

Tanya Leighton

Press Release

Sara Issakharian
'BEHOLD MOTHER, I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW'

22 November – 17 December 2022
Preview: Sunday 20 November, 3–5pm

Sara Issakharian's drawings seem to hang in a liminal space somewhere between here and there, past and present. The world has turned upside down. Order has given way to chaos. Reality and myth are woven together. Horses, swans, elephants and women do fight with snakes and dragons in colourful drawings that evoke battle scenes rendered with an almost carnivalesque quality. As she shows me her recent artworks, she pauses and asks, "How can a human being emerge from this chaos?"

Throughout the fall of 2022, as Issakharian created this series of drawings, a protest movement led by women demanding freedom was underway in Iran. Though she emigrated from Iran to the U.S. as a teenager, the artist remains connected to the country, its culture and people. The stories that colour much of her artmaking stem from her own personal journey growing up as a girl in Iran, facing and then overcoming the restrictions and limitations placed on her by family, society and the state.

Issakharian draws on the alchemy of form and content to convey meaning in her art. She begins her drawings by washing the paper in water and chemicals. As it dries, the textured surface of the paper takes on a sense of aged frailty. It's as if she's reminding us that though the stories being played out in her drawings may be contemporary they are also rooted in age-old struggles.

The art historical and cultural references in the work are multivalent – from medieval Persian manuscripts to Goya's 'The Disasters of War' series that she saw on a recent trip to Spain. She infuses elements of classical painting with Disney characters and uses bright hues. Unlike earlier drawings of hers that were made with shades of black, these works are covered in vivid yellow and deep lapis blue, rich emerald green and bright pink. Explaining this evolution, Issakharian says, "I want to show that this world is not black and white," further noting that she also likes the playfulness of bright colours, an element of childlike innocence that some of the imagery brings to the drawings.

Each of her artworks begins as a complex, dense composition. And as she works, she eliminates components to create space and light. The drawing's tension between the sombre and the playful, between light and dark gives way to a meditative emptiness in the drawings; its emptiness is a critical aspect of her work, Issakharian explains, "They are an opening for me to engage with the viewer, to bring them into conversation." There is movement, a flow in her drawings that carries the viewer along this path between hope and fear. Echoing Nâzım Hikmet's moving poem about our collective struggle for a better future for the children of this world, Issakharian's drawings quietly declare, "I'll make all things new."

–Shiva Balaghi, Ph.D.
Cultural Historian at the University of California, Santa Barbara

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Sara Issakharian (born in 1983 in Tehran) studied philosophy and sociology at UCLA before completing a master's degree at the New York Academy of Art in 2015. She was the recipient of the first-round of awards for the Art Olympia Prize in Japan in 2015.

In 2020, Issakharian was the subject of a solo exhibition, titled 'Open Window', at the prestigious Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin. She has recently been included in group exhibitions at Site131, Dallas, Texas and Andrew Kreps Gallery, New York. Her work is held at the Art Collection of the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business.

In 2021, Tanya Leighton presented her first solo exhibition in Los Angeles, 'There's a whole life in that, in knowing that the sun is there'. A forthcoming solo exhibition at Tanya Leighton, Berlin is scheduled for September 2023.

For more information please contact info@tanyaleighton.com or telephone +49(0)30221607770.

The gallery is open Tuesday to Saturday, 11 am–6 pm and by appointment.