

Maryam Hoseini

*Promise To Be Good*

12.12.2021 – 19.02.2022

The paintings of Maryam Hoseini (b. 1988 Tehran, Iran) share a common world. Figures repeat across distinct canvases and situations as if in a dream or a film. Their positions encompass the violent, the erotic, and anything inbetween. Stylistically flat, with figures overlapping and sometimes blending into landscapes and backgrounds, Hoseini's paintings bear a relationship to the pixelations and squares of color that form our contemporary digital visuality. Yet the paintings don't make it easy to lay the tablecloth of narrative over their bumpy tabletop. Instead of a narrative, Hoseini's exhibition is an anagram: it can be taken apart and put together in different ways. Playful, if you can handle the play.

The new paintings are just as ambiguous. In purplish rooms, with glasses of wine and champagne all around, figures are animalistically contorted. Like whole chickens trussed to be roasted their limbs appear fowlish. In some paintings they look like they're on yoga mats but it is unclear whether or not they're stretching or being tortured. The density of their orgiastic entanglement could so easily be the ecstasy of orgasm or the violence of murder. Sometimes the figures are tied by the ankle, though we don't know what they're tied to. They have hair, whoever they are.

Hoseini uses seriality and architecture to build the shared worlds of her paintings and exhibitions. Hoseini calls the elements that extend off of the canvases--blocky swaths of color on the wall, metal hardware, painted wooden forms looking like walls, fences, or windows--apertures. Strategically, they allow for the materialization of the canvases' common interiority in real space. Instead of a story told across the canvases, the architectural interventions serve to connect the paintings physically. They don't completely close the gap between the individual works: that's why they're apertures. They leave just enough space through which one can maneuver. But they do offer real connections.

In this exhibition, each of the paintings contains at least one opening. They're like windows, the openings on the canvas. One looks through them. By looking through them, perhaps, one reorients themselves in relation to the paintings, which are usually looked at, not through. How can one change their perspective to look through something they have been trained to look at? All of Hoseini's works encourage this question: can you look at something in relation to something else? Can you follow the openings that have been left to you, through the windows and the apertures, and create something new? Can you follow the figures and they multiply and fade away, as they fuck and fight? Can you follow them and allow them to be lost, to fade away, and then reemerge?

These are the questions that one asks looking at Hoseini's works. If they were to be condensed into one question, a question as dense and satisfying and sustaining as a hearty chunk of bread, it might be: can you look without expecting anything in return? Can we use our look to give and serve, or only to take? If one can learn--as Hoseini encourages us--to look without turning our gaze into a medium of exchange, then we might be able to, as they say, "get somewhere." Otherwise you really need someone to promise to be good. And we all know that usually doesn't turn out well.