

“Sima Shahriar: I am a bridge”

2018. Mixed media construction. 27" w x 27" h.

David Feinberg and Beth Andrews, with contributions from storyteller and artist, Sima Shahriar, artists, Kimchi Hoang, Michelle Englund, Michele Stahlmann, Paula Pergament, Sara Feinberg, video and students Kristin Anton, Olivia Novotny, and Miki Schumaker

Iran's revolution officially started with the return of Khomeini to Iran after 15 years of exile. Iran entered American media on November 4, 1979 with the taking of 52 Americans in 1979 as hostages for 444 days. Unofficially, the cultural and religious revolution had already started a deep divide in Iran starting in the late 1960's.

Every Friday my family and I would visit both my grandparents. Fridays are Sundays in Iran. My Dad's parents lived south of Tehran. Driving from our home down to my grandparents I would notice the change in culture, in particular when it came to women. In northern Tehran very few women wore headscarves or chadors, long pieces of cloth that covers the body. As we drove down, there would be more women with head coverings. By the time we reached my grandparents' home, most women wore a black chador a sign of deep conservative values and highly religious community. One particular Friday, driving through a square I noticed the stark difference between the women in black chadors walking all around that square where they lived, as opposed to the women actresses barely wearing anything on the two or three billboards of the cinemas that anchored the square. I must have been eight or nine. I remember thinking to myself, "Why such an imposition of western culture in a community of such conservative families?"

My piece started with this particular image, using the "gul" design as the very center of the square.

The main symbols that were used in my piece are elements that I observed as a young girl growing up in Tehran. Each one had a profound meaning for me. *Gul*: a design element in most Turkmen rugs. *Patterns*: as seen in mosaic work all over Iran. *See-o-Seh Pol* (the bridge with thirty-three spans): an iconic bridge in Isfahan, a masterpiece of engineering and design built in 1600's.

The symbols that have deep connection to the "West" and raised my awareness of the interconnectedness of powers were *Velveeta* and *BP*. Their meaning vastly different in Iran as opposed to in America.

The two abstract compositions at the top and bottom of the piece, in yellow and blue, were the result of an experimental session tapping into the subconscious. Very personal positive images that linked my memories to my home of origin.