

SNAKES & ISLIMI LADDERS

Ali Bakhtiari visits painter Samira Hodaie in her Tehran studio, to talk snakes, dance, literature and pixellating pictures

Iranian-born artist Samira Hodaie has shown her distinctive, pointillist-inspired works worldwide. But her November 2014 show 'And The Dance Goes On' at the Dubai Cube Arts Gallery represents the first time Hodaie has shown in the Middle East.

The terpsichorean theme builds on the 'Dancing the Sharp Edge,' which was Hodaie's show at the AB Gallery, her gallery in Switzerland in 2012, who are co-hosting the new exhibition in Dubai.

The new collection of works emphasise Hodaie's mercurial practice, bound by paint, canvas and a history of Persian literature and thought.

Educated at Tehran's Al Zahra University, she carved out a path that has seen spells assisting elder statesman of Iranian art Reza Derakshani, as well as exhibiting in shows around the world.

We met with Samira Hodaie in Tehran recently and discovered a sensitive and passionate artist, who loves to read poetry and sing classical Persian songs. She has a deep-seated love of literature from around the world, but finds herself drawn repeatedly to the Persian texts that have inspired her all her life.



(Right) 'The Dancing Red Dome' (2014)
(Far right) 'The Clown Ball' (2014)



(Left) 'My bold butterfly'
(Detail) (2014)
(Above) 'Falling Dancer
Upon The Pink' (2014)

'MY BACKGROUND IN GRAPHIC DESIGN GAVE ME AN EXTENSIVE VISUAL OUTLOOK'

What are your earliest memories of painting?

My childhood. My mother used to sketch and I loved to paint. Later on during adolescence, I became obsessed with an art history book I'd found in my father's library, flipping through its pages practically everyday. After that, I was more interested in painting.

So you could say, unlike most families, yours encouraged you to become an artist?

Absolutely, especially when I decided to go to art school, they were extremely supportive. But because painting wasn't an option in the visual arts curriculum for girls at the time, I had to study Graphic design instead.

And was this experience beneficial?

Very much, the experimental atmosphere in art school was very inspiring; we did drawing, painting, photography and our teachers would usually let us do our own thing. After having this experience, I felt as if university had nothing new to offer. It was like doing art school all over again (I did the Graphic Design course at university as well).

Your education in graphic arts, was it coherent with your painting career or, were they in conflict?

I spent some years as Reza Derakshani's assistant, he taught me something very important. He told me that in the field of image-

making, each category is not entirely distinct or separate from the others but that, they are all linked, so it's not as if you should set graphic designing aside and start painting, it is a continuum which ultimately leads to painting. And that's exactly what I did. My background in graphic design gave me an extensive visual outlook. This continued into my paintings.

But I must mention, being Reza's assistant was by far, the most essential experience to my career development. In those six years, I learned more about dealing with the art market and galleries than I ever would have in any institution. He taught me a sort of artistic lifestyle.



Your works are inspired by classical stereotypes, such as Persian paintings and Islamic architecture. In some pieces, it even goes as far as transforming your canvases into those same geometrical shapes.

What made you go towards those subjects?

What intrigued me most about Persian paintings was that all their forming elements were on the same level; as if the focal point had disappeared and this was thrilling to me since I had a graphic background. Another thing was the androgyny of the figures. It reminds me of a place beyond sexuality. For these reasons, I decided to make the first dance series, inspired by paintings of Qajar dagger dancers. For me, it represented the current dualistic situation of women in society, for the dance was both exhilarating and deadly.

And so dance became one of the main themes for your next series.

Yes. Basically, dancing became a metaphor for life and living.

Is your use of pixellation related to contemporary image structures?

Basically all my studies were in digital format, so this cyber or virtual language, so to speak, slowly showed itself through my paintings and at the same time it gave them a lively, dynamic quality.

Where do the narratives come from?

I am very much inspired by classical Persian literature, poetry and music, in a way I discover my own personal fantasies in them, like in

the story of the oracle tree or, the moth and the flame. I am so obsessed with them - to the point that I feel they are a part of my subconscious self.

Does this excessive repetition of Arabesque forms and carpet designs, point to present-day circumstances in any way?

Getting stuck in these patterns and forms, for me is like being born in to a place or religion, like a birthright, it brings along its own religious, political and economical preconceptions. The title to one of my paintings is 'Snakes and Islimi Ladders'. It represents my thoughts on the current social situation; two steps forward, three steps back, like for most of us, born during the war and sanctions. An experience that is both personal and collective.

So any plans for the next series?

Yes I'm currently researching on ways to add a third element to my paintings, something to show the pixels as tiny light particles. ■

'And The Dance Goes On' is at the Cube Gallery, DIFC Dubai until November 27th. cube-arts.com

(Above) Samira Hodaie speaks with Ali Bakhtari in her studio in Tehran.

(Below) 'The River of Lost Souls' (2014)



My Small Butterfly
on Snakes and Islimi
Ladders' (2014)