

## IN THE GALLERIES



GREGORY R. STALEY PHOTOGRAPHY

## An electrifying spotlight on women resisting oppression in Iran

BY MARK JENKINS

Women are represented only by red hands and black hair in Kiana Honarmand's "A Shadow in the Depth of Light," an art installation that's also an act of protest. Inspired by the "Woman Life Freedom" movement in her native Iran, the California artist has filled VisArts's Gibbs Street Gallery with tokens of rage, resistance and resignation.

These reflect the aftermath of the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini while in the custody of Iran's morality police. She was arrested, reportedly, for not wearing her hijab in accordance with government standards; eyewitnesses say she was beaten severely, which likely caused her death.

The show consists of three elements. The opposition slogan "Woman Life Freedom," written in Farsi in green vinyl cutouts applied to the windows of the storefront gallery, casts cursive shadows into the space. Tracing the interior walls at floor level are hundreds of 3D-printed red hands, each bearing the name of an Iranian protester who's been imprisoned, tortured or killed; the hands are positioned on dabs of reflective Mylar that suggest small pools of water. On the walls above the sculptures are braids of synthetic hair, invoking the Iranian women who have cut their locks in solidarity with demonstrators.

Few if any visitors to this shrine will know what it's like to be a dissident in contemporary Iran. But Honarmand's artful use of shadows and reflections does make the installation immersive and involving. To enter "A Shadow in the Depth of Light" is to be transported to a chamber of phantasms, a place of and for all the women the Iranian regime has killed, jailed or simply compelled into darkness.

A different sort of ghostly presence haunts Olivia Tripp Morrow's "Ordinary Sanctuary," upstairs in VisArts's Common Ground Gallery. In 2020, the Northern Virginia artist had major back surgery, which she addressed in a 2021 multimedia exhibition. That show at the Arlington Arts Center (now the Museum of Contemporary Art Arlington) viscerally conjured both Morrow's spine and the operation on it.

While the previous work focused strongly on her body, Morrow is not quite there in this set of delicate paintings made with acrylic washes on gessoed paper. The unpopulated scenes depict quiet domestic interiors and such convalescent accessories as a walker, a massager and a back brace. Among the items without medical significance are plants, furniture and mirrors and windows in which little is reflected. Many of the objects appear to float, as if more capable of independent movement than the artist herself.

Morrow recuperated at her childhood home, so these pictures hint at memories of other events besides her recovery from surgery. Perhaps that's why the paintings are gentler than earlier works on related themes. "Ordinary Sanctuary" evokes vulnerability, but also solace.

**Kiana Honarmand: A Shadow in the Depth of Light** and **Olivia Tripp Morrow: Ordinary Sanctuary**  
Through Aug. 6 at VisArts, 155 Gibbs St., Rockville. visartscenter.org. 301-315-8200.

### Doing the Work

Pablo Picasso, Frank Stella and many more rub shoulders with five emerging artists in "Doing the Work," the latest collaboration between the



OLIVIA TRIPP MORROW



VIVIAN MARIE DOERING

**FROM TOP:** A view of "A Shadow in the Depth of Light," by Kiana Honarmand, an installation inspired by the "Woman Life Freedom" movement in her native Iran. "Ordinary Sanctuary" by Olivia Tripp Morrow. Both are at VisArts in Rockville. "Core Samples" by Ara Koh, at the Kreeger Museum.

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GALLERIES FROM E2

Kreeger Museum and Hamiltonian Artists. Pieces by the local gallery's 2021-23 fellows — four Washingtonians and a Baltimorean — infiltrate the museum's permanent collection, appearing throughout the building's exhibition spaces.

Largest and most imposing is Ara Koh's "Core Samples," which occupies an alcove at the bottom of the museum's main staircase. The installation features 13 earth-toned clay pillars that appear simultaneously architectural and geological. The richly textured upright forms are hollow, with nearly flat blades of clay inside. To curator Anisa Olufemi, this juxtaposition of flat and three-dimensional indicates "a sculptural approach to landscape painting."

Nearby are red and blue pencil drawings and toylike sculptures by Matthew Russo, whose work plays with elementary shapes and the unexpected textures produced by such materials as foam, resin and concrete. Amusingly, Russo's abstracted playthings are scattered on the floor, as if left there by a distracted child.

Upstairs is Kyrae Dawaun's wood, copper, limestone and concrete sculpture, which shares qualities of both Russo and Koh's work: It's a floor piece that contrasts diverse materials and combines geometric and organic forms, as if the result of a collaboration between human and nature.

The other two works, both in sets of three, are more personal. In videos, Cecilia Kim prepares traditional food of her Korean youth; most of the time, only her arms and hands are visible, but she occasionally steps from beyond the black curtain. Samera Paz offers still lifes that serve as pages from a visual autobiography: photographs of every diary she's kept, every beauty item she has and all her clothing. For Kim and Paz, it seems, the essential work is

constructing personal identity.

