

# ART of IRAN

OPERA GALLERY

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Opera Gallery has been involved in the promotion of Iranian art throughout the world, and has connections with Iranian descendants living in Tehran. They have years of experience in curating Iranian art and have constant presence on Iran's artscene which gives Opera Gallery the opportunity to access rare artworks of established masters and the latest talents of emerging artists on a constant basis.

The collection exhibited includes two different angles of modern and contemporary Iranian art. The first approach deals with the transformation of calligraphy from traditional writing to contemporary art, while the second angle is considering the divergence of Iranian modern and contemporary art between Western influences and Iranian roots and culture. You will find a profound evolution in the Art of Iran during the decades exhibited.

Opera Gallery Dubai has the pleasure of inviting you to discover the latest and the best quality of art from Iran in its exhibition which will be held in Opera Gallery DIFC commencing March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2013.

Gilles Dyan  
Founder and Chairman, Opera Gallery Group

Leila Varasteh & Vida Zaim  
Curators

# Calligraphy

FROM TRADITIONAL  
writing to  
CONTEMPORARY art

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# CALLIGRAPHY IS UNQUESTIONABLY the **FUNDAMENTAL** element of **Islamic ART...**

The logos, the word, the gateway to truth and meaning, it is the sacred geometry of language and imbued with all the mystical spirituality of the divine. Used principally as a means to transmit a text, its inherent possibilities of intricate form and aesthetic appeal wove through underlying talismanic anchors and flourished into myriad ways of exploiting script as ornament.

Denying the thread of consciousness which gave traditional calligraphy its layers of meaning, another visual landscape is molded out of pure colour where bold letters surge and jostle against one another in a dichotomy of form and meaning.

Teasing the interplay of decorative elements, one word can give the impression of random brushstrokes, or a single letter morph into florid knots or floating refrains.

Often illegible or out of context, words free themselves from the strictures of spiritual and poetic context and become shape for shape's own sake. In doing so, they make a profound statement as the art of the word was only ever validated through explicit meaning. Today, a purely visual movement is replacing the "Written Word" with the "Painted Word" or Naqqashi-khat.

Moving beyond language, the letters are not painted to be understood but to redefine the ancient roots of their relationship with experience. These singular symbols reject their traditional reading and redirect the experience to evoke sensations rather than the structural familiarity of language. Indeed language is actively denied a role in both the expression and the understanding of the new calligraphy, opening fluid portals to sensory abstraction. Yet as in the iconography of painting the basic reference points remain intact and meaning is awoken through re-contextualization. The illusion of infinity running through traditional calligraphy and the "arabesque" prevails, but legibility is drowned in a sea of form and colour as seen in the transition between the works of Mohammad Ehsai.

The interwoven letters of Ajali fray into unintelligible heaps of strokes and coils. The floating letters of Bakhshayeshi rise in isolation and circle through an alchemical abyss as the intricate incantations of Afjehei merge into a seemingly single stroke of the brush. The repetitions echo ancient calligraphic exercises but the letters have the majesty of the spectacular. Theatrical repetition is a fundamental element and yet we also see dramatic independence as in the work of Mohammad Yaghoubian. In Naqqashi-khat the deliberate and tranquil contemplation of the unfathomable is quickened through intense colour and complexity as it drums out a faster, stronger and bolder heartbeat. Yet beneath the loud and proud odes to modernity whisper the refrains of the timeless, the ancient and the archetypal as history flowers anew.

Zahra Faridany-Akhavan PhD



Mohammad **EHSAI** (1939 -)

UNTITLED, CIRCA 1960s-1970s

Signed in Farsi (centre)

Mixed media on cardboard (red ink on gold leaf)  
40 x 25 cm - 15.7 x 9.8 in.

PROVENANCE  
The artist's studio  
Private collection



Mohammad **EHSAI** (1939 -)

UNTITLED

Signed in Farsi (lower right); stamped (on the reverse)

Car paint on cardboard  
30 x 30 cm - 11.8 x 11.8 in.

PROVENANCE  
The artist's studio  
Private collection

“ As a modern artist, he employed calligraphy as a drawing. Faramarz Pilaram did not use motives but only calligraphy using the old “Nastaleeq”\*. There is no emphasis on the meaning, more like a stream of consciousness.

\* Nasta‘liq, also anglicized as Nastaleeq, is one of the main script styles used in writing the Perso-Arabic script, and traditionally the predominant style in Persian calligraphy.

”

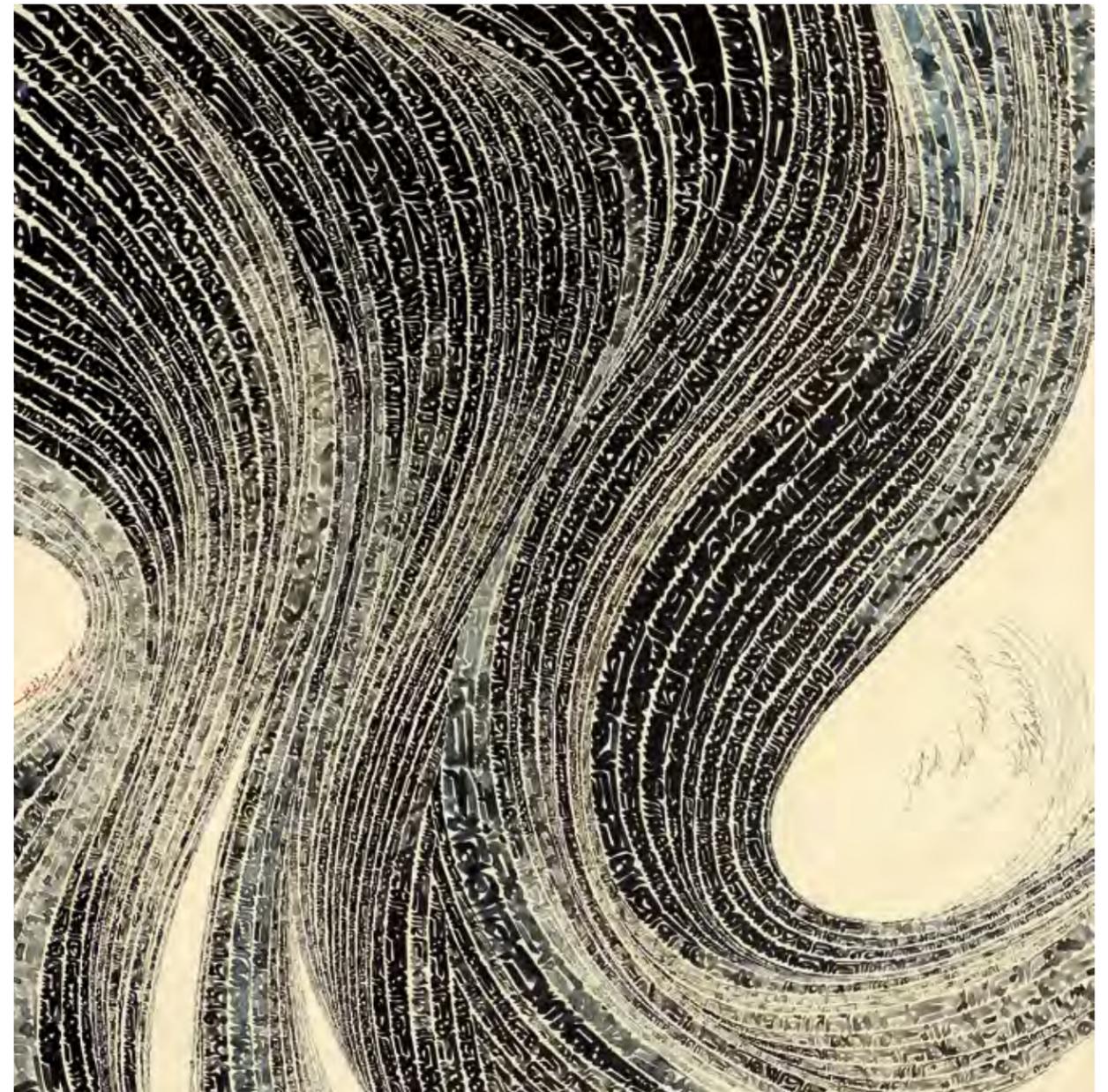
Faramarz **PILARAM** (1937 -1982)  
CALLIGRAPHY, 1972  
Signed and dated “Pilaram 72” (lower right)  
Oil on cardboard  
70 x 70 cm - 27.6 x 27.6 in.

