

## Press Release

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### **Nicky Nodjoumi**

#### ***Someone is coming with a flower***

**November 13th (Tue), 2024 - January 12th (Sun), 2025**

Barakat Contemporary proudly presents Iranian-born American artist Nicky Nodjoumi's second solo exhibition at the gallery, *Someone is coming with a flower* from November 13th, 2024 to January 12th, 2025. The exhibition comprises three works created before the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the first public unveiling of over sixty monotypes on paper produced shortly after the artist's exile to Miami, US, in 1981.

A monotype is created by painting directly with oil paint or ink on a metal or stone plate, and then pressing paper onto it to make a print. It blends elements of painting and printmaking, but its defining characteristic is that it produces a unique work. Nicky Nodjoumi's 1981 monotypes offer a glimpse into the various motifs and artistic styles that would later become central to his acclaimed paintings. Furthermore, by leveraging the monotype's spontaneous and expressive nature, the artist produced a prolific number of works saturated with uninhibited political dissent, artistic fervor, and autobiographic records at the time.

The exhibition title, *Someone is coming with a flower*, refers to a sentence written in Farsi on Nodjoumi's first monotype created in 1976, which also serves as the title of the piece. This phrase expresses hope and anticipation for democracy as if foreseeing the imminent revolution. However, as reflected in the works from 1981, that hope was met with the paradoxical reality of an even more oppressive regime. This irony extended not only into Nodjoumi's personal life leading to his exile but also continues to claim the sacrifices of many to this day.

### **The 1979 Iranian Revolution**

Nicky Nodjoumi is well known for his large-scale, allegorical paintings, of which exemplary works were showcased in his first solo exhibition at Barakat Contemporary in 2018. Both figurative and abstract, the tightly bound compositions of mostly men in suits and religious gowns signifying their

status, flora and fauna, scenes from ancient Persian illustrations, and images from Western media toggle between the borders of symbolism and reality, past and present. The subjects come from a myriad of sources: real-life models including his family, friends, and himself, photos, personal experiences, Persian literature, newspaper clippings, and so forth, as if the paintings are an internalized stage of retinal information Nodjoumi soaked in from his surroundings. The ambiguity of the fissured and almost absurd collection of contexts is often pronounced through broken limbs, harlequin patterns, theatrical masks, geometric lines, and refracted surfaces, constantly pushing and pulling each other, creating irreversible tension. Through such masterfully orchestrated aesthetics, Nodjoumi has incessantly reported the structures of power and violence for over four decades. And as the span of his career suggests, his paintings have taken on very different paths in the past, of which moment is highlighted in this exhibition.

1979, the year of the Iranian Revolution, demarcates this exhibition as it was to Nicky Nodjoumi's life. Not many of his works before the revolution survived, for many reasons including the one explained later in the text. The three works from 1976 included in this exhibition are iconic works by Nicky Nodjoumi from this period, disclosing both dark and hopeful images of political resistance. Moreover, they encapsulate the artist's divergent styles: his early style of painting that begins to cohere the abstract and the figurative, and an illustrative mode he often employed for political posters and satirical cartoons.

Nicky Nodjoumi has always been political, fighting against all forms of repression. In 1968, after receiving his bachelor's degree at the Tehran University of Fine Arts, Nodjoumi received a scholarship to study at Beaux Art Paris as the city was still the dream center of art to many. But as the demonstrations of May 1968 heated up in Paris, his scholarship was cut off and he decided to move to New York. Arriving in the East Village, Nodjoumi joined the Iranian Student Association (ISA), which regularly gathered to protest against the Shah, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's dynasty. The anti-Shah movement was escalating as the regime conjoined with Western powers to aggressively urbanize Iran undermining democracy and human rights. Nicky Nodjoumi himself was a primary victim of the regime, being subject to interrogations by SAVAK, the Shah's secret police, for his ISA activities and he was prohibited from teaching and being involved in public activities in Iran. He still visited Iran quite often to exhibit his art and join the demonstrations against the Shah. Political unrest surged as intellectuals, religious figures, students, and workers of Iran all united to overthrow the Shah. On February 11, 1979, the monarchy was toppled, and soon the Islamic Republic of Iran was established with religious cleric Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini, as the Supreme Leader.

