



**SIMPLY WORDS?**

**CLAUDIA MEYER**

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**SIMEEN FARHAT**

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**MANAL AL DOWAYAN**

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**FARIDEH LASHAI**

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**SIMEEN FARHAT**



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Smoldering, 2011, 95 x 98 x 29 cm  
white urethane cast resin

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**ART KNOWS NO BORDERS,  
NO RELIGIONS,  
NO LANGUAGE BARRIERS.  
ART CONNECTS  
AND DEMANDS TOLERANCE.  
THE LANGUAGE  
OF ART IS UNIVERSAL.**

## SIMPLY WORDS?

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### LIST OF EXHIBITING ARTISTS

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CLAUDIA MEYER, France-Switzerland

09



SIMEEN FARHAT, Pakistan-USA

11



MANAL AL DOWAYAN, Saudi Arabia

14



FARIDEH LASHAI, Iran

18

## **AB GALLERY MISSION STATEMENT**

The Swiss AB GALLERY with locations in Zurich and Lucerne has focussed on the cultural exchange between Switzerland/Europe and the whole Islamic World for many years. We have taken great care in maintaining our contacts to artists, collectors and interested people and cultural institutions, building a fascinating network and many friendships.

Art from the Islamic World is often unjustly met with prejudice, which is certainly due to the fact that contemporary art from these regions has not been shown frequently so far in European countries. The exceedingly dynamic artistic modernity

still goes largely unnoticed by the European art community. We have established the AB GALLERY to strive to trace and discover these highlights and establish outstanding artists on the international art market. Both the Lucerne and Zurich locations offer the perfect framework to get to know and appreciate art from these regions. Our program includes a variety of artistic positions ranging from traditional painting to performance art.

Additionally, in 2010 AB GALLERY Zurich opened AB PROJECTS which constitutes a platform for young innovative art from the Islamic World. We also provide an artist-in-residence programme for young artists from these regions in collaboration with the ORYX Foundation which has been initiated by the AB GALLERY. The artists-in-residence are invited to work for 2–3 months in our own studio in Lucerne and receive the opportunity to broaden their horizon by experiencing new impulses, which will stimulate their artistic work and creativity. On the other hand European artists are also introduced to the Islamic World. The AB GALLERY in cooperation with the ORYX Foundation also organizes round tables and podium discussions about various topics concerning culture, economy and politics that bring together people interested in art from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Art knows no borders, no religions, no language barriers. Art connects and demands tolerance. The language of art is universal.

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**ARTISTS REPRESENTED BY AB GALLERY**

<u>Shahriar AHMADI</u>	<u>Iman MAHMUD</u>
<u>Samira ALIKHANZADEH</u>	<u>Hassan MEER</u>
<u>Wamidh AL AMERI</u>	<u>Bruno MÜLLER-MEYER</u>
<u>Fereydoun AVE</u>	<u>Trudy OUBOTER</u>
<u>Ahmed BADRY</u>	<u>Azadeh RAZAGHDOOST</u>
<u>Barbara BELIN</u>	<u>Baktash SARANG</u>
<u>Rolf BERGMEIER</u>	<u>Hassan SHARIF</u>
<u>Fatima CHAFAA</u>	<u>Sadegh TIRAFKAN</u>
<u>Manal AL DOWAYAN</u>	<u>Jos VAN DER BEEK</u>
<u>Shahram ENTEKHABI</u>	
<u>Simeen FARHAT</u>	
<u>Ernst HESSE</u>	
<u>Samira HODAEI</u>	
<u>Halim AL KARIM</u>	
<u>Toshiya KOBAYASHI</u>	
<u>Farideh LASHAI</u>	

## SIMPLY WORDS?

Words and their meaning are thought to be culturally specific. Being signifiers they refer to something that may or may not exist in the real world – depending on the nature of the signified – and on the specific language as well as the certain context and person deciphering its meaning. Is language understandable for certain groups only, comprehensible for a few? Or is there still a universal character to the word?

The four artists that have been invited to the group show SIMPLY WORDS? are scrutinizing this question in very different ways. Coming from various cultural backgrounds they all survey the effectiveness of words, creating aesthetic material forms out of a textual layer.

All of the artists, Claudia Meyer, the Swiss artist traveling between Lucerne and Paris, Manal Al Dowayan, a photographer from Saudi-Arabia, Farideh Lashai, an Iranian painter and Simeen Farhat, an artist with a US-Pakistan background, address the manifestation of the written word as it appears in different stages of transformation, expressing itself in many different media.

