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Maryam Hoseini
Undertow
16.05. – 11.07.2026

The undertow is invisible yet powerful. Beneath the deceptive still of the ocean's surface, the undertow lurks there, its currents coursing, threatening to yank any creature tempted to take a refreshing dip. In their current solo exhibition at Deborah Schamoni, Maryam Hoseini explores the numerous unseen forces that, like the undertow, obstinately tug on us. Within their paintings, the body is never fixed or given, but instead is continually constituted and reconstituted as it resists and yields to the energies of the external world.

Over the past decade, Hoseini has developed a visual language that takes the philosophical notion of "becoming" and renders it with visceral sensuousness. Hoseini's paintings reside in those briefest of instants when the terrifying turns thrilling, when the elegiac turns ecstatic, when the painful turns pleasurable. Hoseini takes these slivers of time and extends them into eternities. Their works confront us with realms of endless mutability. Glimpses of limbs, flowers, and mountains momentarily bubble up from a field of shifting hues and moods, dissolving into one another before retreating back to the murky depths. Rather than a rejection of Western histories of classification and categorization, Hoseini's paintings might be better understood as transporting us to a world where they have never even existed—where our bodies and most intimate selves have always bled into the physical environments we inhabit, where a feeling has always been an organ has always been a plant has always been a crevice.

This ethic of embodied becoming has its basis in the experience of how queer and migrant bodies must navigate and find joy in an otherwise hostile world. While Hoseini's paintings often give expression to the surprising pleasures to be found within fragmentation and displacement, a palpable sense of unease and disquiet reverberates through their current works, created during a time when the United States, where Hoseini resides, is waging an aggressive war on Iran, where Hoseini is from. In *Undertow*, Hoseini uses the format of multipaneled paintings as a way of creating visual narratives whose initial coherence seems poised to buckle under destabilizing pressures. Forms metamorphose across the panels' divides, splintering and changing color. Reddish organic breasts in one panel become purplish jagged spikes in the next. What first seems like symmetrical order reveals itself to be unstable and fragile, irreparably askew. In one painting, the breakages between panels are exaggerated through Hoseini's addition of wooden constructions that they deem "slitters," a portmanteau that conflates "slit" and "slither" into a term at once playful and sinister. Functioning as both gashes and sutures in the painting's composition, these slitters are a reminder that fractures are also openings through which some new way of being might emerge.

Hoseini builds up their paintings' compositions with care, beginning by tinting their wooden surfaces with pigment and then applying thicker layers of vividly colored paint. The resultant surfaces are seductively tactile, drawing the viewer into their perfectly imperfect worlds. But the viewer's eye is never given a place to rest. Fields of patterns function like structuring systems, their energies propelling our gaze across the painting, placing us into a state of continual drift as we pore over forms that are at once figurative and abstract, organic and artificial, landscape and affect, forms that are always almost coalescing into some other unnamable thing. It is a way of reminding us that our own footing is no more stable than that of the figures we glimpse—that the undertow has us in its grip, too.

Text: Andrew Wagner