Shortly after, Nicky Nodjoumi was invited to exhibit a substantial amount of works to celebrate

the revolutionary spirits at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA). Displaying over 120 monotypes, drawings, and paintings, which included a series titled *Report on the Revolution*, the show opened in August 1980. However, his works were critical of both regimes before and after the revolution. The Islamic Republic was not less repressive if more so than the previous government, enforcing unjust imprisonment and executions of anyone who spoke against the authorities. Nodjoumi's works were immediately reviewed by the newspaper, claiming that Nodjoumi's work was a "bold vulgarity" that attacked and exploited the Muslim revolutionary forces. After the publication of this article, the museum instantly took down some of Nodjoumi's works from the exhibition, although it could not prevent an angry crowd from rushing into the museum. On September 22, 1980, he fled Tehran, after receiving a phone call from a friend that he should leave the country as soon as possible. This was just a few hours before the Iraqi invasion of Mehrabad Airport and the start of the Iran-Iraq War. Nodjoumi never saw his works at TMOCA again to this day.

### **In Exile, 1981**

Nodjoumi flew from Tehran to Miami, where his family: then-wife Nahid Hagigat, who is also a pioneering Iranian artist, and his daughter Sara, were residing in his absence. His brief stay in Miami before moving back to New York was an agitating period for him. Nodjoumi was left empty inside to come to the city where the recent past felt like an illusion. Leaving behind the revolution that once united the entire Iran, a new era of tyranny that left the very revolution in vain, so much of his artworks, and most of all, his home that he could never return to. However the hollowness did not lead to a hiatus, but a significant volume of monotypes that reflect a much more spontaneous and feverish attitude than his usual works and methodology. Unlike many of his later works, which begin with a careful staging of images from various sources, the monotypes were almost an immediate somatic transfer of his emotions and experiences. Using bold primary colors and brisk strokes, the images of the revolution persist, including the new antagonists threatening the freedom of many Iranian people. His family also frequently appears along with the landscapes of Miami. Oftentimes, the personal and political scenes are jumbled together, blurring between the two. The restless repetition of certain motifs is also noticeable, especially of the figures such as Khomeini, marching masses, and silhouettes of men amid action; together they form almost a motion film effect with the lively energies from fiery brushstrokes. All the works together vividly render Nodjoumi's unsettled anguish and the unhindered bounds between the personal and political.

On one hand, combining individual sheets to create larger works due to the printing press's size is similar to the way he currently sketches before painting. In recent paintings, he creates a grid on

which he arranges scrapped images and drawings to scale them to the actual canvas size, as one would in an architectural model. In the monotypes, Nodjoumi combined 4 to 18 sheets to create larger pieces with the seams of the papers left visible. There is a constant tension between the layers of painterly space occupied by the figures and the actual paper. While the grids heighten the logical sectioning of the picture planes such as the horizon and foreground versus the background, an individual paper cell also functions as a space for a completely new subject such as the face of a woman to appear seemingly irrelevant from what is happening in the rest of the work. Although grid scaling is a form of a classic way to copy other paintings or objects, Nicky Nodjoumi throws off the logical orientation of pictorial surfaces to recall that he is, or the world is still fractured.

The 1981 monotypes are a rare body of works on which Nicky Nodjoumi explicitly imprinted his life, daresay more fervently than other works produced before or later in his career through passionate improvisation and inexorable prolificacy. One could say he was fortunate to escape the new dictatorship, but even in the foreign land, Nicky Nodjoumi was still at the frontline of resistance. If he was not amidst the marching crowd, he was relentlessly making art that reported the ongoing devastation as if it was the sole method through which the artist saw and understood the world. And on the paper, he is not in exile but truly free.

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## Overview of the Exhibition

### 1. Date

- Tuesday, November 13th, 2024 - Sunday, January 12th, 2025
- 10:00 - 18:00 | Tuesday - Sunday

### 2. Address

- 58-4, Samcheong-ro, Jongno-gu, Seoul, Korea

### 3. Inquiry

- [contemporary@barakat.kr](mailto:contemporary@barakat.kr)
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## 1. About the Artist

### Nicky Nodjoumi (b. 1941)



© Nicky Nodjoumi

Nicky Nodjoumi (b. 1941, US, born Iran) is a contemporary artist who has used painting as his primary medium while exploring the relationship between power and violence for over 40 years. Nodjoumi participated in the 1979 Revolution in Iran and later also resisted the newly established regime, which ultimately resulted in his exile in the US. This led him to become a major driver in building a profound, political body of works taking social power structure and violence as its subject.

