

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

'Maydan: A Living Agora'

Curated By

Behrang Samadzadegan



Marcos Grigorian, Untitled, 1961, Mixed media on canvas, 110 x 120 cm

Dubai, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is pleased to announce its upcoming collaborative exhibition with Zaal Art Gallery, Toronto, titled *Maydan: A Living Agora*, opening on April 14, 2025 at A1 Space, Alserkal Avenue, Dubai.

The exhibition explores Maydan- a space of gathering, exchange, and dialogue, both as a physical site and as a symbolic structure embedded in Middle Eastern, South Asian, and global cultures. Like the Greek Agora, the Maydan has historically functioned as a civic space, but in today's context, it embodies evolving notions of collectivism, identity, and shared presence.

Maydan: A Living Agora brings together artists from diverse backgrounds who engage with the social, spatial, and conceptual dimensions of communal space. Their works reflect the multifaceted nature of Maydan as a platform for negotiation, memory, and storytelling within today's shifting cultural landscapes.

Set within Alserkal Avenue, a former industrial zone turned vibrant cultural hub, the exhibition mirrors its setting: an Agora within an Agora. Here, artists, thinkers, and publics converge, not in isolation, but in active exchange. Unlike Foucault's heterotopia, Maydan is not a space of "otherness," but one of togetherness, a participatory arena where overlapping narratives and identities intersect.

The exhibition unfolds across three interwoven modes:

Geometry & Spatial Constructs – Artworks exploring the architectural and conceptual design of communal spaces.

Monumentality & Collective Memory – Sculptural works that anchor shared experiences and histories.

Cultural Narratives & Figurative Storytelling – Pieces drawing from mythology, heritage, and lived experiences to animate the human fabric of Maydan.

Together, these threads invite the viewer to inhabit a living, breathing Maydan, an ever-evolving agora of voices, visions, and encounters.

ABOUT THE CURATOR

Behrang Samadzadegan was born in Tehran, Iran, in 1979. He received a BFA from the Tehran University of Arts, and an MFA from TTU (Tehran Tarbiat Modares University). Behrang's work ranges from highly symbolic pieces to arrangements of stuffed-toy sculptures, to various sizes of drawings and paintings, to installations that restage ritual or historical narratives. The subject matters of his works are drawn from images and narratives of contemporary Iranian history, which he combines with fictional stories and the aesthetics of painting. His goal, however, is not to represent historical narratives. The image of history, he believes, is a personal matter created under the influence of visual and aesthetic stereotypes; a combination of confusion, chaos, and a futile quest for reaching unattainable truth. Similarly, throughout his work, he pursues hierarchies and systems that distort the representation of information and the consciousness; systems such as politics, aesthetics, and history that can empty and sterilize contexts and create arbitrary hierarchies that cause confusion and eliminate the possibility of recording and expressing the truth. As he sees it, this system also governs the creation of art, and it does not intend to reach a destination or find a way to redemption; the only thing that remains is a search for an alternative way and finding a new hope to get out of the turmoil and crisis. Thus, his creative process is influenced by the past, paralleled by the experience of living in the present.

ARTISTS: Marcos Grigorian, Reza Aramesh, Sudarshan Shetty, Katya Traboulsi, Lorenzo Quinn, Aref Montazeri, Zeinab Alhashemi, Anton Bakker, Azza Al Qubaisi, Sofia Yeganeh, Farideh Lashai, Parinaz Eleish, Arash Nazari, Mehdi Farhadian, Behrang Samadzadegan, Soraya Sharghi, Shirin Neshat, Wassef Boutros Ghali, Y.Z. Kami, Marwan Sahmarani, Jehangir Vazifdar, Ali Beheshti, Sahand Hesamiyan, Andisheh Avini, Mehrdad Mohebbali, Farah Ossouli, Fereydoun Ave, Ashkan Abdoli, Mohammad Hossein Maher, Shahryar Hatami, Yousha Bashir, Kiarash Alimi, Ali Akbar Sadeghi.

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 catalogs 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.