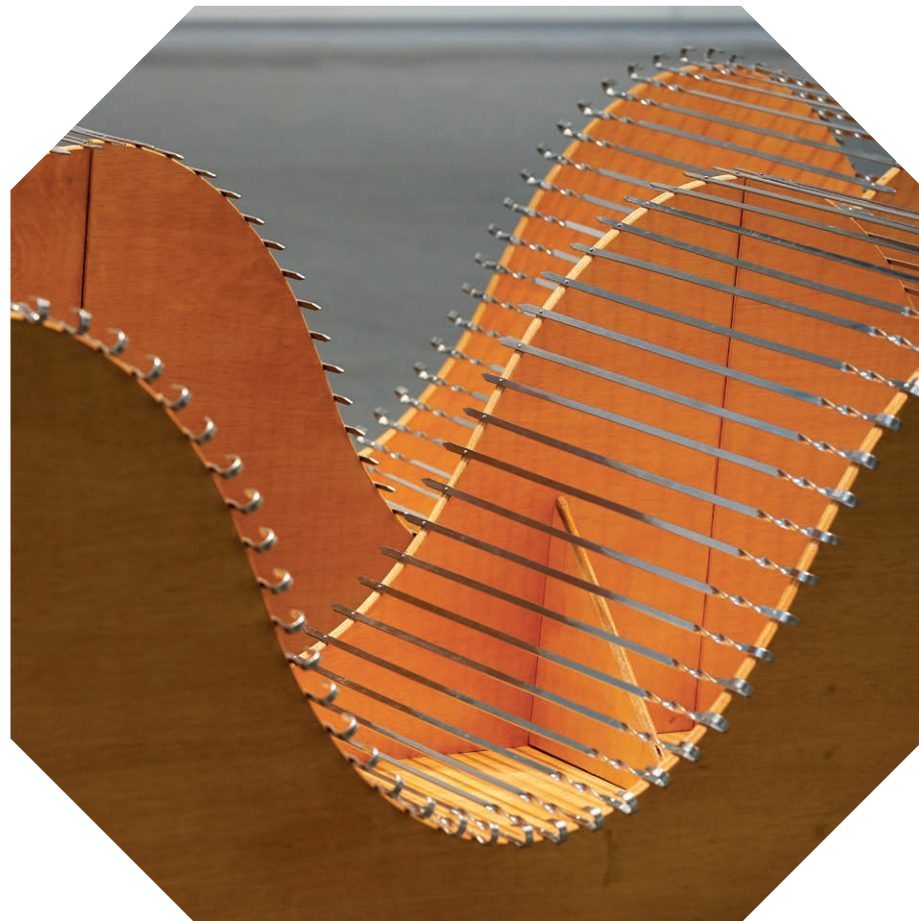


**FARID
RASULOV**

**1001 SKEWERS
BIRD #1**

LAUME/ER



Our History (DNA Conversation) (detail), 2018
Stainless-steel kebab skewers, wood, dimensions variable

DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Dana Turkovic

Tucked away at the western edge of the Caspian Sea, along a fork of the Silk Road and at the world's historic center of petroleum exploitation, Farid Rasulov draws from traditional Azeri artistic practices that he witnesses slowly vanishing from Azerbaijan's collective memory in the face of globalization. Rasulov's indoor exhibition and outdoor commission at Laumeier Sculpture Park extend his current body of sculptural work based on complex cultural references from his home country of Azerbaijan, a former USSR member located in the Caucasus, sandwiched between Chechnya and Iran.

In 2015, I found my way to Baku, Azerbaijan. While there, I was surprised by the mash-up of architectural styles. Definitely, this is where East meets West. Three wavy, ultra-modern buildings dominate the cityscape and what looks like a fire in the sky emerges from the architecture, resembling the grandiosity of Paris. Wide streets with old-world charm and anarchic traffic, an aromatic farmers market and a rigid Soviet-style apartment complex are just a short walk from Zaha Hadid's Heydar Aliyev Center, a massive cultural center that undulates, curves and slopes—a snowboarder's dream of a structure that reveals a façade of windows and hidden entries. Baku is a strangely beautiful place of extremes, East and West, new and old, wealth and poverty—but something of a guise is present. These dichotomies find their way into Rasulov's work.

