



Farideh Lashai
Pooya Aryanpour

Booth: Focus Plus Booth #F6
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New York

Address: Javits Center, 429 11th Ave, New York, NY 10001.
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**THE
ARMORY
SHOW**

At The Armory Show 2024, Focus section, Dastan presents works by Farideh Lashai (1944-2013) and Pooya Aryanpour (b. 1971), two artists whose practice has often explored themes of memory and recall, employing long-standing artistic and cultural traditions to create work that transcends the reach of a singular sensation. The booth features recent mirror-work sculptures by Aryanpour, as well as paintings by the late Lashai.

Farideh Lashai and Pooya Aryanpour were well-acquainted from the 1990s until Lashai passed away in 2013. Notably, Aryanpour co-directed (with Bahar Behbahani) a 2000 short documentary about Farideh Lashai, conversing with the artist about her interest in literature and her inspirations from history, personal experience, and literary studies. "Farideh came to see one of my very first solo exhibitions in 1994. It started a long-lasting friendship. I had the opportunity to enjoy her opinions and gain more insight into her practice throughout the years, especially in 1999, when we were both showing work at the 9th Asian Art Biennale Bangladesh. She was always easily inspired by every bit of her encounters with the world, including travels, literature, music, visual arts, and whatever she experienced in her path. She would immediately start working, be it writing or painting –passionately and expressively."

This is the first time Lashai's and Aryanpour's work is being exhibited together as a duo presentation, focusing on the dialog between their work and aiming to show their inspirations from the natural world, meditations on memory and recall, and their emphasis on how personal experience shapes one's view of objective reality, presence, and the flow of time.

Pooya Aryanpour sets out to remap and expand the architectural techniques of mirror-work (Ayineh-Kari) to craft ambiguous forms that simultaneously seem representational and abstract. His work focuses on creating mystery and suspense, exploring subject material rooted in the traditions of Iranian culture. In his paintings and three-dimensional work, traditional symbolism, styles of narration, storytelling and folklore, Persian calligraphy schools, and their impact are utilized through cutting-edge approaches. His sculptural pieces often take the observer beyond their physical boundaries, as they create wide reflections that lead to plays of light, lines, and forms that create a sensory presence.

Aryanpour's practice follows traditional roots, yet builds on centuries and layers. In his own words, "Throughout my research on traditional Iranian architecture and mirror-work, one of the aspects that never ceased to amaze me was how such works were restored and repaired. I studied restoration processes and techniques in detail. In many restoration projects, surface layers are removed and work begins at a deeper level. Whenever I visited sites that were being restored, I was always fascinated by how these deeper layers could take me closer to the spirit of the original time and work." These studies compelled him to create novel structures underneath mirror surfaces, many of which have been inspired by microscopic lifeforms, the human body, forms in the natural world, and traditional ornamentations.

Initially trained in paintings, his mirror-work surfaces follow many of his experimentations in improvisational drawing and painting: "When designing the patterns, I would make references to a wide variety of studies and observations that were based on things I had contemplated throughout my practice. Many of such references emerged from the world of my paintings—for instance, my studies on natural elements such as rivers, seas, plants and leaves, landscapes, cityscapes, and daily life, began to appear in the mirror-work designs, similar to the way they had appeared previously in my paintings. In addition to these, one of the most influential sources of inspiration for the designs was my studies on the traditions of Tazhib [illuminated manuscript]."¹

Farideh Lashai's paintings reveal her profound ability to merge traditional and contemporary aesthetics. Lashai's work draws on the subtleties of natural landscapes, transforming them into reflections of both external environments and inner emotions. Her paintings are not mere depictions of nature; instead, they evoke the essence and spirit of the natural world, blending delicate abstraction with a vibrant yet muted color palette. For her, nature is connected to the human experience and not an immaculate externality.

Lashai's approach to abstraction is deeply influenced by her broad artistic background, including her studies in decorative arts in Europe and her deep connection to Iranian artistic traditions. Her work resonates with the influence of European modern movements, yet remains distinctly her own, marked by an ethereal quality that avoids direct representation. Instead, Lashai's brushwork captures fleeting moments, the ephemeral beauty of blossoms, and the transient moods of nature, giving viewers a sense of immersion in a contemplative, almost dreamlike state.

In a 1991 interview², she elaborates on her view on nature and takes inspiration from it through personal experience: "...nature has always had an extraordinary pull on me, not as an unrelated phenomenon outside of my existence, but as something intertwined with the internal struggles of humanity, addressing its spiritual conflicts and questions—perhaps related to ontology. Its richness, which never diminishes, primarily, astonished humanity over the years. As we age, gain experience, and explore the myriad corners of this colorful world and its preoccupations, we come to realize: how delightful this astonishment is. I mentioned that the richness of this nature still amazes me, a wonder that is essential for artistic work, whether it be painting, poetry, or music. Then there's the balance and unique aesthetic of each piece within this boundless space at various moments. Nature alone is not interesting to me; it is devoid of spirit and meaning and disconnected from the human soul. It is only through the emotional and spiritual conditions of the observer that it comes to life."

She sees human beings as an integral part of nature: "...the vast underwater expanse, the scorched and the fertile land, or trees with roots in the soil reaching towards the sky seem to connect earth and time. The way these vertical and diagonal lines intertwine with one another creates a space filled with the excitement of existence. Humanity is also a piece of nature. Indeed, it is in separation from it that one becomes lost—a necessary separation imposed on humanity by the course of civilization. The trees are no longer those eternal trees, nor is the sky that calm blue light spread across the universe... In my work, it is from my perspective that nature takes shape; it is the inner self of humanity that projects its specific concepts onto nature in various states; and nature becomes a tool for expressing human emotions, potentially reflecting the inner face of humanity."

1. Pooya Aryanpour in conversation with Ashkan Zahraei. "Gone with the Wind", Exhibition Catalog. Tehran: 2022.

2. Farieh Lashai in conversation with Ahmadreza Dalvand. "Gardoona", Issue 7. Tehran: March 1991.