LIFE

"FLESH AND FABLE": PAST, PRESENT AND SELF DISPLAYED AT THE JORGENSEN GALLERY

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The Jorgensen Gallery held the opening of the "Flesh and Fable" exhibition last Friday, displaying the multimedia work of Afarin Rahmanifar, an Iranian American artist and associate professor of Art and Art History at Eastern Connecticut State University.

Rahmanifar's "Flesh and Fable" collection showcases three series: "Women of Shahnameh," "Threads of Silence" and "Anatomic Myth of Self." Through each collection, Rahmanifar aims to infuse myth and culture with her evolving sense of being.

In "Women of Shahnameh," Rahmanifar portrays the women of Ferdowski's epic poem, "Shahnameh." The women present in "Shahnameh" are strong, forward leaders, but Rahmanifar, in exile from Iran since 1989, feels that the true characters of these women have become lost since then.

"These women are present every time, everywhere in my work, connecting their stories to a broader area of gender, exile, cultural memory and resilience," she said in a virtual interview. "These are some of the things that after the revolution happened in Iran, it's been kind of, you know, pushed to the side. I reinterpret them, and I want them to be on the surface again."

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, life for women shifted dramatically towards stricter religious governance and traditional gender roles, contrasting with the nontraditional lives and personalities of many of the women in the Shahnameh.



Afarin Rahmanifar's poses next to her piece. The Iranian-American artist is an Associate Proffesor at Eastern Connecticut State Univerity.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @AFARINRAHMANIFAR ON INSTAGRAM

In one painting, "Sudabeh," the titular woman holds an orb with two lovers in it, symbolizing her resistance to the decisions her parents were trying to make for her. Another painting showcases Rudabeh, a legendary character who mothers Rostam, the greatest hero in Persian mythology. Rahmanifar paints them exposed, in the rich blues and warm yellows cognizant of traditional Iranian artwork, to bring out their intelligence, courage and leadership.

Rahmanifar's newest collection on display is "Anatomic Myth of Self," a collection of female figures that are constructed and deconstructed in an "evolving self-portrait." Anatomical forms are painted, then cut into layers, assembled in wood panels and collage-style textile mosaics.

"The process reflects how I experience memory, identify as an Iranian woman shaped by exile, held in fragments, yet continually reconstructed." Rahmanifar said. "I'm connecting Persian patterns and symbolic imagery to all these things with my personal history that I carry every day."

In "Anatomic Myth of Self #1," a woman, her anatomy exposed in deep reds, stares at herself in a fragmented mirror. One attendee, Rosalie Puskar, particularly resonated with this piece.



Afarin Rahmanifar's "Flesh and Fables" exhibit opens at Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts. The pieces pictured feature many vibrant colors.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @AFARINRAHMANIFAR ON INSTAGRAM

"It's the importance of women in the world," she said. "It's like she's carrying the history with her."

Walking into the Jorgensen Gallery, one is assailed with that sense. Gold-colored paintings on vellum paper hang from the ceiling as Persian music lilts through the air. A wiry sculpture stands alone against a wall, while charcoal drawings intermingle with paintings on canvas. In one corner, an animation of Rahmanifar's works is played on a television, a unique medium that entranced many of the attendees.

"I love to incorporate animation into my work," Rahmanifar said. "It's really interesting to bring the viewers into and invite them into a completely different atmosphere, different kind of imagery, different kind of composition, music and incorporate that."

Though there are many interpretations of her work, Rahmanifar wants viewers to feel resilience, change and vulnerability through a general understanding of what is happening with the figures and knowledge regarding the artist's personal experiences.

"This is history that goes along with my everyday life," she said. "These are the stories that I inherited."

LABYRINTH EXHIBITION OFFERS PEACE FOR UCONN STUDENTS

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Nestled within the bustling heart of the University of Connecticut campus lies a serene labyrinth. The meandering design of stones regularly catches the eye of passing students, faculty and visitors. Many who've stumbled across this stone labyrinth find themselves drawn to step inside, whilst others wonder about its origin. Why is a labyrinth situated here on campus? Who brought it to life? What purpose does it serve in an academic environment like this?

Phoebe Godfrey, a sociology professor-in-residence, served as the project's co-creator, alongside a dedicated coalition of community members, undergraduate and graduate students.

The Institute for Sustainability funded the rocks, as well as Sean Vassington, executive director of University Planning, Design & Construction and Wesley Ayers III, manager of UConn Public Works.

