



Aida Mahmudova | PASSING BY...

Cover:
Rambling vine, 2015 (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
69 x 82.7 in / 175 x 210 cm

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Aida Mahmudova | PASSING BY...

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“Passing by...”

“Memory is the material of my work.” – Aida Mahmudova often applied this brief but very precise analysis on her own art pieces. Actually, we can understand several crucial aspects of her artistic departure point through this statement. On the one hand the poetic sentence describes her source of inspiration, and the aims she is striving for while creating, i.e. the constant desire of remembering and the investigation of her personal and cultural identity through the artistic process connected to this very memory. On the other hand, it leads us to the discovery that the creating process and the works themselves too are associated with three aspects: besides memory, observation and imagination are also integral parts in her practice. However, if we take a closer look at these aspects, we realise that there are different temporal perspectives that we can trace here: through the present observation she recalls the past – as it has survived in and through her memory – and imagines the future. Aida Mahmudova thus analyses all these three temporal layers incorporated in her paintings that are at first sight landscapes, cityscapes and seascapes, but then they soon turn to be pictorial investigations of the (workings of) memory itself. In this way, the fragile present condition will serve as a tool of both documenting and foreseeing the artist’s beloved context.

The works are personal interpretations of the contemplated natural and built surroundings of the artist’s home, especially Baku, the fascinating capital of Azerbaijan, as well as the Caspian Sea and the Absheron Peninsula. She zealously keeps on investigating the genuine heritage of the city and its neighbourhood, often concentrating on those parts that are quickly getting dwarfed by the recent architectural boom of Azerbaijan: the traditional buildings and vernacular architecture that she can still find – who knows how long, though – in the periphery of the

modern town, just like the authentic natural scenery and the enthralling seashores. This aforementioned “personal interpretation” of the landscape means not only special viewpoints and sometimes peculiar choice of themes but also curious accents on aspects and motives to indicate their being essential for the artist. Thus, these works are not the results of an “objective view” – nota bene, landscape painting or even cityscapes were never about the “exact” rendering of a place: throughout the history of modern painting artists inevitably added something to this rendering of the spot. Even in those periods and genres, for example in the 18th century vedute, where many artists were striving for perfect, exact and objective depiction, the final result was a subjective view – fortunately, we can add. In fact, this “subjectivity” of the landscape and cityscape is exactly that we appreciate the most in the history of these genres, we can quote an endless list from Claude Lorrain and Salvator Rosa through Canaletto and Caspar David Friedrich until even Piet Mondrian and Anselm Kiefer to illustrate how the same subject – the natural and built scenery – can inspire artists to create pictures in a wide diversity of style, approach and emphasis. In a similar way as the traditional representatives, Aida Mahmudova also depicts not only what she sees, but also how she sees, how she remembers and how she foresees the fate of the visual elements



The neighbours, 2015

she had collected during the periods of profound reflection and contemplation of her admired home. The layered title of the current exhibition also refers to the various temporal perspectives embedded in Aida Mahmudova’s works, as well as to the observation and creating process of the artist: “Passing By...” might indicate how visitors of these sites and sights pass by to discover their hidden beauty. But not only: it can also refer to Time itself passing by and leaving its signs on the buildings, in the “form” – or, actually, we should rather say: in the deforming way – of crumbling, decay or traces of weathering. Thus, through the work of Time both natural and artificial elements “pass by”, they get altered and constantly fade away, until the point when they live only in our memories. And not lastly, “Passing By...”

also alludes to the artist herself, who depicts those surroundings that she regularly passes during her daily commuting routine from her home in the outskirts of Baku to downtown.

