

RAMESCH DAHA 32°N/53°E

by Fiona Liewehr

Ramesch Daha's most recent project with the title 3200north/5300east – in reference to the geographical coordinates of Iran – addresses the country's eventful history of the past 100 years. Rather than in recent political developments, the artist's investigation finds its point of departure in her own personal history and her 1978 escape from revolution and resurgent fundamentalism. Over the course of years of painstaking research, Daha not simply traced the personal history of her ancestors but at the same time investigated the economic, political, religious, and social upheaval undergone by Iran. In Ramesch Daha's current exhibition at the Bleich Rossi Gallery, a video of her grandmother, recollecting events between 1934 and 1944, is shown next to drawings of private notes found on the back of historical photographs and large-format, significantly reduced paintings of Persian landscapes – without apparent connection.

Daha's primary concern is neither narrative stringency nor an endeavour to chronicle events in her native country in an exhaustive and scientific manner. More importantly, the deliberate juxtaposition of artistic medium and content produces a subjective collage of meaning and interpretation intended to heighten the critical awareness that history cannot be understood in one-dimensional, objective terms. Even scientific historiography is always interpreted along subjective, ideological lines, constantly reconstructing itself, invariably subject to change, and, hence, at no time neutral.

In her artistic approach to Iran, Daha does not seek to restage past events, viewing them in a way that is neither emotional, accusatory, nor judgmental. Her work draws on historical documents by contemporary witnesses, a critical reflection of media reporting in the internet, newspapers, or television, and measures the significance of historical events vis-à-vis the present. History happens all the time and everywhere: in a deserted landscape as much as in a seemingly incidental marginal note on a photograph, or in individual memory. Ramesch Daha's works do not affirm the past but rather question the present based on past historical events that have almost slipped from collective memory and illustrate one fact: History repeats itself.