Godfrey has long been an advocate for establishing permanent labyrinths on campus; her mission aims to serve the campus community with grounding and potential healing power for those who walk through it.

"The simple act of walking a labyrinth with intention can be a powerful experience that both helps the walker find healing and a great connection to self and the Earth," Godfrey said.

While most confuse labyrinths with mazes, the two structures serve different purposes. Labyrinths are ancient archetypes dating back 4,000 years or more and have been in numerous global cultures and traditions.

The primary difference between the two is their layout and intent. A maze is a complex puzzle made to test problem solving skills and features multiple branching paths, confusing dead ends, and twists and turns meant to disorient, frustrate and trap the walker navigating it.

In contrast, a labyrinth features a single continuous non-branching route known as the unicursal path. This path winds continuously from the entrance directly into the center. There are no wrong paths, tricks or dead ends to navigate along the way.

Since there are no decisions to make, the person walking a labyrinth does not need to analyze or solve a puzzle. While a maze is designed to make you lose your way, a labyrinth is crafted to help you find yours, transforming a physical walk into a calming, meditative journey.

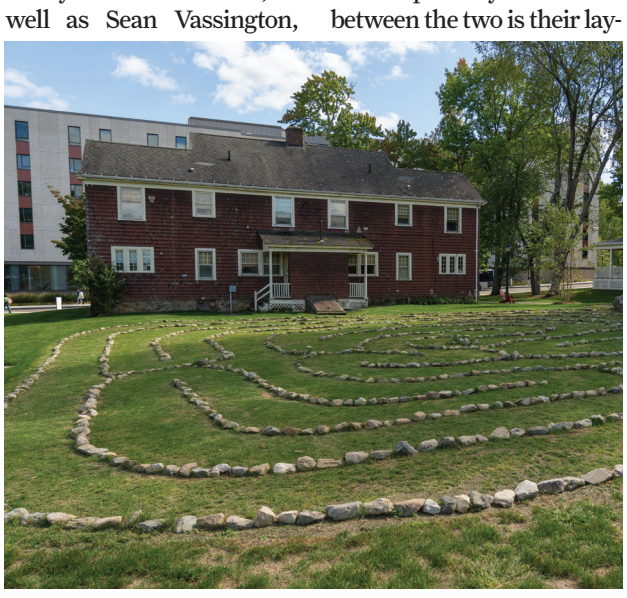
For students balancing high academic workloads and daily stressors, the intentional design of the labyrinth offers immediate peace. Isabella Vancho, a third-semester animation and illustration major, explained how walking the stone path shifted her mindset.

"I felt at peace because I wasn't rushing through or anything. I was just walking and being in the moment. I don't think it would've been the same experience if I cut straight to the middle," Vancho said.

Walking the labyrinth offers a space for personal growth, spiritual transformation and greatly enhances brain activity. Stepping away from the strict mindset of linear and analytical thinking can be hard, but once you let go, walkers can find themselves reconnecting with their deeper sense of self and feel more connected to the surrounding natural environment.



A labyrinth is situated on South Campus across from Connecticut Hall. The exhibition, co-created by sociology professor Phoebe Godfrey, has been on display since last spring.
PHOTO COURTESY OF PHOEBE GODFREY



Phoebe Godfrey, a sociology professor-in-residence, helped create a labyrinth situated on South Campus across from Connecticut Hall. The exhibition has been on display since last spring.
PHOTO BY JACOB BLACKWELL, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER /THE DAILY CAMPUS

The current stone structure represents a significant evolutionary step in the project's history on campus. In April 2025, Godfrey initially installed a temporary spray-paint labyrinth on the Founders Green right outside Austin Hall and Beach Hall.

The early installation was short-lived as the spring rain washed it away. Recognizing the need for a more durable installation, Godfrey secured a grant to purchase stones, creating a weather-resistant structure capable of withstanding any seasonal weather.

"Having a rock labyrinth is one step towards permanence," noted Godfrey.

Looking into the future, the team views the current stone installation as a stepping stone toward a larger permanent labyrinth on campus. The ultimate goal is to eventually replace the temporary stones with a fully integrated landscape design with plantings.

Until then, the current labyrinth remains open to all students, offering a quiet sanctuary where any member of the UConn community can stop and pause, take a deep breath and walk toward the center.