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Shahpour Pouyan, "PTSD"

Kevin Jones

Lawrie Shabibi, Dubai

The beautifully illustrated catalogue of Iranian artist Shahpour Pouyan's latest show at Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi gallery includes one very odd photograph. The artist's tools — a marker, a tape measure and a protractor — are splayed across a soiled potter's wheel. Perhaps this out-of-place glimpse into an artistic backstage is included to insist on this new work as Pouyan's first foray into ceramics. The wheel itself rebounds nicely off the show's title, "PTSD" (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder): its steady, cyclical revolutions channel the soothing, therapeutic vibes that make ceramics a prescribed pursuit for PTSD sufferers. For all its salutary virtues, though, the wheel is at the center of a vortex of tensions that spin through this show, as Pouyan has devilishly enlisted the restful, ancient craft of ceramics into his disquieting exploration of the rather modern business of power and destruction.



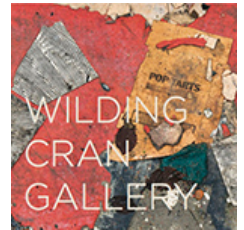
Shahpour Pouyan, Still Life, 2014. Glazed ceramic and acrylic, dimensions variable. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai

Four groups of works are shown on tables and pedestals in a space resembling an artifact storeroom or forensic display area. Circling the tabletop forest of aestheticized artillery shells in the stately yet eerie *Still Life* (2014), viewers are drawn into Pouyan's signature strategy of mingling decorative and deadly: the perfectly distributed, patina-finished objets are read as both wartime relics and ornamental vases. Similarly, *Tzar Trauma* (2014), a series of six craggy-surfaced domes progressing in size from under a millimeter to over 30 centimeters, documents the increasing might of nuclear destruction. Starkly depicting A-bomb evolution — from "conventional" 1940s US-led blasts to the devastating Tsar Bomba tested by the Soviet Union in 1961 — the otherwise innocent, minimalist structures function like an ominous succession of freeze-framed mushroom clouds

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Finish: 31/10/2011
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Finish: 11/09/2011
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Begins: 08/09/2011
Finish: 10/09/2011
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Shahpour Pouyan, Unthinkable Thought, 2014. Glazed ceramic and acrylic, dimensions variable. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai



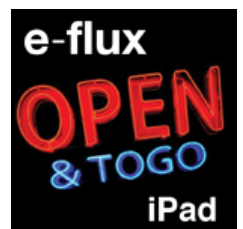
Shahpour Pouyan, Failed Object 1, 2014. Glazed ceramic, 30 x 28 cm. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai

Two- and three-dimensionalities interplay throughout the show: *Still Life* actually recreates a vintage WWI photograph of the camera-worthy shell display, while *Tzar Trauma's* grim prophesy is manifest in the accompanying illustration of Iran's tallest peak, inverted to resemble a vanishing valley. Equally, the collection of *Failed Objects* (2014) — supine, pod- or vase-like terracotta artifacts perforated by holes and punctuated by spouts — dialogue with the ersatz scientific diagrams hung behind them. The pencil drawings, replete with "how-it-works" arrows and symbols, try to ascribe function to the oddly ambiguous pieces. As unsettling as it is aesthetically inviting, *"PTSD"* not only showcases Pouyan's newfound ceramic mastery, it is also a testament to his uncanny negotiation of the boundaries between beauty and peril.

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Shahpour Pouyan, Installation view, Projectiles 1-5, 2011. Courtesy Lawrie Shabibi Gallery, Dubai

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