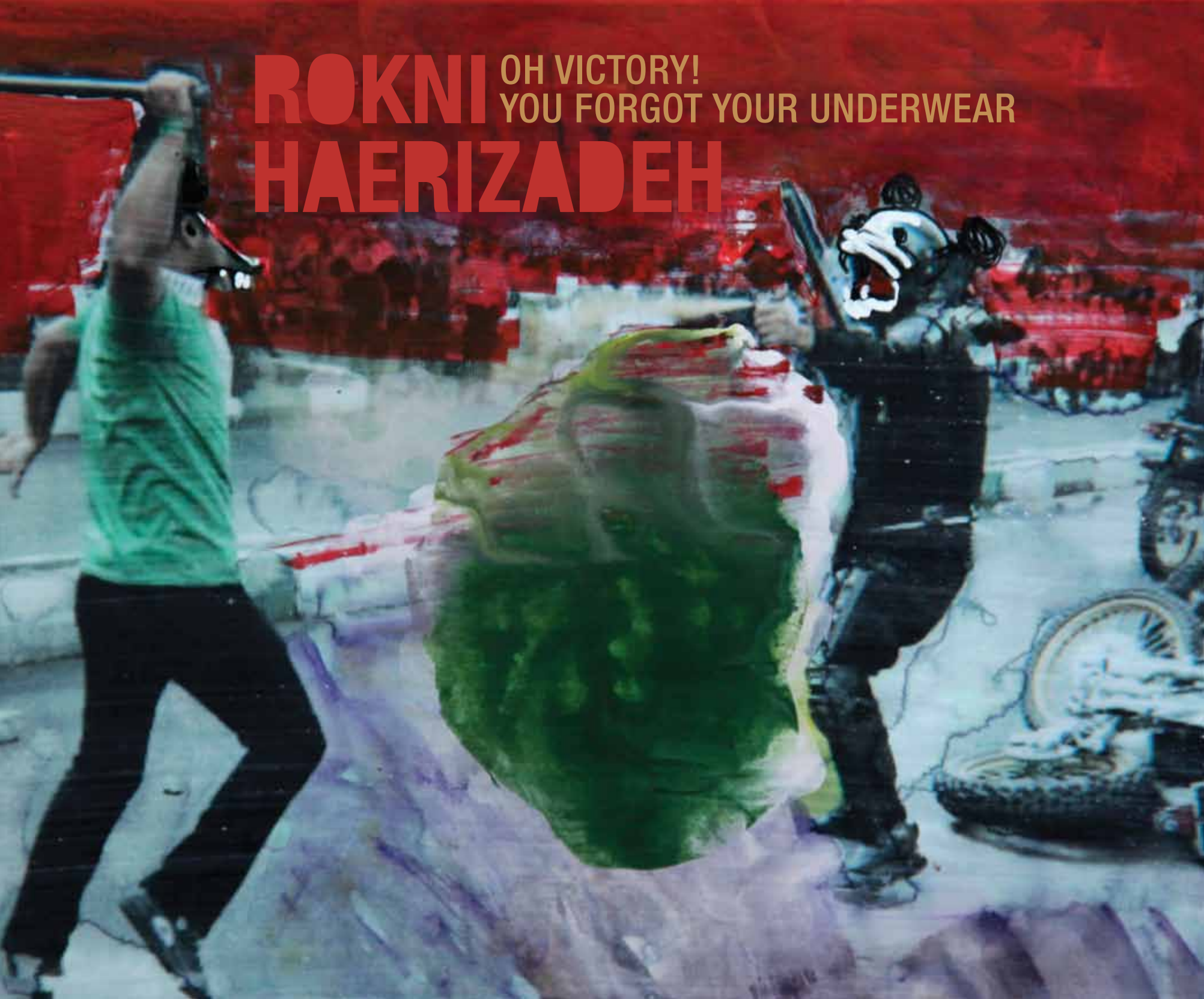


**ROKNI** OH VICTORY!  
YOU FORGOT YOUR UNDERWEAR  
**HAERIZADEH**



“Art that is capable of facing  
the breath of the street.”

