

UC San Diego

The Equilibrium

Title

The Wishes Tree

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Journal

The Equilibrium, 3(1)

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Publication Date

2017

DOI

10.5070/Q23141216

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The Wishes Tree

Farshid Bazmandegan



Ribbons, plaster, tree branches and roots
5' 10"

Farshid Bazmandegan is a visual artist and cultural producer who works with experimental media and sculpture. His research and practice constructs philosophical metaphors to raise awareness of socio-political relations between people, their environment, and the institutions that govern their daily lives. He focuses on creating site specific projects that are intricately tied to the history and memory of the environments they are built in.

Bazmandegan uses art as a gesture of response to his daily life. In Spring 2015, Bazmandegan selected a tree in Mandeville Center and tied hundreds of ribbons onto the branches representing his own wishes, as a response to the proposal to repurpose the University Art Gallery (UAG) on campus. The gesture of making wishes by tying ribbons onto trees is an old tradition Bazmandegan takes from Middle Eastern culture. This piece became *The Wishes Tree*. His idea was to engage with the public and show how students can protest silently, peacefully, and playfully. He chose to display his ribbons on a tree planted in public to allow people to access his work without the need for a gallery space. A year later, Bazmandegan became the co-director of the Undergraduate Art Show, the first show held in the UAG for a year. *The Wishes Tree* stayed up, engaging with the public for a year, until the piece was found defaced, with ribbons from the installation found in a dumpster.



The Wishes Tree (in front of UAG at Mandeville Center)

In the Fall of 2016, Bazmandegan participated in an event celebrating Community Day, the 75th anniversary of the Museum of Contemporary Art in La Jolla. The theme of the show revolved around artistic workshops that engaged the general public in social issues. One particular exhibition that was on display at the museum, *Berkeley Protest Posters*, was a collection of posters made by UC Berkeley students during the 70's that called for an end to the Vietnam War. Bazmandegan was struck by the intensity of the involvement of students in the past and how they used widely accessible art materials to stage their protest. This show inspired Bazmandegan to engage the public in a peaceful protest and encourage them to respond to the idea of protest differently. He drew inspiration from his

past installation, *The Wishes Tree*, to fulfill this new idea of protest. For his art project, protesting was as simple as making a wish to work towards for the future. This gesture was meant to empower people about their own ability to stage a protest to make a meaningful change in their own lives or in society. In a workshop called *Protest Wishes*, held during Community Day, Bazmandegan asked people of all ages to write down their wishes onto pieces of ribbon, which he collected.



Bazmandegan explaining his workshop to visitors at MCASD



Kids writing their wishes as part of the *Protest Wishes* workshop MCASD

In the Spring of 2016, Bazmandegan had an opportunity to curate an art exhibition called *Chroma*, with the support of Dean Cristina Della Coletta and the Assistant Dean Alma Palazzolo of the Division of Arts and Humanities. This show was hosted in the administrative office of the Division of Arts and Humanities, where Bazmandegan invited faculty, students, and alumni from the Visual Arts department to display their work. This show celebrated conceptual art practice happening on the UCSD campus.

Bazmandegan created a piece to exhibit as part of the show. He decided to use both the ribbons from *The Wishes Tree* (UAG), and from his workshop, *Protest Wishes*, and tied them onto a new tree. He anchored this tree in a plaster cast of his head. By casting his head, Bazmandegan was able to incorporate a literal self portrait to symbolize his own personal connection to the tree as a human form. This continuation of *The Wishes Tree* represents

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Bazmandegan himself and his growth both within and outside of his practice as an artist within his community.



Installation of The Wishes Tree at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego, La Jolla (MCASD)

Bazmandegan exhibited the final iteration of The Wishes Tree at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego several months later, the same site where visitors had initially written their wishes onto ribbons, now hanging on the tree. The piece was later exhibited during the CRASSH and CC2UCSD conferences held at UCSD, to show the research efforts and engagement of visual arts students on campus. He continues to exhibit this piece and encourages people to continue adding their wishes onto the tree. This piece would not have been possible without the support of Professor Lisa Cartwright, who shared her

philosophies and ideas on respect and hope which have influenced Bazmandegan's own.

