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The fortunes of fate: Iranian diaspora artist Firouz FarmanFarmaian – artist profile

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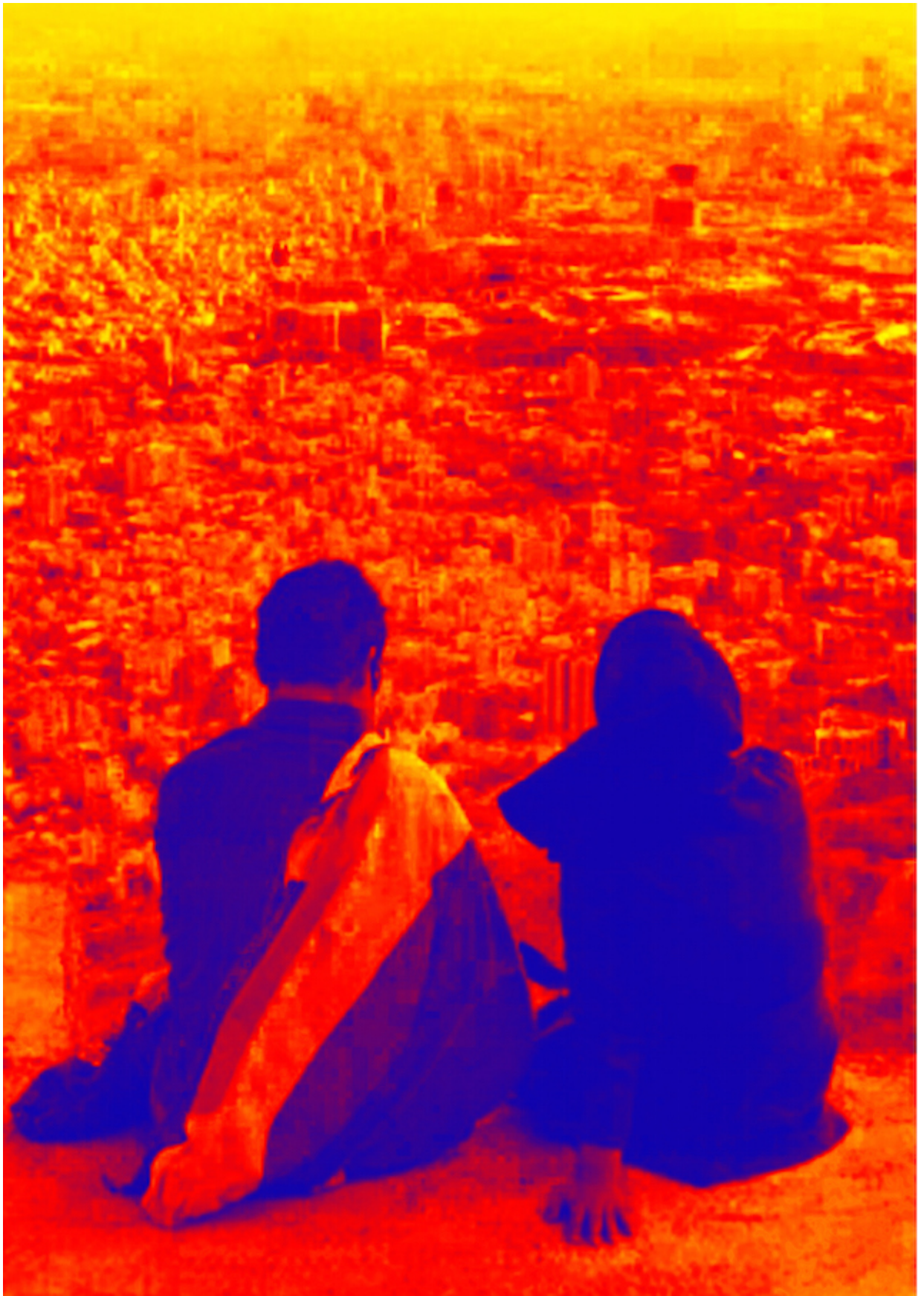
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Firouz FarmanFarmaian traces origins of paradise lost.

