



Image: Georgia SAXELBY, *Lullaby* (still from video performance, detail), 2017, in collaboration with Viva Soudan and Bailey Nolan. Photo: Kristin Adair.

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2019 Samstag Scholars announced

The University of South Australia is delighted to announce the recipients of the prestigious **Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarships**. In 2019, **Elyas Alavi**, from South Australia, and **Georgia Saxelby**, from New South Wales, will take their socially engaged practices to the world stage.

The Scholarships provide each artist with a twelve-month living allowance of US \$48,000, as well as travel expenses and the cost of institutional study fees at a leading international art school of their choice.

Elyas Alavi is a cross-disciplinary artist and poet based in Adelaide. His multifaceted art practice is driven by ideas of social justice, memory, displacement and exile. Born in the Daikundi province of Afghanistan, Alavi lived for many years in Iran following an intensification of war in his homeland, arriving in Australia in 2007 as a refugee at risk. Alavi holds an MFA from UniSA, and has shown at Nexus Art Gallery, CACSA Project Space, Fontanelle Gallery, First Draft, Sydney Contemporary, Mohsen Gallery (Tehran) and IFA Gallery (Kabul). He is also an internationally renowned poet, and has published three books of poetry in Iran and Afghanistan.

‘Exploring agency through personal narratives of identity, memory, displacement and cross cultural integration, Elyas Alavi merges the personal and the poetic with strong geopolitical contexts,’ says **Nike Savvas**, internationally renowned artist, former recipient of the 1996 Samstag Scholarship, and member of the selection committee for the 2019 Scholarships.

UniSA has commissioned Canberra-based writer **Virginia Rigney** to introduce the new Scholars. She writes: ‘a lyrical sensibility weaves throughout Elyas Alavi’s diverse practices’.

‘His works tantalise with suggestion in a transcultural dialogue that resists conventional boundaries of place and identity. Alavi may be safe in Australia now, but his work is conceptually unflinching.’

Georgia Saxelby is an interdisciplinary artist living and working between Sydney and the United States. Her participatory practice engages with issues of public social space, collective ritual behaviour and notions of sacred space in both ancient and contemporary cultures. Saxelby is a Fellow at the art and social impact incubator, Halcyon Arts Lab, Washington, DC creating participatory installations that investigate contemporary cultural relationships to women and feminine identity through invented ritual practices and symbolic actions. Saxelby recently presented a solo exhibition, *To Future Women*, at The Phillips Collection, which will travel between cultural institutions in Washington, DC, including the Hirshhorn Museum & Sculpture Garden.

'Georgia Saxelby's work is highly charged, informed, feminist, inclusive, and relational - inviting participation from women across different cultures, countries, social and political spheres,' says Savvas. 'Her work gives a loud, credible voice to the unrepresented and those without a voice.'

'An urgent curiosity propels Georgia Saxelby to make art of our time,' writes Rigney. 'With the Samstag Scholarship, Saxelby plans to return to the United States and continue to study, research and make work of these extraordinary times.'

Erica Green, Director of UniSA's Samstag Museum of Art, which administers the Samstag Scholarships program, says that 'the Samstag Scholarships will provide Alavi and Saxelby the time and context to advance their artistic practice; it is an opportunity to build upon what they have achieved so far to create an international practice'.

The program, now in its 27th year, can celebrate awarding no fewer than 142 scholarships, their total value exceeding ten million US dollars. Says Green, 'the importance of the Samstag Scholarships within the ecology of Australian art cannot be overlooked. Gordon Samstag's remarkable bequest provides an unprecedented opportunity for Australian artists to develop their practice during a pivotal moment in their career'.

The 2018 scholars, **Sasha Grbich** and **Julian Day** are commencing their study respectively at Maumau, Portugal and Columbia University School of Arts, New York. Green says that they 'have exciting and enviable experiences ahead of them, studying overseas, supported by their well-funded Samstag Scholarship'.