“

Calligraphy is the alphabetic elements of a composition. It has no meaning here. It's just the music of a composition with the help of alphabetic painting.

”

Nasrollah Afjehei



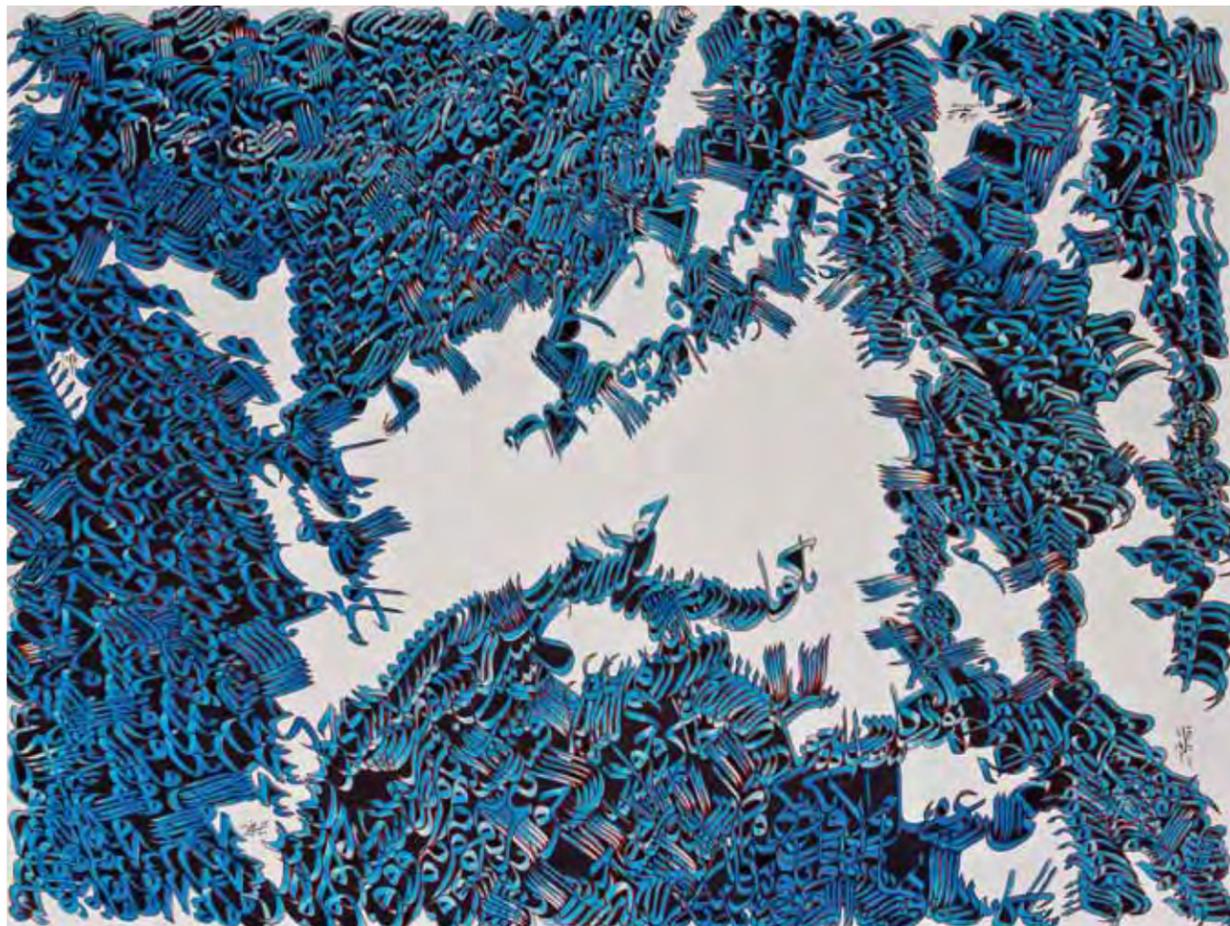
Nasrollah **AFJEHEI** (1933 -)

UNTITLED, 2012

Signed in Farsi (centre left)

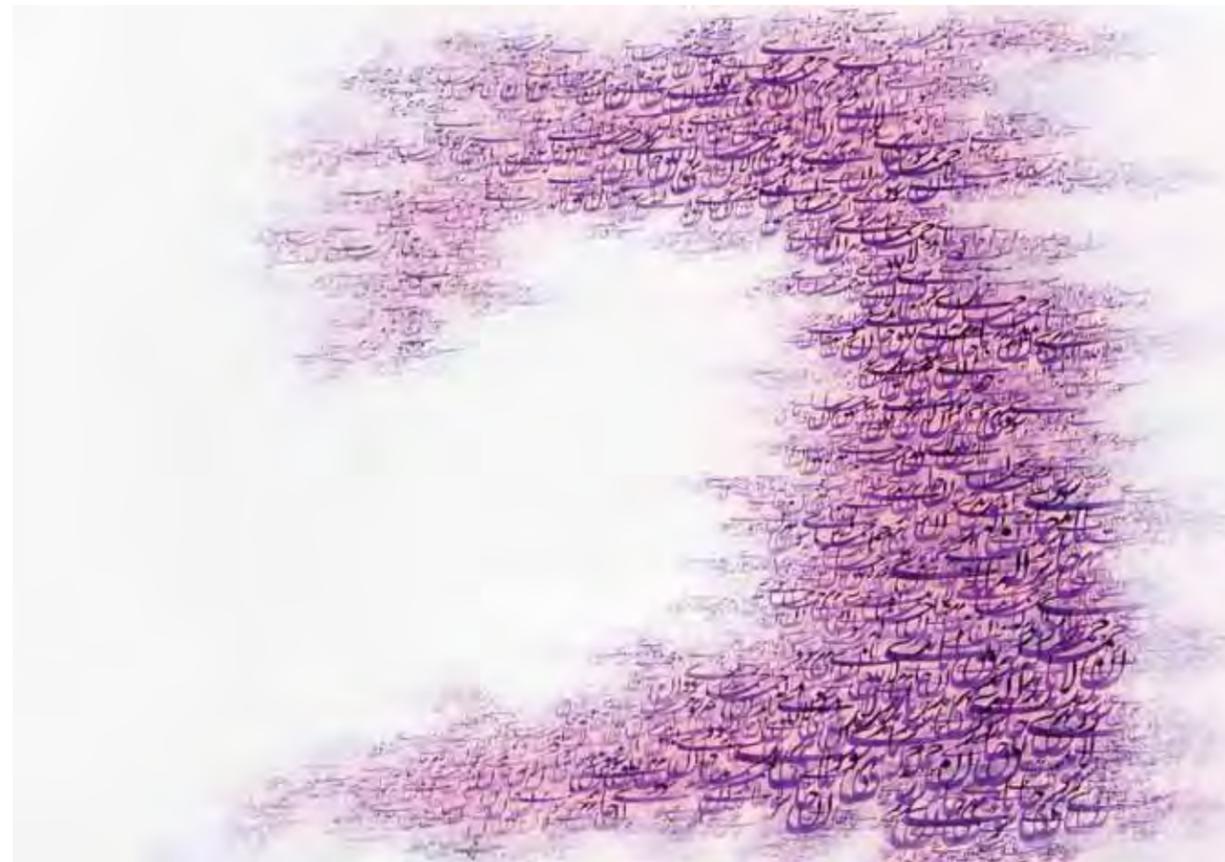
Acrylic on canvas

90 x 90 cm - 35.4 x 35.4 in.



