

A.I.R.

Appearance Stripped Bare

Negin Sharifzadeh

Curated by Giulio Verago

September 6 - October 6, 2019

Opening Reception: Friday, September 6, 6-8pm

Panel Discussion: Sunday, September 8, from 4-5:30pm

With Dr. Carmen Bambach, Giulio Verago, Alix Brouillion, Riccardo Cavallari and Bryn Gast.



Negin Sharifzadeh

A.I.R. Gallery is pleased to announce *Appearance Stripped Bare*, an exhibition by A.I.R. Member Artist Negin Sarifzadeh. This body of work uses photography, sculpture, and animation to interrogate the concept of the European Renaissance as an isolated phenomenon, rather than a period in organic conversation with movements that had started earlier in the Middle East.

Sharifzadeh explores the impact of the broader Mediterranean culture and ideas that helped spark and inform Europe's rebirth, juxtaposed against the present-day collisions of culture, by placing her own body as a contemporary woman from the Middle East within the imagery, iconography, and physical geography of the Italian Renaissance. Too often, art historians have placed European arts in a position of privilege, exorcising and minimizing arts from other regions. Through this re-contextualization and reclamation, she aims to challenge the very idea of European and Middle Eastern otherness.

Curatorial Statement

Giulio Verago

Negin Sharifzadeh Moss project *Appearance Stripped Bare* represents a candid and in a way radical reinterpretation of the concepts of Renaissance, cultural symbiosis between Western and Eastern civilizations and the role played by the eternal Feminine in the history of art and power.

I started working with Negin last year by inviting her to Milan as curator of the residency program VIR Viafarini-in-residence. I quickly realized the importance of cultural dialog in her practice by facilitating her research with some contradictory aspects of 70's Italian cinematographic genres for her work *Perilous Milano*.

When she told me about *Appearance Stripped Bare* I started considering it a chance to distance ourselves from the accuracy of History and to reflect on what still survives of that vision of the world on a more subtle level, as well as a chance to focus on the real meaning of cultural exchange nowadays in the era of rampant inequalities and superficial and lighthearted cosmopolitanism.

The inspiration for these works derives from a residency Negin spent in the Tuscan hills, a total immersion in a glorious past that is still able, beyond the clichés, to touch the human soul.

Negin is perfectly aware that the history of the Renaissance is as complex as the lives of the men and women who have been protagonists.

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She decided to highlight the contrasts and the uncanny affinities between Renaissance vision of Feminine and the one of Persian culture, giving shape to the contradictions of her own condition as a woman split between two sides of the ocean.

The project not only deals with the disparity between men and women artists and male and female clichés but also highlights the fact that “Renaissance” if considered as a term to epitomize cultural climax belongs to every place and cultures, inside and outside of the Western canon.

Well before the rediscovery of the Gioconda’s smile by Théophile Gautier, critics and historians have always recognized the status of Renaissance as a hegemonic narrative that has forged not only the history of European art but also a certain vision of love, friendship, war, and even laziness.

Virtually every aspect of Renaissance has been a matter of Academic debate, starting from its Tuscan origin, essentially literary (there are those who see its premises in XIII Century Saint Francis Laude), then quickly turned into an unprecedented reconciliation of Aesthetics and Ethics. The approach of Negin Moss pays tribute not only to the golden age of Renaissance but considers this period as a continuum, a flux of different inspirations nurtured but the Mediterranean trade and alliances. Negin is also interested in the late stage of Mannerism, the artistic season that killed Renaissance and probably best describes the contradictions we are still facing nowadays, stuck between an agonizing old world and a new order yet to come.

The end of the Renaissance was not sanctioned by the impossibility of creating a more beautiful art than that of Leonardo or Raphael, but by the recognition that it is useless to reproduce any style, even the most powerful, beyond time and culture that they produced it. The works on display use lightness as a key to interpreting the sense of the contemporary. It is not a nostalgic homage to the past. On the contrary, the artist introduces irony, a fundamental rhetorical element, a false ignorance and a detachment from the acquired truth that allow us to discover its inner contradictions, without prejudice or malice.

