



*Barbad Golshiri's  
Curriculum Mortis*

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*To Houshang Golshiri, Babaji (1938-2000)*

Perhaps I have put an end to what I used to do, as for the past 13 years I have never failed to visit cemeteries and, working with death and killing and on the dead and gone has formed the course of my life, my *Curriculum Mortis*. Now I merely make tombstones and rarely other things.

Some of these tombstones are not made of stone. Some are perfectly ephemeral. I have also been offered the chance to make tombstones for real graves in cemeteries. If truth be told, they are in their right places and this shall be my path. I am not supposed to show some of them or reveal their locations. Here, except for two pieces, you merely see those that are in no cemetery. These tombstones do not fall in a series or anything of this sort, as *Curriculum Mortis* is unfinished and many pieces are left untold. Moreover, these tombstones have little to do with each other. Isn't the same true for tombstones, sarcophaguses, headstones and mausoleums of a cemetery? Only mosses and lichens can hold them together.

Barbad Golshiri

Photos: Zarvan Rouhbakhshan and Barbad Golshiri  
Courtesy of the artist,  
Thomas Erben Gallery and Aaran Art Gallery



*Guerrier Contre Dieu*

2012 . Industrial wax . ~6x~55x~125 cm

The reversed epitaph in Persian/Arabic Braille reads "Mohareb", the perpetrator of the crime  
*Moharebeh*: war against God and the state, a capital crime in the Islamic Republic.



***Tombstone for Borges' Assassinated Translator (Ahmad Mir-Alaei)***

2012 . Engraving on stone . ~ 60 x ~ 81 x ~ 10 cm

The tombstone is to commemorate Ahmad Mir-Alaei, the well-known Iranian translator, who was the first to translate works of Jorge Luis Borges into Persian. On October 24 1995, 53-year-old Mir-Alaei, a close friend of the writer Houshang Golshiri (artist's father), left home at a quarter to eight in the morning for a date in his own bookshop at 8 o'clock, but he never reached there. He was supposed to deliver a speech at the medical college at two o'clock in the afternoon of the same day. But lecture was cancelled due to unannounced reasons. At eleven o'clock pm the police reported the discovery of a body and asked the family of the victim to come to the police station to identify the body. The reason for death was announced cardiac arrest.

In Iran, Mir-Alaei's name is associated with Jorge Luis Borges. His case, like many other serial murders of Iranian intellectuals has remained an unsolved puzzle. The translator reportedly had been threatened and even detained by security forces before and taken to a hotel for questioning. His body was found in Jolfa district, Isfahan. A half empty bottle of handmade vodka and cigarettes were said to be lying beside his body, with injection marks on his arm.

The tombstone refers to his life and some of the short stories he has translated: Borges' *Death and the Compass*, *El Aleph* and the collection *Labyrinths*.

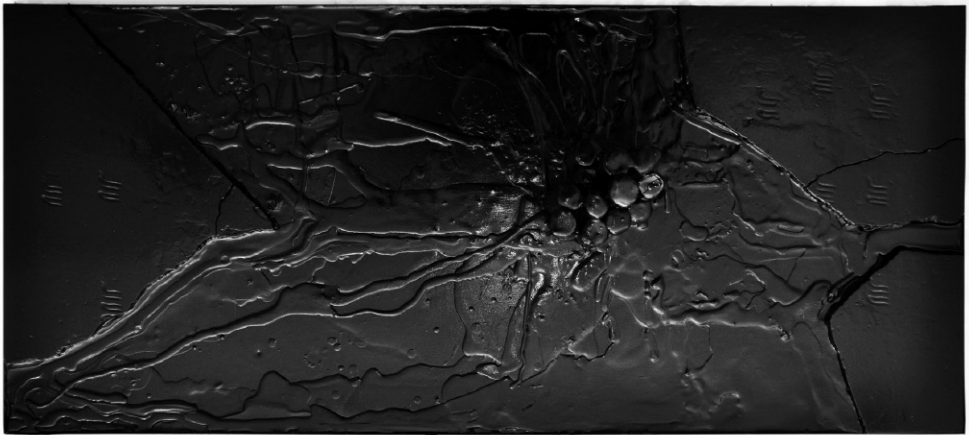
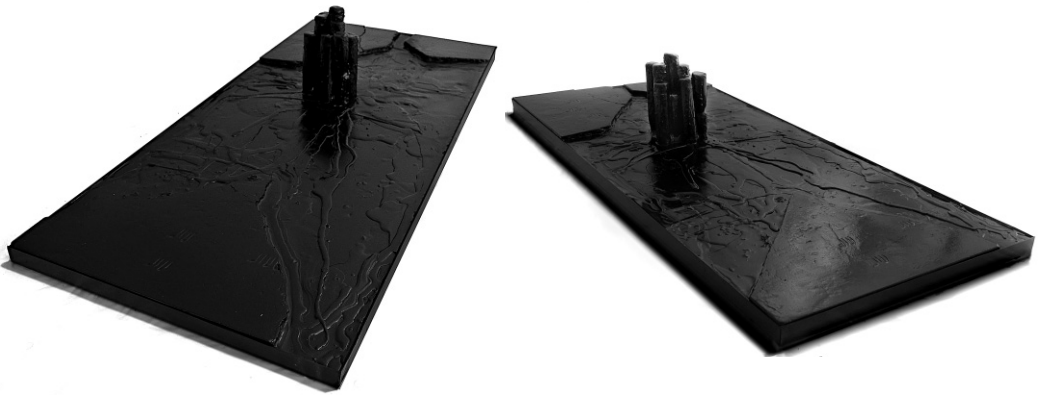
The raw stone was taken from Sefid Châl (Sefid Châh), a 1000-year-old cemetery near Galoogâh, Mazandaran province, northern Iran. Locals say in the past some villagers, while still alive, picked up a stone from the nearby mountains and engraved it for their grave.



