



## NEW COMERS: Shahpour Pouyan



The Iranian artist Shahpour Pouyan belongs to the generation that came of age after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (1980–89). Shahpour Pouyan’s practice reflects on the workings of political power, domination and possession through the language of cultural material and forms. He lives and works in New York, except his Art Studies at Tehran University of Art and at the Pratt Institute, he has studied Neoplatonic Philosophy and received a Diploma in Math and Physics from in Tehran. We discuss with Shahpour Pouyan on the occasion of his solo exhibition at the Galerie Nathalie Obadia in Paris, entitled “We owe this considerable land to the horizon line”.

By Efi Michalarou

Photo: Galerie Nathalie Obadia Archive

Shahpour Pouyan, Photo: Giorgia Fanelli – Courtesy Civitella Ranieri Foundation 238, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Paris/Brussels

**Mr. Shahpour Pouyan, at an era that meanings like multiculturalism and globalization are redefined, through your work, you insist on your own cultural identity, do you believe that this attitude today is necessary more than ever?**

I don’t think artists necessarily adjust their art practice with any art theory of the day. When I live in very today then my art will be enough contemporary. The artist concern should be internal obviously I don’t think about the hot subject or theory of the day. Do I ever thought about globalization or multiculturalism in my works? No, never. Making art is a need for me and everyday I go to studio to put my issues and worries out of my system. How could I care about any Ism? Do I insist in my cultural identity? No, I never do that, but I care about the people of my country as much as I care about many others who suffered in other parts of the world. I make art as I cook food, the last thing that comes to my mind is how my food is fit with the last theory or ism of the day.



Shahpour Pouyan, Untitled, 2017, High fired ceramic, 34 x 29,5 x 29,5 cm, 110 x 45,5 x 45,5 cm pedestal, Photo: Bertrand Huet / Tutti Image, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia-Paris/Brussels

**Concurrently with your Studies in Art you studied Philosophy, how important do you considered is the role of philosophy for the contemporary artist? Since this model refers to past times.**

I don't know if I have ever used my philosophy studies in my art, indeed I use more math in my art practice, I do so many calculations and geometry in my works, especially in this new exhibition. I studied neoplatonism which is about the time that philosophy and religion or in better word mysticism meet each other. The beauty of neoplatonism is how philosophy influenced by mysticism and the fruit of this synthesis is a poetic understanding of the world. I can't say if it is a religion or philosophy, but something in between. It's more like art, so if philosophy is confronting religion and especially mysticism, then here we have both. I think I influenced by the hybridity of this philosophy and how two contradictional elements could meet each other and build a new system. If logic and believe could build philosophy then why not art? However, philosophy is vital for us, it's more important than litherature and math. It's the first priority after food and clean water. I think history of philosophy has to study parrallel to the general history of the world and of course history of religions.



Shahpour Pouyan, The Semitic system, 2017, High fired ceramic, 39,5 x 32,5 x 32,5 cm, 100 x 48,5 x 48,5 cm pedestal, Photo: Bertrand Huet / Tutti Image, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia-Paris/Brussels

**You are creating contemporary artworks not only through the forms, but also through the materials, but you are drawing from the religion, history and tradition of your country. How intrigue is that?**

My art is not about my country or my nationality. I have universal concerns and issues but I use local visual accent or aesthetic. Do not forget these are all abstract concepts and it's hard to say what is exactly local or where is the border between local and universal. However, I unintentionally celebrate some of my local historical art aesthetic. Do I think about them? No. As I said earlier, religion, history and tradition are all related and you can't understand any of these subjects without knowing the parallel subjects. You can't criticize a car if you missed to know about its design, engine and fabrication. You need to know all of them for a conclusion.

**On your first solo exhibition in Paris entitled "We owe this considerable land to the horizon line", you are presenting miniatures based on a selection of Persian miniatures depicting scenes from the ascension of Prophet Muhammad. Through manipulation, you transform them into abstract images or simple architectural scenes then you enhance them with**

**gilding and paint. In this case what is the role of the rice paper with its lightness and transparency?**

I had technical concerns for the paper and this special Japanese rice paper has no any chemical ingredients and its quality is close to the original papers of the old miniatures. The lightness and transparency of the paper is important in mimicking the texture and wrinkles of the original and suggest the fragility and mortality of the physical and metaphysical content of the art object.



Shahpour Pouyan, Untitled, 2017, High fired ceramic, 45 x 24 x 23 cm, 100 x 40 x 39 cm pedestal, Photo: Bertrand Huet / Tutti Image, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia-Paris/Brussels

**Is it a demystification comment on the strictness of the religion through art or a re-reading with new contemporary terms and contemporary art language?**

The best story of the world is an unwritten story. I imagine it as a perfect story with no any mistakes and errors. Could we use the same logic in portraying someone? I think, yes.

**Many of your artworks are reminiscent of bombs and weapons of mass destruction, how influenced you the fact that your father was a military officer and what that means for you?**

I grow up and raised in a highly political military family, I had access to all unfiltered informations

and data of the war and the traumatizing truth. I used to sneak in my father's room and look at his books and magazines which were mostly illustrated by images of aircrafts, blueprints and diagrams. These are part of my personal history and influenced my aesthetic language.



Shahpour Pouyan, Untitled, 2017, High fired ceramic, 40,5 x 20 x 20 cm, 100 x 36 x 36 cm pedestal, Photo: Bertrand Huet / Tutti Image, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Nathalie Obadia-Paris/Brussels

**In the series of 28 ceramic domes-towers that are on presentation at the main space of the gallery, sculpture is conversing with architecture, since you draw elements from archetypical typologies of Islamic, Brutalist, Fascist architecture and 20th Century military structures. Observing these artworks, we realize that are dominated by two elements: the use of a single color that of sand, and the apparent lack of entry in the buildings. Which is the meaning of those elements in this series?**

All these works are high fired clay and has no any glaze. I wanted to create an imaginary, dreamy landscape which is more resembling an utopian sketch. Most of my memory of utopian landscapes or designs are monotone and greyish. This landscape is suggesting a future that has not received yet. A promised land which has not built and you know it will fail. I didn't add door or entrance to many of the buildings when I felt that the door could change the nature of the sculpture and turn it to an architectural model. I only used doors if it was necessary. So I used door if I realized that a

sculpture missing its contents without the door. Also, my utopia like many other utopian landscapes is not welcoming.

**Info: Galerie Nathalie Obadia, 18 rue du Bourg-Tibourg, Paris, Duration: 9/3-6/5/17, Days & Hours: Mon-Sat 11:00-19:00, [www.nathalieobadia.com](http://www.nathalieobadia.com)**

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