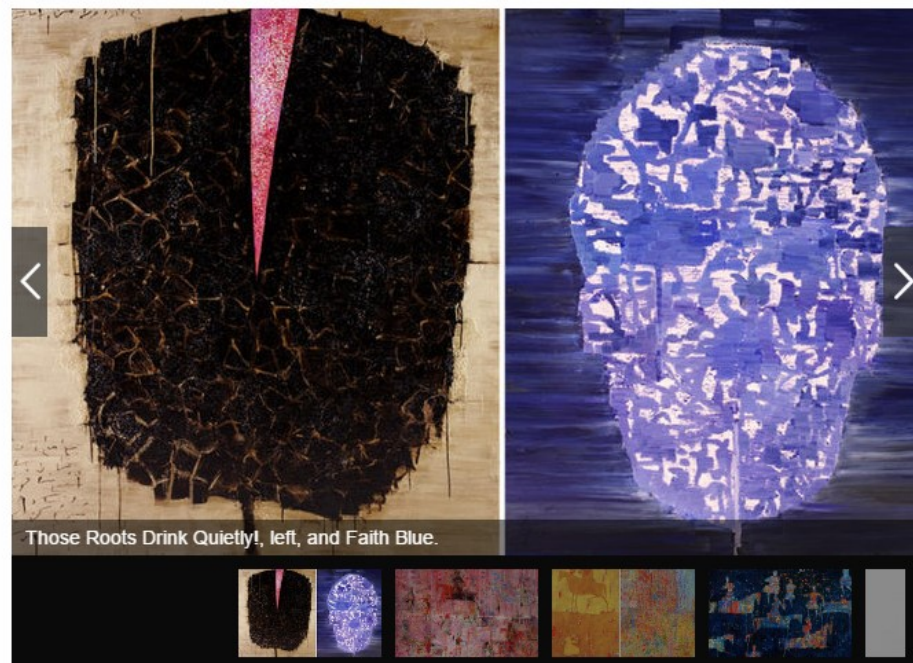


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ART & CULTURE

Reza Derakshani's artworks awaken the senses

Denize Marray | Published — Friday 20 May 2016



Reza Derakshani, the celebrated painter, poet, musician and performance artist transmits a sense of joy, mystery and startling beauty through his work. Speaking to Arab News, he explained that while he 'has a lot of love' for his Iranian cultural heritage, he sees himself first and foremost as a citizen of the world.

"I like the challenge of being measured as an international artist," he said.

This is natural considering his life journey to date which has seen him moving from his homeland of Iran to live and work for many years in the US, Europe and Gulf region.

Derakshani, born 1952 in Sangsar, had his first solo exhibition at the age of 19 at the renowned Ghandriz Art Gallery, and graduated from the University of Tehran in 1976.

He continued his studies at the Pasadena School of Art in California, and returned to Iran to teach at the University of Tehran and the School of Decorative Arts. He left Iran in 1983 following the Islamic Revolution and lived in New York for 16 years. He subsequently moved to Italy before returning again to Iran for seven years.

He now divides his time between Dubai, UAE and Austin, USA, where in parallel to his career within visual arts, he collaborated with legendary musicians such as John Densmore, the drummer of the Doors, releasing two critically acclaimed albums.

In a way, the wanderings of his adult life echo the patterns of his early life as a child living with his nomadic family in the mountains of North Eastern Iran. He has strong memories of scenes from his childhood that captured his imagination and fed his love of color.

"I remember fields full of wild flowers," he said. He also recalled how out of necessity his mother used to craft objects for use inside of their traditional tent — including little clay sculptures for the children to play with.

"I still have vivid memories — those experiences stay with you forever. Sometimes when I play music, melodies come back into my head which take me back to my childhood," he said. He keeps an open mind about the land of his birth in this new era of the 'nuclear deal'.

"I will wait and see what happens," he said with the wariness of a person who has lived through many ups and downs and takes a long term view.

One of his paintings, called 'Those Roots Drink Quietly' depicting a fissure filled with ripe red pomegranates contained within cloying black tar was inspired by verses of Rumi, the 13th century Persian poet.

Another painting titled 'Faith Blue' shows a face covered in blue floral motifs often seen in Persian art.

His work Shirin and Khosrow draws inspiration from the famous tragic romance of the Sassanian King Khosrow II for the Armenian princess Shirin, by the Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209).

He chooses to focus on the moment where the lovers meet and fall in love.

He commented: "I have an optimistic outlook. I always celebrate life, even though I have experienced difficult times. Through art you can turn those moments into vibrant, energetic moments."

The Hunting Series paintings have a dreamlike quality and capture many moods as indicated by their names — Sunset Hunting, Nocturnal Hunting, Blue Hunting and Spring Hunt, Hunting the Ecstasy. The artist layers an abstract landscape with the motif of horse riding hunters. The figures bring to mind the rich artistic traditions of Persian miniature painting and calligraphy.

Derakshani is known both in the Middle East and in the West as one of the most significant contemporary Iranian artists.

After experimenting with pure abstraction, he devised his personal artistic style blending abstract and figurative elements from both Western and Eastern cultures.

His work features in many public art collections including the British Museum, London; the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. He has also performed as a musician in numerous museums and festivals such as the Brooklyn Museum and the Montreux Jazz Festival.

His career includes a variety of collaborations with renowned international musicians, poets and dancers including John Densmore of the Doors, Branford Marsalis, Robert Bly, Deepack Chopra and Madonna.

His recent exhibition at the Sophia Contemporary Gallery, London, showcased new works from a number of ongoing series, including the Hunting, Pomegranate and Garden Party series, as well as two large paintings from a new Calligraphy series, which have never previously been exhibited.

Sophia Contemporary, a new art gallery based in Mayfair, represents some of the most established contemporary artists from the Middle East and Iran working in a variety of media, including drawings, paintings, sculpture, video and photography. The Gallery aims to promote a new generation of emerging artists from the region with a view to providing them with a platform on the international stage. The gallery roster also includes emerging and established artists from Europe and the USA, promoting a creative dialogue between East and West.

From May 26 to July 25, 2016 a large retrospective of the artist's work will be held in the Marble Palace of The Russian Museum in St. Petersburg surveying the artist's career to date.

The exhibition will run alongside a solo exhibition of Robert Indiana's work entitled 'To the 50th Anniversary of Love', also in the Marble Palace. Following on from this, the works will travel to Kunstsammlungen Chemnitz in South East Germany in the autumn.

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