

The background is a complex abstract composition. It features a dense, grainy yellow texture at the top, which transitions into a dark, almost black, area. This dark area is overlaid with large, expressive, and somewhat chaotic black brushstrokes that sweep across the frame. The bottom portion of the image is dominated by a bright, vibrant yellow, which is also textured and appears to be splattered or dripped with black ink, creating a stark contrast with the dark elements above.

GOLNAZ FATHI
Dance me to the end of night

Dance me to the end of night



Born in Tehran in 1972, Golnaz Fathi is an influential member of an exciting group of contemporary artists to surface in Iran over the last several years. While studying Graphic Design at Azad University in Tehran, Fathi, always fascinated by the expressive potential of traditional Persian calligraphic forms, immersed herself in a sustained six-year study of traditional calligraphy. She then became one of only a tiny handful of women trained to the highest level within that discipline. Despite this, Fathi felt the need to expand her practice, to develop new forms of expression. October Gallery conducted the following interview on the occasion of her second solo exhibition at the gallery, *Dance Me to the End of Night*.

It's been over three years since *Liminal-Subliminal*, your last exhibition at October Gallery. Please tell us about your new work.

Yes, how time flies! In this new body of work, I used a very fine pen with ink to develop a new idiom. In stark contrast to my signature paintings with their deep brush strokes, this work is more minimalist, the abstract writing thinning to a mere line. I have been working this way for the past few years, now, and have exhibited in Dubai, New York, and Shanghai, but it was very important for me to show these new developments to a London-based audience. As well as large-scale canvases, this exhibition includes, for the first time, book and video works. One of these is a handmade, folded, Chinese-paper book, which is painted on both sides, not with script this time, but with numbers. Adopting the same technique of using a fine pen, I formed Arabic numbers across one side and, in contrast, used Roman numerals on the reverse. The work, stretching over two metres when completely opened out, is a vital part of the exhibition. Finally, I am showing two video installations in this exhibition. For these, I digitised my hand-written script, often creating multiples of the lines, and worked with software which allowed the lines to move, mix and resonate across the screen. All of these works are the result of my many meditations over the past three years.

The new works in this show are inspired by the *Siah Mashgh* technique. Could you tell us something about this.

Siah Mashgh consists of repeatedly writing letters over and over again, building layer upon layer, until the pictorial

element is entirely covered by the density of the mark-making. Traditionally, calligraphers worked using the practice of *Siah Mashgh* for warming up their hands, before they began to write their main work. For me, it is more than an exercise; it is the most artistic part of calligraphy. When using this practice you don't think about composition and your hand moves freely. You can change the direction and even turn the paper. Then, you reach a stage of solid black by repeating and repeating the alphabet. At the end you are left with a paper, which, although not legible, could still be a piece of art.

Your work integrates differing calligraphic modes such as *Siah Mashgh*, into the creative process. Do you anticipate how the work will develop or is the outcome unknown?

In general, I don't think you can do anything without knowledge. Today, I break all the rules of calligraphy that I ever learnt, yet, without this early learning, I wouldn't be able to create my work. So, nothing happens spontaneously. However, I do all the thinking before starting the works; a meditation which can take a long time. Then, when I begin to work there might be things that happen spontaneously and, while I welcome this adventure in the work, my trained hand also knows how to direct it.

Your creative process demands intense concentration and focus. Explain the origin of the works.

Firstly, I focus on the brush strokes. This part is vital, because I have to place them correctly. Secondly, I begin to write my lines, which requires a lot of concentration. I sit somewhere still and immerse myself in the work for hours and hours. I carry over this method from the many years of training as a calligrapher, when I would sit and practice for over six hours a day, without moving. So somehow it is a remnant of those years but applied in a different way. At times, I listen to music and, at other times, just work in pure silence. This part of the process puts me in an almost Zen-like state of mind. I forget about time and place; I am in a different world! The stillness talks to me. Finally, my attention turns to the red line. This is the last part, but it can often take days to decide the placement of that line. A stroke in the wrong place will destroy the whole piece.



**...there are some things that just speak
for themselves, and we should let them**

From where do you draw your inspiration? You mentioned to me before that your work is the result of a captured thought or story. Please can you elaborate.

The best inspiration, for me, is life itself. All my surroundings, circumstances and experiences affect my life. It could be a piece of music that moves me in a certain way or just a simple thought. I believe we have to look carefully around us, and, it is only then, that we find thousands of things that spark inspiration, even things that are very close to us. We should open our eyes and just sense them.

