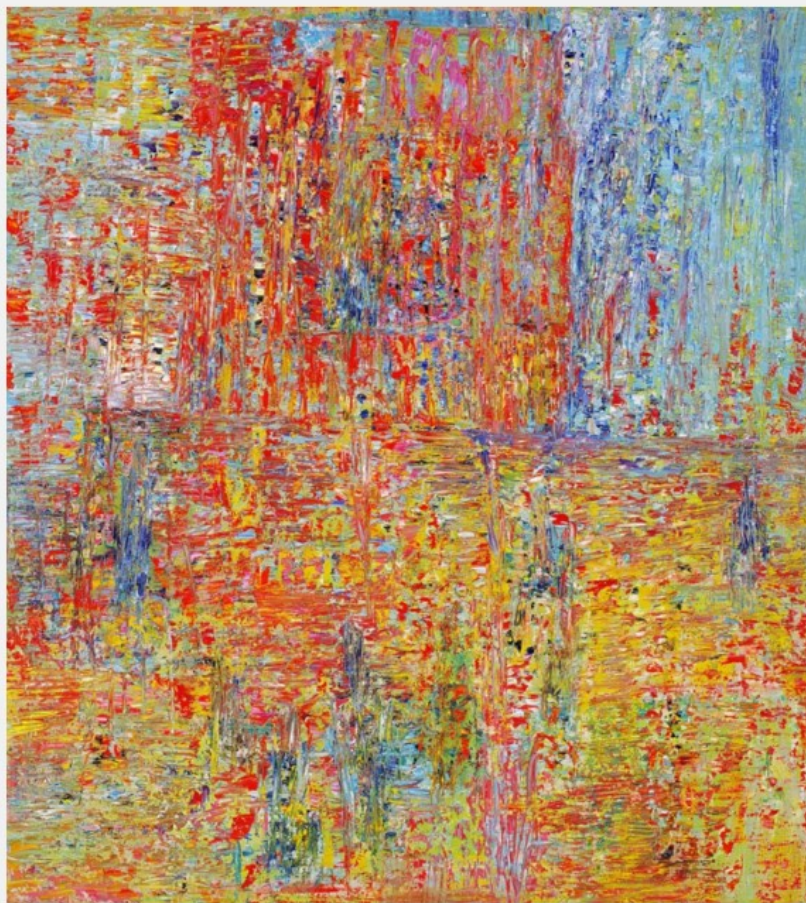


## Reza Derakshani: The Breeze at Dawn, at Sophia Contemporary Gallery – Iranian Abstract Art

on Mar 17, 2016



Sophia Contemporary is the latest in a series of country specific galleries to open its doors in Mayfair. Hot on the foot of the Italianisation of Dover Street and Albemarle Street, springs of periphery galleries have opened in succession, often focusing on the arts of the Middle East and Asia. It's a market that has long suffered in London – it could be argued that it is only in the last few years with the large influx of eastern visitors, investors and inhabitants, that this has become a market worth exploiting. Opening in March 2016, Sophia Contemporary is the latest offering attempting to cut its teeth in the tough marketplace. Founded by Vassili Tsarenkov, Lali Marganiya and Lili Jassemi, the gallery chose to showcase one of the most prominent living Iranian artists; Reza Derakshani (b. 1952). Known for being an artist who fuses painting, poetry, music and performance, Derakshani graduated for the University of Tehran in 1976, before studying in California. After a brief stint teaching back in Iran, he moved to New York for sixteen years. His works can be found in the British Museum, the Met in New York and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary art.



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

For this show, Derakshani is presenting a series of new works from a number of ongoing series, including two large-scale works from his brand new *Calligraphy* series, both of which have never been seen before. Whilst rooted in traditional Iranian art history and practice, the dynamic strokes, vivid colours and thick surfaces are more reminiscent of Western abstract movements – and it's precisely this fusion of East meets West in an explosion of heritage and contemporary, that creates Derakshani's work. He became fascinated by these techniques while living in New York in the 1980s, amongst a circle of artists working cohesively to push the boundaries of their forms and practices. He quickly became synonymous with a group of Middle Eastern artists who were at the point at which their work reached a global audience – it was the turning point – the end of the old within these thousand year old traditions of what Middle Eastern art was.



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

Derakshani's works talk vividly of migration and displacement, yet at the same time they exhibit a real excitement for discovering new culture and how they fuse within a person. In his *Hunting* series, bold colours are fused with dynamic brushwork giving traditional scenes of hunting seen in Islamic manuscript illumination, a modern and compelling twist, while paying respect to its roots. The works are rooted in traditions of the great Classical Arabic poets – contemporary homage is paid to their work through the use of gold paste, tar and glitter on the surfaces of the works.

Harry Seymour

[Reza Derakshani: The Breeze at Dawn, at Sophia Contemporary Gallery](#), 9 March – 23 April 2016. Admission free.