Ali **AJALI** (1939 -)  
UNTITLED, 2012

Signed twice in Farsi (lower left and lower right)  
Mixed media on canvas  
150 x 200 cm - 59.1 x 78.7 in.



Ahmad **MOHAMMADPOUR** (1965 -)  
UNTITLED, 2013

Signed in Farsi (lower centre)  
Mixed media on canvas  
100 x 150 cm - 39.4 x 59.1 in.



Mehrdad **SHOGHI** (1972 -)

UNTITLED, 2008

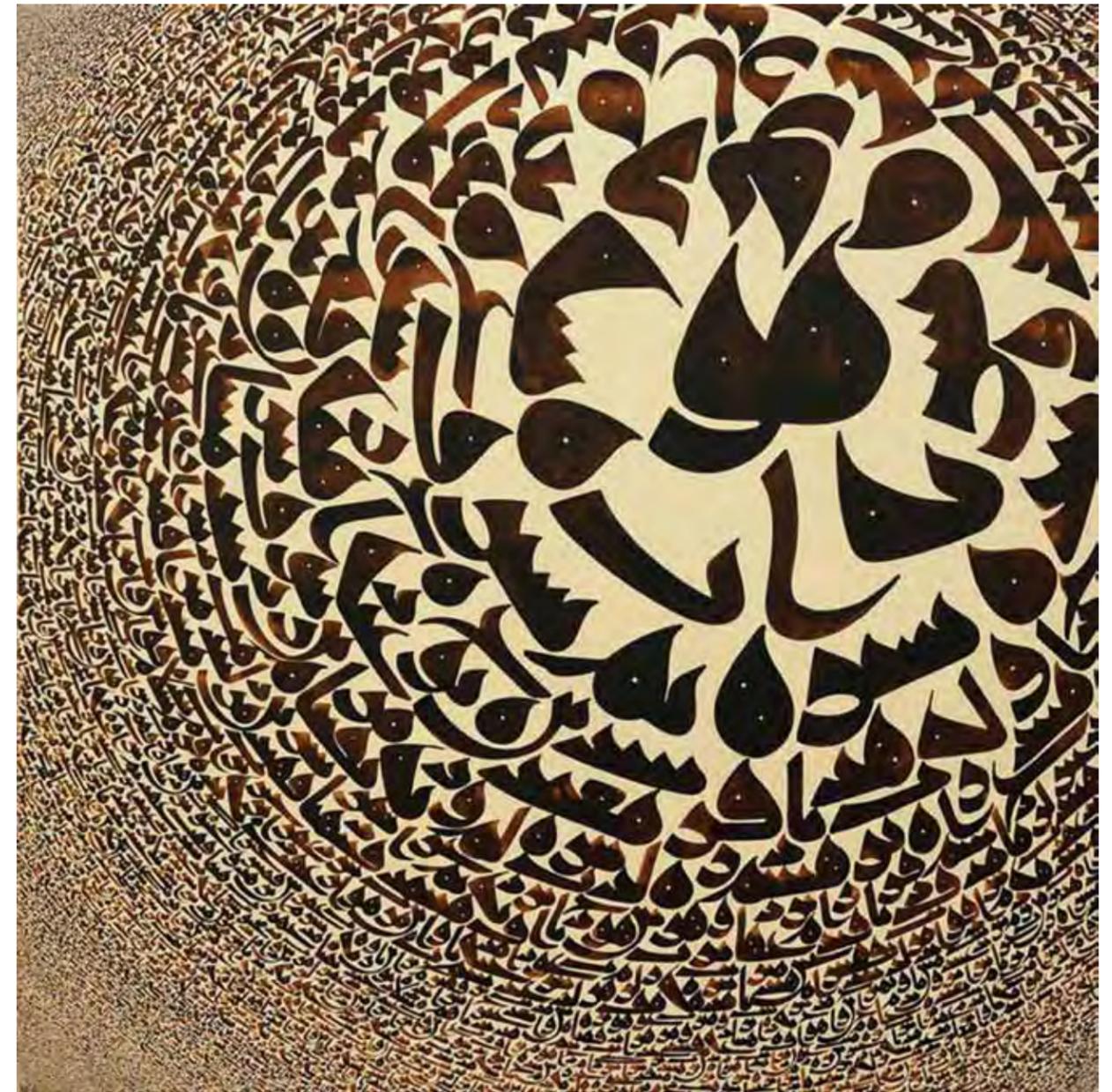
Stamped and dated "MEHRDAD 2008"; signed and dated in Farsi (lower right)

Mixed media on canvas

200 x 350 cm - 78.7 x 137.8 in.

PROVENANCE

The artist's studio



Azra Aghighi **BAKSHAYESHI** (1968 -)

CIRCUMABULATION, 2012

Ink on canvas

135 x 135 cm - 53.1 x 53.1 in.



Mohammad **BOZORGI** (1978 -)  
Love, 2012  
Mixed media on canvas  
Diptych: 165 x 235 cm - 65 x 92.5 in.



Mohammad Mahdi **YAGHOUBIAN** (1974 -)  
UNTITLED, 2012  
Signed "Yaghoubian" and signed in Farsi (lower centre)  
Acrylic on canvas  
136 x 246 cm - 53.5 x 96.8 in.



Behrouz **ZINDASHTI** (1978 -)  
 5 TAN, 1391 (2012)  
 Signed and dated in Farsi (lower centre)  
 Ink and silver leaf on canvas  
 200 x 110 cm - 78.7 x 43.3 in.

“ In this specific work, the “hand” is the symbol of praying God and the “Mehrab” the symbol of the presence of God on earth indirectly. However, the artist paints while using alphabets to make a composition, but there is no emphasis on the meaning of the calligraphy. ”



Alireza **MOHEBI** (1976 -)  
 ZEPHYR, 2011  
 Oil and acrylic on canvas  
 141 x 190 cm - 55.5 x 74.8 in.

PARALLEL and  
DIVERGENCE  
BETWEEN Iranian  
and WESTERN  
modern AND  
CONTEMPORARY art

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# Iranian art has UNDERGONE a SIGNIFICANT **transition** over the last **DECADE...**

...as shifts in cultural politics provoke a transformation that is both increasingly reflective and increasingly critical.

No longer concerned with formalistic innovations derived from Western Art, a distinct sense of self questioning has opened wide windows onto identity and yielded a new visual language with which to explore it. Irony, satire, incongruity and subtle spins on the commonplace are being wryly manipulated into fractured comment as familiar and comfortable iconography is displaced into a new paradigm.

A nascent movement known as “New Art” has injected a radical energy into the Iranian contemporary landscape, as a superbly subtle engagement with traditional motifs and powerful cultural symbols crystallizes into new angles of perception. Naturally for Iran, calligraphy, the veil and the chador were an immediate focus for reinterpretation as the “Contemporary” transitioned from a struggle to stay “in step and time with” Western art to “tuning into” a self generated and self referential modernity. A distinctly Iranian symbology is instantly recognizable, yet its use and the hints toward its reading have built toward a decisive shift in meaning. 19<sup>th</sup> Century iconography is imposed with jarring incongruity onto a contemporary moment as acknowledgement and rejection wrestle into fresh flickers of volatile unity. Collective memory is invoked and bygone priorities are woven through splintered personal histories as Iranian art strives to reconcile its uneasy relationship to the Western tradition with its own roots and break through into individuality.

