

# Samira Hodaei

by Margherita Dessanay

Iranian Samira Hodaei was born right after the Iran-Iraq war. Her work represents her personal way of reflecting on her existence as a woman and artist in one of the most troubled countries on the planet. But rather than expressing her feelings in an explicitly political narrative, Hodaei translates her personal experiences into exquisitely artistic terms.

*Background:* I spent most of my childhood in the hot and humid south of Iran. All I knew was that I loved to draw and paint. When I was 15 we moved to Tehran, then I went on to art school. In Iran we don't have many good art MA's. Teachers are chosen based on who has a good relationship with the government. I soon realized that in order to make a career for myself I had to leave the university environment. The art community is small and there is not much of a market for it. Many young Iranian artists work more with galleries abroad.

*Formative years:* I wanted to find my own visual language before showing my work. I had another job to make a living. While working, I was practising more and more but without a clear future in mind, just to see what would happen. My experience as assistant to multimedia artist Reza Derakshani taught me not to be afraid of swimming against the tide and to have the courage to walk my own path in life.

*Stylistic development:* My art has always had a narrative element in the background. All my works are inspired by my own life experiences, yet I have consciously chosen to lessen this quality as I progressed through each series so that it would convey a more collective feel in purely visual terms.

When I started the first series, *Stones and Mute Birds*, women were having a really hard time in my country. I was trying to express my feelings towards this. The story was in the foreground of the painting because it was more important than the strictly visual aspect. At the beginning I used the head of a bird instead of that of a woman; now I use burqas to show that these women are silent and motionless. It rep-

resents the fact that they cannot say anything or show their reactions.

When I started on *Dancing the Sharp Edge* I already had a different view of life compared to the situation three years earlier. I felt that the situation in Iran was improving. Things in Iran change very fast and almost every day. We don't have a steady situation: this is probably why there is such an expressive gap between my first series and *Dancing the Sharp Edge*.

*Pixels & knives:* With the series *Dancing the Sharp Edge* I didn't want to point to a specific problem in Iran, but rather a condition that we all share in life. In a certain way this series is my autobiography. Life, for me, is like dancing, but sometimes it can be really sharp and painful. However, now it is more important for me to show the constant shifts between real and unreal identities. This is why I have focused on pixels. Pixels shape your life in the virtual world. To adopt pixels is unreal but I can use that identity in real life. In my work I choose to apply a pixellated matrix form to somehow express my own ambiguous perception of the world and how situations and circumstances differ based on the observer's personal views and perception.

*Technique:* I started using this technique about four years ago, when I was looking for something that could express my feelings in a purely visual language. Art is not just about the story you tell: it's about the way you tell it. I was looking for something that could create a 3D effect on canvas. The glass colour does not penetrate the canvas and creates a relief. It gives the painting a touchable quality. At first glance the figures stand motionless like

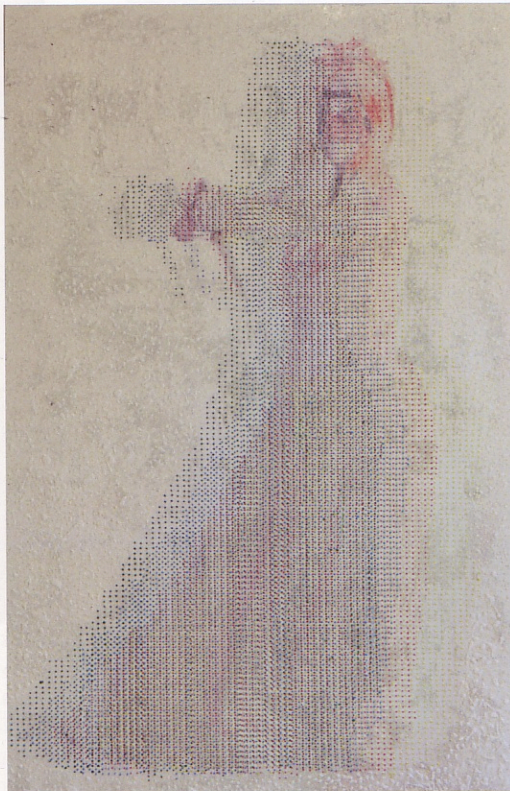
statues, yet the tiny intermingling dots generate a delicate vibration and the different wavelengths of the colours leave the viewer in a state of uncertainty, suspended between the real and the unreal.

