

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

RAHA RAISSNIA

selected texts & press

RAHA RAISSNIA

"I have to tell you, I learned filmmaking more from painters and musicians than from filmmakers," director Béla Tarr has confessed. Reversing his cue, Raha Raissnia learned to paint from filmmakers and musicians rather than painters. Years spent at Anthology Film Archives left her well-versed in the cinematic avant-garde, and her projection performances often involve collaborations with experimental musicians Aki Onda and Charles Curtis. Above all, Raissnia's work aspires to the temporal and experiential condition of music—suggestive, ambiguous, abstract.

Over the past decade, the artist's paintings, drawings, and films have unfolded within a permutational, self-reflexive structure. In her earlier work, the artist presented dense, architectonic black and white drawings and paintings that appeared to echo a certain postwar European abstraction. Rather than deferring to gesture, however, Raissnia orchestrated these scapes by steadily tracing a configuration of intersecting and overlapping vectors in space. In her self-titled exhibition at the gallery in 2009, a hybrid 16mm film and 35mm slide projection occupying one wall provided a glimpse into the expanded cinema practice that informs the artist's two-dimensional work. The artist's films, drawings, and paintings are closely imbricated: paintings are contrapuntal compositions catalyzed by film stills, transferred faintly onto the surface of the panel and elaborated upon with oil and gesso. Her films echo this archaeological process, constructed from fragments of earlier work and structured as overlapping pairs of 35mm slide and 16mm film projections. Raissnia's drawings and collages, likewise comprised of image transfers, with Sumi ink and compressed charcoal, examine this relationship of mutual influence. All are guided by the materiality of their media.

Raissnia's densely textured work draws in equal measure on the gestural and photographic, the figurative and abstract. As her films render these boundaries ambiguous through layers of manipulation and reference, so too does her two-dimensional work present a world that contains aspects of both but belongs properly to neither. It features passageways to indeterminate locations and irrational architectures. "My paintings brought abstraction to the vision I captured from the world on film and now the films are bringing elements of reality into my paintings," Raissnia says. Her viewer is left with the (impossible) task of excavating the two.

Raissnia's work is structured permutationally, permitting levels of signification and interpretation to coexist in, to quote Roland Barthes, a "multi-layering of meanings which always lets the previous meaning continue, as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary." In his text, *The Third Meaning*, Barthes suggests that neither still nor film exceeds, precedes, nor fully contains the other. The same can be said of the still and moving image in Raissnia's multifarious body of work—the two are placed in perpetual counterpoint.

Raha Raissnia (b. 1968, Tehran, Iran) lives and works in Athens and New York City. She received her BEA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1992 and her MFA from Pratt Institute in 2002. Solo institutional exhibitions of her work were held at the Drawing Center, New York (2018) and The Museum of Modern Art, New York (2016). In 2015, she was included in the 13th Bienal de Cuenca, Ecuador, and the 56th International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, curated by Okwui Enwezor. Notable group exhibitions include Greater New York, MoMA PS1, New York (2021-22); Long Live Modern Movement, CSS Bard Hessel Museum, New York (2020); The Foundation of the Museum: MOCA's Collection, The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles (2019); Looking Back – The 8th White Columns Annual, White Columns, New York (2014); Cosmography, The Kitchen, New York (2011) and Engaging the False Mirror, Museum of Contemporary Art St. Louis (2010), among others. Raissnia's sixth one-person exhibition at Miguel Abreu Gallery was held in the winter of 2019. In 2022, she had her first solo exhibition in East Asia, Nour, at Empty Gallery, Hong Kong. She also had her third solo exhibition at Galerie Xippas, Paris, and folie at Galerie Khoshbakt, Cologne, both in 2023.

Raissnia's film and slide projection performances, often undertaken in collaboration with Aki Onda, Panagiotis Mavridis, and Charles Curtis have been held at AB-ANBAR (London), Empty Gallery (Hong Kong), Whitney Museum of American Art (New York), REDCAT (Los Angeles), Kunsthal Rotterdam, Arnolfini – Center for Contemporary Arts (Bristol, UK), the Drawing Center (New York), ISSUE Project Room (New York), and OKLÀ (Montreal), among others. Her work is held in the collections of The

Museum of Modern Art (New York), the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles), M+ (Hong Kong), the Pejman Foundation (Tehran), Colección INELCOM (Madrid), the Pinault Collection, The Museum of Old and New Art (Tasmania), and Tumurun Private Museum (Surakarta).

Thick Time, Rare Time

CONVERSATION BY MARTIN
GERMANN AND RAHA RAISSNIA
MARCH 2025

Martin Germann: Thinking about your mind-blowing film performance in Jakarta roughly one month ago, a couple of remarkable moments are still hovering on my mind. There was a focused intensity one could physically perceive in the space – time became thick. It was a collective experience, where everyone was literally thrown in following the perpetual visual metamorphosis on the screen and what was being transmitted through the speakers. As if one would touch upon a hidden mode of experience which has been long forgotten. Is this something you are trying to evoke?

Raha Raissnia: It's interesting because as I actively manipulate and run the various projectors behind the audience, I have never myself experienced what you are describing in that exact way. I make these works in a kind of trance and never consciously try to bring out any kind of effect upon the audience, however, I do pick up on the audiences' attentiveness, so I have a sense of what you are talking about. In general, the more attentive the audience the better I maneuver and make my moves.

MG: ...you are choosing the word "trance", as if art-making comes close to a spiritual experience, and along with that a mental state which, in today's increasingly rationalized world seems to disappear. Does this state both appear to the moments in which you – technically – prepare these films, and then your presentation? How important is it for your art-making, and how exactly do you reach this state?

RR: By trance I mean working in an intensive, continuous and concentrated way that is very open for things to move in new and unexpected directions. This

is my usual way of making my work and everything is done with great precision. In regard to technicality, a lot of time, care and however amount of mastery I have amassed goes into both making, rehearsing and performing the films. In regard to the performance itself I believe that I work very much like musicians, for example, jazz musicians spend enormous amount of time practicing their instruments with utmost precision but they do this in order that they can then improvise with great freedom and a sense of being present in the moment of performing; at that time there is no room for thinking and judging, they just play.

MG: You are about to start on a collaborative work with Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh, who, from the perspective of writing, seems to share an eagerness of digging behind the fabric of today's historical time-frames – let's say the "known history" to its limits, to somewhat get beyond the horizons of knowledge – which, was one of the feelings I had in experiencing your performance. Does his thinking have a direct influence on your work?

RR: This characteristic you describe about my work existed before I discovered him, so I can say that one of the reasons I am so moved by his work and way of thinking has to do with a kind of shared sensibility. Additionally I am in awe with his depth of knowledge and perspective on so many issues that is a real learning experience. He is truly a huge inspiration to me. He is a rebel, out in war fighting all that is confining, and banal and as you suggested he aims at opening up the horizons bound by rigid frameworks of time, history and other tiered, useless societal models people are still so hung up on in our crisis ridden, mess of a humanity. What he instead endorses and brings forth with what he is into, are all enchanting, captivating and electrifying. He is also extremely eloquent and elegant with his approach. I feel blessed to have a chance to work with him and excited to see it in fruition.

MG: While your work obviously touches upon some primal, hidden, invisible layers of perception, of existence – the medium you are using is film. Film, at the same time can be described as the Modernist technology par excellence. How do you relate to the gap of the rationality, which is inscribed in the apparatus of film, and the extreme irrational states you seem to evoke?

RR: There came a point, when film as a new medium came close to painting and poetry and those were the independent, avant-garde filmmakers. Their work, most of which I got to see and study

at Anthology Film Archives have been of great influence to me. They were not restricted to any boundaries of time, space, rationality and history in any linear fashion. They used film as an extraordinary medium to make astonishing works. When looking at their work one gets a sense that they can relate to ancient ideas and artifacts, as well as to some alien age in the future. Jason Bahbak Mohaghegh eloquently refers to poets, and artists whose work have this quality as "untimely" and they tend to be our favorites. Technology can serve as a tool to expand new possibilities of form, content and envisionment and still be untimely.

MG: Another question, in this way or the other also related to a chasm – but here rather in terms of today's ubiquitous identity discussions: Does your Iranian origin play a role in all this, also in the sense that beyond today's Iran and its religious state model the whole Persian culture heritage is hovering?

RR: No never overtly, and I always tend to avoid identitarian, and nationalistic subject matters. And yet, naturally since I was born and raised there till the age of 14, a great deal of my being was formed in that culture and its influence must resonate and show through my work somehow and somewhere. Perhaps it's a question I could ask you!

MG: Yes, sure - indeed, I was thinking about this life reality of yours a lot. In the age of 14 you were drawn in a entirely new ocean of imagery, but also what must have sounded to you like cacophony of sound – language, you didn't understand at first. Maybe, this biographical fact has influenced your highly unique take on fragmented, looped, sampled images... Now back to the performance in Jakarta, where I namely thought about this - could you tell me a little bit more how you were selecting the films for the respective performance, and how were you sequencing them? What was your intention in those respects, and was there also a connection for you to ROH as a place?

RR: I basically chose five works I have made since 2016 in an order that could fit in a program of one hour. I sequenced them in terms of their intensity, flow of imagery and mood, and not chronologically. Also I chose the ones that however old, resonate with me and with what I am doing with painting, and since for ROH I made a few new paintings, I wanted there to be a connection.

MG: Can you tell me more about intensity and mood? How exactly do

these emerge?

RR: Qualities in my film works are musical, and are accompanied with music. In general even my paintings share a lot with music. Intensity in music has to do with dynamics, that is fluctuation in volume, tempo has to do with speed, timber has to do with tone (color), and articulation has to do with the actual performance. I deal with all these elements that together create various moods and emotional qualities, ranging from melancholic, somber, happy, feelings of puzzlement, etc. People's reaction of course varies.

MG: What is the relation of these films to painting for you specifically in this case, and also in general?

RR: They are closely related on various levels. The film works incorporate both moving imagery (16mm film) and still imagery (35mm slides) that have certain amount of hand painting done directly onto them. Many of the slides that I have made out of meticulous layering of painted fragments of films have been made into paintings and it is in this manner that they both serve as sketches for my paintings and as elements in the whole arrangement of my film works. In a reversed manner I sometimes directly film and photograph certain forms and textures in my finished painting, so there are a lot of crossovers between the two. Another element that relates the two has to do with the uniquely designed projection screens I build for the films. I never use conventional cinematic screens, and instead what I make are essentially paintings made with painting materials such as painted canvas, specific fabrics, and stretcher bars. This element is very sensitive to light and slight shifts in tone and texture on the fabrics can create various optical affects and change the projected imagery significantly. I can say that in general for each body of work and exhibitions that I plan, I first begin with generating large amount of raw photographic and filmic imagery that I then process, synthesis and make into film works (for

installations and performances) as well as paintings and works on paper. My work is permutational, meaning that there is this continuous flow of forms and mediums metamorphosing from one work into another. In almost all of my exhibitions these two different areas of practice: painting and filmmaking are shown together and relate to one another closely. Generally in regard to form and content, I can say that my painting practice brings and adds elements of abstraction to the vision I capture onto film, and my films bring elements of reality into my paintings.

MG: Another remarkable topic I remember from the performance is the meaning of sound. Due to the thick and prolonged time, every little sound became tangible and filled with meaning. We were all sitting there, had to give away our smartphones, and were in this shared state of focused intensity. What does sound mean to you?

RR: I actually refer to them not as sound but music, including the one of hurricane Sandy I recorded, is a kind of music concrete. Music and poetry, the ultimate forms of art is what I aspire to in all my work. I always notice parallels between music and painting as well as the kind of films I make. Stan Brakhage referred to his hand painted films as "moving visual music" My favorite paintings tend to have that quality which is highly suggestive and the type that one responds to emotionally. Music more than any other art form is highly emotive, capable of alluding to the mysteries of life. I love this amazing quote by Beethoven: "Music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend. It gives prophetic vision and heavenly wisdom." I can say that "light" in my films and paintings is like music. Light is also a ghostly incorporeal being that we cannot look at; we can only see things that light reveals to us. I have had the fortune of working with several remarkable musicians over long periods of time. I have a special

connection with each one of them in a sense that we share similar interests and aspirations and we can communicate without much talking. I truly sense a psychic connection between us and what we do together. Of course, we talk about certain technical aspects of our work but there is never a dispute about the work itself. It is an interesting relationship, and it serves to inspire me.

MG: In the end of our artist talk, an older gentlemen used the term "boredom" to describe his experience, but he meant that in an extremely positive way, which became apparent in a review he posted in social media one day later. For him, this state was exactly something which had been forgotten. In Germany, the words used for "boredom" mean "long while" – which can be something positive. Can you relate to what he said?

RR: There is a lot of repetitive patterns and sustained movements in both the visuals and the music in my work, and maybe it's due to this characteristic that he used that term. The kind of exultation one might receive in my case is gradual and forms in a "long while"! I agree with this. Perhaps this leads to a kind of hypnotic and sedative state rather than an invigorating one. It's effect is slow and dense. I understand that this can't be a negative quality but as you suggested in today's world of excessive stimulation, saturated with variety of sensations rapidly coming at one from all directions, this kind of experience is becoming more and more rare.

TEXTE ZUR KUNST

IN PRAISE OF SHADOWS

DIANA D'ARENBERG ON RAHA RAISSNIA AT EMPTY GALLERY, HONG KONG



"Raha Raissnia: Nour," Empty Gallery, Hong Kong, 2022-23, installation view

Following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini in police custody, numerous images of the uprisings in Iran once again demonstrated photography's emancipatory power. Despite the increasing manipulability of photography and a corresponding growth of distrust in it, the medium continues to play a vital role in the context of protest movements. In the work of the Iranian-born, US-based artist Raha Raissnia, it is precisely the act of manipulation, the diverse techniques by means of which she processes her photographic, filmic, and painterly material, which imbues her images with unruly potential. As author Diana D'Arenberg points out in her review of Raissnia's recent exhibition in Hong Kong, the artist's multilayered, ambiguous compositions suggest the fragility of prevailing narratives along with the necessity of their renegotiation.

Iranian-born New York-based artist Raha Raissnia's first solo exhibition in East Asia, staged at Empty Gallery in Hong Kong, sees visitors step into a theatrical pitch-black gallery space in a high-rise industrial building. Eyes and mind are deprived of visual clutter and distraction, left to focus instead on the softly lit artworks that take center stage in the gallery (the only illuminated objects in the entire space). Titled "نور" – transliterated as *Nour*, meaning "light" in Farsi – the exhibition is as much an exploration of darkness as it is about light, and its potential to illuminate and create shadows. Leaving behind the visual white noise and auditory stimuli of the world outside, visitors enter a world of analogue and alchemy.

The exhibition consists of twelve works from 2022 and 2019, encompassing 35mm and 16mm film and installation, graphite and charcoal drawings on paper, and oil and acrylic paintings on canvas, all executed in moody dark tones. The chiaroscuro present in the works creates a tension between light and shadow, the visible and invisible, denseness and transparency. Images dissolve into and emerge out of light and shadow.

The centerpiece and titular work of the show, *Nour* (2022), a 16mm black-and-white film projected through a large semitransparent scrim cube suspended from the ceiling, greets visitors upon entry to the gallery space, the clicking sound of the film projector cutting through the silence. The work is both a two-dimensional film and a three-dimensional sculpture as the projection beams through space onto and through the floating cube and against the black gallery wall behind it. Raissnia's interest in avant-garde filmmaking led her to an internship at Anthology Film Archives in New York for several years in the mid 1990s, and it carries through into her painting, drawing and film works today, all of which overlap and inform one another. The film projection – like the rest of her work in the exhibition – is created through a densely layered handmade process of cutting and collage, manipulating and layering preexisting photographic material. Time, space, and narrative are splintered as Raissnia samples, reassembles, loops, superimposes, and cuts up film drawn from a personal archive of images – some found, other photographs taken by the artist. The process is transformational, resulting in a hypnotic, kinetic visual language, a moving abstract painting indebted to silent cinema and experimental film. Bursting with flickering light and shadow in a continuous three-minute loop – with no discernible beginning or end – *Nour* taps into the subconscious, allowing the imagination to take over. Using a process that calls to mind William S. Burroughs's cut-ups, where text and image fragments are pieced together in order to expand language and human consciousness, Raissnia's film projections and paintings reveal a disrupted, blurred, and fragmented reality, suffused with a Tarkovskian nostalgia.

A child when the 1978–79 revolution broke out in Iran, Raissnia cites expeditions with her father to photograph protests against the Shah as an influence on her work. The artist returned to Tehran as an adult to photograph places she had once visited and has on occasion used her father's negatives in her work. The personal extends into the universal as the artist reprocesses memory, history, narratives, and perception, and calls into question the veracity of photography.



“Raha Raissnia: Nour,” Empty Gallery, Hong Kong, 2022-23, installation view

Photography “passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened,” Susan Sontag writes in her seminal collection of essays *On Photography* (1977). But in Raissnia’s work, photography doesn’t confirm reality or experience – rather, it makes it more ambiguous. Instead of revealing any particular truth, her images obfuscate. The manipulation, distortion, and layering of photographed images subverts the intention of a photograph. This ambiguity suggests how photography is employed as a utilitarian tool – in politics, culture, and in the creation of our own narratives – where the image can be reframed, edited, recontextualized. The images she uses may correspond to a particular time and place, but by manipulating them, Raissnia engages with questions over the nature of memory, truth, and representation, as well as film’s or a photograph’s ability to accurately document subjects or to objectively represent historical or private moments.

