



PARASTOU FOROUHAR

KISS ME

ROSE ISSA PROJECTS

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This is the third solo show in London for Parastou Forouhar, whose latest body of work, the *Kiss Me* series of textile banners, is an exciting new chapter in her art. Forouhar initially gained an international following for her work, *Written Room*, painting vast spaces with mesmerising, rhythmic, invented script. However, she became better known for her digital drawings, intricate and seemingly whimsical works that, on closer inspection, reveal macabre scenes of violence and torture. These works were a cathartic response to dramatic personal experiences: her parents, well-known intellectuals and leading political figures, were murdered in Tehran in 1998 in a case that remains unsolved to this day. Forouhar brought her efforts to investigate the crime out into the open with the publication of her book, *"The country in which my parents were killed – a declaration of love to Iran"* (2011, Herder Verlag).

For her new body of work, Forouhar's provocative spirit is still in evidence. She uses a medium that she has experimented with before in her series *Funeral* (2003), *Safari* (2004), and *Countdown* (2008) – the traditional religious banners that are draped in public spaces in Iran during ceremonies to commemorate the death of Shi'ite Imams and martyrs. In the previous series she used the banners to upholster office chairs, create giant beanbags and fashion funeral shrouds, but in *Kiss Me* they appear in their true form. These strangely kitsch and colourful banners usually have a central medallion with messages about mystical devotion, spiritual love and self-sacrifice. In Forouhar's series, she has embroidered the medallion with lyrics from a famous 1950s pop song, *Mara Beboos* ("Kiss Me"), by the "Iranian Elvis", Vigen Derderian, and embellished the banners with feathers, furs, sequins, and appliquéd motifs.

Though *Kiss Me* can be interpreted as the artist's gesture of reconciliation towards the past and an attempt to quell current tensions, crises and chaos with an uplifting message of affection and harmony, it is also slyly subversive: *Mara Beboos* first became a hit in 1953, when Iran's short period of democracy under Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh came to an end with a military coup. The song thus became a kind of poignant farewell to Mossadegh. By referencing this song, Forouhar is not only enveloping her past and future in a warm embrace, but referencing the glory days of a secular regime.

All images are from the *KISS ME* SERIES, deconstructed textile banner and haberdashery embellishments, 2013

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