ALMINE RECH

Mehdi Ghadyanloo

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Mehdi Ghadyanloo, who began his career making public art, is considered one of the leading artists of the Middle East. Known in particular for his monumental trompe-l'œil murals in downtown Tehran, Ghadyanloo also creates works on canvas with surrealist and minimalist themes, evoking René Magritte or Giorgio de Chirico.

In recent work shown in Almine Rech's project space in Paris, Ghadyanloo has created a series of closed spaces, playgrounds, geometrical cubes, spiral staircases, and architectural environments.

These dioramas are expertly inscribed on the canvas and they function as intriguing narratives. The lines are meticulously detailed, as Ghadyanloo approaches these works as illustrations. Through his mastery of shadow and his use of the empty/full dichotomy, the artist transforms a flat surface into a veritable labyrinth. Ghadyanloo plays with the depth of his canvases in a subtle way: a master at manipulating light, he uses angular elements and shadows to tone down his approach, creating a subdued atmosphere while hollowing out space within it.

While playfulness is foregrounded in this series of dizzying slides, the materials are industrial, impressive, almost intimidating. An optimistic spirit is felt in the essence of his art, but is immediately shadowed by the sometimes dark and melancholy content of Ghadyanloo's work: "I want to create an atmosphere at a specific moment in time where everything is suspended like the calm before the looming storm," the artist says.

Color plays an essential role and immediately affects the reception of pieces such as *The State of Light* or *The Last Soldier*. The artist fills these memories with exuberant color (as in *The Lost Paradise*), as if to contrast with their confined, airless quality. Ghadyanloo's art evokes his memories of life in small square rooms with dim lighting, where his family sought refuge during the Iran-Iraq War.

The space closes in on the viewer even more in *Goodmorning, Midnight*, which is from the series *The Fence*, where a fence unequivocally demarcates the space and its sphere of freedom.

Although any openings seem unreachable, like *The Hope Monument* and its multiple ladders, the artist seems to offer an alternative to this captivity: Ghadyanloo is dedicated to offering vanishing points in all his spaces; a zenithal abyss of varying width is found in each of his paintings, a strong symbol of hope that runs throughout his work.

Ghadyanloo's aesthetic evokes landscapes from a different world, and his spiral-shaped spaces become the reflection of the distant recesses of our psyche, adopting the minimalistic lines of 20th-century modernist architecture represented by Le Corbusier. However, Ghadyanloo's paintings offer an example of hope unearthed in the darkest places.

- Milena Oldfield