Photography here is not used for the purpose of bearing witness, but rather to tap into an inner world. In *Nour*, geometric and architectural shapes and apparitions in striking contrast of light and shadow are blurred, cropped, and scratched. There is something nostalgic and comforting about getting lost in the flickering projection. It calls to mind the enveloping hushed darkness of an old movie theatre with the clicking of the projector. At the same time, the lines of steel and concrete cutting through abstract compositions recall the futuristic urban dystopia of Fritz Lang’s German expressionist sci-fi film *Metropolis* (1927). They disappear and

reappear, fluttering across the cube and the wall like fragments from a dream or memory, as though the artist is attempting to capture the ephemeral. Memories too can be smudged, their edges and details blurred, or manipulated by others.

Displayed beneath spotlights in an adjacent room, are seven large, monochrome paintings and three graphite, charcoal, and ink works on paper. All are densely layered and composed of photographic image transfers that are drawn from the artist's personal archive. A topography of texture reveals itself across the shimmering metallic and densely black-painted surface as Raissnia draws and paints across the canvas, adding layers, smudging paint, scraping it off. Her bifurcated graphite compositions – smaller-scale studies for larger paintings – lack the luminosity and depth of her paintings but are similarly drawn, redrawn, erased, layered, scratched, scribbled, with indentation and erasure marks visible on the paper.



"Raha Raissnia: Nour," Empty Gallery, Hong Kong, 2022-23, installation view

While Raissnia brings together different practices and media, her works intersect in the use of photography as source imagery, and in an architectonic thread that runs through the exhibition. But the paintings and drawings also draw on the cinematic, with multiple spatial and temporal planes crammed onto a single surface. Past, present, and future merge, and boundaries between mediums bleed into one another. Geometric and architectural fragments, spectral figures and forms materialize and disintegrate into darkness and stillness, occupying a liminal space between abstraction and figuration.

There is something magical yet unsettling about Raissnia's oeuvre – the artist as a creator not just of works but of worlds. Fragments of cities and landscapes – conjuring the images of war and ruin we are bombarded with daily in the news cycle, as well as archaeological sites that have succumbed to time and decay – appear in an atmospheric collage in the compositions. They float untethered, joining other shapes in a geometric maze, or dissolve into amorphous masses of black or reflective paint. From chaos, a geometric order emerges. Scraps of a decorative semicircular arch can be made out in the visual collage of the golden-hued *Tympanum* (2022), while *Doric* (2022) offers foggy glimpses of overlapping vertical and horizontal columns and staircases, tenebrous and concealed under striated brushstrokes. *Mycenaean Dream* (2022) – a painting which fuses details from a preexisting smaller drawing and image transfer of the same name (2019) – features a figure, taken from a photograph of a stone sculpture of Zeus, arms outstretched, floating in the center of the canvas panel, surrounded by a circuit board of interconnecting patterns in a clash of the ancient, modern, and futuristic.

In the confusing collage landscapes of shapes and forms, it is almost impossible to make sense of exactly what we are looking at. The process of erasure, redrawing, collaging, and layering that is central to Raissnia's practice interferes with our ability to decode the works and derive a concrete, linear meaning from them. But cities and landscapes are palimpsests of history and narratives, with the past erased, manipulated, and rewritten through war, violence, and various political regimes. Raissnia's work rightly challenges notions of narrative and identity as static and allows for a multiplicity of perceptions. The act of looking is active as we excavate through the layers of paint, graphite, and film, immersed in a world that forges the imagination from light and shadow, destruction and reconstruction.

"Raha Raissnia: نور" at Empty Gallery, Hong Kong, December 10, 2022–February 18, 2023.

Diana d'Arenberg is a Hong Kong-based art writer and musician with rock band The Strixx. She has worked with international galleries, art fairs, and biennials, as well as international publications, including *Harper's Bazaar*, *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), *LEAP* (China), *Vogue*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Ocula*, and *Christie's*.

Image credit: Courtesy of Empty Gallery, photos Michael Yu

canvas



Raha Raissnia. *Mycenaean Dream*. 2022. Oil, acrylic medium and gesso on canvas. 245.5 x 96.4 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Empty Gallery

DRAWING LIGHT

Raha Raissnia's current exhibition *Nour* at Hong Kong's **Empty Gallery** captures the play of light and shade as she creates images that aim to enlighten.

Words by Brady Ng

It's easy to lose oneself in Raha Raissnia's show, *Nour*. Dreamlike, layered and with familiar visual cues bleeding through abstract artworks, the exhibition is a culmination of Raissnia's latest endeavour to build upon the concept of expanded cinema. Reflecting the presentation's title, Farsi for 'light', the artist sees her project as an exploration of luminosity that moulds and recasts the structural elements of cinema – projectors, screens, time and space.

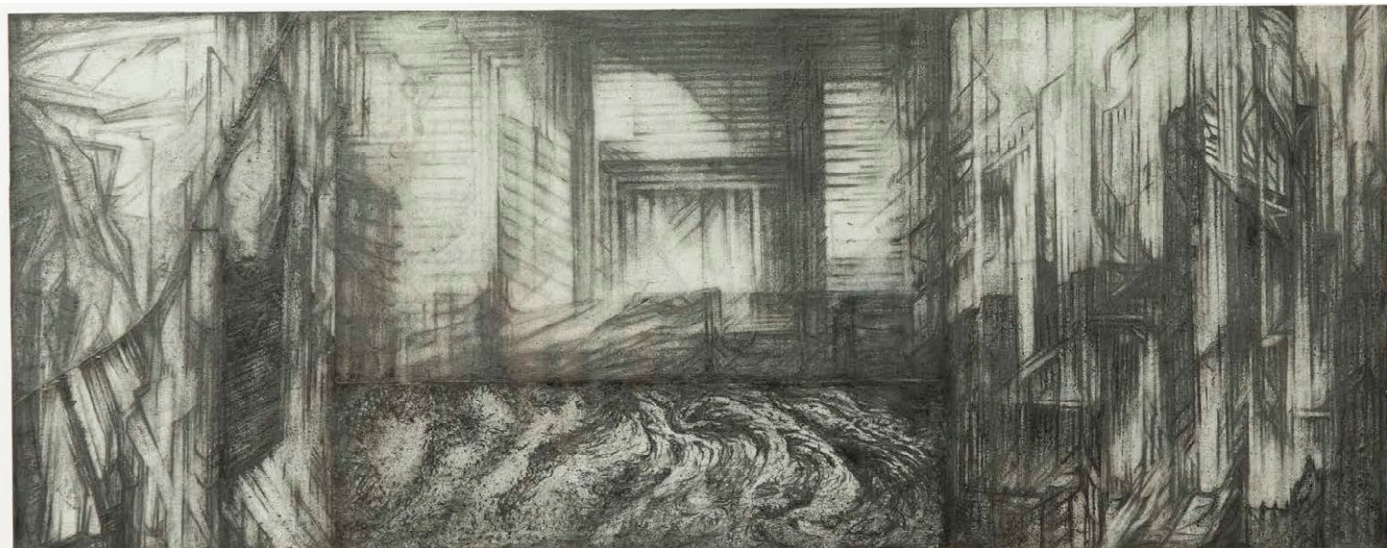
This effort comes through most clearly in two works. The first is *Nour* (2022), three minutes of close-ups of architectural elements playing in a loop, projected from 16mm film onto a cube with scrim stretched over its sides, allowing the beam of moving images

to pass through layer by layer, leaving traces along the way. Look from the side and it appears as if Raissnia's images are given three-dimensional form, dust within the cube catching light as it moves.

Despite its physical lightness, the work's conceptual aspect is dense, and it's barely possible to make out what we see. *Nour* was constructed from photographs and footage drawn from Raissnia's own archives, and it is clear that many of these depict artificial materials such as steel. The absence of narrative and evaluation of cinematic conventions in the artist's work has a lineage – in the late 1990s, she worked at Anthology Film Archives in New York, where she dived into the avant-garde films that were part of the organisation's collection.

Raha Raissnia. *Solaria*. 2022. 30 looping 35mm slides, wood, scrim, canvas. Dimensions variable. Edition 1 of 2 + 2AP. Image courtesy of the artist and Empty Gallery





Raha Raissnia. *Pantheon*. 2019. Graphite, compressed charcoal, ink, collage on paper. 24.1 x 61 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Empty Gallery

Elsewhere in the show, *Solaria* (2022) comprises 35mm slides projected onto textured canvases, again through scrims. These images were captured using digital cameras, the artist's mobile phone, toy cameras and a Super 8, then digitally manipulated and transferred onto film. Conscientiously abstract, Raissnia's practice needs to be viewed holistically rather than as a collection of individual artworks. She emphasises that her drawings, moving image installations and paintings are interconnected, with filmic works and paintings influencing each other while drawings probe this relationship.

Three artworks on paper yield a hint of Raissnia's creative process. These monochromatic collages convey layers of scale, from natural to artificial, minute to monumental. Sharp vertical lines in *Pantheon* (2019) bring forth impressions of skyscraping verticality next to an undertow seemingly swirling beneath the work, currents lapping against its lower edge, architectural stillness colliding with dynamic movement.

In *Confound* (2019), a circular structure – resembling the Theatral Circle on the Greek island of Samothrace – is the focal point. It is framed by layer upon layer of lines that make the viewer think of circuitry or complex systems of cables organised with military precision.

The attention to detail in these works and others in *Nour* reflects the lengths to which Raissnia goes to make her art. By painstakingly assembling, duplicating and superimposing images, performing erasures, then looping back to do it all over again, she figures out how each work stands within the interplay between light and shadow, where a familiar form can pierce through the construct, or how a stab of colour might glow. After the collages are made, she then spends months executing the ideas on paper, blending graphite, compressed charcoal and ink.

The 2019 work on paper *Scholiastic View* anticipated a later painting with the same title, which was completed in 2022. At its full scale, the canvas smoulders through Empty Gallery's 'black cube' presentation with tints of green, ochre and bronze. In its centre, highways zip through an ancient Greek sculpture, trailing toward what might be an aqueduct by a river. To the left, we see a column blending into – or breaking out from – an ethereal arrangement of architectural references. Similarly, the 2019 collage *Mycenaean Dream* informs a 2022 canvas of the same name. In these works, a central figure modelled after a sculpture of Zeus is cocooned by sinews that resemble musculature or neural networks that fade into tidy circuitry, organic fusing into humanmade, light shooting through the surface of the canvas.

Every work in *Nour* functions in the same way: they are beacons of light in the two levels of the gallery, glimmering in an otherwise pitch-black presentation space. In making artworks with this immaterial but unignorable existence, Raissnia has said that she draws inspiration from an observation made by Ludwig van Beethoven: "Music is the one incorporeal entrance into the higher world of knowledge which comprehends mankind but which mankind cannot comprehend."

Beethoven was referring to his belief in the higher purpose of music to lift listeners so they can touch states of divinity. It's a feeling that can be felt but only barely described. The same sensation surfaces when viewing this exhibition. The artist has tapped into something that is primal and pristine, leaving marks that defy active interpretation yet guide the viewer to meditative reflection. 📍

Nour runs until 18 February 2023

Art in America

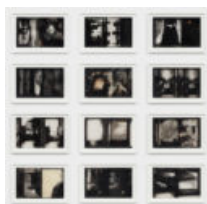
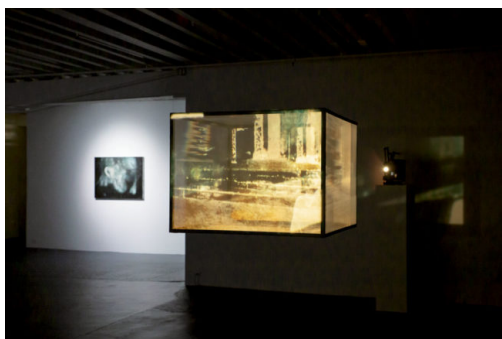
Raha Raissnia

NEW YORK

at Miguel Abreu

by [Shiv Kotecha](#)

Raha Raissnia:
*Galvanoscope 2 (Film
A and Film B)*, 2018,
16mm film, wood, and
scrim, 23 3/8 by 32 by
32 inches; at Miguel
Abreu.



The films, drawings, and paintings in Raha Raissnia's latest show at Miguel Abreu, "Galvanization," interrogate the camera's capacity to faithfully record subjects or to represent historical moments. Depicting details of photographic images in heavily abstracted form, the works stimulate historical material by reframing its particulars. Traces of architectural features and body parts appear amid densely matted textures or dissolve in palimpsests, the artist highlighting the rhythms and movements common to personal memory.

Much of Raissnia's source material for the works came from a set of 35mm slides labeled "Sultanate Architecture" that was discarded by Brooklyn College. The images show the ruins of a fourteenth-century mosque. She also used other found slides and her own photographs. In her large-scale painted portrayals of the materials, the overall scenes are eschewed for dark alleyways, dirt roads, and ornament on facades. *Shade* (2018), for example, shows a shadowy, unmarked box in the middle of an otherwise vacant street. The source photo's grain is meticulously represented in thick, tenebrous layers of paint. In some areas, the surface of the work is coated with shiny gelatin, somewhat warping the image underneath and providing a protective polish.

Alluvius (2018) is a suite of twelve mixed-medium drawings on paper hung in a floor-to-ceiling grid. Many of the compositions are bifurcated, as if showing side-by-side film cells snipped from the reel. Occasional fragments of bodies appear—a hand here, a face there. But when one steps back to see the work as a whole, it shape-shifts. The spatial connections between the drawings suddenly feel less informed by the filmic frame than they do by architecture: chiaroscuro renderings of interiors, bedrooms, and windows dominate the overall composition. Raissnia's dense mark-making within her depictions of these spaces collapses surface and depth.

The installations *Galvanoscope 1* and *Galvanoscope 2 (Films A and B)*, both 2018, consist of 16mm films projected onto cubic, lampshade-like scrim structures suspended from the ceiling. The first installation features a single film. The second overlays two reels projected onto the cube from opposite sides of the room. The various projections in these installations switch rapidly between close-ups of ornate mosques, pans of unpaved roads, and slow sequences showing cloudless skies. The scrim structures, with their multiple mesh panels, divide the

overlapping imagery at the same time that they flatten it. In *Galvanoscope 2*, the two three-minute, sepia-toned films projected onto the cube play on top of each other, their superimposition producing a flickering, layered picture of Iran. Each image in the footage lingers for a moment before dissolving into the strobing of light.

Although the images Raissnia used for the works in the show correspond to specific times and places, in her hands they become less coordinates for mapping historical narratives than they do generative, perceptual conduits for excavating, challenging, and reprocessing visual cultures. Raissnia does not simply present past events, but tests the ways in which we are trained to remember them.

BROOKLYN RAIL

Raha Raissnia: *Galvanization*

by Benjamin Clifford

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MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY | JANUARY 13 – FEBRUARY 24, 2019



Installation view: *Raha Raissnia: Galvanization*, Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, 2019. Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Steven Faught.

Raha Raissnia's atmospheric new paintings, drawings, and projections share much with the work she exhibited at The Drawing Center last winter. The first things a visitor to Miguel Abreu's Eldridge Street location will encounter, in fact, are twelve drawings that were included in the earlier show and which collectively share its title: *Alluvius* (2016). These drawings, as well as the bulk of what follows, incorporate and transform photographs of a ruined fourteenth-century mosque—Raissnia discovered them in a discarded collection of 35mm slides marked "Sultanate Architecture." Despite this continuity with past projects, the new exhibition is anything but a retread. It has its own distinct logic and consistently highlights tense interchanges between photography and painting, architecture and the body.

Although much of Raissnia's recent work originates in found imagery, the relationship between source material and a finished painting or drawing is anything but straightforward. Often, the process of translation involves a cannibalism of images. Raissnia will create a graphite drawing loosely based on a slide, then project another slide onto the drawing, photograph it, and produce another work from the result. This process may continue for several cycles, and in large-scale propositions usually involves the addition of dark oil paint and a thick gel medium. The result is a near-monochrome palimpsest of ambiguous images and painterly marks that, in the most extreme cases, approach total abstraction. In *Untitled* (2018), one of the most inscrutable works included at Miguel Abreu, a wide band of aggressively textured black pigment traverses the breadth of the painting, largely obscuring the indistinct images below. Pale rectangles in the upper right quadrant of the

panel—windows, perhaps—dissolve into a frenzy of gestural handling as they encounter this passage. Here, Raissnia's transformative process is demonstrated in microcosm.

Traces of descriptive subject matter do, however, remain. In several of the *Alluvius* drawings, spectral faces and hands emerge from the walls of the ruined mosque, suggesting how the bodies that inhabit and move through architectural space endow it with meaning and historical weight. In similar fashion, *Aviary #3* (2018) turns the mosque's decorative program into writhing, amorphous figures that seem to body forth from their architectural setting. The visual distortions that produce this illusion are owed to the dramatic texture of heavily worked paint, as well as Raissnia's photographic procedure: when re-photographing the source slide she approximated the effect of an anamorphic lens. *Untitled* (2018) makes use of other imaging technologies, combining a motif previously used in the *Alluvius* drawings with an x-ray and a sonogram. The viewer sees through the skin of the built environment to bodily forms beneath—architecture literally impregnated with a human presence. This work notably features the most dramatic color in the show, a rich red that covers half the painting and intensifies its organic, visceral effect.



Raha Raissnia, *Galvanoscope 1*, 2018. Projector, 16 mm film, 3 min. loop, wood, scrim, installation dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Stephen Faught.

