

## ARTFORUM

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# Sara Rahbar

by Katrina Kufer

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Dove-gray walls have an unexpectedly soothing effect in this exhibition of Sara Rahbar's disembodied bronze appendages—eight sets of life-size cast arms and legs, and one head, displayed on the floor, on plinths, and weightlessly hanging from walls—with one lone flag in the corner. The lack of more forceful white walls doesn't appear gimmicky; instead, it provides an emotionally neutral base for Rahbar's confrontational, discomforting references to unspecified acts of violence. But the aggressiveness is just a front. The subtle juxtapositions employed discreetly temper every harsh note with an element of fragility: The clenched fists and curled toes indicate torture, fear, discrimination, and lack of safety, but paired with unfurled fingers and outstretched arms trying to wrangle the feet back together, the longing for salvation is unmistakable.

Despite the indestructible medium, paradoxical tone, and (literal) cold shoulder, the urge to touch these works is strong. This push and pull embodies the complexity of vulnerability, which Rahbar further broaches through two modes of phenomenological identification—the universality of suffering, and shared limbs and mannerisms—plunging you into unwelcome memories and acknowledgements of global states of anguish with bleak resolutions. Here, the significance of the American

flag-like *Flag 53, Shelter Me*, 2016, rears its head. A meticulous, orderly assemblage on tarp of objects Rahbar carefully collected—such as a knife, bullet belts, and nametags abandoned by soldiers after war, as well as coins and Bedouin-style metal jewelry—bluntly outlines the items and cyclical conditions that sustain, define, and destroy humankind. While Rahbar's theme may not be fresh, this wound is, and it needs a healing touch.