

Shohreh Mehran
DEFACED

Shohreh Mehran

March 18 - April 27, 2013

These are, ostensibly, images of criminals. They are routinely published in daily newspapers.

These criminals – men and women – have been arrested, some even handcuffed. They are covering their faces in an effort to resist identification; but their effort is a paradoxical gesture: it is at once a sign of embarrassment and an act of defiance. Is it because of their shame, or in spite of their shame, that they are veiling themselves? Is this effacement retreat from criminality or a continuation of it through other means?

Recording their images in this particular instant is equally paradoxical: why take a snapshot of a face that is not a face, refusing to be a face? What's the point of reproducing an identity that does not do the work of identification? And is this reproduction, in and of itself, an image of a victorious Law, having captured the element which has resisted it, or rather an image of the Law in defeat, recognizing that has not yet defeated its enemy, recognizing that it needs to do more?

In times such as these, in places such as ours, is the mere fact of veiling yourself, of refusing to be identified, a sign of criminality as such? Most importantly: what happens to these images of criminality and the Law, of shame and defiance, of face and effacement, of glory and defeat, when they are reproduced, ever so meticulously, as art?

Mani Haghighi, February 2013

Behind the Mask

"It would be interesting to know what it is men are most afraid of."

-Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

These are faces without eyes. They are covered by long and mute-colored veils or simply a hand apologetically placed to prohibit sight. The subjects of Iranian artist Shohreh Mehran's recent show *Defaced* are based on studies of gestures of defiance and resistance by anonymous individuals that the artist produced over the last three years. The portrayals are images of people deemed criminals and outcasts of society and are the result of numerous newspaper clippings and other media outlets which Mehran studied in order to create each work. But strangely, the people in these renderings don't seem violent or aggressive; there is an innocence about them as if their mere portrayals were to make the viewer pardon their seeming injustice.

These men and women are criminals. They have been arrested and handcuffed for their wrongdoings. And now, in Mehran's paintings, they appear faceless and devoid of any sort of identifying traits – they hide their faces in shame. In so doing, they invite the question: do they cover their faces in an attempt to hide from their crimes or is it a way for them to continue their wrongdoings through other means? Or, perhaps the larger question: maybe they cover to protect their true innocence; maybe they wish to hide their face because they do not want to be recognized for what they have been accused.

Mehran moreover plays with the spectator's perception. What is the premise behind rendering an individual if their face is not recognizable? What's more is that the very idea of these paintings as exact reproductions of media clippings of the same individuals invites us to muse over the legality of the artist's artistic appropriation of such images. Their mere presence questions the entity which has released them. Mehran seems to be asking her audience if the crimes of her subjects are indeed – just.

The exhibition *Defaced* is staged during times as politically and socially confusing as ours. Mehran graciously captures a collective notion of shame through these evocative oil paintings. Through their ceaselessly haunting and mysterious portrayals, the artist depicts a simple gesture and how it is ultimately the last resort of defiance and resistance.



Shohreh Mehran / from *Defaced* series / 2013 / oil on canvas / 150x100 cm



Shohreh Mehran / from *Defaced* series / 2013 / oil on canvas / 250x160 cm



Shohreh Mehran / from *Defaced* series / 2013 / oil on canvas / 100x150 cm



Shohreh Mehran / from *Defaced* series / 2012 / oil on canvas / 160x225 cm



Shohreh Mehran / from *Defaced* series / 2012 / oil on canvas / 150x100 cm



Shohreh Mehran / from *Defaced* series / 2012 / oil on canvas / 150x100 cm

Biography

Shohreh Mehran

Born in 1958, Ardebil, Iran

BA in Graphic Design, Tehran University of Art, Tehran, Iran

Solo Exhibitions:

- 2013 *Defaced*, Etemad Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2010 *Schoolgirls*, Etemad Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 2007 *Schoolgirls*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 2005 *Under Construction*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 2003 *Cityscapes*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 2001 *Covers*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 1999 *Murals*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 1997 *Cityscapes*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 1995 *Women*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 1993 *Cityscapes*, Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran

Group Exhibitions:

- 2012 Royal Academy, Katara Arts Center, Doha, Qatar
- 2011 Sharjah Biennial 10, Sharja, UAE
- 2010 Slick10 Paris, France
- 2010 *Iran Today*, Brigitte Schenk Gallery, Koln, Germany
- 2007 Art Space Gallery, London, England
- 2007 Art London Gallery, London, England
- 2001 Signature Gallery, Munster, Germany
- 2000 The United Nations, New York, USA
- 1992 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 1991 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 1989 Tehran International Expo, Tehran, Iran
- 1989 Niavaran Cultural Center, Tehran, Iran
- 1988 Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran
- 1985 Goethe Institute, Tehran, Iran



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