

Sheida Soleimani: *Medium of Exchange*

Curated by Kate Shepherd

June 5 - July 14, 2018

Opening reception: Tuesday, June 5, 6-8PM

CUE Art Foundation is pleased to present a solo exhibition by Sheida Soleimani, curated by Kate Shepherd. Titled *Medium of Exchange*, the exhibition presents sculptural photographic tableaux that address the relationship between dictatorships and the petroleum industry at a time when oil has become a form of international currency and a source of warfare.

Soleimani photographs models wearing oversized masks depicting the faces of the all-male ministers of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and the Western officials who together control the oil industry and maintain its prices, as well as leaders of countries implicated in conflicts surrounding the oil trade. Photographed in solitary portraits and group photos against backdrops composed of found images of oil fields and refineries and strewn with props such as diamonds, exotic animals, oil, and its related paraphernalia, her characters are variously engaged in bizarre acts of decadence, excess, and aggression. In group portraits, the power plays between the represented countries are illustrated through references to sexual scenarios from BDSM culture, with the dominant authority marked with a "D" and the submissive player marked with a "S." The artist employs queer models of all shapes, sizes, and genders whose anonymous bodies, decidedly distinct from those of the men whose faces they are wearing, peek through holes in their masks and costumes in jarring ways. These breaches in the construct of Soleimani's characters serves to expose the bodies of those in power to symbolic acts of violence as well as subvert their traditional displays of masculinity and authority; at the same time, it reveals the bodies of those that might suffer at the hands of men in power as they accrue wealth through brutal acts of exploitation against humanity and the earth. The paper backdrops call to mind the notion of a paper tiger, while the lack of depth and structural integrity of these constructed environments seems to ruminate on the flimsy and untenable structure of the oil industry.



Sheida Soleimani, *Director of Central Intelligence Agency, United States & Iraq*, 2017
Archival pigment print, 24 x 20 inches

Soleimani's fragmented narratives conflate reality and fantasy alongside brutality and the absurd to explore a crisis of power and social and environmental justice. As the artist herself states, "The photographs and screenplays use the tactics of theatre and humor to scrutinize the corruption stemming from the oil trade, while suggesting a new way to view the codependence of leaders."



Sheida Soleimani, *Minister of Petroleum & Hydrocarbons, Ecuador*, 2017
Archival pigment print, 60 x 40 inches

Sheida Soleimani (b.1990) is an Iranian-American artist who lives in Providence, Rhode Island. The daughter of political refugees who were persecuted by the Iranian government in the early 1980s, Soleimani makes work that melds sculpture, collage, film, and photography to highlight her critical perspectives on historical and contemporary socio-political occurrences in Iran and the Greater Middle East. She focuses on media trends and the dissemination of societal occurrences in the news, adapting images from popular press and social media leaks to exist within alternate scenarios. Soleimani's research and work critically references the Eurocentrism that pervades the study of art and art history. She is specifically interested in the intersections of art and activism, as well as how social media has shaped the landscape in current political affairs and uprisings. Her work has been recognized internationally in both exhibitions and publications such as *Artforum*, *The New York Times*, *The Huffington Post*, *Interview Magazine*, *VICE Magazine*, amongst many others.

Kate Shepherd is an artist who lives and works in New York. Trained in both art and architecture, she creates subtle depictions of space in a wide range of mediums, including painting, installation, printmaking, and sculpture. Some large-scale works include a stone amphitheater in Santa Fe, New Mexico and an immersive installation at 56 Henry, New York that paid homage to provisional structures found at construction sites. Shepherd had extensive residencies at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas and Lannan Foundation, Santa Fe, New Mexico, and is currently on the Board of Directors for the

New York-based magazine *Triple Canopy*. Her work can be found in numerous museum collections, including the Baltimore Museum of Art, Maryland; the Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indiana; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California; the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; the Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Menil Collection, Houston, Texas; and the Seattle Art Museum, Washington. She is represented by Galerie Lelong & Co. and Anthony Meier Fine Arts, San Francisco.

The exhibition is accompanied by a 32-page color catalogue, with texts by Sheida Soleimani, Kate Shepherd, and Emily Watlington. The catalogue is available online and free of charge to gallery visitors. For more information please contact Programs Director Shona Masarin-Hurst at shona@cueartfoundation.org.

CUE Art Foundation is a visual arts center dedicated to creating essential career and educational opportunities for artists of all ages. Through exhibitions, arts education, and public programs, CUE provides artists, writers, and audiences with sustaining, meaningful experiences and resources.

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