

LISSON GALLERY

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Press Release

Shirazeh Houshiary

Nothing is deeper than the skin

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In her latest exhibition, Shirazeh Houshiary investigates the friction between the conscious and unconscious, control and chance, reflecting on the physical and immaterial qualities that shape art and human life. Bringing together new paintings and sculpture — including her largest painting to date, a triptych of more than eight metres in width — *Nothing is deeper than the skin* marks the artist's first show with Lisson in New York, and her ninth exhibition with the gallery.

Skin functions as a membrane, a barrier but also a soft boundary between the human body and the outer world. It is the conduit to the primeval sense of touch — the first line of defence against friction and conflict – but equally it is exposed to warmth, light and the pleasure of embrace. The works in *Nothing is deeper than skin* explore the complex relationship between the interior and the exterior, manifesting permeability and flux in their mercurial surfaces composed of pigment, pencil, aluminium and glass.

Whilst an intricate and involved process is a recognised feature of Houshiary's work, in the new paintings she introduces an unparalleled level of chance. To create these paintings, a mixture of water and pigment is poured onto the surface of the canvas to produce an enigmatic ground punctuated by pooling sediment and irregular apertures. Over this layer, the artist's hand is introduced through rigorous mark-making, in some paintings manifesting as words — Houshiary's frequent pairing of an affirmation and a denial — and in others as lines creating a steady abstraction that radiates its own frequency and energy.

In new sculptures comprised of a twisting arrangement of glass bricks, Houshiary further explores the notion of transparency and the possibility of transcending three-dimensional space. Each brick, whilst an essential element in the construction of the work, also functions as a sign of absence or void, suggesting the quality of boundlessness. The sculptures' helical forms, created through the careful rotation of each layer at precise angles to produce a spiralling effect, are at once vigorous and evanescent, their materiality appearing to stretch and pull into infinite space, exemplifying the interplay between form and formlessness that is the essential tension of Houshiary's work.

About Shirazeh Houshiary

Since rising to prominence as a sculptor in the 1980s, Shirazeh Houshiary's practice has swelled to encompass painting, installation, architectural projects and film. "I set out to capture my breath," she said in 2000, to "find the essence of my own existence, transcending name, nationality, cultures." Veils, membranes and mists are leitmotifs in work that tries to visualise modes of perception, spanning the scientific and the cosmic while drawing on sources as wide-ranging as Sufism, Renaissance painting, contemporary physics and poetry. Houshiary finds succour in the transformation of material: Arabic words, one an affirmation the other a denial, are pencil-stroked onto canvas so

lightly, and clouded over by finely wrought skeins of pigment, that they morph in front of the naked eye and defy reproduction. So too, aluminium armatures and elliptical brick towers, charged with dynamic tension, appear different from every angle, as if negating their own presence; her commission for the East window of St Martin in the Fields, London, presents a cross, warped and spanning from a circular motif, as if reflected in water. “The universe is in a process of disintegration,” she says, “everything is in a state of erosion, and yet we try to stabilise it. This tension fascinates me and it’s at the core of my work” (2013).

Shirazeh Houshiary was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1955, where she attended university before moving to London, UK in 1974. She has a BA from Chelsea School of Art (1979) and lives and works in London, UK. She has had solo exhibitions at Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore (2016); The Douglas Hyde Gallery, Dublin, Ireland (2007); Tate Liverpool, UK (2003); Islamic Gallery, British Museum, London, UK (1997); Magasin-Centre national d’art contemporain, Grenoble, France (1995); University of Massachusetts Amherst, USA (1994); Camden Arts Centre, London, UK (1993); Musee Rath, Geneva, Switzerland (1988); and in 2013 her exhibition *Breath* was a celebrated Collateral Event of the 55th Venice Biennale, Italy. Major group exhibitions include Fondazione Palazzo Albizzini, Collezione Burri, Citta di Castello, Perugia, Italy (2016); University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor, MI, USA (2014); Dayton Art Institute, Dayton, OH, USA (2011); and Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY, USA (2007). She has also participated in numerous biennials including Kiev Biennale, Ukraine (2012) and the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Australia (2010) and the 40th Venice Biennale, Italy (1982). She was nominated for the Turner Prize in 1994.

About Lisson Gallery

Lisson Gallery is one of the most influential and longest-running international contemporary art galleries in the world. Today the gallery supports and develops 54 international artists across two exhibition spaces in London and two in New York. Established in 1967 by Nicholas Logsdail, Lisson Gallery pioneered the early careers of important Minimal and Conceptual artists, such as Art & Language, Carl Andre, Daniel Buren, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long and Robert Ryman among many others. In its second decade the gallery introduced significant British sculptors, including Tony Cragg, Richard Deacon, Anish Kapoor, Shirazeh Houshiary and Julian Opie, to the public for the first time. In addition to a number of renowned artist estates, including Roy Colmer, the Leon Polk Smith Foundation and the John Latham Foundation, the gallery represents leading international artists such as Marina Abramović, Ai Weiwei, John Akomfrah, Susan Hiller and Tatsuo Miyajima. It is also responsible for raising the international profile of a younger generation of artists led by Cory Arcangel, Nathalie Djurberg & Hans Berg, Ryan Gander, Haroon Mirza, Laure Prouvost, Pedro Reyes and Wael Shawky.

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