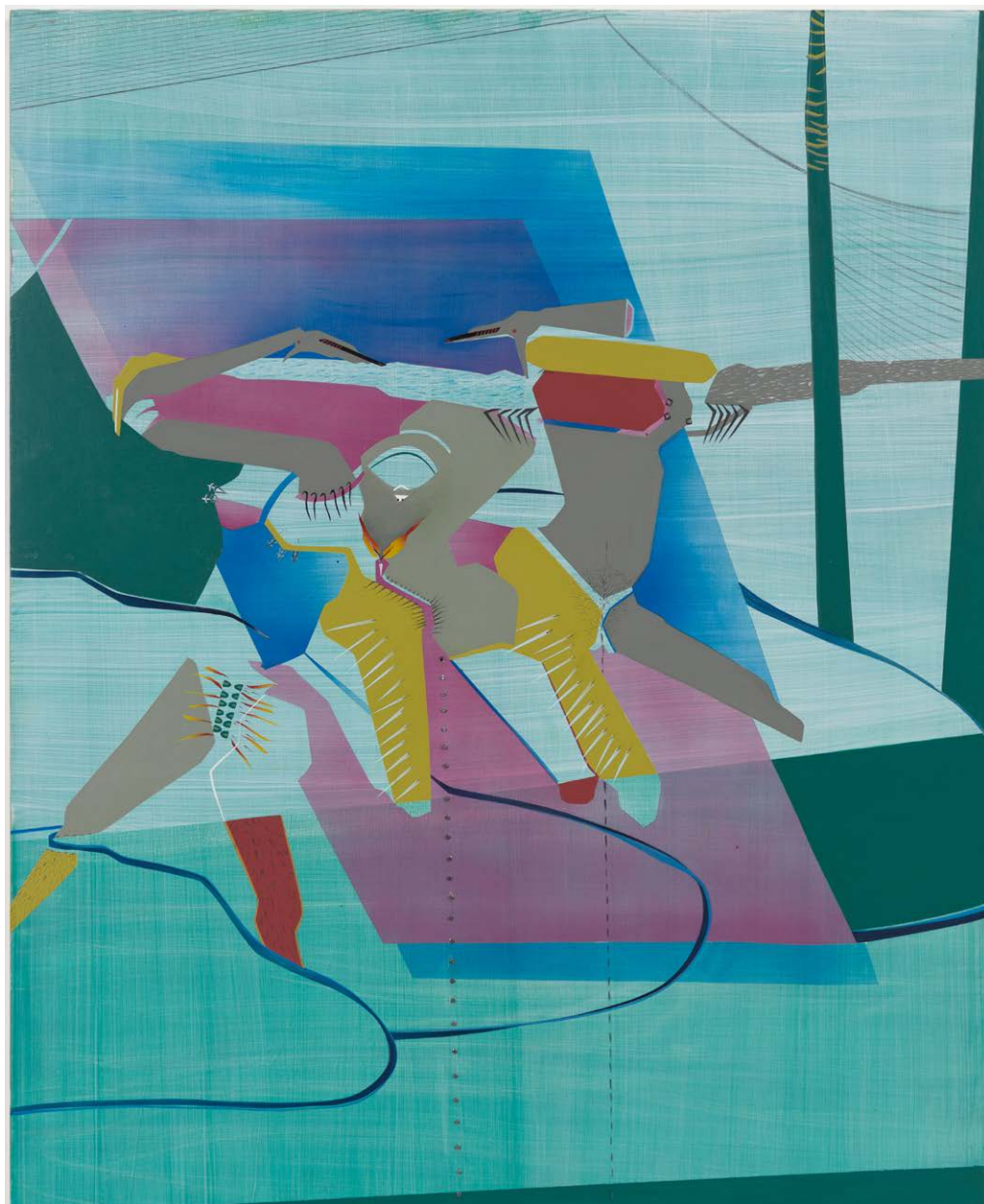


MARYAM HOSEINI

Ever inventive and questioning,
Maryam Hoseini does battle with
her tools, materials and the
wider environment.

Words by Matthew Wilcox





Maryam Hoseini. *Women with Green Lies (2)*. 2018. Acrylic, ink, nails and pencil on wood panel. 76.2 x 61 cm. Image courtesy of Rachel Uffner Gallery

"I sometimes joke around and say that I'm wrestling with my painting," says Maryam Hoseini, speaking from her studio in upstate New York. "I use wood panel, which offers a solid and strong surface for multiple layerings and constructions. I turn my panels around, bend over my painting and sometimes use an exacto knife directly onto the surface. I cut through the painting. It's a matter of trusting the material and leaning into its potential."

The Iranian-born artist has been spending the summer dedicated to her work, an intense style of composition that draws upon mythology, art history and her own life to create richly layered explorations of life and sexuality in paint. It's a theme readily apparent in work such as *Women with Green Lies (2)* from the 2018 show *We Contain Multitudes*, in which headless female forms interlock, seeming almost to tessellate, to disturbing effect.

