



# NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN JUMBLED ALPHABET

27 September 2024 – 12 January 2025  
Main Gallery and Fire Station

Exhibition guide

**SLG**



# NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN: JUMBLED ALPHABET 27 SEP 2024 – 12 JAN 2025

“The wholeness of the toy doesn’t exist, because it is already broken when the child is beginning to play with it. In the same way, a perfect idea doesn’t exist. We are always making something, breaking it and repairing.”

Nairy Baghramian is an artist who has been working with sculpture and installation for over twenty years. Drawing on a broad range of materials and techniques, she combines geometric shapes and organic matter using industrial and hand-made processes to create varied, distinctive works. Her sculptures defy our expectations of the materials she uses and make us question our understanding of certain forms. They also probe ideas around opposites. Shiny, polished metals might be contrasted with soft leathers, or brightly-coloured resins be shown alongside sculptures in natural wood or stone. Whilst the works appear to be abstract, they often suggest parts of the body, hinting at joints, limbs, skin or teeth. Underpinning much of Baghramian’s practice is an exploration of connections between art and other creative industries, such as interior design, dance and theatre.

Baghramian’s installations respond to their environment, architecture and audience. She invites viewers to reconsider their own sense of self, space, object and location. For this exhibition, new installations have been specially devised for the South London Gallery’s spaces, with our far-reaching work with local communities and children also in mind.

In the Main Gallery, Baghramian presents a new constellation of sculptures from her ongoing series *Misfits*. They are shown on a vast, low platform that impacts the way visitors negotiate the space and emphasises the character of the gallery’s architecture. The platform also acts as a huge sunken table, playing on traditional methods of displaying sculpture on plinths. Some of the sculptures don’t quite fit, toppling over the edges. Others are out of visitors’ reach.

Inspired by children’s building toys, in which pieces fit together perfectly, *Misfits* disrupts this way of thinking by celebrating the beauty of things that don’t fit and the creativity of the so-called “dis-functional”. The series recognises the magic of being an outsider and seeing the potential in imperfection. The images of a girl are at odds with idealised expectations for children to look and be happy in

photographs. Some of the sculptures look as though they could fit together. A game is implied, and the title of each piece includes a letter of the alphabet to suggest the possibility of a correct order of things. In reality all the pieces are clearly different and don't naturally fit together. Ultimately, there's no 'right' answer, meaning everything becomes possible and the potential for creative solutions is endless.

“For me, the thin skin, the membrane, is often overlooked and underrepresented, but it is this thin, permeable, vulnerable skin that I value so much... I am interested in the thin membrane that separates the inside from the outside in physical and social spaces. It's about inclusion or exclusion.”

Baghramian questions society's preference for functional harmony over a more transitional state. She is interested in how opposites such as masculine/feminine or inside/outside come to exist, and the space between the two positions. For her, the dividing line or 'membrane' holds enormous

potential for change. By focusing on it, she challenges accepted hierarchies.

By exploring the idea of the 'membrane' as a thin skin between things, Baghramian also brings to mind the concept of touch. The *Misfits* series was initiated in 2021 at the Galleria d'Arte Moderna in Milan, Italy, located in a public park where adults are only admitted if accompanied by a child.

At the SLG, Baghramian creates a dialogue between different codes of behaviour across the two buildings: the Main Gallery and the Fire Station. In the Main Gallery the works cannot be touched, but in Galleries 1 and 2 on the ground floor of the Fire Station visitors are welcome to interact with the sculptures and contribute their own ideas. Pieces from the *Misfits* series can be felt and even sat upon, opening up the potential for the visitors to briefly mingle and merge with the sculptures.

Inspired by the idea of the 'Hand-me-down', in Gallery 2 children can sit on stools designed by artist Nicolas Hsiung and use the materials provided to contribute to collaborative drawings which have been started by Baghramian. The theme of shared creativity is also behind the mobile sculpture suspended overhead, which is a collaborative work by Baghramian

# NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN: JUMBLED ALPHABET (CONT.)

and the artist Annette Messenger. Here she extends her long-standing practice of partnering with fellow artists to co-create works of art. She is interested in the idea of the Exquisite Corpse, whereby each participant adds to a composition in sequence, and of make-do-and-mend. More unique hybrid works will be created throughout the course of the exhibition through the exchange and fusion of sculptural elements made by Baghramian with those of a small number of invited artists.

## LIST OF WORKS

### MAIN GALLERY

*Misfits*, 2021 – present

Varnished cast aluminium, marble, walnut wood from Danh Vo's McNamara project, c-prints in artist frames  
Courtesy the artist, Marian Goodman Gallery, Hauser & Wirth and kurimanzutto

### FIRE STATION: GALLERY 1

*Misfits B*, 2021

Varnished cast aluminium, marble (Statuario altissimo), walnut wood from Danh Vo's McNamara project, c-prints in artist's frame  
Courtesy the artist, Marian Goodman Gallery, Hauser & Wirth and kurimanzutto

### FIRE STATION: GALLERY 2

*Hand Me Down*, 2024

Sketch table, stools and various collaborative works developing over the course of the exhibition  
All works courtesy of the artists

The table was designed by Nairy Baghramian. She has started a series of drawings for children to respond to. Please use the materials provided to add your drawings to the table!

## ABOUT NAIRY BAGHRAMIAN



Photo: Christian Werner

Born in Isfahan, Nairy Baghramian had to flee post-revolutionary Iran as a teenager and has been living and working in Berlin since 1984.

Baghramian explores forms and concepts inherited from the history of art to address issues of functionality, decoration, abstraction, and feminism. Particularly in her prime medium of sculpture, she employs an extensive repertoire of techniques, materials and forms to address the spatial, architectural, social, political and contextual conditions of contemporary art.

Recent solo exhibitions include those at the Nivola Museum, Sardinia IT (2024), the Aspen Art Museum, Aspen CO (2023); Nasher Sculpture Center, Dallas TX (2022); Carré d'Art, Nimes, France (2022); Secession, Vienna, Austria (2021) and Galleria d'Arte Moderna (GAM), Milan, Italy (2021).

In 2023 she completed her façade commission, *Scratching the Back* for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Baghramian has also participated at Venice Biennale, Italy (2019 and 2011); Yorkshire Sculpture International, Wakefield, UK (2019); Documenta 14 in Kassel, Germany and Athens, Greece (2017); Skulptur Projekte Muenster, Germany (2017 and 2007); Lyon Biennale, France (2017); Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art, UK (2012); and the Berlin Biennale, Germany (2014 and 2008). Her works are held in numerous institutional collections around the world.

# WITH THANKS TO

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This guide is available as a large print guide and an easy read guide. Please ask a member of SLG

## SLG

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