



FARZAD KOHAN

Born: 1967, Iran. Lives & Works in Los Angeles, CA.

Everyday... in the absence of words

By Shaheen Merali

Farzad Kohan has been busy examining space and simultaneously has become quite a conversant, using and connecting various personal issues to examine shifts and challenges that have become both his and part of our context over time. Deciphering differences has allowed Farzad to realize the unexpected and remain inventive in finding ways which highlight his own Iranian background whilst adding to Los Angeles artists' heritage. It is this journey that draws an ever-increasing community to appreciate his paintings, drawings and intriguing sculptures. Many collectors and collections, including the permanent collection of LACMA, have understood the place of these unique and vibrant compositions, enabling them to frame experience and consciousness as a visual perspective in a constant expansion of the passionate Kohan spirit.

i) Everyday...in the studio of Farzad Kohan

Farzad tends to work in series, allowing him to temper the intentions and priorities of the narratives that feed and sometimes starve his own history. Works are often arrived at instinctually, by observing the world around himself and through the art histories of his generation. Generally, his drawings and paintings (sometimes even his sculptures) are supervised by an inner alchemy, repelling elements or materials that do not belong together but which are deliberately made to become mutable. In this way, what eventually may unfold is an increasingly complex interplay with image and text, even if the results may seem to read singularly.

The boundaries of colors that repel or materials that create space, are like the 'shy' gaps between trees; those that allow the sun to shine through, and branches to grow upwards rather than to scramble for horizontal space. These general characteristics inform his slight dramas in his studio, pouring, dripping and collating the nonconforming gathering of spaces that trigger details which sustain our enquiring minds.

Farzad is a believer in abstraction from the algorithms, of materials, temperatures, attitudes and much else that can aid to discard notions of neutrality and the objective. All algorithms are nothing more than opinions or behavior embedded in some deep mathematics or poetry. For Farzad, the problem of being alert to art's potential, as Mark Rothko, Adolph Gottlieb, and



Barnett Newman poignantly suggest, “is an adventure into an unknown world, which can be explored only by those willing to take the risks.”¹

Farzad often talks about the process, of manifesting from a place of self -doubt; such a disposition takes time to organize. The constant waiting for the image can be an endless journey of multiple starting points and delays that seem promising and often end as provisional, the luckless abandonment that spurs pursuit on another day. Time seems to be pivotal to Farzad’s practice. Reaching any conclusion with such a practice takes constant vigilance. Waiting to realize that which is embedded somewhere between the tubes and pots of color and the constellation of signs and symbols, the missing words and shadows lie beneath the veneer. With patience, the eventual result ascends, the recurrent image is made possible with layers of words, sounds and colors that mutate in the confined space of the canvas or wood panel, a place emboldened with meaning.

Farzad treats work as a partnership, striving to make sense, knowing or believing that within the process lies an eventual result. Likewise his gift is to further recognize the distance between his starting point and the consequence; the record of his universe.

ii) *Everyday.....Stories of US*

Farzad affirmed the series, *Stories of US*.“all of US being the same yet different” to be “a record of our everyday life in a way, making connections, making relationships and how we interact with each other, basically life as a form.”² These small groups of borderless paintings, painted on circular wooden panels of two to three different sizes are an inspired attempt to create meaning that furthers his ideas and ideals to engender meaning.

These sublime spheres, perfectly floating before US, in pastels or deeply colored are marked by a leathery patina; one that seems to have been observed in a distant planet or moon seen from earth, its hues vibrant and monochromatic, all different yet bound by similarities in size and texture, stationed in static caveats.

