

Branching Out

Iranian artist Ghazel takes a journey into the past with her new exhibition, *Family Tree*.

The inspiration for an artwork can come from anywhere. Whether it's a beautiful landscape, a face lined with a thousand stories or simply an object discarded on the street, any subject can stir enough emotion within an artist that they begin to create.

For Iranian artist, Ghazel, that inspiration came from a source as close to home as it gets. *Family Tree*

is taken from Ghazel's *Me* series, ongoing since 1997 with over 730 scenes. The latest exhibit consists of 12 episodes made from family stories enacted by the artist herself, creating a collection which Ghazel herself describes as: "family stories reconstructed; they all are real stories I dug in my roots (memory)."

To portray the characters from her past, Ghazel adopts a black chador and poses for her own incarnation of situations, personalities and



characters featured in *Family Tree* uses silent-film gesticulations and childlike reiteration of "factual histories", but never sacrifices the genuine fondness with which Ghazel looks back on each character and scenario.

memories from throughout her life. From her great aunt to her mum, her brother, her dad, her nanny, even her dog, Ghazel's approach exudes humour as well as provoking viewers to think back on their own history.

Not only were her family members the inspiration for her

It is her honest approach to her art that has seen Ghazel become one of the most significant Iranian contemporary artists on the international art scene. Considered by many critics to be a pioneer of video art and performance, the *Me* series from which *Family Tree* stems has been shown extensively around the world since 2000, with exhibitions in prestigious institutions and Biennials.

As with any form of personal expression, however, Ghazel's use of her own life experience to create artworks offers a deep insight into her own psyche and history, one which, as a young girl growing up in a troubled country, was influenced by the world around her and cultural, social and economic events in Iran's own development.

However, Ghazel remains true to her roots and appreciates the controversy and conversation that can often come hand-in-hand with being a contemporary artist. She says: "I am open to all reactions and have always discussed my work with people who were against it. This makes you learn a lot."

And viewers can certainly learn a lot from *Family Tree*. Each image offers a door into someone else's history, a door that, once opened, can touch the soul in many ways. ●



GHAZEL GETS BACK TO HER ROOTS

