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# Reza Derakshani's Textured Paintings at the Russian Museum

BY NICHOLAS FORREST | MAY 31, 2016



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Reza Derakshani

The State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg has opened a major retrospective of works by contemporary Iranian artist [Reza Derakshani](#), following the success of “[Reza Derakshani: The Breeze at Dawn](#)” at London’s Sophia Contemporary Gallery. Born in Sangsar, Iran, in 1952, Derakshani is a painter, poet, musician, and performance artist whose painting practice is grounded in Iranian artistic traditions and influenced by the Italian colorist and American abstract expressionist traditions.


The exhibition at the Marble Palace of the Russian Museum in St. Petersburg surveys Derakshani’s career to date and includes works from “The Breeze at Dawn,” at Sophie Contemporary Gallery, which consisted of all 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, previously unexhibited “Calligraphy” series.

Derakshani's's colourful, bold, and dynamic paintings exist somewhere between abstraction and figuration. His dynamic brushstrokes reveal the influence of the textured surfaces from Western abstract art movements, while also reflecting his Iranian identity and imagination. His fearless exploration of form and style is derived from what he describes as "a meditative solitude that results in pure freedom of self-expression"


Commenting on the exhibition, Alexander Borovsky, Head of the Department of Contemporary Art at the State Russian Museum, said: "We decided to exhibit an Iranian artist for two reasons. Firstly, the ancient Iranian culture is well-known in Russia. It has been a part of our cultural tradition ever since the 19th century. Secondly, we were excited by the thought of being one of the first national museums to exhibit work from this territory. We have seen how China and India have begun to play an increasingly important role in the international art scene – both in museums and the art market – and we think the next one could be Iran. It was our friend the collector and co-founder of Sophia Contemporary Gallery Vassili Tsarenkov who turned our attention to [Reza Derakshani](#), one of Iran's leading contemporary artists.

"Why did we chose him? Derakshani's generation has been through all sorts of turmoil. Reza is not a political artist, not at all, but the seismic waves of this civilization's troubles is hidden 'inside' his artworks. What is interesting is that Reza connects very contemporary ideas and subjects, even gender problems in works like 'Masters of Pleasure,' with a very individual vision of his cultural tradition. He fills himself like a fish in the waves of contemporary art - he moves seamlessly from photo-based imagery to concept-led pieces. His work is the opposite of stylization. Stylization is the plague of every art practice based on such strong tradition, including Iranian art. But Derakshani has the antidote to stylization in his practice: he articulates 'the art of memory.' Derakshani works in the visual, the mental and the acoustic. You need only look at the Pomegranate series to see this."

*"Reza Derakshani" is at the State Russian Museum in St. Petersburg until July 25, 2016*

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