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Top: Terike Haapoja, *Atlantis*, 2005, videoinstallation: videoprojection on two screens, video of ultrasound image, 25'00 looped. Sound design by Mikko Hynninen

## Ann-Sofi Noring on Sirous Namazi

# On the Periphery

During this era of accelerating globalization, when borders are shifting or cease to exist and the concept of the nation state is in a process of dissolution, one may well ask where the centre is to be found. Or centres, for innumerable places currently seek the status of a focal point. Everything changes, *pantarei*, as classical Greece put it. If centres are legion, where can we then find the periphery? Significant art often takes its inspiration from such places, at least if the soil is not infertile.

Sirous Namazi was a teenager when he came from the ancient city of Kerman in the south of Iran to the somewhat smaller city of Lund in the south of Sweden. Along with other new Swedes he had the experience of acquiring a new language and finding the right expressions. Many immigrants stop there, with their particular pronunciation and way of life. But Sirous has taken these experiences a step further and absorbed them into his art. He lets us participate in a way of looking at the world that changes our ingrained

opinions. His dual identity renders the ground we tread on unsafe.

*Periphery* (2002) is in the collections of Moderna Museet in Stockholm. It is classified as a sculpture. But is it not also a painting? Sirous Namazi started working on it at a time when he lacked a balcony himself. He undertook careful research, photographing numerous 'open-air' rooms. And he asked a structural engineer to produce drawings before having the balcony made in a workshop. The metalwork is precise, but the profiles are just a little too large which makes us a trifle uncertain about the scale. This is a balcony that we have all seen but we can neither name it nor describe its provenance. It is a sculpture in the minimalist tradition, bare and undemonstrative. The metal walls are pale yellow, a colour associated with functionalism and the Swedish welfare state; yellow contrasting with steel grey and the grey materiality of the concrete base. The metalwork has something of a fence about it, like slats separating inside and outside, private

garden and common land. Contrasting with the rectangular space is a circular parabolic dish. A perfect balance is created between the two forms. On the periphery but in contact with the entire world.

### To Venice

In the Nordic Pavilion Sirous Namazi is showing two entirely new works: one untitled and the other called *Container* (2007). Both sculptures find their point of departure in the urban landscape. There are references to a concrete tradition, not least that of minimalism but there is also a social perspective. It is at this point, in between the sculptural construction and the social connotation, that the tension is created.

In the pavilion, the sculptures have occupied all the dimensions of the room: *Container* is placed directly on the marble floor while the other sculpture strives upwards, outwards, as though trying to escape the limits of the walls. The sculptures are clearly related to *Periphery* but also show points

of contact with earlier works by Sirous Namazi. The way he seeks to deconstruct objects and to give them a new significance is a constant in his work. As is his investigation of the borderland between drawing, painting, sculpture and installation where the boundaries are gradually eroded and one category is absorbed into another.

### *Let's Kick Some Ass*

This is a disarming as well as a challenging title from 1996. Sirous Namazi has been constantly investigating the realm of painting: what are the limits of paint, how can it shift and change our view of things? As a teenager he was a skilled performer on the football field and he has preserved something of the game's attack and ingenuity in his art. With powerful kicks against a wall, like some modern type of action-painting, he and a colleague created a process-related painting in which the impressions of the foot became calligraphic signs. Only beauty remained on the 22 pieces of MDF board. The violent treatment



Terike Haapoja, *Mind Over Matter Over Mind*, 2005, three-part series of video portraits, 3D ultrasound images on LCD monitors, 20'00 - 40'00.



resulted only in testimony to the essence of movement: *Let's Kick Some Ass*.

Sirous Namazi's art has a basis in formal painterly and minimalist issues. Many of the works derive from experiments; his studio has always been his testing ground. There has been much discourse on the extended field of painting and of art in recent years and Sirous Namazi's contribution consists, *inter alia*, of his set-tos with castable silicon, a shiny, plasticky, industrial material. Here he has mixed in silicon paint, let it run down the wall, torn off the skeins of paint and hung them from nails. Layer upon layer, amorphously casual and yet arrested in the exact con-

dition that the artist has determined in his struggle with the material.

#### From the Rubbish Dump

*Patterns of Failure* – a popular title on the Internet – shows diagrams of houses that, for some reason or other, have collapsed. Sirous Namazi chose the title for an ongoing series of almost sixty objects based on items that had been thrown out and that he has resurrected as works of art. A process of reparation. The individual parts are all from the domestic sphere. He has crushed them, taken their origin and identity in his own hands and glued them together with epoxy to produce new meanings. Tall,

slender bodies, like Aladdin's lamp in all the colours of the rainbow. His choice of items from the china cupboard and the rubbish tip has been made solely on painterly grounds. From kicks and blows, violence and deconstruction to the re-use of chance and a return to a new life... Rubbish also served as the starting point for a suite of untitled paintings that he started in 2003. In these, he has enlarged details from photographs of rubbish dumps and has then hand-painted rectangular pixels on large sheets of aluminium with gloss paint. Thousands of rectangles which, close up, create an unintelligible pattern but which, seen from a distance,

provide beautiful and appalling views of human detritus. And so it is entirely appropriate that he has created a rubbish-container work for Venice.

