



ROYA  
AKHAVAN  
**NEXUS**



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OCTOBER 14 – NOVEMBER 7, 2009

**LEILA TAGHINIA-MILANI HELLER GALLERY**

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# INFINITY INTER- RUPTED!

“The only constant thing in life is change.” So declared the oracles of ancient Greece to the flowing herds of fearful worshippers ever searching for spiritual enlightenment to guide them on that inevitable journey that the Gods have bestowed upon us all: destiny.

The paintings of Roya Akhavan abound with such timeless wisdom. At once still yet bursting with movement, silent yet deafening in their chorus-like expressiveness, they confound the modern art worshiper with an anomaly of sorts that strikes the core of our comprehension and leaves us completely unarmed, unprepared and enshrined within a realm which can only be conjured by the prophetesses of an age long gone. True to form, it is perhaps the persistent reference to the art of geometric abstraction, evident in the artist’s work at large and which is generally referred to as Arabesque art, which inevitably escorts the viewer into a hypnotized state of contemplation. However, Akhavan’s work, while clearly referential to her Persian culture, goes beyond a specific dimension to embrace an eclectic array of painting traditions.

Art historical discourse offers today’s art reader with ample insight into the rise and descent of various genres and styles and their championing of certain visual elements as the primary prerequisite to the creative process. Rubens was the ultimate colorist, whose style exemplified that of the Flemish Baroque. Several of his contemporaries, however, especially those trotting the hallways of the Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture in Paris a few decades later, favored line above all other elements. They hailed artists such as Michelangelo au lieu de Leonardo. Claude Lorrain’s notable Vedute paintings were amongst their most preferred, and of course, their superhero, Charles Le brun who was Louis XIV’s favorite, known for his scholarly composition and thorough symbolism.

A comparative inspection of Akhavan’s work reveals a mature capacity in employing both line and color in intricate compositions that liberates the individual figures and motifs from their literal descriptiveness and allows them, through multifaceted patterns and immaculate repetition, to adopt a metaphorical semantic that lends an infinite range of meaning to each of her meticulously executed canvases. Her wide array of colors and hues stand out in particular as she confidently fuses opposites, with secondaries and neutrals in a fashion that defies color theory. The result is a fearless fusion that leaves one hypnotized within an unlimited outburst. It is not often that one stumbles across a contemporary artist whose mastery of the several visual and compositional elements inherent within the art of painting is so far reaching in its grasp and scope. Akhavan seems to meander effortlessly

Cover Image:  
*Untitled IV from Nexus Series* 2009  
Acrylic on linen  
63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)

from line to color, from light to texture, from carefully structured composition to an array of orderly chaos. All of these come together in a triumphant moment of technical virtuosity that is at once intimidating yet dangerously seductive.

When Immanuel Kant stated: "It is beyond a doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience", he was alluding to what future philosophers would refer to as "the aesthetic experience": a condition of being in which knowledge is assimilated, not through logic or rational engagement, but through the corporal senses. With one gaze at a bunch of lines and colors, or a moment of musical notes seeping into one's ears, knowledge is gained. Not the knowledge of how and what, but of why. And with this perception comes wisdom that changes one's being irreversibly. It is on such an ontological level that the works of Akhavan engage their viewer, leaving us enlightened, shrewdly perceptive and irredeemably altered in light of our newly gained insight.

The thematic centrality across the gamut of Akhavan's work is powerfully grounded in the eternal human combat. A cursory skimming on the surface could lead one to recite the same redundant clichés in a slapdash attempt to read the otherwise complex layers within the canvases at had: "Good against Evil", "Right and Wrong" and even more nonsensical "the East versus the West". These are all worn out slogans none of which begin to delineate the multifarious notions contained within these panels. A thorough probing, however, into Akhavan's ethereal yet carnage-abounding universe tells of one eternal fight and no other: that of humanity against itself. It all starts from within; it all ends where it starts. Nothing else matters. Nothing and no one exists beyond those intoxicating, perpetually infinite battles.

