

ARTICLES

ONE TO WATCH

Full Metal Jacket

Upcoming Iranian artist **Shahpour Pouyan** is showing some of his intriguing works at Dubai's Lawrie Shabibi Gallery from 18 April-8 June. Canvas Guide asked curator **Ali Bakhtiari** to sit down with the artist for a Q+A on hooves, Damien Hirst and armour.

Ali Bakhtiari: You grew up in Isfahan - when did you first realize you wanted to be an artist and how has your childhood affected your aesthetic?

Shahpour Pouyan: I remember I was painting a lot, usually animals with many tails and big manes. It was my daily leisure activity and I had to paint one a day - it was almost like a responsibility I set on myself and I used to compare each piece with the others to see which ones were more glorious and which images stronger. I'd finish them just in time each day to be free to watch my children's programmes on Iranian TV. The most important thing I remember from my childhood, though, is the beauty of the palaces of Isfahan, its mosques and the old bazaar - our house was filled with handicrafts.

My routine sightseeing route was to the traditional bazaar with my mother, where the craftsmen would etch delicate metallic bowls. I used to watch them for a long time. These sorts of memories are a part of my childhood as was war: Isfahan's bombardment and all the soldiers who were going to the front out in our streets, that was another part. I remember the time when they bombarded the Isfahan refinery and I saw all this smoke on the horizon. That was my very first encounter with the word "enemy".

AB: You are fascinated with the patriarchal aspect of Iranian society - why so?

SP: It is obvious! If you look at the very long history of Iran, with just one exception before Islam, masculine power and monarchical structure formed the main body of Iranian culture. Iranians had a talent when it came to representing god-kings, the result of thousands of years in Asia and some parts of Europe. Even in transforming Iran from a Roman republic to a kingdom the country drew on the Sassanid dynasty. You can see this in the structure of Iranian families, tribes and the race as a whole - Iranians really love to empower this tradition. I think there is reasons for this, and good ones, in fact, I think Iranian people are still always on the lookout for a hero.

AB: In your *Hooves* series, you concentrate on only the hoof of the animal - how did this series come about and why this focus?

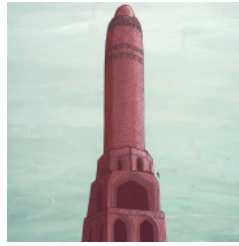
SP: The base of these works is Iranian miniatures, particularly *sihqalam*, but through studies through Asian mythology and Asian religions, I found new references. The cow is a symbol of power in both Indian and Iranian culture. In fact some historical eras even saw the cow depicted on Indian coins.

These symbols were sealed with gold or silver caps which were a definition of art based on wealth abundance. I tried to have fun with Hegel's synthesis, a kind of fusion of Magritte's Surrealism with contemporary pop and dark humor - you could call it a bitter note with a very long history of power.

In fact, in these works I wanted to show the relationship between art and wealth, the synthesis of these two factors effect aesthetics, art and even eroticism, something that has appeared in art history since Archaemenid rytons to Damien Hirst's diamond skulls.

AB: Other works, such as *Towers* have a distinctly phallic aesthetic - when did you first notice this occurrence in Iranian architecture and what does it mean to you?

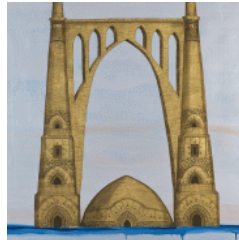
SP: Many years of wandering and photographing hundreds of historical monuments and buildings brought me a kind of vision.



(Detail) 'Bahram Gour Tower'. 2010. Acrylic on canvas. 102 x 145 cm.



(Detail) 'The Hoof'. 2010. Acrylic on canvas. 190 x 110 cm.



(Detail) 'The Towers'. 2011. Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas. 200 x 135 cm.