Negin’s point of view, influenced by her Iranian identity and her American life, is very remarkable as it is able to inspire a sense of dialog and reconciliation, very precious in the current political turmoil. The use of irony, especially in a time of great depression and disillusion, celebrates the freedom of artistic expression. She takes into account the differences in the representation of the female body between East and West, how for instance the influence of classical representation of the female nudity gave shape somehow to the way we see women’s bodies and women’s desires and ambitions, nowadays.

History always repeats itself, especially its power dynamics. Today we are surprised by the rapidity of scientific discoveries and technological innovations that promise us a bright, simpler, wiser future. In the European Renaissance, the world was amazed by the freedom to experiment with new artistic languages and the complete adherence to these values, by the mercantile class that became a patron of these marvels.

But it is good to remember that artistic masterpieces have always been an instrument of the celebration of the hegemonic power of a very small part of society, and that the role of women in this iconography, with very few exceptions, have always responded to rigid schemes that still persists nowadays. The western renaissance celebrated the human body while the eastern counterparts were not fully allowed to fully portray the body. Almost always covered and ornamented, heavily influenced by Islamic art patterns which dictate the limitation to the portrayal of male and female bodies and identities.

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Faced with all this, the protagonists of the works of Negin Moss laugh, above all of themselves. They love without boundlessly because they accept that everything is precarious. They accept to be admired and criticized not fearing to show us their weakness and frailty.

These women do not want to respond to an ideal model because they know that an ideal model is the result of a frustrating negotiation with those in power. These women respond to symbolic exploitation with a defiant smile, aware that there is no greater contradiction than being a woman in a world designed and rules by men.

Negin Sharifzadeh, (b. 1979) is a cross-disciplinary artist and storyteller based in Brooklyn, NY. Sharifzadeh has had solo exhibitions and performances in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Florence, Melbourne, and Tehran, and has been part of multiple international group exhibitions and festivals. Her animated films have won numerous awards, including Best Experimental Film at the 2012 Williamsburg International Film Festival, Best Animation at the 2012 Crown Heights International Film Festival, and Best Short Film at the 2013 New York 3rd-I Film Awards. Her films have also been shown at many festivals internationally, including the Melbourne International Film Festival, Australia; Firenze Suona Contemporanea, Italy; San Paulo Biennale, Brazil; and Frankston Art Centre and Noir Darkroom Gallery in Melbourne, Australia. Both her artwork and her curatorial work has been reviewed in *The Huffington Post*, *The New York Times*, *Art Report*, *Herald Sun*, *Global Voices*, *Artribune*, *Art World Women*, *Art View*, *Voice of America*, and *BBC Persian Services*. Sharifzadeh received her BFA in Sculpture from Tehran University in Iran in 2002, and her BFA in Performing Arts from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2010.

Giulio Verago, (b. 1980) is the Director of Via Farini Artist Residency- Curator & Cultural Manager in Milan, Italy. Giulio Graduated in Philosophy at the University of Pavia and finished his PhD studies at Politecnico di Milano. He is also a Curator and cultural manager specialized in non profit sector for the promotion of visual arts. After having gained experience in public relations and communication for profit galleries, he collaborates with non profit organization Viafarini (www.viafarini.org) since 2008. Appointed curator of the international residency for artists and curators VIR Viafarini-in-residence and curator at the Documentation Center for Visual Arts run by Viafarini at Fabbrica del Vapore, Milan. He has been invited to hold lectures about artist mobility and arts management both in Italy and abroad (KOOSHK Residency, Teheran; Fashion Institute of Technology - New York City; FRAME and HIAP - Helsinki; Italian Ministry for Culture MIBACT, Rome; MAXXI Museum, Rome; NABA Art Academy Milan; Politecnico di Milano; Università Cattolica di Milano; Fitzcarraldo Foundation - Turin).

A.I.R. Gallery is wheelchair accessible via ramp. There are accessible toilets in the venue. There is comfortable seating with backs. Free tap water is available. The venue is nearest to the F train at York St (0.2 miles) and the A train at High St (0.5 miles). The nearest wheelchair accessible trains are the B, Q, R at Dekalb Av (1.1 miles) and the 2, 3 at Borough Hall (0.8 miles). The roads immediately surrounding the gallery are cobblestone. The nearest accessible parking garage (for an hourly fee) is two