The ubiquity of the familiar is offset by discordant notes as unpredictable juxtapositions unsettle the viewer into a probing reappraisal of that familiarity. In the work of Khosro Khosravi, the cloaked commentary on the futility of the chador literally lays bare prohibited areas. Hidden behind full veils Radaie’s 19<sup>th</sup> Century costumed women speak to the “inability of people to determine their destinies”.

Autobiographical narratives probe uneasy connections and fragile identities through jagged shards of broken memory. The mirrored fragments which pervade the work of Negar Varasteh are a deliberately warped looking glass into reality just as the recognizable landmarks of past eras co-exist yet conflict with their setting in the bank notes of Behnam Kamrani. Photographs, the most commonplace representation of collective memory are blinded or stare into the impenetrable narratives of Samira Alikhanzadeh and Bahman Jalali or take new vistas over the distant landscapes of Khosrow Hassanzadeh’s, or indeed shine an elusive light into Shima Esfandyari’s cultural consciousness.

The national symbols that characterized the work of earlier artists such as Sadegh Tabrizi have been dislodged and replanted onto an “alien” landscape, and yet that “foreignness” is no longer the derivative of Western ideas but a mutation of Iran’s own cultural lexicon. Even at modernity’s peak, the intangible connection of the Iranian artist to his cultural context is undeniable. Through the cracking and peeling of Reza Derakhshani’s and distill of Mohammad Niazi’s cutting edge, an elusive nostalgia pervades. This duality of a culture in which nothing is as it seems, has given rise to unapologetic self exploration reveling in the double entendre and the allegorical.

Emotional and psychological interaction with the viewer’s collective consciousness, twisted into incisive illusions and raw reflections are the common thread running through contemporary Iranian art. As it casts off the shackles of imported ideas and indigenous inertia through a progressive cycle of disintegration and resurrection, we are seeing a different dynamic of complexity and ambiguity fighting for a new understanding, a new sense and a new integrity of self.

Zahra Faridany-Akhavan PhD



Reza **BANGIZ** (1937 -)  
 THE FOURTH WIFE, 1387 (2008)  
 Signed (lower left)  
 Engraving and print on canvas  
 150 x 90 cm - 59.1 x 35.4 in.

PROVENANCE  
 The artist's studio  
 Private collection



“ Old miniature while using a sentence that still has no meaning just as a decor for the borders as used to be in old Iranian miniature. ”

Sadegh **TABRIZI** (1939 -)  
 RAIDERS, 1988  
 Signed and dated "S. Tabrizi 88" (lower right corner)  
 Oil on canvas  
 70 x 100 cm - 27.6 x 39.4 in.

“ Manouchehr Niazi is a master artist who has been creating paintings for the last 61 consecutive years. His last collection, featuring demolishing human crowds or figures indicating ever increasing decadence and futility, has been strongly influenced by the phenomenon “the Arabian Spring” and the occurring incidents in the region. The majority of his artworks are sole colour oil painting harmonies on canvas. ”



Manouchehr **NIAZI** (1936 -)  
UNTITLED  
Signed (lower right corner)  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 150 cm - 39.4 x 59.1 in.

“ Shishegaran’s world is a vivid matrix of fluid dynamics and channelled complexity, where word, pattern, geometry and colour synthesise into a torrid visual language. Harnessing the myriad cultural legacies of his native Iran, he shoots fragments of the Orient through the contemporary prism of pop art and modernism with a freestyle nod to graffiti woven into the ride. Exploring the essence of line, pattern and subjective meaning within a set of personal “rules” about the courtship of calligraphy, his bold tapestries of form distil into profoundly human moments as hints of portraiture peek out from behind the oscillating folds. ”

Zahra Faridany-Akhavan PhD

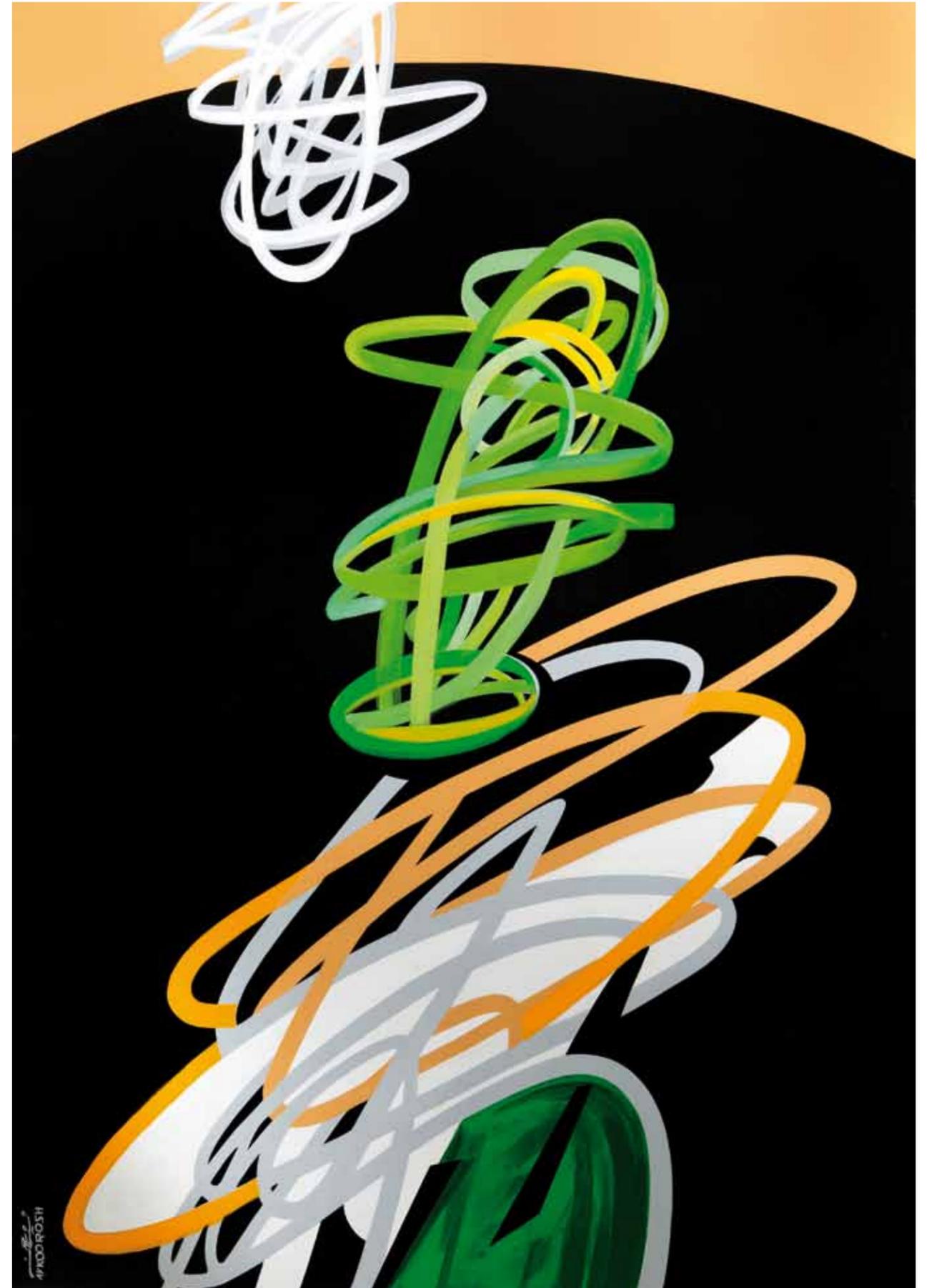
Koorosh **SHISHEGARAN** (1945 -)

GREEN HEAD, 2009

Signed “Koorosh” and signed in Farsi (lower left corner)

Acrylic on canvas

170 x 120 cm - 66.9 x 47.2 in.



