

NAZGOL ANSARINIA:



WHEN
MEMO-
RIES
ARE
BOUND
TO

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Nazgol Ansarinia

Talking about a city is never easy and always personal. But what if the city you want to talk about is so complex that there are truly no words to properly describe it? Would you fall silent or search for a way to make yourself understood? She chose the latter. Her approach? Art.

‡ We visited Nazgol Ansarinia's studio in Iran's pulsating capital city Tehran back in August 2018. Tehran is with its 8.5 million inhabitants comparable to New York but has an even higher density.



→ Her studio is located in a higher building on a slope. A wide window allows a spectacular view onto Tehrans neighbourhood which is a source of inspiration and ideas for the work of Ansarinia.

There is this one city, a city I have never been to, that I have always been curious to learn about. Whenever there is a new movie or documentary about it, I am the first to see it. And yet, I have no idea what this city might be like. The name of this city is Tehran. With more than 8 million inhabitants, it is relatively large, at least by my European standards. I know that it is expanding rapidly, and, to put it with the words of my interview partner, Iranian artist Nazgol Ansarinia, 'heading in the direction of chaos'. Even before hearing such an intriguing statement, I was thrilled to get the chance to talk to her.

Nazgol Ansarinia was born in Tehran in 1979, right after the Revolution. About five years before she was born, my own father, also a Tehran native, saw it for the last time. He left to study abroad in the early 1970s, but unlike Ansarinia—who spent seven years studying in the United Kingdom and the United States—he never returned. After graduating with a degree in Graphic Design from the London College of Communication, Ansarinia received a Masters of Fine Arts from the California College of the Arts. Studying a multidisciplinary subject like Fine Arts was eye opening, she explains, and even today her art is still a mixture of various disciplines like visual arts,



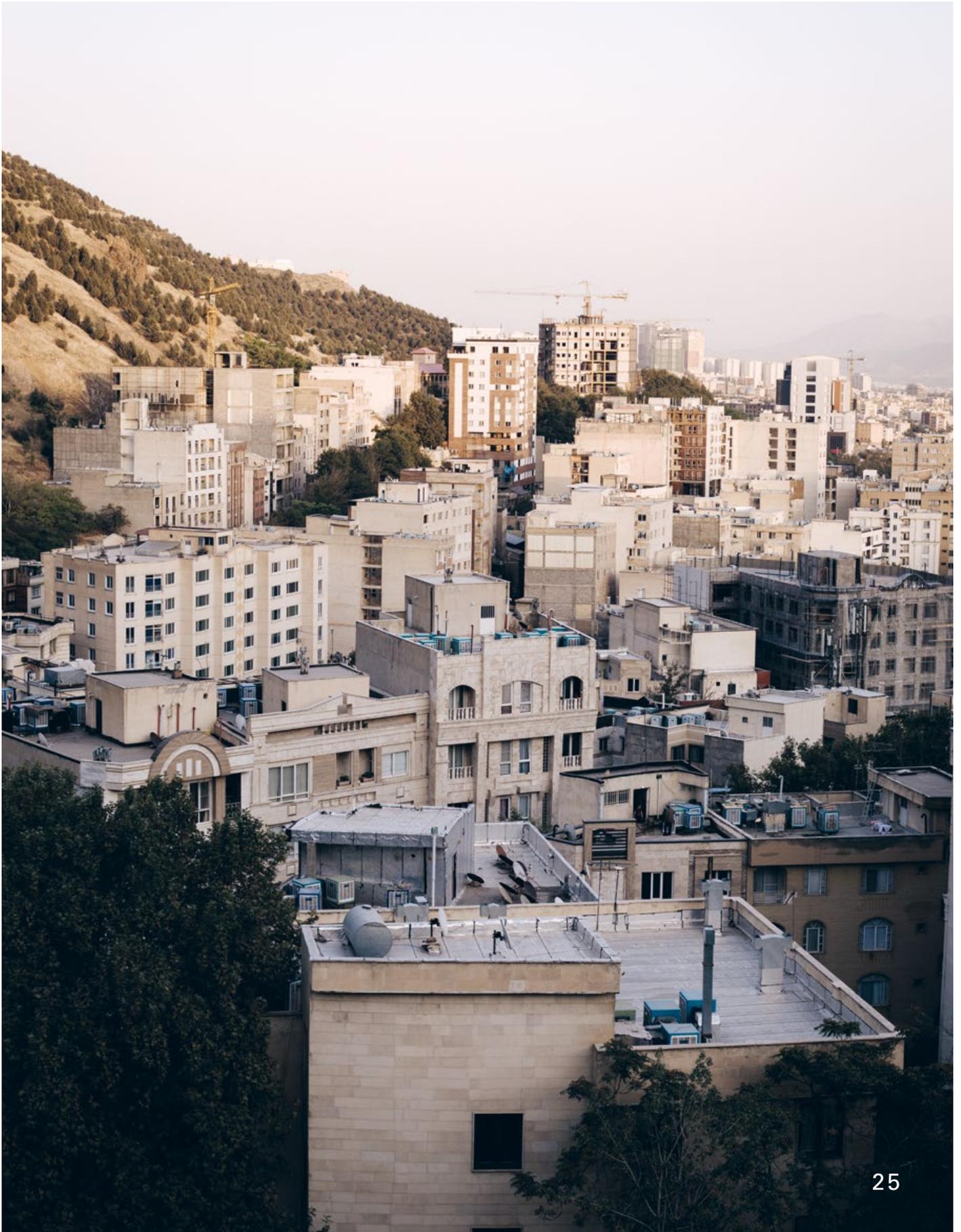
Her studio is a mixture of work space and living room where one can feel being at home.