Stories of US is a set of translations, an act of interpretation, just as is our history of art, of life, of knowledge and of chaos and calm. They reveal a mediated state, a complicated fractal arrangement of sites, traces and regrets, that is human endeavor. These canvasses are full of energy; endless, suspended, and curious, they form an absorbing picture of perspectives that meet and walk together or

¹ Pedroso-Roussado, Brief manifesto: Mark Rothko with Adolph Gottlieb and Barnett Newman, June 13, 1943 edition of the New York Times <https://medium.com/@PRoussado/brief-manifesto-mark-rothko-with-adolph-gottlieb-and-barnett-newman-bf01650381d1> (2017)

² Unpublished e-mail correspondence between the artist and the writer, 2018



apart. They allow us to contemplate the idea of beginnings and completion, as well as to proceed in the spectrum of art which starts in the Hindu tradition of Tantric art and the bindu (in which all experiences collapse, so to speak, into a point from which they arose in the first place) leading to rooms dedicated to modernities early stages in the work of Kazimir Malevich and Mark Rothko.

Farzad's new series emerges out of much recent work that inquires into the circle, the dot or void. Keen exponents of these tropes whose works have truly been shared globally have been Yayoi Kusama, Anish Kapoor and Damien Hirst, to name but a few. Such works have allowed a multitude of people, mostly strangers, to connect with how this particular form defines our current understanding of space and the global nature of our connectivity. Farzad has continually refined his images alongside with displaying a similar ambition to share his works as a place where relationships are formed. He demonstrates art's unique force that unites and multiplies many possibilities for the audience, including that of relating to meanings from beyond one's own circle to circles beyond one's own limits.

Relativity provides an opportunity that artists strive towards, allowing them to open up structures, minds, voids and possibilities; the circle is a realignment for Farzad, a complicated but recurrent format that he has examined many times in the last two decades but has never presented publicly until now. The new millennium remains on the threshold of a revolution, full of imminent change, the opportunity is great and, in its vitality, it has freed up that which had remained locked in the recent past.

The unique sovereign place of the circle, like a lake or a sea, even a pond, remains unbound; an island (by itself), its borders forever circuitous, leading only to itself, a standalone, an un-matrix form (that converts a matrix into a vector). It is this possibility of the position of one point in space relative to another, that allows Farzad to contemplate the place between autonomy and the community.

In previous exhibitions including the *Migration Project* and *Light as Form* (both in 2015), Farzad provided spectral voices, a dexterity of movements, witnesses, testimonies, networks and direct reflections as a means to understand the greater goals towards collective freedom. His aims and his desire remains the same; to create a visual equivalence, a pictorial path and signs and residues that crisscross the self as the other.

In a further development, Farzad has started to gather these circular forms in small clusters; the beginning of a protozoan structure, a makeshift map with a few mapping pins, a family chart or a corner of the cosmos. Farzad's placing into small groups creates a hub wherein to revise, reconsider, reimagine and develop new models, future spaces, possible terrains. One imagines distance by its



proximity and vice versa. Like a hall of mirrors each image slightly distorts (the other) but is born from its relationship to its neighbor.

Farzad has always been preoccupied by and persistent with ideas that implicate the circle as an idea which arises to inform. This circular, within which we have always danced, as in the roundhouses where singers have praised and performed for their times, famously made great in Shakespearian drama.

The circles have become a further constellation, releasing ideas about Farzad's contemplation, each becoming a point of reference, a symbolic place of rest for someone who has travelled a great deal, seen that which should have remained unseen, and yet feels incapable of closing the studio door. At last, after two decades, he has been able to release his anxiety to share the circle, for in his restlessness he has found beauty and deposits that continue to let his methods and meanings expand.

Farzad Kohan is a fine example of an artist who emerges from painting's fatality and sculpture's revival to recommence his artistic journey. Most contemporary artists have had to pick themselves up by their bootlaces, to be able to see the world afresh. Every aspect of existence is now part of an extensive vision made partially from the ubiquitous success of invention combined with knowledge which streams the present and its passing.

ABOUT SHAHEEN MERALI

Shaheen Merali is a curator and writer, based in London, who explores the intersection of art, cultural identity and global histories in his work. Previously, he was a key lecturer at Central Saint Martins School of Art and the Head of Department of Exhibition, Film and New Media at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin.