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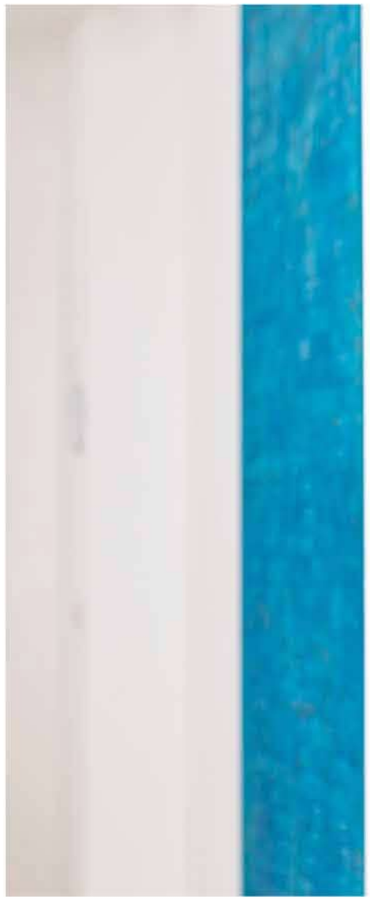
LIMITED EDITION COVER ART BY SARA SHAKEEL



BEHIND THE CANVAS

A new Monte Carlo gallery has its eye on bettering society through art

Art lovers have a new address in Monte Carlo to add to their must-visit list in Monaco – Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar, which has just opened with punch. Featuring the artwork of Iranian-American artist Farzad Kohan, whose exhibition *Human Being, Being Human* explores the lived experience, the inaugural event set the tone for the gallery's future endeavours. Founded and directed by art connoisseur Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar, it aims to be much more than just an art space; as well as promoting international artists, the gallery will partner with charities and work to improve art dialogue in the French Riviera, as its founder explains here.

How did you get involved in your current work? Since 2009, I have been the curator of the permanent collection for Fondation Behnam-Bakhtiar, which is uniquely focused on Iranian modern and contemporary art. In parallel, I have been building our private collection, which started with Iranian art and later branched out to include African and Western contemporary art.

As a passionate art lover, I have also enjoyed hosting an array of non-profit functions in support of the arts in our Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat residence. All of these activities eventually led me to the creation of Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar in Monaco as I believe the Principality provides a wonderful platform for showcasing talent and bringing artists and collectors together.

Why did you chose Farzad Kohan for your inaugural exhibition? Farzad's works are truly universal as they explore themes we can all connect to – love, kindness and human identity. I thought such connectivity would be a wonderful spirit to have for the opening exhibition. He layers, then strips, abstract works through painting, creating weathered surfaces. Allusions to the passage of time, gradual transformations and hidden stories are found in the tactile details.

How do his pieces explore these themes? The strength of these works lies in the emotions they radiate through a unique blend of colour and typography. The painting *Matters*, for example, has "kindness" written all over it in Farzad's signature style.

What are the messages he is trying to convey? Text is central to Farzad's compositions; he uses English and Farsi script to add narrative elements. In *Human Being, Being Human*, he describes moments of realisation, as well as longing and desire, with repetitive statements that are written across his works. The messages correspond with the colour schemes and textured surfaces of specific works, with abstraction used to detail the various sensations of humanity. The works exhibited are at once joyous, uplifting and representative of an enriched life experience. You interpret and conclude the message with your psyche.

How do you plan to further art dialogue in the French Riviera? The gallery's programming includes a non-profit arts scheme, which involves working closely with the Principality's charity organisations. Additionally, Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar runs its own publishing house that produces books and catalogues to accompany its exhibitions, contributing to a wider art historical discourse by inviting curators and writers to collaborate.

> "The strength of these works lies in the emotions they radiate through colour and typography"

Tell us more about the gallery's social initiatives. It is very important for me to ensure that the gallery is a platform that inspires change and highlights the importance of social responsibility. For every exhibition we select an organisation that makes this world a better place, and donate a portion of the proceeds.

mariabehnambakhtiar.com

– RIMA ALSAMMARAE