

Franz Kaka is pleased to announce Azadeh Elmizadeh's third solo exhibition with the gallery, *Timekeepers*.

Elmizadeh is a Toronto-based, Iranian-Canadian painter whose works shift between figuration and abstraction, reflecting movements and techniques that span formal and historical precedents, from colour field painting to Persian miniatures. Rooted in historical archives and ancient allegories, she weaves an interconnected narrative between spiritual and natural bodies. This dialogical approach excavates the past, not as a site of fixed meaning, but as a generative field of reinterpretation. Her atmospheric compositions underscore the ways contingency, uncertainty, and translation can undermine prescribed cultural boundaries. Author Tammer El-Sheikh writes that Elmizadeh's work restores "the porousness and cross-cultural richness of Iranian and Islamic literary and visual arts that are very often denied in both popular and academic representations."¹

In *Timekeepers*, landscape sits at the surface of Elmizadeh's layered canvases. During an extended trip to Iran, she regularly hiked into the mountainous terrain that surrounds Tehran with bundles of canvas in tow, stopping occasionally to build the charcoal and ochre grounds that form the foundation of these paintings. Using a technique known as *frottage*, associated with the Surrealists, Elmizadeh rubbed natural pigments into the canvas as she pressed it closely against the rocky surfaces. She then rinsed and washed the fabrics in pools and streams that run down the mountainside, creating a material index that captures the interplay between pigment, fabric, geological formation, water, and sunlight. For Elmizadeh, the process foregrounds the agency of the landscape, allowing its contingent properties and material dynamics to emerge through focused interaction.

Returning to her Toronto studio with these inscribed surfaces, Elmizadeh connects the terrestrial to the transcendental through representations conjured from ancient rituals and storytelling, especially those which underscore the interconnectedness of human and non-human actors. The works draw on myths and fables that describe the physical transformation of one being into another. Throughout the exhibition a birdlike figure migrates from one canvas to the next, transformed and reborn through fire, holding its form just long enough for a glimpse of something recognizable: a flamingo, heron, or an avocet.

Extending this skyward gaze, the solitary painting *As We Weep, So Too Does the Sky* (2025) depicts a mourning ritual attributed to Anāhitā, in which a gathering of women weep together to invoke the sympathies of the sky, calling forth the respite of rainfall. Here, Elmizadeh engages a speculative approach that intertwines myth, history, and fiction, as her painting imagines this ritual as a cosmological event, fictionalizing an emergent response from the sky. Elmizadeh proposes that Iran's vast salt lakes might serve as the site for this celestial dialogue. Meanwhile, the subtle presence of salt, absorbed by the canvas's threads, acts as an indexical mark, forging a material and conceptual connection between the physical work and its actual geographic origin. Sharing this

¹ Tammer El-Sheikh, "Azadeh Elmizadeh, A Hundred Times, Why?" *BlackFlash Magazine*, 2021, Fall/Winter 38.3.

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Timekeepers

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transient state with the figures depicted, the paintings in *Timekeepers* also originate and exist between multiple localities; Tehran and Toronto; earth and sky; formed and formless.

Azadeh Elmizadeh (b. 1987, Tehran, IR; lives and works in Toronto, CA) received an MFA from the University of Guelph (2020), a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Drawing and Painting from OCAD (2016) and a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Visual Communication and Graphic Design at Tehran University (2010). Elmizadeh has presented solo and two-person exhibitions at Tara Downs (New York, US); Frieze London (UK); Sea View (Los Angeles, US); Tube Culture Hall (Milan, IT) curated by Domenico de Chirico; the Southern Alberta Art Gallery (Lethbridge, AB) and Franz Kaka (Toronto, CA). Her work has been exhibited internationally at island, Europa and Harkawik (all New York, US); Public Gallery (London, UK); Nanaimo Art Gallery; Winnipeg Art Gallery; Kamloops Art Gallery; The Blackwood (Mississauga, CA). Elmizadeh's work has been written about in Hyperallergic, Frieze, Blackflash Magazine, Canadian Art, Border Crossings, the Editorial and Elle Canada and she was the 2020 recipient of the Joseph Plaskett Award in painting.