

ANNA ZORINA GALLERY

NADINE FARAJ

Ages Ago Every Cell In Your Soul Capsized Forever

Into This Infinite Golden Sea

SPRING/BREAK ART SHOW

Anna Zorina Gallery, Room S10

March 5 – March 11, 2019

“Our cave is in the north of modern-day Iraq. It is not far from the Shanidar Cave yet, unlike Shanidar, it still has not been discovered by archeologists. For millennia, my ancestors inhabited the land between the Tigris and the Euphrates rivers, known as Mesopotamia. The cave installation is based on the accounts handed down to me through the female members of my Iraqi family. Before my family was Jewish, we followed common ancient Mesopotamian practices. These were quite liberated when it came to gender expression and sex. Homosexuality was not taboo. Women of that time were encouraged to enjoy their sexuality and use it as a path to nirvana. Spirituality did not conflict with sexuality: both practices were seen as a way to achieve a higher plane.

Our ancient cave was painted by women, for women’s education and ceremonies. My great-aunt Violette as well as my aunts Valentine and Grace were all initiates in this pre-Abrahamic tradition. Our cave is reachable on foot, a journey that takes four days from Baghdad; however by the 1930s my aunts were able to ride a bus for much of this trip. It is my understanding that women would gather there once each year. Girls could be initiated only upon puberty.”

– Nadine Faraj

Since the dawn of the Abrahamic religions women have been pushed to the back of the temple, literally and figuratively. What mystic practices they wanted, they have had to cultivate and maintain themselves. They created their own ways to strengthen themselves to continue their spiritual development. Faraj has been painting mystic erotic imagery for years. However, she has not revealed a link to these particular teachings before. This is an opportunity to link ancient and contemporary cultures.

The artist has chosen to disclose information about her secret sisterhood publicly because we are experiencing a new wave of women’s liberation with #MeToo, with renewed attention to the gender wage gap, with #SayHerName, and with much activism on several other fronts too. Women are sharing personal stories of all kinds in order to empower each other. Sharing an ancient story of free and empowered women is a reminder that the status quo can, and will, change again. Finally, the artist feels it is appropriate to divulge this

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information now because scholars are already on the cusp of discovery of this secret cave.

The artwork consists of watercolor painting on paper that is crumpled and shaped to evoke the bulges of a natural rock ceiling. The lightweight paper will be suspended using concealed linen hinges attached carefully to the ceiling tile infrastructure. Its weight is 1 oz. per square foot and will be evenly distributed. If necessary, ceiling tiles will be cautiously removed. Fragments of the replicated cave paintings will also be on the walls. The walls will have been painted in a dark color so that any section that is visible in between the painted paper fragments will not disrupt the visual event.

Several different scenes will be presented throughout the cave replica. They appear as self-contained images even when they are painted on the same support. The vignettes might appear to be presented at random, but they are all thematically interconnected and related to the practices of the Mesopotamian Sisterhood. Some of these relate to self-care and self-pleasure, others relate to partnered sexual acts. Homosexuality is depicted with the same ease as heterosexuality. Typically, bodies depicted in these scenes are red, brown, or black, similarly to what we find on Etruscan and ancient Egyptian murals.

The special requirement is to have a room preferably without windows, and with only one entrance. The installation is meant to be strange and mysterious, but not dangerous. Visitors enter an unlit room, illuminated only by a minimum of light passing through the slit in the doorway curtain. They are provided amber flashlights or permitted to use their own telephone flashlights in order to properly illuminate the sections of the ceiling they want to see. An attendant will be present to assist visitors at all times.

For further information, please contact Marie Nyquist at 212-243-2100 or via email at marie@annazorinagallery.com.