The work typifies Hoseini's concentrated, layered style of expression, as seen in solo and two-person exhibitions that

include *After You*, Green Art Gallery, Dubai, UAE (2020–21); *Yes Sky*, Rachel Uffner Gallery, NY, USA (2020); *Body Armor*, MoMA PS1, New York, USA (2018); and *Of Strangers and Parrots*, Rachel Uffner Gallery, NY, USA (2017). Hers is a robust and powerful oeuvre that always seems to be forcing its way into new directions and refuses to be satisfied with any semblance of the status quo.

Take her choice to work on board, as she continues to explore the idea of physicality in her work. "Painting is a super-physical practice in general," says Hoseini. "There are a lot of bodily interactions, both in terms of my making process and what the viewer sees in my work." In the past her physical confrontation with her materials has gone as far as involving the hammering of nails into the surface of the paintings. "It's a really scary moment," she admits, "because at any second the wood can break and then the painting is gone."

Coming from a family of architects and designers, it is perhaps no surprise that creativity has been central to Hoseini's



Maryam Hoseini. *Sequences of Women With Long Tails (2)*. 2018. Acrylic, ink and pencil on wood panel. 60.96 x 50.8 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery



Maryam Hoseini. *Sequences of Women With Long Tails (1)*. 2018. Acrylic, ink and pencil on wood panel, 50.8 x 40.6 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery

life. Yet she recalls having to fight from the beginning to go to art school and being inspired at the age of 13 by a particular teacher. Even so, the way in which drawing was taught at the school was very traditional, which the young Hoseini found restrictive and stifling. "It becomes boring and tiring," she admits of the endless copying of masterpieces to hone the students' skills. "I had this issue that I wanted to paint, to do something outside of what I was being taught."

Hoseini went on to study for an undergraduate degree in graphic design at Sooreh Art University in Tehran, but wider horizons beckoned. At the age of 25 she moved to the USA, where she simultaneously completed post-graduate

programmes at Bard College and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Today, international sanctions and immigration bans continue to haunt Iranians as they travel abroad. Although the Biden administration has relaxed much of the rhetoric around immigration to the States, the politicisation of the issue in recent years is a clear theme in Hoseini's work. Under Trump, many diasporic artists felt unable to travel outside the US, particularly to countries such as Iran, from fear that they would be prevented from re-entering. Trapped into choosing between their homeland and their life and work, the anxiety remains. "I can't go back [to Iran] because I might never come back here," rues Hoseini.



Installation view of Maryam Hoseini's exhibition *This End the Sun* at New Museum, New York. 2021. Image courtesy of the artist

The artist is currently showing as part of the Aldrich Contemporary Art Museum exhibition, *52 Artists: A Feminist Milestone* (runs until 8 January 2023), celebrating the 51st anniversary of the historic show *Twenty Six Contemporary Women Artists*. A series of figures painted on geometrically cut board develop earlier themes, masturbatory flights of fantasy that evoke notions of femininity and censorship. Hoseini's subjects – nude, abstracted and flattened human figures – are characterised by their hyper-realistic disembodied limbs covered in hair. These details are rendered in pencil, on top of the acrylic paint, blending the two media. "There are times when I really hit the pencil against the panel and

if someone is at the studio, it's an annoying sound! I have to wear headphones," says Hoseini, as she continues to explore the idea of physicality in her work. "People might not really see through the work, because they're just facing an image, but painting is a super-physical process for me."

Her figures are not supposed to be realistic, she explains. "They're from a cartoon that never existed, avatars that suggest mechanical forms and movements. And, in a way, that gives me the freedom to make sense of the events that happen in our contemporary world, in which we are constantly surrounded by violence and power hierarchies." This violence, whether physical or sexual – or the even the 'violence of alienation' – is



Left: Maryam Hoseini. *Secrets Between Her and Her Shadow*. 2019. 61 x 46 x 3.8 cm.


Below: Maryam Hoseini. *Anxiously One on One*. 2022. Detail. Acrylic, ink and pencil on wood panel. 101.6 x 76.2 cm. Photography by Anna Shtraus. Images courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery



a key theme in Hoseini's work and its exploration is central to her worlds, both internal and external.

The impetus to explore the physical form in potentially radical ways stems perhaps from those early years at art school. "Most of my life in Iran in my early twenties was spent virtually, as there was not really an outside world with which I could identify as a woman. I spent a lot of time watching low budget American 1970s and 1980s comedy-horror movies. I was looking for unfamiliar familiarities." For an artist with such a physical sense of her work and an obsession with the body, it is ironic perhaps that she likes to spend so much time in the

virtual world. "The internet, even though very slow, was one of my few resources, to watch films, to read and find things," she explains. "That's where I got a lot of my inspirations from."

This in turn helps explain how, when exploring her own experiences in paint, Hoseini's work plays with notions of liminality, of the spaces between public and private, the physical and the virtual worlds, and of a life torn between Iran and America. Her paint extends to the sides of her panels and occasionally even to the wall beneath the work, as in her work *Women with long tails II & II* (2018), in a quest to fill – and thereby connect – those very spaces that she finds so intriguing. 

LET'S GET PHYSICAL

the body in art

In this section we explore the artistic potential of the human body and its physical properties, from the power of our hands to create and sculpt to the movement of our limbs in performance art. We also look at the social, political and symbolic aspects of the human form and its physicality, as expressed by artists in their quest to explain and understand what it means to be human.

