. In other words, I used nature to heal the system. Like what Jamie North Australian sculptor, is trying to do in his works of art. pieces that he describes as the intersection of the natural and the human-made. In his cast concrete sculptures, native Australian plant species are employed to seek out natural growth lines and explore the landscape of the work. In time, the selected plants become entangled with the inorganic concrete, creating a continuously evolving and living sculptural form.



Jamie North, Solo exhibition with Informality at Pi Artworks, London. 11th - 17th November

I used this principle for building my first project of this type in the studio 2 project. I made a table as a platform for negotiation between insects and humans. I made it from some human-made architectural elements such as case stairs and arks in mixing with rotten tree trunks in their natural shape decaying due to damage by insects, microorganisms, and fungus. Pieces of wood that keep an ecosystem in themselves create a table that is transforming due to insects and microorganisms. This transformation is a part of the table's identity, even if it collapses. Decaying will transmute and also transform the table in a self-distraction process.



Studio 2: Table (encountering the others)

In the table project, I included nature as a part of the table or its identity that connect all pieces together. A connection that is gradually collapsing and transforming the table concept in the not-so-distant future. Studio 3 started with a specific definition for me: "research and experience of encountering natural phenomena and their reflection in materials and form of furniture products." In this project, I went beyond looking at the nature present in a product as a material. I introduce it as the dominant force in the system or interaction and the effect of different phenomena on each other and us as small living species on earth.



Although everything started with testing different materials such as wood, Moss, carpet, metal, and so on, something that I was looking for in the testing process was the interaction of different materials together or their transformation process. Somehow, I tried to make a replica of the phenomenon on a small scale. For example, something more interesting for me in the molding and metal casting process was not the final product but the molding process and working with sand.

My search for finding suitable materials at the early stage of my project coincided with starting a big protest in my country, and they upraised for their basic rights. That protest has changed into a new revolution which is embedded in me with its motto from the early start days. Consequently, it affected my project, and I decided to dedicate my time and project to the revolution that my people started. Therefore, I prefer to work on protest art instead of designing furniture.

what is protest art? "The term *protest* is often applied to social movements, even though it is a much-misunderstood term. Its Latin root, *protestare*, suggests an etymological connection to publicness and witness. To engage in protest is to offer public witness. Protest occurs in many forms. But when protesting, or witnessing,

becomes sustained as a strategic set of actions, you have a social movement. Common usage often stresses the oppositional side of the protest, the protesting *against*. But protest movements, as the prefix *pro*-suggests, are also always *for* something: they are always proposing and putting forth positive alternatives. “ (T. V. REED 2019)

It has been taken as truth for decades now that art is a form of expression. Art has a powerful capacity to illustrate narratives and perspectives, sometimes open to interpretation and sometimes more direct and explicit in delivery. Due to the expressive nature of art, artists are often also activists, devoting their artistic output to a cause near and dear to their hearts. From fighting for AIDS awareness to protesting government censorship, artists have been at the forefront of activist movements throughout time. Due to the highly visible nature of their output, not to mention the powerful cogency of their communications, they are often influential voices within their sphere.

“what each particular art form can offer for social change efforts. If we examine social movements as *subcultures* or *countercultures* to dominant cultures in the country. Movements are much more than the sum of quantifiable elements. Movements are deeply transformative experiences for those who take part in the and less directly transformative for those who are later shaped by the ideas, feelings, styles, and behaviors they send out into the wider society. artworks that are shared by movement participants in ways that help to create new kinds of social relationships.” (T. V. REED 2019)

“*Protest art* is the creative works produced by activists and social movements. It is a traditional means of communication utilized by a cross-section of collectives and the state to inform and persuade citizens. Protest art helps arouse base emotions in their audiences and, in return, may increase the climate of tension and create new opportunities to dissent. Since art, unlike other forms of dissent, take few financial resources, less financially able groups and parties can rely more on performance art and street art as an affordable tactic.



This category of art acts as an important tool to form social consciousness, create networks, operate accessibly, and be cost-effective. Social movements produce such works as signs, banners, posters, and other printed materials used to convey a particular cause or message. Often, such art is used as part of demonstrations or acts of civil disobedience. These works tend to be ephemeral, characterized by their portability and disposability, and are frequently not authored or owned by any one person. The various peace symbols and the raised fist are two examples that highlight the democratic ownership of these signs.

