ALMINE RECH

Mehdi Ghadyanloo
To You from the Sun

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Born in Karaj, Iran in 1981, Mehdi Ghadyanloo combines minimalist themes and a surrealist aesthetic in his trompe-l'œil paintings, using acrylic, oil, or watercolor. He began his career as a muralist in Tehran in the early 2000s, when, following a call for proposals by the city, he produced almost one thousand gigantic wall paintings, including dreamlike landscapes and science-fiction scenes.

Designed by the Shah as a modern city organized around cars and copying the Western modernism of Los Angeles, Tehran was in the midst of large-scale modernization projects, which were abruptly suspended by the Islamic Revolution. Thus, many buildings were only half-constructed or had just one or two visible façades with big empty spaces — an ideal medium for wall painting. When the new regime took power, Islamic authorities emphasized two types of propaganda murals, either featuring the martyrs of the Revolution with bloody, heroic narratives or inspired by the Socialist realism of the Soviet Union. In this very particular political and aesthetic context, Mehdi Ghadyanloo developed his surrealist-inspired trompe-l'œil frescoes, which were often ambiguous and always dreamlike, and which represented a utopian rebellion against the grayness of daily life — a blue sky amidst atmospheric pollution and trees and horses where there was only gloomy concrete. As director Agnès Varda noted with tenderness and humor in her 1981 documentary *Mur Murs* about the murals of Los Angeles: "The walls that already had ears have eyes and a mouth — they say everything."

Mehdi Ghadyanloo uses the trompe l'œil technique of his murals to compose his recent paintings, and they take on the shape of square boxes with dreamlike imagery and hyperrealistic technique. Their architectural appearance reflects the artist's investigation into designing and representing space on the canvas, evoking the visual and metaphysical constructions of Giorgio de Chirico. Ghadyanloo's meticulous technique reminds us that in his youth he painted Persian miniatures in Iran. Each of his painting-boxes reveals his brilliant ability to trick our eyes and our perception of reality. On what we thought was a flat surface, there appears a fenced-in space or a maze of slides. We thought the painting was closed off, but here a halo of light seems to pass through it. Indeed, shadow and light overlap and challenge each other endlessly in Ghadyanloo's work, and the symbolism of the movement from darkness to light is at the heart of his vision. All the elements that he depicts in his paintings — ladders, fences, holes in the ceiling — are methods of representing a way out, a kind of hope. This spiritual iconographic effort seems to echo Persian poetry, especially the writing of the famous poet Rumi (1207-1273), whose work contains many references to light, elevation, and the triptych inspired by Sufi philosophy that combines the void, the minimal, and the spiritual.

- Martha Kirszenbaum

O you, moon who has risen
In the shadows of the night
Now the light of her lamps
*Has conquered the brilliance of the sun**[1]***

[1] Rumi, *Cette Lumière Est Mon Désir: Le Livre de Shams de Tabriz*, Poésie Gallimard: 2020.