FarmanFarmaian's joint exhibition in New York City seeks to untangle his identity through dialogue with archival footage.

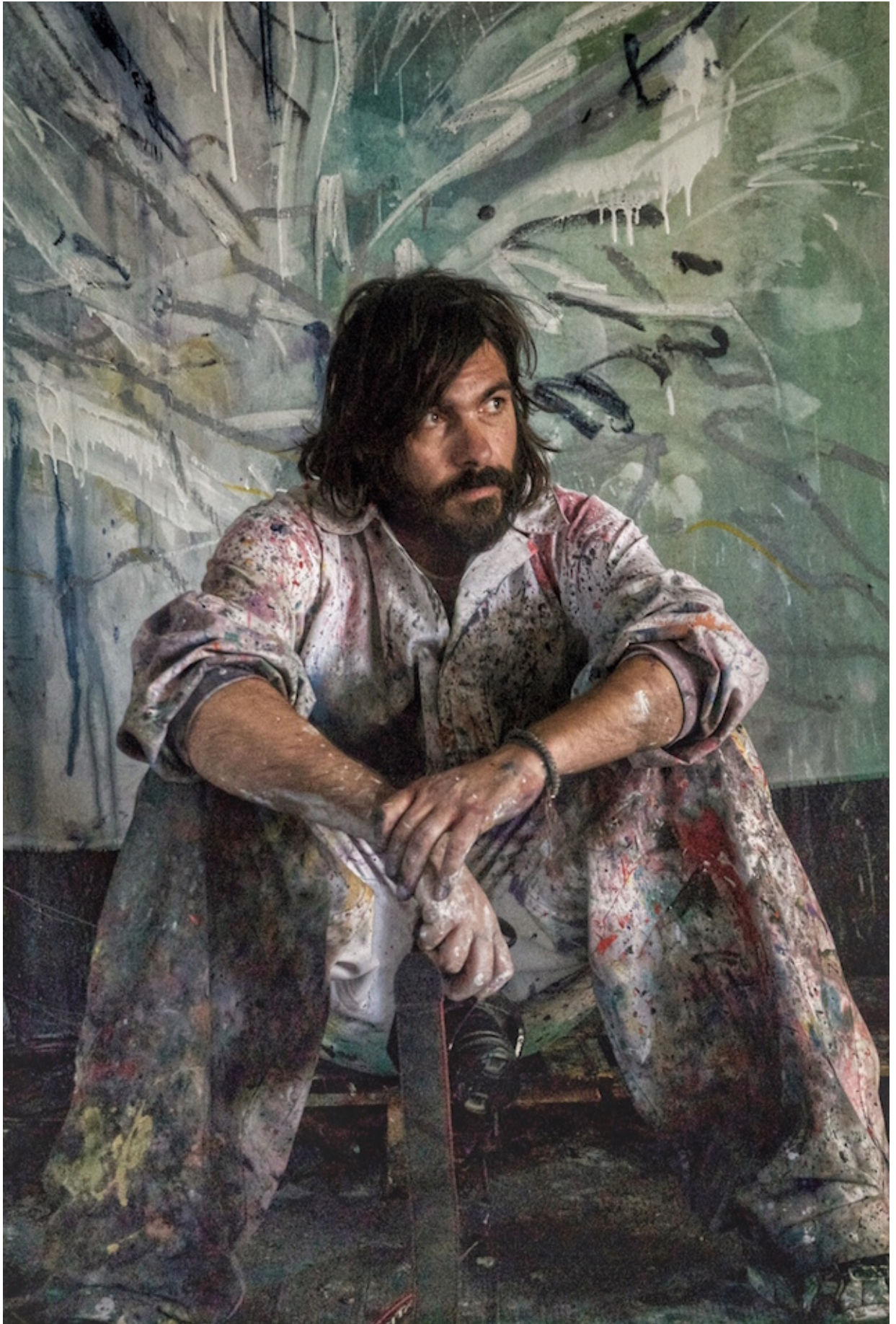


Firouz FarmanFarmaian, 'Tehran Lovers I' (Panel I), 2015, digital art on vinyl Marouflé on Dibond.
Image courtesy the artist.

