

Above: An installation view of Nazgol Ansarinia: *Surfaces & Solids*, 2015. Artwork: *Membrane*. 2014. Paper, paste and glue. 550 x 500 cm.

Below, Left and right: Nazgol Ansarinia. Untitled from *Demolishing buildings, Buying waste*. 2017. Ink and marker on paper.



The road off Imam Ali highway cuts through Tehran's north-eastern suburbs and never seems to end. Piles of rubble indicate a recent dump of construction materials. Large stones of unknown provenance advertise in spray-paint the hottest service in town: demolition work. For two decades now, Tehran has become the massive site of a largely experimental urban facelift. Single-family homes are being subdivided or raised for smaller, multi-story apartment blocks. Elsewhere, medium-sized blocks from decades past are giving way to giant multi-purpose ensembles. Size-wise, everyone is upgrading. Flanked by odd structures of hybrid inspiration, construction sites and empty plots of land, the road into Nazgol Ansarinia's neighbourhood is a mirror of Tehran itself: fastly duplicating but unsure of its newfound look.

Up here at around 1,800 meters above sea level, the air is colder. The last snow clings on in sprinkles. It is this perch overlooking the city, at the limit between smog and oxygen that Ansarinia calls home. A multimedia artist collaborating with Dubai-based Green Art Gallery since 2013 and with Milan-based Raffaella Cortese Gallery since 2016, Ansarinia has, from the onset of her artistic career, drawn inspiration from the fluctuating urban dynamics of her hometown, translating these on to a variety of media—paper (*NSS Book* series, 2008, *Patterns* series, 2009 and *Membrane* series, 2014), newspaper collage (*Reflections/Refractions* series, 2012), silicon castings (*Non-flammable, Non-stick, Non-stain* series, 2009-2010) or everyday objects (*Mendings* series, 2012). Akin to the building of a detailed socio-anthropological encyclopedia of Tehran's urban landscape, her practice captures those moments of pause before the onslaught of change. Nazgol is cutting banana bread. "I forgot the baking soda," she confesses. An omission that gives the bread a soaken and paleo look without taking away the taste. She's also in the midst of a new project called *Demolishing buildings, Buying waste*, a series of video documentations accompanied by 3-D drawings. "I became interested in this dual process of



Above: Stills from *Fragment 1, Demolishing buildings, buying waste*. 2017. Video. 6min 30 sec.

destruction and construction of the housing sector, this grey zone that reveals so much about where we're at. I'm fascinated by the socio-economic forces driving this change, the prevailing wave that pulls people into making two out of one, or make bigger something that is perfectly to size," the artist says.

For her upcoming project, she filmed the process of a home demolition over 16 days. "The entire house, sandwiched between two others, was brought down entirely with pickaxes and shovels. My goal with the video footage I now have is to capture moments between demolition and creation and illustrate the idea that for every building that has gone up, an equal amount of rubble was first created," says Ansarinia. It is a relationship that, in her experience, is not antagonistic, but complementary. The city's construction is actually its destruction, and vice versa. And the empty space left by a home demolition offers a vision of both uncertainty and possibility: are we looking at an end point or a starting point?

The energy of this duality was palpable for the artist each day she spent on site. "I would come home and feel a sort of fever, the ring of the sledge hammers in my head hours for hours on end," she says, echoing an experience lived by millions of others. For the artist, Tehran's real estate boom has acquired a life of its own,

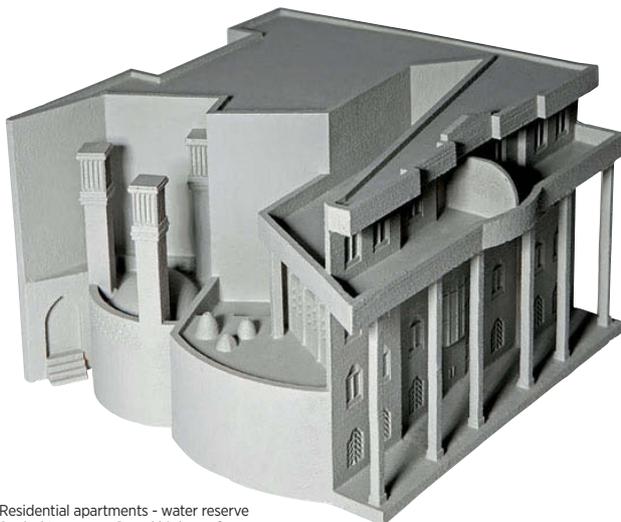
symbolised in the phrase on everyone's lips: "We're also demolishing." Indeed, the magnitude of the phenomenon ensures its own perpetuation: once one lot is affected, every lot and everyone on the street is affected-by the dust and the shaving of metal rods and the cement trucks working into the night, but also by the idea that others are ahead. In a domino effect, the force

spreads. "Imagine you live in a house perfectly suited to your needs and your life, but neighbours around you have undertaken to raise their property and build something bigger, something taller. Suddenly, you are light deprived, you are assaulted by noise pollution and your living space is levelled down in every way. And so the temptation to follow suit is high," she says. Her upcoming work can thus be expected to relay elements of this paradox: that to make more out of something existing, one must first tear down what exists.

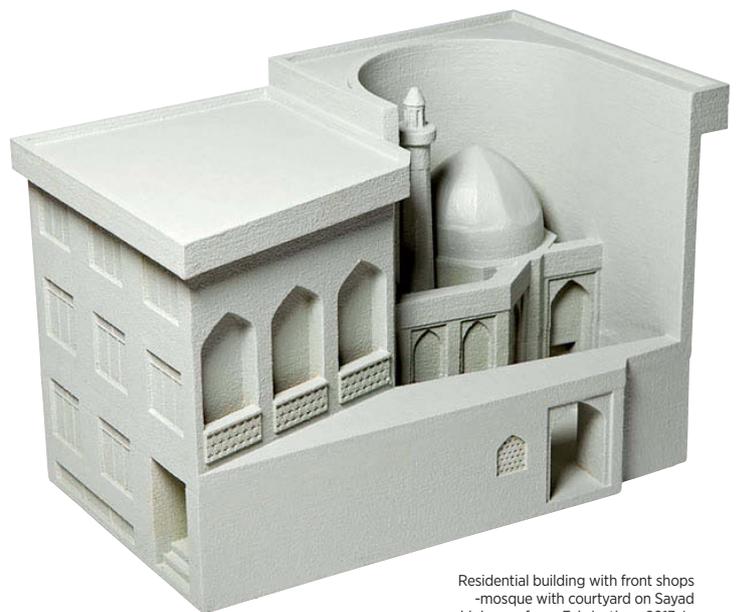
Progress on the videos is slow, as moving media is new to Ansarinia. "The energy put into destroying something is interesting. It raises questions," she comments, slicing with odd ease through the glassy texture of the banana bread. Indeed, these are questions she has a subtle talent for raising in visual form. ■ *Nazgol Ansarinia will show at Kiosk Gallery, Ghent in December 2017*

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Residential apartments - water reserve & wind towers on Sayad highway from *Fabrications*. 2013. In collaboration with Roozbeh Elias-Azar plaster, resin and paint 18.5 x 18 x 11 cm.



Residential building with front shops -mosque with courtyard on Sayad highways from *Fabrications*. 2013. In collaboration with Roozbeh Elias-Azar plaster, resin and paint. 11 x 20 x 13 cm.