

New gallery showcasing contemporary art of the Middle East opens in London



Reza Derakshani, *Hunting the Ecstasy*, 2015, oil on canvas, 180 x 250 cm, 2015, courtesy of the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.

LONDON.- Opening on 9 March 2016 in London's Mayfair, [Sophia Contemporary](#) is a new gallery showcasing contemporary art of the Middle East and Iran alongside contemporary Western art. Founded by Vassili Tsarenkov, Lali Marganiya and Lili Jassemi, the gallery's inaugural exhibition showcases a series of new paintings by the artist Reza Derakshani, one of the most celebrated living Iranian artists.

Derakshani will present 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. Whilst Derakshani's practice is grounded in Iranian artistic traditions, his dynamic brushstrokes reveal the influence of the textured surfaces from Western abstract art movements. The fusion of Eastern artistic traditions and contemporary art movements from the West create an idiosyncratic oeuvre at the confluence of civilizations.

The artist became engrossed in Abstract Expressionism while living in New York and was soon associated with the revival of painting in the USA and Europe in the 1980s through the Neo-Expressionist style. Whilst being loosely affiliated to the movement and evolving in New York artistic circles with fellow artists and friends Francesco Clemente, Shirin Neshat, Alessandro and Cy Twombly, the experience of emigration led Derakshani to reconnect with his Iranian roots. After experimenting with pure abstraction, the artist devised his personal artistic style blending abstract and figurative elements. This synthesis materialises beyond the visual impact of the works, notably in the socio-political themes that Derakshani explores. In this exhibition he brings together nostalgic reflections on the history of his Iranian identity with contested notions of migration, displacement and modernity.

Renowned for his bold and dynamic use of colour, in the Hunting series the artist layers an abstract landscape with the recognisable motif of horse riding hunters. The figurative subject matter is reminiscent of the rich artistic traditions of Persian miniature painting and calligraphy, while the abstract use of vibrant colours reveals the artist's spiritual inspiration grounded in the millenary tradition of Persian poetry. The new paintings in the series continue in the trademark vivid and expressive style of his earlier works and are executed in oil on canvas. For this exhibition the artist also experiments with glitter, tar and gold paste.

The Breeze at Dawn will be accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with an introduction written by Norman Rosenthal, independent curator and former Exhibition Director of the Royal Academy of Arts.

Reza Derakshani (b. 1952 in Sangsar, Iran) is a painter, poet, musician and performance artist. He is known both in the Middle East and in the West as one of the most important contemporary Iranian artists.

Derakshani 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 sixteen years. The artist 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.

A young prodigy, he held his first solo show at the age of 19 at the Ghandriz Art Gallery in Tehran, going on to exhibit internationally. 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. Derakshani also performed as a musician in numerous museums and festivals such as the Brooklyn Museum and the Montreux Jazz Festival among others.