

Interview between Haleh Jamali and Florence Somer Gavage, Kahkeshan TV, Edinburgh Iranian Festival Feb 2011

To me, Art is entertainment or perhaps something more than entertainment. In more personal level, Art is my life. I brought up in a family interested in art. They encouraged me a lot to experience art and follow my passion and study painting in college of Fine art, University of Tehran. It was during that time that I realised what living the artist's life means. In my work I would like to introduce more than one possible interpretation and leaves much to the viewer's imagination how to interact with my works. Some might see it differently based on their own experiences and background.

This work is called "Maral", which is a series of three almost identical large painted portraits. The arrangements of these portraits are in a way, that the three of them formed a room and the viewer counts as the fourth wall. The idea behind this work came from the fact that whenever we go to a portrait exhibition, we as a viewer look at the portraits and will try to find out the message behind them. But here I wanted to reverse this. I wanted to have viewer as a subject of observation, which is surrounded by these portraits. In the first impression you might think they all look exactly identical but actually when you look at them more closely you can notice the differences. They communicate different feelings, for instance one look much more thoughtful and another one look more sad.

This series called "Distance". Consists of twenty square size portraits. In my much earlier works I've used the narrative elements and provided some clues about the person/people on the painting for the viewer to interpret the picture. In some of my later works decided to remove that information from the background of the portrait and concentrate more on portrait's face itself. However in this series decided to re-introduce the narrative elements. Some of these are self-portraits, some are my family members or friends and some are painted from my imagination. What you see in the background relates directly or indirectly to the pictured portrait. Some works are autobiographical

and very personal which have been informed by my own personal experience while others respond to more collective experiences.

This one is called "Mirage" which you see a view of Tehran with Damavand Mountain and Freedom tower in the background. This one is very special to me, expressing my feelings after immigration I suppose. Perhaps this is how this work started but then it can imply a much more extensive meaning. I had many buyers for this work but I thought I couldn't sell it. I think I would always like to keep it on my wall, to be able to look at everyday.

This one is called "Awakening", a portrait of my grandmother. This pose is the pose I always remember her by it. You see more portraits of my family members here. This one is my aunt. This one called "a doll with a yellow skirt". When I was very young I always used to play with this doll. There is something hugely nostalgic about this. Perhaps this is why I've used yellow colour here. Here in this one "Voyage", you see an airport luggage Belts but with no luggage! In "ambiguity" you see a lab environment. As I said before there are some direct and indirect relationship between the portraits and their background. This one is called "Caspian Sea". Caspian Sea is sea very near to the place I come from in Iran where I have many childhood memories. When started this one "Maybe I will forget" I didn't have any specific things in my mind for the background of the portrait but it's interesting where the work takes you. I've ended up having an abattoir in the background in which emphasizing more on the message this portrait is trying to send out. "Pipes" again relates to where I am come from, Iran; a country with lot of oil refineries. In "Borders" I'm exploring the depths of individuals' identity and examining the notion of distance in its personal and physical meaning. Again here you could see a view of Tehran in far background of the work. By doing this work I was hoping to picture my own personal concerns as well as more collective concerns. What interest me the most is the relationship between the viewers and these portraits and if they can pick one which more appeal to them. In this series you can look at these work as an individual paintings but also you can see them as a group and explore the relationship they might have with each

other. I thought Distance could be a great title for these works as a group to imply a much more extensive meaning.

I've worked in Iran as an artist for many years and in fact the core of my practice was shaped in Iran but immigration had a great impact on my works too. My concerns remain the same but perhaps the form of presenting my ideas has changed.

I think people based on their background and experiences can interact with my work in a different level. I would like to have a wide range of audiences from different cultures and not being limited to a certain nationality or gender. I would also prefer to invite audiences to see the world from my point of view. As a result I would like to create a work, which is understandable for people from all different backgrounds. Perhaps an Iranian viewer will perceive my work differently. People with different cultural background might not be able to detect the direct cultural references. But this could be a positive point, although it may appear difficult for them to make sense of the work. I am quite interested to find out how viewer will interact with my works. I leave all of my works open for interpretation and imagination. Whenever I choose a title for my work I'll try to choose a more ambiguous title and would rather to talk less about my work to leave more space for viewer's imagination.