*Sweet Motherland Iran:* The woman in my latest series, *Sweet Motherland*, does not represent an actual woman, nor does she carry any reference to my own life: she is a personification of my homeland and this is why she looks like a queen and her face is not covered. The most important element in *Sweet Motherland* is the cat, a metaphor inspired by the geographical shape of Iran. When I was a child I read a book about a cat. It was in the years of the war between Iran and Iraq. The story was very dark and the cat was going through a lot of pain. Now I really feel that the cat is still in pain and lost in the shadows. This queen, this motherland, which is also mother to all the exiled Iranian people, is worried about the cat because I think that if any other war happens in Iran the cat will break up into other shapes and there won't be a cat on the maps anymore.



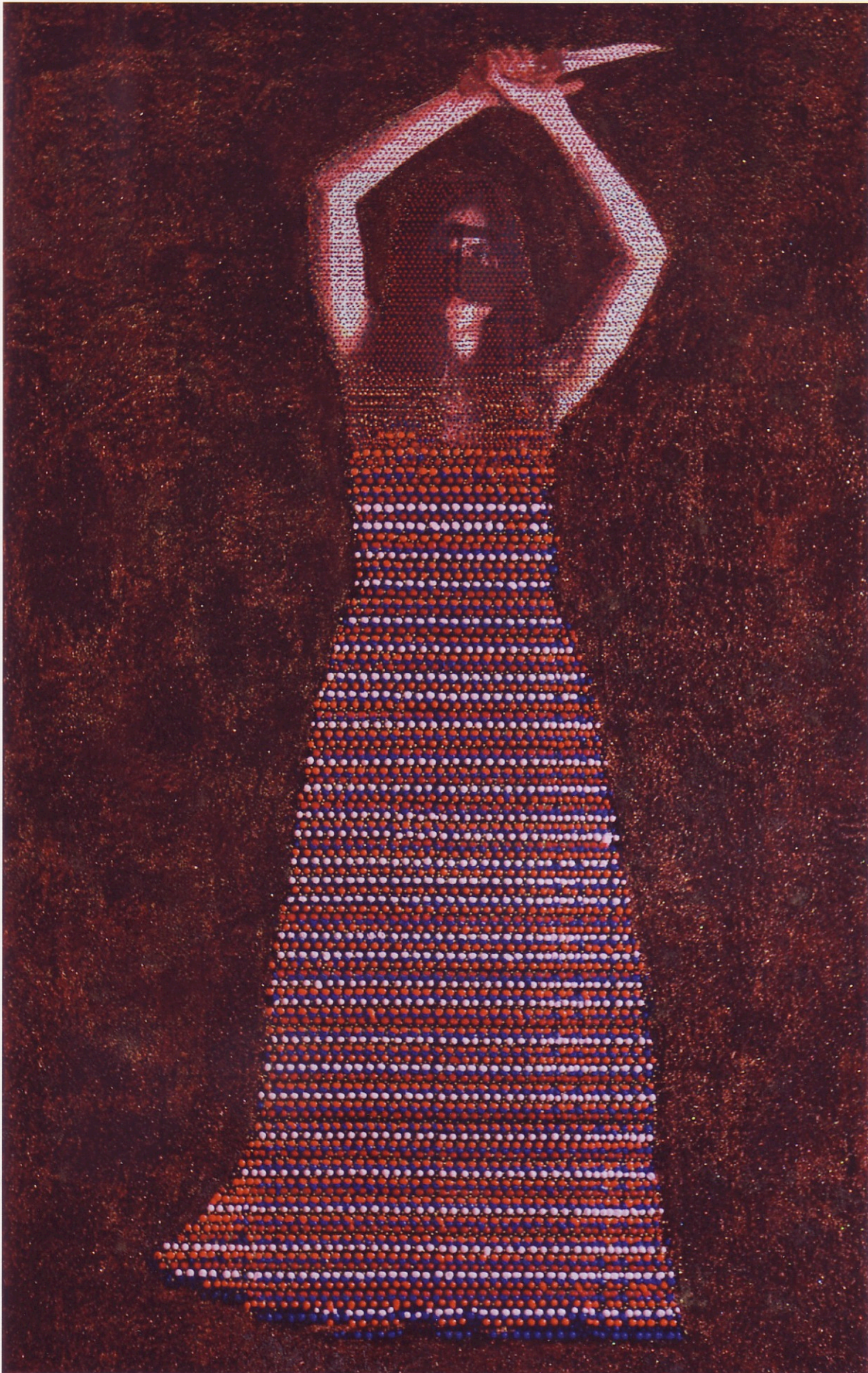


*Breaking through the pattern no. 2, from the series Dancing the Sharp Edge, 2012, mixed media on canvas, 94 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist and AB Gallery.*



