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October 20, 2013 Written by [admin](#)

### Barbad Golshiri: Curriculum Mortis at Thomas Erben Gallery

Shotgun Reviews are an open forum where we invite the international art community to contribute timely, short-format responses to an exhibition or event. If you are interested in submitting a Shotgun Review, please [click this link](#) for more information. In this Shotgun Review, Bansie Vasvani reviews Barbad Golshiri's Curriculum Mortis at Thomas Erben Gallery in New York City.



Barbad Golshiri. The Untitled Tomb, 2012; iron, soot, 53 x 24 in. Edition of 3. Photo: Andreas Vesterlund, courtesy the artist and Thomas Erben Gallery, New York.

The question of martyrdom pervades Barbad Golshiri's sculptural installation of tombstones in his solo exhibition Curriculum Mortis at Thomas Erben Gallery. Through his deeply conceptual yet enormously potent practice, Golshiri devises a way of outwitting the religious regime of his home country Iran with work that one can position in the relatively recent legacy that includes sculptor Parviz Tanavoli and Iranian modernism from the 1950s. Reminiscent of Carl Andre's spare, horizontal sculpture Equivalent VIII (1966), Golshiri's abstract, minimalist forms are a refreshing way of addressing oppression in his country.

In The Untitled Tomb (2012), a transportable metal lid with stenciled Arabic text on its surface serves as a temporary tombstone for a man who was not permitted to have one. Soot poured on the stencil marks the metaphorical site of the grave and the man's epitaph that begins "Here Mim Kaf Aleph does not rest. He is dead..." Aleph's ephemeral gravesite is visible so long as it is not blown away by the wind. If martyrdom is understood in light of the Islamic concept of jihad or holy struggle, Mim Kaf Aleph's ongoing battle to be honored and acknowledged even after his death convolutes this belief.

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Similarly, *Death Sentence* (2012) is comprised of three rectangular marble pieces inscribed with Braille that honor three political activists killed in captivity. The translucency and visual depth of the surface imbue the tombstone with the spirit of the deceased and the muffled truth behind their demise. In addition, through the shattered, burnt cow skull joined with wax and wires titled *Perpetual is He* (2012) Golshiri dismisses conventions of authoritative representation while commemorating the writer Mohammad Mokhtari and the frequent disappearances and untimely deaths of other Iranian intellectuals. The inscribed epitaph refers to their perpetual spirit and strength that live on long after they are silenced.

Ultimately, no matter if his tombstones pay homage to Samuel Beckett or the renaissance painter Jan Van Eyck, Golshiri's innovative sculptures incorporate minimalism in such a way that is endemic to his culture and its history at a crucial time. His simple forms, which defy traditional presentations of tombstones that celebrate death and martyrdom, befit his larger gesture to outdo and question authority without making a frontal attack on it.

Barbad Golshiri: *Curriculum Mortis* is on view at Thomas Erben Gallery through October 26, 2013.

*Bansie Vasvani is an independent art critic and writer based in New York City.*

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