

An Ice Book Floats Down the Karun River

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Published in *Love and Pomegranates: Artists and Wayfarers on Iran*; Meghan Nuttall Sayers, Ed.; Nortia Press; 2013.

Raheleh (Minoosh) Zomorrodinia, a photographer and ecological artist from Tehran came to the United States to study in San Francisco. When she first arrived in 2010, she had an exhibition of photographs in Durango, Colorado, and after the opening of her show Minoosh came to New Mexico to stay for ten days with my husband and me. We had such a fun time enjoying art galleries in Santa Fe, attending a sacred Native American dance at the Pueblo of Taos, and photographing the Rio Grande on cold winter afternoons. Several days before she left, I threw a party for her with twenty women friends and tasty Iranian food during which time Minoosh shared images of the work she does with an environmental group in Iran, the Persian New Art Group.

Minoosh describes the growing environmental art movement in Iran in an essay for the Women Environmental Art Directory, an on-line journal published in California. “Sometimes economic, political, social and religious issues are reflected in the works of these environmental artists, however they focus mostly on urgent environmental issues. Because of the vast physical geographic variations and cultural differences in all of Iran, this movement presents a rich diverse body of work. Many works are ephemeral and are constructed (in part or all) with natural materials such as soil, stones, water, leaves, moss, and/or branches. These works are designed for a particular place (site-specific) and frequently involve collaborations between artists and others, such as community groups or university students. Because final public presentation of these temporal installations is through documentation—photography or video art—collaboration with a photographer is necessary. Also the majority of presentations are on websites and web blogs in order to avoid the expense of exhibitions and to reach large audiences.”

The International Center for Environmental Art in Polour, Iran, founded by sculptor Dr. Ahmad Nadalian, hosts environmental festivals several times a year. Sometimes the festivals are linked with the Persian Gulf Art Centre, established in March 2009, on Hormoz Island in the Persian Gulf. In January 2010 invited artists who participated in the 25th Festival of Environmental Art in Iran stayed in this center and used colored earth and natural pigments to adorn the buildings.

Minoosh e-mailed images of my environmental art work to her artist friends within the Persian New Art Group, so that we could collaborate via the internet on an artwork during the 30th Environmental Art Festival in Shoushtar during late 2010. The artists decided that they wanted to create one of my ice books from the series entitled *Ice Receding/Books Reseeding*, which are hand-carved ice books embedded with local native riparian seeds. This project emphasizes the necessity of communal effort and scientific knowledge to deal with the complex issues of climate disruption and focus on important efforts to restore watersheds. Gathered river water is frozen, carved into the sculptural form of an open or closed book, and placed back into the creek. The closed books have seed patterns on the covers. Embedded in rows in the ice of the open books is an “ecological language” or riparian “text” consisting of local native seeds, which are released as the ice melts into the current. When the plants regenerate and grow along the river they will help sequester carbon, hold the banks in place, and provide shelter.

In Iran, after Tarhere Goodarzy molded and carved an ice book based on the video documentary and photographs sent to them, Isfahan artist Nooshin Naficy arranged the seeds, which she had found growing along the riverbank. After placing the book into the Karun River in Shoushtar, Shahmaz Zarkesh took exquisite photographs. In the images one can see the details of the local seeds forming a magical text as the ice book slowly floats out beyond the riparian plants of the river bank into the current with the tall emerald grasses and the nearby hills reflected in the water.

Nooshin e-mailed me: “I’m really grateful that I could participate doing your work in Iran. It was a very joyful process and I appreciate it and the concept behind it.”

Someday soon, I hope to join this great group of artists in Iran and work collaboratively with them in person.