

## Fears and Inertia Narges Anvar

I have long been intrigued by the importance of personal stories within a life, by our emotional memory related to experiencing the world, and the potential for change and transformation that lies within us as we come to understand, assimilate and overcome such experiences, to then integrate them into our story.

The notion that “humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives”<sup>1</sup> places narrative as intrinsically and intricately embedded within the individual, within our lives, our existence, experiences, perceptions, identities and even our being. We are the culmination of all that we are, emotional vessels of experience.

In *Fears and Inertia*, Iranian born Narges Anvar invites us to immerse ourselves in a metaphorical emotional space, resonant with visual, auditory and emotive storytelling that she has channelled and interpreted from some of her most private and difficult experiences and memories, inspired by her challenges and concerns as an artist, a mother and a human being.

As living beings in environments of near perpetual motion, it can be said that we are always in a state of (physical) change, of growth and even evolution. Yet our inner world can sometimes become stuck, looped, blocked, inert, conditioned through fear, restricting our capacity to act, to function, and to be in the outer world. These impositions or boundaries that we place upon our emotional selves can have very real repercussions within our lives.

Fears are often inherited, either handed down through social, cultural or personal means, or acquired through negative experience. In more severe cases, fear and inertia can paralyse, impair or debilitate. Within the realms of human emotion, experiencing a state of inertia, or the inability to act, move or change, is often related to an underlying fear.

Within the qualities of *being inert* or of an *inert object*, Inertia embodies properties of apparent stillness, isolation from the outside, a freezing. Yet when faced with their

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<sup>1</sup> Connelly, F. Michael, and D. Jean Clandinin. "Stories of Experience and Narrative Inquiry." *Educational Researcher* 19, no. 5 (1990): 2-14.

causes, the feelings bubbling within can be anything but. Confronting fears, expressing, sharing, and understanding them provides great opportunities to become unstuck, allowing otherwise anchored feelings to be revisited or changed, something that Narges actively pursues in her practice through the medium of expressive and intuitive drawing.

I have had the pleasure of working with Narges in the past and strongly resonate with the way that she explores her inner world in her work. As an artist and young mother from a culturally diverse background, Narges spends much time at home, raising her young boy. She describes her engagement with art making as being limited in time and in space in which to practice, a very real and human concern, a constraint which can influence and define how one approaches making art.

When approaching drawing, Narges relates that she seeks to avoid control, to allow flow and better explore the nebulous realms of feeling that demand to be let out. She searches through her emotions, between memory and imagination, layers in her personality and her feelings. Narges admits to not fully understanding the work while making it, linking to a process of allowing, something organic and intuitive whereby the feelings and memories focused upon emerge on their own. Lines come first. There is no planning, as she pressures herself to remain as free as she can be.

As she vacillates between memory, insecurities, imagination and the translation of difficult experience channelled into her own expressive visual language, Narges seldom relies on illustrative or narrative paradigms in her compositions, working in continuous lines through trains of thought-feeling, channelling feelings such as anger, desire, fear, and pain in often raw and communicative ways.

The space that Narges has softly intervened in and adorned with her works emulates the multilayered nature of our inner emotional worlds. It features a soundscape of her mother's voice reciting a story in Persian; an installation of large paintings, titled Daffodil, which is the meaning of the artist's own name in Farsi; and is layered with numerous small drawings staggered along its walls. The artist has inscribed markings, lines and shapes, in pencil and black paint, straight on to the gallery walls, a section of which features an imposing painted black silhouette that creates a sinewy outline running askew from floor to ceiling, stark and somewhat menacing against the white of the space. These painted wall elements are reflected within the small drawings themselves, linking the space to the expressive works and the structural and emotive mark-making they contain.

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All the same size, the edges of the small drawings are sharp against the vast whiteness of the gallery walls, yet seem at the same time to blend their boundaries in, or emerge from them. Like small floating private windows that invite us to look closer, linked one to the other in their giving the sense that we are within something greater, a space within a space.

The drawings themselves are like scenes from a dream, piecemeal, incomplete, seemingly messy yet precisely drafted and focused, their protagonists engaged in mysterious actions. One can get lost in the continuous lines and expressive textural brush marks, not knowing up from down, or able to make sense of the events contained within, yet each leaving one with a distinct emotional impression.

Some of the forms and figures that emerge in these works seem to possess at first glance a nightmarish quality, something out of reverie, surreal bodies, incomplete, faces sometimes twisted or gnarled, the outlines of a face, an arm, a hand, a profile, their features grinning, crying, in the throes of emotion. These bodies are juxtaposed with forms, lines, small black geometrical shapes and subtly and at times more liberally applied washes of colour which enhance emotional expression, often complemented by an intuitive use of negative space that define their outline and character.

The clustered installation along one wall of three paintings titled *Daffodil* is a self-portrait, one that creates a bold presence in the space. The title poetically references both the meaning of Narges' name and the infamous myth associated with the same flower, otherwise known as Narcissus. Three personalities seems to be cast alongside one another, each with their own offset frame, yet linked through their placement.

A seemingly feminine silhouette, elegant and graceful, bearing a single eye who's expression is one of concern, perhaps anger or grief; the smiling, tear-stricken features of a person whose rictus could be one of madness, sadness or even despair; and a floating, or perhaps falling, abstracted figure that seems to be in pain, bearing a small child on its back. All three could be reflections perhaps of the artist's perception of herself, as Narges speaks of the characters in her work as reflections of her, inspired by real and imagined experience and people.

Some feelings, she admits, are too painful to speak about. Many are of her mother, Zahra Ahmadi, and the difficult, unjust experiences she has had to live, passed on to Narges through stories. In a sense, as many an empathic heart can, Narges carries her

mother's wounds, as well as her own, attempting to sift through these feelings by making work, concentrating her emotions onto the page, confronting and allowing them to live outside of herself. Narges' mother has for a long time worked in children's literature and herself writes stories, working towards publishing them in Iran. Herself a (visual) storyteller, the emotional ties the artist shares with her mother are not only seen through some of the drawings but also pervade the space through the sound piece of her mother's voice reciting in Farsi a story of her own writing.

The story she relates speaks of colours within a page, one of which decides to break out of the frame to see what is beyond. Inspired by the colour Red's bravery, other colours follow until they are set free from the boundaries and constraints that they had been given. This work provides overarching link to everything that the space contains, forming another dimension beyond the two-dimensionality of drawing or the three-dimensions of space, into a fourth which is emotional and emancipatory.

For better or for worse, we are often defined by our own stories, in the eyes of others as much as our own, whether fictional, imagined, or all too real and painful. Transcending such stories, where they impair rather than uplift, is a common challenge on our path for growth and healing. For many of us, there can be tremendous challenges in expressing their intricacies, making sense of them, filled as they are with the experiences, perceptions and emotions that make a life and are the culmination of all that we are. Our inner landscapes are private amalgamations of our trajectories through the world, a most sacred space shared often only by invitation. And it is in their expression and eventual sharing that we both connect to others in the most meaningful ways and are provided with our greatest opportunities for change and transformation.

~ André Lawrence

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