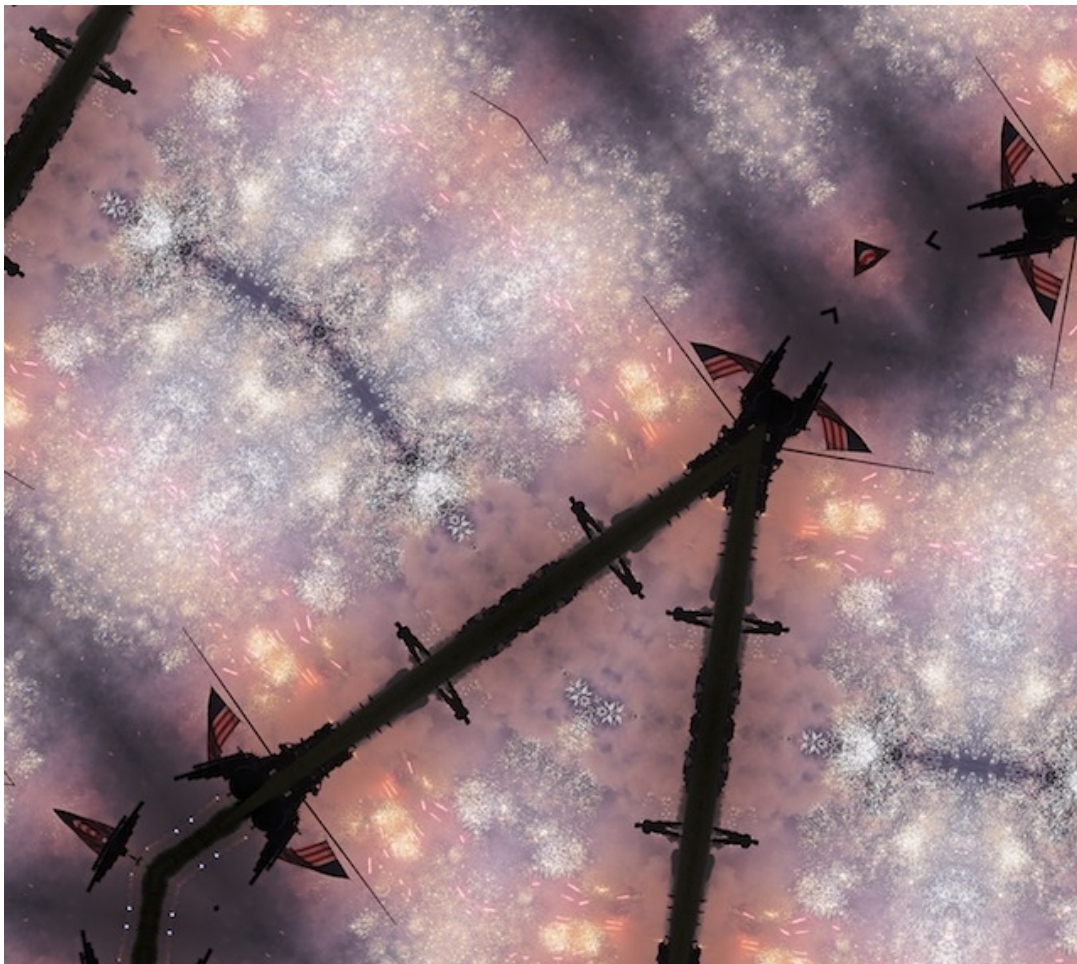


Sanaz Mazinani Warps War Photography Into Kaleidoscopic Collages

Her new exhibition, "Frames Of The Visible," opens on April 23rd and includes a nuanced take on war imagery.

