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## Hadieh Shafie at Morton Fine Art, Reviewed

Posted by [John Anderson](#) on May. 9, 2011 at 2:30 pm



Hadieh Shafie, "10400 Pages"

Mention the circle, and two giants of contemporary art spring to mind: **Jasper Johns** and **Kenneth Noland**. For D.C., Noland is the foremost champion of the circle, since his career, and his circles, began here in the 1950s (perhaps from driving around them so often in his cab). It's a familiar motif, and one that defies easy reinvention. That's why the work of **Hadieh Shafie** is so surprising.

Shafie's "scroll paintings" have made up much of her work of the last decade, but some of her ink and acrylic drawings will remind audiences of Noland. Works like "Still of the Turn" and "Keep on Turning" build concentric bands of rich color around a radius that appears to be a hole punched in the center of the paper. The holes could be large enough for the knob of a record player turntable to fit through.

Tom Wolfe referred to Noland in *The Painted Word* as "the fastest painter alive." This might also apply to Shafie's drawings, if they weren't done with love. Literally: Shafie has written the word love in Farsi ("eshghe") across and down the drawings. In "Radiate Out" and "Radiate In," "eshghe" emerges from the center, becoming darker or lighter as the words near the edge.

On her website, Shafie recalls making little cookies with her grandmother, each the size of a quarter, and dotting each precisely in the center with saffron. Her earliest experience of the power of repetition carries through in each piece, and echoes the traditions of her Islamic heritage. The paintings on the wall are made up of hundreds of tiny bulls-eyes, not unlike the drawings. However, upon closer inspection there is a physical depth to each work. The paintings are assemblages of thousands of little paper scrolls, tightly and meticulously wound, their edges dyed. Inside the scrolls, one word can be read: "eshghe." Through every inch of every scroll, the word "eshghe" is written again and again, like a breath: essential to the work and yet as unnoticeable as one's own respiration. The title of each work is a number: 10250 pages, 12001 pages, 22500 pages. Each references the number of pages contained within each work; the pages are wound to make the scrolls. All told, Shafie uses hundreds, if not thousands of scrolls in a work.

Clearly Shafie, an Iranian-born artist, approaches each work mindful of her past and her identity. But the diligence it takes to roll thousands of tiny scrolls, each with hand-painted edges and repetitiously inscribed with the word "love," might seem dreadfully dull. However, how many traditions did our ancestors carry with them to this country? Mexican families might make a day of making hundreds of enchiladas. Chinese families might take a day to make hundreds of egg rolls. Italian families might take a day to make hundreds of ravioli or gnocchi. Some traditions still get passed down through generations; for Shafie, the tradition has transgressed the kitchen and found its way into the studio. The result is not something we consume with the mouth, but rather with the eye. Both her circular and rectilinear compositions are loud and active with frenzied rhythms of differing circumferences, colors, and color combinations. They are eye-candy, easily consumed, and filled with that ingredient with which all good dishes are made: love.

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