*Breton*

# ROKNI HAERIZADEH

## OH VICTORY! YOU FORGOT YOUR UNDERWEAR

16 NOV 2009 — 07 JAN 2010

The paintings of Rokni Haerizadeh read like novels. Reflections on society are moulded around scenes that have a literary depth and complexity. Like a writer, Rokni enters the minds of his characters – his style shifting between paintings to reflect the atmosphere of the situation he is portraying. As this collection of works shows, the artist is an instinctual storyteller who fashions living characters within his works.

Several new paintings included here continue Rokni's work in diptych. Huge, multi-panel paintings in this style narrate the unease of Iranian society as it modernises and gropes for an identity. Semblances of the 18th and 19th century societal paintings are subverted. The grotesque slips into these scenes, and we're witness to a dark, violent reality that has contorted to his vision.

In 'Seezdah Begar', we see families picnicking beside a highway in Tehran. Relating to the 13th day of Eid, when it is Iranian tradition to eat outside (for fear of bad luck otherwise), the right-hand panel presents a vision of social segregation. Men rest on the grass – smoking, playing cards – while women serve food and accommodate the men in a flurry of industry.

With Rokni's typical injection of fantasy into a mundane reality - society is laid bare by exaggeration. A family who regard themselves as particularly pious, pray furiously in

front of a group of dignitaries. The amount of food being cooked and consumed verges on the ridiculous. And all the while, the towering faces of martyrs watch over this carnival of rampant consumption.

On the left side of the diptych, however, we see an ominous willow tree, created with drips of paint. The collapsing colours and sickly appearance of the willow suggests that it is struggling to survive in this polluted atmosphere. We also see a tree, too thin to support a person, bound in a crude rope swing, and branches hacked down to provide shade. These images illustrate a recurring theme in Rokni's work: The sacrifice of nature for the sake of futile amusement.

Rokni identifies an urge for corruption that runs through Iranian society. He portrays a society so hungry for freedom that they are prepared to corrupt themselves and the space around them in search of it. The overwhelming, orgiastic nature of the scenes presented in this show suggests that frustration is seething at the heart of these people. The thoughtless ruination of the landscape around them is borne of this social frustration. 'Shomal', a diptych exhibited at the Saatchi Gallery recently, presents an equally disturbing vision of excess. Men and women, fiercely segregated, are consuming constantly at a beach in northern Tehran – throwing refuse into the sea, or smoking a shisha pipe in the water. There's a tension to

the scene. People are cagey, they watch and evaluate, altering their behaviour for the benefits of others. Again, women appear to be a prop for the dissolute behaviour of the men around them. We see a loss of respect for themselves, for each other and for nature.

This ebbing of self-respect, Rokni observes, spills over into Iranians outside of Iran. In 'Tehran Cabaret, Dubai', we see Iranians in a state of semi-abandonment. They drink Shiraz wine, a vestige of some stifled nationalist impulse, in a darkened nightclub in Dubai. In the foreground, a mother breastfeeds her baby while her husband holds up a cloth to hide her from view. Proportions change constantly throughout the painting, giving the scene an intoxicated edge. Yet despite the proposed freedom of this cabaret, men still dance with men and women dance with women. However much these restless people try to escape, Rokni seems to say, Iran stays with them.

The riots in Iran following the presidential election also have significant bearing on the works in this collection. Four paintings, executed during and in the aftermath of the protests, explore the delirious emptiness that the artist felt to be simmering beneath the surface of the event. 'Neda' recreates the coverage on CNN given to the death of Neda Agha-Soltan, a woman present at the riots who was shot dead by an anonymous gunman. Frames from the video of the rescue attempt made on her are repro-

duced but, with the emblazon of CNN in the corner and the sickly yellow wash behind the images, they take on the appearance of a showreel. It's as if Rokni is suggesting that the images only served to create a momentary story or a shocking emblem of what was happening – other-side-of-the-world chaos slipped between advertisements for exotic tourist destinations.