In this exhibition you are presenting two new video works. How has working with video developed your practice?

As I mentioned before, this is the first time I have worked with this medium. I am passionate about music and dance, so with these works I decided to take on the role of a choreographer and allow my lines to become like dancers. In this sense I created a different form of script in the videos, in comparison to those depicted with paint that are static, and have no movement; here they dance with the rhythm of the music. I feel it is important for artists to work with different media as it opens up the creative process and generates new possibilities. Although the script visible in the video was originally the same as that on the canvas, its identity is different, because I have treated it differently. It is this part of the process that I find the most exciting, when the work, through the use of a new medium, evolves beyond what I expected.

The titles you have given to your video works, *Dance Me to the End of Night* and *Let's Blow Them Away* are interesting. Tell me more about where those titles come from.

The videos themselves gave me the titles. *Dance Me to the End of Night* concludes with two lines linked together as they move across the screen. For me, this was a direct representation of two lovers dancing in rhythm, and then disappearing...the only title it could be was *Dance Me to the End of Night*.

Entitling the second work, *Let's Blow Them Away*, was instinctive. It had to be a literal translation of my actual intention; I really wanted to blow the lines away! For this work,

I created a pyramid of my written scripts, and by blowing in different directions, interesting movements were formed. Having this power to direct and move my scripts around was a new opportunity for me. Just as I could create, I could also destroy.

It's interesting that you frequently make reference to music. It seems a major component in the video works, especially in *Dance Me to the End of Night*, so beautifully set to Mozart's Piano Concerto No. 23. Has music been influential in the way you work?

Music has always been important, not only in my work, but also in my life. I cannot live without music! In the video works my aim was, as I said before, to give new life to the scripts through movement. In *Dance Me to the End of Night*, I wanted the lines to have a rhythm to which they could move. The work of Mozart, in particular his 23rd piano concerto, fitted perfectly with the rhythm and movement I wanted to achieve. The pauses between notes allow time for reflection and, suddenly, the lines are ready to dance again.

In the new paintings you're showing, a thin red line prevails. Does this red line have symbolic overtones?

This red line is very important but, for me, it cannot be translated into words. Do we have to translate so many things? No, there are some things that just speak for themselves, and we should let them do that. Why not?

Most of your work is left untitled. Do you feel this allows the viewer more interpretative freedom?

Absolutely, it is my intention to give viewers the freedom to translate the works themselves, and not to feel that the artist is dictating to them how they have to react. I create works using my own experiences. The intended outcome is not to try to limit interpretation but to encourage and embrace it. Let the mind go as far as it wants!

