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An Iranian Painter Finds Inspiration in the Dark Poetry of William Blake and Charles Baudelaire

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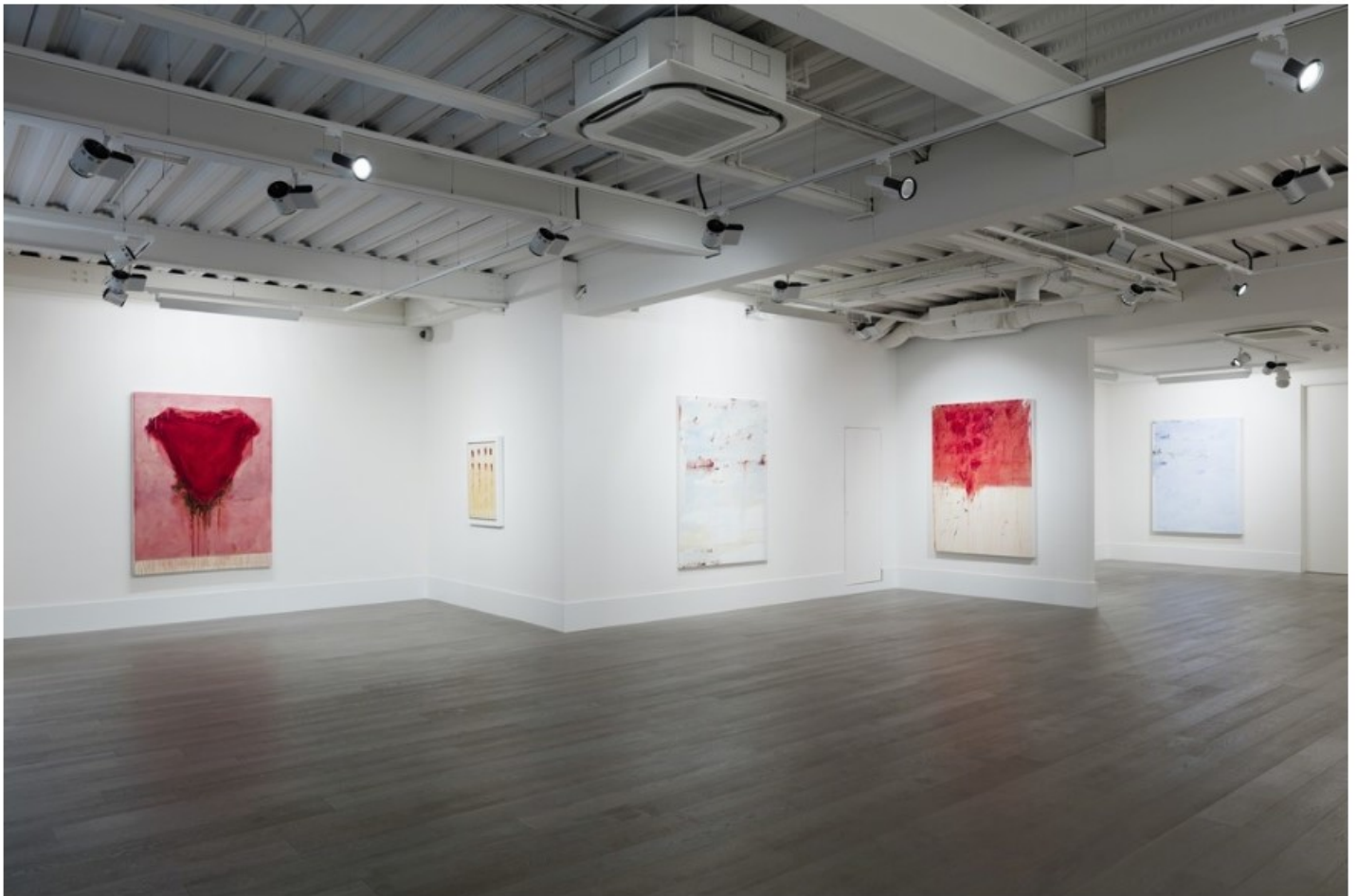


Image courtesy of Sophia Contemporary.

“O Rose thou art sick. / The invisible worm / That flies in the night / In the howling storm: / Has found out thy bed / Of crimson joy: / And his dark secret love / Does thy life destroy.” This short poem, William Blake’s “The Sick Rose” (1794), has special significance for Azadeh Razaghdoost. Like the English poet, the Iranian-born artist is intrigued by certain essential contrasts: those between health and sickness, love and lust, life and death.



Azadeh Razaghdoost
Untitled from the 'Sick Rose' series, 2008
Sophia Contemporary

There's a particular sort of gruesome beauty to the "Sick Rose" (2008) suite of paintings Razaghdoost named after Blake's poem. The artist's roses, in short, look like blood stains. Staring at the deep red shapes that seem to drip down the canvas, with the cheerfully colored pigment turning to muddy brown or sinister black, you'll think of flowers—and also a murder scene.



Azadeh Razaghdoost
Recipe for a Poem from the 'Letters' series, 2009
Sophia Contemporary

“The Sick Rose” isn’t the only poem that has inspired Razaghdoost’s work. She also cites *Les Fleurs du Mal* (*The Flowers of Evil*), a volume of poetry published in 1857 by the French poet Charles Baudelaire. Her new exhibition, “Recipe for a Poem,” on view at Sophia Contemporary in London, features works from her series inspired by Blake and Baudelaire, as well as a selection from her “Letter” series and standalone paintings, including the titular *Recipe for a Poem* (2009).



Image courtesy of Sophia Contemporary.

To be sure, Baudelaire's text is even darker than Blake's. His anthology is long, but an excerpt from one poem, "Une Charogne" (A Carcass), provides a taste of the tone: "Yes! thus will you be, queen of the Graces, / After the last sacraments, / When you go beneath grass and luxuriant flowers, To molder among the bones of the dead. / Then, O my beauty! say to the worms who will / Devour you with kisses, / That I have kept the form and the divine essence / Of my decomposed love!"

Decomposing bodies and eroticism associated with a corpse: morbid, to say the least. Likewise, Razaghdoost's paintings, many inspired by *Les Fleurs du Mal*, evoke both beauty and violence, pleasure and pain. Her work is visceral, even gory. Flowers are symbols of life and of femininity, but their life spans are short, their delicate petals quick to wilt, the blooms inevitably discarded.



Azadeh Razaghdoost
My Wincy Paper from the 'Letters' series, 2009
Sophia Contemporary

Red is the color of romance and, in a way, the color of life—it's the blood running through our bodies that makes human life possible. Perhaps it comes as no surprise that as a child, Razaghdoost says she wanted to become a heart surgeon.

She became an artist instead. A surgeon cuts into the human body, but as a painter, she cuts into the human spirit, with great works of literature as a guide.

—Bridget Gleeson

"Azadeh Razaghdoost: Recipe for a Poem" is on view at Sophia Contemporary, London, Nov. 24, 2016–Feb. 10, 2017.

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