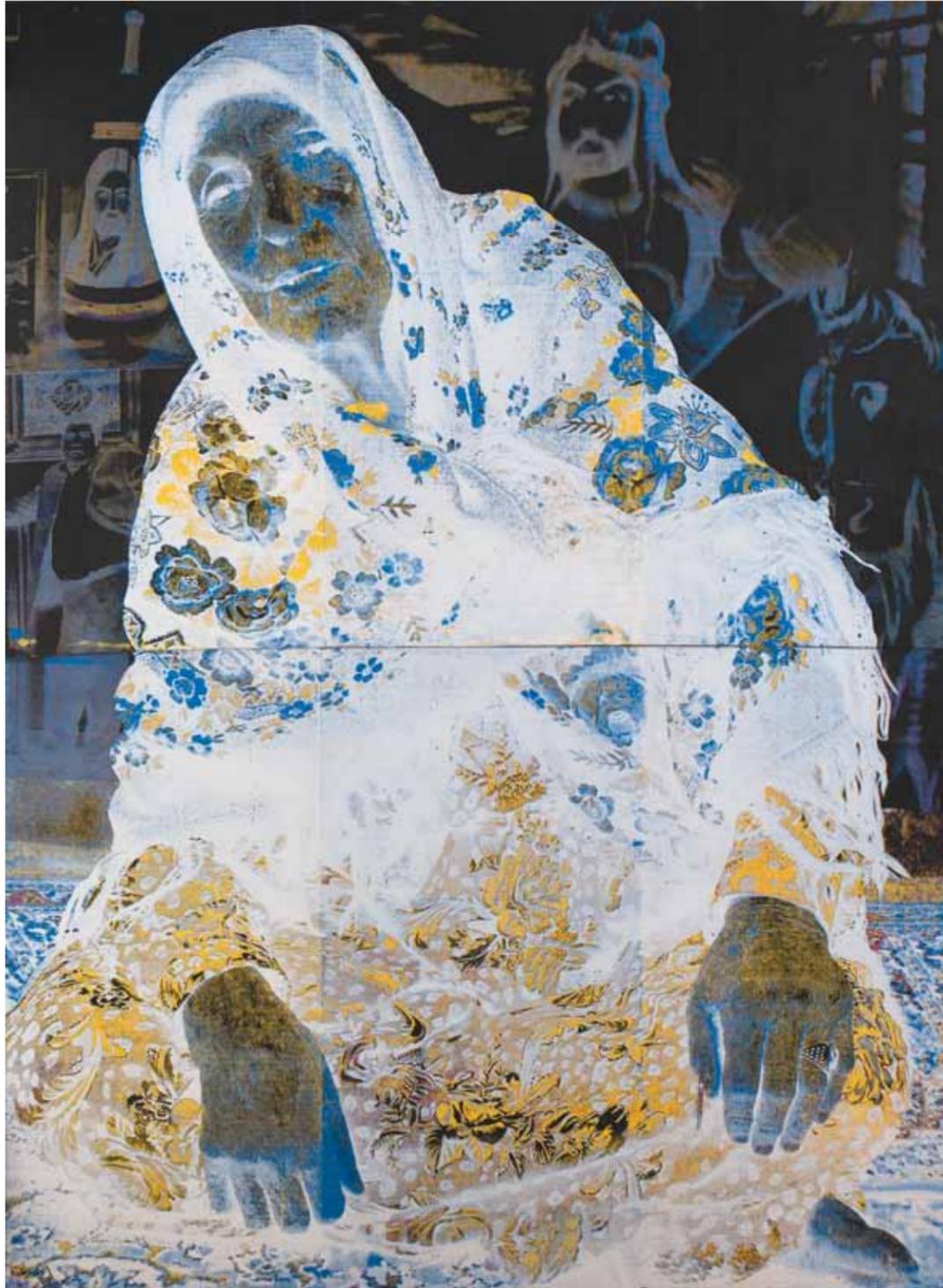


Maryam **SALOUR** (1954 -)  
DEVIL & ANGEL, 2011  
Signed "MSalour" (on the reverse)  
Ceramic, unique piece  
70 x 20 x 8 cm - 27.6 x 7.9 x 3.1 in.



Bahman **JALALI** (1944 - 2010)  
IMAGE OF IMAGINATION SERIES, 2005  
Signed  
Chromatic print, edition of 10  
70 x 70 cm - 27.6 x 27.6 in.

PROVENANCE  
The artist's studio  
Private collection



Khosrow **HASSANZADEH** (1963 -)

TERRORIST NAJIBEH, 2004

Mixed media on canvas

300 x 220 cm - 118.1 x 86.6 in.



Reza **DERAKSHANI** (1952 -)

PIR O TARSA, 2008

Signed and dated "08" (upper right corner);

signed and dated "REZA DERAKSHANI 2008" (on the reverse)

Mixed media on canvas

180 x 200 cm - 70.9 x 78.7 in.



“ In this series, the artist takes a critical and ironical approach using the landscape of old Iranian banknotes to use the historical glory and grander of these monuments not only into the reflection of his own cultural demands, but also his society, and more generally a period. Each work of art in the series consists of painting on high resolution print on canvas of the back side of a used bank note from the Pahlavi period. ”

Behnam **KAMRANI** (1968 -)

WITH PERSEPOLIS, 2010  
Signed in Farsi (lower left)  
Acrylic on printed canvas  
82 x 171 cm - 32.3 x 67.3 in.

