

SHIVA AHMADI

About the Artist

Shiva Ahmadi is a graduate of Azad University, Tehran, Iran, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, and Cranbrook Academy of Arts, Bloomfield Hills, MI. Ahmadi lives and works near Detroit, MI, and is represented by the Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY.

In addition to solo exhibitions at the Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY, Ahmadi has been part of group exhibitions at Rutgers University (2012), Abu Dhabi Art, Dhubi, UAE, (2011), the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2011), and Galerie Sabine Knust, Munich, Germany (2011). She received a Kresge Foundation Fellowship in the Visual Arts in 2009, and was nominated for the Altoid Award by the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, NY in 2007.

All works courtesy the artist and the Leila Heller Gallery, New York, NY

This exhibition was organized in support of the 2012 Wooster Forum: Complexities of the Middle East.

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1975, Shiva Ahmadi's representational watercolors are influenced by Persian and Indian miniature painting, yet occupy a charged contemporary psycho-visual space. According to the artist, her loosely spattered and highly layered paintings on aqua-board, "Create an allegorical realm where faceless tyrants and religious authorities sit on ornate gilded thrones while subservient minions bow to them." These recent works from the artist's mythical *Throne* series are meticulous and loose, playful and somber, and are also very much rooted in the artist's reality.

Ahmadi's earlier paintings were a belated manifestation of the double trauma of the invasion of Iran by Iraq in 1980 followed by the US invasion in 2003. Her more recent work reflects a broader sense of instability about the region and the mounting uncertainty of a tense standoff between aggressive regimes. However, rather than tackle the emotional charge felt by the civilians of these regimes directly, Ahmadi takes an unusual representational detour.

Sometimes the tyrants on the thrones seem messianic, with a veil covering their faces and flames leaping out from behind their heads while others are guardians of nuclear reactors floating on clouds. The minions are often depicted as festive buffoons in the guise of monkeys and dogs kissing the feet of others, juggling grenades, and being restrained by leashes. Other animals include elephants and camels floating on candy-like clutter, or stomping on highly ornamental carpets where the red of the carpet becomes a deep pool of blood and the candy represents cluster bombs, bullets and other projectiles.

Although Ahmadi's lush and seductive paintings create an uneasy tension that appears to be geopolitically specific, her work is fundamentally a critique of any form of overt or covert dictatorial authority.