

Art **Reviews**

## How to Create a Butterfly

In her exhibition at Five Myles, Roya Amigh demonstrates how simple materials can metamorphose into storytelling.



by Seph Rodney  
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In my sleep I migrate back with “Back and Forth” (2017, left) thread, pieces of cloth and paper, 49 x 62 in; and “The world is that kind of sleep” (2017, right) dandelions and pieces of cloth, 25 x 25 x 62 in (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)” width=”720” height=”540” srcset=”https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-1-720x540.jpg 720w, https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-1-1080x810.jpg 1080w, https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-1-360x270.jpg 360w, https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-1.jpg 1400w” sizes=”(max-width: 720px) 100vw, 720px”>

Installation View of Roya Amigh’s *In my sleep I migrate back* with “Back and Forth” (2017, left) thread, pieces of cloth and paper, 49 x 62 in; and “The world is that kind of sleep” (2017, right) dandelions and pieces of cloth, 25 x 25 x 62 in (all photos by the author for Hyperallergic)

In “Silent Diary” (2013–17), one piece of [Roya Amigh’s](#) exhibition [\*\*\*In my sleep I migrate back\*\*\*](#) at [Five Myles](#) in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, thin, black thread affixed to a small, oddly shaped skein of paper arrayed on top of a gray block reads: “How does a caterpillar arrange itself into a butterfly?” This is the question that pulls me through the entire show. Amigh’s creations consist of glued sheets of lace, dandelions, cardboard, and translucent, handmade paper that’s distressed, shredded or cut, with bits of thread glued on to form words or figures. She fabricates an answer to this central question by using particular combinations of thread and configurations of the hybridized paper to demonstrate how simple materials can metamorphose into storytelling.



In my sleep I migrate back, with "Silent diary" (2013-17, center) thread, paper and dandelions, 17 x 11 x 25 in" width="360" height="480" srcset="https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-3-360x480.jpg 360w, https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-3-720x960.jpg 720w, https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-3-1080x1440.jpg 1080w, https://hyperallergic-newspack.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2017/08/Roya-Amigh-3.jpg 1400w" sizes="(max-width: 360px) 100vw, 360px">

Installation view of Roya Amigh's *In my sleep I migrate back, with "Silent diary"* (2013-17, center) thread, paper and dandelions, 17 x 11 x 25 in

When Amigh uses the black thread to spell out letters, words, and phrases, the ensuing story makes me recall the literary strategy of using snippets of dialogue and news headlines to give the reader the requisite clues to piece together the nature of the world in which the characters operate — as one might do with a [Jeffrey Eugenides](#) novel. Here, with "Looming Danger" (2017), it's a tale of contemporary American xenophobia. I read: "Kansas town reels months after failed mosque bombing; Pending a review of our procedures for screening refugees; hate crime ..." It doesn't fail to amaze me that the headlines remain the same as they were five, ten, or twenty years ago, and yet the response is frequently frenzied fear — as if historical amnesia is our default setting.

When Amigh uses the black thread to form shapes and figures, I find a much looser narrative — really I only make out characters and settings. In "Back and Forth" (2017), I can tell the setting is west Asia because there are many camels, and lambs, as well as horses, plus angels with bird-like wings attached to their scapula, and men wearing turbans that curve near the top. Amigh might be depicting a fairy tale, a legend, family history (she is from Iran), or a dream. I cannot tell, but the ancient technique of

creating pictograms has been a means of storytelling for millennia, and here it feels like Amigh is simultaneously letting me glimpse her personal history and a collective one. From the [exhibition press release](#) I gather that she is using the writings of the Persian poets Ferdowki, Rumi, and Hafez, and Persian legends, but still, she might have given me more to go on.



Detail of Roya Amigh's "Back and Forth" (2017)

Lastly, Amigh moves the viewer through meaning by creating shapes that are themselves visual puzzles and bric-a-brac such as the collection of bits and pieces that come to resemble a wasps' nest in "There is an inner wakefulness that directs the dream" (2017). These magpie fabrications are the least compelling for me because it feels like the pieces yield the urgency that impelled their creation to the seduction of formalist matters. The story those works tell is of their own relentless making, a menagerie of strange bits and pieces like a dying flower erupted. The exhibition seems to me in this last piece to exist in that larval stage and in the others to have already sprouted its wings.

Roya Amigh's **In my sleep I migrate back**, continues at **Five Myles** (558 St. Johns Place, Crown Heights, Brooklyn) through August 27.