Protest art also includes performance, site-specific installations, graffiti, and street art and crosses the boundaries of Visual arts genres, media, and disciplines. While some protest art is associated with trained and professional artists, extensive knowledge of art is not required to take part in protest art. Protest artists frequently bypass the art-world institutions and commercial gallery system in an attempt to reach a wider audience. Furthermore, protest art is not limited to one region or country but is rather a method that is used around the world.” (Wikipedia: protest art)

Sand

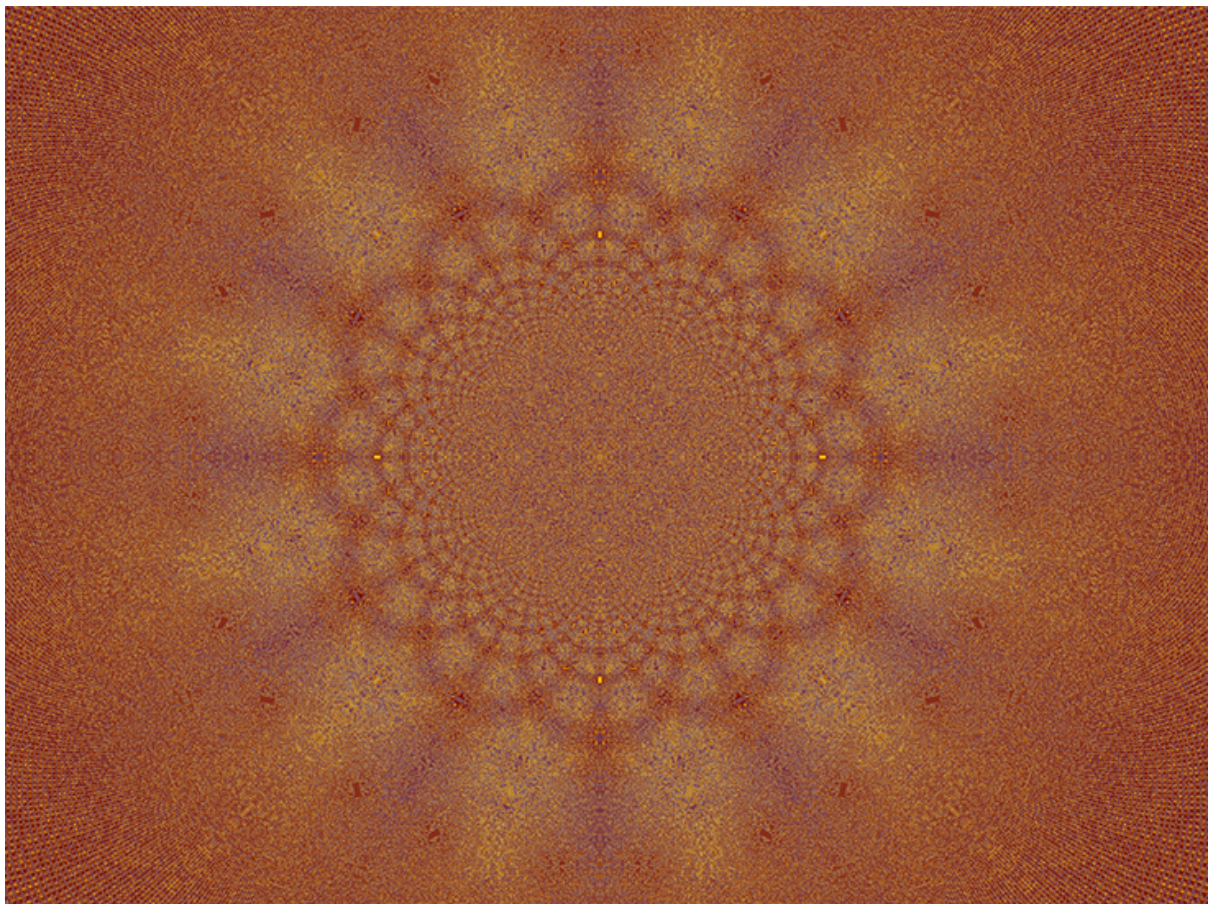
As I mentioned before, the studio 3 project started with testing materials. After testing and working with some substances and going through different processes. I decided to use *sand* as the main material in my project to show the mass movement of my people in the revolution in the best possible way. According to the *Sandpile theory*, the movement of sand is unpredictable, which can be translated to the unpredictable people’s movement in a revolution.