The centerpieces of the show are two projected works, *Galvanoscope 1* and *Galvanoscope 2* (*Film A and Film B*) (both 2018). Raissnia is well known for performances in which she manipulates two analog projectors in real time, combining images from each in an improvised dialogue that parallels her way of working with photographic slides, drawing, and painting. By contrast, the projectors at Miguel Abreu run automatically, each showing a predetermined three-minute loop. They nonetheless highlight the complexity, even unpredictability, of Raissnia's process, and at the same time develop the bodily and architectural themes of the paintings and drawings on display nearby. *Galvanoscope 2* (*Film A and Film B*) consists of two projectors, facing each other from opposite ends of a large gallery space. Between them hangs a rectangular box, fabric stretched across a wooden armature. Each projector casts a series of images onto the box, but its surface is transparent, allowing the two projections to blend. Because of the fact that whichever projector is nearer imposes its images more powerfully, each side of the box displays a distinctive combination of the two films. *Galvanoscope 1* uses the same two series of

images, but Raissnia has already combined them so they can be shown from a single projector. The two films, however, are not simply overlaid one on the other. Raissnia actively manipulated each of them, so that the final work approximates the experience of her performances. Together, the two *Galvaniscopes* testify to the surprising and diverse effects Raissnia can produce from a set repertoire of found images.

The *Galvaniscopes*, like most of the exhibition, foreground the “Sultanate Architecture” slides. Here, however, the material that Raissnia has combined with them is extremely dynamic, featuring dramatic effects of movement, shifting light, and shadow. This animates the viewer’s relationship with Raissnia’s found photographs, and evokes the embodied perceptual experience of moving through an architectural environment. Not only can we imaginatively project ourselves into the space of the ruined mosque, but we become, at the same time, acutely conscious of the gallery environment itself. The rectangular boxes which the *Galvaniscope* imagery is projected onto, respond to the shape and dimensions of the exhibition space, activating the visitor’s passage through the show. It is here that the installation, designed in close collaboration with Abreu himself, particularly shines. The *Galvaniscope* boxes occupy surprisingly large expanses of empty space, allowing a genuinely environmental experience to develop. In this way, the design of the exhibition responds to the content and effect of Raissnia’s imagery, lending her enigmatic architectural and bodily fragments a resonance and immediacy that might not otherwise be so obvious.

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ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS
New York

Raha Raissnia

THE DRAWING CENTER
35 Wooster Street
December 1–February 4

"All a blur": We describe monotony the same way we describe chaos. Raha Raissnia's drawings, despite their quiet consistency, have their genesis in revolution. Amid the 1979 uprising in Iran against Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the artist, then a child, accompanied her father to the streets of downtown Tehran, where he would photograph demonstrations. She inherited his interest in the medium, and in "Alluvius"—her debut solo museum show—Raissnia reckons with tensions of identity and form by rephotographing and then drawing found archival imagery amassed over time. Rather than contest the notion that the camera lays claim to utter truth, Raissnia unsettles distinctions between media to suggest how images are laundered into personal truths. Perception becomes a kind of skeleton key, one remade and remade again unto meaningful divergence.



Raha Raissnia, *Fountain*, 2017, charcoal on paper, 36 x 60".

"Alluvius," 2016, one of two series here, consists of a dozen mixed-media drawings. One can make out urban architecture; a wraithlike face; and a spectral human hand cupped into a claw, reaching into darkness. The smaller charcoal drawings that form "Canto," 2017, blurry and luciform, appear less drawn than impressed. Occasionally, shadows resolve into human silhouettes, slurred by Raissnia's translation. The exhibition's centerpiece is in the corner, where an analog projector relays a carousel of hand-painted, 35-mm slides onto a framed scrim. Slides depict faces and hands as time nearly stills, expiring in slow, satisfying ticks. The source image for a larger work, *Fountain*, 2017, was scavenged from the trash (a box of slides had been thrown out by a lab at Brooklyn College). The drawing, muddily Photorealist, depicts a seemingly abandoned mosque's empty fountain. While a different artist might have used this backstory to evoke annihilative neglect concerning personal and national memory, Raissnia, through her process, suggests a more generative decay.

— Zack Hatfield

THE NEW YORKER

ART GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Raha Raissnia

Through Feb. 4.

📍 The Drawing Center
35 Wooster St.
Downtown

212-219-2166

In a show titled "Alluvius," the Iranian-American artist exploits the smeary versatility of charcoal in abstract drawings based on photographic sources. Although they're full of unidentifiable shapes and apparition-like streaks of light, the works are tethered to specifics of time and place—there are some clues in their velvety depths. "Fountain" vaguely suggests a courtyard, with a round indent at the image's center; derived from a discarded 35-mm. slide that the artist found, which was labelled "Sultanate Architecture," it depicts the ablution fountain of a mosque. Raissnia, who was born in Iran and lived there during the 1978-79 revolution, cites childhood expeditions with her father to photograph protests against the Shah as a formative experience. The family relocated to the U.S. in the eighties, but she has returned to Tehran as an adult, to shoot slides of locations she visited in her youth. Considered in this context, her drawings, twice removed from their original sources, present photography as a poetic but unreliable witness to histories both public and private.

BROOKLYN RAIL

RAHA RAISSNIA with Charles Schultz

Raha Raissnia's first solo exhibition in a museum, *Alluvius*, opened in early December at the Drawing Center. Organized by the museum's Assistant Curator, Amber Harper, the exhibition highlights Raissnia's mixed media work on paper as a central element of her multivalent practice, which encompasses film, photography, and performance. The Rail's Managing Editor, Charles Schultz, met up with Raissnia to talk about her formative years as a young artist, the animism of analog projectors, and how the abstract qualities of music relate to her work.

Charles Schultz

(Rail): When did you first know you wanted to be an artist?

Raissnia: Probably my first year at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago. I had financial problems and I thought I would have to drop out. I remember thinking if this really happens, what would I do? There was just nothing else I could see myself doing. That's the first time, I knew then.

Rail: But you stayed.

Raissnia: Yeah fortunately. I really liked the school, I really liked what I was doing, and wanted to be there. There was nothing else. So you know, it worked out, I just have a lot of student loans now. But maybe it was good for me, because it kind of pushed me to appreciate the opportunity, and to work hard.

Rail: Did you have any teachers in Chicago who were especially meaningful to your progress there?

Raissnia: I studied closely with two women—Barbara Rossi and Susanne Doremus—who are still professors there. Barbara Rossi is one of the Chicago imagists. She taught drawing. Every semester I studied with her closely and she was very supportive. I studied painting with Susanne Doremus. They were both so insightful and intelligent...incredible teachers. I really looked up to them and felt grateful to be able to study with them.



Portrait of Raha Raissnia, Pencil on Paper by Phong Bui



Raha Raissnia, *Alluvius*, 2016 Mixed media drawings. 12 parts, each: 12 5/8 x 19 3/4 inches (32.1 x 50.2 cm). Framed dimensions, each: 16 1/4 x 23 3/8 inches (41.3 x 59.4 cm). Overall installed dimensions: approx. 79 1/2 x 79 1/2 inches (201.9 x 201.9 cm) Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Thomas Müller

Rail: What were your drawings like back then?

Raissnia: They were I think better than now. *[Laughter]* Freer in a way, very visceral, very private, mainly because I felt so ignorant about art so I would do them secretly in a way for myself and would get very nervous when I had to show them in class. They were very much about my feelings and about my family. But I also responded to all the great romantic paintings in the museum: The Art Institute of Chicago that was in the same building. I was very much taken by Titian and all that flesh with his free flowing gestures.

Rail: You were in Chicago, where was your family?

Raissnia: My mom was back in Iran. My mom and I left Iran three years into the war in 1983. We went to Houston first because I had an uncle who was working there, and we waited for my father to wrap things up in Iran and join us. It took him three years. He came in 1986 and unfortunately had a sudden heart attack. He died after two weeks of arriving. I was just about to graduate from high school then and when I left to go to Chicago my mom returned to Iran.

Rail: How old were you then?

Raissnia: I was fifteen when we immigrated.

Rail: Fifteen, wow. And of course there was no email then, and international phone calls were not cheap. How did you keep in touch?

Raissnia: My father had the soul of a poet, he wrote a lot—maybe a letter everyday to us all when we left and before it to my brother because he had left earlier. In all his handwritten letters he describes and conveys much of what happened socially and politically in Iran during and after the revolution and the Iraq - Iran war that followed it. Of course the letters also describe what was happening to our family. My father wasn't active politically, but then everybody was involved and affected somehow, you couldn't not be. He was excited at first about the revolution but soon after with the war it became disastrous for everyone. We had to leave because of it, my family was torn apart.

Rail: Your father was also an amateur photographer, right? Did you ever get to go out shooting with him?

Raissnia: Yes he loved photography. He had a nice camera, many lenses, and slide projectors. He really liked slides.

Rail: What sort of things did he photograph?

Raissnia: Family and things around him like nature, mostly, when we went out of the city...everyday life. He was really into it and always had his camera with him everywhere. During the revolution he was very active in street photography, mainly of all the mass protests which took place downtown right near his office. Several times he took me to the demonstrations without my mom knowing! It was sort of dangerous, but he was so excited and wanted me to see it!

Rail: What was that like?

Raissnia: I remember everything very well. I was about ten or eleven years old. There are pictures of me from the day the Shah left, I'm holding flowers because everybody was celebrating. Life during the revolution was very very exciting and everyone was on the edge. My father had an amazing sense of humor and was very down to earth, so life was sort of pleasant I remember. I had a cool father. He was an avid reader of poetry and literature.

Rail: Did he encourage your creativity?

Raissnia: His influence on me was great but it was actually my mom that nurtured that in me and provided me with opportunities. She was the organizer. I did well in drawing at a very young age, but I didn't do well in school



Raha Raissnia, *Alluvius*, 2016 [detail] Mixed media drawings. 12 parts, each: 12 5/8 × 19 3/4 inches (32.1 × 50.2 cm) Framed dimensions, each: 16 1/4 × 23 3/8 inches (41.3 × 59.4 cm). Overall installed dimensions: approx. 79 1/2 × 79 1/2 inches (201.9 × 201.9 cm) Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Thomas Müller

mainly because it was severely strict. I couldn't obey and always got into trouble. The only thing I had going was with art projects. All the students would ask me to do their projects for them and in return they would let me cheat and pass me the answers during exams [*Laughter*]. At a very young age my mom made it possible for me to study privately with a well-known painter—I think I was nine when I started. My Dad was anti-bourgeois, and that was too bourgeois for him. So he didn't support it.

Rail: Who was the painter?

Raissnia: His name was Ostad Katouzian. He was a realist painter, famous for portraits of beautiful famous people, lots of women but also Dervishes and girls from the countryside with colorful folk outfits. He also painted still lifes and landscapes. Later I went back and looked at his paintings and I'm not sure if I really like them.

Rail: But he was a good teacher?

Raissnia: Definitely. It was a great experience to hang out in his beautiful old house and garden with walls covered with his paintings. He only had three students, two older—one of whom became his wife later—and me. I was the young one. He would give me lessons and I would paint from still life and flowers in the garden. He also sometimes would let us watch him paint. He had models coming in everyday. Later I copied some of his paintings and learned a lot from that.

Rail: Did you take art lessons in Houston, before going to the Art Institute?

Raissnia: I arrived in Houston in the early '80s and I didn't speak any English. I learned French as my second language. Somehow the school was so loose, so lawless, unlike Iran, and they allowed me to attend classes without knowing a word of English. But yes, I did a lot of art classes. That's the only thing I did, I didn't pass anything else, but somehow I still graduated [*Laughter*]. It's kind of amazing.

Rail: Where did you go after you graduated from the Art Institute?

Raissnia: I went to San Francisco for a few years, then I moved to New York to go to grad school at Pratt Institute in 1995.

Rail: And that was when you got involved with Anthology Film Archives?

Raissnia: Yes, soon after I moved to New York I walked into Anthology one night to see a movie. I didn't know anything about the place. I walked in and there was Stom Sogo sitting in the box office with a big smile welcoming me and my friends, saying go in, go in, don't worry about paying! We watched a documentary on Thelonius Monk, and it was so great! I immediately knew what a special place it was. Stom later became my roommate and a very close friend. Sadly he passed away few years ago. Soon after then I dropped out of grad school mainly because I couldn't pay for it and did everything I could to attach myself to Anthology and to all the people working there. I begged to do anything, clean the bathrooms, the theaters, take tickets, anything I could do and as always they were so welcoming. Later they paid me for what I could do. So for several years I was there just about everyday.

Rail: Do you remember the first time you met Jonas Mekas?

Raissnia: I knew he was very special right away when I first saw him. I remember specifically one time at Anthology he was signing his book *I had nowhere to go*. He greeted me with a smile and he signed the book for me. I'll never forget that. I think that was the first time I interacted with him.

Rail: What sort of things did you do at Anthology when you weren't cleaning or checking tickets?

Raissnia: I just hung around. I watched movies. I was friends with Dalius, and August who lived there—they were the artists in residence. August made posters, films and paintings, he had an art studio there. He also played a lot of music with Dalius and their friends in the basement. I sometimes moved boxes around in the library and sat in Robert Haller's classes there for NYU. I watched a lot of amazing films.

Rail: Sounds great.

Raissnia: It was the best education! I felt blessed.

Rail: And was it at Anthology that you had your first shows in New York?

Raissnia: That's right. Jonas—and really everyone there—was so open and generous. Even though I wasn't a filmmaker, I was just some kid, you know!? But I curated two group shows—I put all my friends in it. *[Laughter]* Later on I did my first solo show there.

Rail: Can you tell me about that experience?

Raissnia: Sure. It opened a week or two after 9/11. I remember I had no money to buy the wine for my opening. One night I was doing my card invitations and the rumor was that the subways were dangerous so I rode my bike into Manhattan from Brooklyn, and right near Anthology as I was riding on the street at night with drizzling rain I found three bundles of cash on the pavement! Obviously it must have been drug money wrapped in rubber band. It was \$2,200 dollars. I paid my rent for two months and bought several cases of wine for my opening. A gift from hell!

Strange things happened right after 9/11. It was in response to that show that musician Briggan Krauss invited me to collaborate with him and it was through this collaboration that I began working with film and performance for the first time. Briggan told me that he was inspired by visual artists. He liked Joseph Cornell in particular, I remember. So right away we came up with a system of working and named our collaboration "Systems." We began with him giving me a short piece of music he made and recorded, I listened and responded to it by making a drawing which I gave to him to respond to by making another short piece of music to give back to me and on we went. We came up with other systems of working and only after a month or so two of my artist friends from Pratt who had just started a band invited us to open for them at a dive bar in Brooklyn.

Rail: That was your first performance?

Raissnia: Yes. So right away I was like, "what are we gonna do?" One thing I had was an old vintage projector lying around. It didn't have a carousel so it right away suggested that if I were to use it I would have to make a long strip of film. I then very quickly got the idea to use hundreds of copies of slides of my drawings and paintings (back then I documented my work with slides), paint on them directly, collage and paste them down on colored Mylar and feed them through the projector by hand.

Rail: I'm trying to imagine this gig, how did it go?

Raissnia: Oh, the gig was so great. I think three people came, three special friends. There was no stage. I sat on a chair, put the slide projector on a table and projected on the wall. We played for ourselves basically and my friends in the band played their hearts out, I will never forget! Soon after that I had my first solo show at Thomas Erben Gallery in Chelsea and for that show Briggan and I did many performances and invited other artists and musicians to join in and collaborate with us. This happened in 2004.

Rail: And you've stayed with analog projectors. When I was at the Drawing Center I noticed a digital projector permanently attached to the ceiling, which you chose not to use. The analog projector has a certain legacy as a historical/cultural object, but it's also noisy. That repetitious click and pop of the slides changing, it's very steady —

Raissnia: Like a pulse.

Rail: Like a pulse, exactly. Is that part of your attraction to this object?

Raissnia: I'm very attracted to the analog projectors, perhaps because they are sort of like living things with animism. For example they behave unexpectedly, they get moody and respond differently with changes in temperature and so on. I don't know, they are more fun to handle than video projectors. I also like them because I can take them apart, modify them to my need. I like getting my hands into them. I am open to high-end technology and make use of it when I need to but I like performing with film projectors, and so far I like how they work in installations.

Rail: What about the slides? They are all the original slides that you hand manipulated?

Raissnia: Right. You cannot reproduce those exactly in the same way. With slides, it's light that is being filtered through actual images on film. If I were to use the scans with video projector, the images would be fake, just digits sitting on the surface. It's never the same.

Rail: Are those the slides that you'll use for a performance later on in the exhibition?

Raissnia: Yes, those slides are also part of another piece titled *Nadir III* that is only for performance. It's the third part of a series. It uses a Super 8 film that is hand painted along with a double projection screen that is uniquely designed by me. I manipulate the film and the slides by hand in order to control the speed of their rotation and the amount of light they project.

Rail: Can you describe how you operate the projectors in your performances?

Raissnia: I often use several projectors at once, so most of my pieces are made with various parts that I combine and manipulate live in an improvisational manner. For *Nadir II*, I separate the slides into two carousels, so one hand can cover one slide while the other hand is manipulating the other slide being projected. I sort of fade them in and out covering certain parts, pausing and revealing other parts with another hand. The viewers often can't tell what I am doing so they keep looking back and see nothing clearly in the dark.

Rail: When I think about the title of that piece, *Nadir*—the opposite of a high point—what compelled you to give this body of work that title?

Raissnia: It was something about the suggestion of the underground, the lower realms, which I thought to give attention to as a good thing, a positive thing. I thought it's a good thing to celebrate.

Rail: To celebrate what's beneath. That makes me think of the large drawing in the exhibition, *Vestige*, which looks like a floor, but perspective is *very* close to the floor. I thought, "When do you see the floor like this?" When you're lying down? Kneeling? It's a perspective that aligns with a kind of nadir, too. What's the story with this floor?

Raissnia: A friend of mine, Briggan Krauss, whom I talked about earlier, found a box of slides in the garbage where he works in the media lab at Brooklyn College. They were documents of a great abandoned mosque in India from the Sultanate period that lasted between the 13th and 16th centuries, a period magnificent for its Indo-Islamic architecture. I rephotographed all those slides from projecting them onto different screens in my studio and made a film work that Briggan and I performed once in Brooklyn, in 2013, I think. *Vestige* and the other large drawing *Fountain* that's hung next to it are derived from that body of work.



