



All Wound Up

Local artist Hadieh Shafie is on a roll, showing to packed galleries in DC and abroad.

| By Tiffany Jow |

HOLD TIGHT

Local artist Hadieh Shafie has risen in acclaim after her handmade scroll pieces were chosen for inclusion in an upcoming Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition. Collectors are snapping up her pieces, such as “10400 Pages,” shown here, and in detail, above.

At the recent opening of Hadieh Shafie’s solo show at Washington’s Morton Fine Art (mortonfineart.com), the gallery was filled to the gills with patrons keen to glimpse the rising star. Surrounded by her most recent body of work—assemblages of thousands of tiny hand-dyed, meticulously wound paper scrolls—the artist revelled in the reveal of the pieces that have earned her international attention.

At 42, the Baltimore-based, DC-represented talent finds herself suddenly center stage, having been short-listed for the Victoria and Albert Museum’s esteemed Jameel Prize, an international award for creatives roused by Islamic traditions of craft and design. The London megapost crowns a winner every two years, with Iraqi architect Zaha Hadid as the prize’s patron. In July, Shafie’s 3-D scroll works will be included in a two-month exhibition of all 10 contenders at the V&A. If she wins the gold in September, her pieces will travel around the world, gaining intense international exposure.

In the limelight or not, the tenderness comprising each of Shafie’s creations demands a closer look. For each work, she tirelessly inscribes the word *eshqbe* (the Farsi

word for “love”) onto every inch of the thin paper strips dyed at the edges and curled into tight circles. Their titles—“10250 Pages,” “12001 Pages,” and “22500 Pages”—reflect the number of paper strips within each opus. Unlike the iconic hoops of Jasper Johns and Kenneth Noland, Shafie’s wheels are spun using method, repetition and time, all rooted in the artistic sway of her native Iran. “The language of love is reflected in Hadieh’s work,” says the V&A’s Salma Tuqan, a co-curator for the Jameel Prize exhibition. “It’s the story of its creation and meditative process that allows the work to breathe and take on life.”

Having moved from Iran to Maryland at 14, Shafie was consistently encouraged to pursue her creativity. “Even in the most difficult economic times, my mom would take me across town to study with a private art teacher,” says Shafie, who went on to attend Pratt Institute School of Art and Design.

“One of my fondest childhood memories is decorating cookies with my grandmother, placing little dots

of saffron in the center,” she says. That same power of repetition is echoed in her contemporary scrolls, whose methodical nature makes for creative addiction. “It’s so much about control, while simultaneously letting go and leaving things to chance,” she says.

Shafie’s representation at MFA, which she gleaned after owner and chief curator Amy Morton tapped her for a pop-up exhibition last year, is testament to why she’s on the radar of the international circuit. “Hadieh’s artistic identity is authentic, resourceful and culturally enhanced,” Morton says.

The artist’s global credentials have also caught the eye of several District collectors, who just can’t get enough. “Hadieh represents all that is wonderful about DC as a thriving art destination,” Morton says. “It’s inspiring to see an artist span nationally and internationally, both in terms of collector acquisition and recognition.” In many ways, then, Shafie has already won the prize. ■