What makes Aida Mahmudova’s work of special interest however is that she does not stop at this point of simply representing her context filtered through her remembering, but shows that even our memory is not stable at all. Not only because we forget things, but especially because the weight and order of importance of the elements in our memory can change, just like the physical objects themselves. What we found significant and pivotal to remember might “pass by...” to give its place to previously unnoticed elements we find noteworthy now. To illustrate this phenomenon, it is enough to think about how we can appreciate even the beauty of the mundane from a long distance, let it be physical or temporal distance, not (only) the special moments or renowned monuments. We are often more bound to the ordinary rather than to the extraordinary: we remember for example our favourite cities not by its impressive buildings and must-see sights, but also by the anonymous little streets and seemingly insignificant locations, places that others might find “boring” as a location, unless we share similar memories... Therefore the analysis of the reasons of this different highlights and emphases might help in understanding ourselves better while questioning: why is this aspect more gripping for me now? Aida Mahmudova shows us through her personal experience how memory and the examination of its functioning influences our identity, self-positioning and self-understanding.

How does all this affect the appearance of the images? Actually, the style and technique that the artist had developed in the recent years are largely contributing in rendering her considerations in an aesthetically pleasing work of art. Already in her previous pictures – even if they were of smaller scale – she departed from a concrete view, but let her affection, emotions and feelings towards the location reorganise and overwrite the vision, as well as to highlight certain elements, again, even if these elements might seem insignificant. This continues in the new series too. Just to quote an appealing example: the light-handed quick touch to indicate the drying clothes hanging in the balcony in the image titled *“The neighbours”*. In her works, also the consistency of the paint is thrillingly various: in some cases so liquid that it drips through the whole

height of the large-scale canvas, while in other cases the impasto is so thick that almost brings the painting on the edge of becoming a low relief – no wonder that sometimes she opens her paintings towards the third dimension by adding physical elements, thus letting the work become an installation. This significant difference between the layers is possible only



Somewhere in between, 2015

through a dedicated, careful and conscious working method – the same qualities we can trace when observing the compositional order and delicate palette of the paintings. As the artist formulated it in an earlier statement: *“Our physical world is shifting at a pace so rapid that our memories are frequently blurred, and our remembered past is often forgotten or altered by our subconscious.”* Actually, Aida Mahmudova is right in examining the role of this subconscious only when remembering, but not asking its help while creating. Her painting is not automatic or incautiously and unconsciously instinctive, just the contrary: she carefully and meticulously builds up the picture, weights the elements, plans the composition, studies the impasto and not lastly knows when to stop.

One of the purest and most condensed paintings in the exhibition bears the title *“Somewhere in between”* – actually this is valid not only to the image and its subject-matter, but can also be a nice metaphor of our life, that is in great part constituted through our memories: we are always in between something that has passed and what we try to remember and something yet to come that we try to foresee, however, we often fail in both attempts. Aida Mahmudova’s intention in and through her creation is not solely pointed towards the final result of the artistic process, i.e. the picture itself, but is also a defence and consolidation of her identity through the artistic elaboration of memory.

DR. ZOLTÁN SOMHEGYI
Art historian

Mulberry, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
65 x 82.7 in / 165 x 210 cm





Mulberry, 2015 (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
65 x 82.7 in / 165 x 210 cm

Somewhere we don't belong, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
78.75 x 49 in / 200 x 125 cm (diptych)





Somewhere we don't belong, 2015 (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
78.75 x 49 in / 200 x 125 cm (diptych)



On my way home, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
106.3 x 202.75 in / 270 x 515 cm



On my way home, 2015 (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
106.3 x 202.75 in / 270 x 515 cm

Rambling vine, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
69 x 82.7 in / 175 x 210 cm