It was difficult to grasp exactly what was happening during the protests, particularly for those outside of Iran. Rokni was in Dubai at the time and began taking photographs of televised accounts from the riots. Using gesso, acrylic and ink, he reshaped the images into nightmarish, carnivalesque scenes. These became Fictionville, included in this show – a series of works that refigures the anonymous men and women of the protests into animals. Women in chador become crows, police officers take on the heads of demons or cats, confused protestors become clowns. The images suggest the elated madness of the protests and the intoxicating potential for change they represented. The animals themselves relate to characters in the Shahr-e-Ghesseh, a series of socio-political children's plays broadcast before and after the revolution with a deeply revolutionary sentiment. For all the violence underlying these images, these bizarre characters seem to undercut the moment with a negating sense of absurdity and nonsense.

Images that record specific, recent events can be found in other pieces in this collection. 'Police Raiding The Devil Worshipper's Apartment' recreates a party in the house of an art collector in Tehran. Sculptures by Bita Fayyazi, Parviz Tanavoli and the manipulated photographs of Ramin Haerizadeh line the walls. But at the entrance, we see two agents of the police, cameras in hand, ready to burst in and capture images of those present in the apartment.

Relating to an event that occurred while Rokni was in Dubai, the artist has since settled here. In one of the

works, he turns his eye onto the contrasts and contradictions of the Western lifestyle put through an Arabic context that he has found here. 'JBR Fridays' depicts a glistening consumerist temple – expatriates strewn across a blazing beach, tourists petting a transparent camel that wanders incongruously among the half-naked bodies. We get the sense across the works in this show that Rokni has mingled observations, collected over time, into his work. In doing so, we see the ideas that he presents on the canvas in a refined and matured state. Rather than reproducing a specific scene, he creates a living world by the weaving of myriad impressions.

This show casts a derisive and discerning eye on the layers of self-definition that exist in Persian society.

It is this that gives the works grounding. These aren't simply sardonic attacks or sweeping judgements. There's a battle going on within each of these works that has emerged with prolonged examination of the people around him. For all of the horror that he finds in the schizophrenic society of Iranians, and the paradoxes, perversities and hypocrisies he encounters in the broader world of human behavior, Rokni never stoops to patronize his subjects. The world remains a complex and limitless field for reflection. But it's a world that, for him, only comes alive if it's approached with wryness; a world of contradictions that we can either despair of or laugh at once we peer behind the mask and face its absurdity.

Isabelle van den Eynde

Rokni Haerizadeh employs a 'madness of magic' in his floating landscapes of 'surfaced characters and memories'. His 'dreamed' narratives are a kind of Garcia Marquez in paint, often bringing forth the burden of 'forgotten' histories in order to define the current moment. In these intuitive narratives the imagined and the real, the internal and the external are juxtaposed in uninterrupted fluidity producing free-associated snapshots of human life as it is 'imagined'.

Rokni works in extended series, sometimes creating snapshots of densely populated urban reality and sometimes kaleidoscopic dream-solutions to the layered incongruencies of the self or the collective culture. Endowed with social, historical, and cultural references, the artist's mental processing fabricates intensely individual worlds. Stock characters often inhabit the worlds, appearing and disappearing across series as in a sort of personal « Commedia dell Arte ».

Whether urban fairytales or private mythologies these mental diaries are mirrors to a kind of Jungian « shadow » recalling to reality those primitive and awkward aspects of the collective culture readily rejected.

These investigations are reminiscent of art that Breton called 'is capable of facing the breath of the street.'