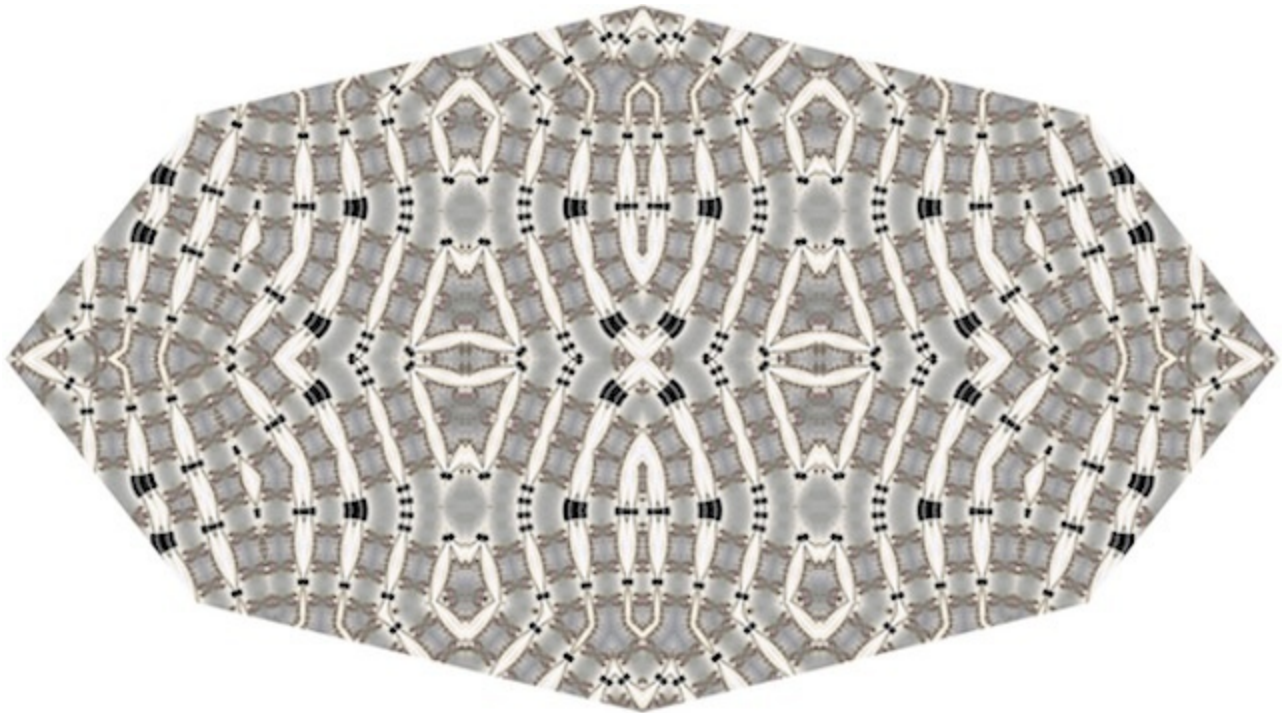
Johnny Magdaleno
Apr 17 2014, 2:00pm



Detail of Howitzer and Fireworks (2014)

Although Iranian-American artist Sanaz Mazinani uses wartime photography to build her kaleidoscopic, jewel-shaped collages, you'll notice notice not a single drop of blood makes an appearance in these works. That's not to say she's ignoring violence—a few of the pieces below create their symmetrical values from roaring explosions, funeral processions, and high-tech weaponry—but it does highlight her fascination with the partition between war documentation and the on-the-ground actuality of war:

"I feel that there are so many hard-to-look-at images of war that are already out there, and I am not interested in contributing to the desensitization of war," she told The Creators Project. "Rather, I am interested in thinking about how we can be more aware of what is really happening around us, so that we can make informed decisions around the choices that our governments so often make for us."



Redacted March #1



Detail of Redacted March #1

Today, many people telecommute to the battlefield (and absorb war information) through video feeds, social media sharing, and various other media outlets. As these sources continue to proliferate, so does our exposure to acute gore and horror.

"I think that as soon as you remove an image from its context and present it along side another, or in different form, you can start to see more," she notes.

"The aim with the collage works is to bring attention to the circulation of images, their repetitive consumption, and perhaps what is being excluded."

