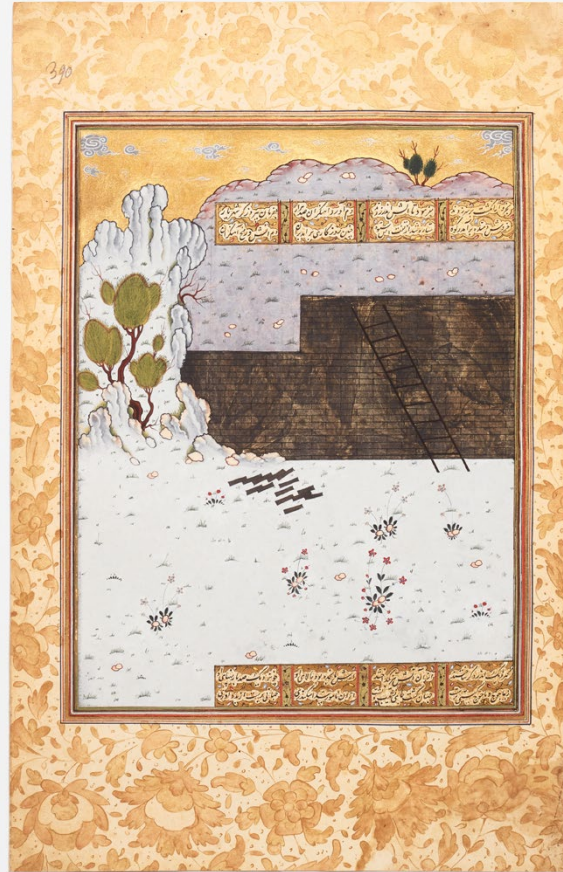


SHAHPOUR POUYAN

249 kilometers by 68 meters

May 17 - July 16, 2022

3, rue du Cloître Saint-Merri, 75004 - Paris



Iskandar supervising the building of the wall against Gog and Magog, 2021
Mixed media and print on paper, 64,9 x 49,8 x 2,5 cm (25 9/16 x 19 x 0 31/32 in.)
Courtesy of the artist and the Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

Galerie Nathalie Obadia is pleased to present *249 kilometers by 68 meters*, an exhibition of recent works by Shahpour Pouyan. One of the most celebrated Iranian artists of his generation, Shahpour Pouyan fashions an oeuvre that unpacks historical sites, offering a critical perspective learned in Persian culture and the contemporary political climate.

The exhibition homes in on the ways in which the artist envisions architecture as a beacon of power, that wields both positive and nefarious influences, surveying three seminal bodies of work.

Architecture has long represented a true aesthetic shock for Shahpour Pouyan who recalls it was the catalyst Iranian artists funneled their creativity into, at a time when art making was tightly controlled and sculpture making was forbidden by Islamic theology. Inspired by the ways in which Iranian culture found its artistic expression through architecture, Pouyan has dedicated much of his practice to developing a vocabulary of forms created through a conflation of Western and Iranian constructions.

As such, the *Flying walls* display attributes drawing from different architectural vernaculars, combining both Roman arches, watchtowers, and gargoyles as well as Persian ornaments. Referencing the 1437 painting by Sassetta part of the *St Francis Altarpiece*, Pouyan upends the motif of the castle in the sky from St. Francis of Assisi's dream of a celestial city. Hence the title of the exhibition further intertwines the works within Biblical scripture, alluding to the length and height of wall fencing the celestial heavens.

Inversely, these walls drawn up in the sky in his paintings evoke societal discords for the artist, alluding to the fortifications various civilizations have erected to divide people. Referencing styles from the gothic period to Roman and Persian epochs, the artist speaks to the universality and timelessness of exclusion of the "other". Rethinking the sky and its symbolism as a place of divide, Pouyan tackles the cloudy atmosphere with deft swathes of grey paint, contrasting with the detailed ornaments of the walls.

Bridging Eastern and Western traditions through aesthetic considerations, Pouyan further weaves the two together in the very technique he employs. The artist effectively starts painting with freestanding brushstrokes, applying paint on vertical canvases, much in the way of Western painting before removing them from the stretcher and laying them on his table to add details and decoration, following in the footsteps of traditional Persian painters (Miniaturists).

The *Flying walls* are thus shown in dialogue with reproductions of Miniature Paintings of the Great Wall of Gorgan depicted in 18 century manuscripts. Said to be only second to the great wall of China, the so-called iron rampart is put in perspective as the artist alters the original miniatures to strip them of their characters, originally shown building the wall, to further criticize its edification, portraying it as a metaphor for dissent.

The exhibition is complete with a touch of optimism as the sculptures of the lighthouses guide us to a more hopeful future. Easing passage and clearing navigation routes for ships at sea so do these lighthouses become allegories for guidance and knowledge. Fusing elements of futuristic buildings, these intriguing structures rendered in bright colors testify to the artist's proclivity towards the creation of complex constructions, amalgamations of existing architecture and an imaginary nourished by historical sites.

Shahpour Pouyan was born in Iran in 1979. He lives and works in London.

Shahpour Pouyan graduated from the Art University of Tehran (Iran, 2004-2007) where he studied painting, from the Iranian Institute of Philosophy in Tehran where he studied Neoplatonism (Iran, 2005), as well as from the Pratt Institute in New York (USA, 2012), in integrated practice and new forms.

Shahpour Pouyan recently had an exhibition entitled *Skyhigh is my place* at the Dhondt-Dhaenen Museum (Belgium, 2021), which has been the subject of a publication. He also participates in numerous major group exhibitions such as *Clay & Ceramics* at the Hayward Gallery in London (UK, 2022), *Contemporary Ceramic Art from the Middle East* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (UK, 2021), *The Moon: A Voyage Through Time* at the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto (Canada, 2019), *Home Land Security* at Fort Winfield Scott, San Francisco (USA, 2016), *Jameel Prize and Memory and Continuity* at the Pera Museum, Istanbul (Turkey, 2016), *Global/Local* at Grey Art Gallery NYU, New York (USA, 2016), *Jacob's Ladder* at the Untitled Art Fair, Miami (USA, 2015), *Punk Orientalism* at Mackenzie Gallery (Canada, 2018), and *Chambers at Part VII: Dark to Light* at the Tower of London (UK, 2013). His miniatures can also be seen in the permanent collections of the British Museum in London (UK), in the Middle East department.

Shahpour Pouyan has also participated in several biennials such as the Yinchuan Biennale For an image, faster than light (China, 2016), the Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Whorled Explorations (India, 2014), the Mykonos Biennale (Greece, 2013), and the Beijing Biennale The Silk Road and World's Civilizations (China, 2017).

Shahpour Pouyan's work can be found in a number of prestigious private and public collections such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, the British Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Cornell University (New York), and the Abby Weed Grey Collection of Modern Asian and Middle Eastern Art (New York).

Shahpour Pouyan has been awarded several prizes and residencies including the Kenneth Armitage Foundation (London, 2020), the Civitella Ranieri Foundation in Umbertide (Italy, 2016), the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts in New York (USA, 2014), the Pegasus Art Foundation in Hyderabad (India, 2011), and the Cité des Arts in Paris (France, 2007).

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May 17 - July 16, 2022

Paris Cloître Saint-Merri - Espace II

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Brussels

Guillaume Leblon

The Traveler Walking On Tiptoes

May 19 - July 9, 2022

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