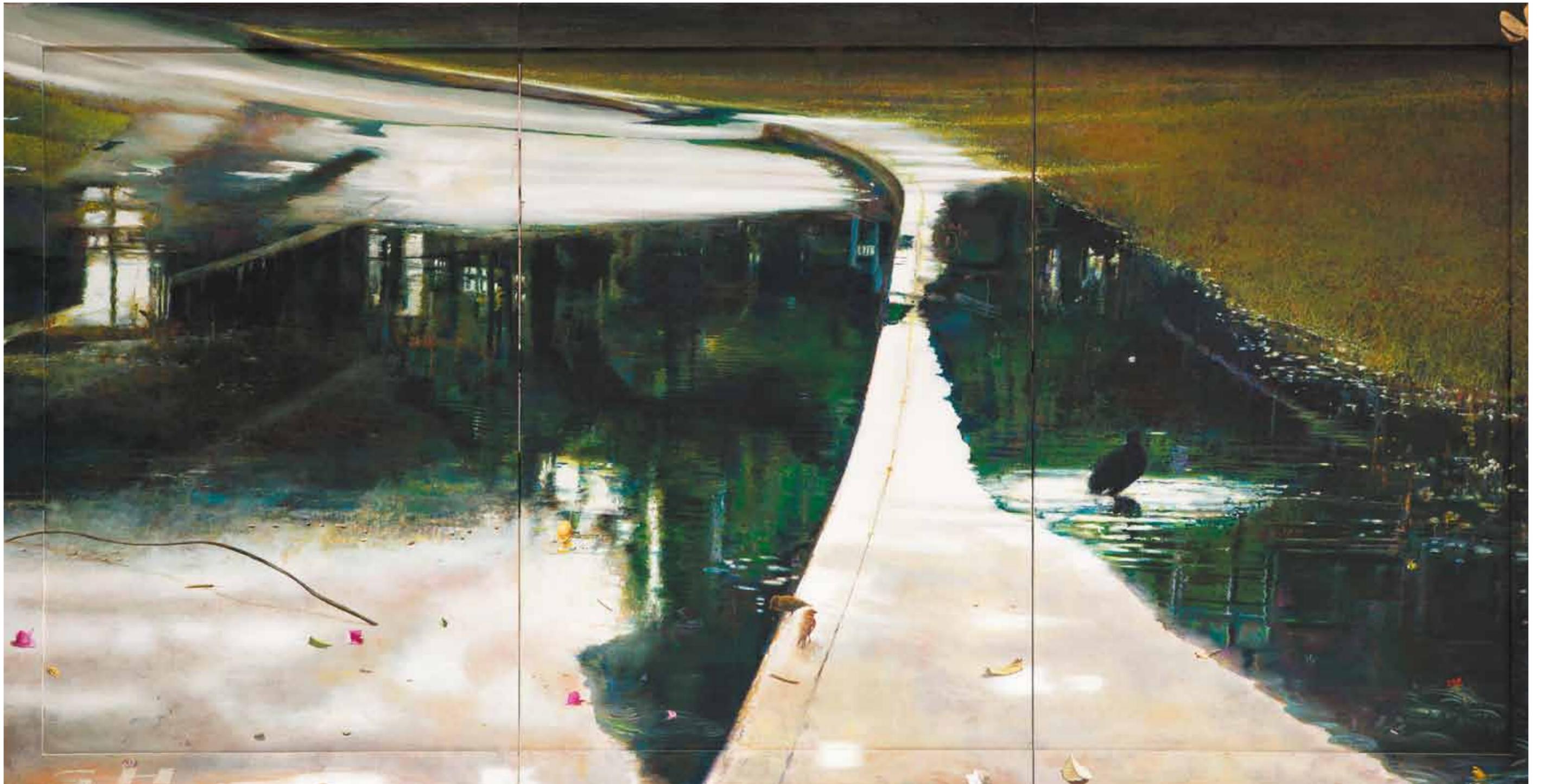
PROVENANCE  
The artist's studio



“ When logic and emotion collide, one has to read between the lines. Innuendos take over, fallacious arguments begin and judgment suffers. ”

Amir Hossein **HESHMATI** (1961 -)

EVIDENCE? FROM INNUENDO COLLECTION, 2011  
Signed (on the reverse)  
Print on Fine Art paper, edition of 3  
50 x 75 cm - 19.7 x 29.5 in.



Ali **ESMAEILIPOUR** (1962 -)

REFLECTION OF LIFE AND TRUTH

Titled "Reflection of life and truth" (on the reverse)

Acrylic on linen and wood with gold leaf

Triptych: 130 x 256 cm - 51.2 x 100.8 in.

“ Agheli always seeks signs and symbols to achieve narrative images. The motifs are familiar and legible in terms of representational features and symbolic implications. The body implies by most classical sense the Iranian icon “Takhti” and the lion represents the certain symbols of ethnic and historical significances. ”



Ghodratollah **AGHELI** (1968 -)

FROM THE COLLECTION OF VENUS IN THE TRAGIC LAND, 2012

Signed (on the left side)

Bronze and brass engraved, edition of 3  
18 x 70 x 53 cm - 7.1 x 27.6 x 20.9 in.

PROVENANCE  
The artist's studio



Samira **ALIKHANZADEH** (1967 -)  
 FROM THE FAMILY ALBUM SERIES, 2010  
 Acrylic and mirror fragments on printed board, edition of 3  
 120 x 150 cm - 47.2 x 59.1 in.



Bijan **SAYFOURI** (1968 -)  
 RIGHTEOUS INJUSTICE, FROM GENERAL DEFECTION SERIES, 2011  
 Stamped with the artist monogram (centre left); signed "Bijan Sayfour" and stamped (on the reverse)  
 Agfa Anapurna MV print on HP artist matte canvas, edition of 4 + 1 AP  
 140 x 140 cm - 55.1 x 55.1 in.

“ Marathon is a dazzling triple sculpture from the “Sovereign” exhibition in which rulers are summoned before the viewer, and provide an opportunity to ponder the history of rulers in Iran. These rulers are faceless and emotionless, but are filled with characters beyond their chosen names. Sovereigns are legends with various names and personas that are often contradictory qualities. Protecting by nature, but bound by power, glory, and glitter. ”



Kourosh **GOLNARI** (1963 -)

MARATHON, 2011

Signed (on the back)

Coins, edition of 5

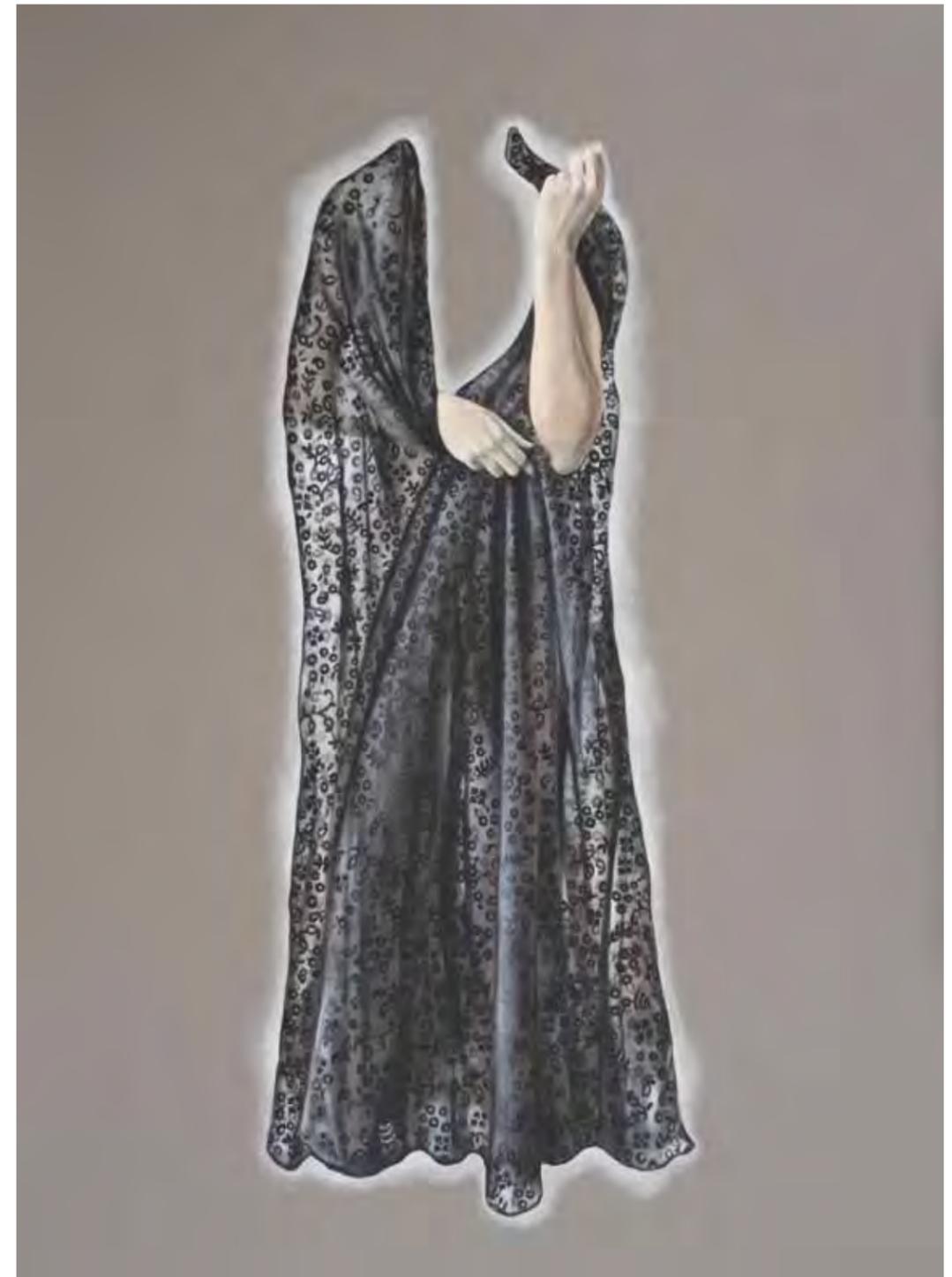
90 x 48 x 30 cm - 35.4 x 18.9 x 11.8 in.

