

THE ARTIST ROOM

POUREA ALIMIRZAAE: TEAR GAS

27 April–20 May 2023

Private view: Wednesday 26 April, 6-8pm

Opening times: Wednesday–Friday, 11am–6pm and Saturday, 12–5pm

How can you tell a story without giving too much information away?

Pourea Alimirzaee, 2023

The Artist Room is delighted to present a solo exhibition of recent paintings by Pourea Alimirzaee (b.1988, Tehran, Iran), the artist's first exhibition in the United Kingdom. Alimirzaee is a painter whose beguiling and otherworldly subjects explore ambiguous and enigmatic notions of the self.

Tear Gas includes a group of recent watercolours. This new body of work arose following the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran last year, often deemed as the country's first feminist uprising responding to a political system that many believe structurally subjugates women. The movement began as a result of the death of Jīna Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, who was persecuted by the state for allegedly improperly wearing her hijab form of headscarf. The event led to widespread protests and calls for revolution. Many women protested Jīna's death by removing the compulsory hijab and cutting their hair while using the slogan *Woman, Life, Freedom*. The response from the Islamic Republic was extensive violence against a population that largely wants to see the instalment of similar human rights to other countries around the world.

The works in this exhibition reflect the fragility of this time – experienced both personally and permeating more broadly in Iranian culture and beyond. One of the key avenues of enquiry in Alimirzaee's work is toxic – sometimes known as fragile – masculinity; a violent, harmful, unhealthy form of masculinity that shapes patriarchal society and constrains men's emotional health. In his works, such as *Bubblegum Hair* (2022), androgynous figures are situated amongst dreamlike and fantastical settings that are often rich with colour and dense with pattern. 'I'm constantly conflicted with how I want to shape my masculinity versus how masculinity is often defined and imposed on me by others – both from an Iranian and Western perspective,' he

recently observed. 'I've created this character where you're not sure if it's a man or a woman with long hair. The long hair is normally a very feminine symbol.'

Hair is a key motif in the exhibition, which Alimirzaee uses as a character and symbol to represent the artist himself and broader society. In all cultures, hair holds social significance, from class to gender, beauty and religion. The choice one makes (or doesn't make) regarding the appearance of their hair is often one of the first things we evaluate and make judgements of each other on. *Forty Wigs* (2022), the largest watercolour in the exhibition, depicts an unidentifiable figure from behind with long, dark hair cascading across their back which resembles the tightly laid bricks on a wall. Differently, in *Chin Chain* (2022), strands of hair cross the canvas, almost creating an almost abstract composition. In *ATF* (2022), a shadowed figure appears constrained by thick strands of her resembling rope. Describing the painting Alimirzaee said, 'I wanted to think about, danger, like self-choking, the notion that you're struggling with yourself about certain ideas, and you don't like yourself, you feel you're tied into some sort of a space.'

Metaphor is a device also used in *Pech Pech* (2022). The painting recalls a memory from the artist's recent visit to Amoako Bofo's artist residency in Accra, Ghana, where a figure was walking outside with a bird peacefully resting on their shoulder. Fascinated by this image, Alimirzaee likened the bird to be like a second consciousness 'sitting on your shoulder and repeating in your ear, how to be, to think, to behave.'

Alimirzaee's poetic and storytelling paintings image power in the face of oppression and freedom to promote dialogue and express agency and individuality. In his work, the artist illuminates how outside events, even small or fragile ones, can 'provoke you, bother you, move you'.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Pourea Alimirzaee (b.1989, Tehran, Iran) lives and works in Vienna. In 2014, Alimirzaee moved from Tehran to Vienna, where he began studying painting at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

Recent solo exhibitions include *Pomegranate Seeds*, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Berlin (2022) and *Harem*, Improper Walls Gallery, Vienna, Austria (2018). Selected group exhibitions include *Inside Out-Narration*, Städtische Galerie, Waldkraiburg, Germany; *Mendels Disko*, Rathaus, Vienna, Austria (both 2023); *Various Others*, Galerie Nagel Draxler, Munich, Germany; and *Touch Me: Nudes from Mittinen Collection*, Kunstraum Potadam, Potsdam, Germany (both 2022).

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