

SAM SAMIEE

Talking to Sam Samiee about his painting practice is an utterly high-speed undertaking. He belongs to that rare group of artists who like to talk – and listen. The amount of knowledge that the painter pours into the first few minutes of a dialogue is impressive. He moves seamlessly from the ninth-century invention of Farsi to how this coincided with the emergence of painting in the West as a technique to negotiate metaphysics, and then to contemporary psychoanalysis, culminating in possible answers to the question of why Germans still haven't learned to mourn properly. This all makes sense considering Samiee's background. Born and raised in Tehran, the artist completed his formal education in the Netherlands and currently lives and works in Berlin.

The painter's intellectual trajectories are emblematic of his visual landscapes; which is not to say they are the same. He is well aware of when to apply which mode of communication. His installations, often composed of paintings and objects, break open the normative order and iconography of traditional European painting. Samiee synthesizes this history with one of his recent research interests, the Persian term *adab*, used to describe the dual concept of ethics and aesthetics. His work is heavily influenced by Persian literary legacies and their close kinship to contemporary psychoanalysis. Fusing these knowledge systems allows the artist to enter into or create new spaces and temporalities, beginning on the canvas and usually extending into the three-dimensional exhibition space with the support of objects as a means of challenging hegemonic visual practices.

This approach is always driven by a desire to deflect the conditioned gaze of viewers and witnesses from conventional interpretations or processes of meaning-making towards new fields of possibility; a procedure that evolves from the attempt to unhinge familiar subjectivities or positions of subjecthood, blurring the idea of the self-contained, rational Western subject. In Samiee's oeuvre this manifests itself in what he calls "shrines of abstract art," heterodimensional spaces that allow the viewer to mourn, reflect, and pause for a moment. For example, assembled in the gallery space his paintings *The Bedroom Posters* (2015-16) depict the queering of (male-ascribed) physiques or disproportionately painted celestial constellations installed next to the warm light of a bedside lamp. As a whole, such constellations of works and objects evoke a sense of disorientation. They also have a performative character; Samiee's installations prompt viewers to physically situate themselves in space and attune themselves to the atmosphere. One can read this as a call to temporarily accept disturbing environments, unknown and unfamiliar, which ultimately invite us to actively participate in the birthing of new, more interrelated worlds.

Leading up to the 10th Berlin Biennale, Samiee continued his explorations of the idea of *adab* during a two-month studio residency at the ZK/U-Center for Art and Urbanistics, where his work *The Unfinished Copernican Revolution* (2018) is on view.

– Magnus Elias Rosengarten