PROVENANCE

The artist's studio



Amirhossein **RADAIE** (1986 -)  
FROM THE FORTUNE TELLER SERIES, 2013  
Signed (on the bottom of the right side of the veil)  
Bronze and cast iron, edition of 5  
37 x 25 x 25 cm - 14.6 x 9.8 x 9.8 in.



Khosro **KHOSRAVI** (1965 -)  
FROM FLORAL VEIL SERIES, 2012  
Signed  
Acrylic on canvas  
170 x 125 cm - 66.9 x 49.2 in.

“ I spent my childhood and adolescence sometime in the city, sometime in my father’s farm. In those years I was so detailed-oriented that every thing interested me: a river fish, my father’s old calculator, the goose wish bone that my mother was cooking and so on. In those years my interpretations were one at a time and everything extraordinary seemed normal. Today, my recollections are interwoven, forming a language or an illusional message, which I consider more real than the reality.

”

Alireza Fani

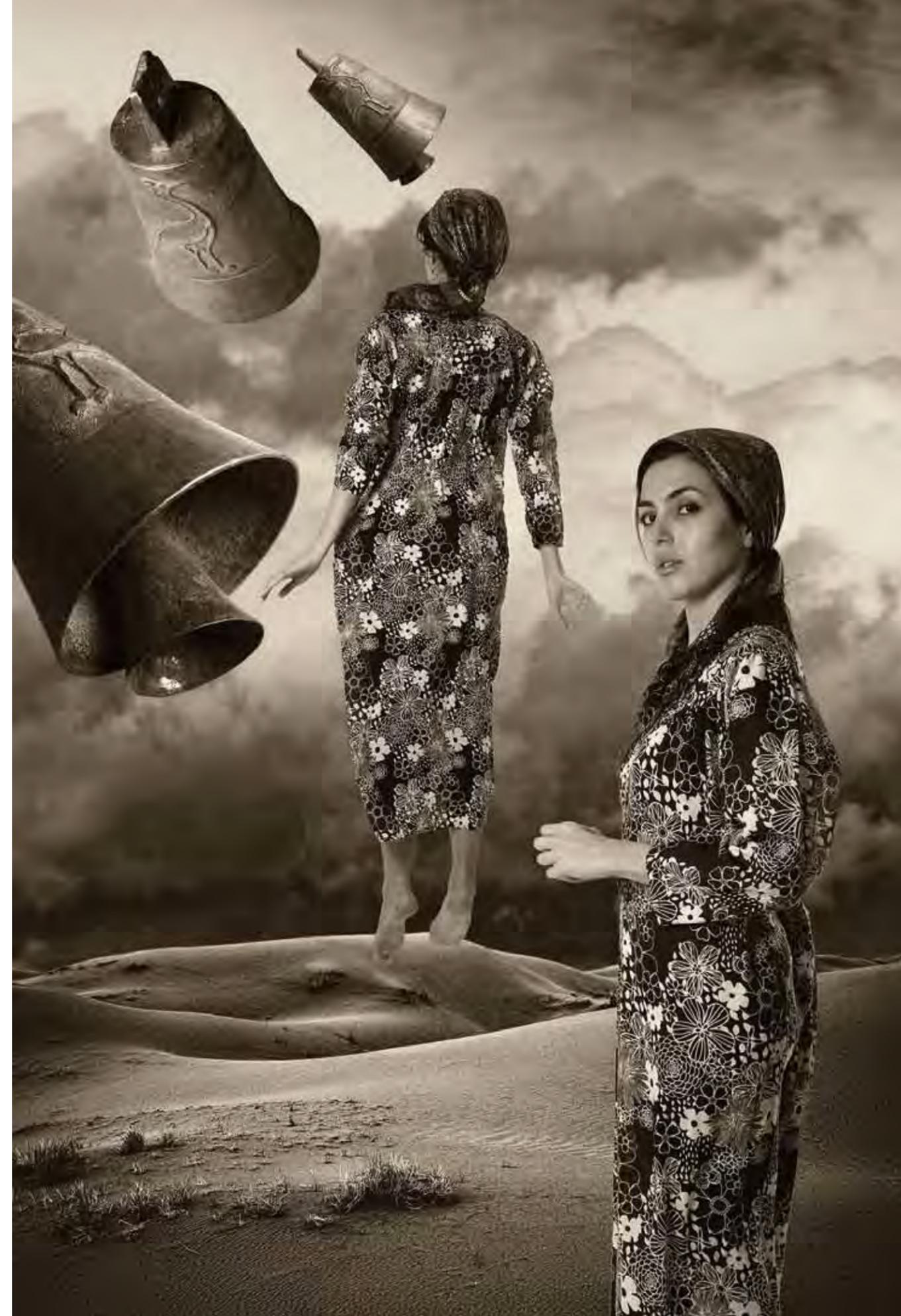
**Alireza FANI (1975 -)**

PLAY TIME, FROM THE ILLUSION SERIES, SPRING 2010

Signed and numbered 'Alireza Fani /4' (on the reverse)

Pigment inkjet print on Premium Luster 260 gr., edition of 4 + 1 EA  
150 x 100 cm - 59.1 x 39.4 in.

