

TalkCloud

A solo exhibition by Mahmoud Bakhshi

May 30- July30, 2014

A solo exhibition by an Iranian artist Mahmoud Bakhshi will open at YAY Gallery (Baku) next month. The exhibition is curated by Daria Kirsanova; London based art historian, art theorist and curator.

TalkCloud will be hosted by Yay Gallery located in the historical area of Baku.

Yay Gallery was established in September 2012 as an addition to the broader initiative conceived by YARAT Contemporary Art Organization in order to support and promote the development of Azerbaijani contemporary art both on a national and international level. The gallery is commercial but not-for-profit purposes. All potential revenue from the art sales is channelled into supporting YARAT initiatives and the artists.

Mahmoud Bakhshi's practice deals with a visual aesthetic that developed in Iran in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. He reflects on the recent history of Iran through a recontextualisation of the official symbolism of the Islamic Republic of Iran, and uses deeper historical and traditional formal references to ground this recent history within the larger context of Iranian identity.

TalkCloud is a cross-disciplinary project that includes lightbox sculptures, drawings and video (currently in production). The project was exhibited earlier this year at Niavaran Cultural Centre in Tehran and narrative gallery in London. The project's conceptual core is the multifaceted and multilayered relationship between art and power-holding systems in Iran and elsewhere. This relationship has been a longstanding subject of artistic enquiry for Bakhshi. In this new body of work he is looking into the very origins of the notion of so-called 'political engagement' in art. But it is not just political power that Bakhshi is interested in. He is equally concerned with the interaction between art and capital, another stakeholder in this rivalry for authority.

The lightbox sculptures formally recall traditional Persian calligraphy, but, instead of famous verses of poetry, they reference well-known phrases that comment on the social role of art. The quotes include expressions by the leaders of the Iranian Islamic and Russian Bolshevik revolutions – Khomeini and Lenin – alongside those by the ideologue of the 'artistic engagement' and Socialist Realism, Anatoliy Lunacharsky, as well as Andy Warhol.

The contrast between the content of the phrases, which call attention to a social role of art, and their presentation in the shape of embellished ornament, creates a conceptually charged paradox. At the same time, the diverse industrial materials used to produce the works underline Bakhshi's fascination with the brutal aesthetics and materiality of Arte Povera.

The eight-panel installation *My Land, Meridian ...° - ...°, orbit ...° – ...°, a reference to Yasna, Hat 46* was shown for the first time in 2004. It was subsequently reworked in 2013, when an iron frame with the inscribed quote from Yasna and the exact geographical coordinates was added to each panel. The eight panels represent eight parts of the current border of Iran and refer to the areas where the important battles and significant conflicts took place throughout the history. The events that transformed the country, that divided the perception of history to 'before' and 'after'.

The quote from Zarathustra, in this context, points out to another layer of meaning. It references the nostalgic, sentimental relationship one has with the past and one's own homeland. The work puts the discussion around the social role of art into a wider, historical and philosophical perspective.

The drawing series *Hard copy* is an ongoing project that the artist started in 2012. These digital drawings, made using coloured ink, reference familiar propaganda iconography that glorifies martyrs in the Iran-Iraq war. Bakhshi transforms them into simple, childlike drawings, using formal alterations to trigger conceptual metamorphoses. He takes these images out of their charged context, the detached realm of 'heroic propaganda', and turns them into schematic, nearly abstract graphic symbols.

About the Artist

Mahmoud Bakhshi (b. 1977, Tehran) is currently in residency at Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten, Amsterdam. His previous exhibitions include *TalkCloud*, Niavaran Cultural Centre, Tehran and narrative gallery, London 2014; *Recalling the Future: post-revolutionary Iranian art*, Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London, 2014; *Love Me/ Love Me Not, Contemporary Art from Azerbaijan and its Neighbors*, The 55th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Venice, 2013; *DISASTER*, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris-Pantin, 2013; *Transformed Visions*, Tate Modern, London, 2012; *Hard Copy*, Art Gwangju 2012; *Bah Man*, Aun Gallery, Tehran and Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 2011; *The Engaged Artist: Influences of Graphics on Sculpture in the Middle Ages*, Saatchi Gallery (Project Room), London, 2010; *Last Ride in a Hot Air Balloon*, The 4th Auckland Triennial, 2010; *Iran: New Voices (Exploring Contemporary Iranian Film and Video Art)*, Barbican Centre, London, 2008; *Lion under the Rainbow (Contemporary Art from Tehran)*, Athens, 2008; *Iran.Com, Iranian Art today*, Museum of New Art, Freiburg, 2006.