The abelian sandpile is a mathematical model introduced by Bak, Tang, and Wiesenfeld in 1987. The model describes the evolution of an idealized sandpile under random dropping addition of grains of sand. The abelian sandpile was the first model which demonstrated the concept of self-organized criticality (SOC), the property of certain dissipative systems driven by fluctuating forces to automatically converge into critical configurations which eventually become unstable and relax in processes referred to as avalanches, characterized by scale-free spatiotemporal correlations.

Even though more than 30 y passed since its initial introduction, the sandpile model remains an active field of research. Despite being the first and archetypical model to study SOC, this continued interest of the scientific community can be explained by the various intriguing mathematical properties of the abelian sandpile, several of which are explained below. The sandpile model is a cellular automaton defined on a rectangular domain of the standard square lattice. Each vertex of the domain carries a nonnegative number of particles (“grains of sand”), referred to as the configuration of the sandpile. Starting from some initial configuration, particles are slowly dropped onto vertices chosen at random.

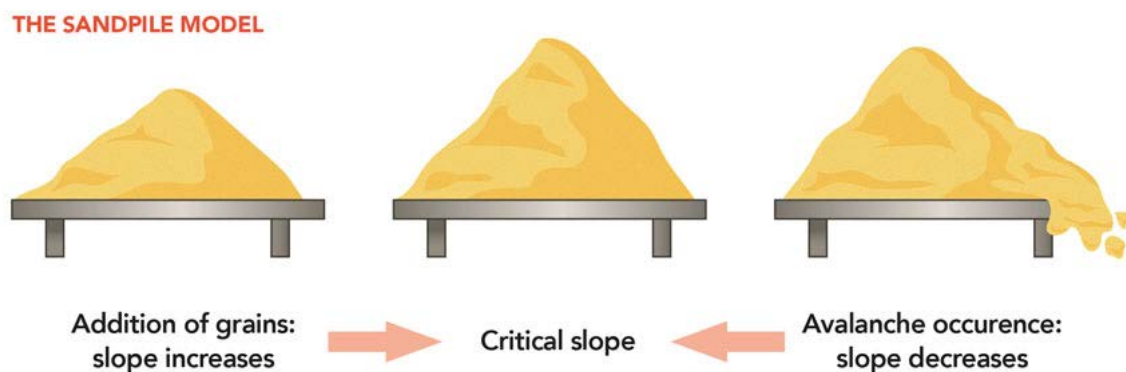
When during this process, the number of particles of any vertex exceeds three, this vertex becomes unstable and “topples,” decreasing the number of its particles by four and increasing the number of particles of each of its direct neighbors by one. Thus, the toppling

of vertices in the interior of the domain conserves the total number of particles in the sandpile, whereas the toppling of vertices at the sides and the corner of the domain decreases the total number by one and two, respectively. The redistribution of particles due to the toppling of a vertex can render other vertices unstable, resulting in subsequent topplings in a process referred to as an "avalanche." Due to the loss of particles at the boundaries of the domain, this process eventually terminates, and the "relaxed" sandpile reaches a stable configuration that is independent of the order of topplings. The distribution of avalanche sizes—the total number of topplings after random articles drop—follows a power law and is thus scale invariant. However, the critical exponent for this power law is yet unknown. Soon after the introduction of the sandpile model, the set of stable configurations can be divided into two classes, recurrent and transient ones. Thereby, a stable configuration is recurrent if it appears infinitely often in the Markov process described above, where the probability of dropping a particle on any given vertex is nonzero. Transient configurations, in contrast, appear finitely often in these the same process. Equivalently, recurrent configurations can be defined as those stable configurations which can be reached from another configuration by dropping particles and relaxing the sandpile. Since it is always possible to drop particles onto every vertex of a given configuration, the "minimally stable configuration," where each vertex carries exactly three particles, is necessarily recurrent. It follows that a given configuration is recurrent if and only if it can be reachable from the minimally stable configuration. The importance of the distinction between recurrent and transient configurations stems from the fact that the set of all recurrent configurations forms an abelian group, known as the sandpile group. The group operation thereby corresponds to the vertex-wise addition of particles and the subsequent relaxation of the sandpile. (Jordan 2021: overview)



Patterns in the sand: A view of the center of a billion-grain sandpile. Wes Pegden

In simple terms, consider a pile of sand on a small table. Dropping an additional grain on the pile may set off avalanches that slide down the pile's slopes. The outcome of the avalanche dynamics then depends on the steepness of the slopes. Either all the sand will come to rest somewhere on the table, or avalanches will continue until some grains fall off the table's edge. In the former case, we have added one grain to the pile, so on average, the steepness of slopes has increased. In the latter case, we have removed some grains from the pile, so on average, the steepness of slopes has decreased. In the long run, the slopes evolve to a critical state where a single grain of sand that is dropped is likely to just settle on the pile but also has a non-negligible probability of triggering a massive avalanche. This experiment suggests that the critical state is very sensitive to stimuli because a small (internal or external) variation can cause a large effect.



