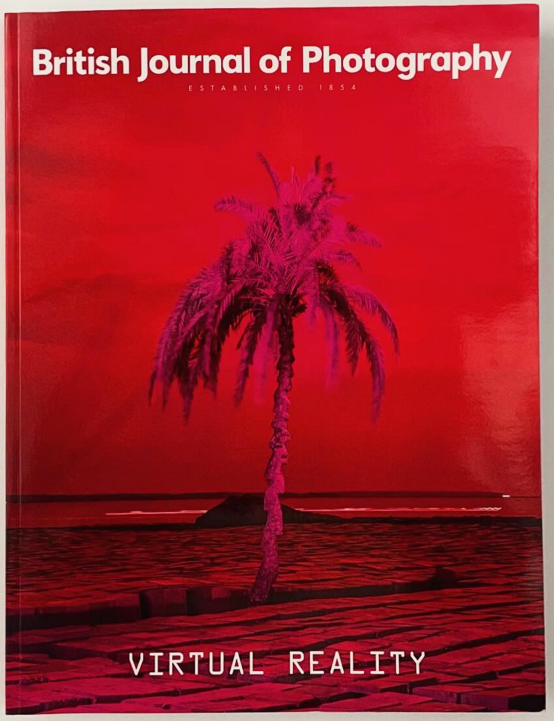

IMAGES OFFER A PARTIAL LENS ON REALITY. GOING BEYOND SUBJECTS AND MOTIFS, FIVE PHOTOGRAPHERS DISCUSS HOW THEY USE FORM TO MAKE A STATEMENT

INTERVIEWS BY PHILIPPA KELLY

TRUST THE PROCESS

NAZANIN NOROOZI

NAZANIN NOROOZI IS A MULTIDISCIPLINARY ARTIST WHOSE WORK INCORPORATES MOVING IMAGES, PRINTMAKING AND ALTERNATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY PROCESSES TO REFLECT ON NOTIONS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND DISPLACEMENT. HER WORK IS ROOTED IN A SEARCH FOR UNIVERSAL EVOCATIONS OF LOSS AND LONGING, AND HAS BEEN EXHIBITED IN MUSEUMS AND GALLERIES ACROSS EUROPE AND AMERICA

'This Bitter Earth is a series of works on paper and a hand-made film that I created in tandem. I usually work like this with my projects – film-making, stop-motion or experimental film-making is relatively new to my practice. I used to be a painter and printmaker, so I usually work with both of them together, one influencing the other. I've always worked with archives, found images, personal things, and my work has been photo based for a long time.

The work has four main chapters. One is the birthday scene, the Super 8 films that my dad took in the late 1970s and early 80s in Iran. I found them a couple of years ago in our basement and became obsessed with them. I thought I have to do something – and started making these stop-motion paintings and painted films. Then there are three chapters focused on historic but more recent events. The main umbrella that connects the project is the downing of the PS752 plane by the Iranian government in 2020, when they shot a plane with missiles and all 176 passengers died. Then there is the last troops of the US Air Force leaving Afghanistan in 2021, and also the explosion at the port of Beirut in 2020.

These are the four main chapters, and it's important that people understand what these sources are. But at the same time, I'm much more interested in the idea of a broken narrative. I'm creating this kind of parallel universe, where weird things are happening at the same time from the past, present and future. I was drawn to the vivid footage of the explosion in Beirut and how it was captured from many different angles by passers-by. What struck me most was the scale of this human-made disaster. A sense of helplessness links all of these images together. It's hard to believe that these atrocities can happen – they're indigestible. But art has the capacity to talk about things that are hard to believe or fathom. It has always done that.

In general, my work is about ideas of belonging, displacement and a sense of instability. I've always felt like everything that you've worked for, everything that people make, can be taken away from you in a second for reasons completely outside your control. I want to talk about this sense of heaviness, of insecurity, that all we citizens of the world feel.

The work is also about so many other things. It's about how we understand an image, and how we work with archives. It's about how I can take these images created by other people, these stories that are told by others, and make them my own. Or, by making them haphazard, actually create something else.

This Bitter Earth is the first project for which I have hand-made paper, and I worked in a specific paper-making studio. But because I come from a printmaking background, I'm interested in building the layers of an image. If I do any kind of alternative photography processes, they're more like prints, meaning I'm more interested in the process of printing the work than capturing the picture. The picture is captured by somebody else a lot of times, so I'm like a camera less photographer.

That process of going back and forth with the images – painting on them, building layers, doing a cyanotype and doing silkscreen on top of it – that's where I create that emotional space. It's never a straight relationship. I don't say, 'OK, what kind of technique can I use to make this ghostly or emotional?' the way I work makes things a little ghostly and emotional.

For a long time I've wanted to step out of my most immediate surroundings, because I see the events of this work as interconnected. With these four chapters I thought it kind of shows the spirit of the region in a way, the grandeur of everything that we have to deal with, but also maybe it's a historical perspective as well. I'm less and less thinking about memory, and more thinking about history – what we see in history, or what we understand as history.' ☛

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Opposite: Recital 2020(d) #1
Pages 100–101: Tehran 2020(d) #1
Both images from the series This Bitter Earth, 2022. © Nazanin Noroozi.