



# Art Radar

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

## "The Breeze at Dawn": Iran's Reza Derakshani at Sophia Contemporary – in pictures

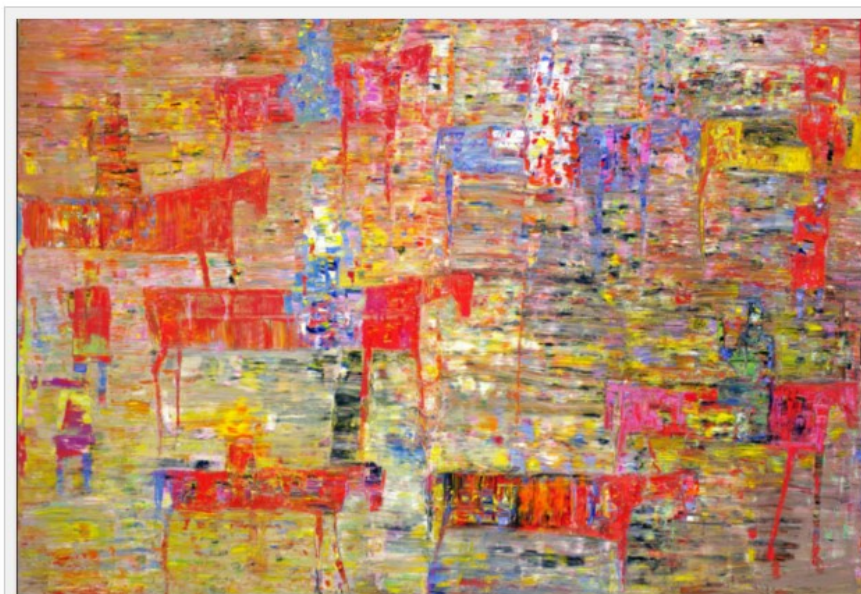
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**Reza Derakshani inaugurated a new gallery in London with his exquisite fusion of abstraction and iconography.**

The artist's 18 paintings on show nearly sold out on the opening night of Sophia Contemporary Gallery's new space in London.



Reza Derakshani, 'Untitled', 2015, oil on canvas, 198 x 224 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.

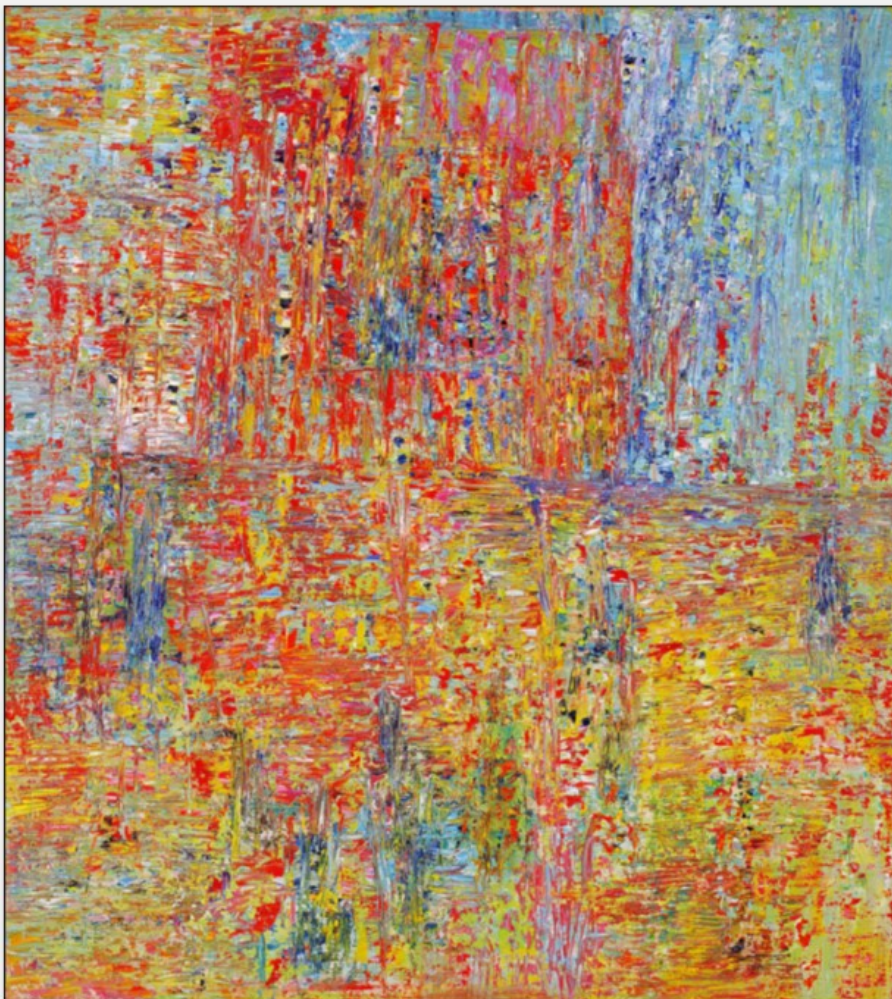
Acclaimed Iranian-born artist Reza Derakshani recently enjoyed a near sell-out success at Sophia Contemporary Gallery in London. According to Vassili Tsarenkov, the Russian dealer who co-founded the new space, Derakshani's paintings were **priced roughly between GBP60,000 and GBP150,000 and sold to collectors in the United Kingdom, United States and Germany**. *Art Radar* brings you some close-ups of the successful show, entitled "The Breeze at Dawn", which runs until 23 April 2016.

