

AN IRRESISTIBLE IMPULSE

How do we measure love? How do we visualise impulse?

Nasim Nasr has spent her life asking and answering.

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At the age of 25, in 2009, **Nasim Nasr** migrated to Australia from Iran with her two younger siblings to pursue her art practice, which explored themes of feminine identity, free from state interference. Nasr first settled in Newcastle, where she attended art school and was encouraged by her teacher **Ann Graham** to move to Adelaide to access more opportunities and support. There, mentored by the legendary **John Barbour**, Nasr began to reorient her practice to her new environment. Her first piece, the photo series *Liberation*, 2009, embodied an important thread in her work and life: the desire to break the control of convention and expectation. On visiting a nude beach with her new Australian friends, rather than partake of bodily abandon, ironically she felt compelled to don full chador. A photo from

Liberation is revisited in her upcoming show *Impulse* at MARS Gallery, Melbourne, which consolidates several bodies of work made over the last two years as the artist continues her exploration of the affective experience, and potential, of cultural difference.

In the video installation *Impulse*, 2023, an athletic white man wrestles with a swathe of black, then white, fabric, creating moments of formal beauty and intense sensation, the flowing cloth echoed in the earlier black and white image of the artist as she stands, covered, in a place where nakedness is welcome. This tension, and mutual indebtedness, between various dualities – organic/inorganic, black/white, male/female, hidden/revealed, East/West, 2D/3D – runs throughout Nasr's work.



Measure of Love, 2021-2023, for example, features black and white glass vessels which the artist commissioned from Canberra Glassworks in the form of oversized traditional 19th century Iranian tear jars, or ashkdan, swan-necked bottles used to collect the sorrows of women separated from their husbands by war. In one iteration, life-sized

ABOVE: Nasim Nasr, *33 Beads* 5, 2018. Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photorag Baryta, 100cm x 80cm.

OPPOSITE: Nasim Nasr, *Measure of Love (Ashkdan)* 5, 2023. Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photorag Baryta, 120 x 90cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND MARS GALLERY, MELBOURNE.

photographs figure the artist's black hair and pale limbs entwined with the objects' sinuous lines. In another, solely black vessels are assembled on a spotlight black plinth, the ambient darkness heightening the elegiac soundscape Nasr made in collaboration with French musician **Loane Coste**. In *Measure of Love* Nasr acknowledges the immeasurable grief of the pandemic and honours the countless tears shed for separation from loved ones.

The last work in *Impulse* strikes a very different tone. *Triumph*, 2023 is a video and suite of photographs of several pairs of hands of different races, ages and ethnicities performing the exacting rhythms of traditional Persian finger snapping or beshkan. The key here is attentive listening and responsiveness as the individual snaps ebb and flow between chaos and complex syncopation. "This is how I see the future," says Nasr, "all coming together in celebration."

In recent years, Nasr has cemented her place as a significant voice exploring cultural differences from a female perspective. Her work has been included in the prestigious Triennial of Asia (Asia Society, New York City, 2021-2022) and Paris' Fashion Film Festival (2018), and its public resonance recognised in the people's choice award for the Bowness photography Art Prize (2017). This new exhibition showcases the growing ambition of her practice. "Impulse," says Nasr, "is the spontaneous and unstoppable reaction, from my heart and soul, to different life events and crises. It is the visual evidence of how we deal with love, separation, freedom, control, conflict, overcoming and celebration."





ANDY DINAN

Director MARS Gallery, Melbourne

“We cannot turn away from important issues in the world – we may be tucked away in our safety here in Australia but our artists are the voice of what is being felt in the world and I want to be part of that discussion. If it turns my stomach, if it repels me and if it needs to be said and the media are not saying it then I want and demand my artists to say it. I don’t want safety I want MARS artists to take risks, be brave and be true to their voice in their work and that is what **Nasim Nasr** is – true to her work.

Nasim gets attention from all around the world and has shown throughout the world including Hong Kong, Paris, New York, each state of Australia and regionally. It would be remiss for me not to note that Nasim was shown Asia Society Museum in New York 2021-2022 as the first Australian Iranian Contemporary artists ever exhibited there.

Quite a few people are waiting for Nasim’s work and to see what she does with her first solo show with us so I do feel pressure for her but her voice is clear and the work is magic.

Prices are consistent with Nasim’s previous shows and our stockroom works.

Don’t be deceived by the quiet elegance of this artist, her roar is loud even when the video or image is quiet. A good collector in my experience collects from a place of understanding: once they learn about Nasim and her work I find they cannot step away.”



PROFESSOR NATALIE KING OAM

Curator and writer

“I first became aware of Nasim Nasr’s work in Adelaide when researching the 2014 TarraWarra Biennial: *Whisper in my Mask*, co-curated with **Djon Mundine**. We gravitated towards Nasr’s *Unveiling the Veil*, 2010 comprising close-up footage of her rubbing her eyes so she weeps and her mascara becomes progressively smudged.

Even though we exhibited this film some years ago, it seems as relevant as ever given the oppression of women in Iran and the

sorrow within her community.

Nasr, like her predecessor **Shirin Neshat**, deals with exile in a rapturous and haunting way. Her work is poetic yet political, personal and profound. She bravely explores gender, the chador and Persian poetry through performative gestures.

Given the more recent repression and violence towards women in Iran, it is more urgent than ever to build creative solidarities which Nasr does with her practice.”

OPPOSITE: Nasim Nasr, *Measure of Love (Ashkdan) 4*, 2023. Archival pigment print on Hahnemühle Photorag Baryta, 120 x 90cm.

ABOVE: Nasim Nasr, *Impulse*, 2023. Digital print, performer John Fabry.

COURTESY: THE ARTIST AND MARS GALLERY, MELBOURNE.

Nasim Nasr’s exhibition *Impulse* shows at MARS Gallery, Melbourne from 29 March to 22 April 2023.