



Palimpsest

Darvish
Fakhr

4 SEPT –
8 NOV 2014

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EOA.PROJECTS is proud to present Darvish Fakhr's debut solo exhibition in London, Palimpsest. Over the last three years Fakhr has produced an extraordinary collection of multi-layered, ruminative pieces in response to his recent trips to Iran. In a body of work including paintings, installation and the eponymous digital collage 'Palimpsest' (2014), Fakhr explores the relationship between shared memory and the passage of time, looking both to the past and the future. The historical patination implied by the artist's chosen ground of Iranian public walls – sun-bleached, free-form noticeboards ordered only by time – is set off by the contemporary thread running through this collection.

On the surface, or else buried beneath multiple layers of paint, Fakhr presents brief, sometimes tantalizing aperçus of recent Iranian history, each one suggestive of its relationship to the present. We see Iranian peep shows, utopian landscapes and studio portraits; fortune-telling birds, telephone numbers, stencilled graffiti slogans, obituaries and, central to this body of work, offering both a way in and a challenge, a family of mostly anonymous individuals gazing out at us and the world beyond. Women in sunglasses, chador and lipstick, a bearded and brown-robed mullah, a street vendor and a former Iranian Emperor, each rendered with a classical sensitivity which prioritizes mark-making and a direct communication of texture and surface. It is Fakhr's handling of these influences which sets this collection apart, demonstrating his mercurial ability to combine a breadth of disparate elements into a coherent and mesmerising whole.

MULLAH AGAINST PINK WALL
DETAIL

2014
OIL ON LINEN
151 X 173 CM

The Palimpsest body
of work came out of
that attitudinal shift.
It came out of the fire.

A conversation with Darvish Fakhr

JENNIFER COPLEY & HENRY HEMMING

JC: Can you talk a little about your new paintings?

DF: They are a reaction to being in front of these walls in Tehran, which have a very strong essence to them. They pulsate with a life force, their own life force, which has seen so much, which has gone through so many changes, just by the nature of the politics, the nature of the history, the overthrows, the placing of various governments one over the other, each one trying to efface the last. But they're all part of this thing, that has been created, that is now the present-day Tehran. There's a sense of time coming off of the walls, in a way that I've always thought painting embodies. Because paintings take time to make. So they seem directly linked. A photograph of these walls would never do, because I need to have the visceral qualities that these defaced, refaced surfaces have. These layers...of time and meaning.

JC: These pieces are heavy with meaning.

DF: The word that comes to mind is 'palimpsest.' There is a Quran in Yemen that has been discovered and when they examined the parchment closely they noticed that there were layers underneath of ... another Quran that pre-dated this one by at least 500 years. So the multiple interpretations merge and become one reading that implies change. The history and the present cannot be separated even if they try to replace each other.

JC: The paintings are very sculptural. The way you have achieved the incising, the pasted elements, the textured surface.

DF: The walls are a witness to what they see, they take on a life form ... and the form is ... like a flesh. It can be carved and it can be marred, the way flesh can... It gets very physical. It's not so much about just adding on. I'll scrape off, and I'll discover something underneath, like I'm excavating something.

HH: Tell me about the fire.

DF: It happened about 2 years ago. One day, in Brighton, I went to my studio and found the building cordoned off by the police. I'd been working on a series of Iranian landscapes for a show at the Aun Gallery in Tehran. They were utopian, pure, idealized and totally free from people. They had become, for me, an escape. At the time I had two young children at home and these landscapes had become a kind of retreat. I had even frosted over the windows in my studio. In every sense I was blocking the world out. Then one night, the night of the fire, a homeless man, a drug addict, broke into the studio. Because it was cold he started a fire to keep himself warm before falling asleep. But the floors were wooden so the studio caught fire. He never made it out. It was unbelievably sad.

HH: What effect did this have on you and your work?