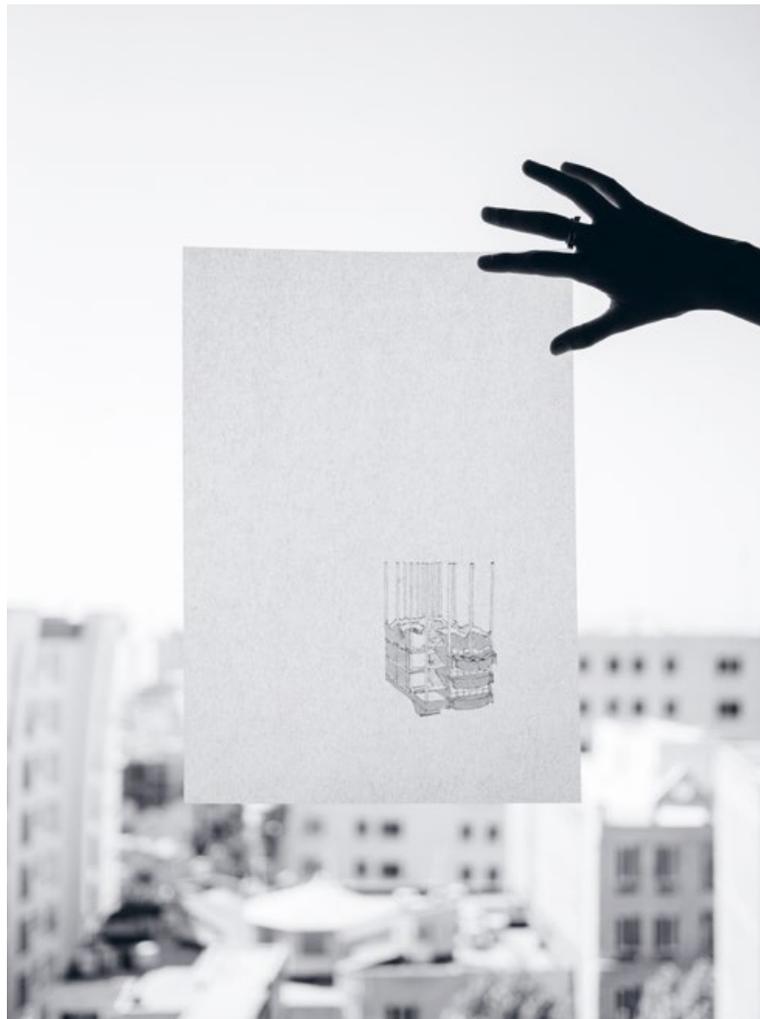
'As buildings are knocked down, collective and individual memories vanish.'

design, and architecture. Her design legacy shines through in everything she does, for her design is a way of thinking, a lens through which she analyses the world around her.

