



LEILA HELLER



LaLaLand
NAEEMEH KAZEMI

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Images courtesy of the Artist, Naeemeh Kazemi

LaLaLand

Beginning her creative journey as a sculptor, Naeemeh Kazemi turned to painting in 2020, sparked by the constraints of lockdown and unable to get to her studio, she transformed her one-bedroom apartment into a sanctuary of imagination. In Kazemi's *LaLaLand* series, she invites viewers into a dreamscape of intricate allegories and deep contemplation.

Living in Iran, Kazemi masterfully utilizes symbols to convey her messages, avoiding potential conflict with the government. Her paintings disguise complex themes with motifs drawn from the natural world, classical art, and everyday objects as each brushstroke finds its place on the canvas.

Initially, viewers are greeted by the flourishing flora, fauna, and enchanting colors. As Kazemi articulates, "Tense dreamy moments occur, rushing blood to my cheeks." The vivid hues extend an invitation into this "dreamy" realm. However, upon closer inspection, to illustrate the feelings that Kazemi describes as, "a moment later, silent, unsure, tired, and depressed," camouflaged within the canvases are portraits of mysterious figures obscured by hands or foliage—an eerie spectacle. This juxtaposition of emotions permeates the canvas, mirroring the interplay of the artist's own feelings. A delicate dance between vitality and contemplative solitude, her work reflects the struggle between tension and tranquility. As aptly put by Art Basel, a sense of being "wholly suffocated by a too-bright, too-lush, tangled web of plant and animal life" resonates, reminding us of the vulnerability of our existence.

In *LaLaLand*, Kazemi presents a world of paradoxes—interconnected yet fragmented, familiar yet alien. It invites viewers to ponder the profound questions that underpin Kazemi's work: "Could the whole history of the world be a mere misunderstanding? Is it possible that man, with all his discoveries, developments, culture, religion, and global wisdom, is just lingering on only to the outward of life?" These inquiries reflect Kazemi's feelings and anxieties, of the ecological crisis, feminism, and humanism, which are further amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic. For her, Kazemi's canvases serve as an oasis, a realm where questions find solace and fears are temporarily subdued.

From the fragility of the planet to the depths of personal introspection, *LaLaLand* embodies an evolving narrative, a reminder that the search for meaning is a universal endeavor. As one immerses themselves in the world she has crafted, a captivating synthesis of symbolism and introspection, Kazemi offers viewers a mirror through which to engage with their own perceptions and emotions. Her work transcends the confines of visual representation, resonating as a poignant dialogue between artist and audience, inviting us all to explore the intricate landscapes of the human experience.

"Fear swirls like dreaded particles in the air, inhaled with every ragged breath, it begins to leak from every pore, hardening all that it touches. Screams of displeasure fill the air as the world hurtles on through space, cyclical in the unrelenting chaos. This civilization is being torn to pieces now more than ever, the throwaway culture thriving as the only living tissue found in its remains. I constantly think to myself, could the whole history of the world possibly hinge on a simple misunderstanding?"

Is it possible that the existence of man, rife with discoveries, developments, culture, religion and wisdom, still lingers on the periphery of meaning? Yes, it is possible! To be alone with such awareness of the superficiality of life leaves little room for amusement. I'm incredibly scared, because I know we'll soon annihilate this singular life-giving planet. Soon our home will be nothing but a shell of skulls, bones, and dead machines. We can't do anything for her. We lost the game!

Thus, I am anxious and I believe one must act upon this feeling before it mutates into fear. Frustratingly, in life, sometimes a situation has no remedy. However, the human soul seeks contentment and because of this I must get to work and engage with my surroundings. I look for things that my situation lacks, hopeful to find relief from the many torments of this life. It is in the space between where I am and where I could be, that I find shreds of optimism. In my mind's eye, I find a land where the laws of nature begin to wiggle and weave under the pressure of my imagination. I see everything existing in a state of perpetual flux; formed from unique combination of unpredictable and unrepeatable circumstances. There is no room for the authoritarian acts of man. This flux is what provides hope and purpose, as our old world is continually reborn through inevitable change. The ontological fabric of meaning is relentlessly called into question providing an antidote to the chaos.

The paradoxical truth that truth does not exist provides space for unity amongst those who can bare to speak in the language of the uncertain. The result will be a consolidated identity where the "la-la land" appears. In this space, I can come back to myself, there is a tranquility and I feel refreshed. Everything I know comes into question and is torn up before my eyes. Little by little I am learning to see. I am obsessive in my desire to blend the internal and external parts of myself; the visceral unforgiving organic aspects of existence with the expansive fluid mysticism of consciousness.

I am calmer now. Imagining a new world brings me a sense of unbridled joy, but the awareness of perpetual change brings new challenges. One moment I am restless, eager, hopeful, and enthusiastic, a moment later, silent, unsure, tired, and depressed, as if the pieces of my life have caught a new light and mutated in a strange unfamiliar way.

I breathe better now, busy watching my la-la land; I tread lightly, and somehow untroubled..."

— Naeemeh Kazemi



Untitled (LaLaLand Series), 2023
Oil on Canvas
170 x 160 cm. / 66.93 x 62.99in.



Untitled (LaLaLand Series), 2022
Oil on Canvas
150 x 150 cm. / 59.06 x 59.06 in.



Untitled (LaLaLand Series), 2023
Oil on Canvas
150 x 200 cm. / 59.06 x 78.74 in.



Untitled (LaLaLand Series), 2022
Oil on Canvas
150 x 200 cm. / 59.06 x 78.74 in.



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Oil on Canvas
150 x 200 cm. / 59.06 x 78.74 in.



Untitled (LaLaLand Series), 2023
Oil on Canvas
170 x 160 cm. / 66.93 x 62.99 in.



Untitled (LaLaLand Series), 2023
Oil on Canvas
140 x 160 cm. / 55.12 x 62.99 in.



Untitled (LaLaLand Series), 2023
Oil on Canvas
150 x 160 cm. / 59.06 x 62.99 in.