Vali Mahlouji

Vali Mahlouji is an independent curator, critic and writer





*Sizdeh Bedar (The 13th Day of the Persian New Year), oil on canvas, two panels of 200 x 300 cm, 79 x 118 in (overall diptych 200 X 600 cm, 79 x 236 in), 2009*





Chiniye Gole Sorkhi, oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm, 60 x 79 in, 2009



Khosrow and Shirin, oil on canvas, 150 x 200 cm, 60 x 79 in, 2009





*Police Raiding Through the Devil Worshippers Apartment, oil on canvas, two panels of 200 x 300 cm, 79 x 118 in (overall diptych 200 X 600 cm, 79 x 236 in), 2009*





*The Disappeared Came Knocking, oil on canvas, 200 x 220 cm, 79 x 87 in, 2009*

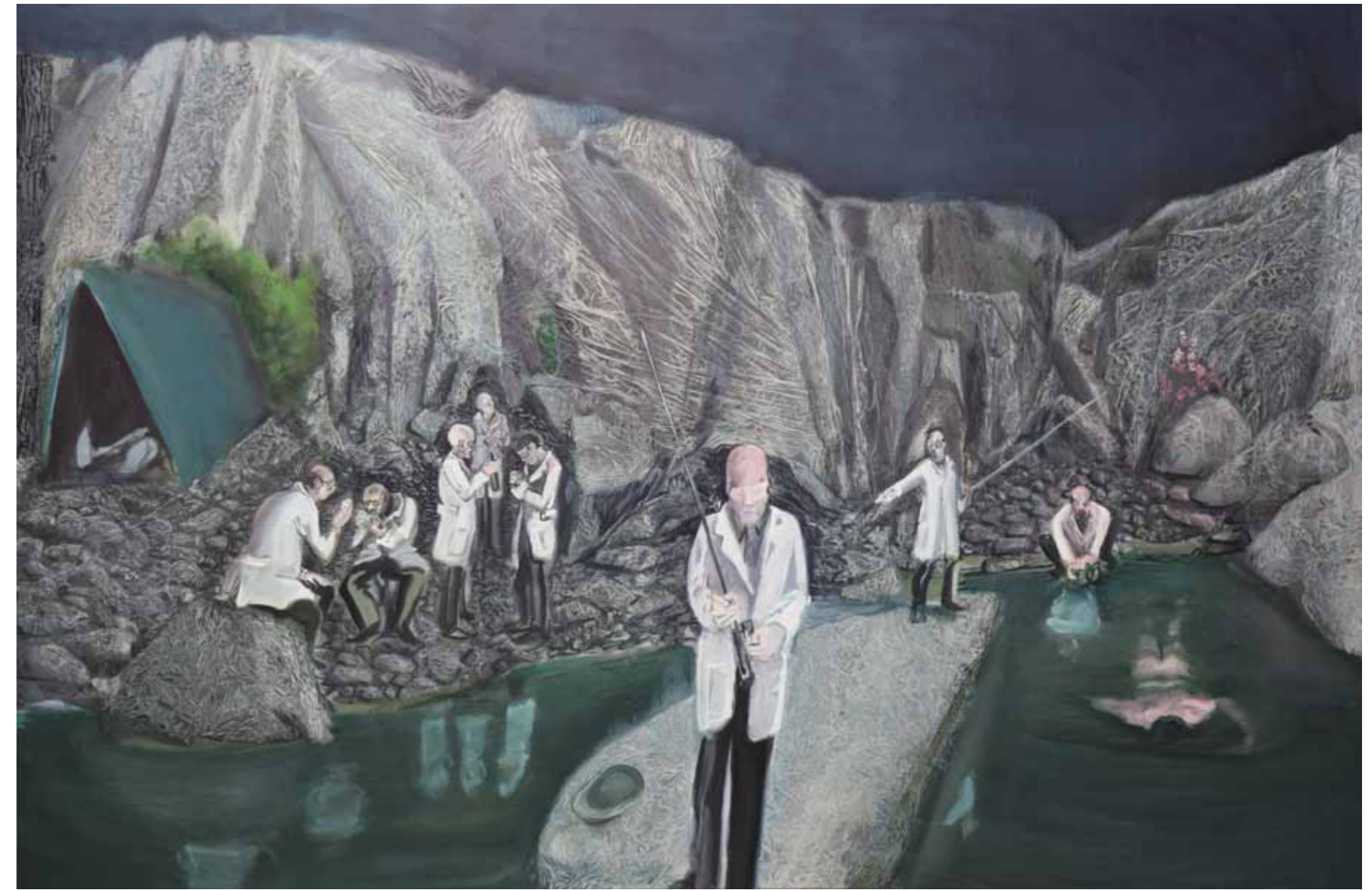


*Tehran Cabaret Dubai, oil on canvas, 220 x 200 cm, 87 x 79 in, 2009*





*Jumeirah Beach Residence Fridays, oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 79 x 118 in, 2009*