Presented in these works is a thinly veiled duality—pleasure and terror balanced on a knife edge. The kebab skewer, used as material for *1001 Skewers*, is a utensil used for feasting at restaurants—yet sharp, pointed and derived from lethal weaponry used by Steppe warriors. It is also a reference to the classic Arabic tale, *1001 Nights*. *Bird #1*, Rasulov's

* Northwest Persian rugs drive the high-end, museum quality antiques which include Serapis, Heriz, Tabriz and Bakshaish. Those are towns populated by ethnic Azerbaijanis living in the country of Iran. Dealers still call these "Persian" carpets, and the truth is that the original Azerbaijani designs are woven by Azerbaijanis in what is today (depending on who you talk to), Iranian Azerbaijan, South Azerbaijan and Persian Azerbaijan. www.visions.az/en/news/262/35d8792/, accessed 3/1/18.

monumental, fiberglass sculpture perched in our Northern Grove, is a rug ornament inspired by nature, weaving in the symbology and basic principles of design in what Westerners call "Persian"* carpets, which Azeris claim as their own national tradition. These intersectional arguments about cultures adopting and appropriating each other's forms also find new meaning in the Midwestern American landscape at Laumeier.

Rasulov is active across a wide range of artistic media—large-scale paintings, installations, photography, performance, animation and sculpture. His works are intellectually provocative, with complex historical and cultural references relating to art, architecture, craft and the biological sciences. This work remarks that our everyday existence is deceptively simple, particularly when viewed through the objects surrounding us.

For this exhibition, Rasulov lays out a large, sculptural, multi-part installation entitled *1001 Skewers*, fabricated in Azerbaijan. Used for shish kebabs, his formal configurations using a stainless steel “Şiş”[†]

employ the device of storytelling through linear configurations based on the outrageous geometries found in Azeri rug patterns[‡], co-mingled with symbols found in science, religion and technology.

Azerbaijan has a long and rich tradition of weaving rugs with seven distinct rug weaving regions—Tabriz, Shirvan, Qazakh, Quba, Genca, Qarabah and Baku. Each of these regions has its own unique colors

[†]“Şiş” is a Turkic word meaning “sword” or “skewer.” It is understood that the shish kebab was invented by medieval soldiers who used their swords to grill meat over open fires, eating straight off the blade.

[‡]During the 14th and the 15th centuries, European painters such as Memling, Holbein, Van Eyck, Carpaccio, Vermeer and Crivelli started to introduce Azerbaijani carpets in their works. The ravishing play of colors and dizzying geometric patterns in the carpets was a mark of exoticism.



Installation view of *1001 Skewers*, 2018

and patterns, typical of that particular region. Each design motif acts as a kind of vocabulary—each carpet tells a story that can also hide coded messages, which makes for a fascinating and mysterious object.

While Rasulov’s collection of short, fairytale stories using countless skewers is personal, universal and contemporaneous, the *Arabian Nights*—also known as *1001 Nights*[§]—evokes the Orient and the exotic for American audiences. Written out by Rasulov, each one of his five works contains an accompanying story to guide the viewer, serving as both artist and narrator. The theme of storytelling engages another part of the mind and helps to develop our imagination.

The Tree of Life, a symbol common in several monotheistic religions and in Azerbaijani carpet designs, is a symbol of the afterlife, immortality and hope. As a significant subject and object in the story of the Garden of Eden, it reminds us of man’s aspiration to become immortal. Unable to eat the forbidden fruit of life, mankind must place all hope in existence after death. In Rasulov’s *Tree of Skewers*, 2018, the thin, stainless-steel branches emerge from the concrete of the gallery as they scale the wall and stick to the sheetrock like a creeping vine. In the most direct way, Rasulov’s use of symmetrical lines and patterns symbolizes the balance and purity of geometry in nature, God’s gift to humankind and Laumeier’s lush landscape.

Rasulov’s other works, *Wifi*, *44+XY*, *Adenine* and *Our History (DNA Conversation)*, 2018, each touch on the subject of technology and biology, with a dash of piety and a slight jab at crass commercialization. In *44+XY*, a reference to the human male karyotype, a large series of crossed skewers are pinned in what appears to be a mass sword fight. Similarly, in *Our History (DNA Conversation)*, a wave form made up of 500 skewers dividing the width of the gallery space, the undulating skewers are both subject and object. *Our History* is the perfect coupling of comedy with sincerity in a commentary on history and human behavior; the skewer is genetic and material, a symbol that is indivisible from its culture.

[§]*The Arabian Nights* is a collection of tales from the classical Arab canon or Islamic Golden Age, compiled by various authors over many hundreds of years. They are all centered on the frame story of the sultan Shahrayar and his wife, Scheherazade. The stories she tells comprise the collection, including *Aladdin’s Lamp*, *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves*, and *The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor*.

