

Shirazeh Houshiary: *Smell of First Snow*

22 May – 4 July 2015
52–54 Bell Street, London

Cross-sensory perception quickens and multiplies in *Smell of First Snow*, Shirazeh Houshiary's eighth exhibition at Lisson Gallery. Through painting, drawing and sculpture, Houshiary approaches the intangible and evanescent, articulating a metaphysical reality that lies beyond mere form and surface.

A diaphanous mesh of pencilled words traces its way across Houshiary's canvases like spiralling strands of DNA. Each word is precisely written yet cumulatively becomes illegible, individual meanings giving way to vibrations that invoke a plethora of non-verbal associations. Migratory currents, the minute structures of living matter, shifting atmospheres and the whorls of fingerprints are simultaneously summoned in the written topographies that swirl and crystallise across the picture surface, conveying turbulent energies and the processes of the universe.

In the vast central diptych, *A Deluge* (2015), a tissue formed of innumerable tiny words and powdered cobalt and violet pigments form a fine tracery evocative of the muted luminosity of a clouded sky. The monumental structure of the image, immersing the viewer in its sea of meticulously organised atoms, is near symmetrical while suggesting endless flux. Telescoping biological and cosmic scales, it grants a glimpse of infinity within the limits of its dual panels.

Smaller works such as *Zero* and *Seed* (both 2014) likewise evince a protean energy. Proceeding from the binary starting point of a black or white aquacryl ground, these paintings possess a numinous quality, their teeming eddies of words being inscribed with precision yet feeling as though they arrived pre-formed — as organic as language, as effortless and essential as breath. Describing what is known rather than seen, felt via overlapping senses and via memory, Houshiary's canvases are manifestations of mindfulness in which the artist's touch translates into being.

Accompanying the paintings are sculptures made this year. Two wall-based works, *Allegory of Sight* and *Allegory of Sound*, explicitly strive after synaesthesia. Resembling dancing ribbons or darting wavelengths, these cast stainless steel sculptures are coated in dense black and evanescent white paint respectively, creating a dialectical evocation of these vital senses. Lit from above and attached to the wall, they traverse not only between two- and three-dimensionality, but also between the physical and immaterial worlds, throwing shadows whose echoing delineations form a continuation of the works.

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About the artist

Since rising to prominence as a sculptor in the 1980s, Shirazeh Houshiary's practice has swelled to encompass painting, installation, architectural projects and film. "I set out to capture my breath," she said in 2000, to "find the essence of my own existence, transcending name, nationality, cultures." Veils, membranes and mists are leitmotifs in work that tries to visualise modes of perception, spanning the scientific and the cosmic while drawing on sources as wide-ranging as Sufism, Renaissance painting, contemporary physics and poetry. Houshiary finds succour in the transformation of material: Arabic words, one an affirmation the other a denial, are pencil-stroked onto canvas so lightly, and clouded over by finely wrought skeins of pigment, that they morph in front of the naked eye and defy reproduction. So too, aluminium armatures and elliptical brick towers, charged with dynamic tension, appear different from every angle, as if negating their own presence; her commission for the East Window of St Martins in the Fields, London, presents a cross, warped and spanning from a circular motif, as if reflected in water. "The universe is in a process of disintegration," she says, "everything is in a state of erosion, and yet we try to stabilise it. This tension fascinates me and it's at the core of my work" (2013).

Shirazeh Houshiary was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1955, where she attended university before moving to London in 1974. She has a BA from Chelsea School of Art (1979) and lives and works in London. She has had solo exhibitions at Magasin-Centre national d'art contemporain, Grenoble (1995), University of Massachusetts Amherst (1994), Camden Arts Centre, London (1993), Musee Rath, Geneva (1988), and in 2013 her exhibition *Breath* was a celebrated Collateral Event of the 55th Venice Biennale. Major group exhibitions include the 40th Venice Biennale (1982), the Kiev Biennale (2012) and the 17th Biennale of Sydney (2010). She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1994.

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About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, it pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Sol LeWitt and Richard Long, as well as those of significant British sculptors from Anish Kapoor and Tony Cragg to a younger generation, led by Ryan Gander and Haroon Mirza. In addition to its two exhibition spaces in London, one in Milan and a fourth gallery to open under the High Line in New York in 2015, the *Lisson Presents* programme also extends a legacy of curatorial innovation beyond the galleries, working with institutions and artists to present new initiatives around the world.

Exhibition Facts

Opening Hours: Monday-Friday 10am-6pm, Saturday 11am-5pm

Location: 27 Bell Street, London, NW1 5DA

Tel: + 44(0)20 7724 2739

Website: <http://www.lissongallery.com>

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