Mazinani's work kaleidoscopic-like work is both a marvel to look at, and an illuminating exploration into the complex relationships among the media, war, and the diverse groups of people who consume war-focused media. The Taymour Grahne Gallery in New York City is hosting Mazinani's "Frames Of The Visible" exhibition that opens on April 23rd. For add more insight into the exhibition, The Creators Project spoke with Mazinani about the process behind creating these collages, why aircrafts make a recurring appearance, and the influence of Islamic-oriented patterns in her work.



Explosion (2013)



Detail of Explosion

The Creators Project: When selecting images to work with, what qualities (or lack thereof) did you look for?

Sanaz Mazinani: I have been collecting images for just over 10 years now, and sometime around 5 years ago I decided to have a look and see what I had been squirreling away. At that point I had about 60,000 images that included mostly my own photography but also a vast collection of online images that referenced conflict. My categories were anything from explosions, Iraq,

night-vision, to celebrities in military apparel. So it is a bit hard to define exactly what I was looking for at the time. Although I must say that I have always been interested in figuring out what is missing in a picture. I am fascinated with the photograph's incredible ability to tell a story, and to take us elsewhere. But also interested in the medium's limitations, as a photograph can only show us a singular point of view.

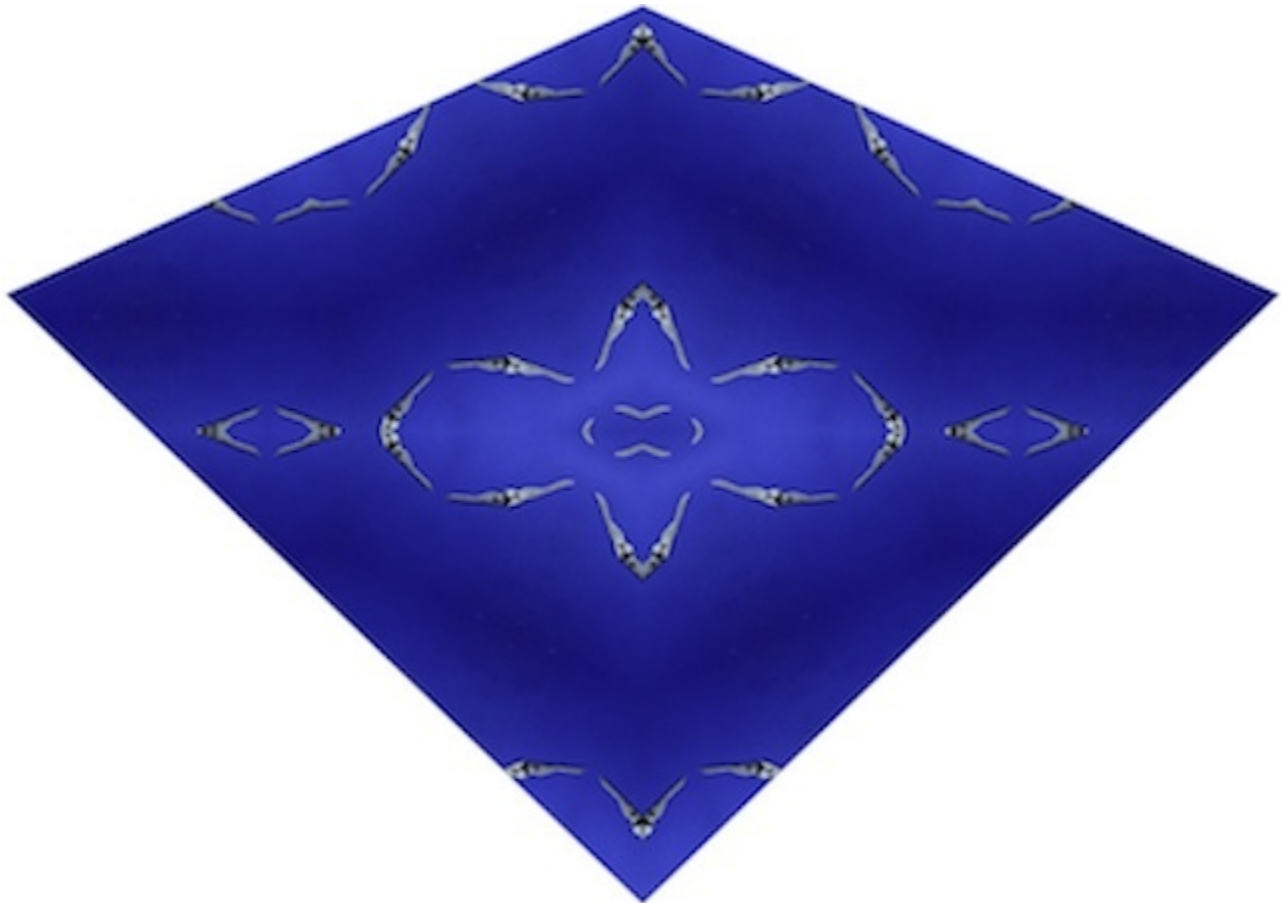
What do these collages convey to the viewer that their source images are unable to?

