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## [AN ALIEN REQUEST](#)

By Katherine Volk

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Carbon 12 founders Kourosh Nouri and Nadine Knotzer, who are celebrating 10 years of the gallery, first came across Anahita Razmi in the autumn of 2010, as her name cropped up over a course of a few months in several institutional shows, particularly in Germany.

Having presented alongside established names such as Christian Jankowski, Ralf Ziervogel, and Jorinde Vogt, “[Razmi] had such a brilliant, solid practice so early in her career,” recalls Nouri. “She champions, to such a unique level, cultural re-contextualisation and solid appropriations, and the level of performative element in her video works is mind blowing. It got better every step of the way, each time we experienced the works in person.”

*Take Me to Your Leader* explores contemporary culture and politics, while simultaneously using Razmi’s own experiences as a springboard for cross-cultural misunderstandings—namely, how Eastern cultures and politics are often misinterpreted by the West. As the daughter of an Iranian father and a German mother living in Germany, the artist examines the complex issue of identity by playing with context through her installations and films.

She dismantles existing ideas and rearranges them to explore failures in communication and mistaken messages. “She always points, in a fine and non-didactic manner, at topics that could be controversial, yet manages to neutralise them in jaw-dropping way,” says Nouri. “The reception to her works is always so strong.”

Two pieces, *REIGN COAT #1* and *REIGN COAT #2* (both from 2018) are installed in the gallery as Persian carpet *jinbaori*, playing with the appropriation and misuse of cultural artefacts. In 16th century Japan, woven silk *jinbaori* were worn by the military class as overcoats for their iron armors. During the Momoyama Period (1573-1615), imported luxuries such as carpets came from Persia to Asia via the silk road or Portuguese ships. But placing textiles on the floor was not compatible with Japanese culture; and so—when the original function of the item was impractical, speaking to the history of cross-cultural meetings and mix-ups—the carpets were sometimes appropriated as textiles and made into sumptuous *jinbaoris*.

Parodying this misappropriation, Razmi titles the piece with a spelling pun, implying that this prestigious garment may not be intended to function in this way. Also, as a further play on the title of Razmi’s exhibition, the notion of ‘take me to your leader’ dives into the alien-like aspects of the unfamiliar; covered in traditional Persian motifs, such as a lion attacking its prey, the carpet would decorate the battle gear of the Samurai with patterns, symbols and animals from another land, speaking to historical and contemporary trade and economic practices.

Furthering the complexities of representation, Razmi toys with visual linguistics and pop culture. In the series, *LEADERS/DEALERS* (2018), the extraterrestrial request lenticularly shifts colours and meaning: the 'L' changes to a 'D', and blue becomes yellow or black becomes white. The alien trope is altered with a single head movement, and the cartoon greeting becomes a question: who is asking, and who is answering? The semiotics explore communication missteps, and how meaning can easily change with a slight modification to our perspectives.

From her recent project *THE FUTURE STATE*, created during her Goethe at LUX residency, Razmi exhibits *PARTIES* (2018). A staple in the exhibition, the word play in the video's title speculates on the loaded issue of The Islamic Republic of Iran and its future. Logos and banners of Iranian political parties throughout time appear, spaced with a steady beat. Combined with the black and white logos, two hands give visual instructions on how to perform the *beskhan*, also known as the 'Persian snap'—a two-handed finger snap. The title plays with the contradiction of a celebration, as the *beskhan* is traditionally performed during dances and parties, contrasting here with the symbols of political parties in a non-democratic society where they are banned.

Illustrative of humanity's cultural exchange throughout history, Razmi alludes to the inaccuracies of comprehending popular culture and politics between East and West—and queries the potential consequences of such misunderstandings. In the city of Dubai, where contemporary life is always shifting and evolving, with a revolving door of cultural exchange, *Take Me to Your Leader* is a fitting exhibition for a milestone anniversary at a gallery that has established itself as a leading space where programming stands outside of regional limitations.