



Clockwise from left: Ali Momeni and Robin Mandel, Smoke and Hot Air 2008; Mirza Kadyr Irevani, Portrait of sitting woman, 'Tempera', 1870; Sara Rahbar, Take me home 2013; Courtesy of the artists and the gallery

# A Vision WITHOUT BORDERS

Baku's non-profit art organisation YARAT was recently home to a group show devoted to examining frontiers in all forms. Ayesha Shehmir discovers the cultural and political messages behind the featured works

Last month, Baku-based non-profit organisation dedicated to contemporary art, YARAT, was home to recent and newly commissioned works by 16 renowned artists with the shared belief that no border is utterly durable. Entitled *Fragile Frontiers*, the group exhibition examined the dilemma of borders specifically within the Iranian context, recalling topics surrounding political identities and borders. The curators, Farah Piriye and Anna Fech, joined hands with Milan-based exhibition designers Md'A Agency, noting inspiration from The Caspian Sea, to create bespoke rooms dedicated to representing geopolitical, cultural, mental, social and physical borders.

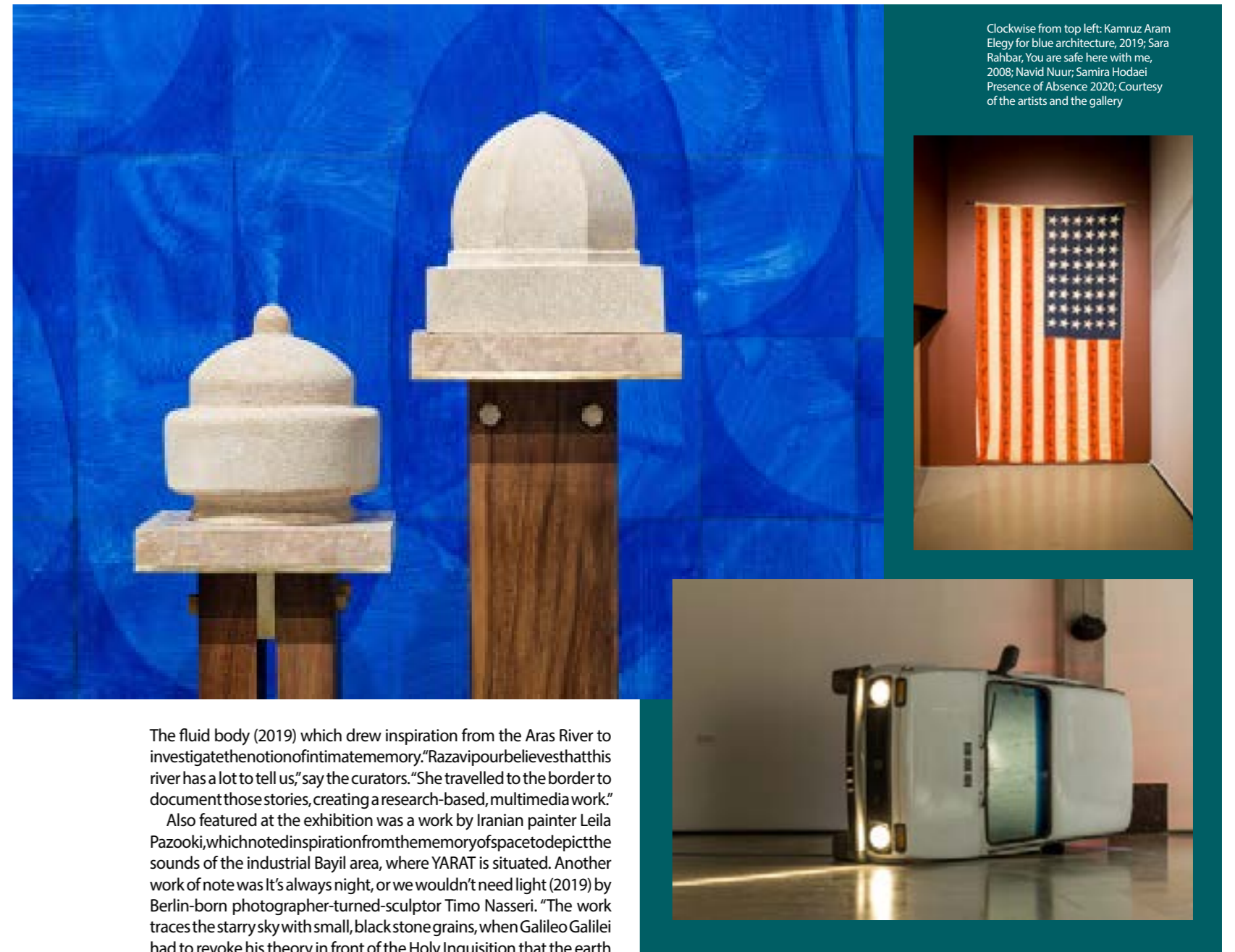
On the second floor there were no rooms or walls, indicative of a world without borders. Upon entrance was an installation entitled *The Stride* by artist Navid Nuur, leading visitors into "the mysterious realm of *Fragile Frontiers*," as curators Piriye and Fech describe. "There, each work – whether it's a real car resting on its side with its headlights on, or several islands of sand spread around the floor – explores the elements of travel unexpressed by borders such as memory, water, air, or time."

