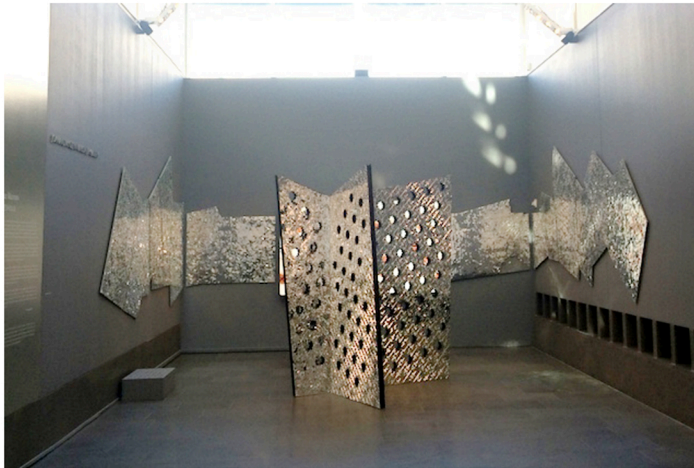


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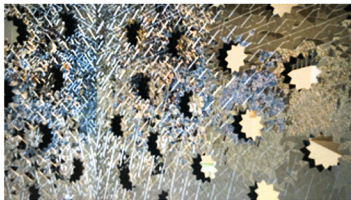
Seeing Fractured Explosions in Fragmented Mirrors

by An Xiao on May 1, 2015



Installation view of Sanaz Mazinani's 'Threshold' (2015) at the Asian Art Museum (all images by the author for Hyperallergic and courtesy the Asian Art Museum)

SAN FRANCISCO — The past year has seen many powerful, violent images. Whether of the racial justice movement in the United States, the democracy movement in Hong Kong, or the many conflicts and natural disasters in different parts of the world, gripping images have dominated the internet and broadcast media. They ripple out, get remixed into memes or [reappropriated into other contexts](#), and are then spread broadly across different networks. Out of context, viral images of violence can appear to tell a full story, but in fact they can only reflect a small part of the larger truth.



A GIF detail of one wall showing the effect of the explosive video against the mirrors

Threshold, a video and mirror installation by [Sanaz Mazinani](#) at the Asian Art Museum (curated by Marc Mayer, with whom I'll be working with on a museum event this summer and who gave me a tour of this show), combines beautiful, laser-cut mirrors along the walls while [a looping video at the back of the installation](#) shows kaleidoscopic explosions taken from popular

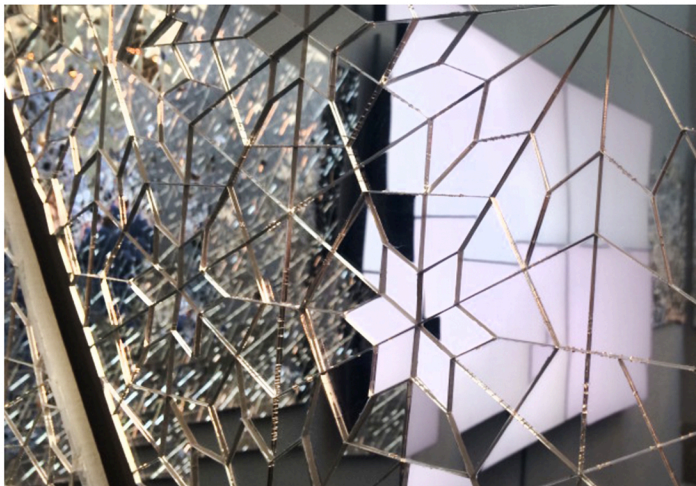
Hollywood films. It's not immediately obvious that they come from the world of entertainment, but little details — like an airplane — give us clues. Inspired by regular trips to Iran, where the artist was born, Mazinani references Islamic geometric designs in laser cuts, including the mirrored interior of the [Shah Cheragh mosque](#). As the museum walls twinkle and undulate with reflections of these explosions, a soft bass, composed by Mani Mazinani (the artist's brother), pounds like a heartbeat.



The layers of mirrors seem to encourage selfies, but the selfies appear fractured.

When I visited, I couldn't help but take a selfie, and it seemed that most visitors felt the same. But as I lifted my phone, I saw my face broken into many layers and views, not just on the wall in front of me, but on the side walls. While the construct of a fractured mirror initially struck me as a cliché, I found the details of Mazinani's installation, with clean, geometric lines, offered a fresh take on the concept. Peering through star-shaped holes in the mirrors, I saw more mirrors, which in turn reflected the explosions, which were themselves refracted to begin with.

"Architecture and site are important in understanding one's position from which the world is viewed," Mazinani noted [in a statement](#). "The mirrored surface provides a reflective space, a place for speculation on the nature of perception, and the complexities of representation and the self."



A detail of the laser-cut mirror, with the video playing in the reflection

The choice of Hollywood representations of violence lends a dimension of uneasy seduction to the piece. For so many people living outside of war zones, Hollywood and other forms of mass, broadcast media provide the only vision of what conflict looks like. Highly aestheticized, *Threshold* awes, and the shock comes after realizing that the shimmers in the walls are in fact aestheticized images of violence. These representations, like Mazinani's installation, capture attention and mesmerize. But unlike her work, they exist more to entertain than unsettle.

Viewed from afar, images of violence can depict only a part of the whole story, and their spread and dissemination blur the context. The perspective on the ground is often more painful and traumatic than anyone can imagine, but all we're left with are images that tell a myriad of tiny, incomplete truths.

[Sanaz Mazinani: Threshold](#) continues at the Asian Art Museum (200 Larkin St., San Francisco) through May 3.