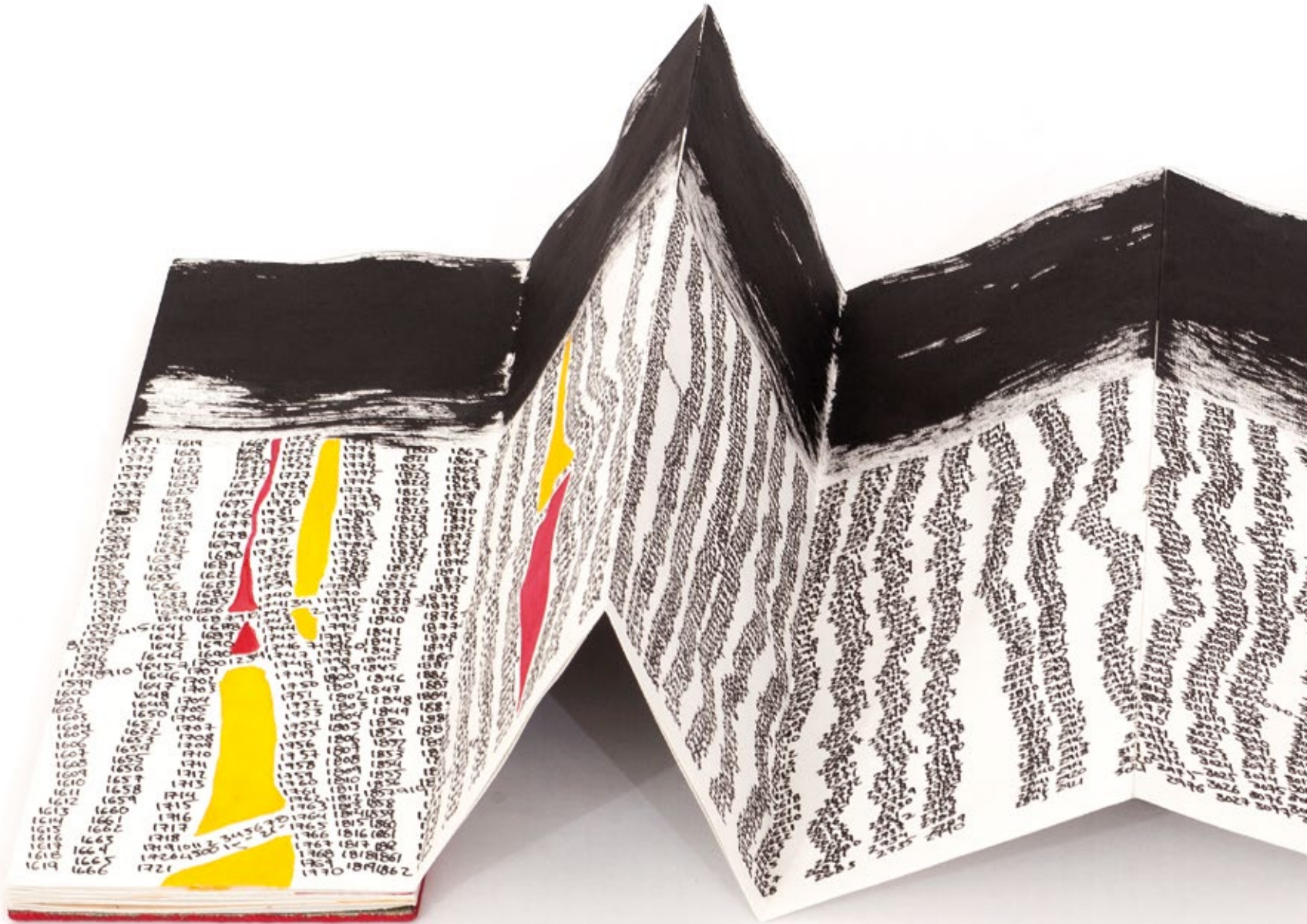


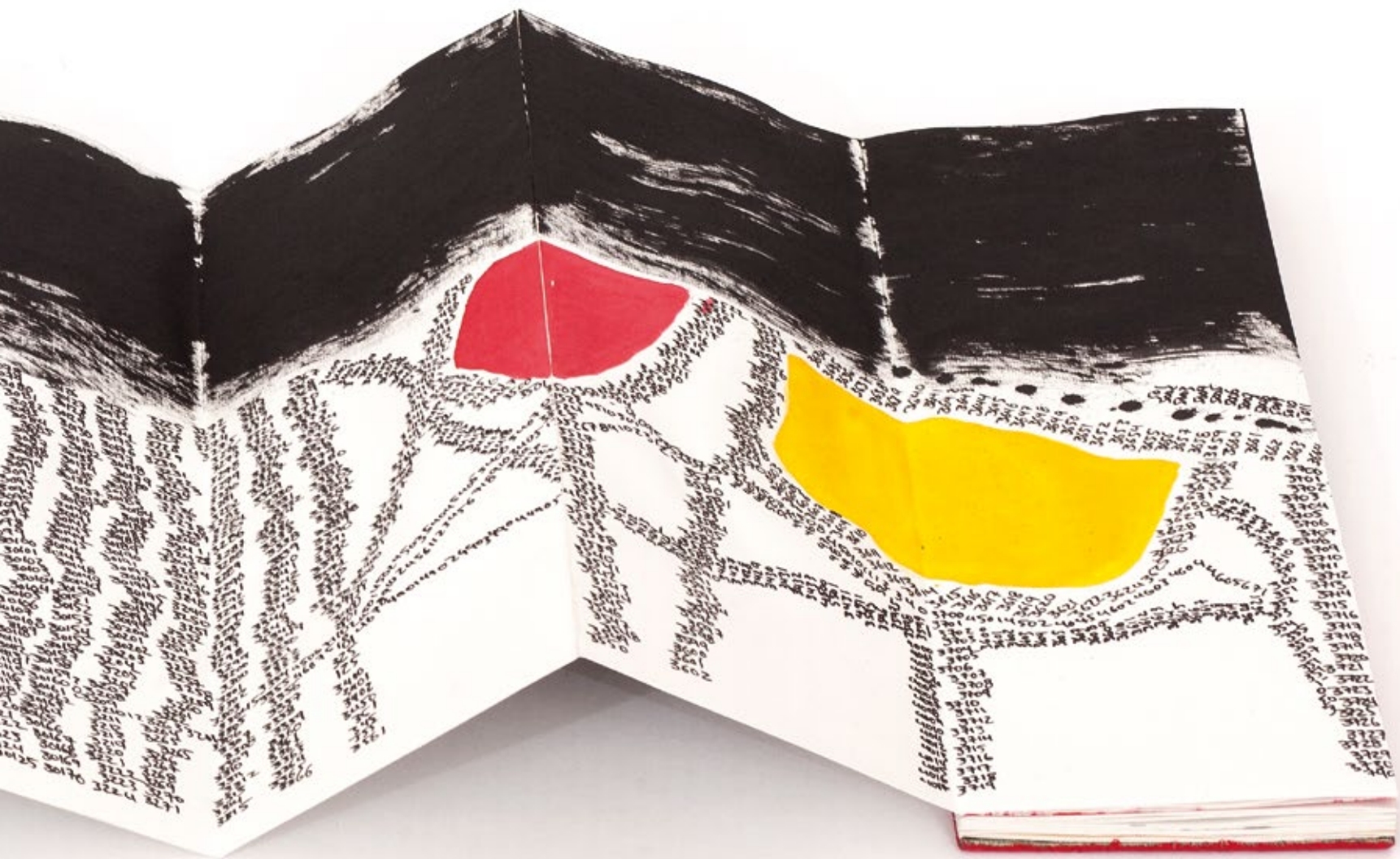
Untitled (33), 2014.
Triptych - Acrylic, pen, gold leaf and varnish on canvas,
40 x 120 x 5 cm.