*Queen of the darkness, from the series Sweet Motherland, 2012, mixed media on canvas, 94 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist and AB Gallery.*

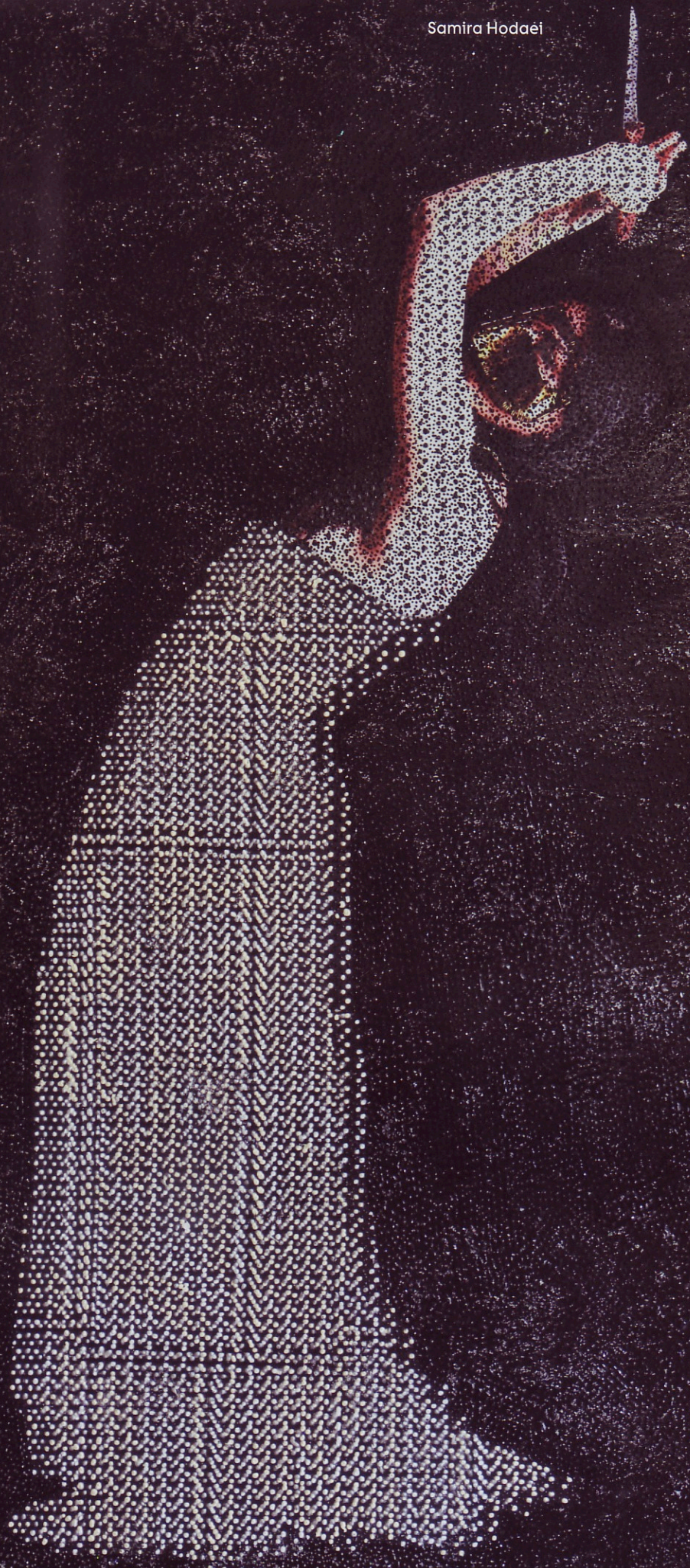




*Hands up lady!*, from the series *Dancing the Sharp Edge*, 2012,  
mixed media on canvas, 94 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist and AB Gallery.

Every day, every night, from the series *Dancing the Sharp Edge*, 2012, mixed media on canvas, 150 x 94 cm. Courtesy of the artist and AB Gallery.





F