I think that as soon as you remove an image from its context and present it along side another or in a different form, you can start to see more. Elements that were always in that image but were previously expected as the norm can be seen with fresh eyes. I spend a great deal of time thinking about images and how they inform me about the world that I live in. The limited access to information about the conflicts that the US is involved with is staggering, and it is often not that easy to find out more. The aim with the collage works is to bring attention to the circulation of images, their repetitive consumption, and perhaps what is being excluded.

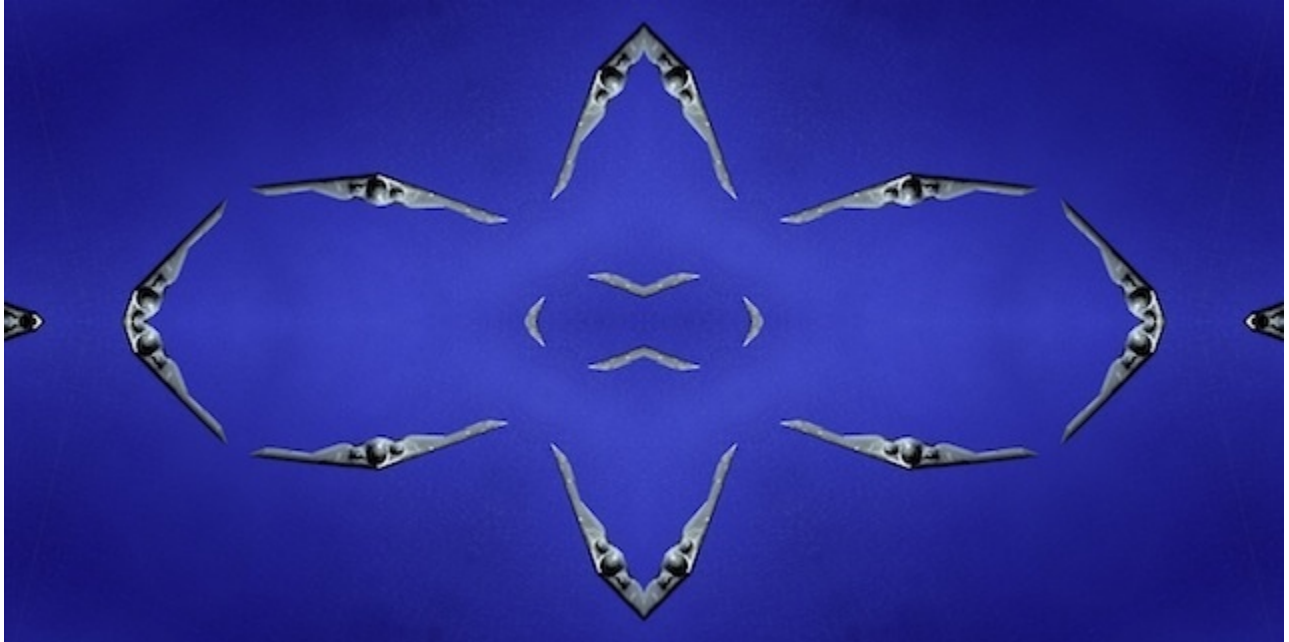
There's a notable emphasis on aircraft throughout your works. Why is that?

