

Bazaar

Harper's

ARABIA

ART

ISSUE 20



*Lalla
Essaydi*
and her
WOMEN of
the INTERIOR

MIDDLE EASTERN COLLECTORS & ARTISTS UNITE

BLACK^{AND} BLUE

(Below) *Wound 4*.
2015. Inks on linen.
122 x 122 cm.
Courtesy of Leila
Heller Gallery.

Arawing on diverse cultural sources including literature, history, folk art and religion, Pouran Jinchi has developed a visual vocabulary that inhabits the space between abstraction and calligraphy. Working in a realm that is defined by the overlapping fields of painting, sculpture, drawing, and writing, her art practice entails a conversation between the materials she uses and the subjects she addresses. Inscription in her art becomes a visual apparatus beyond meaning. Jinchi produces textual landscapes that are recognizable yet illegible. This fall, Leila Heller Gallery New York will mount *Black and Blue*, an exhibition of Jinchi's most recent work. This body of work is an artistic response to pervasive social and political violence. Revisiting Sadegh Hedayat's modernist classic, *The Blind Owl*, Jinchi explores the universal tropes of pain and violence threaded throughout the novel. One particular passage is explored repeatedly across various mediums – "I write only for my shadow, which is cast on the wall in front of the light. I must introduce myself to it." Jinchi dismantles the text, drawing fragments of the letters onto patches of paper that are then stitched together with copper thread into quilts. She paints the sentence onto raw canvases where the characters evoke a

battlefield strewn with the wounded. Each line of the first page of the book is rendered into sculptural form; Jinchi painstakingly cuts each letter from a sheet of copper, forming it into abstract shapes by hand, and stringing it onto a chain fabricated from copper safety pins.

Currently living and working in New York City, Pouran Jinchi was born in Iran and studied engineering before becoming an artist. Her work has been collected and exhibited in leading museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C.; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; and Zayed National Museum, Abu Dhabi. Two of her paintings are currently on view at the 56th Venice Biennale through November 2015.

Over the past year, I've been making regular visits to your studio here in Brooklyn. It's a beautiful space, filled with light. It's peaceful and embracing.

The space in which I work is very important to me. There is a sense of order to my studio that helps my creative process. I sketch out my work carefully before I begin making it. And even as I am making the pieces, I have a sense of how they will be presented in an exhibition.

Your process is very planned, very meticulous. It strikes me that there is a distinct relationship between the materials you use, the colors you use and the meaning embedded in the work. Can you discuss this in relation to this particular body of work?

Every new body of work presents new possibilities to me. I like to experiment with new forms, new materials, and new colors. I think about how the material can add dimension, texture, and color to the work that can help convey meaning. For this exhibit, I used a defined palette of blues, blacks, red, and fuchsia. I use raw canvas,

*In July, Dr. Shiva Balaghi, a curator and scholar of Middle Eastern art, spoke with Iranian artist **Pouran Jinchi** in her Brooklyn studio about the works in her forthcoming exhibition, **Black and Blue**.*

handmade paper, transfer paper, and shiny copper. These surfaces all reflect something about the work itself.

Of course ultimately, my art takes different meanings based on how other people see the work. That communicative capacity of art is very important to me, for people to be able to see the work through their own lenses and understand it in their own way. *The pieces in the show are extraordinarily beautiful. Yet in this exhibit, you are exploring the themes of pain and violence. Describe the tension between beauty and pain in this work.*

The idea for this body of work stemmed from a human reaction I had to this pervasive violence in our society. There is always news of more violence—in Syria, Iraq, the earthquake in Nepal. What is a possible artistic response to all this violence? This question led me back to Sadeq Hedayat's novel, *The Blind Owl*. Pain and violence are threaded throughout the novel. So it became a starting point for this new work.

At the same time, I then wanted the viewer's experience of the work to be reflective and contemplative. When it comes to art, beauty is very important to me. When we see something beautiful, it attracts us, draws us in, and puts us in a space of contemplation. In each work, there is an element of fear, of danger, of angst. Yet this is balanced by a sense of calm, of beauty.

Sadeq Hedayat's writing clearly resonates with you. On the one hand, his writing was very rooted in Iranian problems and thematics. On the other hand, his writing has a universal resonance and translates well into other languages. I can see this element in your own art.

In some ways I do identify with Hedayat, even though we are from different eras. I can identify with his life experiences. His stories are dark, always full of angst and pain. But he's always holding something back, either consciously or not. I think this is a reason he uses so many metaphors in his writing. And yes, his

writing is deeply Iranian on the one hand, but it also translates well and has a universal meaning. This aspect has been very appealing to me.

*There is a fascinating installation piece in this exhibit. It features 243 ink drawings of dots—the diacritical notations taken from the pages of *The Blind Owl*. Each noqteh or dot has its own unique design—your detailed interpretation of various Islamic designs.*

In Islamic art and calligraphy, the noqteh represents the beginning. Each word we write, each line we draw begins with a dot. In writing, the dots help determine the letters and therefore give meaning to the words. And yet, when Persian is written by hand, these dots often get overlooked, they can disappear. So I wanted to focus on these dots, on their importance in giving language its meaning. Sometimes the things we don't notice at first glance are the most important of all.

In this body of work, you return to Persian calligraphy. But the letters are fragmented; nothing is actually legible. Can you talk about the relationship of language to this body of work?

My art is text-based. I'm really a writer without words. At some level, every work in this show is a form of writing. Artists always use their art to say something they can't convey with words. I happen to work with Persian text, but any language can be translated into a visual experience. **HBA**

Black and Blue runs until 24 October at Leila Heller Gallery, New York.

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Pouran Jinchi