Raha Raissnia, *Vestige*, (2017), Charcoal and mixed media on paper. 36 × 60 inches (91.4 × 152.4 cm). Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Stephen Faught.

Rail: So the mosque was abandoned, and the slides of the mosque were being abandoned...

Raissnia: That image of the floor is a segment of the floor of the mosque that I zoomed in on and photographed. When I was making work for this show, I thought of this body of work and went back to look at it carefully and found those two images to work with. They somehow related to the other works I was making for the show in an interesting way I thought.

Rail: How so?

Raissnia: I respond to images in a very intuitive way, so it's difficult for me to say clearly. I think I was intrigued by the fact that they were less abstract and more specific and recognizable to a degree. There are other connections but I would need a lot more time to explain.

Rail: Well, I'm naturally drawn to the literary elements of works that, like yours, have such density that there seems to be more possibilities of meaning because the obvious meanings are obscured. When I was thinking of the title of that floor drawing, *Vestige*, it seemed very clearly linked to the word "alluvius," which is both the title of your show and a body of work. Both words reference a trace of something that's passed.

Raissnia: Yes well that's the thing, with *Vestige* I was intrigued by that image of the floor, because of how many people had stepped on it, because of all the cracks and the holes in the floor. And yes, that relates so closely to what alluvius is. I only found this connection later as it's always the case with my work. I seep myself in the images, respond, make work, and later find connections between them. This is my process.

Rail: The texture of that drawing, the labor of your hand, gives that essence to the image. A photograph, or a film still, could never create that feeling in the same way. The image would just be too flat, too smooth.

Raissnia: Yes, I tried to do that. I tried to enhance the textural aspect in a physical way. That's perhaps one of the reasons or the urge behind needing to draw and paint the photographic images I collect. When I make a painting or a drawing from a photographic image the challenge is always to make it come off stronger. It's very difficult to do. I don't always win!

Rail: Whether or not the viewer knows the source, everyone can relate to an image of a floor. It's just so archetypal. And because it looks so heavily trafficked, it transmits this sense of age. When I think about how that sense of age correlates with the meaning of a vestige, as it relates to this well trodden floor, I wonder what these traces refer to?



Raha Raissnia, *Fountain*, (2017), Charcoal and mixed media on paper. 36 × 60 inches (91.4 × 152.4 cm). Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Stephen Faught.

Raissnia: Yes, the remnants of all the footsteps, the traces left, you know? I have a few small felt rugs that came from an old mosque in Iran. People used them to pray on for I don't know how long. I love knowing that about them. I think I was drawn to the floor of that mosque through this.

Rail: Prayer takes place so close to the floor, and suggests to me the idea of being humble, or penitent. Recognizing that there's something that's bigger than you, that you can't fully grasp or understand entirely.

Raissnia: Yes, and that's why some people become believers in God. The ones with the big egos don't usually. [Laughter]

Rail: So that image came from a found photograph, but when you go out to make photographs do you have a plan in mind?

Raissnia: Sometimes yes, sometimes no. For my last film, *Longing*, it just happened that I was up in East Harlem with time to kill. [Laughter] I got stood up and I was there for an hour, so I started photographing and recording with my phone. And then two years later I started thinking about that area and took out to see what I had recorded. I sensed that there was a lot there to revisit and so I made plans to go back in several trips. It's not an easy place to photograph so I came up with ways of hiding my camera and had to adjust my attitude and the way I moved through space. So I switch from just casually carrying my camera as everyone does now to going to photograph in a more planned manner.

Rail: Can you walk me through your process behind all the drawings in the show?

Raissnia: Yeah, sure. All the works here were derived from my photographic works with 16mm film and slides. I went through a lot of raw footage and outtakes and carefully selected images I thought I could work with for this show. My process is very layered. I re-photograph, modify in the computer, print and reprint the selected sources until they are ready to be interpreted into drawings. I say interpreted because I give myself a lot of freedom to change the original image as I draw it and draw into it. As I said before the challenge is to transfer the photograph and bring to it a distinctly unique quality that only drawing can bring forth, a quality that is very different from a photograph.

Areas of some of my photographic works are of my paintings and drawings because in my studio images get recycled. I often project images onto paintings I have in studio and film and photograph them. So, the paintings and drawings enter back into the film and later get re-interpreted to other paintings and drawings. In my show at the Drawing Center the double screen I project the slides onto uses a painting. So there is a lot of crossover between the medias in my work.

Rail: The way your process feeds itself to create itself reminds me of the Egyptian snake symbol, Ouroboros—the tail eater.

Raissnia: I like the fact that I can photograph life; it's food for me. Using a moving image camera and still camera that generates so many images—I love the fact that I can go through so much, pause and look at each image carefully from scans of films in my computer. I started as a painter and I am still fascinated by what a still image can carry. But then, of course, the moving image, the photographic material has its own magic and beauty. So I'm sort of addicted to switching between the mediums. When I exhaust myself in one I switch to the other, maybe similar to how painters like Picasso or Miró would switch from painting to sculpture, and of course one always informed the other.

Rail: Giving one medium a break enables you to see it in a different way when you return to it later.

Raissnia: Of course, that's always great. I think the reason painters liked sculpture was the release from the flat surface. I think the reason Lucian Freud enjoyed looking at sculpture so much had to do with that. It's a very different experience than looking at the model and translating it two-dimensionally. Similarly I receive something different from moving imagery and also moving through actual space to get an image than drawing and painting on a still surface.

Rail: Can you tell me a bit about that screen you use to project your slides on at the Drawing Center? It looked home-made.

Raissnia: In my old studio I used the same wall for my projections as I did for my paintings. One day I turned the projector on and it shined right onto my painting and the effect was very surprising. It gave me an idea to layer various surfaces to project on. For this piece in the show I have layered two different paintings on stretchers held together within a frame. The outer layer uses a sheer fabric that I have painted faintly with gesso. It both reflects the light and lets it penetrate through and hit the back layer that is a painting made with black paint on gesso. The surface of the black paintings is textured and varnished in parts glossy and in parts matte.

Rail: The painted background behind the screen reflects and absorbs the light, then?

Raissnia: There's space between the outer screen and the back screen, so the thing brings much depth to the projected images of the slides, creating an optical effect that is sort of three-dimensional. Also richer in tone and texture.

Rail: I could just see the beginning of the effect in the gallery.

Raissnia: That's often the problem with doing installations in a gallery—the lighting is always tricky. I need light for the drawings and paintings, but I need darkness for the films and slides. So when the room is small it's difficult. But in this show unlike all the previous ones I have had I am intrigued with the faintness of the projection! It's subtle.

Rail: One of the things I was thinking about when I was looking at the *Cantos* drawings is how they seem to be variations on one another, and how an essential characteristic is this blur. In film, blur typically occurs because something has moved too quickly in front of the lens, or the lens has moved—the blur always refers to some kind of speed. So I was curious, in your drawings, how you thought about this blur as an aesthetic decision.

Raissnia: There's no aesthetic decision, I arrived at the images through the use of superimposition and montage. Everything is from real life—the objects, abstracted forms, blurs you see and the spaces. I have this urge to layer and superimpose images. I kind of see it as a natural urge similar to the way our minds work maybe. As we go through life our minds jump around from one thing to the other and in this process we make sense of the world, or we don't but just experience it that way.



Raha Raissnia, *Canto*, 2017 [detail]. Graphite and acrylic medium on paper. Ten parts, each: 9 × 12 1/2 inches (22.9 × 31.8 cm) Framed dimensions, each: 11 × 14 1/2 × 1 1/2 inches (27.9 × 36.8 × 3.8 cm) Courtesy the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York. Photo: Stephen Faight.

Rail: I think it's interesting how layering so many different images that are coming from reality removes you—removes the viewer—from a direct experience of reality.

Raissnia: Yes, I think what I am attracted to is how suggestive they become rather than being literal. This abstract quality, found similarly in music suggests in the viewer all kinds of feelings and visions that are not there literally!

Rail: We haven't mentioned your series of screen prints, *Nóstos*, which also relate to the idea of memory. Can you tell me a little about how you selected those images, what you drew from?

Raissnia: I looked back at many of the recent works I've done on paper and made a selection carefully. In thinking about the title I suddenly saw them as scenes from a movie. It's very nice to title works, because everything comes together somehow, always bringing with it meanings and metaphors. *Nóstos* in Greek means homecoming. In the *Odyssey*, Odysseus has gone through a tumultuous life or journey and longs to return home heroically. He has *nóstos*. But *nóstos* can also relate to nostalgia, which is a combination of longing for home mixed with pain. So, Achilles on the other hand in the *Iliad* had nostalgia and not *nóstos* because he decided to die heroically rather than returning home heroically. Several of the images in this series have the same head that is the same character in different settings. To me this head is my hero having *nóstos*. I envision him returning home at the end. I like happy endings!

CONTRIBUTOR

Charles Schultz

Charles Schultz is Managing Editor of the *Brooklyn Rail*.

ARTFORUM

CRITICS' PICKS

Malmö

Consensus

SIGNAL - CENTER FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Monbijougatan 17H

September 16–November 6

Consensus is an exhibition in the middle of an uneasy break—the way someone might, midsentence, struggle to find a word. Upon entering, one comes to a kind of pause that takes the show past the limits of saying something: By not perspicuously speaking, it says volumes. Raha Raissnia filmed everyday life in East Harlem with a concealed camera to make *Longing*, 2015. By transferring the unsteady footage to 16 mm, then cutting it up, collaging it, and having collaborator Panagiotis Mavridis compose a deep, ambient sound track, Raissnia has created a preternatural portrait of the neighborhood. Katinka Bock's series of sculptures "Zarba Lonsa," 2015, makes use of *verlan*, the French slang that inverts syllables, in its title. The word *verlan* is itself an example of this, a turning around of the syllables in *l'envers*, meaning "the inverse." The piece was based on exchanging goods with shopkeepers in the suburbs north of Paris: For example, Bock would offer something to a butcher in exchange for a piece of meat, which she would fold in ceramic and fire. The meat burning up in the kiln left an aperture in the ceramic, a trace of the trade. Dana DeGiulio's *Syntax for Queen Lear*, 2016, is a multitude of fragments, cut-up images, and tape installed on both sides of a wall. Coming close to some kind of writing, or musical notation, it remains tantalizingly illegible. It makes up no constellation, no single image—precisely what the exhibition as whole grapples with. Sometimes a show may function outside the comfortable clarity of themes and instead leave enticing impressions.



Dana DeGiulio, *Syntax for Queen Lear*, 2016, mixed media, dimensions variable.

— Theodor Ringborg

*Basement
Performances*

Posted in [news](#), [The Bottom Line](#)

Interview with Raha Raissnia

Posted on January 27, 2016 by [admin](#)

Raissnia is performing with Panagiotis Mavridis this Saturday at The Drawing Center during the Basement Performances, curated by John Zorn

By Amber Moyles, Curatorial Assistant

I had the pleasure of visiting artists Raha Raissnia and Panagiotis Mavridis in their studio Sunday afternoon where we discussed techniques for expanded cinema and Mavridis' original hand built instruments. After a private viewing of one of Raissnia and Mavridis' pieces, a thirty-minute series of black-and-white film loops intermeshed with drawing and live instrumentation, I had the opportunity to speak with Raissnia about expanded cinema and the influence of avant-garde film on her drawings and installations.

Amber Moyles: Could you describe the term expanded cinema and the meaning of this term for your work?

Raha Raissnia: I see expanded cinema as a live event in which the artist engages in creating cinematic works in the presence of the audience. It is, we could say, a dense exploration of light as it manipulates cinema's structural elements with regards to space, time, projectors, and screens. My own work with expanded cinema is layered and permutational. It incorporates other areas of my practice, which are painting and drawing. I make use of both old and new technologies, and I rely heavily on what my hands can achieve.



Raha Raissnia in her studio, 2016.

The piece that you and Panos will perform at The Drawing Center as part of Basement Performances is titled Mneme. What is the significance of the title for this work?

Mneme in Greek means memory. In Greek mythology Mneme is one of the three muses. She is memory personified. Her two sisters are Aoide, muse of song and music, and Melete, muse of study. When I finished making this work and showed it to Panos, he said it made him think of the way our memory works. The work is made out of pre-existing materials that I cut, painted, and collaged together, making something entirely new. So, after reflecting a bit, I agreed with him that, yes, this is in fact analogous to the way our memory functions; *Mneme* puts together bits and pieces from the past and forms new meaning in the present.

Raha Raissnia and Panagiotis Mavridis, *Mneme*, 2015. Projector and sound performance. Courtesy of the artist and Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York.



You worked at the Anthology Film Archives for a number of years. Can you describe the effect this experience has had on your work? Is there a particular film you came in contact with that has influenced your practice?

It's been a long time since I worked at Anthology, but its influence on my work and life continues. Working there was an education, and through my experience I learned about the works of a number of significant artists who are known historically, but I also learned tremendously from the people who worked and showed there and who are now my great friends. Major influences have been works by Stom Sogo, Jonas Mekas, Harry Smith, Andrew Lampert, and Martha Colburn, to name just a few.

How has working with musicians and live instrumentation, and with Panos who constructs his own instruments, informed your work?

Music and sound play a major role in both inspiring and forming my works. In general, I aspire to the temporal and experiential condition of music, which are suggestive, abstract, and ambiguous. The work and sensibility of the musicians I collaborate with inspire me. Our collaboration is very focused but in a free manner in which we work independently. Rehearsal is key and it is becoming more and more important to me. I consider my projectors as my visual instruments that I play live, very similar to the way musicians play their instruments.

Movement, or the ability to embody motion, has been described as the essence of cinema. Your projection performances are both cinematic and still, combining characteristics of drawing (a static medium) and cinema. How would you describe the contrast between stillness and motion in your work?

Several aspects that belong specifically to drawing are used in my film works. One aspect is the direct hands-on manipulation of the photographic image on celluloid through both scratching or fading and the application of ink. The other aspect is incorporating pre-existing drawings done on paper through photography, filming, printing, and collage. And the final aspect of drawing used in my film is *stillness*. Because I mostly perform my film works, I can play with both stillness and motion. I can break apart the frames, create individual images as slides, make long strips of film that I can hand feed and manipulate. I can also slow down the frame rate from 24 frames per second to one frame per second and even pause on that for as long as I want. This is all done of course through the use of various types of projectors that are at times modified by hand.

There is a quote from Agamben that reads: "paintings are not immobile images, but stills charged with movement, stills from a film that is missing." If the same could be said of your drawings, is it possible to describe the missing film from which your drawings would have been taken?

That is a nice quote, but there is no film missing from my drawings. They belong to the same world, with the same theme. What separates the two, drawings and film, is the overall composition. The drawings are a concentrated force whereas the films flow and transform. Each frame of the film longs for the next one to come immediately after.



Exhibition
Arsenale Cordier

Raha Raissnia 063

Raha Raissnia's multimedia practice profits from her long experience working at New York's Anthology Film Archives. Well versed in the cinematic avant-garde, she is also deeply interested in experimental music. Her projection performances often involve collaborations with musicians Aki Onda and Charles Curtis. Working in painting, drawing, and film, Raissnia initially respects the medium-specific conventions of her artistic means, but later renders their boundaries ambiguous by manipulating and layering her source materials. Building her practice by modifying previous works, the artist superimposes different layers of signification to produce films that oscillate between figuration and abstraction.

Raissnia's recent three-part 16mm black-and-white and color film *Longing* (2014) was developed from a series of visits to a poor area of New York's East Harlem. Not wishing to arouse suspicion among residents, the artist decided to hide her camera in her pocket; as a result she was unable to frame her shots. By having to use her whole body to aim the lens, Raissnia's whirling and erratic movements created abstractions throughout the footage, and those are enhanced by positive-negative reversals, known as solarizations in photography. The resulting film stands out as an honest portrait of the people of East Harlem, whose integrity and lively spirit made a lasting impression on her. The soundtrack to the work was created by the New York-based artist Panagiotis Mavridis, who composed them on instruments he personally designed and produced, some using rolls of celluloid film mounted on gear motors. Producing sound from film, Mavridis's instruments fuse cinema with music to reimagine the genre of the soundtrack.

—TR

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1968
She lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, USA

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Raha Raissnia, *Longing*, 2014

Art in America

Much more manageable is Raha Raissnia's *Longing* (2014), a beautiful and moving 16mm print that shows blurred over-exposed black-and-white ghost images bleeding into one another; the soothing sounds of a motorized hum forming the soundtrack. An abstract, seemingly diaristic collection of fragments of fugitive images occasionally coalesce—an arm hanging down holding a cigarette, the newspaper photograph of a bearded revolutionary, a block of city streets from above—before fading back into shapes that cannot be discerned.



miércoles, 16 de julio de 2014

RAHA RAISSNIA: LA IMAGEN Y SU EXCESO



RAHA RAISSNIA: VIOI

GALERÍA MARTA CERVERA: 24/06/14-31/07/14

Suele decirse: la realidad, actualmente, remite a una imagen global que cubre por completo el espectro de lo real; la famosa imagen-mundo, diríamos.... Pero nada más lejos de la verdad. La imagen, sea cual sea, es un dispositivo que, de una u otra manera, lucha por salir a la superficie mediática, que tiene sus polos de génesis y de distribución. Una imagen es, siempre, un constructo social que sale a la luz solo después de una dura batalla —política, social y, por ende, escópica— por llegar a ser tratada como tal. Es decir, no toda imagen es una imagen. En este sentido, el primer triunfo de la ideología es hacernos pensar que toda imagen lo es porque sí, porque está ya *ahí*.