I have a vivid memory from when I was around 7 years old, swimming in my grandparents pool. This was during the long eight year war between Iran and Iraq, and every once in a while there were bomb raids in Tehran, so that all you would hear was the cycling sound of the sirens warning that aircraft bombers were fast approaching and one should seek shelter. I remember hearing the siren coming from my grandma's kitchen radio and moments later hearing and feeling the aircraft fly over me. The fighter jet was so close that I have a faint memory of feeling the hot exhaust off its engine. The experience must have been momentary, but in my mind the aircraft hovers for minutes, its giant body right over me, dark and mysterious and rather awe inspiring.

This is the first time that I have been using images of aircraft in the work, and I am really interested in the dichotomy that takes place between the allure of war and the devastation of it. By including these images of air-to-ground combat jets, I consider the scale warfare and the anonymity of it today. With the use of these incredible fighters, stealth bombers, and drones a vast distance is created between the operator of a war machine and the people on the ground.



Royal Stealth (2014)



Detail of Royal Stealth

War coverage often attaches highly personal media (portraits of individual soldiers, close-ups of wounded, etc.) to bald, objective journalism (logistic details of invasion, casualties listed primarily as numbers, etc). How do you believe your artistic approach fits between or comments on these two spheres?

Wow! That is a good one. It is honestly the main question that I ask myself all the time. I feel that there are so many hard to look at images of war that are already out there, and I am not interested in contributing to the desensitization of war. Rather, I am interested in thinking about how we can be more aware of what is really happening around us, so that we can make informed decisions around the choices that our governments so often make for us.

Could you describe the process behind formatting these collages. What tools or computer programs did you use?

Once I determine the image, or image pair that I want to use, I open up the files in Photoshop and align the image to the orientation and scale that I want to work with. I then begin a long process of copying, cropping, mirroring and pasting in Photoshop. Each step builds out the image further, and each choice of cropping determines the form of the pattern. The process is rather meditative and I often get lost in it for hours at a time.

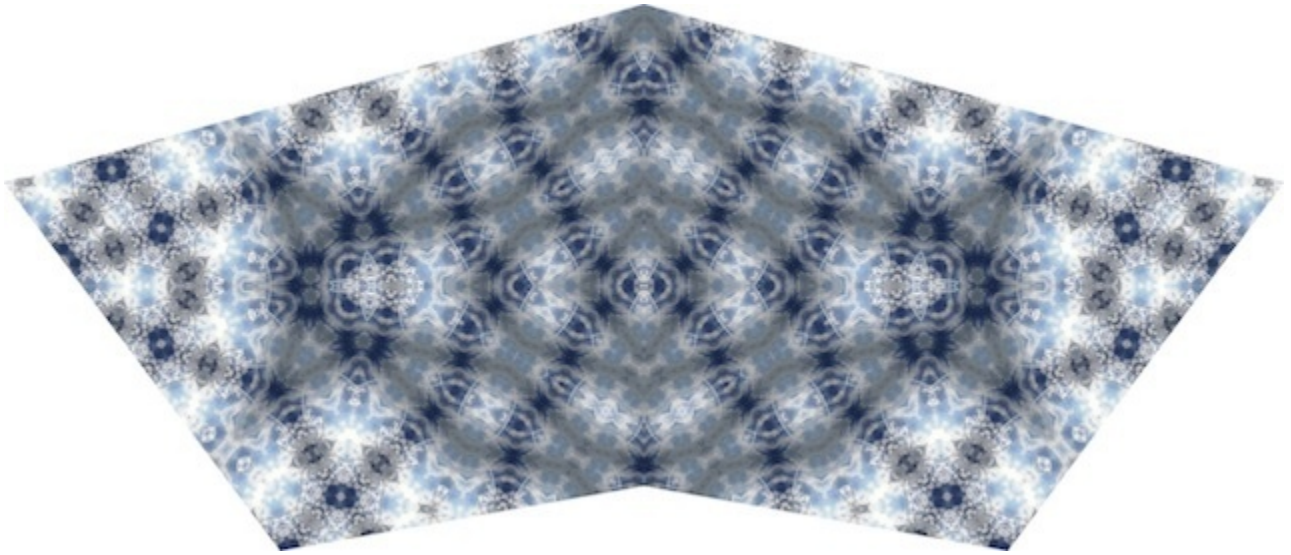
After altering the images into repeating patterns, how do you then decide on the entire collage's shape? I notice some are symmetrical while others are not.