Rasulov’s outdoor commission, *Bird #1*, 2018, is a formal extraction of geometric, abstract shapes from Azerbaijani rugs, which tell stories through symbols, colors and patterns unique to their distinct weaving region. Birds are symbolic of the miracle of flight, with the ability to see from a greater perspective. Rasulov’s

simplified *Bird #1* makes a multiplicity of references, installed here as a massive white sculptural shape—a pixelated dove. In a sculpture park, it is whimsical and humorous, a representation of the natural world in dialogue with the concept of representation in art. Ultimately, *Bird #1* is a celebration of Rasulov's heritage and traditions in the Caucasus. Enlarged and isolated in this way, the story being told here is one of contradiction—*Bird #1* is free yet isolated, exotic yet ordinary, and comically profound.



Bird #1, 2018
Painted polyvinyl, dimensions variable

Rasulov's exhibition is built around an amalgamation of abstraction and representation, original and reproduction, Europe and Asia, Islam and Communism, art and craft, personal, local and world history—all turned into an encompassing environment of dizzying complexity. *1001 Skewers* and *Bird #1* are pulled from nature but inspired by culture through the universal language of art.

Dana Turkovic is Curator at Laumeier Sculpture Park.







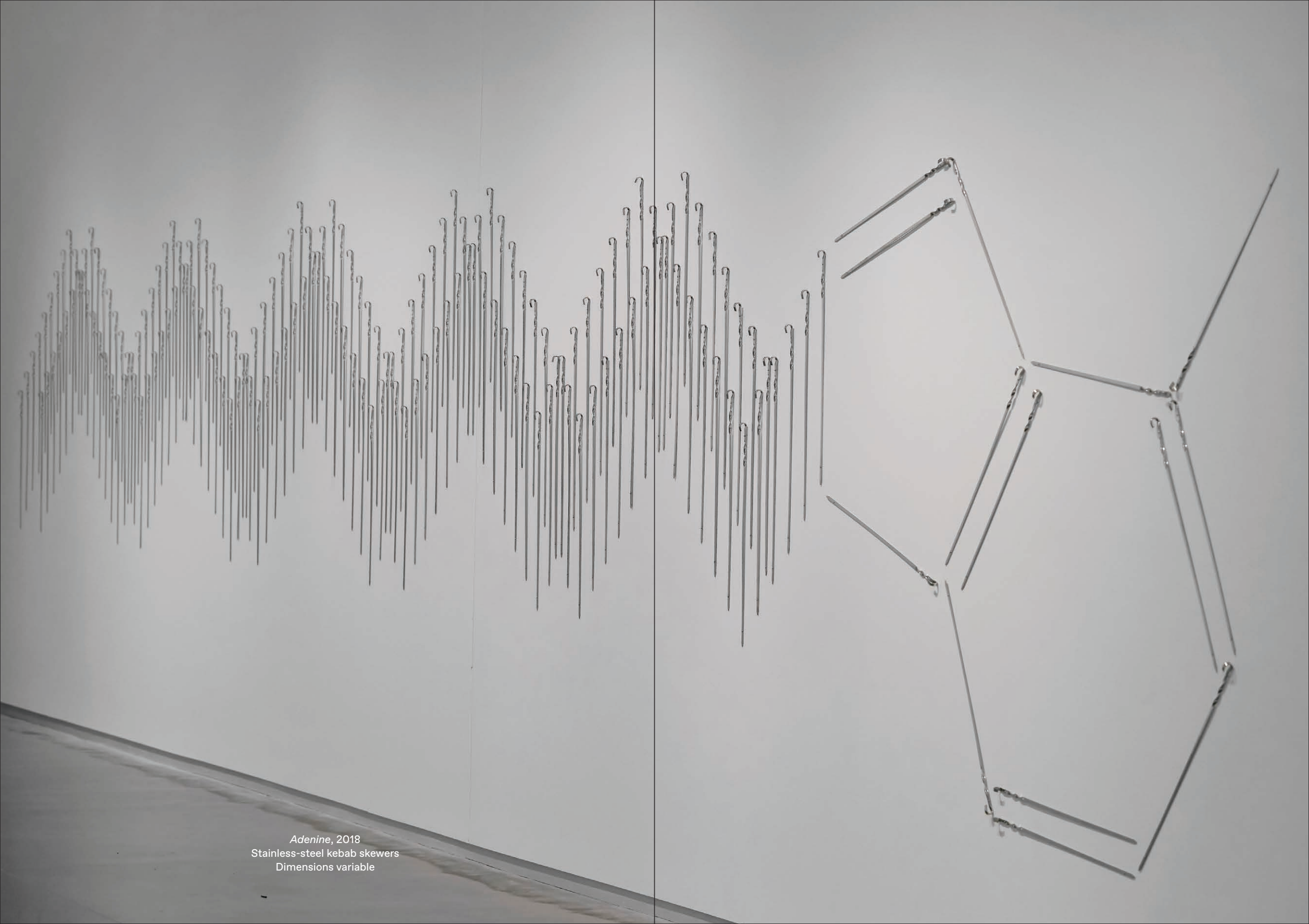
44+XY, 2018
Stainless-steel kebab skewers
Dimensions variable