La presenta exposición de Raha Raissnia en la galería Marta Cervera (la segunda después de aquella titulada 'Glean' en el año 2011 —cuya crítica ya hicimos [aquí](#)) alude, como es propio en ella, a la génesis de las imágenes, al momento en el que las imágenes se mezclan produciendo otras imágenes, ahí donde la imagen se fragmenta en temporalidad heterotópicas. Raha Raissnia opera con imágenes precisamente para desenmascarar el bulo ideológico del régimen escópico al que nos hemos referido: que toda imagen es ya, y desde siempre, imagen.

La exposición se titula "Vioi", vida en griego, y en tal título podemos rastrear algunas de las intenciones que adivinamos en la artista. Por ejemplo que, en la oposición dialéctica entre lo visual y lo visible, Raissnia siempre apoya a lo visible. Y es que frente al ojo-máquina de reminiscencias vertovianas, frente a la pasividad absoluta de un "yo" que se erige en dispositivo mediático, la realidad vital nunca puede ser reducida a simple pasividad, a simple registro fehaciente de lo dado, a pura pasividad. Siempre, la vida es más: es aquello que lucha por elevarse a la superficie del medio, es eso que acontece en las suturas, en los intervalos de tiempo con que se recosen las imágenes para dar sensación de continuidad.



Quizá, en este sentido, todo el quehacer artístico de Raissnia vaya en la onda de frente al todo-visual en que ha devenido la realidad, frente al cine como continuum que invisibiliza esos puntos de sutura donde las imágenes se engarzan, valorizar cómo se merece a la imagen, no ya como inmanencia pura sino como construcción política, como decantación escópica. Y es que el cine abre el mundo imponiéndose como técnica, como cálculo inexcusable que nos remite a una destinación ya-dada, cerrada en las propias posibilidades de una técnica que impone no una imagen del mundo sino un mundo como imagen.

El uso de los 35 mm remite, pensamos, a una obsolescencia técnica que nos resitúa ahí donde, a pesar de la ideología de la panavisión, no dejamos de estar inscritos: somos nosotros quienes, como una tecnología más, en última instancia, creamos las imágenes, quienes las hacemos emerger refiriéndolas a un "inconsciente óptico" que se ha tornado ya en inconsciente maquínico. Pero una construcción tal no remite en modo alguno a un campo topológico-libidinal plano sino que es siempre (somos siempre) reconfigurados, redefinidos en relación a las necesidades escópicas del propio sistema

En definitiva, Raha Raissnia nos viene a decir que no seamos inocentes, que si bien ya hemos dado por acabado aquello de la realidad bajo las apariencias, tampoco caigamos del otro lado del trampantojo ideológico y creamos que las imágenes ya están aquí listas para nosotros. Todo, en su emergencia, queda referido a procesos de visibilidad políticos, a engranajes pulsionales, a tectónicas escópicas que –aunque queden silenciadas por una técnica analógica capaz de hacer el milagro de hacernos creer que la vida es eso que vemos en nuestras pantallas– es mucho más que eso: es eso más todo lo que le falta el tiempo que sutura las imágenes, el empaste que hace que a una imagen le siga otra dando la apariencia de una continuidad meramente aparente.



es imposible de registrar. Porque en las pinturas se adivinan fotogramas de la película pero nunca de forma exacta sino en desplazamiento y en complementariedad, estrategias éstas de recodificación de film que acentúa el carácter siempre constructivo de las imágenes. Es decir, es en la pintura (y de ahí su imposible muerte) donde mejor se comprende el hecho de que cualquier imagen puede ser una imagen simple pero nunca puede ser una simple imagen.

En definitiva, esta estupenda exposición nos recuerda que no hay vida capaz de ser registrada en imágenes, que lo que es vida es precisamente el exceso que aletea en la imagen, aquello que lo vincula con la convierte en ex-céntrica de sí misma. La imagen nunca es registro sino operador de diferencia.

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Raha Raissnia, *Series in Fugue*

Dates: September 8 – October 20, 2013

Reception: Sunday, September 8, 6-8 PM

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce *Series in Fugue*, Raha Raissnia's fourth solo exhibition at the gallery.

"I have to tell you, I learned filmmaking more from painters and musicians than from filmmakers," director Bela Tarr has confessed. Reversing his cue, Raha Raissnia learned to paint from filmmakers and musicians rather than painters. Anthology Film Archives left her well-versed in the cinematic avant-garde, and her projection performances often involve collaboration with experimental musicians Aki Onda and Charles Curtis. Above all, Raissnia's paintings aspire to the temporal and experiential condition of music—suggestive, ambiguous, abstract.

Over the past decade, the artist's paintings, drawings, and films have unfolded within a permutational, self-reflexive structure. For *Series in Fugue*, the principles governing Raissnia's body of work have been collapsed into panels of oil and gesso, along with works on paper. Here, Raissnia's films, drawings, and paintings are more closely imbricated than ever: each painting is a contrapuntal composition catalyzed by two visual quotations from the artist's films. Their faint transfer onto gessoed wood guides the building up of oil paint and its sanding and reapplication, leading to images heretofore unseen. Her films echo this sedimentary process, themselves constructed from fragments of earlier work and structured as overlapping pairs of 35-mm slide and 16-mm film projections. Raissnia's drawings, likewise comprised of image transfers, with sumi ink and compressed charcoal, examine this relationship of mutual influence. All are guided by the materiality of their media.

The resulting densely textured paintings draw in equal measure on the gestural and photographic, the figurative and abstract. As Raissnia's films render these boundaries ambiguous through layers of manipulation and reference, so too do these paintings present a world that contains aspects of both but belongs properly to neither. They feature passageways to indeterminate locations and irrational architectures. "My paintings brought abstraction to the vision I captured from the world on film and now the films are bringing elements of reality into my paintings," Raissnia says. Her viewer is left with the (impossible) task of excavating the two.

Though their source material is heterogeneous, the paintings that comprise *Series in Fugue* might best be conceptualized as stills excerpted from a single film. As Roland Barthes suggests, the essence of the filmic may be found, paradoxically, not in the moving image but in the film still which houses a level of meaning that lies beyond information, symbolism, or language. He terms this erratic, persistent, and elusive form the Third Meaning. Any reading of the Third Meaning "remains suspended between the image and its description," can be found "over the shoulder" or "behind the back" of articulated language. This domain approaches the unassimilable spaces proposed by Raissnia's paintings.

Like the archaeological layers of Raissnia's panels, the Third Meaning is structured permutationally, permitting levels of signification and interpretation to coexist in a "multi-layering of meanings which always lets the previous meaning continue, as in a geological formation, saying the opposite without giving up the contrary." Here, Barthes suggests that neither still nor film exceeds, precedes, nor fully contains the other. The same can be said of the still and moving image in Raissnia's multifarious body of work—the two are placed in perpetual counterpoint.

Raha Raissnia and Aki Onda will perform alongside William Basinski on Saturday, October 19, at ISSUE Project Room (22 Boerum Place, Brooklyn) as part of Ten Years Alive on the Infinite Plain, a two-month festival celebrating ISSUE Project Room's 10th anniversary. For more information or to purchase tickets in advance, please visit issueprojectroom.org.

BOMB

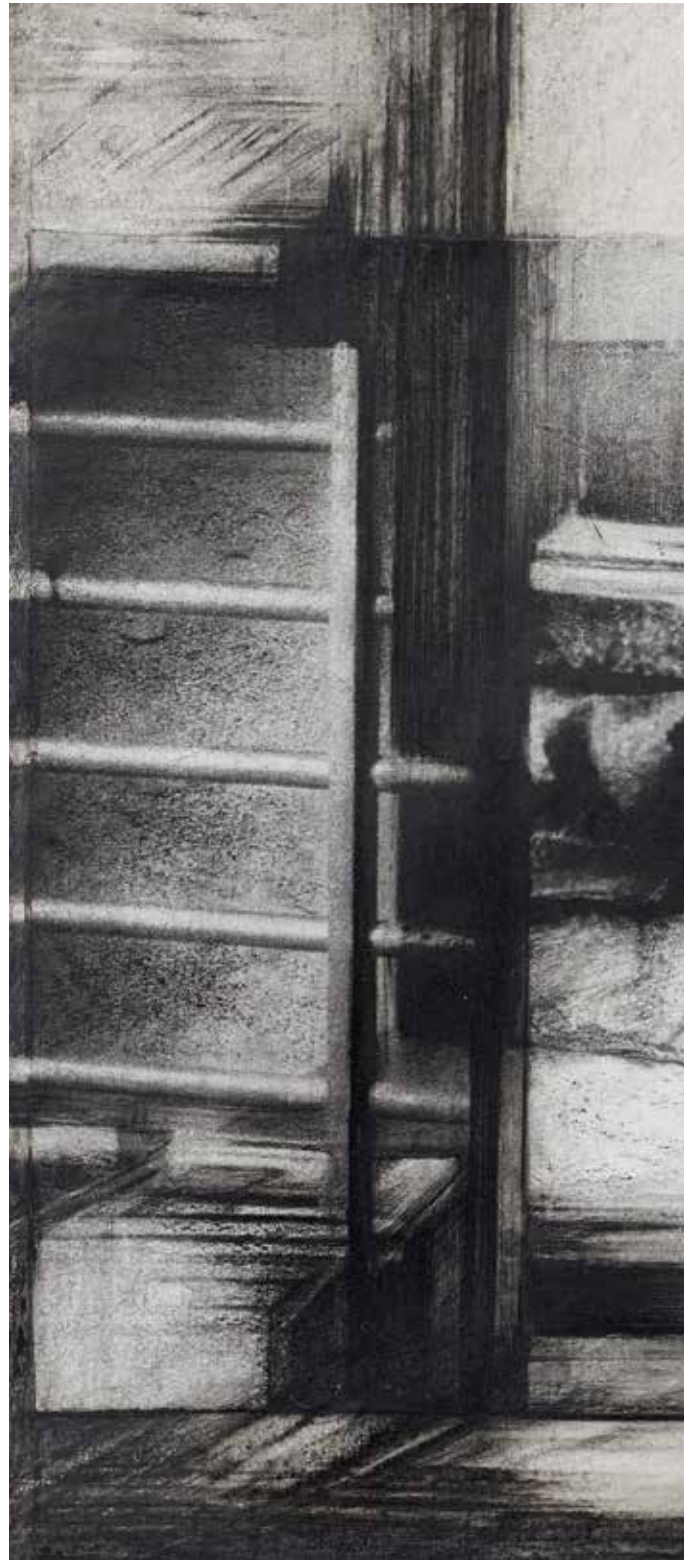
Raha Raissnia by Jeanne Liotta

They say that stolen fruit is the sweetest. It's always a pleasure to steal terms from another discipline—it automagically bestows an enlarged perspective on the work, suggesting it might strain against garden variety containers.

Raha Raissnia's show of drawings and paintings *Series in Fugue* at Miguel Abreu this past fall led me to consider the form of the fugue. The fugue, literally "to chase, to run away, to take flight or flee," designates repeating musical motifs that will chase after each other in turn and variation, in call and response, echoing and reforming, multi-threading, layering, and running circles around each other.

There's a Google group devoted to the art of the fugue where recently musicians were deep in disagreement over the possible existence of a visual fugue—since Walt Disney, case in point, had failed so miserably with that silly animation of Bach's *Toccatà and Fugue in D Minor* in the opening scene of *Fantasia* (1940). Oskar Fischinger showed more than a little dissatisfaction with that filmed experiment in visual music after Disney changed his design. His infamous parting of the ways with Disney was nothing if not a sworn vow to non-objective reality, where abstract art aspires to the *condition* of music, not its illustration.

There is nothing silly in Raissnia's dark and complex 2D works—oil and gesso, wood, charcoal, and ink are in dynamic conversation with the photographic and architectural, taken from her own film material via image transfers. All devoid of color, all moody tones and shadows, murky then sharp, all shifting depths, edges in motion, dissolution, dispersion, and gathering storms. A perfect foot peeks out from under a







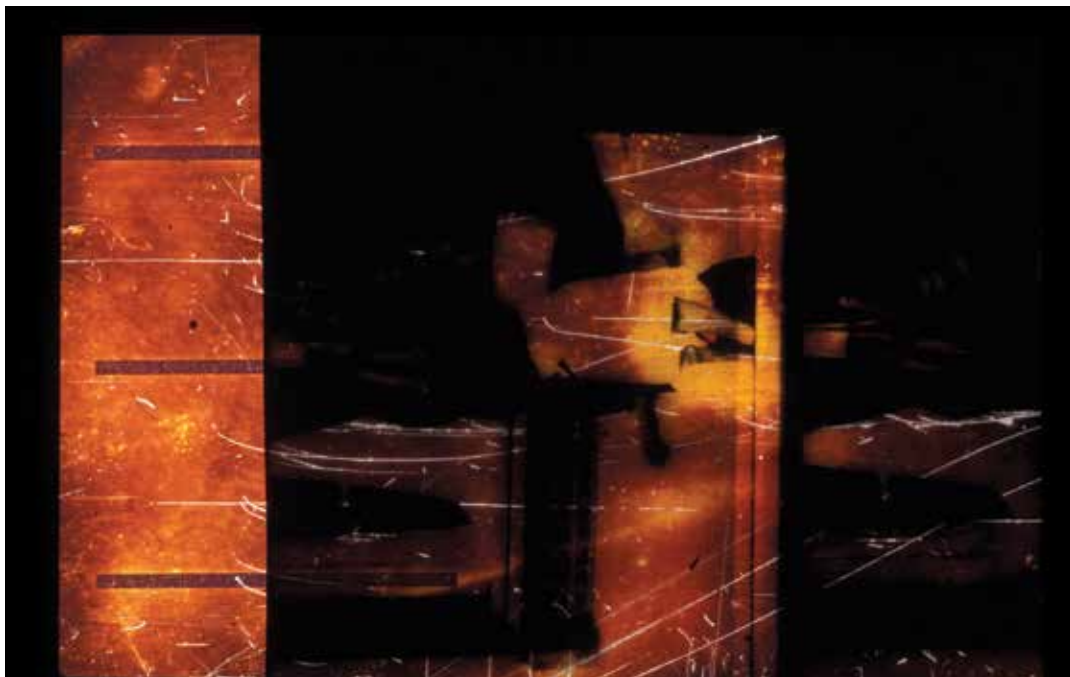
Untitled, 2013, image transfer, Sumi ink, compressed charcoal, and collage on paper, 14 x 17 inches.

smoldering robe. A huddled form lies crumpled on a mattress framed by scaffolds and stairways to the infernal depths. If this were music it would be industrial.

For all the static works in this show, it is worth emphasizing that Raissnia's various projects over the years have been intensely stirred in a homemade cauldron of film, performance, musical collaborations, and slide projections, often loudly and simultaneously. One sweltering night last summer, for instance, Raissnia performed live in Abreu's empty loft space with various 16mm films and slides projected onto one of her larger paintings, accompanied by Dalius Naujo's Search and Enjoy choir. It was an intense, reckless, and unforgettable evening. A shifting fugue took place amongst all the mediums present to produce that work—in time, in space, in voice, alive and absolutely unpredictable.

Series in Fugue clearly related to this densely layered process, though it sometimes felt as though Raissnia was trying to arrest the very thing she set loose that night in the loft when she made a painting and bombarded it with light and sound. What was that thing but some kind of wild ephemeral synaesthesia? I am sure it is asking for the impossible to want to locate such energy inside a 2D work. Maybe that's what those Google group musicians felt when they insisted that a visual fugue was an impossibility.

— JEANNE LIOTTA makes films and other cultural ephemera. More on her can be found on her website: jeanneliotta.net.



Two hand-painted collages, 35 mm slides overlay.

EL PAÍS

El arte sin velo de las creadoras iraníes

Occidente redescubre el innovador trabajo de autoras como Farideh Lashai, Raha Raissnia o Samira Hodaiei

ROBERTA BOSCO | Barcelona | 21 ABR 2013 - 00:28 CET

1



'Catching the moon', obra de la artista iraní Farideh Lashai.

En Nueva York dos galerías, Leila Heller y Edward Tyler Nahem, acaban de inaugurar conjuntamente la primera muestra póstuma de Farideh Lashai (Rasht, 1944), artista fascinante fallecida hace un mes, justo cuando museos y coleccionistas empezaban a rifársela. Lashai, que ya tenía tres representantes: las dos neoyorquinas y la suiza AB Gallery de Lucerna, era la punta de lanza de un grupo de mujeres artistas con una sólida trayectoria y una obra sorprendente por calidad e innovación que la Primavera Árabe ha descubierto al público europeo.

En Nueva York se pueden ver algunas de sus piezas clave, en las que combina pintura, literatura, vídeo, animación, instalación y escultura, como *Rabbit in Wonderland*, reinterpretación del fantasmagórico mundo de Lewis Carroll, a través del prisma de la historia reciente de Irán. La más célebre es *Leyli va Majnun*, los Romeo y Julieta de Oriente Medio. Su historia de amor y muerte, que se transmite desde el siglo XII, cobra nueva vida a través de la

tecnología y la mirada insólita y poética de Lashai, que para relatar esta tragedia utiliza el vídeo proyectado sobre sus pinturas. Los efectos, que proporciona el uso de sofisticadas técnicas audiovisuales sobre el lienzo, incrementan la belleza de las telas y las llenan de luminosidad, mientras que la banda sonora contribuye a sumergir al espectador en la cultura persa.