Nicky Nodjoumi currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York, USA. Earning a Bachelor's degree in Painting from Tehran University of Fine Arts before relocating to the United States in the late 1960s, Nodjoumi received his Master's degree in Fine Arts from The City College of New York in 1974. Nodjoumi's works were selected by the New York Times in 2020 as one of "The 25 Most Influential Works of American Protest Art Since World War II", and were recently cast in a new light in the "A Revolution on Canvas"(2023), HBO documentary film.

Nicky Nodjoumi's works are in several prominent institutional collections worldwide, including the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the British Museum in London, Guggenheim Museum in Abu Dhabi, the DePaul Art Museum in Chicago, and the National Museum of Cuba. Major exhibitions of the artist's work include those at the British Museum (2021), LA County Museum of Art (2018), Metropolitan Museum of Art (2015), and Cleveland Museum of Art (2014).

## 2. Selected Works



Nicky Nodjoui, *Someone Is Coming with a Flower*

1976, Monotype on paper

Image: 75 x 53 cm, sheet: 79.5 x 57.5 cm

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Nicky Nodjoui, *Gun and Flower*  
1981, Monotype on paper  
Image: 27.7 x 27 cm, sheet: 32.2 x 31.5 cm  
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary





Nicky Nodjoui, *Standing Tall*  
1976, Oil on canvas, 177.8 x 114.3cm  
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Nicky Nodjoui, *Walking and Talking*  
1976, Oil on canvas, 172 x 114 cm  
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



Nicky Nodjoui, *The Blue Horse*

1981, Monotype on paper

each panel - Image: 162.5 x 111.5 cm; Sheet: 167 x 116 cm

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



*Past to the Present*  
image: 162.5 x 111.5 cm  
sheet: 167 x 116 cm

*Sara Alone Among the Crowd*  
image: 162 x 111.5 cm  
sheet: 167 x 116 cm

*Sleeping Sara*  
image: 162 x 111.5 cm  
sheet: 167 x 116 cm

All works: Nicky Nodjoui, 1981, Monotype on paper

Installation view of Nicky Nodjoui: *Someone is coming with a flower*, 2024  
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary



From top Left (clockwise):

*On That Side of the Wall; Terrorist and a Dog; A Fighter with the Mask;*  
*On This Side of the Wall; Lone Dog; Gift to You*

All works:

Nicky Nodjoui, 1981, Monotype on paper,  
image: 76 x 56.5 cm, sheet: 80.5 x 61cm.

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From left (clockwise):

*Cubistic Mullah*, image: 76.5 x 56.5 cm; sheet: 81 x 61 cm;

*Love Making*, image: 56 x 38 cm, sheet: 60.5 x 42.5 cm;

*The Rooster*, image: 56 x 38 cm, sheet: 60.5 x 42.5 cm;

*Two Women*, image: 76.5 x 56.5 cm, sheet: 81 x 61cm;

*Dark Room with the Light*, image: 40.7 x 30.5 cm, sheet: 45.2 x 35 cm;

*It Started with the Play Not Talk*, image: 56 x 38 cm, sheet: 60.5 x 42.5 cm;

*A Woman Among Them*, image: 56 x 38 cm, sheet: 60.5 x 42.5 cm.

All works: Nicky Nodjoui, 1981, Monotype on paper.

