

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

The Missing Witness

By

Behrang Samadzadegan



Untitled, watercolor on paper, 128x183cm, 2022

Dubai, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is pleased to announce artist Behrang Samadzadegan's solo show '*The Missing Witness*' opening on 17th January 2022.

Born and raised in a country where becoming engrossed with socio-political history is an inevitable burden upon birth, it was only natural for Behrang Samadzadegan to be immersed in the relationship between socio-political history and art for the past decade. He has set out to work by painting the recent past he had not experienced first hand. Behrang tried to "imagine and recreate this history by painting its ambiguous and veiled aspects." Later, he concluded, "at some point, history becomes a subjective incident for the artist in which fantasy and aesthetics play a more prominent role than historical truth." Is a direct relationship between art and history even plausible? Or does the artist, similar to a historian, distort history? He decided that his work exploring the history and then translating it into the language of painting amounted to an unedited and distorted rendition of history, which again is not based on a historical testimony. Subsequently, the exhibition is titled '*The Missing Witness*'. Painting has always had an intrinsic correlation with the recording of historical events; however, even if art claims it attests to history, it is not an eyewitness. Instead, it depicts history by relying on subjectivity, making the result unedited and distorted.

Behrang began painting large watercolors ten years ago to experience a more physical and intimate relationship with painting. Later, watercolors served as a metaphor for the movements in history. As he explains, "similar to any revolution or political movement in history, the painter may foresee the final desired outcome, but accidents and mistakes can deviate the artist from his original path. After every mistake, he is coerced to advance in the direction of the consequences following that error. For this reason, water color equates to history as it moves forward with predictions and swerves its course with every irreversible mistake that, comparable to history, cannot be erased, whitened, or reset. Thus, the works of '*The Missing Witness*' collection are not concerned with reconstruction and representation, rather they are pursuing the historical progress created with water color resulting in an unedited and distorted history."

With intricately interwoven narratives, Behrang's work draws a clear connection to the tradition of Iranian painting (or what is more commonly known as Persian Miniature Painting). With colorful margins and forms diverging from them, and the way his subject matter carries a trace of history while refusing devotion to historical facts, he devises vertical compositions inspired by a combination of the seventeenth to nineteenth century Western art and Iranian art, Behrang continuously pays homage to the tradition of Iranian painting. Like Iranian miniaturists of the past, the artist does not shy away from dipping his brush in bright colors. That being said, the color palette seems to, first and foremost, be a playground for the artist to amuse himself by whimsically exploring an array of colors.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Behrang Samadzadegan (b 1979 Tehran, Iran) learned the basics of art at a very young age. He received his BFA from the Tehran University of Arts and his MFA from Tehran Tarbiat Modares University. In 2008 he received the Golden Feather from the first International Media Art Forum for Youth in Cairo. In 2009 he received the Visiting Arts artist residency award in Spike Island, Bristol, United Kingdom. In 2012 he was awarded an artist residency from the Atelierhaus Salzamt Linz, Austria. He was also the recipient of the artist residency of the Cleveland Foundation Creative Fusion Artists Program, Cleveland, Ohio, USA. Since 2004 he has been giving lectures on art theory and holding workshops at the Sooreh University, Tehran University of Art, Aria Art Institute, and Mahe Mehr Cultural Art Institute. As a visiting artist, he taught at the Cleveland Institute of Art for a semester in 2015. He has been a jury member of the fourth Damonfar Biennial for Painting, the New Generation Annual for Painting, the Video Artist Festival of Isfahan, the Persbook Annual of Contemporary Arts, the Vista Prize, Versus Biennial, and the Mohsen Projects Open Call. In 2022 he curated the exhibition titled "Minimalism and Conceptual art in the mid-20th century" at the Tehran Museum Of Contemporary Art (Tehran MOCA). In his works, Behrang seeks to probe the possibility (or impossibility) of representing truth, identity, and history within the framework of aesthetic laws and to challenge the capacity of the image for displaying these concepts. As a scholar and curator, he enjoys discovering and studying new artistic phenomena and believes in rethinking and challenging the established rules and requirements of art. Painting has been Samadzadegan's main focus. The subject matters of his works are drawn from images and narratives of contemporary Iranian history, which he combines with fictional stories and the aesthetics of painting. His goal, however, is not to represent historical narratives. The image of history, he believes, is a personal matter created under the influence of visual and aesthetic stereotypes, a combination of confusion, chaos, and a futile quest for reaching unattainable truth.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since its establishment over four decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting a creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists. It has garnered a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western, Central Asian, Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern artists, the gallery is also active in the American, European, and Middle Eastern secondary art markets. In November 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. At 16,000 square feet, the state of the art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom will be presenting their work in the Middle East.