Recoge el testigo Raha Raissnia (Teherán, 1968), representada por la galería Marta Cervera de Madrid, que combina dibujos, pinturas y proyecciones de películas y diapositivas, a veces con equipos antiguos, en instalaciones que remiten al arte simbolista europeo de finales del siglo XIX. La arquitectura utópica visionaria y una imagerie densa e inquietante contribuyen a plasmar obras de cine que a menudo incluyen al espectador y sus sombras al moverse. La estrecha relación de Raissnia con la vanguardia cinematográfica y musical de Nueva York se ha plasmado en colaboraciones con el cineasta Dalius Nojo y el artista sonoro Aki Onda y a menudo utiliza el ruido de los propios aparatos de proyección.*

Comparte la aproximación multimedia Samira Hodaiei (1981), otra artista de AB Gallery, que relata cómo su infancia, marcada por la guerra entre Irak e Irán, transcurrió entre el miedo y la alegría. "Fue como danzar sobre el filo de un cuchillo", explica, y así lo hacen las mujeres de su Irán natal, protagonistas de series pictóricas como *Dancing the Sharp Edge* y *Sweet*



Raha Raissnia, con una de sus instalaciones.

Motherland. Congeladas en poses que evocan milenarias danzas persas, esgrimen cuchillos y espadas en actitud brutal y valiente, sin esconder su sexualidad y atractivo. En sus pinturas de marcado relieve y textura, hechas mediante una sucesión de puntos de color, metáfora del complejo entramado de la cultura islámica, la artista consigue que la sensación del movimiento se genere en la retina del espectador. "Ninguna cultura es estática", dice Hodaiei. "Estas obras son un homenaje a aquellas mujeres que vivieron y murieron en la ambigüedad, rodeadas de duras convenciones sociales".

* Translation: Taking up the torch, Raha Raissnia (Teheran, 1968), represented by the Marta Cervera Gallery in Madrid, combines drawings, paintings, film and slide projections, sometimes using vintage equipment, in installations that hark back to late 19th century European Symbolist art. The visionary utopian architectural motifs and dense, disturbing imagery contribute in fashioning filmic works that often include the spectator and his shadows as he moves about. Raissnia's close relations with New York's film and music avant-garde have led to collaborations with filmmaker Dalius Nojo and sound artist Aki Onda, often utilizing the noise of the very projectors in her works.

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: RAHA RAISSNIA

Early Spring

Dates: May 8 – June 26, 2011

Reception: Sunday, May 8, 6– 8 PM

Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to announce the opening of Raha Raissnia's *Early Spring* on Sunday, May 8th, the artist's third solo exhibition at the gallery.

The show features an 11-minute, looped 16mm film, along with a sequence of six small-scale paintings that, in a sense, emanate from the film. The dense and layered cinematic object itself takes at its starting point footage that Raissnia shot in 2005 in the slums of the Molavi neighborhood of Tehran. As is customary with her work, the original film has been layered and superimposed with other film and video materials to produce an immersive, high-contrast visual experience that allows only traces of the initial documentary footage to appear here and there.

By contrast to Raissnia's earlier paintings, the scratched surfaces of the black and white works in this exhibition are marked by a loosening of their architectonic structure. Imagery ambiguously reminiscent of moments in the film seem to re-emerge in the paintings in a somewhat ominous interplay of forms, things, light and darkness.

Raha Raissnia received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1992 and an MFA from Pratt Institute in 2002. In between completing her degrees, her interest in avant-garde filmmaking led her to take on an internship at Anthology Film Archives (1995-1999), where she also occasionally exhibited. Solo shows of her work were held at New York's Thomas Erben Gallery, Galerie Xippas, Paris, and the Isfahan Museum of Contemporary Art in Iran. In 2010, she had a one-person exhibition at Galeria Marta Cervera, Madrid, and was the recipient of a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Grants to Artists Award. Last February, The Kitchen, New York, presented *Cosmography*, Raissnia's film/music collaboration with composer Briggan Krauss.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery:

36 Orchard Street (between Canal & Hester), New York, NY 10002

Tel 212.995.1774 • Fax 646.688.2302 • post@miguelabreugallery.com

Gallery hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11:00 AM to 6:30 PM

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street; J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street



Raha Raissnia, "Early Spring"

Thu Jun 2 2011

[Miguel Abreu Gallery](#)

36 Orchard St, New York, 10002

Time Out says

Thu Mar 15 2012

New work is presented by the Tehran-born Brooklyn artist, whose darkly abstract slide shows, 16mm films, drawings and paintings have been described—quite accurately—as a meeting of horror-illustrator H.R. Giger and '60s conceptualist Barry Le Va.

REVISTA CLAVES DE ARTE

Raha Raissnia en la Galería Marta Cervera

23 de Noviembre de 2010 | Por Ana Folguera de la Cámara



Untitled, 2010. 139.7 x 152.4 cm

El arte hace posible las contradicciones. Es capaz de hacernos creer que estamos en otro lugar, transformar eso en aquello, que el verbo "ser" y "parecer" sean lo mismo. Lo sorprendente de **Raha Raissnia** (Irán, 1968) es su enorme capacidad para aunar la figuración y lo abstracto (términos que nos han enseñado como antitéticos e incompatibles). En sus obras no llegamos a distinguir formas, y sin embargo, en ningún momento nos sentimos expulsados de ellas. Es más, las habitamos, nos paseamos por ellas, nos escondemos. La muestra que podemos ver en la **Galería Marta Cervera** nos revela el proceso de trabajo que ha seguido **Raissnia**: partir de un fuerte realismo para deformarlo y difuminarlo.

La técnica, en este sentido, está claramente dislocada para que no sea reconocible. La artista recurre al óleo sobre lienzo, pero también a las diapositivas pintadas, a las fotografías, incluso a las radiografías, demostrando que la profundidad se puede convertir en superficie, y no por ello perder puntería. Frente a las obras de **Raissnia**, no podemos asegurar ninguna técnica, porque parece utilizarlas todas a la vez.

Raissnia sostiene que para ella es fundamental el concepto de sinestesia en el arte, y para ello busca la confluencia entre la pintura, el cine y la música. Sobre todo se centra en esta última, ya que es capaz de transmitir cualidades plásticas de manera auditiva. En este sentido, hay que destacar la pieza de film performance de la exposición, que concentra de manera eficaz todas las aspiraciones de la artista. Pensamos en **Rudolf Schwarzkogler** y en su acción *Wedding* de 1965, ya que en ella observamos la misma confusión de técnicas y soporte artístico; en **Philip Corner**, en **Maciunas** y en **Tehching Hsieh**. Recordamos también a **Wodiczko** y sus proyecciones sobre la arquitectura urbana. En efecto, las obras de **Raissnia** sugieren una fuerte impresión de sombras y ausencias, casi como si estuviéramos en una película expresionista. Sentimos que estamos huyendo, y hemos aparecido bruscamente en esas habitaciones tan oscuras. Una vez allí ocurre algo extraño: ya no distinguimos señales de profundidad y volumen. La técnica del collage, que aparece en algunas obras, refuerza esa intención de yuxtaponer técnicas, igual que en una secuencia cinematográfica se superponen distintos planos.

El cineasta **Eggeling** ya hablaba de cine como “creación pura”, perfecta para plasmar eso que le falta a la pintura: la dimensión temporal. Hans Richter insistía a su vez en el enorme hallazgo que había supuesto el cine para resolver ciertos problemas, como la coordinación formal, el color y la simultaneidad. De esta manera, sólo la transformación de las formas, su desarrollo y proyección en el espacio constituyen materia suficiente para contruir una película y mezclarla de manera ambigua con la pintura.

Es precisamente en este territorio confuso donde trabaja **Raissnia**. Parece que la artista se mueve entre la vehemencia del expresionismo y la contención de la abstracción (contención aparente, claro, porque todos sabemos que el código es una manera de esconder el grito). Casi a la manera de **Ansel Kiefer**, hay una preferencia por la sombra y la oscuridad, como lugares de la creación fotográfica, es decir, a partir de la luz. Insistiendo en esa capacidad del arte para hacer posible lo improbable, la artista iraní nos demuestra que se puede obtener oscuridad a partir de lo luminoso.

English translation by Milton Cruz

Art makes contradictions possible. It can make us believe that we're somewhere else, transform this into that, make the verbs “being” and “seeming” one and the same. The surprising thing about Raha Raissnia (Iran, 1968) is her enormous capacity for conjoining figuration and abstraction (terms we've been taught to think of as incompatible). In her works we don't get to distinguish forms, and yet we never feel ousted from them. What's more, we live in them, walk through them, hide. This show viewable at the Marta Cervera Gallery reveals Raissnia's work process: starting from something strongly realistic in order to deform it and make it indistinguishable.

Technique, in this case, is clearly displaced so as not to be recognizable. This artist uses oil on canvas as well as painted slides, photographs and even x-rays, demonstrating in each case that depth can become surface without ever missing the mark. Face to face with Raissnia's works we cannot be sure of the technique as she seems to use them all at once.

Raissnia maintains that synesthesia is a fundamental concept in her art, looking to the convergence between painting, film and music to achieve it. In particular music, capable as it is of conveying plasticity through hearing. Notable in this sense is the film-performance piece in the exhibition which ably sums up all her aspirations. It brings to mind Rudolf Schwarzkogler and his 1965 Wedding-Action, where the same blurring of boundaries between technique and artistic media is evident; in Philip Corner, Macunias and Tehching Hsieh. We are also reminded of Wodiczko and his projections on urban buildings. Indeed, Raissnia's works strongly suggest shadows and absences, almost like an expressionist film. We feel as though, fleeing from something, we find ourselves suddenly in these ever-so-dark rooms. Once there, something strange happens: any signs of depth or volume disappear. The use of collage in some of these works reinforces the juxtaposition of techniques, the same way as different kinds of shots combine to make a film sequence.

The filmmaker Eggeling spoke of film as “pure creation”, ideal for restoring the temporal dimension missing from painting. Hans Richter in turn insisted on the great discovery that was cinema for resolving certain problems relating to the coordination of forms, color and simultaneity. In this way, only the transformation of forms, their development and projection in space would be sufficient for constructing films that would in an ambiguous way be extensions of painting.

It is precisely in this ambiguous territory where Raissnia works. This artist seems to move between expressionistic vehemence and the self-containment of abstraction (self-containment only in appearance since, as is well known, the code is one way of hiding the scream). Almost like in Ansel Kiefer, there is a preference for shade and darkness as ideal places for photographic creation, in other words, starting from the light. Insisting on art's capacity for making the improbable into something possible, this Iranian artist demonstrates that one can derive darkness from luminosity.

ARTPULSE

REVIEWS



Raha Raissnia. Installation view at Galeria Marta Cervera. Courtesy of the artist and the gallery.

RAHA RAISSNIA

Galería Marta Cervera – Madrid, Spain

By Paco Barragán

Gallery Marta Cervera presents the first solo show of Iranian-born, Brooklyn-based artist Raha Raissnia in Madrid. The show consists of a film-performance installation titled *Glean*, a series of oil on canvas, and drawings on graphite.

Raha Raissnia has studied among others at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn; in addition, she did an internship between 1995 and 1999 at the Anthology Film Archives in New York. She has had solo exhibitions in New York since 2004 with Thomas Erben and with her actual dealer Miguel Abreu, and in Paris with Galerie Xippas. Finally, she received a grant from the Pollock-Krasner Foundation in 2008.

This brief introduction gives us a good idea of the consistency and continuity of Raissnia's artistic practice, and especially her interest in film, or more precisely in the moving image. She was born in Tehran, Iran in 1968 and emigrated to the United States in 1983. It is easy to sense that her origins inform her pictorial practice, which in its turn informs her cinematic installations.

In line with the artistic experimentation carried out by artists like Bill Viola, Sam Taylor-Wood, Fabian Marcaccio, Tim White-Sobieski, Ori Gerst, and Monika Bravo, just to name a few, Raissnia too explores in a challenging manner the way how we can construct a painting in the early 21st century in a society that is on one hand mediated by an excess of images—whether moving or still images, be it photographs, video stills or television—and on the other, whose

representations are enabled by new gadgets like iPhones, digital cameras, or Google Earth.

When the visitor enters the gallery, he sees around six mid-sized paintings in black and white; immediately to his right there are a series of small works on paper carried out with ink and graphite; to the left in the dark room we find one of her signature and, if we may say so, iconic film projector installations titled *Glean*. *Glean* is a projection of found 16 mm footage that has been painted and altered by hand and onto which 35 mm slide projections have been overlaid. The interplay between static images (slides) and moving images (found footage) surely concites in the viewer not only the very essence of film, but also the idea of a painter playing with a colorful palette. It all looks like a sophisticated high-tech moving painting, where abstraction and figuration constantly challenge each other by articulating, and sometimes only hinting at, aleatory forms and textures that play with synaesthesia. Raissnia herself has stated on several occasions that her work "aspires to music and develops like a musical piece."

Her paintings on their turn are predominantly black and white, and one has dark red in addition. This series seem less rigid than former paintings where one could sense a more severe contrast and distribution. Here forms mix and interact smoothly with the background creating mysterious landscapes that basically revolve around binary oppositions like life or death, fantasy or reality, nature or constructed landscape, and tradition or innovation.

Raissnia's work all has a natural flow to it, and she is surely an artist to watch as she has been able to reinvent in a challenging manner past and present. ■

(November 4 – December 31, 2010)

La película plástica de Raha Raissnia

GLEAM. MARTA CERVERA. General Castaños, 5. MADRID. Hasta el 8 de enero. De 2.000 a 15.000 €.

Las pinturas de Raha Raissnia, realizadas con óleo negro sobre una gruesa capa de yeso blanco, tienen algo de anacrónicas. En primer lugar por la técnica; la preparación de yeso nos remite a los tiempos medievales, cuando se aplicaba sobre las paredes o sobre tablas como base para la decoración mural al temple o para los primeros óleos. Su uso, es cierto, se ha prolongado a lo largo de la historia de la pintura, y sus cualidades han sido reivindicadas por influyentes artistas como Agnes Martin, admirada por Raissnia. También parece de otro tiempo su repertorio de formas. A lo largo de la pasada década ha ido endureciendo o ablandando las geometrías de sus composiciones y permitiendo, o no, que afloren insinuaciones figurativas que, aquí, son casi siempre arquitectónicas. En conjunto, las pinturas tienen un aire de otra época: un geometrismo de raigambre más europea que americana que tira a siniestro y a seco.

Son mucho más interesantes, en mi opinión, sus dibujos y su trabajo con película. En ambos medios utiliza el collage de formas cuadrangulares que aportan una sutil tercera dimensión a las imágenes. Los dibujos están ejecutados con grafito, aplicado de manera insistente de modo que crea superficies dinámicas y con una gran fuerza visual. A pesar de que las composiciones son similares a las de las pinturas, aquí adquieren



UNTITLED, 2010

una sensualidad nueva y se prestan a un recorrido más rico a través de la multiplicidad de planos. El recurso al recorte y el encolado tiene sus raíces en su experiencia en los Anthology Film Archives, donde conoció no sólo las técnicas de restauración sino también las obras de cineastas experimentales como Paul Sha-

rits o Bruce Conner, que jugaban ya con la película como soporte "plástico". La obra más ambiciosa que ahora se presenta es *Tender Laps*, una proyección de una película de 16 mm y de 160 diapositivas—en dos proyectores—sobre dos cuadros de tamaño mediano, con acompañamiento musical de Charles

Curtis. Raissnia había ya combinado la proyección de película y diapositivas en su exposición de 2008 en la galería Miguel Abreu de Nueva York pero añade aquí una tercera (o cuarta) capa de imágenes: la pintura. Es un experimento muy interesante pero hasta cierto punto fallido, pues lo que más desearíamos ver, esas diapositivas modificadas que son ya pequeñas obras de arte y el extraño lenguaje filmico de la autora, son casi indiscernibles.



Raha Raissnia (Teherán, 1968) emigró a Estados Unidos en 1983. Estudió en el Art Institute of Chicago y en el Pratt Institute y, de 1992 a 1995, trabajó en el Anthology Film Archives de Nueva York. La Foundation for Contemporary Arts que preside Jasper Johns acaba de concederle uno de sus Grants to Artists Award 2011.

ELENA VOZMEDIANO

**Raha Raissnia****Shorthand of Sensation****28 mars - 02 mai 2009****Paris. Galerie Xippas**

Sombres, sombres et rigides lignes qui n'empruntent l'oblique que pour passer du vertical à l'horizontal, qui ne se rejoignent qu'afin d'épaissir le trait, plus de cercles mécaniques qui font les engrenages, seulement des tensions technologiques qui désignent des circuits ; les abstractions de Raha Raissnia.

0 réaction**VOS RÉACTIONS**

Par leur répétitivité, les machineries sont sans doute inhumaines, mais la visibilité de leurs infatigables mouvements indique la vie possible, tandis que les circuits électroniques, corps inertes qui dissimulent leurs actions, forment déjà des images fixes.

Sans doute sous les photographies, les peintures et les dessins de Raha Raissnia passent-ils de semblables flux, mais ils demeurent pareillement insensibles. Restreinte aux noirs et aux blancs, sa palette déplie ainsi les petits mondes cachés où les lignes forment de nouveaux cadres aux œuvres, des labyrinthes clos, des entrelacs brutaux et froids, une géométrie complexe qui paraît ignorer l'accidentel du monde, et dont pourtant on soupçonne qu'elle forme bien un monde ; étranger sans doute, mais comme toute étrangeté nous est un peu familière. Ce rapprochement possible de l'inhumain et de l'humain, les marques de peintures, les rehauts de blanc le permettent. Pourtant, ce sont les peintures qui semblent les plus bloquées, les moins vivantes, paralysie à laquelle contribue le grand format des supports.

Néanmoins, c'est dans une petite huile sur toile qu'une silhouette apparaît, à demi gommée, mais courbes d'un corps tout de même, minuscule organisme prisonnier d'un monde raidi dont il ne mesure pas l'échelle qui le dépasse. Interruption, ce corps ne sert à rien, il entrave plutôt les courses des lignes qui, dans les autres œuvres, se poursuivent librement. Pourtant il est là, reste archéologique prisonnier d'un temps passé, embryon de futur, ou image du présent; image présente en fait.

