

New exhibition sees stained glass, 24 tons of blue rubber mulch installed at the Aga Khan Museum

****Terms and Conditions Apply*, by Toronto-based artist Ghazaleh Avarzamani, encourages viewers to look ‘behind the scenes’ at the sometimes-invisible design choices that shape our everyday lives**

Toronto — November 8, 2021 — Iranian-Canadian artist Ghazaleh Avarzamani encourages audiences to question the sometimes-invisible control mechanisms and design choices that affect their everyday lives with her bold new art installations for the Aga Khan Museum. Debuting on November 6, [**Terms and Conditions Apply*](#) challenges viewers to consider how institutions and public spaces designed to keep people and property safe may protect and inspire us but also ultimately restrict our freedom, whether we’re aware of it or not.

A series of site-specific stained-glass panels installed in the Museum’s second-floor gallery draws the viewer’s attention to the highly “curated” experience of exploring a pre-designed space such as an art exhibition. A second installation, which saw the reflecting pools in the Aga Khan Park filled up with a total of 24 tons of blue rubber mulch — the same material used in playgrounds to prevent children from injuring themselves — reveals the control systems in place in seemingly open and free-flowing shared spaces such as parks, malls, government buildings, and public squares.

Avarzamani’s creations are the product of her time as the inaugural Aga Khan Museum-Delfina Foundation Artist-in-Residence. Starting her initial research by exploring the uses and preservation of text-based works in the Museum’s Collection, she met with conservators and curators to discuss how artifacts are stored and displayed. She was struck by how many measures were in place to control the objects’ environment to preserve them for future generations. “When you walk into a museum, whether you notice it or not, every aspect of the experience is curated, from the lighting to the temperature and even the air circulation,” Avarzamani says. “I am fascinated by this and wanted to explore it in my work.”

Artificially extending the artifacts’ lives creates a kind of paradox, she says. “When we force life into these objects, we also take life away from them. In order for them to last longer, we must keep them in the dark, out of sight from people and away from their original context. I am interested in what is gained and what is lost when we push their life expectancy by hundreds of years.”

Some of these choices, Avarzamani observes, aren’t just for the protection of objects in museums’ collections. They may be designed to shape the audience’s experience — for example, by promoting an aura of calm or drawing the viewer’s eye to the artworks on display. “At the Aga Khan Museum, there is often more light and activity in the corridors than there is in the exhibition spaces. When you enter the galleries, the lighting is dimmer and more consistent. It reminds me of religious spaces in the sense that everything is designed to make you feel a certain way.”

The tie-in to religious spaces shines through beautifully in the stained-glass component of **Terms and Conditions Apply*. For this installation, Avarzamani collaborated with glassmaker Lorena Louie Diaz to realize a series of 30 panels that will line a glass balcony railing overlooking the main-floor gallery. The series functions as a direct response not only to the Museum’s Collection but also its architecture.

The stained glass is meant to be appreciated from different perspectives. Viewed from the main floor, the panels and the blue light filtering through them inspire calm, wonder, and reverence. On the other hand, people seeing the windows from the second floor will be treated to a grittier “backstage” perspective. The stark contrast is intentional. By exposing the stagecraft behind her own stained-glass installation, Avarzamani is nudging viewers to think about the decisions that shape how they experience and relate to various shared spaces and institutions.

Having Avarzamani turn her artistic gaze onto the curatorial practices and control mechanisms of museums has been eye-opening, says the Museum’s Marianne Fenton, who curated the residency. “Internally, it gave us a refreshing new perspective on what we do and how we do it. It’s not negative or judgmental, but it does push us to reflect upon the choices we make and sometimes take for granted. It has been both a humbling and a productively challenging experience.”

Before she ventures to London to complete the UK-based leg of her residency, Avarzamani is contributing to Delfina Foundation’s renowned *Collecting as Practice* program. *Collecting as Practice* explores the politics, philosophy, and psychology of collecting in order to generate new research that re-imagines collections and the institutions that house them. The third edition of *Collecting as Practice* will unpack issues of commemoration, restitution, and social inclusion, while also exploring collecting in relation to communal ownership, cultural memory, and education.

Initiated by the UK Steering Committee for the Aga Khan Museum, the residency builds on the Committee’s early efforts to develop new public-facing Museum exhibitions, artist residencies, and co-commissions in Britain. The residency’s conceptual framework was established by Delfina Foundation, whose previous collaborations with the UK Steering Committee and Patrons’ Circle also included a performance with theatre actor Susaan Jamshidi, a talk with contemporary visual artist Babak Golkar, and the presentation of the shortlist for the 14th cycle of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture.

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The Museum’s mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage while often reflecting, through both its permanent and temporary exhibitions, how cultures connect with one another. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto’s Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic.

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