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***On The Elusivity of Identity***  
**Bijan Ramezani**  
**July 30 – August 28, 2015**

In his new work titled *The Elusivity of Identity*, Bijan Ramezani challenges the ways in which identities are constructed through the production, dissemination and consumption of mass-produced images, especially those in reference to Iran, and his own Iranian identity. The work is the latest in a series of ongoing projects that explore what the artist refers to as “a self discovery of a distant culture that I identify with, but at the same time feel strongly disconnected from.”<sup>1</sup> This dual condition of being simultaneously near and far--connected yet removed--is the narrative thread that pieces together this ongoing exploration.

As a first generation Canadian with an Iranian background, Ramezani begins his exploration by accessing and gathering an archive of personal and public photographs, as well as documents and objects that together seem to represent his Iranian identity. These are often the most iconic and the most accessible images of Iran, from pictures of the Iranian revolution from his family archive to popular newspapers and trending Google images of Iran. He then re-frames these images through a series of aesthetic and formal gestures that subtly communicate the layers of distance that exist between what is ‘real’ and visible and what is represented or simulated through the lens of mass media.

The project is placed appropriately in the Window Space of Xpace Cultural Centre, as it is able to speak to a wider audience and question the institution it represents. The installation is comprised of a series of photographic objects. A light box containing an image, which appears to show a crowd of men desecrating American flags in Iran, is paired with its original context: a

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<sup>1</sup> Artist’s Thesis “Persona Non Grata”, 2014

reproduced stack of the Canadian conservative newspaper, The National Post. Here Ramezani dissociates the image from its context, and aestheticizes it through the means of its display to brings his viewer one step closer to the image itself – to what is “raw and uncut”<sup>2</sup>. This pairing is coupled with a very similar kind of image, but one to which the artist feels closer: a black and white reproduction of an original photograph taken by his father during the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The image depicts a group of unidentifiable women who, with the exception of one, are facing away from the lens of the camera and seem to be marching together. The lone figure in the crowd offers the photograph a moment of pause; a revelation. This revelation opens up a space for other narratives to emerge in the photograph. Ramezani then isolates and magnifies the very fragment that seems to speak to subjectivity in that image (both of the photographer and the photographed) and presents it to us as a rolled-up print, an object devoid of any subjectivity. A similar formal approach is echoed in a rolled-up print of a life-size Persian rug. Sourced from a thumbnail image in the online catalogue of IKEA, the reference image is already a representation of a cultural artefact that is appropriated and mass-produced.

While scrutinizing his dual nationality and identity, Ramezani creates an ambivalent space within which these images can fall out of their own bounded context and structures of representation and enter into a new network of references and narratives. Peeling back the layers of representation that are inherent in the production and consumption of mass produced images, *The Elusivity of Identity* ultimately points towards the futility of searching for one’s identity through the perspective of others.

**-Faraz Anoushehpour**

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<sup>2</sup> Artist Statement, 2015