**Simeen Farhat's** work speaks about light, production, craft until it becomes clear what the curved pieces are: they are letters.

After a very long process, the artist uses the letters to create aesthetically coherent yet expanding objects. The letters are drawn from poems and writings by well-known poets as Rumi, Saadi, Ghalib or Faiz Ahmed Faiz. Transforming their poetic dynamics into aesthetic manifestations the artist's aim is to transfer visual energy to the viewer.

In her large-size paintings, **Farideh Lashai** combines the meticulousness of a constantly recurring mantra and heavy paint. The small detailed writing can be only seen at a second glance – at first the words seem to be a grey whole. Like the juxtaposition of heaviness and lightness occurring in works of great poets, the use of the written word is a sign for her lyric influence. Inspired by Orhan Pamuk's "My Name Is Red", Farideh Lashai depicts the story of the tree, which addresses the inherent nature of art in her practice: "I don't want to be a tree; I want to be its meaning."

**Claudia Meyer** works with fragments of words that are taken from her own texts. She creates layers of sentences, letters, puts them together upside down and, the other way around so that the meaning loses its obvious appearance. The artist addresses the decline of individual handwriting due to the rise of electronic media and decreasing use of the paper as a medium. By creating large formatted works of words, texture, light and energy she reactivates the handwritten word and reclaims individuality.

**Manal Al Dowayan** is a young artist from Saudi Arabia, dealing with mostly two societal topics that affect her – the city as a place for virtual communication and its inhabitants and the role of the women in a traditional society. Her self-portraits show a sensitivity towards herself and the ways women have to choose; ways between work, tradition and passion. The aim to try to position her identity is also evident in Manal Al Dowayan's light installations in which she asks for a break to allow herself to get clear about her own path.

## CLAUDIA MEYER

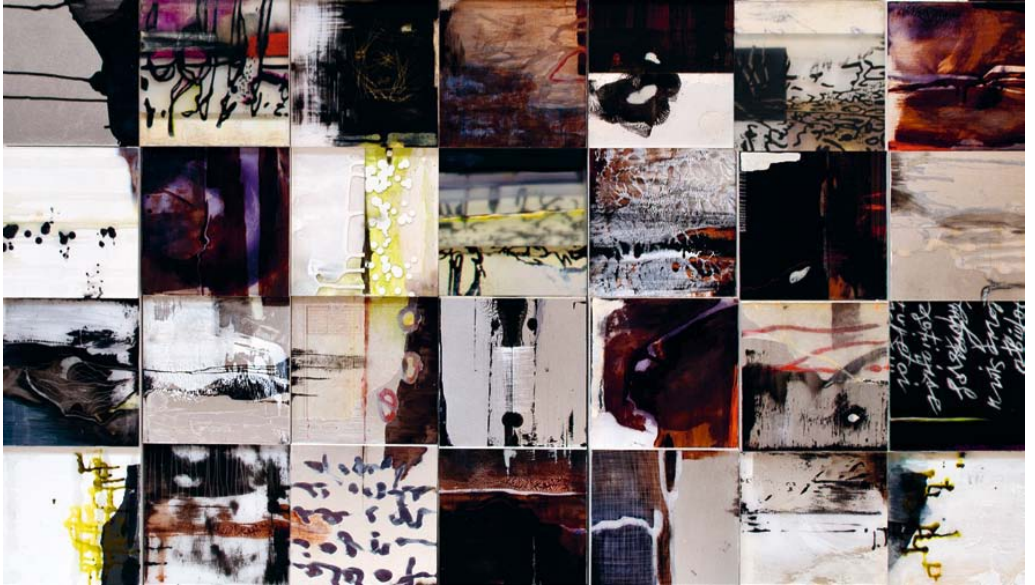
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Claudia Meyer was born in Switzerland in 1961 and has lived and worked in Paris and Luzern as an independent artist since 1989. She trained as a graphic designer at the Hochschule für Gestaltung und Kunst in Luzern from 1977 to 1982. She then spent a year in Stuttgart, Germany where she worked as a graphic artist and made the acquaintance of Anton Stankowski, the grand master of German design, in whose studio she was able to work. In 1986 she moved to New York and the Fashion Institute of Technology, State University of New York, where she worked intensively on the expressive possibilities of fabric design and modern technologies such as the computer. She received prizes for her work during this period, which explored the border between design and painting. After her return to Europe in 1989 she devoted herself, alongside commissions, to painting and the creation of objets d'art. Since then her work has regularly been exhibited in galleries both in Europe and the United States.