DF: When I got into the studio I saw all of these once immaculate paintings, which I had been so excited about, either destroyed or discoloured. It was shocking. But in some ways the damage made each one more interesting. It was as if they had become connected to the reality of where I was and what was happening around me. I understood the extent to which I'd shut myself away. The scars on these canvases seemed more profound than the pieces itself, so I began to work into the damaged paintings, adding military elements to most of them. In one, where smoke had damaged the middle of a pure sky, I painted an armoured helicopter. I wouldn't say that the fire politicized my work, but it illustrated to me the role destruction plays in our lives and how that can be incorporated into creation. The Palimpsest body of work came out of that attitudinal shift. It came out of the fire.

HH: How did you find Iran when you first went?

DF: It was a very soulful experience. Soulful and emotional. As a teenager, when I got into painting, my interests had drifted towards Europe and for a while I dreamed of moving to Italy and learning how to paint like the masters. But I never made it to Italy. Instead that desire was transposed to Iran. There seemed to

be a different way of thinking there, a way of being which I identified with. It was as if the things that really mattered concerned your connection to the people you loved – your family – and it wasn't so important if, let's say, you biked down the street the wrong way. There was a soulful calmness to it all. I certainly never expected to feel so free in a country like Iran. Of course I was in a privileged situation, but that visit changed my understanding of Iran and Iranian-ness and I began to incorporate what I had seen into my work.

HH: So what effect has Iranian visual culture – as opposed to Iranian culture per se – had on your practice?

DF: I was excited by what I could see Iranians doing with pattern as well as colour and flatness. It's something I became very interested in – similar to how the post-Impressionists were drawn to the colour and flatness of Japanese prints. What seemed to be a conscious uncoupling from perspective and the rules of architecture was also attractive. On a different level, I was excited by the enthusiasm for the arts you felt in Iran. It wasn't just that when I painted outside I'd experience a direct engagement with the people around me, but also in Tehran I was struck by the vitality of the gallery scene there.

HH: How does this new exhibition relate to your earlier work?

DF: In this body of work I'm not looking for a finished image, I'm interested in the states that are achieved along the way. Each piece can always be changed, just like the walls in Iran. There's a particular scarring to them which I found fascinating. These walls hold a significant weight, keeping out the world, surrounding families, and at the same time containing the history of what has happened to them. In a similar sense, I find that with my work the more time I put into a piece the more interesting its surface becomes. And the tactile surface is exciting for me – which is why I want people to touch these works. If they rub off a layer, I think it would make the piece even more interesting. I didn't feel that before the fire.



ARTIST IN HIS STUDIO

2014

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Born in 1969, Darvish Fakhr grew up in the U.S. before moving to Britain where his practice has been based for the last two decades. In 1997 he graduated from the Slade School of Fine Arts, London. In 2004 he won the BP Travel Award, through the National Portrait Gallery, which allowed him to visit his father's home country of Iran and begin his depictions of Iranian culture. Since then, Fakhr has taken Iran as his principal subject and has been exhibiting in Tehran at the prestigious Aun Gallery. In 2008 he was asked by the National Portrait Gallery to paint a portrait of the contemporary dancer Akram Khan; his nine-part panel painting now forms part of the NPG permanent exhibition. This is Fakhr's debut solo exhibition in London.

ABOUT EOA.PROJECTS

EOA.Projects was established in 2009 as a gallery platform for artists working between the Middle East, Europe and United States. Under the vision of Stephen Stapleton, founder of Edge of Arabia and The Crossway Foundation, EOA.Projects collaborates with artists in building their careers and realising their potential to an international standard. Through production studios in London and Jeddah, EOA.Projects supports artists in developing new projects including limited edition fine art prints and special commissions. In 2012, EOA.Projects opened a 400m² gallery in South-West London with a curated programme of exhibitions, film-screenings and talks aimed at international audiences.

