

LEILA HELLER.

Bahar Sabzevari
GAZE AND GLANCE
September 17 – October 14, 2020



Persian Medusa (Crown Series), Oil on Wood Panel, 30" h x 30" w, 2020

Leila Heller is pleased to announce, ***Gaze and Glance***, an exhibition of new paintings by Iranian-American artist, Bahar Sabzevari, opening on Thursday, September 17th, 2020 and on view through Wednesday, October 14th, 2020.

Sabzevari's self-portraits are deliberate and layered, focusing on themes of identity and nostalgia. The artist goes through a technical process of studying Persian mythology, paired with a curiosity for wildlife and animal documentaries resulting in a fusion of themes to create her version of a Persian-wonderland. Prior to painting, Sabzevari conducts a disciplined approach with her creative application. She creates preliminary sketches and then assembles a combination of models and maquettes of the creatures that come to mind. This varying relationship between contemporary culture and art history allows the artist the freedom and conceptual range to arrange her own reality on canvas, wood or linen.

Her self-portraits represent a visual diary of nonverbal record, seeking to convey her identity, beliefs, values, state of mind, and experiences as a woman in Iran. The paintings are emotive, through the eyes, color palette and suspended playfulness around the woman's crown. Inspired by her love for animals, dream reflections and cultural heritage, her canvases grapple with presenting her personal self-image and self-expression within an age where social media largely skews the public perceptions of the individual.

In ***Gaze and Glance***, Sabzevari considers the importance of the gaze. She simultaneously invites the viewer to observe her and be observed by her, provoking the questions; "*Who is the object?*" and "*Who is the subject?*". Sabzevari notes, "*I like when the communication between the two gazes blurs the boundaries between the two roles until it becomes unclear who exactly is gazing at whom...I follow [the viewer] everywhere around the room and I ask them to do the*

LEILA HELLER.

same...challenging them by blurring the lines between subject and object, real and unreal, being seductive, or showing a powerful woman, or both at the same time."

In some ways, Sabzevari's self-portraits become an extension of herself and the viewer. They are conceived through a creative process in which she is able to experience deep introspection and a meditation on gaze and the subsequent painter-model and viewer interaction. Under her eye, the painting engages her, (seeing her own joy, anger, and doubts) and within the painting she sees freedom. Yet, to the viewer, Sabzevari's self-portraits take on a unique meaning based on their own experiences, background, age, and gender, thus imbuing boundless meaning and vivacity in her works.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Bahar Sabzevari (b. 1980, Iran) is a visual artist based in New York and works internationally. She has a painting practice, exploring identity through self-portraiture, narrative painting and drawing. Her career spans over 15 years and she has worked and studied in Iran, Europe and the US. By integrating Persian motifs, religious details and characters into her self-portraits, she explores the concept of nostalgia and creates illusions of a lost age of Persian glory. Her work explores the boundaries of human identity: self-identity, freedom, restriction, and sense of place and belonging. In particular, her work looks at transient and hidden forms of identity: the imagination, hopes, fears, dreams, histories and evolution. Sabzevari's process is research and studio-based and involves the bringing together of complex imagery, symbols and narratives, often drawing from the fields of mythology, science, religion and art history in a humoristic way.

ABOUT THE GALLERY

Since its establishment over three decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central Asian, and Southeast Asian artists. 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 practices of established artists.