



99¢

Reza Farkhondeh

Curated by: Mohammed Rashid Al-Thani

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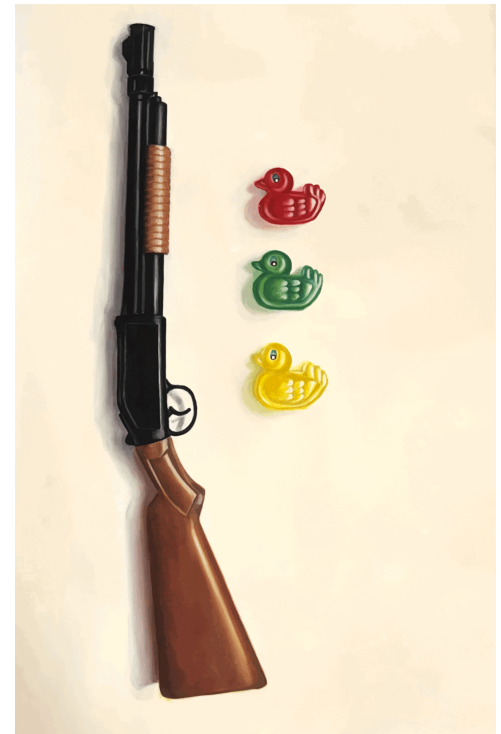
Institute of Arab and Islamic Art

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IAIA is pleased to present the 99¢, first institutional solo exhibition of Reza Farkhondeh in the United States of America. This exhibition brings together a series of monumental oil paintings and works on paper, produced between 1993 and 1996, highlighting Farkhondeh's series '99 Cent Objects'. Depicting American toys mass-produced in China, this series probes the complexities of consumer culture. Tracing the relationship between play and propaganda, Farkhondeh reveals the ideologies inherent to these ostensibly benign objects. Born in Iran, Farkhondeh approaches these objects from outside of the culture that produced them, exposing what familiarity had made invisible to those within: that to give a child a toy soldier is to begin their education. The formal grandeur of these paintings — the meticulous rendering of molded plastic, the monumental scale, the salon seriousness — arrests this invisibility. These objects — the toys that line the bins of 99-cent stores — carry within them the full weight of globalization, ideology, and the transmission of power.

Trained at the Villa Arson in Nice, France, Farkhondeh brings to this series the full inheritance of European salon painting. The toys Farkhondeh painted — weapons, vehicles, and hyper-feminine dolls — constitute the first symbolic vocabulary handed to children in the West. These apparently innocuous items expose the cracks in America's veneer — the gun evokes wars overseas, race cars miniaturise a lifestyle of inaccessible affluence, and dolls reflect Eurocentric beauty standards. Stamped 'Made in China,' the objects Farkhondeh paints are simultaneously artifacts of American militarist culture and products of the accelerating global supply chain of the 1990s. Farkhondeh's objects remain a prescient meditation on a reliance that has only deepened. By applying the most labor-intensive medium in Western art history to disposable products of global capitalism, Farkhondeh exposes the deep contradictions of a culture that trains its children through play, then forgets what it has taught them.

Fascinated by the glitches and errors of mass production — the seam where the mold split, the colour slightly off, the proportions not quite resolving — he gives soul to these items devoid of soul, imbuing each one with the isolated dignity of a portrait subject. These objects are replicas of expensive toys, mass-produced at speed for those who cannot afford the original; the flaw is not incidental, it is the class argument made visible in plastic. Rendered with impassioned precision, at a scale that confronts the viewer, Farkhondeh evokes the interior experience of childhood, when these objects were encased in a patina of preciousness. Resisting Pop Art's irony and refusing institutional critique's distance, Farkhondeh insists on painting's oldest power: to make ordinary things impossible to look away from.



Mission

The Institute of Arab and Islamic Art (IAIA) is an independent, non-profit center that promotes and advances the artistic and cultural dialogue between New York City and the Arab and Islamic worlds. Through outreach programs, a multidisciplinary exhibition space, a knowledge-building facility, residency program and an emphasis on collaborations with cultural organizations, IAIA provides a convivial, welcoming environment to learn about and engage with an often over-simplified culture.

Reza Farkhondeh: *Born in Iran, Reza Farkhondeh lives and works in New York. He studied Economics before completing a BFA in painting at the Beaux-Arts de Dijon and an MFA in video and short film at the Villa Arson in Nice. He also studied at the Institut des Hautes Études en Arts Plastiques in Paris. Farkhondeh has maintained a long-standing collaboration with artist Ghada Amer, producing works in which the boundaries of authorship dissolve — pieces begun by one artist and completed by the other, image and gesture entering into dynamic conversation. He has exhibited at the 4th International Istanbul Biennale and held solo shows at Rizzo Gallery, Paris, Singapore Tyler Print Institute, Singapore, Kukje Gallery, Seoul, Tina Kim, New York and Pace Prints, New York*

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