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I.

I remember when I was a child in Iran. In a small corner of the neighborhood, a man – who was a kind of nomad – came with a lot of accessories and instruments, and he would set up a stage, sometimes in cafes or very traditional tea shops. They would perform stories with music and poetry, reciting stories from *Shahnameh* – a long epic poem written by the Persian poet Ferdowsi – or some religious stories. You will not find a footprint of this tradition, it is not part of any nation-centered narrative. Yet the people who have this role in the community are respected. They are preserving and regenerating a specific and treasured kind of knowledge.

When I was in university, a friend and I decided to go to the northeast of Iran. He was a musician himself, and I was really interested in documenting these musical traditions from the region. We traveled to village after village, recording the music of the local players. Very instrumental and beautiful, and it was very common all over the region. The players were humble, a performance was quite intimate. And at the end of our travels we met a very well known player, Alireza Soleimani, son of Haj Ghorban Soleimani. It was he who showed me that there is a book. Each line of players only ever receives one copy – the grandfather receives it from his father and so on, generation after generation, and it is something confidential. The only way of sharing it is by singing. The interesting part of it is that in these stories – after each generation, century after century, based on the political and religious movements of the time – you can see the new generation, the new version, of the same story. They have the same roots, but have been modified based on new values. And with each recitation, in each new moment, you can see how this is a very generative way of preserving the knowledge within.



II.

Where I am from, we have a concept called garden. This concept has a deeper, more specific meaning than its common usage. Rather, the garden is a project that affects all aspects of daily life and existence. It explains why the carpet is full of floral motifs, and in the architecture, woven into the typography, you find foliage, and why, in a land that is so dry, they try to create a specific enclosed garden, with water at the center. This deeper concept of the garden, adopted by Islam, comes from Zoroastrianism, and is part of a worldview in which the deity cultivates the land, giving it life. Making a dry land green is a virtue in this belief. The idea is that one must endeavor to make the world green – make it alive, viable, and a good place to live. And everything we do should mirror this practice. One should be working to make paradise on the earth, live in it, and leave the paradise that we make for the next. So, perhaps unconsciously, we are trying to present and preserve the garden symbolically, even inside the house, as a reminder of this task.

History is not a link of stories, but, like the trunk of a tree, it grows in rings, each new story containing the last, growing and changing to reflect its environment and needs. The crisis of the modern believer is a lack of regeneration in the garden. Now the people are not the ones that regenerate or create their stories. There is a dominant media narrative that modifies and customizes the values of the story based on what it needs. And in this way people are just receivers, no longer recreators of the stories. This is like, for example, if you had a wide patch of natural land, full of all varieties of life, and you razed it. You remove the natural part and seed only the things you need or that will bring you profit, not trying to regrow anything that was once indigenous, and without trying to make it look natural. You have created a garden that is not natural, reaped only for its energy and resources. This is why I wish to stress the importance of listening as an action. By listening to its own stories, by listening to lost or small voices, the community preserves and regenerates itself. When we listen—even without understanding, just listening in good faith—we inhabit a mindset of rebirth. There is potential for spring in the garden.



III.

Roots prefer to grow in the dark. Seeds won't propagate, matter won't form, unless it does so in the dark, like a baby in a womb. Having access to light, or knowledge or awareness, is a kind of richness. If there is too much light too fast, you will burn. There is such a thing as too much to handle. So you have to integrate in the darkness. Things need time to form and become strong before they can metabolize a certain amount of exposure to light. If we decelerate the process of access to light, how does this affect growth? Distance in space and time allows for preparation. Like going from A to B, the distance between A and B is an occasion to prepare for our understanding of B. These days we pass quickly between A and B, without fully processing A, and even encountering C and D in between. Everything is so easy to access, but sometimes we cannot process it. We should limit ourselves to protect ourselves, and limit our intake to better understand what it is we are receiving.

This is a classical pedagogy in my culture. Even in the architecture and municipal design you can see this idea – you are not invited to be in the main part of the garden first. You move through the house, the garden, the question, the problem in stages. The deeper you explore, the more gates you will pass through, but you can only pass through one at a time.

As an artist I don't present or project things for people. Instead, I make a path, and someone can explore it and activate it, or they might miss it. But there is something that needs an action to be activated – it cannot be accessed passively, understanding is not a given. In a default way, what lives inside the work is not accessible without real listening. You can't be outside of the playground – in front of the gate – to see what happens, because it is about more than just seeing. It is about activating the potential of the garden by listening to that which has been lost or forgotten, by trying to receive and integrate it, thus giving it time and space to grow. But for this to happen we must actively move through the gates, be part of the environment, and explore it. And, once there, we just may find the entrance to another door.

IV.

Do you have a recurring dream/nightmare in your sleep?

I don't think I have any, as far as I remember.

What historical figure, living or dead, would you most like to have dinner with?

Omar Khayyam, he was a poet in (1048-1131)

If Hollywood made a movie about your life who should play you?

One of "the birds" in Hitchcock's movies!

If you could reincarnate as a plant, which one would you be?

Grapevine

If you could be a texture, what would it be?

*A surface of a lake around 7pm in a summer day
or a folded paper with notes written in ink.*

Which superpower would you like to have?

*A power to defuse any action that is based on a lie, avarice and ignorance.
The ability to reset historical events and life of people.*

Do you believe that alternate universes exist, and if yes, what universe are you currently in?

I have no idea.

Is there any artist that you would like to share your studio with?

*One corner for Andrei Tarkovsky when he has Ozu for a tea.
One corner for Richard Serra.
One corner for Michael Haneke when he is working on White Ribbon.*

If a wizard ambushed you in the park and made you choose, what category of food would you give life and be forced to keep as your best friend?

Fruit!

What is the oldest piece of art that you have kept of your own creation?

A painting of 6 dead fish.

What is the most bizarre thing that you've ever done that most people probably have not?

nothing bizarre enough to mention!