

تمارا السامرائي، حجيرة

Tamara Al Samerraei

What Floats in Space

At the heart of Tamara Al-Samerraei's new research, there is an object. Or rather, the idea of an object; a form which has shifted from the realm of the real to become an obsession, where the origin of this shape is of little importance. It could as well be a box, a rock or a pile of waste, but above all, it is the way in which it has been absorbed and digested by the artist, the process of revelation that should interest us. From this forgotten artifact, the artist draws the essence of a new series of work.

"Dreams come before contemplation. Before becoming a conscious sight, every landscape is an oneiric experience," wrote Gaston Bachelard in *Water and Dreams*. This quote reveals two important ideas that must be connected to the work of Al-Samerraei. On the one hand, the construction of the world, especially the physical space, comes specifically from our intangible and timeless experiences -the unseen- and on the other hand, the projected vision of the world is derived from past life elements and situations, once tangible but now hidden in our mind as "already seen". It is also fascinating that Bachelard connects notion of dream and reality to the notion of the aqueous, which is a major element in Al-Samerraei's work. She often

represents stretches of water, artificial or natural, and even her way of painting, using charcoal and sometimes dripping, seems to evoke a fluid form.

Loïc Le Gall





Previous spread: Lobby, Acrylic on canvas, 194 x 117 cm
This spread: Entry, Acrylic on canvas, 26 x 21 cm



Port Romano, Acrylic on canvas, 124 x 105 cm



Green Carpet, Acrylic on canvas, 186 x 167 cm



Night Shrub, Acrylic on canvas, 104 x 88 cm



Sleeping Figure, Acrylic on canvas, 137 x 104 cm



Bedroom, Acrylic on canvas, 185 x 155 cm



One, Acrylic on canvas, 77 x 67 cm



Two, Acrylic on canvas, 96 x 120 cm



Containers, Paint coated styrofoam, 90 x 80 x 45 cm each



TAMARA AL-SAMERRAEI
in conversation with
LOÏC LE GALL

- LL. In your new body of works, you are developing a more abstract painting style. A big black shape is recurring and it looks like a monolith in a way. This form, or the idea of this form, reminds me of that of the black rock of *2001: A Space Odyssey*, a film directed by Stanley Kubrick. The shape attracts as much as it troubles.
- TAS. This new pattern comes from two objects that I have been obsessing over for a while. Last year, there were two boxes left behind by my studio in Paris. I did not pay attention to them at first, but these objects came back to my mind later. They imposed themselves on my imagination in a strange and ghostly way. I want to note that my work is not related to my dreams in a direct sense, it rarely ever is, but the construction of some paintings could resemble the construction or logic of dreams. The analogy with the monolith of *A Space Odyssey* is interesting because, in the film, the object remains an enigma.
- LL. Beyond the conceptual link, I also see visual links with cinema. There is a structured way of constructing space that recalls the assembly of different shots in a scene.
- TAS. I worked minimally on videos a long time ago and the moving image is not a form that works well with me at all. But yes you are right, sometimes it feels cinematic. The idea of telling more than one story in one image started when I was exposed to Islamic miniature painting. I was interested in the compositions and the use of margins, where events take place in and outside those margins. That is when I started playing with the idea of having more than one scene or event within the same image and creating nonlinear narratives.
- LL. What do you mean by nonlinear narratives in the case of your painting? Because it is very easy to identify and understand this process in literature and cinema - an author relates the events of a story in an order different from the one in which they are supposed to have occurred - but it is more complex for the still image.

TAS. Sometimes there are two figures in the same painting but not necessarily there at the same time. There is more than one thing happening that is taken from different angles, at different times and in different light conditions. The way they are placed together is not to tell one clear story, but maybe one that you would possibly experience in a dream.

LL. In your paintings, there are some figures lying on beds, I understand this presence as the representation of an unconscious state? But, they are also reified in a way.

TAS. These are scenes of intimacy, which are usually not supposed to be exposed. It is also an absorbing setting like the swimming pool. We dive into sleep, the same way we dive into water.

LL. This makes me think again of a cinematic reference: *Hiroshima mon amour*¹. The film is built with some flashbacks to create a nonlinear storyline and invokes the theme of memory. There are beautiful and intimate

bed scenes, the story being a poem of love and death. I see here a curious coincidence: we talked a few weeks ago about the black hole. Resnais's film evokes mostly the psychoanalytical context regarding certain muted traumas but also the chaos of the bomb, and then on April 10th, the first *real* image of a black hole -the astronomical object- was released. Maybe your black shapes are playing on both registers: physical and psychological?

TAS. This physical phenomenon is invisible since no light comes out. We can only perceive the silhouette. It scares me. It is like waking up from a nap into night time. Thinking back to Jalal Toufic's notion on black holes and trauma, especially in relation to war, some people cannot go into and then return from their own memory; they remain lost in between. My black objects proceed in the same way, as black holes of the psyche and that of space: they absorb, while hiding.

¹ *Hiroshima mon amour*, 1959, directed by Alain Resnais, with a screenplay by the writer Marguerite Duras.

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