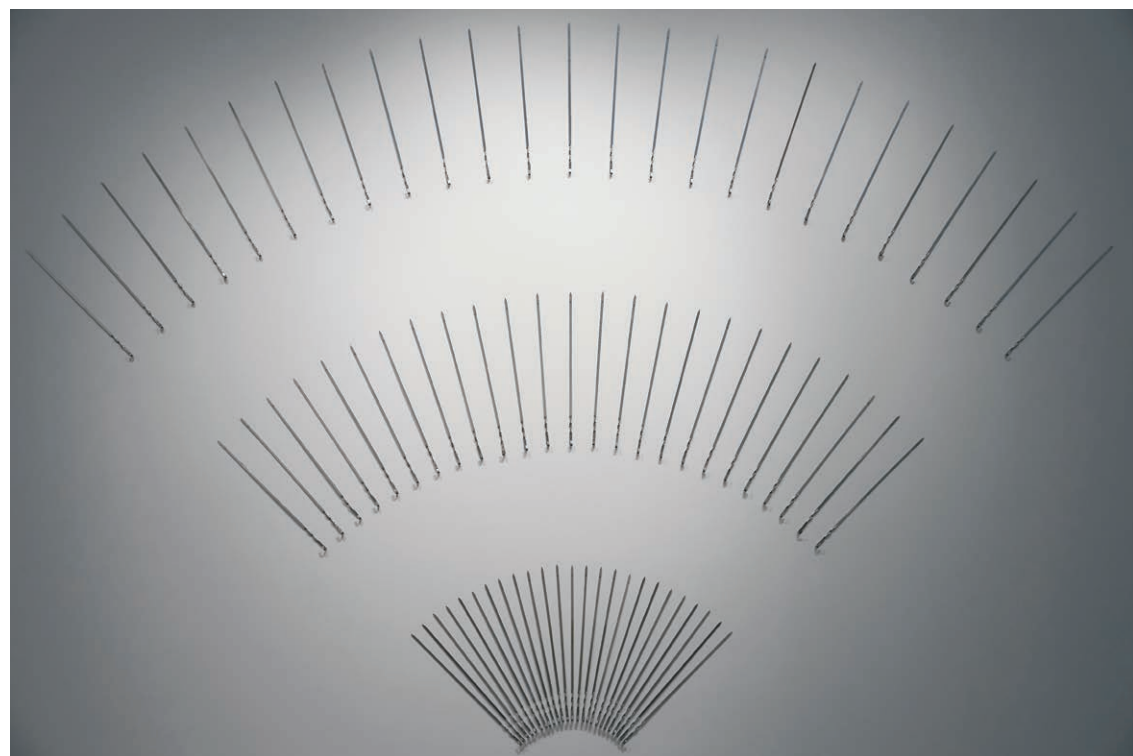
Our History (DNA Conversation), 2018
Stainless-steel kebab skewers, wood
Dimensions variable



Tree of Skewers, 2018
Stainless-steel kebab skewers
Dimensions variable



Adenine, 2018
Stainless-steel kebab skewers
Dimensions variable



Wifi, 2018
Stainless-steel kebab skewers
Dimensions variable

THE SECRET LIFE OF OBJECTS

Teymur Daimi

One of the features of contemporary art is the organic correlation (by most sensitive and perceptive artists) with relevant, theoretical discourse. Most radical artists, including Marcel Duchamp, were more likely to establish favorable conditions for the emergence of possible theories rather than to create manmade works of art. I am not aiming to assign Azerbaijani artist Farid Rasulov to such an artist type here, but it is obvious to me that works by Rasulov are quite powerful and resonate with current trends in the intellectual industry. In this article, we are not going to review Rasulov's current projects—but rather, walk through his earlier works from past exhibitions (e.g. *Objects, Seafood, Only One Chance*) that were a kind of precursor to his current, creative solutions.