Untitled (32), 2014.
Triptych - Acrylic, pen, and varnish on canvas,
40 x 120 x 5 cm.

Untitled (35), 2014.
Book - Acrylic and pen on paper,
35 x 150 cm.

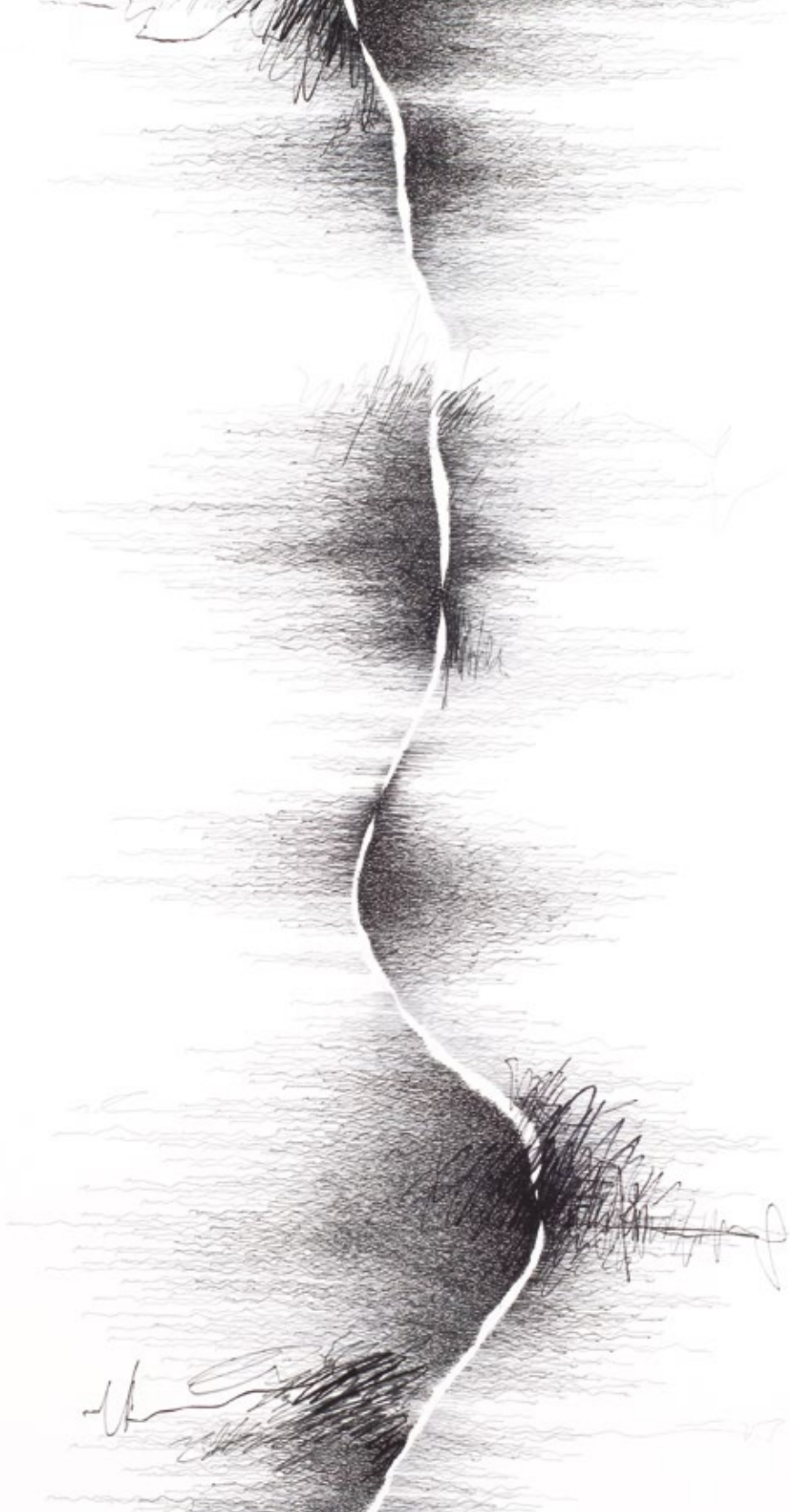




Untitled (34), 2014.
Triptych - Acrylic, pen, and varnish on canvas,
180 x 405 x 5 cm.







Left:
Untitled (31), 2014.
Acrylic, pen and varnish
on canvas,
146 x 128 x 5 cm.

Right:
Untitled (30), 2014.
Acrylic, pen and varnish
on canvas,
146 x 128 x 5 cm.



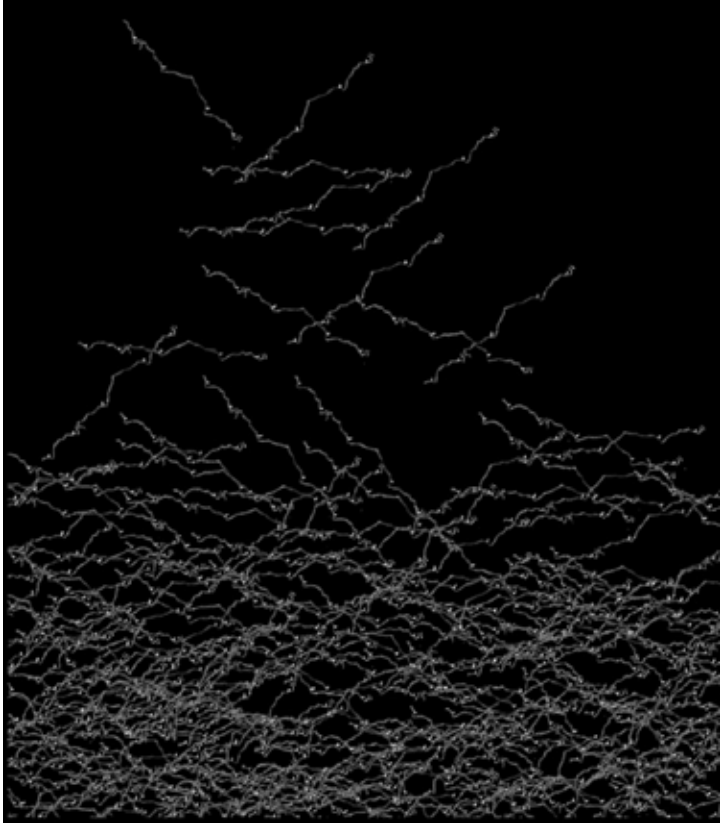


Left:
Untitled (27), 2014.
Acrylic, pen and varnish
on canvas,
144 x 130 x 5 cm.

