



Ahmad Amin-nazar, *Untitled 14*, 2009, Ink on paper, 150 x 1000 cm.

## Ahmad Amin Nazar's Reconsideration of Images from *Shahnameh*



**B 21 Art Gallery  
Al Quoz 1  
0097 1 (0)4 3403965  
Dubai  
Ahmad Amin Nazar  
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Among the sweeping black lines that whip elegantly across Amin Nazar's canvases, wrestlers and shadowy forms emerge. With a nod to Goya's *The Disasters of War*, Amin Nazar creates carefully constructed vignette-like scenes. We see grotesque masks and the heads of demons atop Persian wrestlers engaged in a surreal battle. Delicate yet inflammatory bursts of paint seem to flash in the distance as if the lights of a distant battle are the only illumination.

In his first exhibition in Dubai, Ahmad Amin Nazar presents a collection of kinetic paintings that evoke a tradition in chaos. A master of line and form, the artist taught private drawing classes to a new generation of Iranian artists in the early 1990s, with Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh as pupils who both cite the artist to be of major influence.

Ahmad Amin Nazar, *Untitled 11*, 2009, Acrylic on paper, 110 x 150 cm.



Ahmad Amin-nazar, *Untitled 5*, ink on paper, 110x150 cm, 2009.

It's as if we are watching the Persian miniature being dismantled before our eyes. The flat plane paintings often used to illustrate scenes from the *Shahnameh* (*Book of Kings*) — the epic poem that sits at the heart of Persian culture — are here made three-dimensional. Amin Nazar, also a skilled miniature painter, has introduced gravity into this two-dimensional world. The effect is disorientating, figures who once danced appear to tumble like bodies caught in the midst of an explosion.

The artist incorporates characters and figures from the *Shahnameh* such as Zahhak, notorious for the serpents that grow from his shoulders and are only satisfied by feeding on the brains of young boys. Zahhak appears repeatedly as a motif throughout these works as an ominous, blasted presence watching over the destruction around him. This figure — symbolic of a destructive and nihilistic sacrifice of youth — immediately draws parallels with the situation in Iran and the violence associated with the 2009 protests. Amin Nazar painted these works around the time of the protests and seems to point towards a dark and foreboding reality: something apocalyptic looms over these scenes amid a tumult of black paint. The collection builds to a vast, 10m wide piece where each character seems to fade into such an abyss.

Identifying the constant battle between good and evil that underpins Persian thought right back to pre-Islamic times, he cites Sedegh Hedayat, one of Iran's most noted modern writers who concerned himself with this same duality, as a counterpart. Hedayat appears in the





artist's works, clad in a sharp suit and a confused expression, and the writer's own Kafka-like prose seems to have some bearing on Amin Nazar's narrative paintings.

Amin Nazar offers insight into a generation that preceded Iran's new wave of artists. As one of the first to bring the tradition of Persian miniature painting into the destabilising sphere of Western thought, he captures a new vision of the miniature. Through powerfully wrought bodies caught in a snapshot of conflict, or mythological figures engaged with absurd symbols of modernity — a laptop, a mobile phone — we sense an artist struggling to equate a rich tradition with a volatile present.

Ahmad Amin-nazar, *Untitled 13*, Acrylic on paper, 110 x 150 cm, 2009.

Ahmad Amin-nazar,  
*Untitled 3*, ink on  
paper, 110x150 cm,  
2009.