#### Container

*Container* is "Yves Klein" blue. That is the industrial enamel colour that is used for marking containers for depositing large quantities of rubbish. Sirous Namazi has made use of a standard type, from the fundamentals. For this is an actual container that has been revealed in all its parts at a 1:1 scale, it is real but has, at the same time, been moved from its context of use, has been deconstructed and de-notated.

Top: Terike Haapoja, *Atlantis*, 2005, videoinstallation: videoprojection on two screens, video of ultrasound image, 25'00 looped. Sound design by Mikko Hynninen

Bottom: Terike Haapoja, *Diachrony*, 2005, live installation, Helsinki Cable Factory; spatial design and director Terike Haapoja; sound design Mikko Hynninen; performers Terike Haapoja, Julius Elo, Pasi Mäkelä, Tuire Tuomisto.





Containers of this sort are a central part of the contemporary urban landscape. Sorting rubbish has become an everyday activity for city dwellers whether one lives in Stockholm or in Venice. Outside Sirous Namazi's studio there are numerous containers and he has managed to trace the bright blue one to a manufacturer who has supplied him the parts – though not for producing something to put rubbish in but for a sculpture. The *Container* has been shipped over the sea, probably in the company of numerous large containers for all sorts of goods.

On the floor of the pavilion the sculpture becomes the concrete remains of a performative act: that is the act of deconstructing, step by step, an everyday object from being something usable and useful to the sphere of art. The sculpture carries its associative history; it is hard, concrete and monochrome. In the leap from functionality to the "now" of the pavilion, a slight dizziness is generated.

#### *Sign*

Sirous Namazi's studio is a workshop for ideas. As a painter he prefers to use

the rubbish dump as his palette and this is evident in his studio. It is not spotted with paint. Instead there are pictures pinned to the wall, bits of text, while a second-hand desk serves as his easel. Empty cardboard boxes provide the materials for a new series of works. While he was studying art, he undertook a project entitled *Discussion with empty fruit boxes* (1998), an arrangement of boxes which, from a painterly point of view, were decidedly subdued. He has taken up this work again as he likes to work in cycles and to follow several tracks at the same time, letting

older works confront newer ones. A constant theme of his art is the shift of meanings. He readily disrupts the principles for recognizable objects, whether these be a box, a window, a door – or a sign.

*Sign* (2003) is a large, shiny, aluminium sculpture that might have been designed to be visible by the side of a motorway where only instant messages are comprehensible. But there is no visible message; at least not immediately visible. Sixteen lamps on both sides of the sign illuminate the glossy but empty surfaces. Our attention is

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not answered and we are dazzled by the spotlights. This gives rise to an almost tragicomic sense of emptiness: how do we behave in the public domain when there are no signals for us as consumers? In similar fashion, Sirous Namazi confuses us with his video in which a man plays a drum roll followed by a brief silence. Or in another video in which he tells Persian jokes without any subtitles. A drum roll raises our expectations but nothing happens. And however entertaining it may be to watch Sirous' facial antics, his jokes fall flat. The artist's dual identities cre-

ate shifts that mean that the world no longer seems familiar.

#### With an Open or Closed Door

The tall, nameless sculpture cuts through the low, horizontal of the pavilion, white, pure and shiningly liberated; seemingly totally absorbed in its own dynamics. It is solidly anchored at three points but it is simultaneously in motion, on its way in numerous directions. The sculpture is made up of five balcony doors of standard format, made out of rigid plastic with double glazing and metal door handles.

Manufacturers produce all sorts of doors and, while seeking out his 'standard' door, Sirous Namazi excluded numerous possibilities. He decided on a door that was transparent and opaque in equal measure; a door with equal amounts of window and door.

The details are decisive: beneath the window there is a simple black strip that emphasizes the distinct, graphic character. Reduction and repetition are fundamental elements in Sirous Namazi's art. Here he varies a few themes that disrupt the standardization. The order is precise, the sur-

faces are clinical, the glass is expertly polished – but the sculpture as a whole balances on the thin, almost fictitious boundary with chaos. It is a highly concentrated act, just a hair's width from collapsing into a state of confusion or, alternatively, freezing into lifeless symmetry. The sculpture is the sum of its parts, the actual balcony doors, but at the same time it exceeds its own limits. As one views the work one loses one's sense of direction entirely and has to seek for a new footing. A door can, apparently, be open and closed at the same time. +