*So Much Water So Close to Home, oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 79 x 118 in, 2009*





*So the Wind Won't Blow it all Away*, oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 79 x 118 in, 2009



*Sinking of a Book* by Omar Khayyam, oil on canvas, 200 x 300 cm, 79 x 118 in, 2009



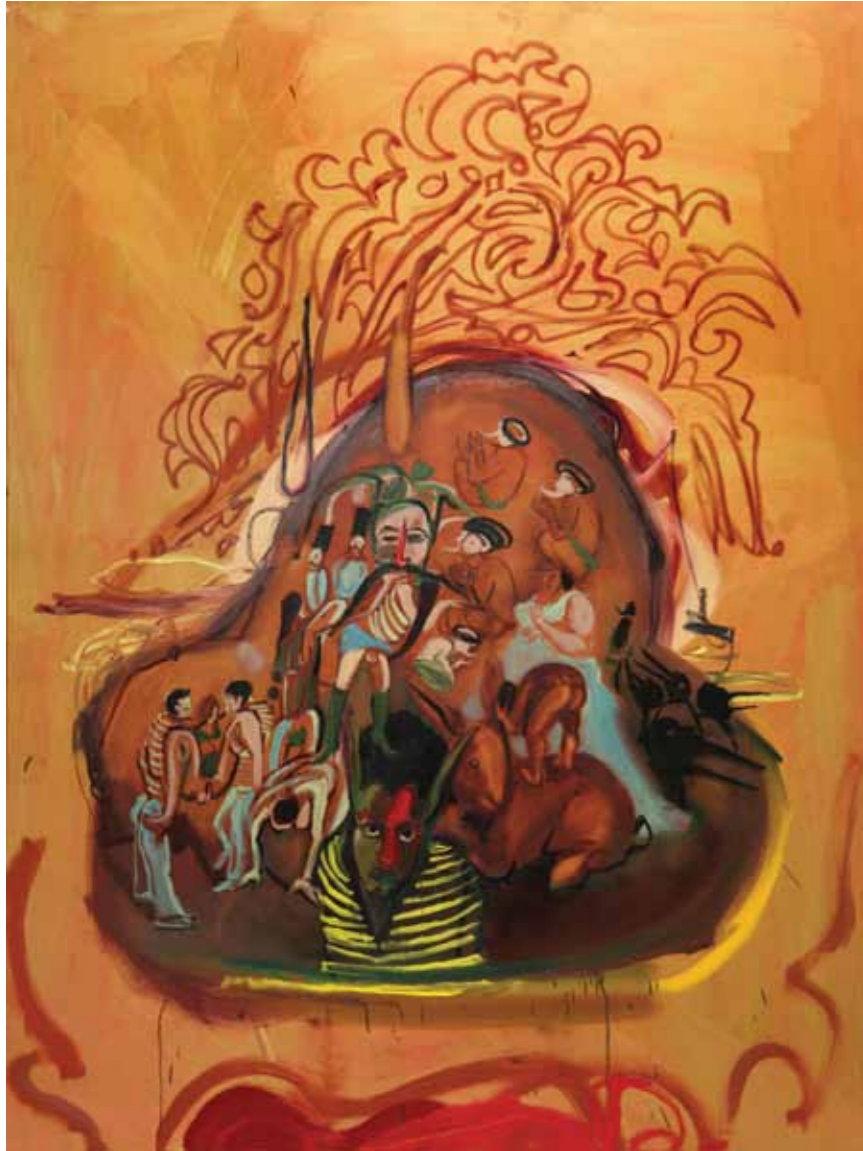


*The Camel, the Cow and the Leopard, oil on canvas, two panels of 250 x 100 cm, 98 x 39 in (overall diptych 250 x 200 cm, 98 x 79 in) , 2009*



