

PRESS RELEASE

Massoud Arabshahi: Early Works from the Azari Collection

23 September – 2 November 2017

Lawrie Shabibi is pleased to announce an exhibition of early works by Iranian pioneer artist Massoud Arabshahi. Comprising 25 works on paper, card, carbon paper and foil, all made between the years 1960-1965, this exhibition will give an overview of this seminal artist's output from this period, at the moment that a truly Iranian modern art was born.

Loosely grouped with others of his generation, artists that include Hossein Zenderoudi, Faramarz Pilaram and Parviz Tanavoli, Arabshahi passed through his "Saqqakhaneh" phase at this time, when he and the others were searching for a new visual language to connect Iran's rich traditions to present day reality, unusually, Arabshahi took his inspiration from reliefs of ancient Iran and Mesopotamia.

Even more so than his contemporaries, Massoud Arabshahi's work of this time is marked by experimentation. The extraordinary variety of motif, materials and technique he employed in this short period range from large, boldly executed works in poster paint that anticipate street art, to others resembling abstract expressionist action painting, with dripped metallic and industrial paint, to minutely executed panels of relief on gold foil and card. As one of Iran's foremost modernist painters, included in all the important surveys of Iranian modern art and a recipient of a retrospective at Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, remarkably little is seen of his early, formative work from the 1960s. This exhibition will re-examine and re-evaluate this under-exposed yet pivotal period of Arabshahi's work.

This group of paintings, drawings and reliefs comes from the private collection of the Azari family, formed by an Iranian / American couple resident in Tehran between 1959 and 1965. Comparable only to that of Abbey Weed Grey (now the core of the Grey Art Gallery collection at New York University), this collection is outstanding for its depth of focus within the narrow time frame of this seminal period, and is an almost certainly unique being held in private hands.

About Massoud Arabshahi

Massoud Arabshahi (b. Tehran, 1935) draws inspiration from Achaemenid and Assyrian art as well as Babylonian carvings and inscriptions. From his early work from the early 1960s to the present day, he combines tradition and modernity, often with hints of futurism. Arabshahi held his first solo exhibition at the Iran-India Centre, Tehran, in 1964, a year before graduating with a BA in Sculpture and Painting from the College of Decorative Arts, Tehran, where he completed his education in 1967 with an MA in Interior Design. Architectural reliefs have long been a major part of his work, both in his Iran and later in the United States, including large-scale commissions for the Conference Centre in Tehran's Arg Square (1969) and at the Office for Industry and Mining, Tehran (1971), and the California Insurance Building in Santa Rosa (1985). His paintings have always had a dialogue with reliefs, pushing the boundaries between the 2D and the 3D.

His work has been shown in a number of solo and group exhibitions in Iran, Europe and the United States, including *Two Modernist Iranian Pioneers*, at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, 2001; and *Iranian Contemporary Art*, Barbican Centre, London, 2001 and *Iran Modern* at The Asia Society, New York, 2013. This is the first gallery exhibition of his work in the Arab Middle East.

About the Azari Collection

Put together in the years 1959-1965, the Azari Collection comprises work by many of the painters who are now among Iran's most celebrated, including Massoud Arabshahi, Hossein Zenderoudi, Farmarz Pilaram, Nasser Ovissi, Sohrab Sepehri and Sadegh Tabrizi, alongside holdings of Iranian textiles, ceramics, antiquities and Turkmen jewellery.

About Lawrie Shabibi

Lawrie Shabibi is a contemporary art gallery housed in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. The gallery supports the long-term development of the careers of young international contemporary artists with a focus on those from the Middle East and North Africa. The gallery also organizes art historical exhibitions working with an older generation of artists from the region. Liaising with curators, institutions, museums and collectors the gallery has successfully introduced international artists to the region whilst at the same time presented Middle Eastern artists to the international contemporary arts community. By holding a regular programme of exhibitions, screenings and talks, publishing catalogues and participating in international art fairs, Lawrie Shabibi has in the space of six years been a forerunner in the development of the contemporary art scene in Dubai.

For more information on Lawrie Shabibi please visit:

<http://www.lawrieshabibi.com>

Press Inquiries

For more information, please contact Asmaa Al-Shabibi

E. asmaa@lawrieshabibi.com

M. +971 50 467 0272

T. +971 4 346 9906