Firouz FarmanFarmaian's work uncovers a lifetime in exile and the "circumstances" around the forces that shape individuals. As the artist relayed in an interview for the **Janet Rady Fine Art website**, his use of disparate materials – from sand to digital art – creates a nuanced connection between the present and the past:

Graphically and conceptually, my whole body of work is traversed by the idea of movement, married to the previous idea of trace. To work on different and ever-shifting formats is also central to my process of research. I work with canvas, nylon, cotton, vinyl, paper, metal to over-painted photographs and digital art, using natural pigment, acrylics, gouache, oil sticks, wax crayons, sand or cement with tools such as rubber gloves, sponges, brushes, paint rollers, software and sound.

Thematically, I tend to work on two main segments, identity/memory and architectonics/the natural world. I am at this moment thinking of a project linking those segments into one body of work for 2017.



Firouz FarmanFarmaian. Photo: Ivana Dachy. Image courtesy the artist.

Born in Tehran in 1973, Firouz FarmanFarmaian was a child when his family fled Iran during the rise of the Ayatollah Khomeini and settled in Paris. Through his grandfather, architect Abdol-Aziz FarmanFarmaian, the family was introduced to classical and contemporary architecture, with Firouz exploring that discipline before focusing his energy on becoming a full-time artist.

Firouz FarmanFarmaian embraced the natural world and learned about Persian poetry from his father, who spent time in Southern Spain and Morocco after the revolution. His interest and exposure to nature have been further honed through frequent visits to Finland, alongside his wife, the Finnish interior decorator Camilla FarmanFarmaian. The artist lives and works in Tarifa, Spain.



Firouz FarmanFarmaian, 'Shahzdeh AbdolAziz FarmanFarmaian (In the Memory of)', 2013, pigment, acrylic and sand on canvas, 1.20 x 1.60. Image courtesy the artist.

These aspects of identity/movement and architectonics/natural world have all had a marked impact on FarmanFarmaian's body of work and as reported in *Artscoops* e-journal **remain a touchstone throughout his oeuvre**:

While Firouz's father introduced him to oil paint, his grandfather, the Iranian architect Abdol-Aziz Farman-Farmaian, was also a major influence, introducing him to architectonics, he says, which has translated into his work. Other elements, such as Persian lore and nature, are also in evidence. Having lived in exile for three decades now, Firouz is keenly aware of what it means to be caught up in what he refers to as a "nomadic displacement of sorts".



Firouz FarmanFarmaian, 'Season Of The Land IV', 2016, pigment, acrylic, oil stick on canvas, 300 x 190.
Image courtesy the artist.

The multidisciplinary artist's work is currently being exhibited in **"Memory and Future / Future and Memory"** until 13 November 2016 at the Shirin Gallery in New York City. The joint exhibition includes work by fellow Iranian artist **Sassan Behnam Bakhtiar** and is curated by art consultant **Janet Rady**.

Of particular interest to FarmanFarmaian are images captured on Super 8 mm film from his family's summer gatherings along the Caspian Sea shortly before they were forced to flee their homeland. According to **Shirin Gallery**, the artist "appropriates" memories through these found images, while seeking a connection to a country he can vaguely recall:

In FarmanFarmaian's ongoing series, Summer at the Caspian II - V, an ongoing series of works, the artist leads us back to hazy family summers spent in the North of Iran, captured on Super 8 mm film. Too young to have witnessed these scenes personally, he appropriates the memory of this former era through snapshots, serenely faded through the prism of time. Overlain with digitally layered ground plans of the artist's family former properties on the Caspian and stained with splashes of archival mark making, these enduring images reside in an orphaned, timeless zone, not forgotten, not past.



Firouz FarmanFarmaian, 'Summer at the Caspian IV, Part 2', 2015, pigments, acrylic, digital art layered on a Super 8 mm print, laminated canvas Marouflé on Dibond, 092 x 064 cm. Image courtesy the artist.

