

“STUBBLY NUMBNESS”

Morteza Khakshoor
Opens at Five Car Garage
Saturday July 23rd 12-4pm
Rsvp info@emmagrayhq.com for map



“Tender Just Like a Riot”
Acrylic on canvas
24 x 20”
2022

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Emma Gray HQ is delighted to present “*Stubby Numbness*” by California based artist Morteza Khakshoor, who is shortly moving to London. Khakshoor works with a range of subjects, but it’s his attention to the male—in all his foibles, struggles, and pathos—that remains a salient feature of his output. As frequent protagonists in his paintings, like all of his subjects, they result from circuitous paths through found images and memories, seen and remembered, or invented from whole cloth. His consumption of these images feed into his daily drawing practice, which in turn, metabolizes disparate information into schema for paintings at once playfully tragic and colorfully dark.

Raised in Iran where, until college, boys and girls attended separate schools, Khakshoor was immersed in testosterone-laden campuses, which he calls the ‘homo-social’— particularly in those catering to the un-behaved. As he progressed to coed college in male-only dormitories, Khakshoor was exposed to higher stakes in the homo-social environment, in which boundaries were pushed, rules were constantly broken, and chaos loomed through state provocations of the student body. He observed the Shakespearean tragedy in his male cohort, captured in all those productions by Orson Welles, Akira Kurosawa, and Laurence Olivier he had seen on television as a child. Even if he barely understood these films at the time, he had already begun to look at men with an obsessional, yet fearful fascination—for what they were capable of and for being a male himself.

Case in point: In *Confessor* (2022) he depicts the head of a young man in tones of olive green and pale yellow. Derived from his memory of watching a fellow college student being forced to condemn himself and his beliefs on live state television, Khakshoor incorporates slight echoes of what is arguably the most radical innovation in twentieth century painting, cubism, into the depiction of a live emasculation by the patriarchal state, a tradition that still continues in Iran.

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Works like *Heap of Flies* (2021) take on more mytho-poetic dimensions: a woman and a man are seen in front of a building commonly seen in Tehran before the 1978-1979 Islamic Revolution, whose origins stem from a robust architectural movement influenced by Western and Persian architecture. The man's mouth is curiously agape as a number of flies swarm around him. Fairy tales abound which transform men into aquatic animals or vice versa. The building's role thus becomes estranged and fabled by association.

Khakshoor frequently turns to Iranian history for content, but his formal influences are decidedly Western. He cites Picasso, Beckman, Mantegna, and Hockney as perennial favorites. Akin to Hockney, Khakshoor mines the endless surprises and possibilities in Picasso's oeuvre. But unlike Hockney's earnest approach, Khakshoor strips them for parts, injecting humor, absurdity, and tragedy in their reapplication towards new ambiguous, but strident configurations. All of which speak to Khakshoor's complex relationship to his formative years in Iran, its political and cultural history, and the various genres in the Western painting canon.

These coordinates of Khakshoor's practice dovetail prominently in his Martyr series (2021-present), which commonly depict a lone reclining male figure (some are occasionally female or ambiguously gendered) that appear to be dead or asleep. The series arose in reaction to “Bloody November,” in which an unprecedented number of protesters were killed by Iranian state forces in November 2019. Still processing the rage, sorrow, and hopelessness of the incident, Khakshoor continues to delve into the complexity of martyrdom and its combination with the innovations of early Renaissance painters Mantegna and Massacio. Their sympathetic portrayal of the dead inform Khakshoor's homage to the suffering, defeated, and murdered.

Combined with Khakshoor's more humorous works, such as *What Now* (2020), which depicts a single bleary eyed man staring back at us—naked below the waist and holding a beer—we are confronted with striking contrasts: they are shifts in tone that mirror Khakshoor's inner-tensions, those between his identity

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and the greater forces out of his control. By painting, he can give form to them in all of their manifestations.

Written by Max Maslansky

Morteza Khakshoor (b. 1984 Iran) currently lives and works in Southern California, soon re-locating to London, England. He moved to the US in 2010 to continue his education in Fine Arts. He received his BFA from Lyme Academy College of Fine Arts in 2015 and completed his MFA at The Ohio State University in 2018. He has been exhibiting his work nationally and internationally since 2011. Solo exhibitions include ‘Forty-One Drawings and Prints’, University Art Gallery, California State University (2018) and; ‘What Has Become Of Your Strength’, George Mason Atrium Gallery, George Mason University, Fairfax, VA (2016). Group Exhibition include, ‘Humoral Theory’, (3-Person Exhibition), BEERS London, UK (2020); ‘Woolwich Contemporary Print Fair’, London, UK; ‘Art on Paper Fair’, The Tunnel, NY (2019) and; 2018 Edition Artists Book Fair (E/AB), New York, NY.

He is the recipient of many awards, including The Inaugural Emerging Artist Award given at the Editions/Artists’ Book Fair (E/AB) in 2018. His works are in several private and public collections, most notably The Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice in New York City.