Determining the shape of the work is often the final step, and echoes the pattern that emerges through the process of making the work itself. Sometimes the shapes mimic aircraft and other times they are simply angular geometric forms. I like using vertical symmetrical shapes in the work as it mimics the human body.

A few years ago I was reading an anthropology book on symmetrical patterns and cultures that do not have the written language but use patterns as a form of cultural archive. The case study basically proved that not only are our bodies built symmetrically but our brains also absorb information through vertical symmetry. These anthropologists were able to understand the hierarchy and societal structure of a particular African tribe through studying the patterns in their beaded belts. They understood their coded language woven into their belts through a process of deduction. When a mine was discovered not far from the village, all the men left to work a few miles away. So the role of the women in this tribe shifted and with it the symmetrical patterns woven into the beaded belts. After seeing these patterns change, it was finally understood that pattern was a form of coded language used to pass along information from one generation to the next.

This case study left me to think a great deal about the distribution of images in our own digital world, and how images are circulated through our networks, and social media connections. So to me these patterns also speak

about our personal networks of information, and the Internet bubbles that we each function within.



Blue Angel (2013)



Detail of Blue Angel

When you came across an image you wanted to use, did you instantly have an idea of how you wanted its collage to look like? Or was it a process of constantly testing out a variety of manipulations?

