

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

"The Storyteller"

A collection of contemporary narratives



Sudarshan Shetty, Untitled, 2017, Recycled teak wood, 182.9 x 182.9 x 228.6 cm, 203.2 x 101.6 x 30.5 cm

Dubai, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is pleased to announce its group show titled "The Storyteller", opening on 26th April, curated by Behrang Samadzadegan, featuring artists Wim Delvoye, Azza Al Qubaisi, Zeinab Alhashemi, Melis Buyruk, Parinaz Eleish Gharagozlou, Nathaniel Aric Galka, Robert Wilson, Lorenzo Quinn, Lin Jingjing, Ran Hwang, Naeemeh Kazemi, Arash Nazari, Marwan Sahmarani, Alaattin Efe, Farideh Lashai, Ghada Amer, Shirin Neshat, Marcos Grigorian, Ana D' Castro, Reza Aramesh and Behrang Samadzadegan.

Contemporary art is often seen as challenging and even perplexing, with artworks that may seem abstract or devoid of traditional forms of representation. However, at the heart of much contemporary art lies a powerful narrative or story, one that the artist is seeking to communicate. Artists who work with narratives may use a variety of mediums, from painting and sculpture to video and installation art. In each case, the artist is using their chosen medium to create a narrative that engages the viewer and invites them to consider complex issues and ideas.

One way in which artists use narrative is to tell stories about themselves or their personal experiences. Other artists use narrative to explore social and political issues, such as race, gender, identity, and political crisis, and some use narrative to create fictional worlds or alternate realities. In all of these cases, the artist is acting as a storyteller, using their chosen medium to create a narrative that engages and challenges the viewer. By working with narrative, contemporary artists are able to create works that are not only visually striking but also intellectually and emotionally stimulating.

The artists selected for this exhibition aim to convey the power of storytelling through a focus on contextual and situational realities. By observing and reflecting on these realities, they seek to intensify the empathic perception of intimacy, fragility, and micro-history. The singularity and authenticity of each situation and contextual meaning are crucial elements in their approach to storytelling. By emphasizing the concreteness of singular, situational, and contextual realities, the artists hope to create a poetic and powerful narrative that enhances sensitivity to the diverse and complex anthropological realities of our world.

Overall, it seems that the artists are exploring the ways in which contemporary narratives can be shaped by the relevance of specific contextual or situational meanings. By highlighting the lived realities of individuals and communities, they hope to create a more nuanced and empathetic understanding of the world around us.

Walter Benjamin's essay "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" reflects on the loss of the art of storytelling and the impact of industrialization and modernity on traditional forms of communication. Benjamin argues that the act of storytelling is more than just a means of transmitting information, but a way of connecting individuals to their cultural and historical roots.

The exhibition title, inspired by Benjamin's essay, suggests that the art of storytelling is still present today but is in danger of being lost. It emphasizes the importance of retaining and preserving stories as a means of keeping alive our cultural heritage. The title also alludes to the idea that the act of storytelling is a communal activity, one that requires both a storyteller and a listener. Through the act of listening, the listener becomes a part of the story and is able to retain it in their memory, passing it on to others in the future. Overall, the exhibition title suggests that the art of storytelling is a valuable cultural tradition that needs to be preserved and nurtured in the face of modernity and technological progress.

"For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained. It is lost because there is no more weaving and spinning to go on while they are being listened to. The more self-forgetful the listener is, the more deeply is what he listens to impressed upon his memory. When the rhythm of work has seized him, he listens to the tales in such a way that the gift of retelling them comes to him all by itself. This, then, is the nature of the web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled. This is how today it is becoming unravelled at all its ends after being woven thousands of years ago in the ambience of the oldest forms of craftsmanship".
Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov, 1936.

Text by Behrang Samadzadegan

ABOUT THE GALLERY:

Since its establishment over four decades ago in New York, Leila Heller Gallery has gained worldwide recognition as a pioneer in promoting a creative dialogue and exchange between Western artists and Middle Eastern, Central 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, Central Asian, Southeast Asian 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 16,000 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.

In addition to presenting a dynamic exhibition schedule, Leila Heller Gallery actively organizes shows with world-renowned curators, hosts educational panels and film screenings, and produces catalogues and books with scholarly essays. Each year the gallery participates in major international art fairs and stages off-site projects as a platform for exploring new conversations within a wider context of galleries, artists and institutions. Gallery artists have consistently participated in international museum exhibitions and biennials, and are included in leading institutional collections worldwide.

For any press enquiries please reach out to ankita@leilahellergallery.com