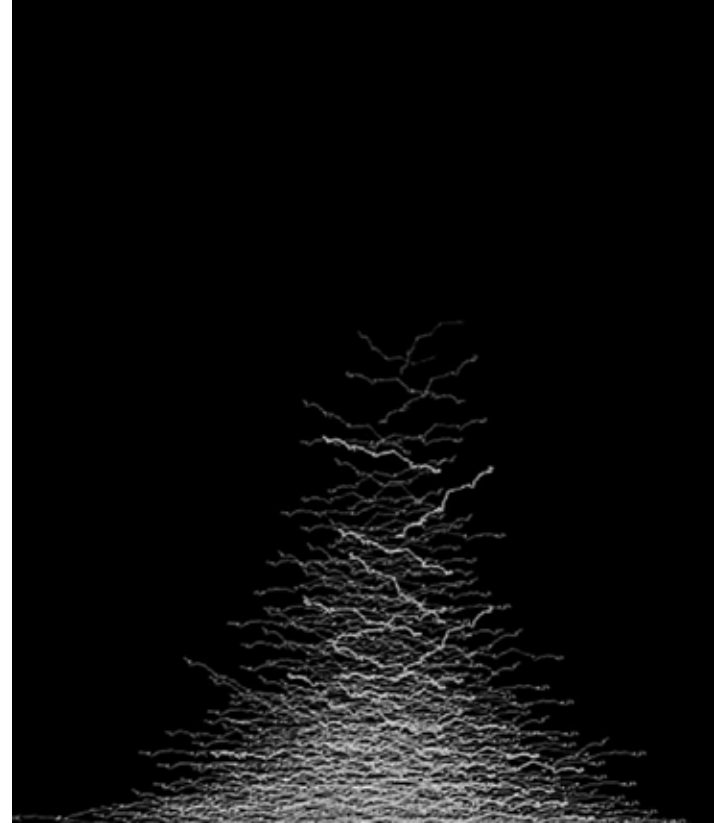
Right:
Untitled (29), 2014.
Acrylic, pen and varnish
on canvas,
146 x 128 x 5 cm.