Sefid Châl Cemetery, 2012



The Hebrew Aleph in the centre of the labyrinth



### ***Pentimento***

2011 . Iron, industrial wax, granite, paint . 111 x 50.5 x 20 cm

The Arabic epitaph reads: [There is] no God.

*Pentimento*, literally 'repentance' (Italian), in art history is a visible trace of earlier painting beneath a layer or layers of paint on a canvas showing that the artist has changed his or her mind as to the composition during the process of painting. In his work, Golshiri has taken the famous Islamic prayer for the dead, engraved on granite, and has removed all words except 'no God'. He has also followed the aesthetics of broken tombstones of the disloyal to religion or state, recurrently vandalised by ideological thugs.





***Tombstone of Barbad Golshiri***

2012 . Engraving on stone . ~ 121 x ~ 50 x ~ 7 cm  
Epitaph: EPITAPHE.

epitaph (n.) mid-14c., from Old French epitaphe (12c.) and directly from Medieval Latin epitaphium "funeral oration, eulogy," from Greek epitaphion "a funeral oration," noun use of neuter of epitaphos "of a funeral," from epi "at, over" + taphos "tomb, funeral rites."



### *The Untitled Tomb*

2012 . Iron, soot . 60.5 x 135 x 0.2 cm . Edition of 3 + 1AP

The stenciled text narrates the labyrinthine death of a man who for political reasons could never have a tombstone on his grave. His family asked the artist to make a tombstone for him and the artist made an ephemeral tomb for their loved one. Each time the family visits the cemetery, they bring along the stenciled tombstone with them, place it on the grave and stealthily pour soot powder on it. The text is thus imprinted and depending on the wind strength vanishes in a few hours or a few days. The act is repeated as a ritual.

The epitaph reads in Persian:

Here Mim Kâf Aleph does not rest. He is dead. Layer beneath layer dead. Depth beyond depth. Each time deeper. Each death deeper. Stone upon stone. Each stone deeper. Each stone a death. Mim Kâf Mim Aleph has no stone. Has never had. No trace of it [also: so be it]. Never in all deaths. December came and Mim Kâf Mim Aleph was no longer [there]. Is not.





### ***Death Sentence***

2011-13 . Engraving on marble . (Three pieces) . 55x107x5 cm . 56x107x4 cm . 55x120x4 cm  
Three parts of a triple marble tombstone the artist has formed as fallen dominoes for Ezzatollah Sahabi, Haleh Sahabi and Hoda Saber.