L'architecture que dessinent les œuvres de Raissnia expose donc un univers encore capable de comprendre l'humain, l'organique visible. Car la rigueur spatiale qui structure ses toiles n'est pas seulement une concentration menaçante, elle introduit aussi les rythmes d'une musique qui invite à la contemplation. Si l'on voit dans ces lignes celles d'une portée, alors on peut percevoir une rythmique qui n'est pas celle d'un monde inconnu, mais très proche. Si de surcroît, avec un peu de chance, le soleil pointe, alors on peut voir, depuis une l'ouverture d'une fenêtre, les arc-boutants, les raidisseurs, les encadrements des arcatures de la galerie Xippas et ceux, en contrebas, de la verrière de la galerie Yvon Lambert. Aperçus en fragment grâce à l'encadrement, toutes ces pièces de métal peintes en noir, par le contraste et le jeu des entrelacements, provoquent une image voisine des œuvres de Raissnia que la vision précédente de celles-ci a rendu possible. Rapports d'un monde virtuel et fantasmatique, cette exposition-là tenait peut-être en fait de l'installation *in situ*.

Œuvre(s)**Raha Raissnia**

— *Untitled*, 2009. Tirage numérique sur papier Kodak satine. 39 x 61 cm

— *Untitled*, 2009. Tirage numérique sur papier Kodak satine. 39 x 61 cm

— *Untitled*, 2009. Huile sur toile. 152.5 x 178 cm

— *Untitled*, 2009. Huile sur toile. 152.5 x 178 cm

— *Untitled*, 2008. Collage, encre et graphite sur papier. 22.9 x 30.5 cm

RÉAGIR ●**LIRE L'ANNONCE ●****INFOS PRATIQUES ●**

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: RAHA RAISSNIA

Dates: September 7 – October 19, 2008

Reception: Sunday, September 7, 6:30 – 9 PM

Opening on Sunday, September 7th, Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present Raha Raissnia's second solo exhibition at the gallery. The show will feature recent paintings and drawings by the artist alongside a slide and film projection with sound work by Charles Curtis.

In a seminal sequence from Dziga Vertov's *Man With A Movie Camera*, a horse's steady trot is halted to a standstill and seized upon as a frame within the strip of film destined for the editor's table. To fully understand how Raha Raissnia reanimates detritus, we must start at the cutting room floor and play these stages in reverse.

Using transparent tape, Raissnia collages found 16 and 35 mm filmstrips with hand-processed, hand-painted and manipulated materials she then presses between glass slides, like specimens for inspection. The variegated components comprising any single slide may include segments of a still life photograph with paint and ink drawings reworked and scratched into acetate sheets. Pushing further the theme of 'still life', Raissnia incorporates selected sections from human x-rays into her mix of pictures. After the resulting palimpsest has undergone full treatment, she sets the final slide array into a sequence intensified by projection and injected with sound.

Raissnia develops her filmmaking process by breaking apart the cinematic movement of 'film' into three components: Two slides are projected side-by-side and partly overlap in the middle, while an 18 frame per second, 16mm film is superimposed over the left image. This composition, in effect, produces a slow-moving montage during which scenes are at once temporary and aleatory. The arrangement underscores cinema's inherent paradoxical structure of manipulating stillness to conjure up the illusion of movement.

The movie camera lens lolls about, repeatedly failing to apprehend and fully represent an ambiguous, external light source. The disembodied eye of a segmented film struggles to look back onto itself. Beneath this drunken movement, one projector screens images of a fetus in utero, exposed within the architecture of the female body, against perhaps, an image of a human figure, miniscule against a looming building. The resulting procession of dark and saturated colors is occasionally punctured by the barest inflections of light. Charles Curtis' haunting, mathematical sound accompaniment reinforces the high-pitch of this shuffle of quixotic images.

While clearly influenced by New York's Materialist-Structuralist avant-garde, Raha Raissnia's cinematic work departs from the trope of revealing the stilled frame by instead recuperating the 'dead' still as her originary material point. The artist's avoidance of projecting a full stop thereby sidesteps the complete destruction of cinematic movement. As is suggested by her choice of images, her work hovers between movement and stillness, life and death.

If Raissnia's cinema extends time, her drawings delimit time. In certain renderings we can cull subcutaneous sinews and tendons. Most compositions, however, depict a crushing build-up of marks so dense that their excess verges upon illegibility. It is as though we are witnessing the result of a scene that has been superimposed and slowly replayed upon itself so thoroughly that the image, stuck in its frame, has suffered a slow burial under the topographical sediment of graphite and ink.

Furthering this theme of temporality, it is perhaps useful to turn to Raissnia's newest paintings in which she has inverted her usual order, Ivory Black paint atop white gesso. Her newest configurations, Titanium White paint atop black gesso, like previous compositions, remain architectonic. However, if previous iterations could have been interpreted as aerial views of infrastructure, movement and transit, we are now confronted with crystalline

forms that seem to rise up and break past a horizon to converge, cross and continue through the dark void of limitless space. The resulting network of vectors resembles what one could imagine to have been a sketch from a lost letter in the Crystal Chain. We sense an ambitious, if not ambiguous proposal for a yet-to-be-realized future.

To better consider Raissnia's material inversion, one might extend this historicized fantasy to include the influential American contemporary of early European Expressionist architects, Frank Lloyd Wright. Since 1959, Wright's *Ennis House* (completed in 1926) has served as a cinematic backdrop for multiple Hollywood films and commercials. Its depictions are often futuristic despite the fact that its primary material components, interlocking cast concrete blocks, were fashioned after the style of Puuc architecture from the Mayan city, Uxmal.

If Frank Lloyd Wright's references to 'the ancient' are propelled into the future through the 'now-present' medium of cinematic time, it seems that the same sort of séance could be contrived in Raissnia's process of graphic inversion. By deploying the same methodical techniques of painting – layering and erasure (via scratching) – Raissnia bridges the gap between her Ivory Black on white, sepia-toned ruins and her Titanium White crystalline spires that are still freezing into form. The transits pictured in each remain not fully decipherable and, therefore, mysteriously incomplete.

Between Raissnia's separate but thematically related practices, we are invited to consider the terms under which we triangulate representations of our own present – the version of a 'past' to which we defer and the future it foregrounds. Our eyes, like the camera, seek sources of illumination that may guide us. Raissnia's work, embedded in history (or perhaps, rather, something akin to an ambiguous 'ancient' dimension), looks forward, and pulls us through the darkness of this search.

Raha Raissnia received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1992 and her MFA from Pratt Institute in 2002. In between receiving her degrees, her interest in avant-garde filmmaking led her to take on an internship at Anthology Film Archives (1995-1999) where she also occasionally exhibited. Solo shows of her work were held at New York's Thomas Erben Gallery, Galerie Xippas, Paris, and the Isfahan Museum of Contemporary Art, Isfahan, Iran.

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Raha Raissnia

by Ben La Rocco, October 2008

Miguel Abreu Gallery September 7-October 19, 2008

The Miguel Abreu Gallery is low lit for “Free Way,” Raha Raissnia’s composite 35mm slide projection and 16mm film. Her big black and white paintings and small drawings don’t suffer from the dimming, a testimony to the toughness of all Raissnia’s work—you can see it in the dark. It’s as if the sci-fi illustrator H.R. Geiger were to make something that the cleaver-wielding minimalist Barry LeVa would approve. If your creepy meter isn’t reading high enough, a throbbing soundtrack pulsing through the gallery ought to jack it up.



Raha Raissnia, “Free Way,” 2005—2008. Composite 35mm slide projection with 16mm film, 15-minute loop. Dimensions variable. Sound by Charles Curtis. 3 analog looped cassette tapes. Courtesy Miguel Abreu Gallery.

Everything in the exhibition is about looking very closely. The imagery is abstract, but what comes across is a sense of exploring some sort of organic-mechanical system through a magnifying glass. The film is a composite of found 16mm footage spliced together and then painted and altered by hand. Some representational imagery—from x-rays, in particular—does appear, but for the most part the sensation of dark motion and changing textures dominates. Raissnia overlays the 16mm footage with 35mm slide projections thus doubling the image and deepening the sense of immersion in an alien landscape. What little color she uses (the only place it appears is in the films) seems carefully inserted to highlight the severity of the rest of the palette.

Raissnia's paintings are large without being monumental and the emotion they convey is severely compartmentalized. This is different: we're familiar with painting that intentionally avoids emotion to evoke contemporary being, but less so with painting that attempts to pinpoint exactly what form our present feeling takes (as if we are any less emotional today than we ever were). The paintings' movement seems cinematic. When their black interlocking forms – sometimes jagged, sometimes curved—bleed occasionally into the white ground, it's like mist on marble. A brooding classicism underpins these dark surfaces, a labyrinthine hive extending beyond the picture plane's boundaries. Is it adapted from some other source, lifted from life as is the 16mm footage? It seems not. The forms feel found in a more organic sense. Either way, Raissnia has invested them with the power of imagination.

There's plenty of tributary history in Raissnia's work. Stan Brakhage's films are a colorful relative but there's a clearer family resemblance in the abstract films of Hans Richter from the 1920s. The mood is less somber with Richter, but the sense of a system in which elements of form repeat themselves against the mobile backdrop of cinematic time is germane. The idea of photography and film usurping painting is as long gone as the '80s. Raissnia draws on film for her painting then seamlessly exhibits the two media side by side.

MODERN PAINTERS

NOVEMBER 2008

Reviews



RAHA RAISSNIA

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

Oil on canvas is one of the oldest technologies of representation; at times it can seem downright archaic that artists still smear blobs of colored pigment around on bolts of stretched linen. Yet in painting there survives a potential to represent spaces and scenarios that don't have an indexical connection or procedural relation to the current culture of instantaneity. For painters such as Raha Raissnia, painting's condition of fantastical or utopian invention is always in tension with newer mechanical and digital technologies.

In Raissnia's recent suite of abstract paintings, she applies white paint to black gesso in gridded formations of complex and dense structure. These improbable architectures of merging vectors and skewed intersections convey both vertigo-inducing velocity and the blur of a chaotic instant hastily arrested. The unusual technique of applying stark white paint to a dark ground lends a harsh, *Alphaville*-esque quality to the work, as though even blinding fluorescent light struggles to blanch a pervasive gloom. The comparison to cinema is not far-fetched; also shown is a film of hand-painted slides in which painting is collaged with found 16 and 35 mm footage in a palimpsest of 20th-century visual culture.

Experiencing Raissnia's work is like witnessing a parallax view: new technologies seen through older and possibly wiser ones. In today's omnipresent language of technological connectivity—networks and matrices—often the effects of such semiotic constructions overshadow the material reality of their impossibly vast structures (of massive server farms in remote corners of India, for example), or their elaborately minute forms (recent innovations in nearly invisible silicon nanocircuits). Raissnia's richly constructed works give material existence to those ineffable intricacies. —EVA DÍAZ

THE NEW YORKER

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

ART

October 1, 2008

“RAHA RAISSNIA”

The ghosts of Moholy-Nagy, the Russian Constructivists, and Stan Brakhage haunt Raissnia’s second solo show at the gallery. An installation using manipulated found film strips and reworked slides is projected onto a wall, and accompanied by a minimalist soundtrack (by Charles Curtis). Architecturally abstract paintings are less interesting than the multimedia piece, though they take the same raid-the-vaults approach to art history, harking back to early Abstract Expressionism, when palettes pared down to stark black-and-white were the rage. Through Oct. 19. (Abreu, 36 Orchard St. 212-995-1774.)

– Martha Schwendener



September 27, 2008

AFTERNOON DELIGHT

LES ART SCENE'S A SUNDAY SURPRISE

By SARAH SCHMERLER

ON a Saturday night, the Lower East Side might as well be Meatpacking District Lite. Overpriced drinks? Check. Annoying restaurants? Check. And don't even get us started on the people.

Lower East Side Sunday afternoons are a different thing altogether. Because while the neighborhood is host to one of the more obnoxious night-life scenes, there's also another scene that's cropped up, and it's a cool one.

The 'hood has one of the most vibrant art scenes in town: 35 galleries, lots of them run by young, hot dealers. It also boasts a brand-new museum called, fittingly, the New Museum.

The best part is that even if you don't know art from your elbow, you, too, can be a bona fide member of the scene. While most Chelsea galleries are shuttered on Sundays, these galleries are open for business. And on the last Sunday of every month, the galleries hold their opening receptions together. Translation: free beer and wine. Woohoo! So read on for our hype-free tour. With our help, you'll beat the hipster bar crowd, talk like an art maven, nosh like a king and pass a gorgeous Sunday for less than a \$10 bill.

The Nabe: Sprawling. From around Great Jones Street to the north and Canal Street to the south; East Broadway to the east and the Bowery to the west. You'd be crazy to do it all in a day, so take your time - there are plenty of Sundays to go around.

The Buzz: Why all the word on the street? "LES Galleries can take more risk because their overhead is not as high," says Paul Laster, editor of Artkrush.com. "They can present emerging artists at an earlier stage in their careers. Plus, you'll find dealers there who have broken out on their own, who used to work for dealers in Chelsea." In other words, this isn't just some "Sex and the City" wannabe scene. This here's the real deal.

The Tour: We think some of the best of the scene is south of Delancey, and even spills into Chinatown. This sort of talk will really tick off a lot of gallerists to the north, who are good, too. But we can't be everywhere at once, so let's focus. First, make like Amy Irving and cross Delancey, where you need to fuel up on Grand Street. Sweets lovers can stop by the Doughnut Plant (379 Grand St.; 212-505-3700), where a to-die-for square (yes, square!) doughnut filled with Italian plum jelly will set you back \$2.75. Those who prefer a different sort of starchy ambrosia head to nearby Kossar's Bialys (367 Grand St.; 877-4-BIALYS) to snap up a bialy for 90 cents. Reach into their fridge and grab an individual-size salad spread of your choice (lox, tuna, you name it - they're around \$3 each) and voila! Whitefish on a bagel for less than four bucks.

Fortified, head up Orchard Street - where, within two blocks, you'll find one of the biggest concentrations of high-concept art worth concentrating on. Lisa Cooley (34 Orchard St.; 212-680-0564) is a savvy young dealer who used to work for Andrea Rosen in Chelsea. Now she reps local artists like Andy Coolquitt, who makes inventive sculptures - lots of which are electrified and light up! - out of pipes and other stuff he finds on the street.

Miguel Abreu (36 Orchard St.; 212-995-1774) always puts a lot of thought into what goes on the walls of his pristine, kitchen-tile-floored space (a former Buddhist temple). This month it's Raha Raissnia's drawings in sumi ink and graphite, plus a weird sort of post-structuralist film in which she splices and recombines them.

Rachel Uffner Gallery (47 Orchard St.; 212-274-0064) has paintings of "stuff" you can easily recognize, but still, they're pretty cool: portraits by Roger White of such everyday things as a T-shirt, a box of Kleenex, and even a Brita water filter. This is the gallery's first show. Remember, you saw it here first.

Oops! You're not caffeinated enough, are you? Duck into the Roasting Plant Coffee (81 Orchard St.; 212-775-7755) for a custom-blended cuppa joe

(\$2.25); then head over to il Laboratorio del Gelato (95 Orchard St.; 212-343-9922) for a yummy sorbet (\$3.25).

Looking at art is hard work, so walk your repast over to one of the sweetest community gardens in town, the M'Finda Kalunga Garden (between Chrystie and Forsyth streets, with an entrance at Rivington Street; mkgarden.com), where you can relax. Its name, translated from the African Kikongo language, means "Garden at the Other Side of the World," but our translation: No hipsters in sight! There's even a sandbox for kids.

Once you're rested, keep trekking further south over to Rental, (120 East Broadway, sixth floor, 212-608-6002), a new gallery in a decidedly non-artsy building that houses Chinese lawyers and dentists. If you don't like the group show you'll find there, "Monsters," curated by well-known Chelsea artist Robert Longo, just head one block south to Dispatch (127 Henry St.; 212-227-2783). It's a tiny, hard-to-spot project space, run by two curators - one formerly of the Whitney Museum. Don't be intimidated. Instead, ask questions. That's the beauty of LES gallery-hopping!

This month, Dispatch's idea is to let folks see a small sample of art it's putting in bigger shows overseas - without having to pay the airfare.

So how do they stay in business? A set of limited-edition prints, which at \$4,000 may be one of the LES's bargains. "The spaces here don't have the deep pockets, or the attitude, of Chelsea," says Julie Evans, a painter who shows at a top-notch Chelsea gallery. "Sure, the scene is younger, homegrown, but a lot of the art here is dead serious."

Reflecting The Treasured Traditions Of This Cherished Community★



The Villager



West and East Village, Chelsea, Soho, Noho, Little Italy, Chinatown and Lower East Side, Since 1933
Volume 78 / Number 17 - September 24 - 30, 2008



Courtesy Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York

Jennifer Steinkamp's "Daisy Bell" evokes the illusion of entering a two-dimensional plane.

Fall frontier on the Lower East Side

New dimensions of digital art and installations

By Stephanie Buhmann

On Sunday, September 7, the Lower East Side was swarming with art enthusiasts. It was the inauguration of the fall season and many of the galleries downtown had coordinated their exhibition openings for that afternoon. While by now, plenty has been written about the developing art scene in this pocket of Manhattan, it might have been that Sunday that truly reflected the creative energy that can be found here these days.

While the levels of the artists' sophistication vary, an overall trend towards contemporary media and installation can be traced. More than a few galleries feature solo exhibitions that fuse different art forms, such as painting, film and sculpture. Experimentation is encouraged here and though most of

the spaces are much less generous than elsewhere in the city, they leave the artist more freedom to employ the gallery as a true component within the art dialogue.