Claudia Meyer's oeuvre is situated in the highly exciting field of tension between the objective and abstract conceptions of painting. Her work, from the early paintings of the late 1980's right up to her latest works, reveals her efforts to use everyday experiences as a basis for art and find a visual language that can reflect these rapidly changing times aesthetically through both form and content. Contrary to the representatives of classical modernism, her concern is to impart a concept of art that incorporates not only the freedom of the artist, but also the freedom of the subject receiving the work. Such aesthetic considerations allow the formal structure of a work, which is not traditionally called into questions, to take on quite different dimensional artwork. She is concerned about making the free reception of a work, a hitherto neglected artistic moment, an integral part of her work. Hence the work of art becomes a mirror not only of herself and society, but also of the attentive viewer of her work.

Roland Merk

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**CLAUDIA MEYER**

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Fragment IV (Detail), 2011

150x210 cm x2 (diptych), mixed media on wood

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## SIMEEN FARHAT

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The text in my sculptures and installations are revolutionary poems, appropriated mostly from famous Farsi and Urdu poets, such as Rumi, Saadi, Ghalib and Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who all wrote powerfully about freedom of thought and speech. The small-scale wall-mounted sculptures, “Speech Bubbles,” represent the poems’ poignant and piercing power to induce strong emotions. As many of these poems have also been sung by famous singers from the sub-continent, the suspended installations also express the poems’ melodic power and ability to elicit uplifting thoughts. The shadows cast on the wall are also vital to the aesthetic as they add additional depth and layers behind their meaning. My goal is to translate their poetic dynamism into visual energy.

By pairing female forms with poetic text, I strive to show a connection between the mind and soul: a mind is free to think and a soul free to exist. Separate from their utterance as a sound and with or without the coverings of an outer garment. The text is used aesthetically, as a flowing pattern; as well as philosophically, paired with the ethereal figures it enables a dialogue with the viewer or monologue between mind and body.

Through the interactive nature of my installations, sculptures, and textual drawings, I pose questions for each culture to examine from their own perspective: Considering that there is a figure but no embodied form showing, can this be called contemporary figurative Islamic Art? Do these life-size veiled figures threaten or confuse non-Muslim Westerners and why? Recognizing that this work represents women’s freedom to think, can this work be called a universally Feminist art?

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Simeen Farhat

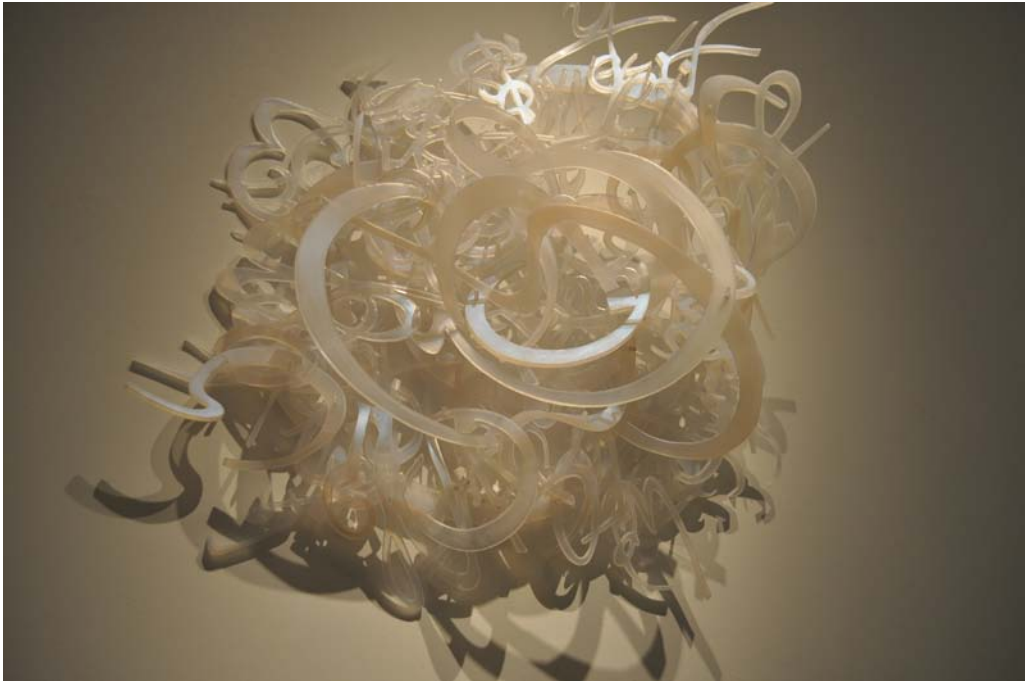


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**SIMEEN FARHAT**

Before We Descend, 2011, 105x98x30 cm  
pigmented urethane cast resin

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**SIMEEN FARHAT**

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Fading, 2011, 97 x 91 x 29 cm  
urethane cast resin

