

Shahpour Pouyan

After examining the logbook, the doctors assume they are dealing with the plague.

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Press release

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is very pleased to present *After examining the logbook, the doctors assume they are dealing with the plague*, Shahpour Pouyan's second solo exhibition in Paris after the one in 2017. Considered as one of the most important Iranian artists in the contemporary scene, Shahpour Pouyan reflects on notions of power and domination in his multi-faceted and poetic oeuvre, articulating various influences from Persian culture, historical symbols and contemporary socio-political issues.

Through an ensemble of recent miniatures and ceramics, Shahpour Pouyan proposes a dialogue between the mediums of painting and sculpture, poeticism and functionality, and the elements of water and light. In this project, the artist continues his practice of using history and tradition in conversation with the present and modernism.

The two-dimensional miniatures are a continuation of a series starting in 2008 and are altered reproductions of medieval and pre-modern paintings from Iran and central Asia. First shown as part of Lahore Biennale in 2017, these paintings pertain to the subject of sailing and stories of travel at sea. These reproductions are crafted with near-complete loyalty in regards to size, aesthetic and the appearance of age, creating the illusion of historical originality. However, all figures have been removed, including any hero or mythical creature that may have been present, obscuring the subjects and interfering with the narrative certainty of the worlds within the miniatures.

A ship at sea has been the metaphor of destiny or uncertainty of human life and a core depiction of fate since medieval times in Iran and the surrounding region. Water, a sacred element, represents clarity and purification and in Persian painting tradition is rendered in silver paint. However, the fate of silver is to oxidize into darkness. An individual's can be likened to a ship sailing upon a dark sea, unable to see what the rough waters may contain and unable to control where the currents of fate will lead.

In dialogue with the miniatures, the glazed ceramics presented in the exhibition constitute variations on the motive of the lighthouse. Lighthouses provide light and navigation for ships at sea, providing a way to avoid dangerous obstacles and chart a clearer path in the dark. Because of this function, they are used as metaphors for guidance and knowledge. They are more functional, mathematically based, and utilitarian than the poetic narrative of the paintings. The constructions presented here are not based on existing lighthouses, but take on forms that are both familiar and unusual. Featuring characteristics of traditional lighthouse architecture and elements of futuristic buildings, the structures are designed by taking functional and geometric considerations to the extreme and created in response to the miniatures.

The title of the show is inspired by the plot of *Nosferatu (A Symphony of Horror)* directed by F.W. Murnau (1922). The artist also draws inspiration from the symbolism of *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and the ongoing global refugee crisis.

Shahpour Pouyan was born Iran in 1979. He lives and works in New York (United States) and Tehran (Iran).

He graduated from the Art University of Tehran (Iran, 2004-2007) where he studied painting, the Iranian Institute of Philosophy in Tehran (Iran, 2005) where he studied Neoplatonism, the Pratt Institute in New York (United States, 2012) in Integrated Practices and New Forms.

His sculptures are currently on display at the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, as part of the exhibition *The Moon: A Voyage Through Time* and his miniatures are also on view at the British Museum within the Middle East Department, as part of the permanent collection.

He has taken part in many major international group shows: *Home Land Security* at the Fort Winfield Scott in San Francisco (United

States, 2016), Jameel Prize at the Pera Museum in Istanbul (Turkey, 2016), Memory and Continuity at the Pera Museum in Istanbul (Turkey, 2016), Global/Local at the Grey Art Gallery NYU in New York (USA, 2016), Punk Orientalism at Mackenzie Gallery (Canada, 2018), Chambres à Part VII: Dark to Light at the Tower of London (United Kingdom, 2013).

The artist has also taken part in many biennales: For an image, faster than light for the Yinchuan Biennale (China, 2016), Whorled Explorations for the Kochi-Muziris Biennale (India, 2014) and the Mykonos Biennale (Greece, 2013), and the Beijing Biennale (China, 2017) entitled The Silk Road and World's Civilizations.

The work of Shahpour Pouyan is present in many prestigious public collections: the Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York, United States), the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (Tehran, Iran), the British Museum (London, United Kingdom), the MFA, Houston (Houston, United States), the Cornell University Museum (New York, United States) and the Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Asian and Middle Eastern Art (New York, United States).

Shahpour Pouyan has been granted several fellowships and residencies: the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Umbertide (Italy, 2016), the Residency program of the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in New York (United States, 2014), the Pegasus Art Foundation residency in Hyderabad, India, 2011), the International Cité des Arts in Paris (France 2007).

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