



*The Ladder of Divine Ascent, Monastery of St. Catherine Sinai, 12th century, Egypt*



*Photograph of 22 Gia Long Street by Hubert van Es, during the American evacuation on 29 April, 1975*

## Climbing Jacob's Ladder

Shahpour Pouyan's performance of *Jacob's Ladder*, on the grounds of the UNTITLED Miami Beach art fair, comments on the recent history of war, the repeated mistakes and errors of judgment therein, and the cataclysmic effects on individuals' lives. Conjuring the history of evacuation operations, the performance spotlights one of the dire consequences of conflict: that of 'liberation.' The hope of rescue and the desperate need for a mythical 'act of god' to avoid complete abandonment, are the main tenets of the performance—and of Shahpour Pouyan's personal experience during the Iran-Iraq War.

Presented by Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, AKArt Advisory, and The Committee, with the support of Alserkal Avenue, Dubai and The Compleat Sculptor, the iconic and dramatic images of helicopter evacuation operations worldwide have created a portrait of crisis, and of the contemporary "saviour." Seen within the codex of Judeo-Christianity religious imagery, the helicopter both connects the earth and heaven — as the ladder does in Jacob's dream in *The Bible* — and symbolizes Jesus saving humanity by restoring freedom to mankind. Pouyan's performance focuses on the poetic moment when human salvation and redemption come into play.

Eternal fear of loneliness, and the mythical desire for salvation, remain relevant in contemporary conflicts amidst its technology and supposed expertise. These themes also overlap with the environs of Miami's art fair week. The controlled nature of the performance — although reassuring — evokes a fear of being alone in an unsafe and chaotic environment, wastefulness, and the ultimate futility of political and intellectual elites.

With degrees in math and physics and a background in philosophy, Pouyan grew up in a military family in Iran: "I read military

technology magazines in my father's library, fascinated both by the brutality and mystery of stories of war," the artist shares. The performance, lasting only several impactful moments, takes place at 'nautical twilight,' a time which military units often treat with heightened security, and in which everyone assumes a defensive position.

New works from Pouyan's *PTSD* series will also be presented by Lawrie Shabibi in booth C06 at UNTITLED. This installation in the medium of ceramics — an ancient material and technique of artistic production, also commonly prescribed for those struggling to overcome trauma — examines a series of monumental religious domes from around the world. The works present an identical silhouette from all sides of the dome, a unique ancient historical architectural structure. Projecting an almost divine symmetry, the dome has often been used as an ideological expression of power. Selections from the series have been selected for inclusion in the upcoming Kochi-Muziris Biennale.

On Friday, December 5 at 12:30pm, as part of UNTITLED. TALKS (located at the fair's beach terrace), an artist talk entitled "Holding Out For A Hero: Conflict, Hope and Betrayal" (about the timeliness/timelessness of Jacob's Ladder, and the link to the artist's *PTSD* series), will be held with Shahpour Pouyan and William Lawrie, Director of Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai, and former Christie's Head of Contemporary Middle Eastern Art. The conversation will focus on the performance's cinematic overtones, how it encapsulates our shared deep fear of abandonment, and the artist's personal childhood experiences in Iran—which inform his attitude to current crises in the Middle East, and worldwide, such as Ebola.

Shahpour Pouyan's work is a commen-

tary about power, domination, and possession through the force of culture. Born in Isfahan, Iran, in 1979, Shahpour Pouyan currently lives and works between New York and Tehran. He recently completed an MFA in Integrated Practices and New Forms at Pratt Institute, New York, and has an MFA in Painting from the Tehran University of Art. He previously studied Neoplatonic Philosophy at the Iranian Institute of Philosophy and received a diploma in Math and Physics from Elmieh School, Tehran. Between 2007 and 2009 he taught art history and the history of Persian Architecture at Science and Culture University, Tehran. Pouyan has had numerous solo gallery shows, including shows at Ave Gallery, Tehran (2008), XVA Gallery, Dubai (2009), and Lawrie Shabibi (2011), and has participated in numerous group exhibitions and art fairs around the world. His work has also been included in publications produced both in and out of Iran and is part of many prominent private collections and the permanent collection of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. He has participated in several international residencies including International Cite Des Arts, Paris, and the Pegasus Art Foundation, Hyderabad, India, and began one at the Elizabeth Foundation for the Arts, New York, in June 2014.

Lawrie Shabibi is a contemporary art gallery housed in a 3000 square foot warehouse in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue arts and culture hub. The gallery's supports international contemporary artists mainly from the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. By holding a regular programme of exhibitions, screenings and talks, publishing catalogues and participating in international art fairs, the gallery engages the wider local and international community. The gallery represents Hamra Abbas, Adel Abidin, Wafaa Bilal, Asad Faulwell, Nadia Kaabi-Linke, Taus Makhacheva, Nabil Nahas, Driss Ouadahi, Nathaniel Rackowe, Marwan Sahmarani, Larissa Sansour, Yasam Sasmazer, Shahpour Pouyan and Adeel uz Zafar.