



Artist Interview

Excerpt from
*A CONVERSATION BETWEEN SORAYA SARAH NAZARIAN
AND GLORIA GERACE, SPRING 2010*

GERACE Tell me about your life's journey from a childhood in Tehran to today, living as an artist in Los Angeles.

NAZARIAN I was raised in a close-knit Jewish Iranian community in Tehran, where I had a lot of beautiful, good friends. Many of these childhood friends are here in Los Angeles with me, since we moved here about the same time. As a child, in school and with my mother at home, I had a sense that I was talented, but I did not know where my talent could grow.

My mother was strong, and gave me my strength; my father was very sensitive, especially with me. When we were young, he read to us each evening. That was very common for fathers in Iran; after dinner, they would read poems, history, and classical stories to their children. My father took me to the children's theater, which was very good in Iran. Just he and I would go. We laughed together; he as much as I. My father loved and appreciated art. He had an artistic side that was warm and emotional. He spent quite a lot of time with me, talking about art. He would show me works of art and explain them to me, even when I was very young.

From childhood, from my strong mother and my artistic father, I was determined to create; was yearning to make something. I always wanted to learn what I could be, what I could do. But I was married very young, as was our tradition. So I didn't have that period of my life, after school, to be independent — to discover my talent. With my husband, I had the chance to travel and meet other people, which helped me to find myself. Part of all my travels — throughout Iran, Israel, Europe, and the United States — was to educate myself: to go to museums and to see all kinds of art. I was like a hungry person. I was looking here and there, appreciating other artists, studying how they made what they created, and inspired by their works.

In 1979, when the revolution started, I left everything in the past and started my new life here. We were actually in the United States that winter, for a short visit with my parents in New York, when we learned that we could not return. I had packed only for that short trip, so we left everything behind: all our belongings, our children's baby pictures, our art collections, and even my marriage certificate. And we left behind our neighborhood, our business, and our culture. But since we all had green cards, our family could be here together, and be safe, and we appreciated our new home very much. We were so lucky that we were here.

I then decided that I had to learn to be American, to Americanize myself and my children. I was trying to learn how we could become part of the community, the American community. I went to Santa Monica College and took ESL classes. Little by little, here and there, I educated myself, until at last I decided that it was time to do something for myself. I had always been looking for something in my life that I knew was missing — and that was art. So I started to take art classes at several different places. Finally, when I started working with stone, I found myself.