



AILEEN BAHMANIPOUR
IT IS MEANT TO BE READ

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ODD Gallery

Crafting the archive catches one's attention in Aileen Bahmanipour's exhibition *It Is Meant to be Read*. Her creative process is entangled with concepts of accessibility, traceability, poetical anarchy, and explorations of positionality. Her approach introduces us to the function of the archive as a counter-archive. She animates reading, shredding, rewriting, and archiving the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran as the aim of 'study' not as a learning process, but as an interruption in the speed of censorship that comes from the text. Bahmanipour's uncanny exploration and activist method resists the legitimacy of historicism.

Aileen's technique of making brings to mind Tim Ingold's argument that thinking does not end when making begins, thinking and making co-exist inside a process of growth.¹ This thinking and making process reveals itself in *It Is Meant to be Read* with the new relationship it begins with the body of the text and the body of the writer, as well as the body of the text with the bodies of the audience. Aileen rewrites the text of the constitution not intending to preserve it, but to 'study' it, which itself is considered activism. 'Study' is an action that questions the certainty of the text and opens up writing anew.

It Is Meant to Be Read confronts us with many papers installed on the wall and inside an archive cabinet. In some, the shredded text is trapped inside the paper. In others, the artist's trace of typing attracts our attention. By shredding, mixing, and embedding pieces of text inside the paper, she has written a new text that is dissimilar to the original. This new text confronts us with questions about how technique and form affect our thoughts. This indicates the departure of the text from a disciplined structural system to writing with a poetic arrangement that spells out an "expressive depth and resonance equivalent to what melody and rhythm lend to the words".² Also, fingerprinting as writing is another anarchical act in the text inscribed through gestural movements of the hand on the keyboard. In fact, her embodied act of writing generates a new understanding of writing beyond its traditional frameworks and free from compliance.

1. Ingold, Tim (2013) *Making. Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*, Routledge, Oxfordshire, England, UK.

2. Ingold, Tim (2011) *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Routledge; 1st edition, p.178.

The other question that this project raises is how, through the counter-archive, might we activate current traces toward future events. Aileen knows that her body is an archive of affect that accumulates and registers stories from the past as well as recompiles them in the present. Counter-archive for her is the process of creating a new archive to make the future. Her counter-archival method challenges the passage from force to form through the technique of disorganization, and allows us to be the evidence for the interruption in the speed of its legitimation. Aileen registers a mode of devaluation that resists what shapes our viewing practices and affects our image and future making. Thereby, the disintegration of the archive is a method of emancipation that emphasizes uncertainty and constantly changing position and invites us to think about what comes next.

- Elham Puriya Mehr, 2023

AILEEN BAHMANIPOUR is an Iranian-Canadian visual artist. She is currently living and working on the unceded territories of the xwməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səíl̓wətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) peoples, known as Vancouver, and in Bella Coola Valley, the traditional territory of Nuxalk people. She has received her BFA in Painting from the Tehran University of Art and her MFA in Visual arts from the University of British Columbia in Vancouver. She is currently a member of the Continuing Studies faculty at the Emily Carr University of Art and Design.

Bahmanipour has exhibited her works internationally as well as in Canada, including her solo and group exhibitions at the GlogauAIR (Berlin), Banff Centre for the Arts, Alternator Centre for the Contemporary Arts (Kelowna), Vancouver's grunt gallery, Two Rivers Gallery (Prince George), and Aaran Art gallery (Tehran).

She is the recipient of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council grant in 2017, the Gail and Stephen A. Jarislowsky Artist Fund in 2019, the Early Career Development grant from BC Arts Council in 2019, the Linda and Richard Singleton Endowment Fund in 2022, the Canada Council for the Arts and BC Arts Council's grants in 2021 and 2022.

ELHAM PURIYA MEHR (Iran/Canada) is an independent curator and lecturer based in Vancouver on the territories of the xwm kw ý m (Musqueam), skwxwu7mesh (Squamish) and s̓lilw ta (Tseil-Waututh) First Nations. She received her BA and MA from Tehran University of Art, her Ph.D. in Art Research from Alzahra University in Tehran, and now is a postdoc research fellow at Advanced Practice in Goldsmiths, University of London. Her research focuses on knowledge production in social contexts, curation of social spaces, and researching through curatorial as a methodology of learning.

Exhibition Statement

I'm interested in the agency of a material and the ways in which it can take over the autography of a person or group of people. I investigate manuals as transparent utopian sources of information that afford the promise of showing us how systems work. I question if a Constitutional Law could be a manual with similar promises.

IT IS MEANT TO BE READ is an interactive drawing and sculptural installation that includes a series of handmade papers from deconstruction and reconstruction of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and contemplates issues of regulation and information access. It digests two categories of source material and teases out the formation of information in the act of reading, writing, and archiving.

The installation is a self-destructive archive system: a "transparent" filing cabinet and collection of diagrammatic imagery which was found online and selected for its tendency to bypass internet filters put in place by the Government of Iran. By painstakingly removing the negative spaces in these printed images and stacking them in transparent folders, I conflate figure and ground, creating new visual forms. The viewer is invited to flip through the collection gathered inside a modified filing cabinet that has been made see-through by the removal of its exterior panels. From the lower drawer of the cabinet, plastic tubing administers a slow drip of anti-archival, acidic ink that will, over time, rust on the acetate and mar parts of its imagery.

Exploring the materiality of the paper and paper-making process as a matrix and ground that embraces the image/figure/information, the series of handmade papers studies an English translation of The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In one approach, I shredded the Constitution and reassembled it with twisted knotted lines, attempted to create a new imagined constitution, a possibility for a concrete poetry, a possible new meaning or interpretation. A more cryptic series are 55 pages that record the fingertip movements that were made in still-wet fibers of handmade paper pulp, with each imprint attributed to my bodily gesture and memory as I typed the Constitution into the keypad of my underlying tablet computer.

IT IS MEANT TO BE READ invites active interpretation of reading manuals (be it a constitution of a country or an exploded view of a machine) with their promise of transparency and sharing knowledge about how a system works from inside, despite the opacity of its facade.

-Aileen Bahmanipour, 2023

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