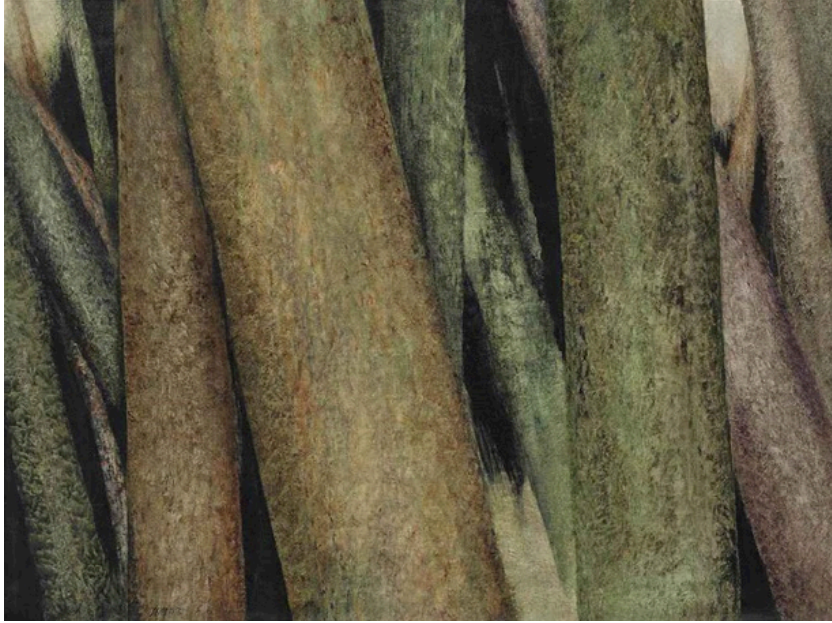


Sohrab Sepehri

Poetic Landscapes

January 18 – February 29, 2016



Untitled (From the tree trunk series), 1972, Oil on canvas, 38 1/8 x 49 1/2 in

Leila Heller Gallery Dubai
I-87 Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE

Leila Heller Gallery is pleased to present "Sohrab Sepehri: Poetic Landscapes" at their Dubai location from January 18-February 29, 2016.

Sohrab Sepehri was a leading Iranian modernist poet and painter. In both his poetry and his paintings, Sepehri expressed a layered sensibility through his distinct abstract landscapes. Sepehri was a traveler, absorbing various cultures whose influences became manifest in his canvases. He studied lithography in Paris, Japanese calligraphy in Tokyo, and Buddhism in India. These influences produced a unique painterly quality – variously marked by bold brushstrokes, or gestural swipes marked by a quiet, precision. He reinvented landscape painting, creating a visual poetics that went against the grain. At a time when Iranian society was experiencing rapid modernization and urbanization, his paintings were imbued with a nostalgic return to a more placid naturalism.

"All my dreams led to the desert and to the trees," Sepehri wrote, referring to elements of peace, harmony and balance he found in nature. His study of Taoist and Zen Buddhist concepts of nature and life practice serve as the crucial underpinning of his poetry and paintings, inviting the viewer to explore the dynamics between the spiritual and natural world as presented in Sepehri's work.

In the 1960s, Sepehri began painting stark close ups of tree trunks—which perfectly combined Western modernism and Japanese minimalism into a Persian aesthetics. The tree paintings have become iconic canvases in the Iranian modernist canon. To Sepehri, trees symbolized munificence and permanence in a world tainted by malevolence. Tree trunks served as icons of abundant strength. His fascination in depicting sections of the trunk, rather than the entirety of the tree, was intentional and draws on Taoist

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

principle of absolute truth. In his works, it is the imagery that is not depicted which alludes to the mystery of a unified cosmos while reflecting the limits of our perception. Visiting his studio in Iran during this period, the trailblazing American collector Abby Weed Grey observed, "His canvases are abstract poems about the earth."

Sepehri combined his intertwined careers as a poet and a painter. He published several volumes of poetry, and his *Hasht Ketab* (Eight Books) is widely considered a masterpiece of New Persian Poetry. His poetry has been translated into several languages, including English, French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic. In 1958, Sepehri became among the first Iranian artists to exhibit at the Venice Biennial. He also showed at the first Tehran Biennial held in the same year. During his lifetime, Sepehri held several solo exhibitions in Tehran but also participated in international exhibitions—in Brazil, France, the US, and at Art Basel.

Following his tragic death from leukemia in 1980, for some years, his paintings were rarely seen in public venues. Leila Heller Gallery's presentation of Sepehri's paintings marks the first in-depth exploration of the artist's practice since his retrospective at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in November 2009-January 2010. Sepehri's paintings are in major international collections, including the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Grey Art Gallery of New York University.

About the Gallery: Since its establishment over three decades ago, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central and Southeast Asian artists. In 2010, the gallery moved from the Upper East Side to its flagship space in Chelsea where it has garnered a reputation for identifying and cultivating the careers of artists leaving a lasting impact on contemporary art and culture. Currently representing a diverse roster of Western and Middle Eastern artists, the gallery is also active in the American, European and Middle Eastern secondary art markets.

In November 2015, Leila Heller Gallery opened its first international location in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue. At 14,000 square feet, the state of the art gallery features three exhibition spaces, making it the largest gallery in the UAE. Showcasing leading regional and international artists, many of whom will be presenting their work in the Middle East for the first time, the gallery is dedicated to supporting the evolving practice of established artists. The gallery has strong innovative curatorial and educational programs with an emphasis on promoting a dialogue between Western and Middle Eastern artists.

For press, images, or further information, please contact brooke@companyagenda.com or dubai@leilahellergallery.com