

Mahsa Aleph

What is washed returns as language

The Berlin-based Iranian artist Mahsa Aleph works at the intersection of film, installation, and text. In her work, she explores the relationship between language, materiality, and memory. Words, images, and objects appear not as fixed meanings, but as fluid states that constantly overwrite, transform, and reform themselves.

The exhibition features the installation *Jowhar* (2021) and the film *Reanimation* (2026), both of which tell of iterations of disappearance and return.

The exhibition title *What is washed returns as language* serves as a conceptual link between the two works: What seems lost, erased, or left behind does not disappear completely, but returns in a different form.

The starting point for *Jowhar* is a term of Arabic origin meaning “essence,” which in Persian came to denote writing ink—a double meaning central to the work. The installation itself consists of paper rolls inscribed with ink and a sculptural arrangement of metal elements and ink-filled tear catchers. A single sentence recurs continuously across the paper rolls. “The future is merely a part of the past which has been forgotten.”—a conception that is inscribed in the work in material form.

While creating the work, the artist washes the writing out of the paper. The artist collects the ink that is dissolved in the process in the containers, a reference to a historical practice in Iranian culture in which “tear catchers” are attached to graves as a symbol of remembrance and mourning.

What appears to be erased is thus preserved in a different form. The ink becomes the essence of the words, which do not disappear but are transformed and re-inscribed. An accompanying video documentation records the artistic process, highlighting its nature as a physical and time-bound act.

The notion of ongoing transformation is also at the core of the new video-based work *Reanimation*. Created in the outskirts of Tehran, it follows the material remnants of a city in transition. Doors from demolished houses end up in landfills and then become building materials for new abodes. Makeshift architectural structures emerge from fragments and offer shelter while simultaneously bearing the traces of past lives. Aleph describes them as “a borrowed, patchwork body assembled from the parts of others”—fragile constructions poised between loss and new beginnings.

The film focuses on people living in these liminal states and speaks of dignity, perseverance, and the ability to bring forth new forms of existence from what has been left behind. Home does not appear as a fixed place, but as something that must be continuously recreated.

Exhibition

10 July–20 September 2026

Opening

Thursday, 9 July

7 pm

Introduction

Dr Angela Lammert,
Head of Interdisciplinary
Special Projects, Academy
of Arts, Berlin, and Senior
Lecturer, Humboldt University of Berlin

Artist Talk

Thursday, 27 August

7 pm

with Mahsa Aleph and Julia
Rosenbaum, art historian

Closing event and guided tour

Sunday, 20 September

4 pm

with Mahsa Aleph and
Dr Kristina Schrei, art historian and curator

Address

Haus am Kleistpark
Grunewaldstraße 6–7
10823 Berlin
Telephone 90277-6964
www.hausamkleistpark.de

Free admission

No disabled access

Tue–Sun 11am–6pm

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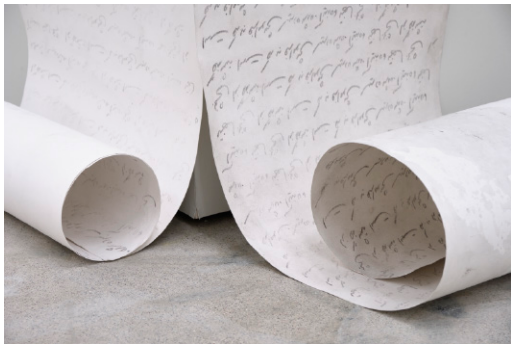
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Tel. +49 (30) 90277-6964
hausamkleistpark@ba-ts.berlin.de

An exhibition organised by the Department of Art, Culture and Museums, Tempelhof-Schöneberg. The project is funded by the BKF Fund and the Fabik Fund.

With her first institutional solo exhibition in Berlin, Mahsa Aleph offers insights into an artistic practice that understands memory not as the preservation of the past, but as an ongoing process of overwriting, loss, and reformation. Between language and matter, ritual and everyday life, she creates works of great poetic power in which personal experiences relate to social and cultural issues.

Mahsa Aleph (*1990 in Ardabil, Iran) studied painting at the University of Art in Tehran. She has received various grants and research fellowships, including ones from the Braunschweig University of Art, the Academy of Arts Berlin, and the Berlin Senate. For her work *Jowhar*, she was awarded the grand prize of the State of the ART(ist) Award by Ars Electronica in 2023. In 2026, the Tyrolean Art Pavilion in Innsbruck presented her first solo exhibition in Austria. In the same year, she received the Istanbul Fellowship from the Berlin Senate.



Details from: *Jowhar*, Scrolls and Tear Catchers with Ink, 2021,
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