

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Ayad, Myrna. "Sharjah Art Foundation exhibition on the late Iranian artist Farideh Lashai is 'like a cabinet of curiosities'" *The National* (March 23, 2016).

## TheNational

Sharjah Art Foundation exhibition on the late Iranian artist Farideh Lashai is 'like a cabinet of curiosities'



The installation *Tyranny of Autumn, Not Every Tree Can Bear* is one of the standouts in the exhibition of Farideh Lashai's works at Sharjah Art Foundation. Alfredo Rubio / Sharjah Art Foundation

It's hard to say which space in Bait Al Serkal at the Sharjah Art Foundation features the most poignant work in the retrospective exhibition on Farideh Lashai. But one of the biggest draws is easily a corridor heavy with the late Iranian artist's *Horses* series.

"They are very powerful, gestural paintings," says Sheikha Hoor Al Qasimi, president of SAF, who curated the show. Lashai had lost her mother to cancer in 1988, and began painting horses in havoc, only to later realise that they symbolise death. Painting after painting lines the corridor that leads to a self-portrait from 1986 – quite the aesthetic climax.

This exhibition comes three years after Lashai's death from cancer, and three months after her first retrospective at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art curated by Germano Celant and Faryar Javaherian. But while the curatorial duo sought to trace Lashai's life in a chronological display, Sheikha Hoor chose to focus on the artist and presents an experience in a non-sequential narrative.

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Overall, the exhibition feels like every corner holds a secret.

"It is like a cabinet of curiosities," says the artist's daughter, Maneli Keykavoussi, who heads the Lashai Foundation. However beautiful the newly renovated Bait Al Serkal is, it is a difficult space to work with because it has multiple rooms and odd spaces. But hands down, the show is as much experiential as it is a wonderful journey through one modernist's colourful life – from her early Impressionist paintings and abstract trees and horses to delicate canvases and video installations.

"You're entering and exiting rooms, so that very much adds to the visual narrative of the exhibition," says Sheikha Hoor. "I wanted to showcase the entire breadth of her career without overwhelming the viewer with too much work, leaving room for the works to breathe and the viewer space for contemplation."

In this scattered chronology are glass cabinets of archival material that feel lost in the space, but offer a peek into the artist's poetry, photographs and writings. The SAF incarnation also borrows works from collectors in the UAE.

One standout installation is *Tyranny of Autumn, Not Every Tree Can Bear*, for which SAF specially constructed a room in the courtyard. In darkness, four monumental mesh cylinders of different sizes hold paintings of suspended cypress leaves on Plexiglas, which are inscribed with the famed poetry of Hafez.

This is Lashai's forest, first exhibited in 2004 at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art as part of *Gardens of Iran: Ancient Wisdom, New Vision*.

She chose cypress for its courage, says Keykavoussi: "It's the only tree that endures harsh conditions."

It was while working on that installation that Lashai was diagnosed with breast cancer and, against the wishes of her daughter and friends, avoided medical treatment for fear of being unable to complete her work.

"My mother lost her life over this production," says Keykavoussi. "She even worked on the *Goya piece* 10 days before she died."

Titled *When I Count, There are Only You, But When I Look, There is Only a Shadow*, the piece is inspired by Spanish romantic painter Francisco Goya's *The Disasters of War* (1810-20). A mesmerising masterpiece, it combines painting and projected animations – a style Lashai practised in her later years, and of which Sheikha Hoor has included several examples in the show. Placed in a small room, it induces a sense of intimacy as the viewer engages with the work. The same can be said of other areas in the exhibition, and the architecture augments the experience. Upstairs are examples of Lashai's glasswork, a medium she experimented with early in her career. There is a sense of warmth as the light shines through these delicate pieces.

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The exhibition of Farideh Lashai's artworks occupy several rooms and floors at Bait Al Serkal at the Sharjah Art Foundation. Alfredo Rubio / Sharjah Art Foundation

Lashai's work will tour three European institutions beginning next year, and two monographs, one by Skira and the other by SAF, are scheduled for release this year.

"I love this show and I love the first, which was really important for me in terms of seeing my mother, so to speak, for the first time [since her death]," says Keykavoussi. "Here, it's more focused on the works and it's more intimate. The difference is that Sheikha Hoor is a painter herself."

Perhaps that aspect lends the show a personal touch, but the ultimate objective, in which Sheikha Hoor has succeeded, is to portray Lashai as a multimedia artist whose ideas and artistic expressions continually evolved throughout her life.

• **The Farideh Lashai retrospective is at Sharjah Art Foundation until May 14. Visit [www.sharjahart.org](http://www.sharjahart.org)**

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