FORTUNE TELLER
(9TH STATE)

2013
OIL ON LINEN
102 x 127 CM



NEXT SPREAD
PALIMPSEST
(STILL)

2014
OIL ON LINEN
+ PROJECTION
200 x 300 CM





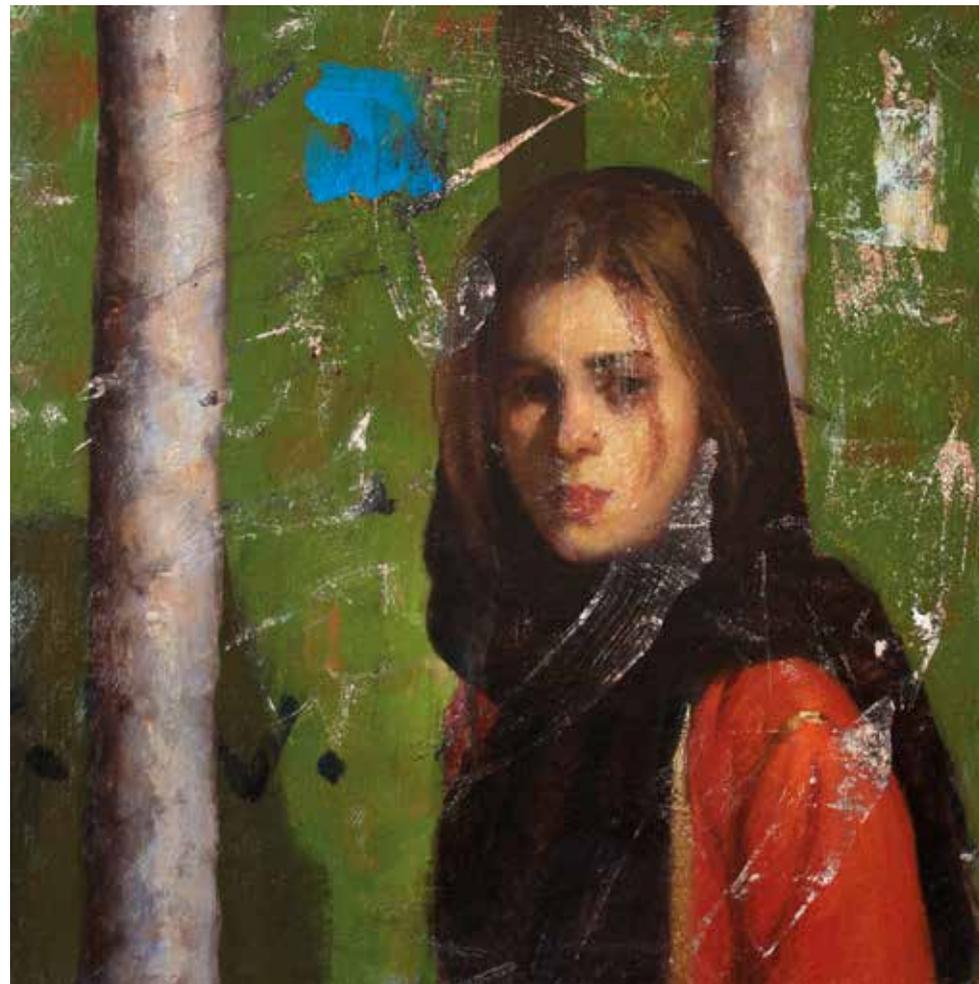
NARGESS
(23RD STATE)

2013
OIL ON BOARD
51 x 51 CM



MONA
(8TH STATE)

2013
OIL ON BOARD
51 x 51 CM



SAHAR

2014
OIL ON LINEN
60 x 60 CM



BUS STOP

2014
OIL ON LINEN
122 x 87 CM



SOLDIER

2013
CONTE ON PAPER
12.5 x 20 CM

*RED WALL WITH POSTERS
(25TH STATE)*

2014
OIL ON LINEN
50 x 50 CM



CLUTCH
(23RD STATE)

2014
OIL ON LINEN
81 x 97 CM



BLUE MOON
(17TH STATE)

2014
OIL ON CIRCULAR CANVAS
100 CM DIAMETER

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