The selection committee for the 2019 Samstag Scholarships comprised **Simon Biggs**, Professor of Art, South Australian School of Art, UniSA; **Christian Lock**, Lecturer: Painting, South Australian School of Art, UniSA and recipient of a 2013 Samstag Scholarship; and Nike Savvas, a celebrated Sydney-based artist who recently exhibited in the *2018 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art: Divided Worlds*.

Samstag Scholarships are awarded by UniSA on behalf of the Trustee of the estate of Gordon Samstag, the celebrated American artist who taught at the South Australian School of Art in the 1960s.

The University of South Australia warmly congratulates Elyas Alavi and Georgia Saxelby, and looks forward to following their careers! Read Virginia Rigney's essays in full: unisa.edu.au/Samstag

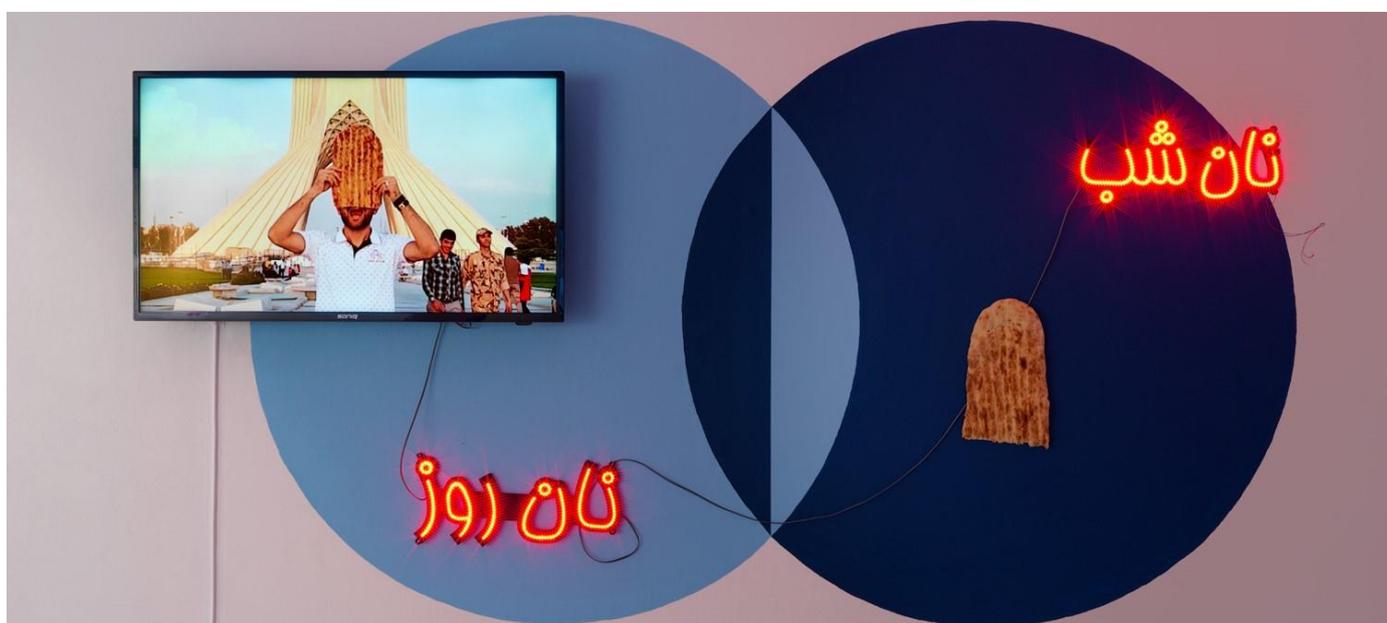


Image: Elyas ALAVI, *Naan/Bread* (installation view, detail), 2017, video still, Middle-eastern bread, LED light, acrylic on wall. Photo: Grant Hancock.

For further information contact

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