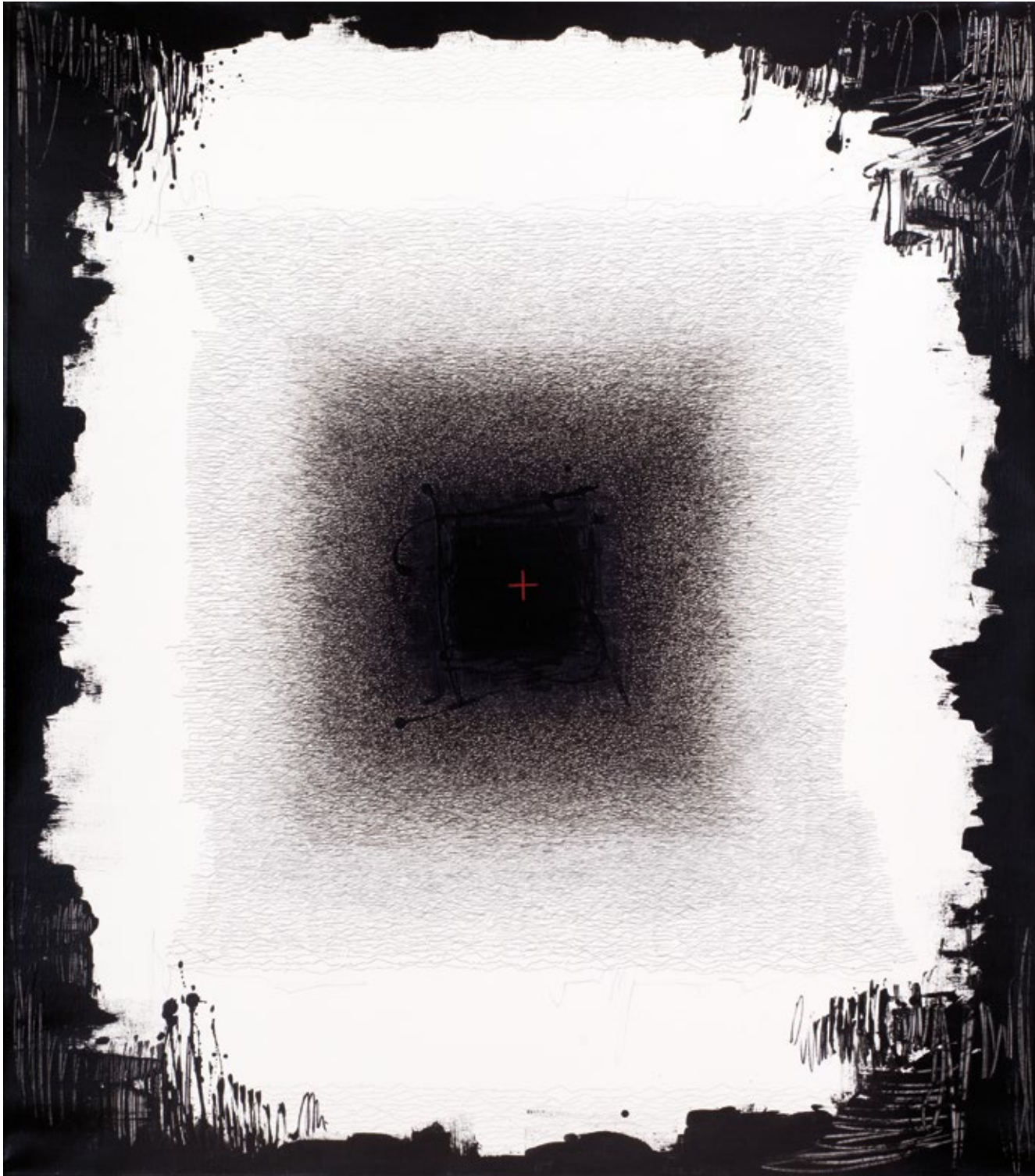


Dance Me to the End of Night, 2014.
Video, 2 min 14 sec.



Let's Blow Them Away, 2014.
Video, 1 min 48 sec.

Left:
Untitled (25), 2013.
Acrylic, pen and varnish on canvas,
146 x 128 x 5 cm.



Left:
Untitled (28), 2014.
Acrylic, pen and varnish
on canvas,
144 x 130 x 5 cm.

Right:
Untitled (26), 2013.
Acrylic, pen and varnish
on canvas,
146 x 128 x 5 cm.



GOLNAZ FATHI

Born in Tehran in Iran 1972, lives and works in Iran

EDUCATION

- 1996 Diploma of Iranian Calligraphy, Iranian Society of Calligraphy, Tehran, Iran
- 1995 Bachelors of Art in Graphics, Azad Art University, Tehran, Iran
- 1990 Secondary Studies Degree, Tehran, Iran

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *Dance Me to the End of Night*, October Gallery, London, UK
- 2013 *The Living Road*, Pearl Lam Fine Art, Shanghai, China
Golnaz Fathi, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, U.S.A
Falling Leaves, The Third Line Gallery, Dubai, UAE
- 2010 *Liminal-Subliminal*, October Gallery, London, UK
Controlled Chaos, The Third line, Dubai, UAE
Ride Like the Wind, Sultan Gallery, Kuwait
- 2009 *Doha Series*, The Third Line, Doha, Qatar
- 2008 *My Freedom*, Xerxes Gallery, London, UK
Sleepless Nights, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE
- 2007 *Beyond Words*, La Fontaine Centre of Contemporary Art, Manama, Bahrain
- 2006 *Golnaz Fathi*, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE
- 2005 *Space SD*, Beirut, Lebanon
Un-Written, The Third Line, Dubai, UAE
- 2005 *Virtual Painting Exhibition*, ArteEast, www.arteeast.org
Espace SD, Beirut, Lebanon
Maison des Jeunes et de la Culture de Neuilly, Neuilly-sur-Seine, France
- 2004 *Galerie L'œil du Huit*, Paris, France
Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 2002 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 2000 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
Shahr-e-Ketab Bookstore of Niavaran, Tehran, Iran
- 1999 Seyhoon Gallery, Tehran, Iran
- 1998 Seyhoon Gallery, Tehran, Iran