Much like an adopted child digging for clues surrounding his/her biological parents, FarmanFarmaian seeks to shine a light on his identity and heritage through his work. This journey and exploration take a glance at a more innocent time, pregnant with possibility and with a decidedly childlike naïveté. In particular, his series *Summer at the Caspian* and *Retroprojection*, Qajar-era portraiture provide muted visions and traces of the past: each dreamlike image drawing the audience into an intimate, inner circle as silent participants.

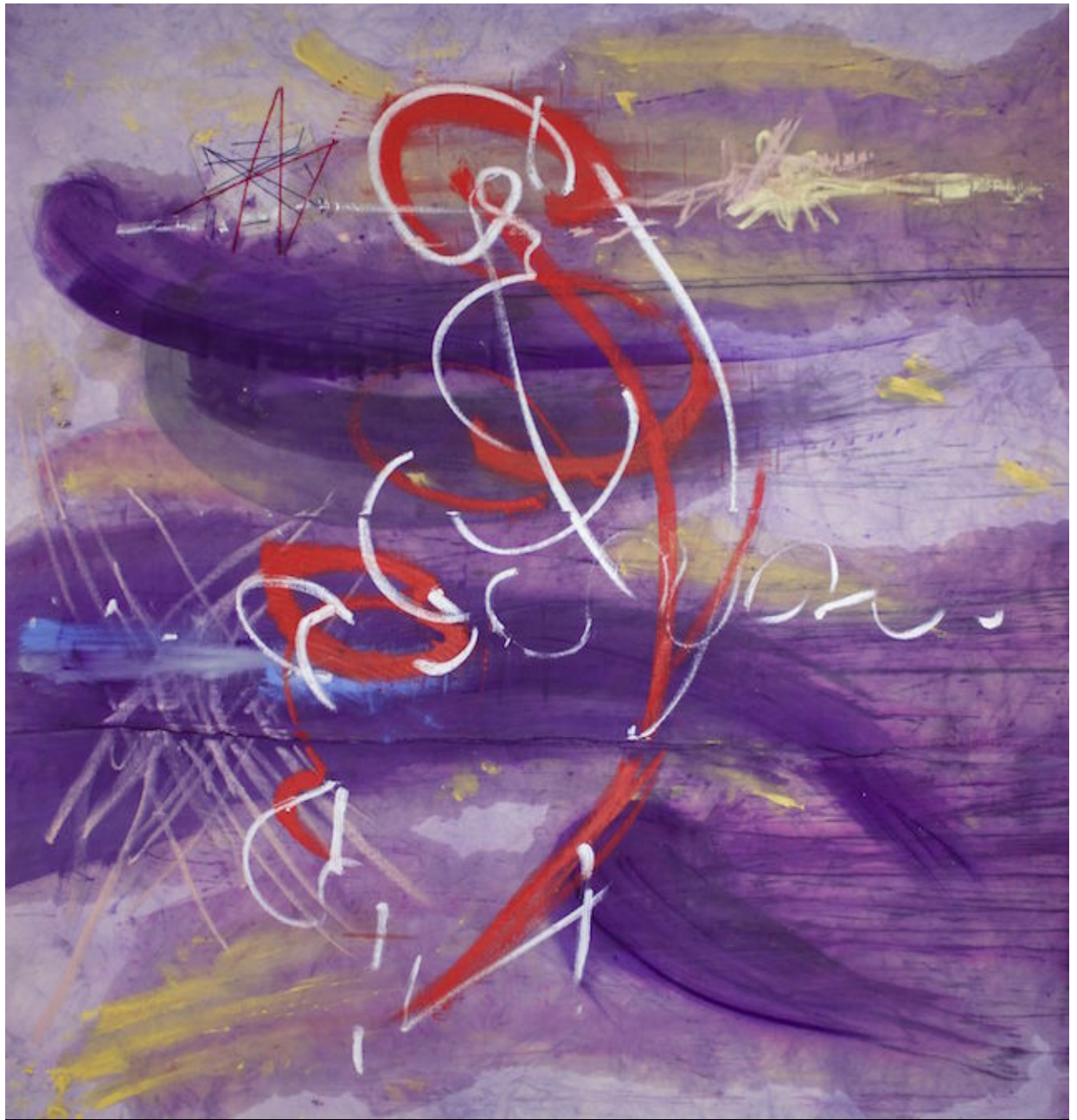


Firouz FarmanFarmaian, "Retro Projection Panel #1", 2015, photographic print, pigment and majorelle bue on canvas, 100 x 150, limited edition print. Image courtesy the artist.

The eyes of exile

As a diaspora artist, FarmanFarmaian experiences his heritage through the unique lens of an individual in exile who has not returned to his homeland for a prolonged period of time. This distance provides him with a subjective version regarding historic events and what **fellow Iranian artist Nicky Nodjoui termed as a "broader sense of clarity"**. For FarmanFarmaian, there is the nostalgia of an unknown, or better said, of what was not to be known, largely controlled by what the artist considers to be the **circumstances produced by fortune and fate**:

I like to say that history commands and I often relate to Tolstoy's determinist vision of it. It sometimes feels as if we are mere screws and bolts in an ever-turning implacable wheel. In addition, I can also relate to the old Pagan Roman concept of Fortuna. Thus, fortune and fate produce circumstances and ultimately shape our lives. If I look back and try to read what shaped our exile in the first place, it can go back as far as 19th century Persia and the Great Game.



Firouz FarmanFarmaian, 'Organic IV', 2016, pigment, acrylic, oil stick and woolen thread on Berber Tent Fabric, 1.70 x 1.80 cm. Image courtesy the artist.

Into the wild

Recently, the artist has returned to paper studies with a body of work depicting bold interpretations of the natural world. Here, abstract shapes are imbued with dynamic movement and rich texture. Brilliant blues, purples and reds stand alongside works employing a subdued colour palette. This meditative journey is fuelled by his life in Spain and yearly summers in Finland and lifelong interest in the outdoors. According to a quote from the artist's website, his series *Organics*, *Oceanic Asphalts* or *Seasons of the Land* are **inspired by the land itself** and constitute a "growing body of work" for the artist:

I returned to paper studies using pastel, aquarelle, gouache and crayon, researching new linearities inspired by movement and geology. I progressed back onto canvas introducing large Sennelier oil sticks and specially scouted Moroccan pigments. The effort has translated into a growing body of work including recent series such as Organics, Oceanic Asphalts or Seasons of the Land.



Firouz FarmanFarmaian, 'Blue Panels' (from the "Blue Taxi To Paradise" Series), 2015, Moroccan pigment and acrylic on canvas, 300 x 280 cm. Image courtesy the artist.

Performances and installations

Not to be restricted solely to the use of a paint brush, FarmanFarmaian has also spent time as the lead singer for the band Playground and has dabbled with mixed media installations, often using sound as an important component. In 2015/2016, the artist brought the *Blue Taxi to Paradise* installation to Los Angeles and Spain. In 2016, a rawer and more personal installation was unveiled after two of FarmanFarmaian's friends perished in the terrorist attack in 2015 at the Bataclan in Paris. From that tragedy, the *Dark Side Of the Masses* installation was born, with the artist confronting his feelings of rage, anguish and grief.

Firouz FarmanFarmaian | Dark Side Of the Masses | 2016.



[Click here to watch 'The Dark Side of the Masses' installation video on YouTube](#)

This mastery of technique and media, as noted on the Shirin Gallery website, “creates a unique visual rhythm” for an artist whose vision is broadly facing the future, while negotiating the past:

The raw and visceral emotion of his pieces is tempered by their material properties, which are strongly rooted in a resolute emphasis on craftsmanship. Each work is the result of careful contemplation of the techniques and tools that will achieve a singular aesthetic and emotional intention. These in turn are deftly combined to create a unique visual rhythm across a wide range of media, including painting, sculpture, film and music.

Lisa Pollman

1391

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