Ezzatollah Sahabi was the Iranian humanitarian, prodemocracy activist, politician and former parliament member who spent 15 years in Prison both before and after the 1979 revolution. On 31 May 2011, he died at the age of 81. His funeral was aborted by the removal of his body by force by plain-clothes agents. According to eyewitnesses, his daughter, Haleh, also a humanitarian and prodemocracy activist, on leave from prison to be at his father's bed at his last days, was beaten by the agents for holding a photograph of her father and died of cardiac arrest- the artist had also attended the funeral. To protest Haleh's death and the government's crackdown on the funeral, Hoda Saber, a journalist, translator and civil society activist went on a hunger strike in his cell. Some of the prisoners testified that during the six hours between the time he first complained of chest pain and when he was finally taken for medical treatment, Saber was screaming in agony, but the prison staff paid no attention to him. They have announced their readiness to testify in any court as to how his condition and cries were ignored. After eight days of hunger strike, Saber died of heart attack on 10 June 2011. The three epitaphs are in Persian Braille and have been engraved in reverse. The letter ●● (H) in Ezzatollah, Haleh and Hoda functions as the matching spot so the touching ends match and the line of play is created, their *death sentence* too.



### *Tombstone of Jan Van Eyck*





### ***Tombstone of Eyn Rouhbaxshân***

2012 . Engraving on stone, Hedera helix . Behesht-e Zahra cemetery,  
southern part of metropolitan Tehran

Abdol-Mohammad Rouhbaxshân (1938 - 2012) was an Iranian well-known scholar, journalist, translator and editor. His signature is engraved on his tombstone and his dates of birth and death, engraved on lower part of the stone, are taken from his own handwriting, as in his last months, after a painful illness he wished to die.



### *Perpetual Is He*

2012 . Engraving on cow skull, iron, industrial wax . 36 x 23 x 18 cm

A shattered and burnt cow skull is again joined with wax, wires and screws. The epitaph engraved on its forehead is in *Thuluth* calligraphy style and reads in Arabic: Perpetual is He. Apart from artistic connotations and the very history of Vanitas and its failure, it refers to what many expect of tragic political deaths. "Perpetual Is He" is a translation of "*Hova al-Bâqi*" and, like the religious percept 'memento mori', it is a reminder of inevitability of death of the mortals and imperishability and immortality of God.

In his speech at the burial of Mohammad Mokhtari, one of the victims of the serial murders of the Iranian Intellectuals, the writer Houshang Golshiri (artist's father) and a survivor himself, uttered the sentence in an earthly manner: "Yes, *Hova al-Bâqi*, Mohammad Mokhtari is perpetual."



### Eyeck

2008 – 2013 . (In collaboration with Shahryar Hatami) . Oil on canvas, wood, iron, brass . 145x145x18 cm  
*Eyeck* was originally intended as performance: initially, Barbad Golshiri wanted to perform it facing Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait* and then at Groeningemuseum facing *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*. He was to remain seated for days, while the "curator" fed him. In return, he had to fill the bucket with his excrement. Spectators would visit the museum as usual; examine the painting as usual, therefore blocking the blind gaze of the artist.

After he failed, in collaboration with painter Shahryar Hatami, he created a painted threaded lid for a charnel house or a crypt in which the original piece lies metaphorically. The perspective used in *Eyeck* is Eyckian, as parallel lines do not meet in one point, the viewer sees the floor from above and the three walls from afar, and, as Bruges masters did with virtuosity, the viewer is close to the character and its accessories.

The walls' upper parts refer to the Ghent Altarpiece and the chair to Lubbert Das' chair in Bosch's *Stone Operation* and Benjamin Rush's *Tranquillising Chair*. The floor is composed of E and Y tiles: Eye Epitaph in English Braille reads:

The circular epitaph on the imitation frame reads: Sitting far left on a high chair the artist. Not older than thirty years of age. Sightless and by no means clairvoyant. Hands manacled to the chair arms. Feet shackled to the chair legs. Head in a camera obscura attached to the chair back. Far right levelled with camera obscura's pinhole hangs Jan Van Eyck's *Virgin and Child with Canon van der Paele*. Seeing that the chair is slightly decentred towards his right, upon Van Eyck's reflection in Saint George's shield, the artist's gaze would fall. The artist failed in his fight for the painting and thus *Eyeck* never came to fruition.

Beneath resides *Eyeck*. 2008 – 2013





### *Second Coming (Before Holbein)*

2012 . 50.2 x 200 cm (without frame) . Print on canvas, frame . Edition of 5 + 1AP

The piece refers to Holbein's *Dead Christ in Tomb*, resurrection and post-mortem erection. According to a scholarly work, a number of Renaissance era artists depicted Jesus Christ after the crucifixion with a post-mortem erection. The artworks were suppressed by the Roman Catholic Church for several centuries.



