

IMPROVISATIONS

/ fereydoun
ave

16.11.25

/ 07.01.26

/ raana
farnoud

/ shaqayeq
arabi

GALLERY
ISABELLE
ایزابل گالری

There are no grand gestures, no monumental declarations. Instead, there is attentiveness to surface, to material, to what resists resolution. Flowers, fruits, twigs, small things, overlooked things. Together, they compose poetry of modesty. There is also a playful curiosity. The artists tweak, return, adjust. Forms reappear in altered states, as if trying on different moods. The repetition is not mechanical but searching.

IMPROVISATIONS brings together works by Fereydoun Ave, Raana Farnoud, and Shaqayeq Arabi. Their visual languages are distinct, yet in proximity, they begin to echo each other. The exhibition reveals a shared attentiveness to what is provisional, such as a line that wavers, a form that repeats with variation, or a gesture made in passing but left to settle. This is not only about spontaneity, but also about staying with uncertainty and shaping meaning from it.

In Raana Farnoud's paintings, beauty and melancholy grow entangled. Flowers are not idyllic ornaments but are tense, restless, unresolved. The flowers feel bodily, bending, collapsing, stretching. They seem to be wrestling with their own becoming. One senses in them a deep tension between emergence and disappearance. These are not floral still-lives. They are painterly moments where something struggles into being and almost slips away.

Fereydoun Ave's paintings are quiet yet charged, composed with humility rather than minimalism. A fig leaf floats, a pomegranate bleeds, petals fade like pressed memories. His gestures feel weightless but deliberate, unfolding through both structure and instinct. Each small element in his work — a stain, a smudge, a bloom — anchors a larger sentiment. His works honour simplicity, allowing passing moments to settle into poetry.

Shaqayeq Arabi's sculptures are fragile assemblages made from desert detritus and salvaged urban materials. Palm fronds twist with metal mesh, roots coil around rusted rods. The materials speak of a childlike logic of "what if I attach this here?" Out of the ruins of an entangled ecosystem, new forms emerge. She turns branches, wire, and debris into new compositions that are birdlike, vegetal, skeletal.

The artists transform the familiar through acts of care, attention, and intuitive play. In a time that often demands urgency and spectacle, these works ask us to slow down, pay attention, and find presence in the modest, fragile, and unresolved.

Artists Biographies:

FEREYDOUN AVE

Fereydoun Ave (b. 1945, Tehran) is an influential Iranian artist, curator, and cultural figure whose multifaceted practice spans painting, collage, photography, assemblage, textiles, set design, and curatorial work. Educated in England and the United States, Ave earned a BA in Applied Arts for Theatre from Arizona State University and studied film at NYU before returning to Tehran in 1970, just as the city's cultural scene was flourishing.

His work moves fluidly between abstraction and figuration, rooted in mythology, history, and the personal. Ave draws on a wide range of references—from Iranian wrestling and heroes of the 10th-century Shahnameh, to Greek mythology and contemporary allegory. "I'm a collage myself," he once said, capturing the essence of an artistic language where painterly gestures, repetition, calligraphic lines, and found objects all coexist.

Then come the four elements, the four seasons, and the tiny and mundane things: shells from the shores of the Seychelles, juicy figs in Greece, “Trompette de la Mort” and twigs near Paris, dahlias from his garden in Tehran—all dance before our eyes. These recurring motifs connect the metaphysical to the tangible, infusing Ave’s compositions with memory and materiality.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, while many artists left Iran, Ave chose to remain. He became a key figure in the reemergence of the visual arts scene, founding 13 Vanak Street—an independent art space that operated under the radar for nearly two decades. Alongside his own practice, Ave has been a tireless supporter of other artists, fostering a sense of community and creative freedom amid often challenging circumstances.

His work has been exhibited extensively in Iran and internationally, and is held in the collections of institutions such as the British Museum, the Centre Pompidou, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. A 2020 retrospective at the British Museum and his inclusion in the 58th Carnegie International highlight his ongoing impact. Ave continues to live and work between Tehran and Paris, committed to a lifelong exploration of art, form, and the poetic everyday.

SHAQAYEQ ARABI

Shaqayeq Arabi (b.1974, Tehran) is an artist whose practice moves between sculpture, drawing, and intuitive material assemblage. Working with salvaged materials—branches, wire, palm fronds, rusted rods—she creates fragile sculptural forms that feel birdlike, vegetal, skeletal. Through these gestures of improvisation and play, Arabi conjures tenderness from debris, crafting beauty from what’s broken, twisted, or overlooked.

Rooted in the physical landscape of the Gulf, her works speak of entangled ecologies, often drawing on desert flora and the discarded remnants of urban life. Her approach is materially sensitive, favouring intuition over monumentality.

Arabi holds a deep interest in the poetics of assemblage and the minor acts of noticing, repairing, and reanimating. Each work is a quiet proposition that to make art is to be-with in fragile ways.

Arabi has exhibited widely in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Her recent shows include *The Sea Was Far Away* and *the Sky Further* at the Farjam Foundation, Dubai; *Dancing on Stilts* at Signs & Symbols, New York; *Fragments, Notes & Lines* with Fereydoun Ave at Total Arts at the Courtyard, Dubai; and *Elsewhere* at Mohsen Gallery, Tehran. Her work has also been presented at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art and Aaran Projects.

RAANA FARNOUD

Raana Farnoud (b. 1953, Mashhad) is a painter whose practice explores the tension between presence and disappearance, beauty and unease. She is known for shifting between abstraction and figuration, cultivating a visual language that is distinctly her own. Her figurative works, marked by quiet complexity, stand apart both within her practice and the wider landscape of contemporary Iranian art. Avoiding traditional representational; Farnoud’s figures are not portraits, but presences. They occupy a suspended realm where inner life eclipses outward form.

Farnoud’s compositions evoke a quiet restlessness. Colour pools and retreats. Outlines fade. Surfaces pulse with ambiguity. Recurring shapes return in altered moods, as if trying on different states of being. Through gesture and repetition, she invites the viewer into a slow, intimate rhythm that honours fragility and resists resolution.

Over four decades, Farnoud has exhibited widely in Iran and internationally, including solo presentations at Emkan Gallery, Etemad Gallery, and Golestan Gallery in Tehran, as well as exhibitions in France, Germany, the USA, and China. Her work has featured in institutional shows at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art and Art Jameel, and in international art fairs including Art Dubai and Contemporary Istanbul.