PROVENANCE  
The artist's studio





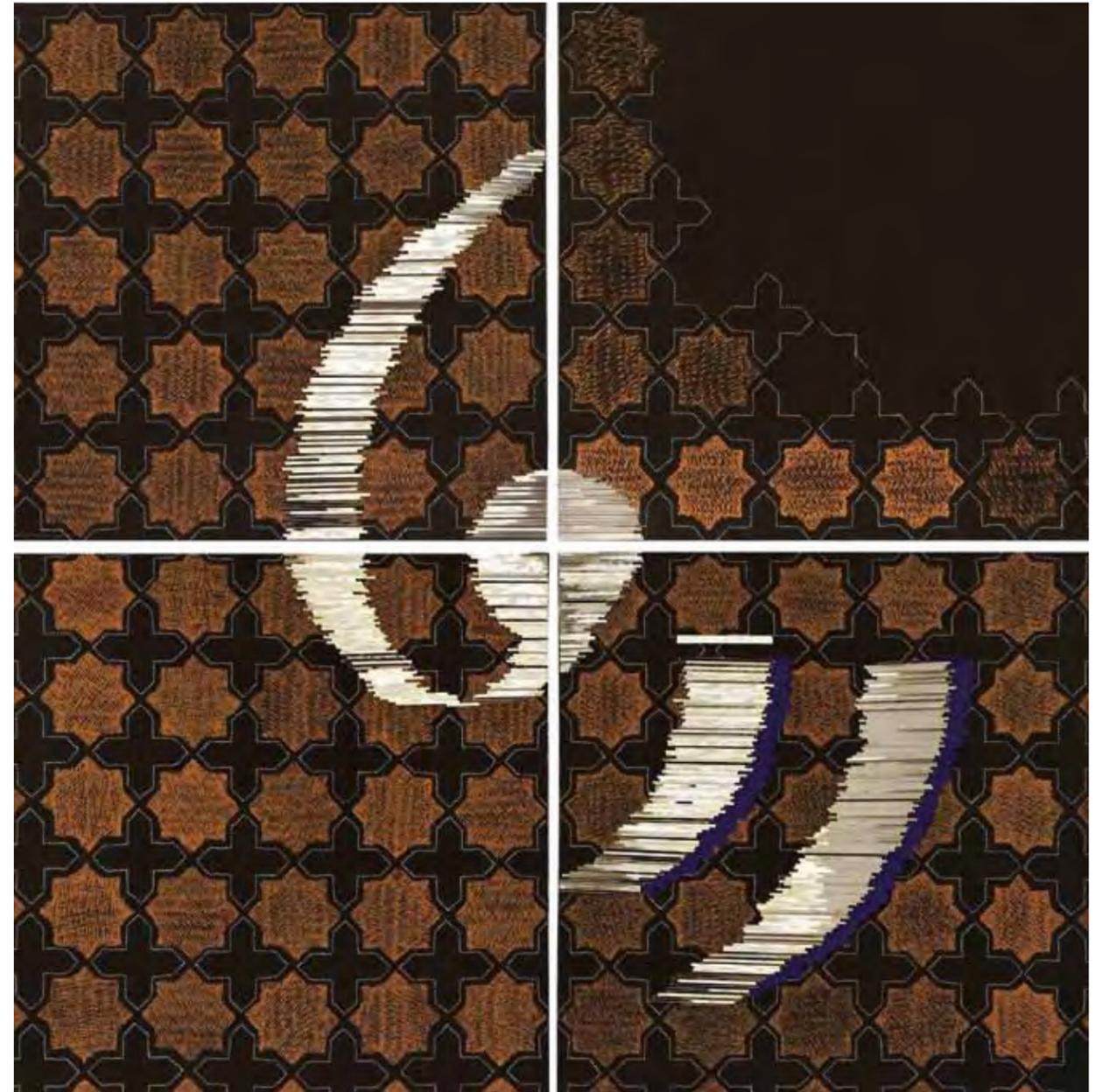
Mojtaba **RAMZI** (1988 -)

BLIND KNIGHT, 2012

Signed, dated and numbered "Mojtaba Ramzi 2012 /5" (under the tail)

Bronze, edition of 5

27,5 x 22 x 14 cm - 10.8 x 8.7 x 5.5 in.



Negar **VARASTEH** (1975 -)

REZGH, 2012

Signed (on the reverse)

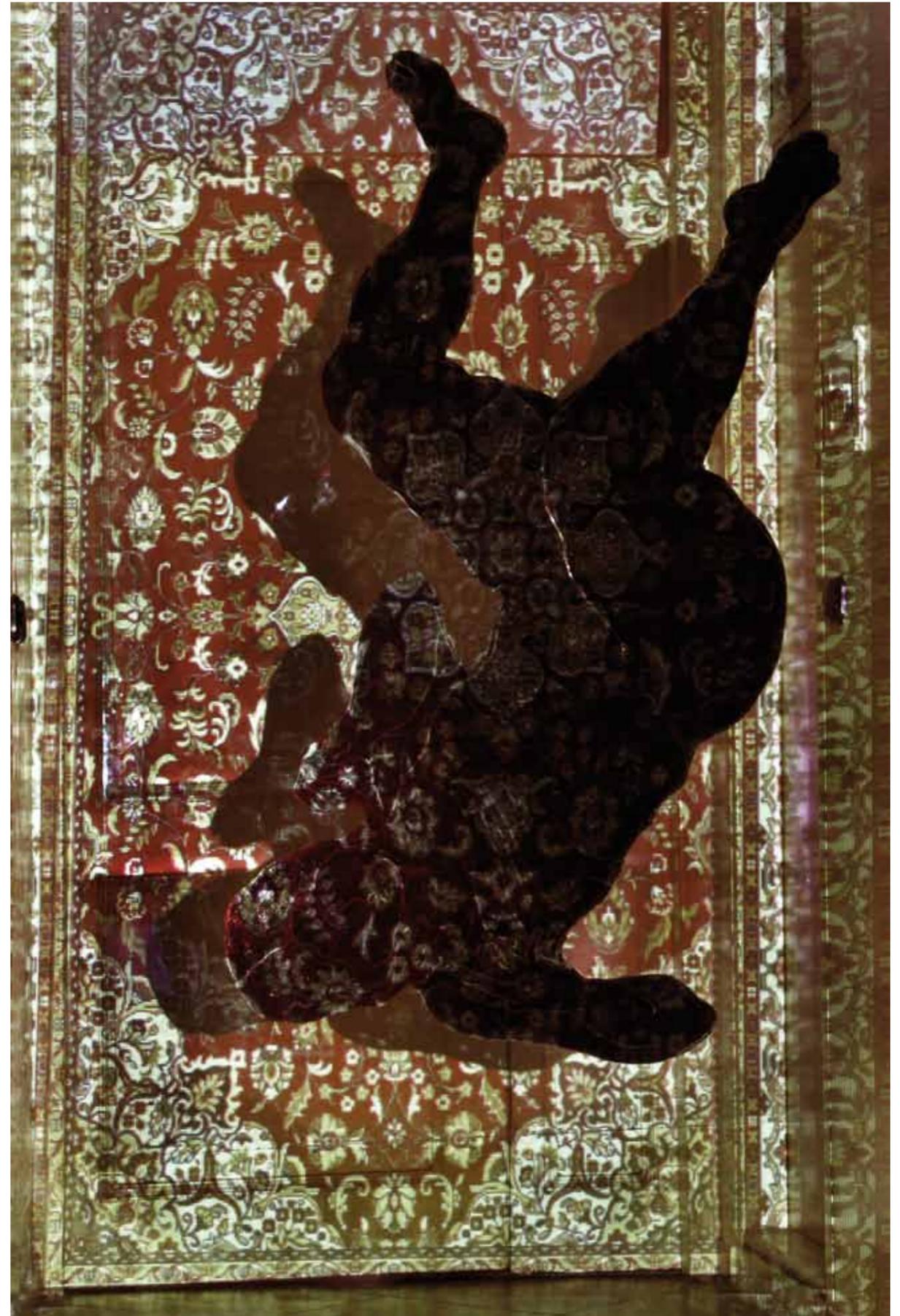
Mirror work on printed canvas, unique piece

4 panels of 60 x 60 cm - 23.6 x 23.6 in.

“ Mirror is a metaphor for light and lucidity. Once you immerse in this radiance and glow, it appears as if you have reached the other side, for this perception you need to believe in light.

” Negar Varasteh

“ This project consists of painting-installations on plexiglas in which metal wires have been used in some. With a proper lighting, an atmosphere has been created that expresses the artist’s main theme. The shadows which are created by the means of the lighting thrown on the shapes portray different expression. These shadows, combined with the paintings, create a duality in emotion for the viewers and show a variety of body shapes. These various personalities that are unseen to us or hidden and denied by ourselves follow us like shadows and at times mingle with our real self. They are made up of our own thoughts and beliefs and have severed our roots. They are behind us and with their strings of fear and doubt hold our lives and fate in their hands and they whisper in our ears that we are alone and yet many bodies in our loneliness. ”



Shima **ESFANDYARI** (1977 -)

BODIES, 1391 (2012)

Signed and dated in Farsi “Shima Esfandiyari 91” (upper right)

Oil on plexiglas with video projection

120 x 90 cm - 47.2 x 35.4 in.



Vahid **DANAIEFAR** (1983 -)

TV SCREEN SERIES, 2010

Signed and dated "Danaefir 2010" (on the stretcher)

Oil on canvas

50 x 60 cm - 19.7 x 23.6 in.