

Arghavan Khosravi

The Witness



Arghavan Khosravi, *The Witness*, 2022, Mixed media, 51 x 61 1/4 x 7.7 in

April 06 – May 21, 2022

Opening Reception April 06, 2022, 5 – 8 pm

Kavi Gupta presents *The Witness*, a solo exhibition of new paintings by Arghavan Khosravi (b. 1984, Shahr-e-kord, Iran), Joan Mitchell Foundation Grantee and Walter Feldman Fellow. Following recent exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Yinchuan, China, and Newport Art Museum, Newport, RI, this exhibition continues Khosravi's investigation of the aesthetics of ancient Persian miniature painting as a vehicle for cultural transformation.

Khosravi's paintings dazzle the eye with their dreamlike

color palettes and masterful draughtsmanship. Yet, their most formidable visual characteristic is their multi-dimensionality. The images burst forth from the wall, their complex scaffolding of cut wooden panels offers a dramatic and constantly shifting perceptual experience to viewers. There are many hiding places in these painted realms, where danger lurks, and treasures await.

If aspects of these images look familiar it is because each of Khosravi's paintings references a specific

Persian miniature painting from history; yet, their architectural presence makes clear that they are not homages, but are intended to subvert the tradition to which such images belong.

Persian miniatures originally illustrated folkloric texts. Their landscapes were flattened, eliminating any sense of depth or perspective, and depicting all figures and architectural features at the same scale.

No longer conforming to the architecture of the page, Khosravi's paintings are able to literally broaden the narrative, creating new spaces that welcome new points of view.

For Khosravi, these paintings are about taking a conscious look at how values are transmitted and fostered through visual art.

Typically, the only women portrayed in Persian miniature paintings have a subservient or secondary role, lacking agency and social significance. The value system transmitted by that iconography continues to shape Iranian gender politics today.

Khosravi's paintings introduce contemporary figurative and symbolic iconographies that challenge that misogynistic cultural architecture by spotlighting the contemporary international fight for gender equality. Abstract elements, like black, liquid plumes, reference corrupted economic and political systems, while female bodies are often depicted as being shackled or with their mouths sewn shut.

The subject matter is grounded in Khosravi's personal experiences as an Iranian woman living and working in the United States. Born in Iran shortly after its 1979 revolution, Khosravi was raised in a contradictory culture where one repressive regime—an ancient monarchy—was overthrown and replaced by an even more repressive theocracy. She noticed, however, that despite public adherence to the authoritarian political culture, many Iranians were looser and freer in their habits and beliefs when in private.

"The contradiction was part of our everyday life," she says. "We separate our life: public and private. In public there are restrictions imposed. But we have our freedom in private space."

In this dualistic atmosphere, symbolism, metaphor, and abstraction have become essential parts of cultural expression. The same elements are at the heart of Khosravi's work.

"I deconstruct and reconstruct the work so I can speak my own narrative within that space," says Khosravi, "but I want to leave some space for the audience to have their own interpretation based on their own experiences. I don't want to limit them."

Like the ancient Persian miniatures they emulate,

Khosravi's paintings operate on multiple levels—intellectual, sensual, and emotional. They both critique and weaponize a particular type of authoritarian thinking: that which supposes art is frivolous and decorative, and yet knows art has the power to communicate and affect social expectations and desires.

Khosravi earned an MFA in Illustration from the University of Tehran, and a second MFA in Painting from the Rhode Island School of Design. She is a Joan Mitchell Foundation Grantee and a Walter Feldman Fellow. Her work has recently been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Yinchuan, China; Newport Art Museum, Newport, RI, USA; and Provincetown Art Association and Museum, MA, USA. She has been an Artist in Residence at the Studios at MassMoCA, North Adams, MA, USA. Khosravi's works are in the collections of the Rose Art Museum, the Newport Art Museum, and the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum, among others.