### A child prodigy

**Reza Derakshani** (b. 1952, Sangsar, Iran) was a child prodigy who **received his first commission at the age of nine** and held his first solo exhibition at the renowned Ghandriz Gallery in Tehran at the age of 19. His artistic pursuits were heavily informed by his childhood years growing up in the rustic countryside of Sangsar – an environment that featured mountaintop fields, horses, and blue and yellow wild flowers. His appreciation for natural beauty is evident in his work, which incorporates a detailed observation of the natural world as well as themes, motifs and patterns inspired by Persian art and folkloric traditions.



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



Reza Derakshani, 'Garden Party at the Red Castle', 2015, 198 x 178 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.



The artist weaves together such diverse elements into magnificently lyrical canvases that shimmer with a distinctive and striking aesthetic. Derakshani adds influences of Western modernist painting into the unique recipe, developing a truly singular language that is both visually and emotionally rich and evocative, addressing complex issues of Iranian identity and trauma.

#### Art of a nomad

Derakshani graduated from the Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Tehran and continued his studies at the Pasadena School of Art in California. He then returned to Iran to teach Art and Graphic Design at the University of Tehran. The 1983 Islamic Revolution prompted him to resettle in New York for the next 16 years, after which he moved to Italy. Derakshani eventually returned to Tehran for seven years before once again leaving his homeland in 2010; currently the artist lives and works between Dubai and Austin, Texas.



Reza Derakshani, 'Hunting the Sunshine', 2015, oil on canvas, 198 x 224 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.



Reza Derakshani, 'Wings and Waves', 2016, oil on canvas, 122 x 244 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.

The artist's work is thus enriched by his nomadic lifestyle and informed by diverse voices from the East and the West. Tsarenkov observes that Derakshani's art is **"at the confluence of Eastern artistic traditions and Western contemporary practices while reflecting the globalised world that we live in"**. Derakshani is known for his fearless exploration of form and style, skilfully blending tradition with a wild contemporary spirit. In a relentless quest for innovation and mental stimulation, Derakshani combines challenging techniques with a piercing vision, carving out a unique path of freedom and self-expression.

### Anatomy of a breeze

The exhibition "The Breeze at Dawn" features new works from a number of ongoing series as well as works from new series. Featuring his trademark dynamic use of colour, the paintings also incorporate tar, glaze, glitter and gold paste, synthesising abstract and figurative elements in a highly personal style. The overall effect creates exquisitely abstract patterns with figurative subjects deftly woven through, as if they were swimming through a pixelated haze or cloud, or a breeze broken up under a microscope.



Reza Derakshani, 'Blue Hunting', 2015, oil on canvas, 152 x 183 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.



Reza Derakshani, 'Hunting the Night', 2015, oil on canvas, 198 x 224 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.

Such a visual vocabulary harkens back to traditional Iranian miniature painting and calligraphy, while the bold brushwork and textured surfaces reveal the influence of Western abstract art. Kasha Hildebrand Gallery writes that Derakshani "clearly delights in the physicality of his media and indeed the very activity of art-making"; while Sophia Contemporary's press release observes that the "abstract use of vibrant colours reveals the artist's spiritual inspiration grounded in the millenary tradition of Persian poetry".



## An art of Iran

Derakshani has a strong following in both the West and the Middle East, and his works are collected by institutions including the British Museum, New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. The power of Derakshani's art clearly goes beyond mere visual impact: the press release states that the show displays Derakshani's

*nostalgic reflections on the history of his Iranian identity [together] with contested notions of migration, displacement and modernity.*



Reza Derakshani, 'Sunset Hunting', 2015, oil on canvas, 198 x 224 cm. Image courtesy the artist and Sophia Contemporary Gallery.

In the **press release of a 2013 exhibition**, the artist is quoted as saying:

*I've long tried to steer clear of politics, but it's always been there in the background. [...] We have huge problems in Iran which we need to face.*

It would, however, be reductive to define Derakshani as merely a political painter. As Scott Indrisek writes, quoted in the 2013 exhibition press release:

*Defining Derakshani as a political painter would be reductive – shrinking his oeuvre into little more than an extended, anguished salvo against a regime – and it's more interesting to note the unavoidable ways that such concrete realities are instead ingested, and transformed, by the artist.*

**Michele Chan**

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