*Inner Amen, oil on canvas, 220 x 200 cm, 87 x 79 in, 2009*





*Me and My Heroes, oil on canvas, 200 x 150 cm, 79 x 59 in, 2009*

*I Rather Stay Alive Even if it Means Peeking at the World Through a Donkeys Asshole, oil on canvas  
200 x 150 cm, 79 x 59 in, 2009*



































# ROKNI HAERIZADEH

BORN IN 1978, TEHRAN, IRAN | WORKS AND LIVES IN DUBAI, UAE

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2009 'Oh Victory! You Forgot Your Underwear', solo, B21 Gallery, Dubai, UAE  
 2009 'Crossing the Persian Gulf', group exhibition curated by C. Merewether, Hong Kong International Art Fair 09  
 2009 'There Goes the Neighbourhood', collaboration with Bita Fayyazi, B21 Gallery, Dubai, UAE  
 2009 'Raad-o-Bargh' 17 Artists from Iran, Thaddaeus Ropac Gallery, Paris, France  
 2009 'Unveiled, New Art from the Middle-East', Saatchi Gallery, London, UK  
 2009 'Looped and Layered', group exhibition, Thomas Erben Gallery, NY, USA  
 2008 'Tehran 206', solo exhibition, Ave Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2008 'Gol Andam and Bad Hijab', solo, GalleriArtist, Istanbul, Turkey  
 2008 'The Donkey, the Pagan, the Bride, and Others', solo, B21 Gallery, Dubai, UAE  
 2007 'Within and Without', NoMoreGrey Gallery, Iranian Contemporary Art London, UK  
 2007 'Wishes and Dreams, Iranian New Generation Emerges' Meridian International Center, Touring exhibition, USA  
 2007 'Haft Negah', group exhibition, Niavaran Creation Centre, Tehran, Iran  
 2006 'Dolme', solo, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2006 'Iran.com Iranian art today', Museum fur Neue Kunst, Freiburg, Germany  
 2006 'Paintings and Drawings by Rokni Haerizadeh', solo, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE

2006 'Drawing facing Design', Homa Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2006 'What film', Azad Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2006 'Khosrow and Shirin', solo, Day gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2005 Beijing Painting Biennale, China  
 2005 Mah Gallery, group exhibition, Tehran, Iran  
 2005 'Second Generation', Assar art Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2005 'Paintings by Rokni Haerizadeh', solo, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE  
 2004 'Gardens of Iran', Tehran Contemporary Museum of Art, Tehran, Iran  
 2004 '4 Young Painters', group exhibition, Day Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2003 'Lucky Charms', group exhibition, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2003 'On the Road', various public places, Tehran, Iran  
 2003 Environmental Art Exhibition, Polour, Iran  
 2002 Atashzad Gallery (Sajadeha), Tehran, Iran  
 2002 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
 2001 Mural, German Embassy, Tehran, Iran  
 2000 Elahe Gallery, Tehran, Iran

## EDUCATION

BA in Fine Arts, University of Tehran  
 M.A. in Painting, Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran  
 Certificate in Writing from the Islamic Ministry of Culture and Guidance

## AWARDS

Second prize at Tehran painting biennale, 2003

## COLLECTIONS

Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Iran  
 Charles Saatchi Collection, London, UK  
 JP Morgan Collection, NY, USA  
 Devi Art Foundation, Delhi India

## ABOUT B21 GALLERY

Located in an industrial area near the centre of Dubai, B21 Gallery opened its doors in 2005 with the founding objective to discover young promising contemporary artists from the Middle-East region. Under B21's tutelage, a new generation of artists began to attract the attention of international collectors and curators, as well as public and private institutions; now leading the way in a burgeoning and exciting art movement.

Providing a platform for Middle-Eastern contemporary art, B21 has showcased an intense and innovative program of exhibitions, publishing of a catalogue for each.

## OPENING HOURS

Sat. – Thu. 10am – 7pm; Fri. closed

## ADDRESS

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