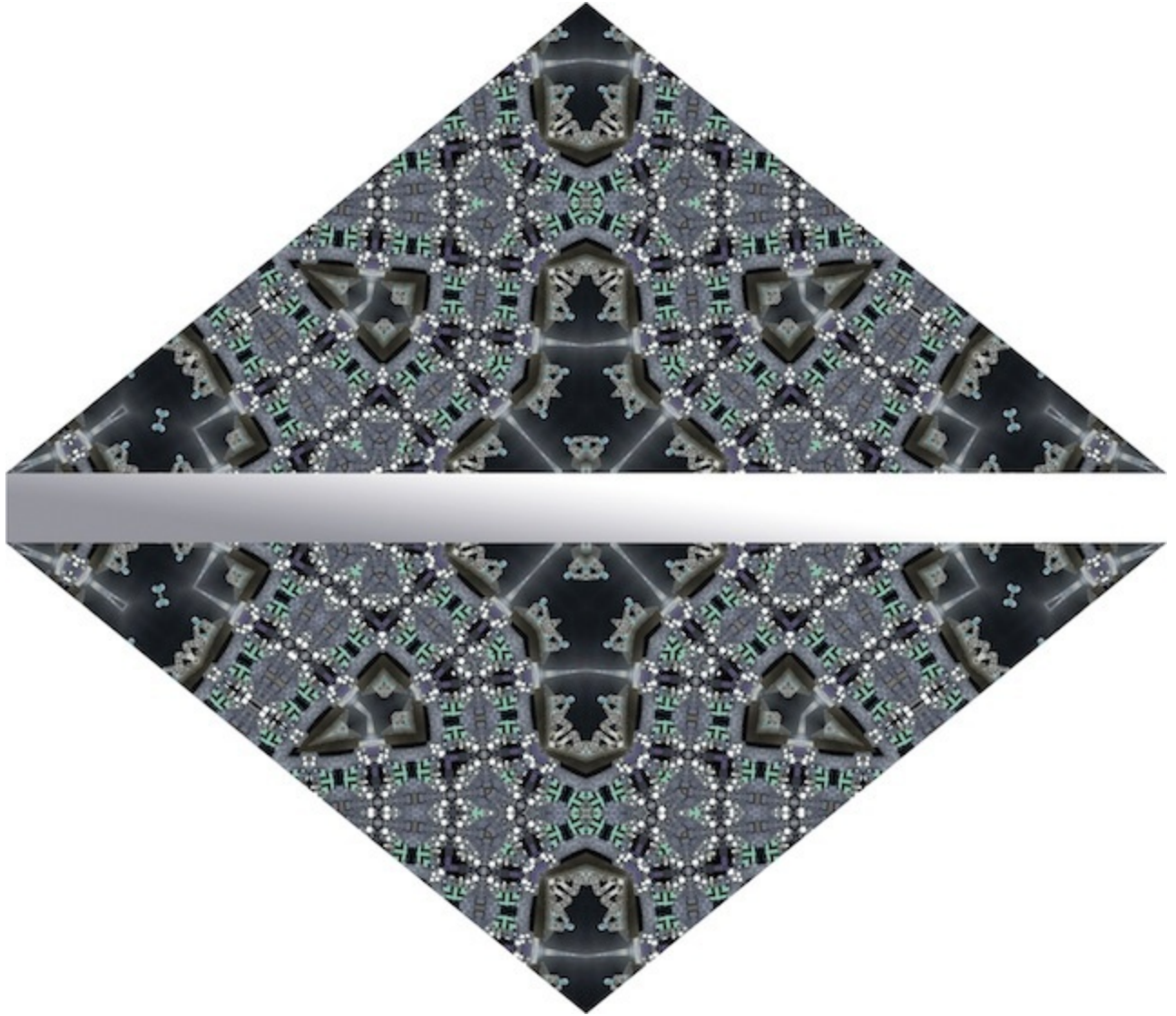
It is mostly the latter. There are some images that I think will make a great piece but after working with them for several days, I simply have to abandon them. What is fun about the work is that I do not plan out the pattern, but just allow it to emerge out of the play. Sometimes that process of making and finishing a piece takes around a year, as I need to wait until the final form comes to me, or just allow some time to think through the work. This all makes the art making process really enjoyable for me, as it is always a unique experience.

Your press release mentions a fascination with the "culturally specific ideology of transfiguration." How do these pieces reflect the variety of cultures you associate with (born in Iran, living in both Canada and the United States) and their respective approaches to transfiguring war vis-a-vis the media?

