



Window Space



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Arshia Salesi

How the Curve Fits Inside the Square

October 26 - January 5, 2019

Arshia Salesi's ongoing series, *How the Curve Fits Inside the Square*, uses abstracted Arabic letters to investigate painting's relationship to its three-dimensional surroundings: the perceived and tangible real world. In its fourth iteration, a text-image cooperation is used to explore the function of language in public space. Through the use of colour, the artist aims to challenge Orientalist views and provide new possibilities of understanding; according to Edward Said, "*Orientalism* is a perspective that emphasizes, exaggerates and distorts differences between Eurocentric and Eastern cultures."¹ This work analyzes the nuances of transculturality through a non-hierarchical lens by visualizing a newly developed complex space that has resulted from the intermixing of various cultures in a diverse cosmopolitan city like Toronto. The work describes the process of understanding that occurs through a constant negotiation between Iranian and Western modes of thought.

Like a diorama, or perhaps a vitrine in an electronics store, the Samsung TV box painting is overwritten with the artist's own linguistic forms. The image resembles two anthropomorphized bodies: the black calligraphic and the green graphic stencil are floating and hugging, yet caught and loosely suffocated, perhaps alluding to the traditional practice of Iranian black-ink calligraphy in relation to contemporary Iranian

¹ Said, Edward. *Orientalism* (New York, Pantheon Books), 1978

² Salesi, Arshia. *How the Curve Fits Inside the Square*. Conversation with the artist, 2018.

type and graphic design; the black/dark-brown inks used in Iranian calligraphy signify formality and adherence to tradition. The TV box is not just a rectangular plane to paint on, it is also an item that speaks to commodity and globalization. These traits, in relation to the TV box, refer to the global acceptance of television sets as commodities and fixtures of homes; furthermore, televisions represent the most readily available resources for seeing, experiencing and gaining understanding of what is foreign and unknown. The TV box also alludes to Iranian satellite TV channels, showing integration of two languages with a preferred frontal image that usurps. This linkage of thought is why Salesi paints on non-art objects. It is a comical approach to a typical and mundane rectangular plane and an attempt at exploring the variants of a paintable rectangular surface.

Here, the installation mimics a storefront vitrine, as if the work is formulated for advertisement. The disconfigured Farsi Samsung sign looks like there was a malfunctioning during its production. Unlike previous iterations from this series of Salesi's work that invited the viewer to enter the painting, viewers are instead situated outside of the work, looking inside the Window Space; but it is nonetheless encounterable. "Having spent a significant amount of time in this neighbourhood, I'm understanding its culture better; a place where immigrant's residents and businesses are situated; it's fulfilling to be able to contribute to that."²

Painting on the wall and the plastic hanging sign come together like a large-scale collage as the paint engulfs the space. "It's merging many ideas, and for me the biggest challenge is controlling how everything comes together because part of the work is previously constructed, but part of it is made on the spot."³ The Window Space creates a pictorial image from three-dimensional works inside the small space. "Every work I make, I consider the space that it will be displayed in; that space is its frame, square or cube; I want to talk about that space, not leave it out. I think it's important because the work's containment becomes just as important as the piece itself."⁴

² Salesi, Arshia. *How the Curve Fits Inside the Square*. Conversation with the artist, 2018.

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*

The painting goes beyond the cardboard plane and reaches every corner of the walls in the window space; as if Salesi used the edges of the material as guidelines instead of absolute limitations; painting both on the panel and outside of it, Salesi engages with the space within and beyond the surface.

Her blocky letters, filled with colour, have a graffiti-like appearance. However, she herself may argue against this description on the grounds that graffiti tends to rely on letters and language to convey meaning. Salesi, on the other hand, partially relies on skewed and deformed letterings to illicit conversation. The strictly formal elements of Salesi's work are neither primary nor secondary, just the borderless way she prefers to talk about language, culture, transculturality, painting and installation.

"Maybe the work is interesting in this context of Canada, as opposed to Iran, where the dominant language is Farsi. Often I grapple with that. Is the other, the unknown, more interesting to engage with because the unknown is just simply exoticized?"⁵

How the Curve Fit Inside the Square is less about language and more about culture: a non-straightforward, non-store-bought Western ideal often sold to us; a complex transcultural space, where fluidity begets movement. If language forms the way we think, then finding new ways of communicating could unlock new and more complete understandings of other cultures in a non-hierarchical way; a in which all cultures are valid, and none dominate other. The curve describes fluid forces and beings inside a well-defined and rigid structure: whether it be the paint on a rectangular plane, the confines of institutional space, strict parental upbringing, or societal/governmental laws.

- Benoni G. Green

⁵ Salesi, Arshia. *How the Curve Fits Inside the Square*. Conversation with the artist, 2018.