**Doing the Work** Through Aug. 5 at the Kreeger Museum, 2401 Foxhall Rd. NW. kreegermuseum.org. 202-337-3050.

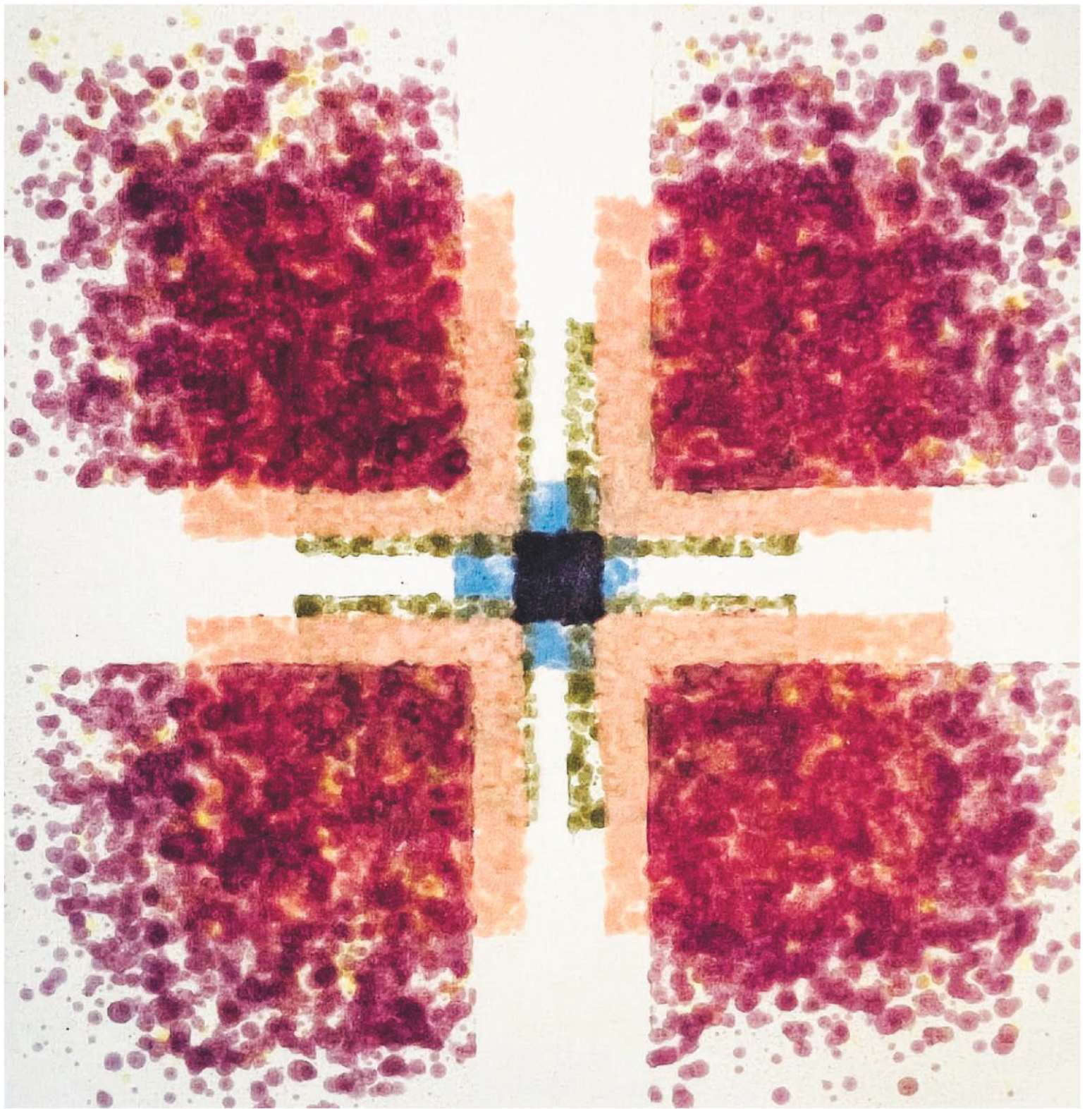
**Howard Mehring**

Connersmith's show of 1961-62 paintings by Washington colorist Howard Mehring (1931-1978) is titled "Radiant" after a painting that intriguingly combines the softly stippled colors of the artist's early style with the hard-edged, rectangular motifs of his later output. The picture is one of several surprising ones in the exhibition, which spotlights unexhibited pieces. Like earlier installments of the gallery's ongoing rediscovery of Mehring's short career, the exhibition includes paintings that had never been stretched for display.

"Radiant" is striking, yet not as surprising as "Untitled (Quatrefoil)," whose curved forms are nearly unprecedented in the artist's work. (There may be one other Mehring quatrefoil painting, but its whereabouts are unknown, says curator Jamie Smith.) The picture is center-focused and symmetrical, as is typical of these canvases. But it has rounded shapes in bold red and yellow, set off by an almost-neutral gray background, that pop loudly rather than undulate quietly.

"#27 (Black/Gray Cruciform)" is similar to "Radiant" in composition, yet significantly different in effect. It's the most open of these pictures, with a white void at its center and four arrays of gray and black L-shapes that are stacked to provide an illusion of depth. Where Mehring's all-over paintings appear physically impenetrable, this one seems to beckon the viewer to enter. It's an inviting path, and one that Mehring could have fruitfully traveled further.

**Howard Mehring: Radiant** Through Aug. 5 at Connersmith, 1013 O St. NW. connersmith.us.com. 202-588-8750.



HOWARD MEHRING/CONNERSMITH

"Radiant" by Washington colorist Howard Mehring is among the more surprising pieces in the exhibit at Connersmith in Washington.

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