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## MANAL AL DOWAYAN

### The Choice

The collection "The Choice" is influenced by an ongoing dialogue that affects Arab women's lives everyday; a dialogue that discusses the restrictions placed on women due to local traditions that have become entwined with religion and identity. Identity preservation among all cultures is strongly linked to traditions. As our societies rapidly develop to keep up with our changing world, people cling to certain traditions for a sense of safety. Local traditions should not be left unexamined. Women represent half of all communities. Therefore their potential and energy become valuable resources for a healthy society. If traditions are used as a tool to suppress and control, our communities will become handicapped. Acknowledging women's goals and embracing their achievements is essential to reach a needed state of societal balance.

*"By using simple posed images I am able to communicate a very strong statement with no space for abstractness. Although some might feel a mood of darkness looming within the images because of the subject that is being addressed, at the same time the viewer is enveloped by a strong sense of beauty and hope that somehow filters through the eyes of the models.*

*The juxtaposition of the contrasting colors offers simplicity, minimalism as well as depth and drama. I use black and white photography because it is a medium that gives me control*

*over the whole process of producing the right visual affect that I desire along with conveying my ideas clearly and without obstruction."*

### I AM

The collection "I am" hosts a variety of Saudi Arabian women who perform important roles in Saudi society through their careers. At the same time each photograph has a piece of traditional jewellery placed in an obstructive and unnatural way, questioning cultural traditions that prevent Saudi women from expanding their roles in society. Although the history of the Arab woman inspires me, it is the modern Arab woman that motivates and gives me courage. I hope that women with education and financial independence will become fully and actively involved in shaping the decisions that affect their future and the futures of their daughters.

### AND WE HAD NO SHARED DREAMS

Cities have sounds. The sound is ever-present, an expanding and contracting energy resonating within a single space. The city inhales, with difficulty, tension building, until it exhales – an intense release. With every breath the city takes, people gravitate towards it with a longing for the happiness that it promises. Little do they know, however, that when a city breathes, suffocation is bound to follow.

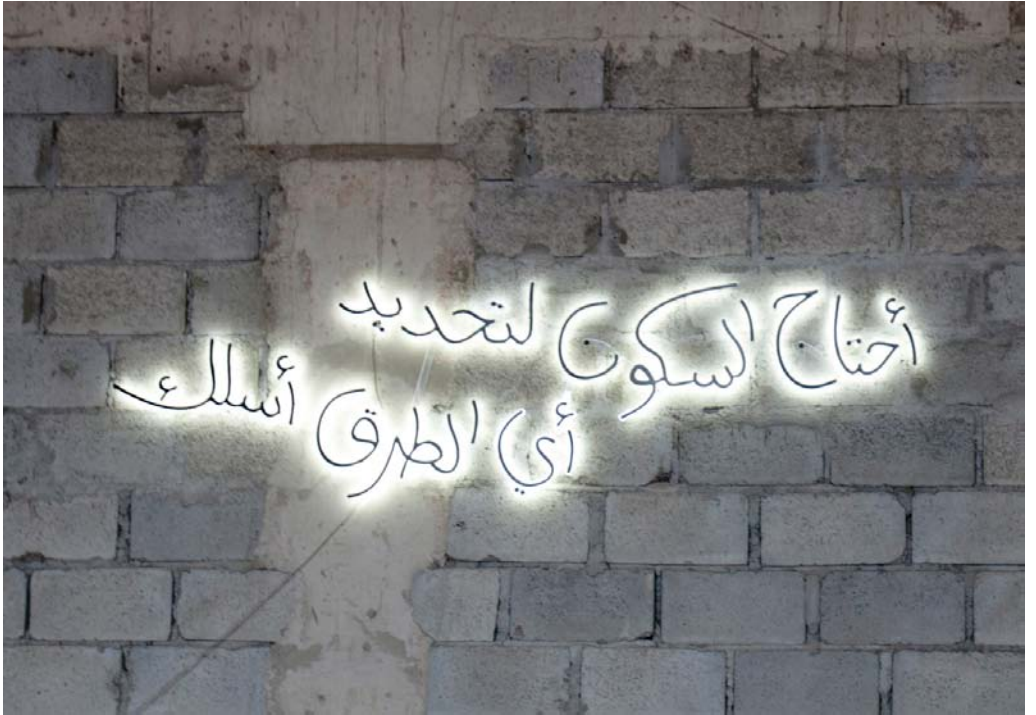
The city acts as a theatrical backdrop; it sets the scene and mood of the act to come. The city gives you the details, but not the story. We are mere props that complete the urban landscape. As the city grows its inhabitants slowly lose themselves, their identity, and eventually blend into this backdrop. Millions of people exist in anomie, surrounded by communities that they do not identify with. Every day, they live between concrete walls and are transported en masse to other concrete locations. They live suspended between states of consciousness and unconsciousness; existence plagued by isolation within congestion.