Installation view of Nicky Nodjoui: *Someone is coming with a flower*, 2024

Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea

Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary

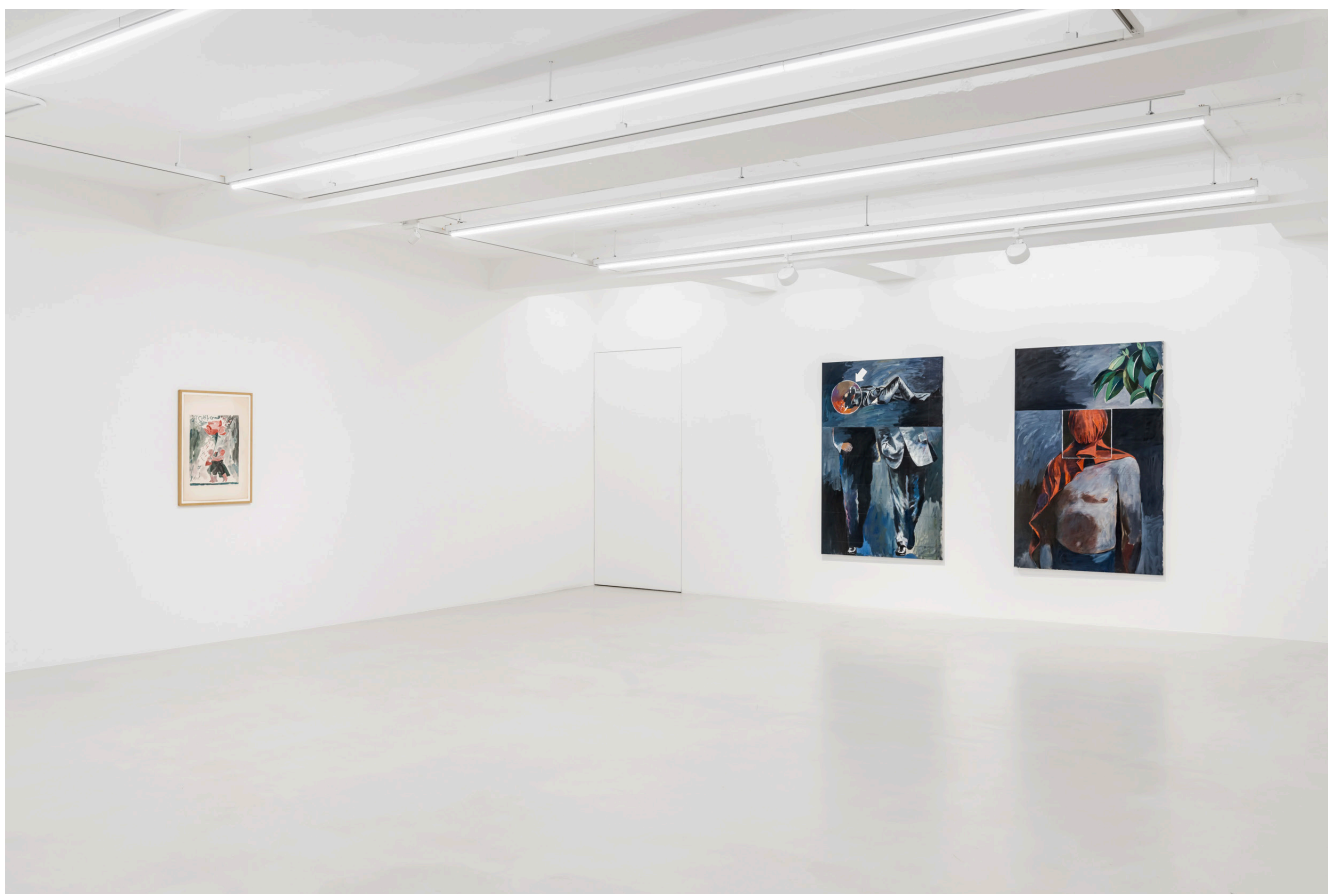


From left to right:  
*The Blue and Red; Upside Down; Dancing Man; Falling Ball; Armed Mullah; Fish Situation; Woman and Red Horse; Suppression; To Point Out; Double Edge Blade; The Frightening Man; Frightening; Black and White; Abstraction.*

All works:  
Nicky Nodjoui, 1981, Monotype on paper.  
Image: 40.7 x 30.5 cm; sheet: 45.2 x 35 cm

Installation view of Nicky Nodjoui: *Someone is coming with a flower*, 2024  
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea  
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary

### 3. Installation views



Installation view of Nicky Nodjoui: *Someone is coming with a flower*, 2024  
Barakat Contemporary, Seoul, Korea  
Image courtesy of Barakat Contemporary





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