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ayyam gallery



Detail of *Untitled*, 2017, Oil on canvas, 200 x 330 cm (Triptych)

AFSHIN PIRHASHEMI

*Can You Keep a Secret?*

20 January - 10 March 2021

Ayyam Gallery is pleased to present *Can You Keep a Secret?*, a solo exhibition featuring a new body of work by Afshin Pirhashemi.

## About the exhibition

In Afshin Pirhashemi's work, black is symbol for the power that cloaks femininity, truth, militancy and a worldview in which the stakes are high. His monochrome register never loses its dimensionality, although primary colours have begun to seep in, as well as the sheen of poetic fragments.

The iconic women that populate Pirhashemi's paintings like alter-egos – a recurring motif – are both alluring and forbidding, multiple and individual yet in this latest series, they have come into their own. Layered with different texts, their outlines stream into colours and forms, evading absolute capture. At times, they seem familiar, symbolic of the film industry and popular culture. Other times, they are imaginative – superheroes conjured by the artist. Often they appear as real characters, raw and terrifying. They bleed and write confessional texts. Both violence and seduction are always implicit in Pirhashemi's paintings except this time, a vulnerability manifests, deepening his photorealistic approach and inciting untold stories.

Pirhashemi's painterly strokes have evolved from precise figuration to transformation as his latest diptychs and triptychs evidence different takes on what could be the same image – drafts on the concept of negative and positive space. Perhaps this is what Pirhashemi draws from Pop art: the idea that within endless reproduction, change exists through an artistic imprint. This is where Afshin Pirhashemi differs from the long line of artists fascinated with the Coca-Cola bottle after Andy Warhol, and the level of intrigue embedded in this symbol of Americana.

His Coca Cola is never rendered in exactly the same way. Largely reduced to its classic, unchanging and ever-recognisable logo, Coca Cola is indicative of a certain opacity – its recipe for the past four decades kept a closely guarded secret – and yet it represents a brand that has inspired so many knock-offs and imitations.

Other American iconographies such as the flag and The White House remain as backdrops in this show – so does Coco Cola, except in one work, where it is foregrounded. Inside, a woman covers her eyes and there are painted tears that hint at ruptures in the painting. If the bottle reminds Pirhashemi of better times in Tehran, he also alludes to its sense of mystery, compulsion, duality, signs of global hegemony and the East-West divide.

Pirhashemi is a process-driven artist who works in series of paintings, depicting extremes and creating narrative environments of oppositions, where struggle and strength are made manifest. But he is also showcasing a certain abstract Romanticism, such as in his two crimson landscape paintings of cascading movement, female apparitions, disguise and reflection. As he continues to reinvent himself, his tableaux are dramatic vignettes that unravel in a palimpsest of past and present where more is revealed, and less is known.



## About the artist

Through his oeuvre, Afshin Pirhashemi examines the complexities of life in modern day Iran through photorealist portraits that often bleed at their edges into expressionist compositions, becoming dramatic tableaux. Fascinated by the role of women in contemporary Iranian society and their relationships to the world around them, the artist taps into the psychosocial dimensions of contemporary Iran. Pirhashemi explores manifestations of power as they appear or are negotiated through gendered bodies and spaces.

This evident fascination with women and their struggles in hostile environments has been translated through his distinctive style into photorealistic portraits audaciously positioned on minimalist backgrounds. While his brushwork remains idealistic, his prudently harmonized portrayals of his flamboyant characters, paired with strong symbolic titles, Pirhashemi takes the viewer on a guided tour through a narrative and painterly language he has created for himself. He leads us through an ever-progressing psychic state that translates his oeuvre into one continuous series.

Born in 1974 in Urmia, Afshin Pirhashemi now lives and works in Tehran. Pirhashemi studied at the Rome Art Academy and completed his artistic training at Iran's Azad University. His works are housed in public and private collections throughout the Middle East and Europe and he is the recipient of awards from the 2003 Tehran 6th International Art Biennial, and the 2004 Beijing Art Biennial Award. Solo exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery DIFC, Dubai (2017); Ayyam Gallery, London (2014); Ayyam Gallery, Dubai (2015, 2013); Homa art Gallery, Tehran (2009); Seyhoun Art Gallery, Tehran (2005); and Barg Gallery, Tehran (2005). Group exhibitions include Ayyam Gallery, Al Quoz 1, Dubai (2018, 2016); In & Out, Milan (2009); Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran (2006); Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran (2004, 2003).

## About Ayyam Gallery

Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organization that manages the careers of diverse established and emerging artists. Blue-chip art space in Dubai, a series of collaborative projects in the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia, and a multinational non-profit arts program have furthered the gallery's mandate of expanding the parameters of international art. With its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship program that manages the estates of pioneering artists, Ayyam Gallery has also contributed to recent efforts that document underrepresented facets of global art history.

## Exhibition Facts

Exhibitions Dates: 20 January - 10 March 2021

Regular Hours: Sun - Thur : 10 am - 6 pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery, B11, Alserkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1, Dubai

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