

## Elsewhen

Ala Ebtekar

January 18 - March 8, 2012

Informed both by his cultural background and what it means to be a part of a diasporic community in the 21st Century, Ala Ebtekar's meticulous paintings, drawings, and installations have imagined what the present day could look like if it collided with history and mythology.

Exhibited widely throughout the United States and internationally, Ebtekar's impressive body of work over the past decade has drawn evocative parallels between events unfolding today and events and stories of the past. Challenged by an increasing desire to look towards the future and how to manifest this palpable impulse into a new series of work, he began researching the narratives and concepts of the literary genre of science fiction, where depictions of the future, space flight, and time travel set the stage for narratives of realistic speculation about possible future events.



*The Dark Midnight, Fearful Waves, and the Tempestuous Whirlpool, 2011, mixed media digital pigment prints, 100 x 66 cm*

Although the genre has important historical antecedents in the West – including Johannes Kepler's *Somnium* (1620), Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864), and influential 20th Century works by writers such as Isaac Asimov, Ursula K. Le Guin, and William Gibson – Ebtekar had a difficult time locating prominent examples of this type of writing in Iran. One reason may be because the philosophy permeating much of Persian literature has been a focus on the now. In works by celebrated poets such as Rumi and Hafez, a recurring refrain to fully embrace the moment of the everyday and to acknowledge that yesterday has already transpired, and tomorrow brings the unknown is pervasive. But what about tomorrow? What would a future Iran look like? What do Iranians and those in the Diaspora see the future holding for them?

Galvanized to pose these questions about the future from the perspective of the 21st Century, Ebtekar presents two new bodies of work exploring concepts of alternate realities, space, and utopia against the backdrop of photographs of the famous Tomb of Hafez located in Shiraz, Iran and actual book pages from Hafez's revered collection of works, the *Divan-e-Hafez*. In the Persian-speaking world, Hafez is regarded not only as an extraordinary poet whose verses were infused with an abundance of mystical love seer, a "tongue of the mysterious" whose poetry was divinely inspired. Over the centuries, many have consulted the words of Hafez to garner and

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solace on subjects such as personal travels, family illness, or financial transactions. Holding the *Divan-e-Hafez*, they close their eyes, make a wish, randomly turn to a section of the book, open their eyes, and recite the poem on the page, receiving an amalgamation of poetic rapture, existential guidance, and moral inspiration.

Surrounding the Tomb of Hafez are serene pools of water and well-maintained flowerbeds and gardens, providing an optimal environment to pause, breathe, and pay homage to the beloved Persian poet and natural beauty illustrated in his writings. Ebtekar's works envision what this precise moment of reflection and contemplation could look like: where in the momentary interlude from daily reality, a world fully imbued with physical properties of the cosmos and the latent potential inherent in an expanded perspective beyond this world is possible. Similarly, with the series of paintings on pages of the *Divan-e-Hafez*, Ebtekar visualizes the psychological, emotional, and spiritual manifestation of the act of reading Hafez, a time of suspended reality where poetic illumination is possible, where imaginative variations on the present condition of the world are infinite, and where the portal to the cosmos is centrally located, unobstructed, and literally within the words of Hafez.

Through these two bodies of work, Ebtekar not only conjures up what could be interpreted as representations of the transcendent ineffable and the divine, but also suggests a world where an expanded frame of reference can help lay the foundation for realities alternative to what currently exists.

#### **About Ala Ebtekar**

Ebtekar describes his work as "a visual glimpse of a crossroad where present day events meet history and mythology". As a young teenager he joined the seminal group K.O.S. (Kids of Survival), working with artist Tim Rollins on collaborative artworks involving groups of urban youth. He received his BA from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2002 and his MFA degree from Stanford University in 2006.

His work has been exhibited internationally and throughout the United States in shows such as "One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now", a touring exhibition originating at the Asia Society, NYC, and in the "2006 California Biennial" at the Orange County Museum of Art, and most recently in "The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds After 1989" at ZKM - Museum of Contemporary Art, Karlsruhe, Germany. He is a visiting lecturer at Stanford University, and lives and works in San Francisco.

#### **About The Third Line**

The Third Line is an art gallery that represents contemporary Middle Eastern artists locally, regionally and internationally, with a gallery space in Dubai. In addition to on-going exhibitions, The Third Line hosts non-profit, alternative programs to increase interest and debate in the region.

The Third Line also publishes books by associated artists from the region. Books published to date include *Presence* by Emirati photographer Lamy Gargash (2008), and *In Absentia* by Palestinian-Kuwaiti Tarek Al-Ghoussein (2009), and most recently *Cosmic Geometry*, an extensive monograph on Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarman, edited by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Karen Marta (2011).

Represented artists include: Abbas Akhavan, Ala Ebtekar, Amir H. Fallah, Babak Golkar, Ebtisam Abdulaziz, Farhad Moshiri, Fouad Elkoury, Golnaz Fathi, Hassan Hajjaj, Hayv Kahraman, Huda Lutfi, Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige, Lamy Gargash, Laleh Khorramian, Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarman, Poursan Jinchi, Rana Begum, Shezad Dawood, Shirin Aliabadi, Slavs and Tatars, Susan Hefuna, Tarek Al- Ghoussein and Youssef Nabil.

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