

PRESS RELEASE

Farhad Ahrarnia

The Lacemaker

20 January – 4 March 2020

“Perhaps even through the initial simple acts of flickering through, browsing and selecting and saving images some degree of partial personalisation and ownership is achieved by each and every one of us.” Farhad Ahrarnia

Lawrie Shabibi is excited to announce *The Lacemaker* by Farhad Ahrarnia, our opening exhibition of 2021, and the artist's third solo at the gallery. Comprising images drawn from a diverse range of sources and media – the internet, printed or painted material, and composed with embroidery, painted metalwork and grooming items – the exhibition gives new insight into this Shiraz (Iran) and Sheffield (UK) based artist's intriguing eclectic practice.

Role-playing and performance, the perception of surface and the notion that appearances are skin deep are recurrent themes in Ahrarnia's work, here expressed in four distinct groups of *Embroideries*. These include: faked portraits of Boko Haram brides depicting much older, attractive individuals in order to gain attention and sympathies; various white film actors in “Arab dress” portraying TE Lawrence (“Lawrence of Arabia”); the Italian actor Franco Nero dressed as silent film star Rudolph Valentino as “The Sheikh”; and, the performance artist Nasim Aghdam, the “YouTube Shooter”, who having been heavily censored online for her vegan and animal right activities and motivated by perceived discrimination by YouTube towards her channels, stormed their headquarters, injuring four before turning the gun on herself. Each of these characters stand for a set of entangled, interrupted, failed or manipulated ideals and desires. Alongside these, a final group of *Embroideries* shows covers of Harper's Bazaar magazines superimposed with images of actual bazaars.

Exhibited with these *Embroideries* are works of a type Ahrarnia has never shown before, yet which have been in development for the past six years. Working with a brother and sister team of commercial painters in Hamdan, Western Iran, Ahrarnia uses Soviet social realist and 19th century European style paintings as the basis of his compositions. Adding objects acquired from the bazaar directly to the surfaces of the artworks, Ahrarnia's compositions are a direct challenge to the hierarchy of painting vs. found objects. His sourcing of these objects and inspiration comes from the antique shops he trawls, the bazaars of Iran and the many car-boot sales that he used to attend in Yorkshire, almost religiously every Sunday morning regardless of the weather.

Ahrarnia is aware of the implications of appropriation and its conceptual potentialities: through the creation of reproductions a new set of qualities emerges. The painters use images of existing paintings, not to produce exact copies. The applied brush strokes and the painterly marks achieved are always different from the originals, sometimes slightly more crude or coarse, or more rigid and self-conscious. Ahrarnia's interest in these qualities, the notion of cultural mimicry which never feels “authentic”, which runs deep in many aspects of our cross-cultural multiple realities, and our state of selecting and editing images, and to some degree reinforce our status, interests and ambitions. Ahrarnia makes these images his own, through the additive process of embroidering, creating a texture otherwise lacking from flat digital images, and by fixing objects to paintings made by commercial painters, questioning notions of originality.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Farhad Ahrarnia (b. 1971, Shiraz) is an Iranian-British artist, based in Shiraz and Sheffield. He adopts and draws knowledge from an extensive variety of craft making techniques relevant to his localities. Through a rigorous methodology of citing art historical references, particularly those of Saqqakhaneh (a movement from the 1960's where the then contemporary artists tapped into Iranian Popular Culture, traditional craft and Persian artefacts), Russian Constructivism and Surrealism, he continues to dissect and re-articulate the spirit and experience of modernity and modernism in contexts other than exclusively Western. Thus entangling, twisting, complicating and interrupting the established art historical categories, narratives and dichotomies.

Ahrarnia holds a degree in Experimental and Documentary Film Theory and Practice from the Northern Media School, Sheffield Hallam University, England. Ahrarnia has exhibited in several solo shows such as Art in Another Language, Galerie Janine Rubeiz, Beirut, 2019; Something for the Touts, the Nuns, the Grocery Clerks and You, Lawrie Shabibi, 2017; A Dish Fit for the Gods, Lawrie Shabibi, 2015; Stage on Fire, Rose Issa Projects, London, 2014; Canary in a Coal Mine, Rose Issa Projects, London, 2014 and Stitched, Leighton House Museum in collaboration with Rose Issa Projects, London, 2008. Recent group shows include: Manouchehri Merchant House, Kashan, Iran, 2016; Shirin Gallery, Tehran, Iran, 2016; Unseen, Lawrie Shabibi, 2017; Recentring Modernism, Insights sector, Art Basel Hong Kong, with Lawrie Shabibi, 2016; Serpentineform, Museo di Roma, Italy, 2016; Open Your Eyes, Rose Issa Projects, London, 2014; Embroideremania, Hinterland Kunst Art for Vienna Art Week, 2013; Bringing the War Home, Winchester School of Art, 2013; The Beginning of Thinking is Geometric, Maraya Art Centre/Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah, 2013; Aks: pictorial representations from Iran, Rose Issa Projects, London, 2012; Come Together, Edge of Arabia, London, 2012; Migrasophia, Maraya Contemporary Art Centre, Sharjah, UAE, 2012.

His work is in several public and private collections including The British Museum, London, UK; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), Los Angeles, USA; Cartwright Hall Art Gallery, Bradford; Harewood House, Leeds, UK; Mohammed Afkhami, Dubai, UAE; Huma Kabakci, Istanbul, Turkey. He lives between Shiraz (Iran) and Sheffield (UK).

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Lawrie Shabibi was founded in 2010 and opened its doors in early 2011 in Alserkal Avenue, located within the light industrial warehouse district of Al Quoz in Dubai. Following the relocation of several renowned galleries, this quickly became the hub of contemporary art in the region.

We support the long-term development of the careers of young international contemporary artists, with a focus on those from the Middle East and North Africa, and more recently diasporic artists within the UK. We have also organized art historical exhibitions, working with an older generation of artists from the Middle East and North Africa region. In October 2020 we held our first exhibition at our London outpost in Cromwell Place.

For more information on Lawrie Shabibi please visit: <http://www.lawrieshabibi.com>

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