A significant part of Bazmandegan's continuing art practice has been social engagement, which he has been practicing for the past three years within the UCSD community. Part of his community and social engagement practice involves turning academic administration spaces into art galleries featuring the work of UC San Diego artists to initiate a movement to foster more art in a predominantly STEM driven campus. He curated two group shows following in this direction, one called Chroma, supported by Dean Cristina Della Colletta, and the other called Mint, supported by Dean Kit Pogliano. He is also the founder of Triton Art, a student driven arts organization for which he has organized over 50 workshops and social events at UCSD's arts community. In addition to this work, he has curated several shows at the Triton Art Gallery in support of undergraduate students and was also the Co-Director of the Undergraduate Art Show at the University Art Gallery in 2016. He received the Warren College Research Scholarship that allowed him to pursue an experimental documentary project about the San Diego Tijuana Border, where he explored the social engagement of people from both sides of the border.

His current research has led him to question gender equality based off his experience as a Middle Eastern man practicing in the contemporary art environment. His final thesis solo show, Untitled II, at the UC San Diego Kamil Gallery, was a gesture to respond to this issue in the contemporary art environment.



Detail of The Wishes Tree



Installation of The Wishes Tree in the FHG



Farshid Bazmandegan

Visual Arts

Farshid Bazmandegan is an Iranian American visual artist working between experimental media and sculpture. His research and practice constructs philosophical metaphors to raise awareness of socio-political relations between people, their environment and the institutions that govern their daily lives. Bazmandegan has exhibited his work at the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego, the University Art Gallery, the Adam D. Kamil Gallery, the ARTifact Gallery and the FHG. He received his Bachelor's degree in Visual Arts with honors from UC San Diego in June of 2017.

He is currently employed by the Dean Office of the Division of Arts and Humanities at UC San Diego as an Artist and Promotions Specialist, where he supports departments, faculty, and students by promoting the highlights and achievements of the Division.

What was the inspiration behind your art piece?

I was born and raised in Iran. When I came to America to study my passion, art, I wanted to incorporate some of the memories and cultures from my motherland. Iran is a country that is very different; it's gone through a radical revolution. This made me think about change and the concept of having the ability to effect change through protest.

How did you start? Take us through the process.

This first piece was outside of the Mandeville center for almost a year. My idea was to engage with the public and show how we can protest silently, peacefully, and playfully. Another one of my goals was to link art and protest in a way the audience can accept and respect, in harmony with nature. I finally decided that hanging colorful ribbons on a tree would be the best way. And so, I started to make a wish tree.

Wish trees actually have a long history; they can be found in Asia, in the Middle East, and in small cities in Iran. I also thought about how this piece can represent diversity, race, gender, and culture. I was hoping other people would even come and add something to the art, to make it more engaging.

How has your artwork evolved?

After making the initial Wish Tree outside Mandeville, I was invited to the Museum of Contemporary Art at La Jolla for their 75th Anniversary. A couple hundred people of all different backgrounds and ages came to this event. There I had a table with many ribbons, and I asked people to write down their wishes for a brighter future. The scene is still fresh in my mind today, a little boy asked his mom what to write and she told him, "equality for women". I'm very proud to see that my art gave people the opportunity to teach their kids about ways to participating in society and effecting change peacefully. Two months later, the museum asked me to come back and share the final piece.

Any last words?

Although this piece wasn't created in response to the political change, I've found it to be a perfect match. In such a tense atmosphere, people want to find a way to protest, peacefully and silently. My point with this work was to remind everyone of how we protested years ago, in the times of the Vietnam War, in order to introduce change, and that we have to continue to build that culture of protest.