

SHOJA AZARI & SHAHRAM KARIMI

THE COLD EARTH SLEEPS BELOW

June 22 – September 1, 2016



Shoja Azari and Shahram Karimi, *Dreamscape II*, 2016

Opening Reception: Wednesday, June 22, 8-11pm
Leila Heller Gallery, 1-87 Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz 1, Dubai, UAE

'The cold earth slept below/ Above the cold sky shone;
And all around/ The breath of night like death did flow'
Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822)

DUBAI, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is pleased to present a selection of work from the recent exhibition at Leila Heller Gallery New York, a collaboration of filmmaker Shoja Azari and painter Shahram Karimi, on view from June 22 to September 1, 2016. *The Cold Earth Sleeps Below* features three of the artists' unique, hallmark video-paintings, portraying and exploring humanity's relation to the natural landscape. The exhibition takes its title from the work of English poet Percy Shelley; the artists seek to revisit, in their own words, the contemporary relevance of "the paradoxical notion of beauty and the sublime that the Romantics fought to free from the clutch of utilitarian materialism, egoism, and the rational mind of the 18th century".

Beauty betrays; yet its seduction remains as compelling as its deception. In the hypnotic, shimmering collaborations between Shoja Azari and Shahram Karimi, a deep suspicion of the beautiful reveals disaster below the surface of the idyllic: a terrible sublime. For each composition, the painted canvas, layered with elements of relief texture and written text, mirrors the video image; according to the artists, their cooperative "artistic intervention attempts at thwarting or enhancing the perception of the neglected."

For Azari and Karimi, however, as for Shelley, the beautiful is not a placid or comforting manifestation of equilibrium, symmetry, or harmony, but a violent, visceral experience of awe, even terror. As the artists state: "With the continuing arrogance, objectification, and destruction of nature since the Industrial Revolution, we believe that man might have arrived at a point of no return. Nature is rebelling and with it is unleashing its great powers of awe and terror. The future of our species, and that of others, is unknown." The beautiful here is not serene, but sublime.

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

About the artists Shoja Azari (b 1958, Shiraz, Iran), filmmaker, and Shahram Karimi (b 1957, Shiraz, Iran), painter, although childhood friends, first collaborated in the early 2000's in London and New York. Their collaborative work has been featured at Mana Contemporary, Jersey City, NJ (2013); with ArtAngel, London (2002); and in numerous galleries and festivals in London, Rome, Belgium, and New York.

Azari utilizes new media and film to confront themes such as gender, politics, and intercultural prejudice, mining visual culture to expose the boundaries of contemporary ideology. Azari's work includes a series of short films, *Windows* (2005), which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival. Azari's film *Women Without Men*, co-directed with his wife, Shirin Nashat, won the Silver Lion for best director at the 2009 Venice Film Festival. His work has been featured at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris (2012); Haus der Kulturen, Berlin (2010); ICA, London (2010); MOMA, New York (2010); Centre Pompidou, Paris (2009); and the Havana Biennial (2009). He lives and works in New York.

Karimi, both painter and poet, employs an evocation of nostalgia to explore the dilemma of a bicultural Iranian subject, wedding his personal memories with a contemporary form, composing in Farsi verse as completes his paintings. Karimi's solo exhibitions include the Museum Sieburg, Germany (1998 and 2010) and Leo Castelli Gallery, New York (2008). He has participated in group exhibitions at Chelsea Museum of Art, New York (2009); the Iranian Cultural Center, Los Angeles (2003); and the Istanbul Biennial (2003). Karimi lives and works between the United States and Germany.

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