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Leili Arai Tavallaei: *Shotor* ○ *Morghe*

May 17 – June 21, 2025

Opening Reception: May 17, 5 – 7 pm



Left: Portrait of artist. Image courtesy of artist.

Right: "Recollection," 2024, acrylic gouache, colored pencil, found packaging, tissue paper, and shelf with hidden surprise, 20 x 16 in.

ERIN CLULEY GALLERY is pleased to announce *Shotor* ○ *Morghe* (SHOH-tohr morph) an exhibition of work by 2025 Cluley Projects Open Call Winner Leili Arai Tavallaei. *Shotor* ○ *Morghe* continues the artist's exploration of cultural memory and familial archives through printmaking, sculptural assemblage, and figurative painting. Incorporating heirlooms and adages from across her multicultural heritage, Tavallaei's practice brings together artifacts from Iranian and Japanese traditions into deft displays of emotional intimacy. Her new exhibition threads the line of historical preservation and honor. Translated memories from the artist's ancestry form the base for a blended language representing her lived and inherited experiences.

Leili Arai Tavallaei's practice incorporates techniques from printmaking, animation, and mixed-media collage. Her use of layering—whether paint, found objects, or drawing—build up texturally rich compositions while simultaneously mirroring the continual accumulation of memory. Tavallaei utilizes artistic methods to create tight-knit archives. Wrappers from Japanese confections, screenprints of her Mother's Nokia mobile phone, and gift boxes from family members add to the artwork's nostalgic weight. *Shotor* ○



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Morghe gives the artist's recollection a tangible presence in form, color, and abstract composition.

The title of the exhibition, *Shotor* ○ *Morghe*, combines the native languages of her parents: Farsi and Japanese. *Shotormorghe* is a compound Farsi word meaning "ostrich" and "○" represents 丸 (*Maru*) translated from Japanese to "circle" or "zero." Combining the Farsi words for *Camel* (*Shotor*) and *Bird* (*Morghe*), *Shotormorghe* references a Persian fable about two separate halves coming together to form a unique whole. Between two cultures, Tavallaei advocates for her singular nature, informed by, but not wholly beholden to her lineage. The Japanese 丸 (*Maru*) symbol, represented by "○," affirms the harmonious nature between the artist's dual heritages as they intertwine art, life, and memory.

Tavallaei grew up in a blended household, receiving cultural traditions from her mixed-Japanese and Iranian parents. Through a personal lens, her artistic practice explores the unseen ways parental heritage overlaps and coalesces in future generations. Tavallaei creates new rituals for genealogical conservation affirming art's important place in creating new traditions. *Recollection* (2024), is a mixed-media painting featuring a pastel yellow kneeling subject, collaged candy wrappers, and a small painted drawer. The work's central subject represents a mythical creature charged with protecting the artist's emotional state and blended multiculturalism. Similar to the other works in *Shotor* ○ *Morghe*, *Recollection* generates new mythologies in celebration of memory's abundant archives.

In her exhibition at Erin Cluley Gallery, Leili Arai Tavallaei explores the formal connections between artmaking and the honoring of ancestral histories. The artist's work practices various methods of translation; translations of language, inherited objects, and family background. Personal ephemeras—recreated or used directly in her work—take on the moral weight cast onto them from Tavallaei's lived reality. Through the use of interdisciplinary techniques, *Shotor* ○ *Morghe* conceptualizes art as a nexus of collective memory, documentation, and generational meaning-making.

An exclusive reading by the inaugural recipient of the Cluley Projects Arts Writing Mentorship, **Chukwudi Ukonne** will be held at the opening reception of *Shotor* ○ *Morghe* on May 17th. Ukonne will read his text "**In Constant Translation: Leili Arai Tavallaei's tender archive of memory**" created in conjunction with Tavallaei's solo presentation at Erin Cluley Gallery.

Shotor ○ *Morghe* will be exhibited concurrently with *current*, an exhibition of new sculptures by Dallas-based artist Ryan Goolsby.

Leili Arai Tavallaei is a Dallas-based multi-disciplined artist *working* primarily in print, video, found object collage, and mixed media. She received a BFA in Animation and



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Printmaking from the Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in 2022. Tavallaei attended Osaka Gakuin University in Suita, Osaka Prefecture, Japan.

Born into a family of immigrants, her father having migrated from Iran and her mother a Hāfu (of mixed-Japanese ancestry), Tavallaei's work draws on generational memories through potent collages of photographs, ephemeras, and familial heirlooms. In her practice, she documents the active loss of memory through translation—linguistically, formally, and physically. Ultimately, Tavallaei aims to preserve her family history into a new, blended lexicon.

Tavallaei has been recognized nationally in galleries and film festivals across the United States. She is a 2022 Islam & Print Fellow and a 2023-24 Cohort 4 alumni of Cedars Union in Dallas, TX. In 2025 she was the recipient of the Anne Giles Kimbrough Fund Award to Artists from the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Artist-in-Residence at the Dallas Asian American Historical Society.

Notably her work has been shown at Arts Fort Worth, TCC South Carillon Gallery, Lawndale Art Center, Silber Gallery, Black Artist Research Space, and Current Space. The artist's work can be found in the collections of NoMu NoMu and Islam & Print. Her video work has been screened at NASA Goddard, at the historic Parkway Theater Baltimore, and at Downtown LA Independent Theater. Arch and Ann Dallas Kimbrough Fund recipient.

Tavallaei currently works as the Cultural Organizer and Facilitator for Mixed Japanese-American healing Circles, and as the Fine Arts Program Manager for the Dallas Asian American Art Collective (DAAART).

Erin Cluley Gallery is a contemporary art gallery representing emerging, mid-career, and established artists from Dallas and the United States. The gallery presents a provocative program of artists working in both traditional and alternative forms including painting, sculpture, new media, photography, sculptural installation and public intervention.

In 2014, Erin Cluley Gallery ignited a creative movement in West Dallas acting as a hub for visual arts and community engagement. After nearly five years on Fabrication Street, the gallery has moved its operation to Riverbend – a development in Dallas' Design District celebrating the intersection between culture and commerce.

From April 2021 to November 2024, Cluley opened and operated Cluley Projects – a satellite location in West Dallas acting as an incubator space focusing on regional artists and providing a platform for discovery and mentorship.

For all press inquiries contact
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