Lehman Maupin features “Daisy Bell,” digital work by Los-Angeles based artist Jennifer Steinkamp, who is known for bestowing a unique sense of painterliness onto the digital medium. One impressive projection, covering the gallery’s entire back wall, evokes the illusion of entering of two-dimensional plane. Made of a seemingly infinite amount of animated flowers, “Daisy Bell” moves with a transfixing rhythm as if seen while a steady breeze would be swooping through a field.

The title of the series refers to a specific moment in the history of science and culture in 1962, when Bell Labs used an IBM 704 computer to synthesize speech and recreate the popular 19th-century English song of the same name. This manipulation of human speech and sound through computer technology relates to Steinkamp’s translation of nature into a digitally animated tapestry of floral color and form. In both cases, abstraction is not visual, but lies in the code, which does not need to be deciphered to be enjoyed.

In her first solo exhibition with Salon 94, Vidya Gastaldon shows two sculptures and watercolors. Her playful work creates a fantasy world filled with otherworldly creatures. They range from god-like figures to hairy trolls and curious eyeballs that float through mythic landscapes made of translucent color.

Born in France and currently residing in Switzerland, Gastaldon is interested in the icons and signs found in different cultures and her works incorporate the occasional symbol derived from Eastern religions or Pop Culture.

Meanwhile her sculptures exhibit an element of craft. They are made of fabric and yarn and are knitted or sewn by hand. Employing tactility as a key element, they use fabrics that are soft and plush, while the delicate handiwork, which must require meditative obsessiveness, adds a delicate quality.

Gastaldon’s world is one of harmony and surprise, leaving me to guess that the exhibition title, “Do You Wear The Love Glasses?,” is not meant ironically, but as an invitation. We are asked to engage in a pictorial language, which a cynic’s eye could dismiss as trite, but which for others will offer the inspirational opportunities found in fairy tales.

At Miguel Abreu Gallery, Iranian-born Raha Raissnia contextualizes a selection of abstract paintings and works on paper with a slide and film projection. Made of ivory black paint atop white gesso, her paintings thrive on the elaborations of contrast and nuance.

Strong vertical and horizontal lines dominate the picture plane, like a steel construction seen against a bright sky. The compositions are reminiscent of architectural structures that are seen from aerial perspectives and bring the geometric abstractions of Russian Constructivism to mind.

Raissnia’s filmmaking process explores the conventional movement associated with this medium and breaks it up into smaller elements. Here, two slides are projected side-by-side, while slightly overlapping in the middle. In addition, an 18 frame per second film is superimposed over the left image, creating a montage of slow-moving imagery.

As in Steinkamp, the projection reveals a strong sense of poetry, but in Raissnia's case, her images are fragmented and only sparsely woven together like arbitrary thoughts popping up from the past.

In Kevin Bewersdorf's "Monuments to the INFOspirit," presented by V & A Gallery, questions of existentialism are raised in a web forum. A classically trained pianist and web artist, Bewersdorf aims to "construct [his] presence in the spirit world of the web." He creates marketing products such as brands and identities by using practices that are identical to those employed by major corporations. This entails the creation of stock photography, jingles, logos and video. At V & A, the web works are translated into actual objects. A poster shows different graphic logos found on the Internet, which incorporate the letters A, B, and C and which were selected so that the terms American, Business, and Christian occurred most frequently in the acronyms.

To Bewersdorf, artworks in a "gallery space are products that we pretend are not products within a business that we pretend is not a business." He deals with this problem by presenting the object itself as something mediocre, but the information it conducts is sacred to him. The exhibited objects are ordered from the web and upon arrival are again, documented and loaded up on the web. Through this cycle, Bewersdorf creates a consistent dialogue between virtual and physical realities as the objects refer to the web as much as the web refers to them.

Here, reality is no longer reflected by the experience of it by man, but rather by the virtual coverage it receives on the Internet. Having in recent years seen so many major art institutions spend much of their focus on creating comprehensive web sites and exhibition coverage, one cannot help but wonder if in a few years time the physical experience of art will give way to a virtual experience of it.

In the meantime, the Lower East Side offers a nice conventional way to see much thought-provoking art in the texture of everyday life.

Lehmann Maupin

(201 Chrystie St.): Jennifer Steinkamp, "Daisy Bell." Through 10/18.

Salon 94 Freemans

(1 Freeman Alley): Vidya Gastaldon, "do you wear the love glasses?" Through 10/18.

Miguel Abreu Gallery

(36 Orchard St.): Raha Raissnia. Through 10/18.

Smith-Stewart

(53 Stanton St.): Rashawn Griffin. Through 10/5.

V & A

(98 Mott St.): Kevin Bewersdorf, "Monuments to the INFOspirit." Through 10/12.

The New York Times

Art in Review

Published: August 3, 2007

LATE LIBERTIES

*John Connelly Presents
625 West 27th Street, Chelsea
Through Aug. 24*

One can't help but agree with Augusto Arbizo, a curator of "Late Liberties," that it's hard to find a place for abstract painting in today's art world, driven as it is by a market enthralled primarily with the new and the blue chip. The artists selected for this show, all of whom deploy abstraction, have thus positioned themselves between a rock and a hard place. Exploring the tried and true is risky business.

Some of the pictures nonetheless push abstraction's envelope. Although Tauba Auerbach reaches back to the arabesque patterns of William Morris wallpaper in her ink drawing, she also inserts refreshing forms that look something like futuristic camera lenses. Carrie Moyer's blobs made from washes of rainbow color and glitter grew on me. And Michael Zahn's "in and out (not up and down)," a grouping of pastel canvases in a Minimalist vein, has a reduced Super Mario Brothers aesthetic à la Cory Arcangel.

A number of the works, however, look back rather than forward. Alex Kwartler's Constructivist studies in black rehash, or rather remix, Constructivism. Mr. Arbizo's Rorschach paintings, while dreamy in a 1970s kind of way, don't add much to the long conversation about this image type. Dana Frankfort's "GUTS (yellow/gold)" is indebted to Julian Schnabel but lacks his exuberant brushwork and compositional skills.

It isn't the quality of the art, however, that holds this show back. It's the curatorial premise of putting abstraction back into a formalist box. There will always be a place for great painting (abstract, figurative or otherwise), but the days of the abstract avant-garde are gone. BRIDGET L. GOODBODY

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Exhibition: Raha Raissnia
Stele

Dates: October 29 – December 3, 2006

Reception: Sunday, October 29, 6:30 – 9 PM

Opening on Sunday, October 29th, Miguel Abreu Gallery is pleased to present *Stele*, an exhibition of new paintings and drawings by Raha Raissnia, her first solo show at the gallery.

A shaft of light on darkness remains a force to be reckoned with in Raissnia's exiled, gestural paintings. As if scratching the arid earth from too close a range, the architectonic balance of her black and white shapes seems to emerge from an extended battle. As if charred by overexposure to the heat of the sun, her tumultuous compositions appear to struggle against the passing of what might have been long ago an ardent color arrangement. There is no need to attempt calling to mind uncertain references to urban life, nature, or to the cosmos, for those tend to be refuted before they can prove themselves. Here the mind is made to wonder and the body shows.

Raissnia emigrated from Iran to the United States in 1983, and it is perhaps because she comes from *elsewhere* – that is from a certain distance – that she so freely encounters, as if by chance, some of the towering figures of modernist painting. Early Jackson Pollock springs to mind, or the Roberto Matta of the same period. By analogy, the effect of her practice is reminiscent of the moment when the miraculous films of her countryman Abbas Kiarostami first stunned Western audiences, at the very time modern cinema was declared a thing of the past.

Raissnia paints, but her paintings and drawings are as much acts of inscription. For the master of Islamic calligraphy, to recognize the shape of a single word often suffices to learn and recite by heart the calligraphic text or poem at hand. This kind of foreign skill of the mind might have something to do with the referred to *elsewhere* that, somewhat paradoxically, enables the artist to create the assured and affirmative images she makes here and now.

Raissnia received her BFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1992 and her MFA from Pratt Institute in 2002. In between receiving her degrees, her interest in avant-garde filmmaking led her to take on an internship at Anthology Film Archives (1995-1999) where she also occasionally exhibited. Recent solo shows were held at Galerie Xippas, Paris and the Isfahan Museum of Contemporary Art, Isfahan, Iran.

On Tuesday, November 21st, at 8PM, Raissnia will project a montage of her manipulated slides at the gallery in collaboration with musician Charles Curtis.

For more information or for visuals, please contact the gallery at 212.995.1774.

Gallery hours: Wednesday – Sunday, 11:00 AM to 6:30 PM
36 Orchard Street (between Canal & Hester)
New York, NY 10002
Tel 212.995.1774 Fax 646.688.2302

Subway: F to East Broadway; B, D to Grand Street
J, M, Z to Delancey / Essex Street

36 Orchard Street, New York, NY 10002 • 212.995.1774 • fax 646.688.2302
info@miguelabreugallery.com • www.miguelabreugallery.com

Flash Art

NEW YORK

R E V I E W S

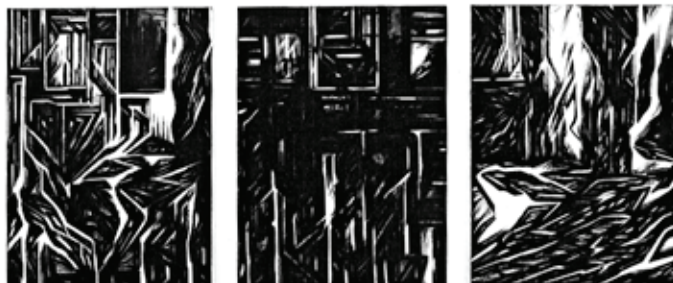
RAHA RAISSNIA

MIGUEL ABREU GALLERY

Resistance and seduction, the works of Raha Raissnia, dense black-and-white graphite drawings and equally intense paintings reduced to the same tonal range — same freighted density of tenebrity — how they tempt with their refinement whilst ultimately refusing to yield! The picture plane, push and pull of foreground and perspective, leads one further and further into the tangle, the mechanics, bowels, looking for a way through, irresistibly led to some potential space that lies way back at the other side. Surely it might be possible to navigate the topography of these marks, the *mappa mundi* of such jagged terrain, to embark on something like a narrative, a journey, traversing the ambiguities, deserts and oasis, the final ranges of these limitless plots?

Yet the actual surfaces of Raha's works refute the lure; the drawings are so packed, so thick, their shiny skein becomes almost reflective and the paintings have been sanded to an absolute smoothness, a silky finish at odds with the angularity of content. We are not allowed to enter, only admitted so far, the artist's defiance offering us an object, a perfect, polished object that is also a life, a whole world. There is something metaphysical to the gravity of these compositions, a beautiful sincerity we could only refuse out of embarrassment at the richness of the gift. If so, one might say they echo a certain postwar European abstraction, Pierre Soulages or even André Marfaing. But as gallerist Abreu puts it so pertinently, "By analogy, the effect of her practice is reminiscent of the moment when the miraculous films of her countryman Abbas Kiarostami first stunned Western audiences, at the very time modern cinema was declared a thing of the past." For the artist, Iranian heritage cannot be entirely dismissed; terms such as 'Islamic science fiction' or 'coded calligraphy' have been applied, but ultimately the numinous potency of these works shifts us from banal biographical to utter universal.

Adrian Dannatt



RAHA RAISSNIA, view of the exhibition "Stele" at Miguel Abreu Gallery, New York, 2006.

ARTS+

'LATE LIBERTIES' at John Connelly Presents, Page 20



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ARTS&LETTERS

THE NEW YORK SUN | THURSDAY, AUGUST 2, 2007

GALLERY-GOING

Addressing Liberty Without Literality

By STEPHEN MAINE

The relevance to contemporary life of reductivist abstraction, exemplified by Piet Mondrian, Ad Reinhardt, and Donald Judd, has been contested bitterly for decades, but its allure is so strong that many painters continue to work in opposition to it. This phenomenon was faced squarely in shows such as "Vernacular Abstraction" at the Wacoal Art Center in Tokyo in the mid-1980s, and "Critiques of Pure Abstraction," a traveling show organized by Independent Curators Incorporated and Mark Rosenthal, which traveled to several North American venues in the mid-1990s. As these exhibitions demonstrated, abstract painting in the postmodern period was reinvigorated by the infusion of forms, textures, and structures derived from other disciplines, including photography, pop culture, the sciences, and critical theory. The dozen young and youngish painters in "Late Liberties," a lively show at John Connelly Presents, have digested this

LATE LIBERTIES

John Connelly Presents

critical approach to abstraction, and made it their standard operating procedure.

"Late Liberties" is curated by Augusto Arbizu, a painter who is also a curator at Greenberg Van Doren Gallery. All the work is dated 2007, making the show a snapshot of abstraction's current, unabashedly impure period. The undulating, anthropomorphic forms of Carrie Moyer's "Numina," and its interplay of brilliant veils of acrylic glazes and glitter, are much in the spirit of her recent solo show at Canada, on the Lower East Side. Derived from sources such as prehistorical artifacts and political graphics, Ms. Moyer's vessels and Venuses are partially disguised through superimposition, and attain a surprising weightlessness.

Dana Frankfort is interested in



JOHN CONNELLY PRESENTS
Augusto Arbizu, 'Untitled (Rorschach)' (2007).

the visceral weight of hand-lettering. In "GUTS," that four-letter word rendered in brushy gold paint stretches across a 5-foot square expanse of blazing yellow. The painting, despite its immediate impact, seems a bit perfunctory compared to many other canvases by this logocentric artist.

Michael Zahn works with motifs familiar from the computer interface, locating reductive abstraction in that most utilitarian area of design. Four overlapping slabs resembling enormous "stickies" in moss green, butter yellow, pow-

der blue, and flamingo pink, march off the wall in "in and out (not up and down)." Mr. Zahn's work comically updates Han Hofmann's principle of "push-pull" as a means to activate pictorial space, activating the space of the room in the process.

Along with keyed-up color, the show includes a lot of black. In her large, untitled canvas, Raha Raissnia articulates a dense and complex matrix in black oil by scraping the white interstices nearly clean. Her meticulous paintings suggest networks of an unknown scale, from electronic circuitry to cities. Her touch is stiff and she doesn't seem to enjoy paint, but the elaborately developed interchange of figure and ground is impressive. Wendy White's rollicking, gutsy canvases have for some time relied on a range of blacks as a foil for jittery primary and secondary hues. She incorporates sculptural gestures into her painting: "nevercracked/roomy" sports a pair of soccer balls suspended in front of the painting's surface by means of steel pipes attached to the gallery walls.

Among these New Yorkers, the West Coast is represented by Kim Fisher, who works in Los Angeles, and by San Francisco-based Tauba Auerbach. Ms. Fisher's hard-edge, crystalline imagery alludes

to the light-jumbling qualities of gemstones. The smoothly interlocking facets of "Damaged (pink)," in a range of pinks, purples, and magentas, are qualified by scraped, sprayed, splashed, and stenciled paint. A fringe of canvas, splayed outward from the stretcher rather than properly tucked behind, provides a nicely contrasting tactility. Ms. Auerbach's primary reference is typography, as in the ink-on-paper "L," in which an impossibly ornate display-type L unfurls like an exotic headdress. Helvetica has its day in Ms. Auerbach's "Ready or Not or Ready and Not," wherein the artist layers the letters of that title, in vibrant gouache on black paper. It feels like a familiar device, but the piece is a neatly choreographed encounter between linguistic legibility and pure opticality.

Solid efforts by Elizabeth Neel, Daniel Hesidence, Alex Kwartler, and Jeff Elrod round out the show. Mr. Arbizu provides the viewer with an update on his own painting, in which he has moved away from his overtly landscape-based work of a few years ago. "Rorschach (green + black)" features a symmetrical, distinctly skeletal arabesque in black enamel that floats on a canvas stained in acrylic in a range of greens. In addition to its obvious connection to psychiatry, the painting recalls the dozens of based work of a few years ago. "Rorschach (green + black)" features a symmetrical, distinctly skeletal arabesque in black enamel that floats on a canvas stained in acrylic in a range of greens. In addition to its obvious connection to psychiatry, the painting recalls the dozens of "Rorschach Paintings" Andy Warhol produced in 1984. Flexible indeed are the parameters of an abstract practice that would count among its referents the Prince of Pop.



Time Out New York / Issue 619 : August 8, 2007 - August 14, 2007

Staycations 2007

Trip #4: Art hunt

See some of the city's most visually stimulating treasures in 72 hours.

By Emily Weiner

Start your whirlwind tour in West Chelsea, the uncontested epicenter of the contemporary art scene. Fuel up with breakfast at the 24-hour **Empire Diner** (210 Tenth Ave at 22nd St, 212-243-2736), a Fodero-style Chelsea mainstay beckoning gallerygoers with its classic decor and European sidewalk-café tables. Afterward, mosey to the ever-colorful **John Connolly Presents** (625 W 27th St between Eleventh and Twelfth Aves, 212-337-9563) for a group show curated by Augusto Arbizo (quirky standouts include paintings by up-and-comers Tauba Auerbach and Dana Frankfort). You'll find equally interesting art gems at other young galleries that, like JCP, recently resettled on this all-star 27th Street strip. Quit the new galleries on the block for the neighborhood stalwarts on 24th Street, the so-called "miracle mile" of Chelsea. See works by bigwigs Tom Friedman, Damien Hirst and Jenny Saville in one fell swoop at the cavernous **Gagosian Gallery** (555 W 24th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves, 212-741-1111), then duck into nearby **Gladstone Gallery** (515 W 24th St between Tenth and Eleventh Aves, 212-206-9300) for a dramatic exhibition of sound-and-sculpture installations by death-metal-obsessed artist Banks Violette.



*More information
available upon request*