In fact, in my prototypes, each sand particle is a symbol of a human being involved in the revolution, and by gathering all sand particles, the mass movement of people in the revolution could be reconstructed.

The sand particles also have some special specifications, such as:

- Uncontrollable from a material physics perspective
- Unpredictable in the case of exposure to other materials and even with itself.
- Uniqueness of every single particle, despite the similarity in shape and form when you got a fistful of sand, is also quite unique on a microscopic scale.

The physical specifications of sand particles weren't the only features that encouraged me to use them. The experience I tried to achieve while I was working with sand was an immersive experience that encouraged observers to interact with the final products.

Maybe even watching the role of one single particle of sand in creating the whole transformation process and making the mass movement of sand particles in a sand dune encourage observers to think about how their actions like a sand particle could be effective in creating big changes in a system. I decided to use sand as the main material of the project, but it didn't reduce the hardship of the working process, and working with it was harder than I expected. For example, creating a concept using sand and putting them

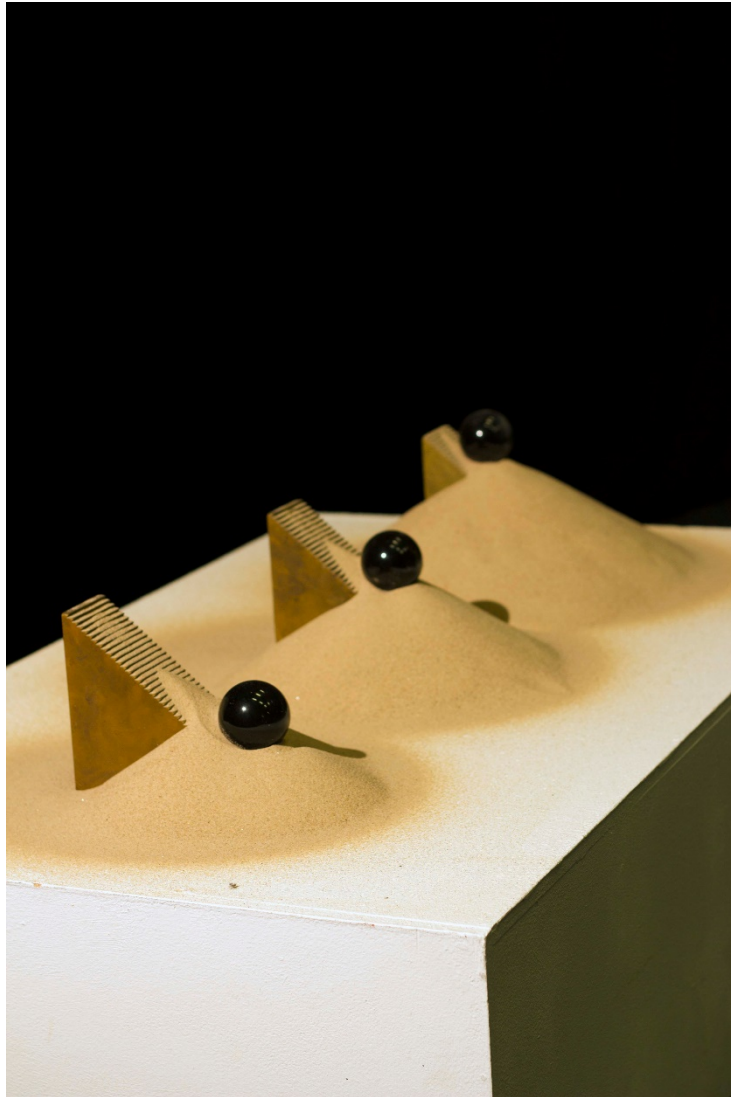
together in a meaningful frame or controlling the size and shape of the sand dune to prevent them from collapsing too early, or controlling them to spread evenly on a surface, etc., all have been challenges for me as an artist who get used to working with connectable pieces and materials in a specific shape and form.

