

Lifeline as Medium: Recent works by Arghavan Khosravi and Cecilia Charlton
October 18 – November 13, 2018

In *Lifeline as Medium*, Thomas Jaeckel Gallery showcases two bodies of recent work from American artist Cecilia Charlton and Iranian-born painter Arghavan Khosravi that delve deeply into the perpetual struggle between the past and the present in our lives. Each artist uses an inventive combination of diverse mediums, both traditional and contemporary, and both work with compelling imagery that demands the viewer's participation to reveal hidden meanings and elusive narratives only hinted at by surface appearances. A dual portrait emerges of two artists' deep concern with keeping the dialogue between the ancient and modern alive and fruitful.

In Khosravi's canvases, characteristic elements of traditional Persian miniatures—shallow space; isometric perspective; intricately patterned details; vibrant textures including gold and silver leaf; and figures from Middle Eastern angelology and demonology—coexist with characters who are blatantly modern in appearance. The dichotomy between the private lives and public personae of women in modern Iran is a recurring theme. A persuasive system of visual metaphors elicits thoughts of concealment (via veils, screens, curtains, and figures that block one another's faces from view), introspection (via mirrors, both implied and directly portrayed), and the inextricability of human interaction from social constraint (via rope-like strands of yarn, both actual and illusionistically painted). At times, female characters are depicted in outdoor settings wearing clothes that more conservative Iranians might deem inappropriate for public display. In *Every Morning News From Home*, a standing and a reclining figure who are only visible from the legs down wear recognizably trendy skinny jeans and sneakers in a courtyard that might have popped out of a fifteenth-century Persian illumination; the upright figure is concealed behind the veil of what appears to be a portable—or more accurately, wearable—privacy booth, implying the impropriety of stepping out in such immodest and/or contemporary garb. Khosravi uses her materials to reinforce these ideas in more subtle ways as well. Exposed areas of the unprimed linen on which she works are used to depict the rough texture of her characters' drab, uniformly gray garments, while *Inward Element* transforms a piece of traditional woodblock-printed paisley textile into a mirror containing the visage of a nude woman who seems to kneel over her reflection from a gravity defying angle perpendicular to the picture plane. In *Staircase to Heaven*, another woman's form is defined by a body-shaped hole in the canvas, reinforcing the conflation of presence/visibility and absence/invisibility engendered by socially-enforced codes of public modesty.

Although Charlton works with a strikingly different range of materials and processes, her technical and conceptual approach toward artmaking is just as complex and multifaceted as Khosravi's, and her influences are equally diverse and just as grounded in a dialogue with the past. Well-trained in traditional craftmaking processes of silversmithing and ceramics as well as contemporary painting in a classically Modernist style, she is also a third-generation textile artist. These influences have led her on a journey through a distinctive, personalized form of geometric abstraction she once dubbed "reductive scientific surrealism" (examples of which are

represented in this show by a series of canvases titled *Bottles I-V*) to a more recent body of exquisitely labor-intensive needlepoints that evoke the visual language of Modernist abstraction while also referencing a vast array of much older traditions of weaving and object-making that have been handed down around the world from generation to generation since ancient times. With an astute evocation of the exploitation of traditional cultures by modern civilizations that borders on cynicism (or perhaps even outright snark), titles such as *It might've been a walk-in spirit (according to my 72-year-old Peruvian roommate)* and *Michael Pollan says it's OK to use psychedelic drugs (in a therapeutic setting), part 1* hint at the precarious position such traditions have in the industrialized world, as the forces of cultural appropriation, economic colonialism, primitivist reframing, and technological transformation threaten to transform them into something completely unrecognizable to their original creators.

Thomas Jaeckel Gallery's selection of works in *Lifeline as Medium* celebrates Khosravi's and Charlton's compelling and singular paths toward finding a new life for perennial (but mutable) imagemaking traditions within the world of contemporary art. Each artist makes us question where we've been and where we're going, not only as fellow travelers in the art world, but also as residents of this postmodern globe. Together, these works explore the profound tension between past and present, preservation and innovation, tradition and progress. Though neither artist proposes a complete denial of progress or modernity, nor a regression to an idealized past, both poses questions best not ignored.

Arghavan Khosravi has an MFA in painting from the Rhode Island School of Design, a BFA in Graphic Design from Islamic Azad University of Tehran, and an MFA in Illustration from University of Tehran. Her works have been exhibited in New York, Iran, and throughout the U.S., and are in the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum in Providence, RI, as well as many private collections.

Cecilia Charlton is an American-born artist living and working in London. Her recent exhibitions include: SURGE: the East Wing Biennial, Courtauld Institute, London; Rogue Objects, UCL, London; Living Room, Safehouse 1 & 2, London. In June 2018 she completed her MA Painting at the Royal College of Art.

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