In this series, Akhavan's work maintains its splendid transcendentalism while invoking probably for the first time ever in such a bold and evident manner, the presence of the eternal "She." Upon this encounter which the artist has so cunningly orchestrated, hidden yet revealed, maternal as well as seductive, bold while retracting into the contemplative nature of the work, one's mind races with those seminal images that have eternalized women forever. The Venuses of Willendorf and Laussel, the fertility goddesses of Catal Huyuk, the terrifying Sumerian eyes of Ishtar and the healing hands of Ancient Egypt's Hathor seem to have all been distilled into one omniscient presence that strips the soul from any attempt at camouflaging or feigning one's true being. As this invincible force lures us, we are simultaneously reminded of the holiest icons of the Virgin, by the likes of Giotto and Fra Angelico, and those more infamous such as Fouquet's 15th century Holy Virgin in which the Madonna is none other than Agnes Sorel, the maitresse-en-titre of king Charles VII of France. The purity of Titian's Venus of Urbino contrasted with the vulgar demeanor of Manet's Olympia, Suzanne Valadon's chubby women intentionally oblivious to the male gaze and even the feminist femininity of Lara Croft. All of these and more images are brought to the fore when contemplating Akhavan's grand dame.

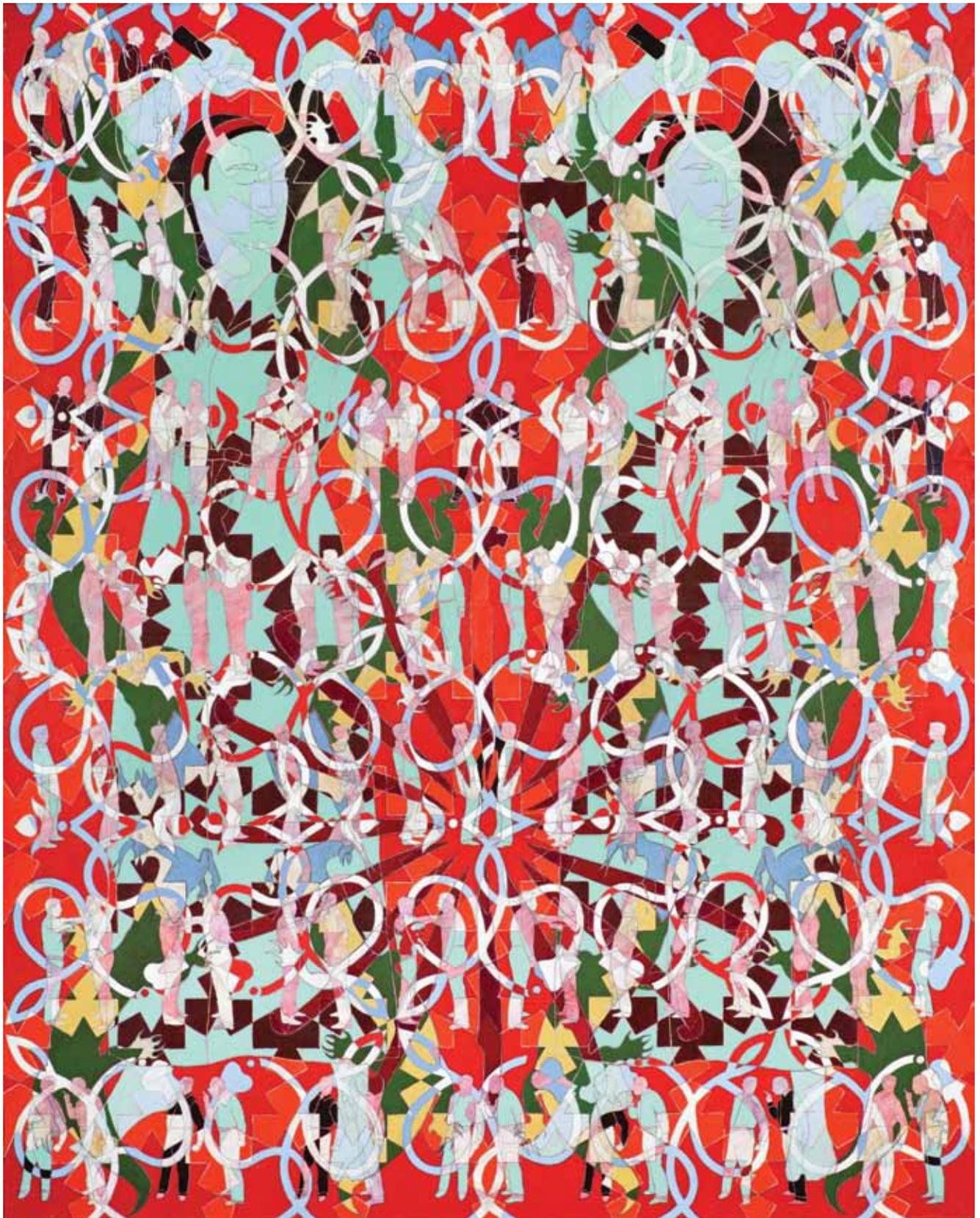
Yet, more gripping than all, when I first looked upon this astute female figure, beneath all the fancy layers of historically magnificent oeuvres, so majestically seated within the artist's intricate composition, I was mostly reminded of the journey of one talented little girl, who left her native country of Iran at the tender age of 14 and was never to go back. In an act of combat with self, she would summon her instinctive memories of the past and weave them into an art that crosses the margin of locality. She would battle with the notion of homeland and belonging as she delves into the unpredictable journey of her life as an artist and an exile. Today, this once young girl stands before us, physically and figuratively to say, in a fashion similar to the priestesses of old, "the only constant thing in life is my art which is constantly evolving. I am my own woman. I have come of age."

*Sam Bardaouil, Curator Middle Eastern Art*

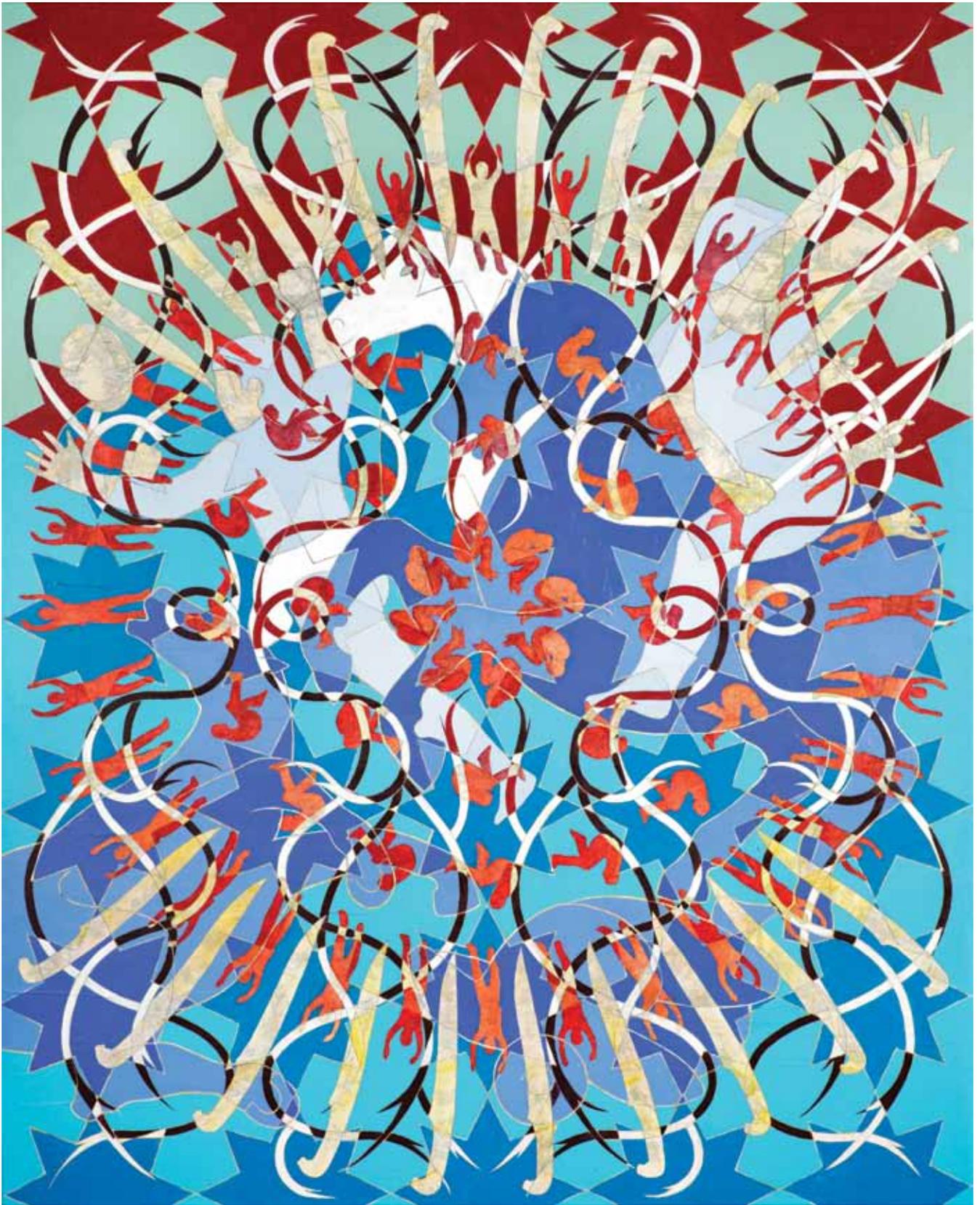
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*Untitled I from Nexus Series 2009*  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



*Untitled II from Nexus Series 2009*  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



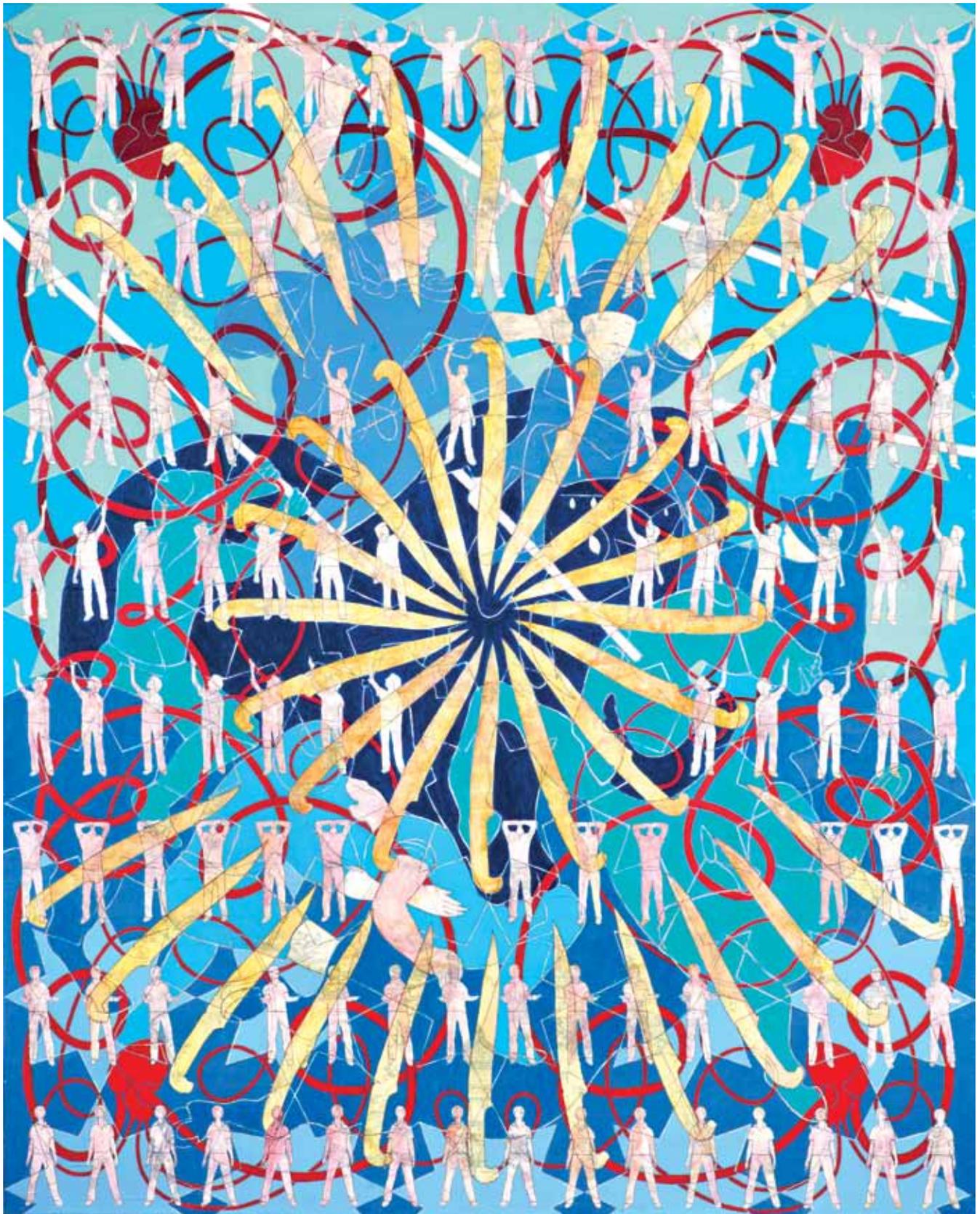
*Untitled III from Nexus Series* 2009  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