Hans Holbein the Younger, *Dead Christ in Tomb* (1520-22)  
30.5 cm x 200 cm. Öffentliche Kunstsammlung, Basel

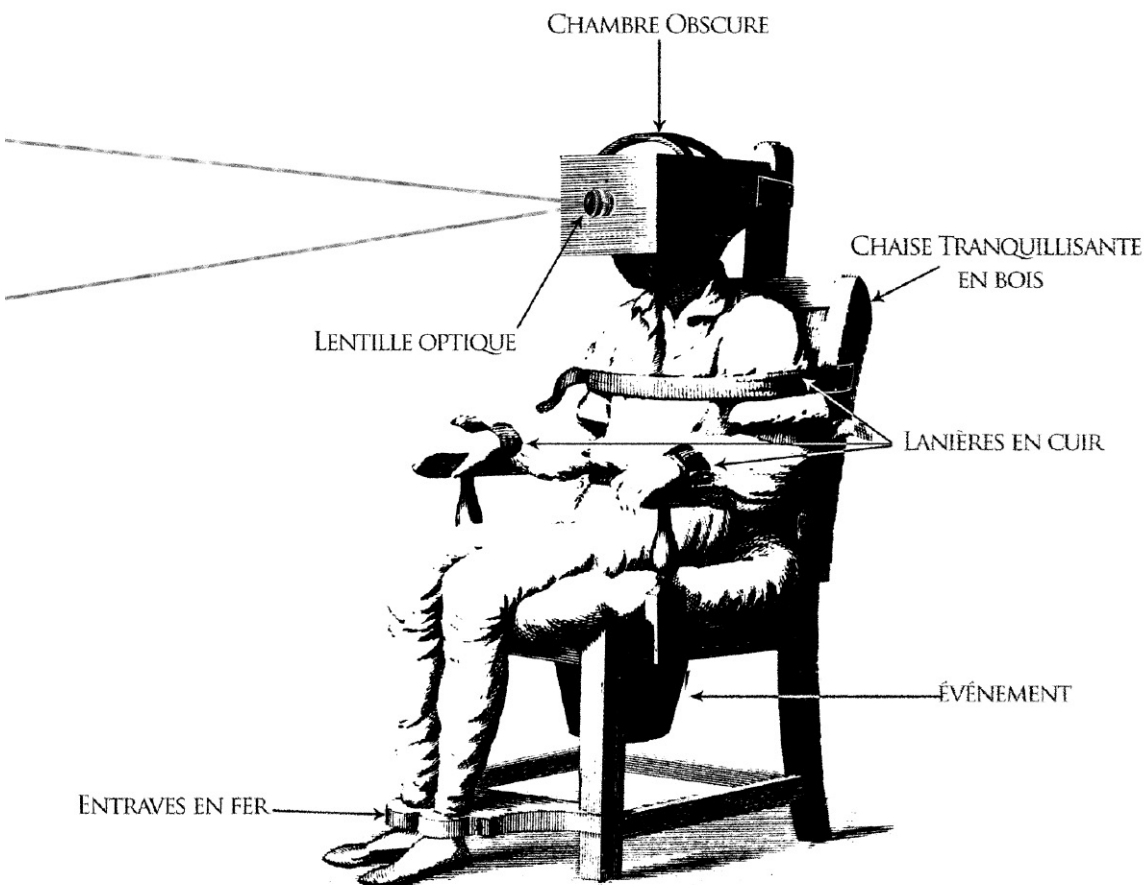
Unlike erotic or pornographic imagery and also advertisements that (ab)use human body, in *Second Coming* one would not feel the skin when one draws close to the body, one would merely see black dots in different sizes (colour halftone processing).  
Like all other tombstones by Barbad Golshiri, *Second Coming (Before Holbein)* lays on the ground and shall never be raised or hung.



### **As Dad as Possible, as Dad as Beckett**

2000 – 2013 . Iron, ashes . 200.3 x 100.2 x 28.3 cm

The iron tombstone is a replica of Beckett's tomb in dimensions. Inside the artist has burnt hundreds of works he has produced during the past 13 years: his writings, paintings, photographs, sketches and so forth.



detail of Barbad Golshiri's sketch for the performance *Eyeck*

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