This time I should combine these connectable components with new uncontrollable and unharnessable ones to challenge all composition rules by using gravity force. In other words, gravity is supposed to act as another dynamic material in the prototypes. At first, when I started to use sand in a new project, my work with sand looked like kids playing with sand in kindergarten. This process entered the more comprehensive and more consistent stages, such as making shapes and patterns, testing the effect of vibration, and falling particles, combining sand with different colors, and studying the audio-visual impressions of all these combinations on myself as an artist at the first stage and as an observer at the next level. The important event in this process is changing my position from an artist to an observer.

As in different stages of this process, nothing was repeated twice. Created patterns in sand dunes were different in detail even though their overall shape looked similar. Therefore, nothing happened twice, and every time, my role as a designer changed to an observer who was a witness to a specific pattern. It wasn't clear when and at what point this pattern started to collapse. The waiting time for transformation was a common feature between me as an artist and as an observer.

How to use and connect different shapes and forms as protest art was a big challenge for me because people from different cultures could have a different understanding of the project that questions the main goal of the project. For example, people may have different interpretations and meanings of a sand dune. In order to prevent different interpretations, I tried to start everything with keywords that were forming in Iranian society. Keywords that could give hope, such as unity and solidarity, hope, supremacy, pride, cooperation, unison... or unpleasant and destructive keywords, such as loss, sadness, pressure, mourning, and suppression. In the next stage, continue to build prototypes.

Since all these keywords are related to the conflict between good and evil, I decided to use black and white sand to represent different individual characteristics within each person. In this way, as I described earlier, I tried to search and two opposite extremities, darkness and evil on one side and light and goodness on the other side. Translating these keywords and symbols and using them to build artwork was challenging for me. It was a two-way path between my activities in social media and as a protestor who has responsibility for making people aware of the situation on one side and as an artist to translate these real-life activities into a common and academically understandable audience on the other side. To translate these meanings and values into tangible prototypes. For example, to present keywords like equality or even qualification, I used sand grains as an elevator to transfer a black ball to the top of three case stairs. The more sand was used caused; the more ball directed to the higher level of stairs. (*Prototype 1-6*)

