



Above left: Golnaz Fathi, *Untitled*, 2014, acrylic, pen, and varnish on canvas, 146 x 128 x 5 cm. **Above center:** Golnaz Fathi, *Untitled*, 2014, acrylic, pen, and varnish on canvas, 146 x 128 x 5 cm. **Above right:** Golnaz Fathi, *Untitled*, 2014, acrylic and pen on canvas, 146.6 x 124.7 cm. Images: Courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

Golnaz Fathi at Sundaram Tagore Gallery

As one of most important calligraphic writing systems in the world, Islamic calligraphy, with its various “genres,” has a rich and lively history as an art form. It has attracted poets and painters, scholars and dreamers for more than a thousand years and is central to Persian identity. In modern times, numerous Iranian artists have embraced calligraphy as one of the most important features of their art practice. Among them is the Iranian Golnaz Fathi, who is trained in classical Persian calligraphy.

Every Breaking Wave is Golnaz Fathi’s first solo show in Hong Kong. Her acrylic and pen on canvas works are inspired by calligraphy and, clearly, by Western abstract expressionism and other modernist movements: this is not unusual as she works in both Paris and Tehran. Fathi’s abstraction is quite severe but it is tempered by the lyrical quality of her line and use of color. One sees this clearly in the bold red-and-black untitled work from 2014. That all her paintings are untitled encourages the viewer to think about their content and the process of their making.

And even as one imagines a wild, free spirit at work in pieces such as the dark brood-

ing 2014 untitled work in which there is a sense of the heavens opening up in a broiling storm and in the 2014 untitled work in blue, black, and white that is a beautifully layered union of natural energy, there is always a sense of a highly disciplined artist at work.

Fathi engages our eye with the restless power of the natural world being reined in by a bold artistic imagination that is never constrained by her formal training. Looking at her paintings closely I never sense any cultural affectation, but rather a feeling of spiritual force that is entirely human. Also her visual statements, with their roots in calligraphy, never appear to be design or graphic art posing as painting, which is quite often the case in the work of artists who have not mastered the rules and techniques and ‘grammar’ of calligraphy and its potential. Fathi has clearly mastered the language, visual and spiritual, of calligraphy and knows how to break the rules to make something fresh.

Like all excellent calligraphers Golnaz Fathi makes art that speaks not only to the richness of her own culture but also to that of others far beyond her reach. Her art is also linked to the world by the abstract human narrative that she articulates beautifully in her compact paintings.

Ian Findlay

INDIA

New Delhi

Revisiting Beauty at Threshold Art Gallery

The expansive exhibition entitled *Revisiting Beauty* explores the various ideas of beauty by juxtaposing the past with the present and it does so in an engaging manner. The black-and-white photographs by JJ Valaya, from his *Decoded Paradox* series, are exciting: they evoke memories of the age of Rajas and Maharajas. By cleverly placing his gorgeously attired royalty in India’s common present day, Valaya—photographer, artist, and designer—adds a new dimension to photography. He shows that an object of antiquity, when viewed through a contemporary lens, may produce interesting and exciting new meanings. He displays how India’s rich tradition can be reflected in our contemporary existence.

As a photographer Valaya strikes an interesting conversation between the past and the present in each of his composed black-and-white images, all of which are aesthetically engaging. Valaya combines the opulence and decadence of Royal India with contemporary India. Somewhere a chord is struck and there is harmony with each other:

friends from the fashion, art, and cinema worlds model the exquisite clothes.

Valaya creates a fascinating drama as he poses a merchant in front of a *baoli* (step wells used in the past). Steeped in decadence a young woman languidly does her *sbringhar* on the last few steps of the *baoli* well. As she holds a mirror to her face, her maid combs her hair. Another gorgeous *saree*-clad woman plays the sitar against the backdrop of a dilapidated village hut. Wrestlers in loin clothes are gathered behind an aristocratic figure.

Historical monuments appear behind a prince surrounded by a diverse crowd. In a dilapidated room with worn-out furniture sits a Maharaja. A noble man sits pensively in front of ruins reminiscing on the grand days. His companions are his dogs who are the only faithful ones left. A noble man is seated in a chair surrounded by huge camels while his slave holds a magnificent fan to protect his master. A portly *nawab* sits in a chair in the open surrounded by people busy with morning chores. Such are the enchanting images of this exhibition.

According to the artist his photography is more about “narrative and composition than technique.” This is the first series in this vein. Although the images echo the time of royal portraiture of 19th-