My main talking point is that most of Rasulov's previous works correlate with the current, hottest trend in modern philosophy, speculative realism*—more particularly with object-oriented ontology[†] as represented by contemporary American philosopher Graham Harman. It bears reminding that the very essence of this speculative realism philosophy resides in its eagerness to think about the world before/without/after humans, i.e., to gain access to this reality which exists without prejudice and independently of human's thinking—or in other words, going beyond anthropocentrism.

According to Immanuel Kant, "Everything in the world narrows down to the ability of human perception and thinking." This means that every-

* Speculative realism is a movement in contemporary Continental-inspired philosophy that defines itself loosely in its stance of metaphysical realism against the dominant forms of post-Kantian philosophy (or what it terms "correlationism"). Speculative realism takes its name from a conference held at Goldsmiths College, University of London, in April 2007.

[†] Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology: A New Theory of Everything* (London, United Kingdom: A Pelican Book, 2018). *Object-Oriented Ontology* rejects the idea of human specialness: the world, he states, is clearly not the world as manifest to humans. At the heart of this philosophy is the idea that objects—whether real, fictional, natural, artificial, human or non-human are mutually autonomous.

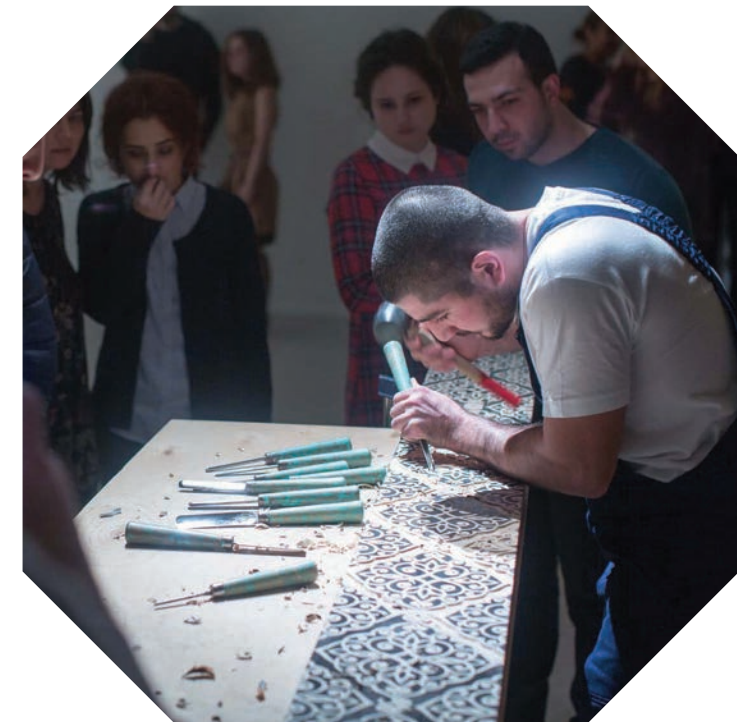
thing in this world will exist insofar as it can be conceived by a human being—and nothing exists outside of the frontiers of his/her knowledge. Accessing a non-human level, i.e. a world without humans, may implicate "setting free from a golden cage of anthropocentric exclusivity" (aka, *Anthropo-Racism*) and recognize the concept that all the objects in the universe are equidistant from reality without any privileges. Having said so, not only animate objects are implicated. Put another way, speculative realism proclaims radical, ontological democracy of all existing objects, which in their deepness are open to the mystery of reality.

Going back to Rasulov's creative artwork, a reference must be made to a series of his flagship paintings that depict simple objects; a curved spoon, shattered cup, broken pot, damaged cassette, electrical socket and switch pulled out from the wall, along with large canvases where eggs with broken shells, fruits, medical products or even birds are just a slice of life. What's more, all these pieces dovetail into one another. Most notable are the artist's photographic prints and videos containing a variety of modeled animals set within domestic spaces decorated with colorful rugs, such as his series titled *Carpet Interiors*.

But, what is the main peculiarity of all these pieces? It is a combination of Rasulov's use of hyper-realism, the absence of human principle and the author's neutral point of view. In these works, the artist refrains from demonstrating a subjective relationship or a depicted emotional involvement while confronting us with a world of objects outside of human influence. Last but not least, these objects seem to enter into certain relations with each other. In Rasulov's work *Only One Chance*, we observe how fire devours a wooden object. This non-human, performative act is precisely correlated with an example of interaction between cotton and fire, often cited as an illustration of Harman's ideas.