This series of works depicts an imagined conversation between urban inhabitants and their cityscape. It is an unstable, symbiotic relationship in a constant state of uncertainty. It is a romance on the verge of collapse.

The artworks comprise delicate black and white prints representing the city, an elegant stage for the dialogue set forth. The conversation between the city and its inhabitants is represented with words and images that are superimposed with lights, buff-proof spray paint and ink. The rough and flashy medium of the foreground only further amplifies the people's constant need for attention and reconciliation. The inhabitant asks, "Are you mine forever? Do you share my dreams? Do you long for me?" In response the city exhales.

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Manal Al Dowayan



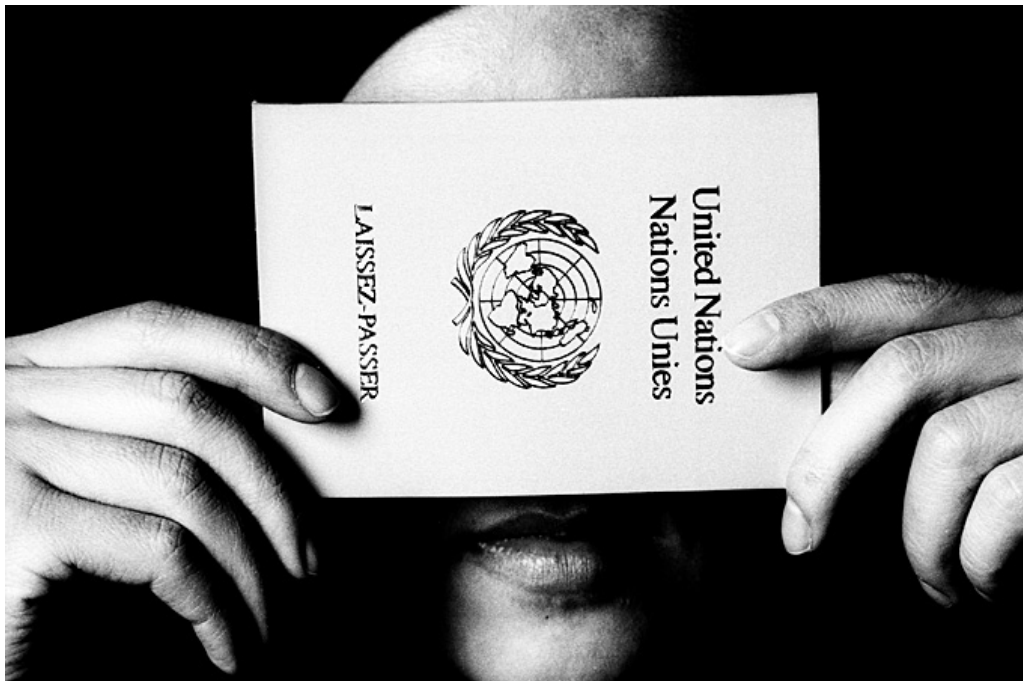
**MANAL AL DOWAYAN**

I Need Pause to Choose What Path to Take, 2011  
260 x 200 cm, painted aluminium and LED lights



**MANAL AL DOWAYAN**

The Choice II, 2011, 51 x 41 cm, gelatin silver print



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**MANAL AL DOWAYAN**

I am a UN Officer, 2008

51 x 41 cm, Gelatin Silver Print

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## FARIDEH LASHAI

Lashai's painting is at once tender, brusque, indecipherable, and calligraphic. Color fields that often predominate her canvases, obscure margins and diminish a sense of surface.

Her works are less concerned with surface treatment as they are with the seemingly unrestrained invasion of line. Though the viewer is inclined to interpret the invasive forms as elements of nature, they are ultimately abstract. The surface aberrations defy placement, fusing into abundant free lines in the compositions, in some cases so dense as to fill the background, in others so absent as to evoke hollow, infinite vacuity.