Rambling vine, 2015 (detail)
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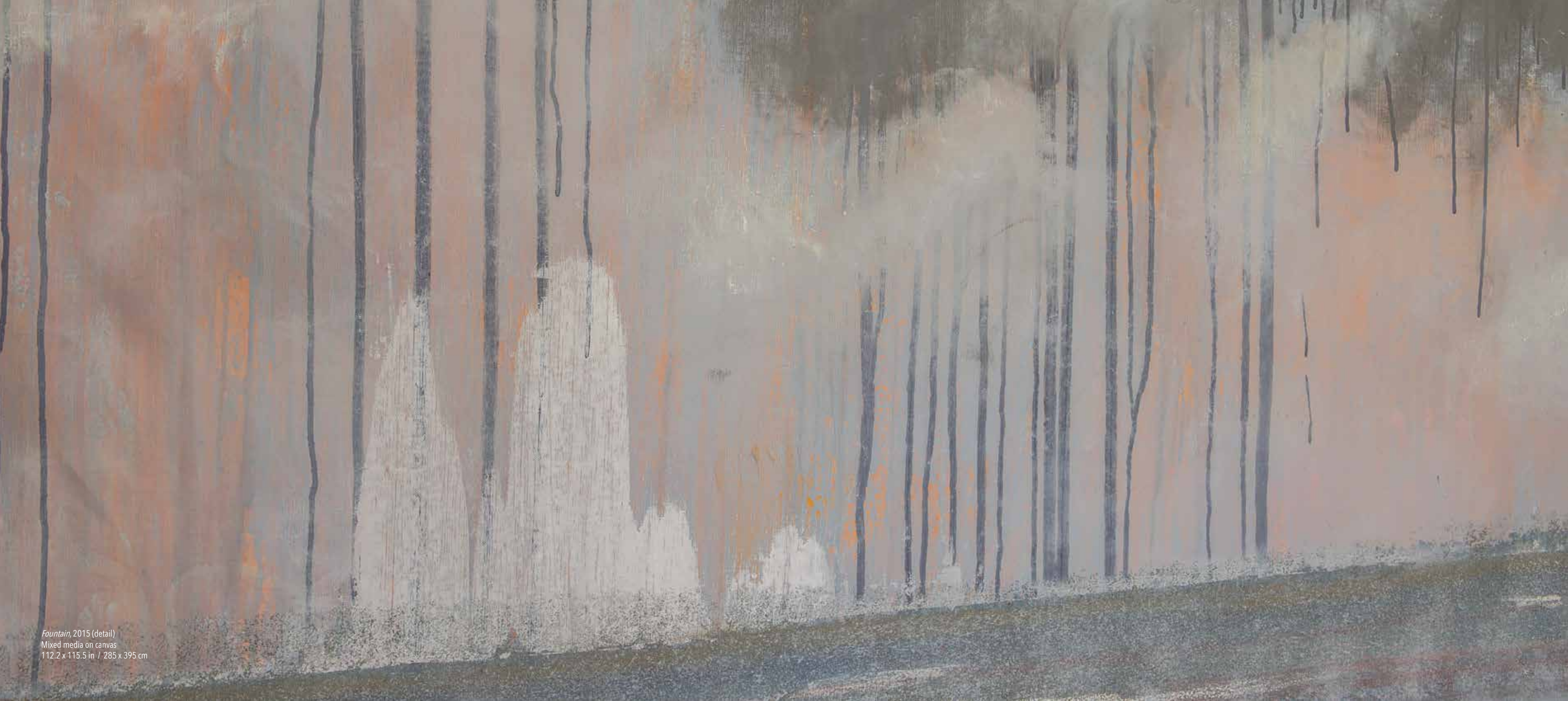
The neighbors, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
78.7 x 118 in / 200 x 300 cm



The neighbors, 2015 (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
78.7 x 118 in / 200 x 300 cm



Fountain, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
112.2 x 115.5 in / 285 x 395 cm



Fountain, 2015 (detail)
Mixed media on canvas
112.2 x 115.5 in / 285 x 395 cm



Somewhere in between, 2015
Mixed media on canvas
98.4 x 59 in / 250 x 150 cm

Aida Mahmudova

B. 1982, Azerbaijan

Lives and works in Baku and London

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EDUCATION

2006 Degree in Fine Arts, Central Saint Martin's College, London, UK

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2015 *Passing By...*, Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY
2013 *Internal Peace*, Barbarian Art Gallery, Zurich, Switzerland
Internal Peace, Kichik GalArt, Baku, Azerbaijan

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2015 *Vita Vitale*, Curated by ArtWise, National Pavilion of Azerbaijan, 56th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Making Histories, YARAT Contemporary Art Centre, Baku, Azerbaijan
Exploring Inward, Louise Blouin Foundation, London, UK

2014 *Here...Today*, Old Sorting Office, London, UK
Poetics of the Ordinary, Vienna Art Fair, The New Contemporary, Vienna, Austria