*Untitled IV from Nexus Series* 2009  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



*Untitled V from Nexus Series 2009*  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



*Untitled VI from Nexus Series* 2009  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



*Untitled VII from Nexus Series* 2009  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



*Untitled VIII from Nexus Series* 2009  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)



*Untitled IX from Nexus Series* 2009  
Acrylic on linen, 63 3/4 x 51 1/8 in (162 x 130 cm)

ROYA AKHAVAN (b. 1953, Tehran, Iran)



## EDUCATION

- 1977-1981 The Art Students League, New York, NY  
1974-1976 Ecolé Nationale Supérieure des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, France  
1974 Simmons College, B.A. in Art, Boston, Massachusetts

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 **Nexus**, Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery, New York, NY  
1998 Galerie Transversale, Paris, France  
1992 Galerie Etienne Dinet, Paris, France  
1991 Galerie Etienne Dinet, Paris, France  
1980 Washington World Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
1976 Tehran Gallery, Tehran, Iran

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 **Selseleh/Zelseleh: Movers & Shakers in Contemporary Iranian Art**,  
curated by Dr. Layla S. Diba, Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller Gallery, New York, NY  
**Iran Inside Out**, Chelsea Art Museum, New York, NY, traveling exhibition  
2008 **East West Dialogues: Mysticism, Satire and the Legendary Past**,  
curated by Dr. Layla S. Diba, Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller Gallery, New York, NY  
1999 Galerie Transversale, Paris, France  
1998 **Art '98**, London, England  
1997 **Iranian Cultural Heritage Foundation Exhibition**, London, England  
1993 Galerie Etienne Dinet, Paris, France  
1991 Galerie Sabine Herbert, Paris, France  
1989 Galerie Etienne Dinet, Paris, France  
1979 Washington World Gallery, Washington, D.C.  
1977 **International Women's Year Exhibition**, Tehran, Iran  
Tehran Gallery, Tehran, Iran

## PRESS

- Keyhan International, November 21, 1976  
Tamasha, November 20, 1976  
Tehran Journal, November 24, 1976  
Etelaat, December 4, 1976  
The Washington Post, May 5, 1979  
Keyhan London, May 2, 1991  
Keyhan London, February 8, 1998  
Tavoos Art Quarterly, Autumn 2000  
Tavoos Art Quarterly, Winter 2001







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