Seven artists were especially commissioned to create new works for the exhibition, namely Navid Nuur, Timo Nasser, Jaleh Nesari, Neda Razavipour, Samira Hodaei, Kamrooz Aram and Leila Pazooki. "The show aims to evoke a complex system of lines and boundaries within an Iranian context, bringing forth history's transitory and mercurial nature," say Piriye and Fech. "We wanted to create a body of work that plays with invisible forms of demarcation and their dissolution to a sensual soundscape of alternating noise and silence. Some works have been selected for their strong sound qualities, whilst some muse silently about separations and border anxieties."

Also on view was a sound and video installation by Razavipour entitled



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE ARTISTS AND YARAT



Clockwise from top left: Kamruz Aram Elogy for blue architecture, 2019; Sara Rahbar, You are safe here with me, 2008; Navid Nuur; Samira Hodaei Presence of Absence 2020; Courtesy of the artists and the gallery

The fluid body (2019) which drew inspiration from the Aras River to investigate the notion of intimate memory. "Razavipour believes that this river has a lot to tell us," say the curators. "She travelled to the border to document those stories, creating a research-based, multimedia work."

Also featured at the exhibition was a work by Iranian painter Leila Pazooki, which noted inspiration from the memory of space to depict the sounds of the industrial Bayil area, where YARAT is situated. Another work of note was *It's always night, or we wouldn't need light* (2019) by Berlin-born photographer-turned-sculptor Timo Nasser. "The work traces the starry sky with small, black stone grains, when Galileo Galilei had to revoke his theory in front of the Holy Inquisition that the earth orbits the sun," say the curators. "The work is very subtle and fragile, but we did not put any fence around it, so that people would walk over the work and the shapes of the work were slowly disappear. His work is also a good example how borders are a question of perspective."

Iranian artist Samira Hodaei's *Presence of Absence* was another highlight, for which the artist collected gloves from Iranian and Azerbaijani oil workers. "The work not only revealed the invisible stories of these people, who made a significant contribution to the country's economic wealth, but also pointed out the complex strategy of cultural identification versus a coherent and static understanding of a nation," express Piriye and Fech.

The entire concept of the exhibition was inspired by American-Iranian historian Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet's essay entitled *Fragile Frontiers: The Diminishing Domains of Qajar Iran*, which explores the effect of border shifts on Iran. "She highlighted that modern borders, which may seem infallible due to international laws and treaties, in truth, remain susceptible to change and transgression," explain Piriye and Fech. "Besides the physical frontiers, she mentioned the metaphorical ones that serve to address the cultural boundaries within societies, which are sometimes even more difficult to allocate, as they are more complex and sometimes even paradox." ■ *Fragile Frontiers: Visions On Iran's In/visible Borders* was on view at YARAT Contemporary Art Centre, Baku, Azerbaijan from 22 November 2019 until 16 February 2020