Urgency and chaos are constant in Lashai's work. Often one feels confronted by a wayward literary piece's disregard for grammatical convention. But free yourself from the quest for subject and with aid of the senses and imagination arrive at the more profound. Lashai's frenzied lines inhabit obscured vastness and reflect the artist's naturally scattered mentality- so of course they fail systemic interpretation! Comprehension of Lashai's secret universe requires levity of spirit- the willful submission to chaos. In this manner, a composition seemingly out of the artist's control is primed for the series of revelations by which we read abstraction.

Imparting scattered lines to surfaces has always been a manifestation of the inner world, a type of psychological purging. We all indulge this ancient habit when scribbling absently, despite our efforts to rarify it. Artists merely cultivate an intrinsic human tendency. A painting is a reflection of the artist's personal wishes and inner feeling; Lashai does not vie for dignity or majesty, only at best expressing a fleeting instant in and against time. Abstraction is a representation of dual discovery. The artist does not strive for legibility, and the viewer, with signs and figures failing, is able to create a personal course of interpretation.

The sketching elements of Lashai's work, whether reminiscent of figures in nature, or skewed alphabetical characters, have precedent in the history of abstract expressionism. In Robert Motherwell, Hans Hartung, and Mark Tobey we often see decomposed characters and informal drawing elements contributing to a non-literary narrative and composition. The electrified lines in Lashai's works have an informal quality that recalls the thunderous uninhibited invasion of pen strokes on an unidentified surface.



**FARIDEH LASHAI**

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Untitled, 2009, 200 x 160 cm x 2 (diptych)  
mixed media on canvas

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We may draw parallels to the work of the great American artist Cy Twombly, whose monochromatic and white series appear like the obscured illegible sprawl of a slack writer. In the forms these adopt they appear to be discarded graphic lines or the hallucinatory expression of ineffable thought. Twombly sometimes gives the impression of deliberately effacing figurative signs, blurring them to achieve private and enigmatic effect. These wavy lines may not be explicable to the artist, even if they surreptitiously invite viewers to the artist's inner world.

Lashai, with comparably greater lyricism employs color fields and lines, not for intellectual signification, but to evoke the ecstatic mirth and enchanting existence of nature. Graphic impressions in her work move between unconscious line and the artist's nimbleness in minimizing natural form. Her figurative genius is in this playful wavering between constructed spaces and uncontrolled strokes, enrapturing the viewer in perpetual joy. Lashai is not making a statement on the language of painting, nor does her work require affirmation, rather she creates a pretext for ascending into realms outside our deafening world. Her works are always an opportunity to visit an inner, utterly foreign, universe and to encounter unlikely and exhilarating elements of life. Her work can convince a viewer that such profundity and gratification is best attainable through the medium of painting.

But initially, Farideh Lashai does look like a naturalist painter. In most of her works the footprints of nature can be traced, a tendency she herself recognizes:

*"...Nature stimulates the primary sense and the essence of life in me, a sense that we experience in love. The projection of myself to nature arouses the ecstasy of existence in me, and in this way I connect to inner elements."*

Interview with Farideh Lashai,  
the Haft Magazine, No. 19, March 2005

But she differs from other great Iranian naturalist painters, such as Sohrab Sepehri, Abolghasem Saidi, Nasser Assar, Manouchehr Yektai and Jalal Shabahangi, in her lack of concern for formal or conceptual exploration. Instead, nature is a refuge for the essence of being. Like an itinerant soul, nature is the base to which she continually returns, a nostalgically reference point. The result is a childlike fear and enamored with the natural world that mirrors nicely the creative authenticity and freedom in her work-achieving an effervescent power that surpasses many of her contemporaries. But unlike other large expressionist paintings, Lashai's works do not generate anxiety and unease in the viewer, rather having passed through life's sufferings their creator imbues them with reverence for nature's ability to conjure the infinite.

Dr. Alireza Samii-Azar

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**FARIDEH LASHAI**

Untitled, 2009, 200 x 200 cm  
mixed media on canvas

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**AB GALLERY**  
across borders

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Arealstrasse 6  
CH-6020 Emmenbrücke-Luzern  
Switzerland

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**AB GALLERY**  
across borders

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Klausstrasse 23  
CH-8008 Zürich  
Switzerland

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**AB PROJECTS**  
across borders

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Klausstrasse 23  
CH-8008 Zürich  
Switzerland

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