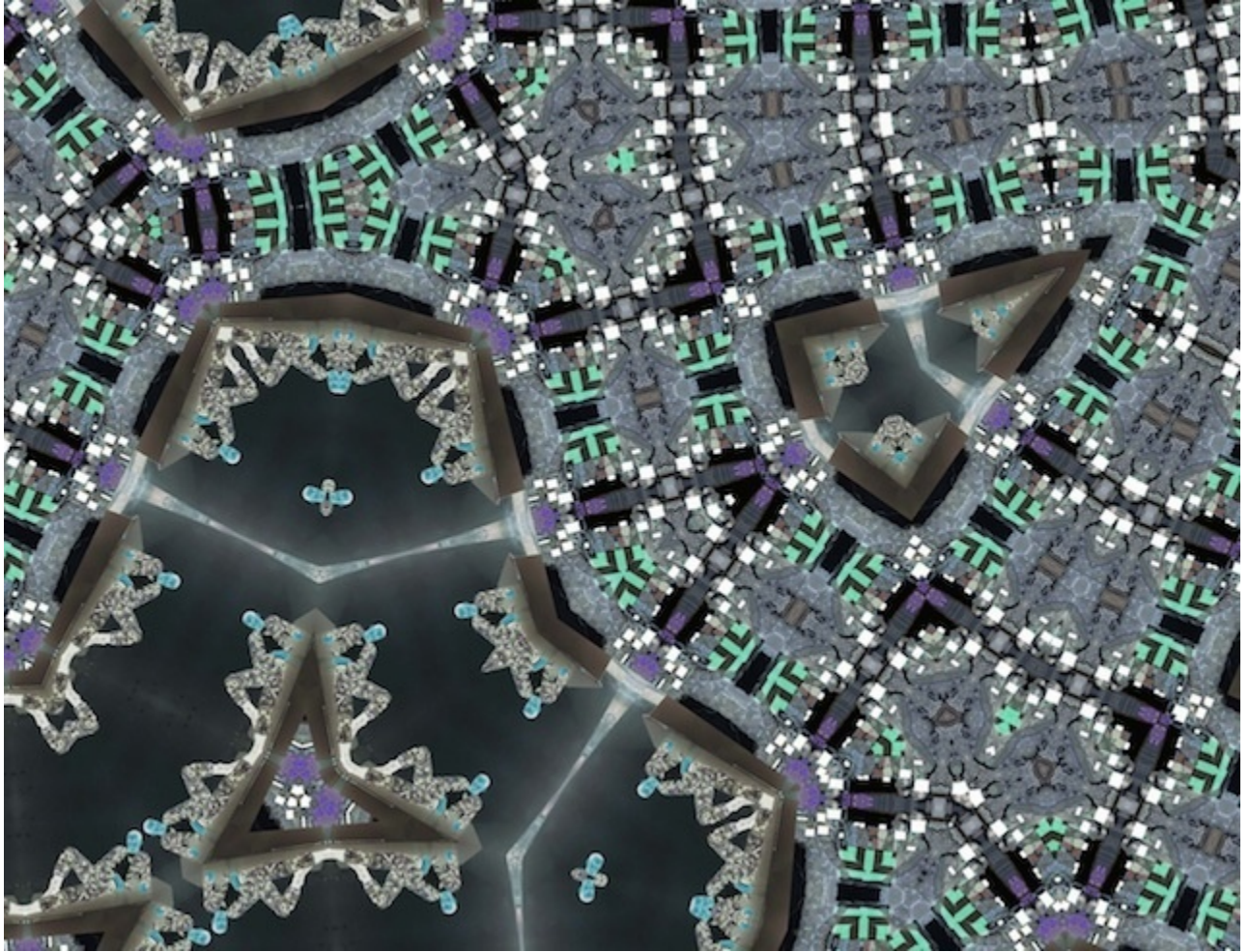
I hadn't really thought about the culturally specific ideas around transfiguration when it comes to Canada and the US. I think that there are a lot of similarities between them, but to my surprise, I did experience some culture shock when I first moved from Toronto to the Bay Area, so it would be certainly interesting to delve into the differences between their respective approaches.

The loss of life as a result of war is a hard subject to tackle. I am always shocked about how little we hear about American soldiers who are wounded and those who have lost their life in wars abroad. I think there is a great deal of effort that goes into the manicured representation of war on this side. Since I grew up in Iran and left when I was eleven, I can clearly see the similarities and differences between my Iranian culture the one I am surrounded with here. In Iran, people are extremely anti-war because they saw first hand the results of conflict in the '80s when Saddam Hussein was bombing the country. The government did not censor the news, so the reality of war is much more part of the daily consciousness of the average citizen in Iran.

When I started to make this new work, I thought that it was somewhat dark, as it deals with some hard subjects, so I was looking to insert a positive element in the work. That is when I decided to use Islamic ornamentation in the patterns. In Iran, these patterns stand in for the idea of transfiguration. The patterns allow the viewer to meditate and think about an elsewhere; they act as a point from which one can flourish. For example, when you stand in front of one of my large works, your entire field of vision is covered by the pattern that allows your eye to cycle through the imagery, but also to fall beyond it. The idea here is to provide a position from which we could consider alternatives, and to imagine other paths and perspectives.



Redacted March #3 (2013)



Detail of Redacted March #3