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2014 *35 Years of Transvanguard: Contemporary art from around the planet*, October Gallery, London, UK
Marked: Contemporary Takes on Mark-Making
Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, USA
- 2013 *To be a Lady: An International Celebration of Women in the Arts*. Curated by Jason Andrew, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Singapore
- 2012 *Masters of the Transvanguard*, October Gallery, London, UK
Alternative View: Three Generations of Iranian Women, Mellat Gallery, Tehran, Iran
Written Images: Contemporary Calligraphy from the Middle East, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, Hong Kong
The Other Half of Iran, Sem-Art Gallery, Monaco
World stories- Young voices, Brighton Museum, Brighton, UK
Masters of the Transvanguard, October Gallery, London, UK
The Elephant in the Dark, Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, India
- 2011 *Hong Kong Art Fair*, Pearl Lam Fine Art Gallery, Hong Kong
Written Images: Contemporary Calligraphy from the Middle East, Sundaram Tagore Gallery, New York, USA
The Art of Writing, Art Forum of Wiesbaden, Germany
Transvanguard: Contemporary Art from Around the World, October Gallery, London, UK
- 2010 *Iran Inside Out*, Farjam Collection, Dubai, UAE
- 2009 *International Women Artists' Biennial*, Incheon, South Korea
Iran Inside Out, Chelsea Art Museum, New York, USA
Selseleh/Zelseleh: Movers & Shakers in Contemporary Iranian Art. Curated by Dr. Layla Diba, Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller Gallery, New York, USA
- 2008 *Look what love has done to us once again*, Cramer Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East, British Museum at DIFC. Curated by Venetia Porter, Dubai, UAE
- 2007 *Cutting Edge: Spotlight on the Avant-Garde of Emerging Countries*, Artcurial, Paris, France
Collected Memories, ArtSpace Gallery, London, UK
Within and Without: Contemporary Iranian Art, No More Grey Gallery, London, UK
Mah Gallery, Tehran, Iran
Unnamed Gallery, Amman, Jordan

2006 *Wishes and Dreams*, Meridian International Centre, Washington DC, USA
ARTPARIS 07, Grand Palais, Paris, France
 Niavaran Artistic Creation Foundation, Tehran, Iran
Transit, Istanbul Improvisation Days, Istanbul, Turkey
 Group Exhibition, Don O'Melveny Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East, The British Museum, London, UK
9th International Open Exhibition, Woman Made Gallery, Chicago, USA
 2005 Espace SD, Beirut, Lebanon
 Mah Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 Italian School of Tehran, Tehran, Iran
 2004 Depot Square Gallery, Boston, USA
 Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York City, USA
 Fatima Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 Italian School of Tehran, Tehran, Iran
 Royal Mirage Hotel, Dubai, UAE
 2003 Williams Tower Gallery, Houston, USA
6th Tehran Contemporary Painting Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran
 Italian School of Tehran, Tehran, Iran
 The National Arts Club, New York, USA
 Lo Sguardo Di Luce, Padua, Italy
New Art from Iran, Art Centre of Plano, Plano, Texas, USA
New Art from Iran, Museum of Arts and Science, Daytona Beach, Florida, USA
 2002 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 Don O'Melveny Gallery, Los Angeles, USA
New Art from Iran, Art Museum of Southeast Texas, Beaumont, Texas, USA
New Art from Iran, Queen Library Gallery, Jamaica, New York, USA
 2001 La Maison du Livre, Brussels, Belgium
 Hôtel de Ville de Saint-Gilles, Saint-Gilles, Belgium
 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 Courtyard Gallery, Dubai, UAE
 Meridian International Centre, Washington DC, USA
 2000 Azteca Gallery, Madrid, Spain
 Seyhoon Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 1998 Seyhoon Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 1997 *1st Islamic World Calligraphy Festival*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran

1997 Seyhoon Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 1996 *Calligraphy Exhibition*, Reza Abbassi Museum, Tehran, Iran
Calligraphy Exhibition, Seyhoon Gallery, Tehran, Iran
 1995 Exhibition of Art University Students, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran
 1994 *Exhibition for Iranian Women Painters*, Istanbul, Turkey
 1993 *2nd Painting and Miniature Exhibition*, Tehran Exhibition Centre, Tehran, Iran
2nd Tehran Contemporary Painting Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran

GRANTS AND AWARDS

2012 Visiting artist at "Art Campus", Meissen Porcelain Factory, Germany
 2011 Chosen as a Young Global Leader - World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland
 2010 Sharjah Calligraphy Biennial, UAE - Selection Committee
 2007 Residence Scholarship, Fabbrica, Treviso, Italy
 2004 Residence Scholarship, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France
 2003 Residence Scholarship, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France
 1995 Best Woman Calligraphist in Ketabat style, Iranian Society of Calligraphy, Tehran, Iran
 1993 Diploma of Honour in Graphics and Painting, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran

ACQUISITIONS


Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA; Brighton & Hove Museum, Brighton, UK; Carnegie Mellon University in Doha, Qatar; Islamic Art Museum, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Asian Civilisation's Museum, Singapore; The British Museum, London, UK; Devi Art Foundation, New Delhi, India; Farjam Collection, Dubai, UAE; Salsali Foundation, Dubai, UAE

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GOLNAZ FATHI

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