Goats in the Kitchen (from the series *Carpet Interiors*), 2014
Digital print on aluminum, dimensions variable



Only One Chance, 2015
Performance at MOMA, Baku

From Harman's perspective, fire and cotton do not need human presence to enter into relation. In his book *Towards Speculative Realism*, the American philosopher sheds light on the "grand universe of objects," which excludes the human view and/or privilege on these things. Hammers, flashes of lightning, people, tigers and blueberry pies are placed on singular, ontological flatness—and as such, can be considered as *equisignificant*. These objects, theoretically, experience adventure, seduce one another, make alliances, create new objects, take naps or endlessly escape from any relationship—situations also common in Rasulov's canvases and prints.

Nevertheless, we are faced with one contradiction here. No matter how neutral or non-human the artist's object-oriented works are, they are still made by a human. Since such interaction of objects is imprinted by a witnessing man, then what kind of "non-human" dimension can we talk about? And here goes the following explanation: If we are in consent with conceptual strategy toward speculative realism, then a human is the same as all other objects in the universe—not better and not worse. A human does not have privileged access to this "reality," just like all other objects, both animate and inanimate, otherwise are connected to this "reality." The matter here is that interaction of objects

can occur only at mediation (or intermediation) of a certain invisible field, which would connect these objects to themselves. Through its ontological status, such a field or place would exceed the level of objects and create favorable conditions for their meeting.

Since we are talking about the artist, visual art and visual perception, could such a uniting place/mediator be a meta-optical instance represented in human as his/her neurological system (i.e. brain), through which the process of the artist's perception toward a world of objects occurs? We might note parenthetically that such a meta-optical instance can be correlated with conscious phenomenon, and, as such, we can talk about the concept of panpsychism (the presence of consciousness in all forms of beings), considered by significant scientists within the framework of consciousness philosophy. When it comes to the human (i.e. artist), he pursues an objective to approach this "mysterious instance" through overcoming his sense of anthropocentric exclusivity, which holds him in the grip of limited, subjective perception. Otherwise speaking, being a human after all, an artist does not put himself above those objects once depicted by him, but realizes the product of meta-optical instance, which is equidistant from all objects of the universe, seeks to comprehend it as a thread leading to this reality.

Translated from Russian by Samir Mammadov, Baku.

Teymur Daimi is a multimedia artist, filmmaker, philosopher (Ph.D.) art and film critic, theorist of culture, art consultant, art teacher and publicist who studied at the Azimzadeh College of Art and the Azerbaijan State University of Culture and Art. His professional interest lies in interdisciplinary activity comprehending visual arts, filmmaking, experimental cinema, theory of perception, art writing, pedagogical practice, neurophysiology, psycho-technologies and anthropological practices. He is an established writer whose articles have appeared in art publications around the world. Teymur's work was among the work chosen to represent the visual art of Azerbaijan at the 53rd Venice Biennale in 2007. His articles were published in the Azerbaijani Pavilion's catalogs for the 52nd and 54th Venice Biennales. Daimi lives and works in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Artist Biography

Farid Rasulov was born in 1985 in Shusha, Azerbaijan. Solo exhibitions include Gallery Rabouan Moussion, Paris; Sharja Islamic Art Festival, Sharjah, UAE; Aidan Gallery, Moscow; and Kichik QalArt Gallery, Baku. Selected group exhibitions include Kunsthistorisches Museum, Neue Burg, Vienna; Spazio D-Maxxi National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome; Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow; ME Collectors Room, Berlin; Hotel Salomon de Rothschild, Paris; Phillips de Pury & Company, London; 55th International Art Exhibition of Venice Biennale, Azerbaijan Pavilion, Venice; Modern Art Museum, Baku; YARAT Contemporary Art Space Baku; Gazelli Art House, London; Kichik QalArt Gallery, Baku; PERM Museum of Modern Art (PERMM), Perm; Aidan Gallery, Moscow; Deutch Kyrkha, Baku; Voltahalle, Basel; M'ARS Gallery, Moscow; 53rd International Art Exhibition of Venice Biennale, Azerbaijan Pavilion, Venice; Atrium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berlin; and Residenzschloss, Dresden. Rasulov lives and works in Baku, Azerbaijan.

FARID RASULOV

1001 SKEWERS

Aronson Fine Arts Center

BIRD #1

Northern Grove

Laumeier Sculpture Park

Organized by Dana Turkovic, Curator

April 7 – July 29, 2018

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