2013 *Love Me, Love Me Not*: Contemporary Art from Azerbaijan and its Neighbors, Curated by Dina Nasser-Khadivi, Heydar Aliyev Center, Baku, Azerbaijan
Love Me, Love Me Not, Curated by Dina Nasser-Khadivi, Collateral Event for the 55th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
Home Sweet Home, Azerbaijan Cultural Center, Paris, France
Home Sweet Home, Baku Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), Baku, Azerbaijan

Fly To Baku. Contemporary Art from Azerbaijan (Traveling exhibition), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Neue Burg, Vienna, Austria; Spazio D – MAXXI building, National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome, Italy; Multimedia Art Museum, Moscow, Russia; me Collectors Room, Berlin, Germany

2012 *012 Baku Public Art Festival*, Baku, Azerbaijan
Merging Bridges, Baku Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), Baku, Azerbaijan
Fly To Baku. Contemporary Art from Azerbaijan (Traveling exhibition), Hotel Salomon de Rothschild, Paris, France; Phillips de Pury & Company, London, UK
Foreword, Alternative Art Space of YARAT, Baku, Azerbaijan

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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"Double Act. Azerbaijani artists come to London," *Baku Magazine*, (Spring 2015)

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"My Year Ahead: Aida Mahmudova," *christies.com*, January 12, 2015

"6 Azerbaijani Artists to Know," *artradarjournal.com*, November 14, 2014

Sabine B. Vogel, "Die Grenzenlosigkeit der Skulptur," *Kunstforum*, (October – November 2014): 65-71

Simon Hewitt, "Full of Eastern Promise, Vienna's Oktober ArtFest: From Baku to Bucharest, via '70s Moscow," *russianartandculture.com*, October 23, 2014

"Ones to Watch," *Baku Magazine* (Autumn 2014): 64

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Kris Kulakova, "Azerbaijan will have a greater presence at art fairs, institutions and biennales--Adia Mahmudova" *thenewcontemporary.com*, September 29, 2014

Anna Maria Burgstaller, "Interview with Aida Mahmudova – Yarat," *artandsignature.com*, October 7, 2014

"Baku, centro culturale del basso Caucaso," *RSI.ch*, August 20, 2014

Anna Kats, "Love Me, Love Me Not," *Modern Painters* (September 2014): 91

"Yarat Contemporary Art Organisation," *GlassIsMore.com*, August 2014

Cassandra Najl, "The 8 Most Influential Women in Central Asian and Caucasian Art," *TheCulturetrip.com*, July 31, 2014

Hanae Ko, "Love Me, Love Me Not," *Art Asia Pacific Magazine* (July/August 2014): 94-95

Rania Habib, "Due North," *Canvas Magazine*, (May/June 2014): 56-57

Megan Conway, "Baku To The Future," *The Wall Street Journal Magazine* (March 2014): 140-144

Anna Silvia Barrllà, "Il mercato puta sugli artisti azeri," *Il Sole 24 Ore* (April 26, 2014): 79

"Fire in the Belly," *Harper's BazaarArt Arabia* (May-June 2014): 59-64

"The Power 50," *Canvas Magazine* |(March-April 2014): 130

Sophie Chamas, "Building Baku," *Brownbook* (March/April 2014): 61-68

"Aida Mahmudova," Art Asia Pacific: *Alamanac* (2014): 202

Grace Banks, "Art and Azerbaijan: interview with YARAT's Aida Mahmudova," *apollomagazine.com*, April 22, 2014

Sabine B. Vogel, "Love Me, Love Me Not," *artforum.com* (May 1, 2014)

Lisa Chiari and Roberto Ruta, "Atterraggio a Baku," *artibune.com*, December 10, 2013

"Conversation with Aida Mahmudova," *Art+Auction* (November 2013): 117

Grace Banks, "The artists' room," *A Magazine* (October / November 2013): A200 – A201

Rozana Azimi, "Le Centre d'Art Yarat Dessine une Autre Image de l'Azerbaidjan," *LeQuotidien de l'Art, Le Quotidien de L'Art Weekend* (September 20, 2013): 4

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