

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

Roya Akhavan



Birds, 2024, Acrylic on Linen, 63.77 x 51.18 in | 162 x 130 cm

Dubai, UAE – Leila Heller Gallery is delighted to announce a presentation of works by Roya Akhavan.

Hybrid figures emerge throughout Roya Akhavan’s work, hovering between vegetal, animal, and symbolic states. These forms resist fixed identity, echoing natural processes in which boundaries remain fluid and porous. Interlacing lines weave through the compositions like roots, neural pathways, or migratory routes, acting as connective tissue that binds individual elements into larger, interdependent systems. Akhavan’s paintings represent an underlying map of relationships that sustains visible form.

Roya Akhavan’s work explores repetition as a living, generative force. Across layered compositions filled with recurring forms, intricate linework, and bold colors, her paintings investigate how organic life—plants, animals, bodies, and ecosystems—interacts with systems of order, memory, and ritual. Motifs repeat but never resolve into sameness; instead, each iteration shifts subtly, suggesting growth, mutation, and the passage of time.

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Color plays a vital role in shaping the emotional and conceptual terrain of her work. Vibrant reds and oranges evoke vitality, heat, and life force, while expansive blues introduce depth, distance, and a sense of the infinite. The tension between these palettes mirrors a broader dialogue within her paintings: energy versus containment, freedom versus structure, chaos versus order.

Drawing from both natural and imagined worlds, Akhavan's practice reflects on how systems—ecological, social, and cosmological—shape living beings, and how those beings, in turn, reshape the systems they inhabit. Her work invites sustained looking, encouraging viewers to trace patterns, follow lines, and recognize repetition not as stasis, but as transformation in motion.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Roya Akhavan was born in Tehran, Iran in 1953. Akhavan graduated with a BFA in Art from Simmons College in Boston in 1974. She also attended the Arts Students League in New York City and the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Decoratifs in Paris. Akhavan's expressive work employs repetition and pattern as an instrument for metaphor. She builds upon traditional Persian painting techniques, creating a fresh visual aesthetic and engaging fragmentation as a style. *Breakthrough* (2013), for example, is a sculptural installation constructed in colored glass, which juxtaposes void and possibility, and fragility and stability. Akhavan has had several solo exhibitions, including *Nexus* in 2009 at Leila Heller Gallery, and at *Galerie Transversale* in Paris in 1998. Her work has appeared in a number of group exhibitions worldwide, such as at *Art Dubai* and *Art Abu Dhabi*.

ABOUT LEILA HELLER 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.