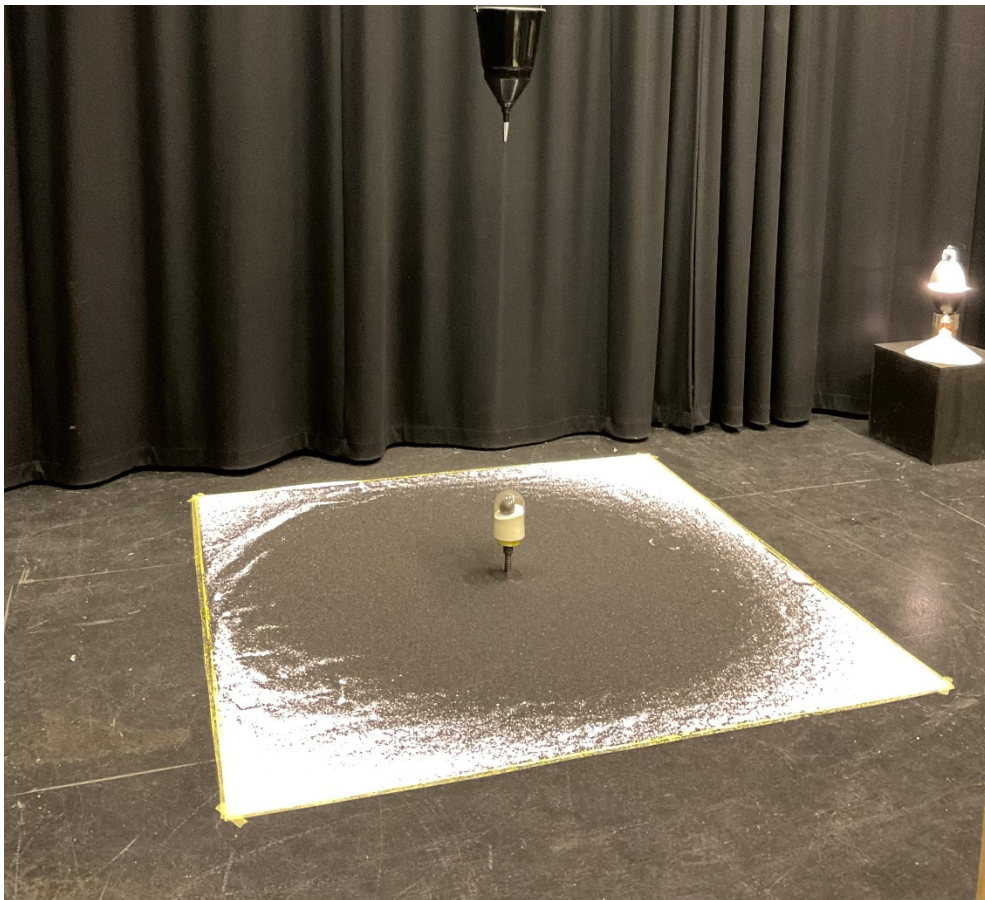


Studio 3: Prototype 1-6

Sometimes in the process of making, at some point, I asked myself if the keywords or even the final prototype based on that is too simple and kind of stereotype between artists throughout the entire history of art. But in the process, I realized that what makes the difference between them is their manifestation of materials and handcrafting techniques that make them unique in their expression.

In another prototype, the keyword "hope" is supposed to be shown in the form of material. In this case, due to the various interpretations of this word due to the cultural, political, and geographical boundaries, the prototype should show the real feeling of hope which is of sadness, loss, and desperation among Iranian people due to mourning and the loss of loved ones. To make an immersive experience or at least something close to that, I tried to make sound effects, light effects, and also graphic and visual patterns with sand. For instance, wearing black clothes is a part of mourning and funeral ceremonies among Iranian people, this feeling should be manifested in the sand as the base material. Therefore, I used black sand for this purpose. Each particle of black sand is a symbol of a hopeful, furious,

mournful Iranian and, at the same time, hopeful for the future. The movement of these sand particles should end with a specific goal to visualize the hope and the sorrowful atmosphere in Iranian society. To make sound effects, I used white cardboard while sand particles dropped on it. As a result, it creates patterns of black sand particles on the white surface and gradually covers it. Those patterns and the sound of particles while dropping on this surface induce an immersive experience for the observer. Up to this stage, the project induced the feeling of sadness and desperation very well, but I was looking for a way to convey the feeling of hope in a situation of procrustean hopelessness. Therefore, I used a small black ball floating in a glass dome full of white sand. Black sand particles hit on this glass dome before dropping on the white cardboard surface. This process conveys the meaning in mind that black sand particles are trying to break the glass dome and release the black ball. Although it looks impossible from a physics law perspective, over time, it may be possible after several years of the continuous dropping of sand particles on the top of the glass dome. Some dictatorship governments collapse after several years or even decades of suppression. This part I have taken from an allegory in Persian literature, which says: that the devil (Ghoul) keeps its soul in a fragile glass bottle, and the hero (Pahlavan) must break the glass to kill it. That refers to the stupidity of the devil. (*Prototype 2_6*)



Studio 3: Prototype 2_6

Conclusion

Based on my experiences last year, despite the cultural differences, audiences interact better with works of art that challenge simpler and more basic keywords and concepts. Perhaps the reason is the encounter with the new methods or languages that artists used to communicate their concerns and words, which complicates the matter for the audience. Interpreting hidden signs in a new language is a huge challenge, and therefore simpler ideas are better transferable.

Nature knows all languages and speaks in the simplest way, even in its most angry state, the message is simple. Although the final scene of the phenomena is short and punchy, the story behind them is complex and sometimes undiscovered. The contrast between complexity and simplicity, oppressive and soothing, silence and commotion, death and life has brought me closer to knowing more about nature, where the umbilical cord of all of us is connected. The closer we get to our roots, the more we see similarities.

Although the overall feedback from viewers for the exhibition was good, all my effort to make cultural awareness was limited to a specific number of people who attended the gallery's exhibitions but not the public. If I had the intention to broaden this effect to a wider context of the public sector, could it be enough to be to exhibit my works in a few galleries for a specific group of people?

If it is supposed to visualize the hardship of having a normal life and the deprivation of basic human rights for ordinary people in a society, could an isolated gallery environment be a good space and suitable media for this purpose?

After asking questions like that and looking at feedback from viewers, I decided to develop and improve this theme in my protest artworks to be placed in public interior spaces, such as hotel lobbies, lounges, airports, or urban spaces like squares and parks.

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