Ansarinia has a special interest in the built environment. The city is her context: she was born in a city, has always lived in big cities. That is where she happened to be placed. Cities make up her immediate surroundings, and constantly provide new themes and materials. As with any truly meaningful bond, it is a love-hate relationship. On the one hand, Ansarinia sees Tehran as the beautiful place where she grew up, which she calls her home, full of trees and mountains up north. On the other hand, it is a big, noisy, polluted city, bulldozing over itself, with every breakneck construction comes demolition. And as buildings are knocked down, collective and individual memories vanish. While it would be easy to feel lost and sad under such circumstances, Ansarinia is not nostalgic, professing no longing to preserve or bring back things from the past. Her aim is much more focused on documenting the process of demolition, detecting the unseen and making it visible to others. Her contribution to the larger social discourse is to find a way of speaking about topics that are difficult to even describe, let alone truly grasp. To accomplish this, Ansarinia turns these topics into art.

From the pictures Sima Deghani took of Nazgol Ansarinia in her light-flooded studio—with big windows, hardwood floors, plain furniture, and a tidy





↑ Similar to an architect Nazgol uses sketches and models to communicate her ideas on a specific topic. This sketch shows a perspective of a demolished building.





desk—I was expecting a modern woman of unpretentious style and aesthetics, someone thoughtful and considerate. But within minutes of talking to her, I found she was much more than that. She is not only an observer of the ordinary, the banal, and the repetitive, but describes herself as an analyst. She frequently uses terms like 'method', 'tools', and 'process', hinting at her extensive academic background. With the patience and precision of a researcher she gathers information for every new project. With a topic in mind—and Ansarinia always focuses on one topic at a time—perception changes, and suddenly everything can become inspirational. With this mindset, opening up a newspaper or a book, only what relates to the current subject jumps out. When it comes to talking about her ideas and works, Ansarinia prefers like-minded people to experts. Ansarinia's process and manner of making art is clearly a deeply personal journey for her.

With this knowledge of Ansarinia's approach to creation, I was not surprised to learn that almost all of her work is produced in her studio, which is also her living space. She transforms this space to meet the needs of her current project, as she does not usually know what the next project will be or how much space she is going to need. She will close off one part of the studio and turn it into a casting area if necessary, she states. Everything is created in her own little cosmos, only work involving large machines like laser-cutters or 3D-printers is done elsewhere. However, Ansarinia doesn't hesitate to involve these outside tools as needed, explaining that, once, she knew her models had to be 3D printed, because they needed 'to come in one piece, with no joints and no involvement of hands', to underline the concept that some things can only exist as an idea. How I love that explanation! In addition to building models, other elements of her work include videos, drawings, and even municipal murals. I asked Ansarinia about external parameters that influence her work, and she discussed several. For example, when she is working with galleries—and she has partnered with galleries from all over the world, from Dubai to London, from Paris to Ghent, and not least Germany; she has also taken part in both the Venice and the Istanbul Bi-



ennale, amongst many others—she designs for those specific spaces. She says, 'it can be nice for a visual artist, who has all the freedom in the world, to have some limitations'. While her theme remains unchanged, she welcomes the challenge of fabricating various pieces on the same subject if the space allows or asks for it. That morning before the interview, Ansarinia had been visiting a construction site—not just any one, but her own. While it took her a long time to select the ideal site, she says that inspecting that many apartments in every corner of the city was a fascinating experience. During the search for her yet-to-be modified shelter she got to know Tehran, once again, in a completely new way. Although the process of extensively renovating her house to make it a perfect space to live and work has been challenging and at times frustrating, Ansarinia explains that this has also given her the experience of interacting in a new way with her built environment, hopefully leading to developing a new project. And even though creating an ideal personal space in the midst of the craziness of this city can be emotionally draining, I could not think of a better twist. The woman who—despite her struggles—loves Tehran so much found her place of retreat in the very heart of it, the city centre. And until the day when she finally moves in, she has the next best thing about the city right in front of her - the mountains that she never gets tired of appreciating. For Ansarinia, these mountains are the epitome of perspective, a place she can always turn to.

' The models needed to be printed in 3D (...) to underline the concept that some things can only exist as idea.'

← 3D-printed working models, casted models and styrodur are only one of the outputs of her work. Dozens of them filling her studio which is also her living space.