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REORIENT Radio – Sassan Behnam Bakhtiar

By Joobin Bekhrad

Talking art, war, and Iranian identity (amongst other things) with Monsieur B.B.

Sassan Behnam Bakhtiar. Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat. And here I am, a sucker with two names from a one-word town; but I wouldn't have it any other way.

In an age when patriotism and celebrations of Iranian heritage and history are deemed passé and old-fashioned by many in the diaspora, the work of artists such as Sassan Behnam Bakhtiar assume even greater importance and poignancy. One might expect someone like Sassan – an émigré artist and entrepreneur based in the south of France – to have by now changed his name to Sébastien and taken on a quasi-French identity, particularly as he doesn't look like your run-of-the-mill Iranian (or, as some would rather say out of shame, *Puuhhshian*). After all, when self-styled 'leaders of the Resistance' in Tehrangeles and elsewhere are routinely calling for sanctions on and armed aggression towards Iran, a person like me learns to control their expectations somewhat.

REORIENT Radio - Episode 5: Sassan Behnam Bakhtiar
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Sassan is frustrated, and rightly so; but he hasn't just been nagging at me on the telephone and not doing anything about it. Last year, he launched the Fondation Behnam Bakhtiar, a non-profit organisation dedicated to the promotion of contemporary Iranian art, and later this month will be exhibiting in New York City works from *Invincible,* his latest series exploring issues of Iranian pride, cultural preservation, and perseverance against all odds. There are things Sassan and I often talk about on the phone, but I thought I'd record a typical chat of ours just for the record. We're certainly not at our most bellicose here (we're angry young men and we know it) … but you'll get the idea.

'Memory and Future/Future and Memory' runs between October 20, 2016 and November 13, 2016 at Shirin Gallery in New York City.

Cover image: *Untitled* (detail; from the *A Reason to Fight* series).

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