INTENSE EMOTION

GALERIE MARIA BEHNAM-BAKHTIAR WILL BE HOME TO FRENCH ABSTRACT ARTIST MARIE-CÉCILE APTEL'S FIRST EXHIBITION IN THE PRINCIPALITY OF MONACO. FOUNDER **MARIA BEHNAM-BAKHTIAR** *SPEAKS TO* **AYESHA SHEHMIR** *ABOUT WHY THE LARGE-SCALE WORKS ARE AN EXAMPLE OF QUINTESSENTIALLY FRENCH JOIE DE VIVRE*

Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar in her eponymous gallery with works by Marie-Cécile Aptel

Situated in the Principality of Monaco in Monte-Carlo, the newly launched Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar is set to house its second exhibition entitled Conveyance of Joy by famed French abstract expressionist Marie-Cécile Aptel.

The eponymous gallery, founded by Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar – who has been part of the international art scene since 2009 – is also set to participate in this year's edition of Monaco Art Week. "Since our launch in December last year we have become an active player in Monaco's exciting art scene, delighted by the warm welcome we received from the residents of the principality," says Behnam-Bakhtiar. The space is located steps away from Nouveau Musée National de Monaco and the Grimaldi Forum, which houses the yearly prominent artmonte-carlo fair.

On view from 26 March until 22 May 2020, Conveyance of Joy will see a selection of large-scale abstract works spanning over 15 years of Aptel's practice, marking the artist's first show in the Principality of Monaco. "The works are united by a definite emotion the artist felt at the time of their creation – an intense joy, either spontaneous or experienced as a result of a conscious pursuit in challenging darker times," explains Behnam-Bakhtiar. "The scale of works is all-enveloping, emanating the spirit of exultation throughout the space and onto the viewer. They are a wonderful find for anyone looking to infuse some pulsating energy into their surroundings."

Comprising vivid colours and deep lines, the works are the embodiment of "quintessentially French joie de vivre," as Behnam-Bakhtiar describes. "Evidently multi-layered, but light handed and free, the works often feature deliberately childlike details, adding unrestrained sensibility to Aptel's canvases." she says. Several featured works recall classroom blackboards with free-flowing scribbles, a testament to innocence, mischievous behaviour and freedom of the inner self. To avoid restrictions that are often placed by labels, the works are all left untitled to enable a direct, intimate dialogue between the artwork and viewer, "leaving interpretation to the latter."

Aptel has exhibited internationally and her works have been included in a number of significant public and private art collections

such as the Mairie of Paris, EDF Foundation, FRAC Haute-Normandie, and Jean-Jacques Lesgourgues (Quasar Collection). The artist also had a very successful collaboration with renowned French luxury fabric house Pierre Frey, initiated by the company's president and creative director Patrick Frey when he reproduced one of Aptel's paintings from his collection on a linen fabric. Entitled *Arty,* the fabric rapidly became an iconic design of the house and a renowned creation in the world of design.

Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar's very first exhibition, Human Being, Being Human, by Los Angeles-based artist Farzad Kohan, launched 6 December last year, exploring themes of humanity, love and kindness.

Aside from the scheduled programming, the gallery serves as a platform to inspire perpetual positive change in society through art and is a beacon of the importance of social responsibility. A portion of the proceeds from every exhibition held within the space contributes to selected organisations such as AMADE (Association Mondiale des Amis de L'Enfance) and MAP (Monaco Aide et Presence). Ultimately, Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar focuses on contemporary and modern art, with an emphasis on the aesthetic significance of the works, while the philanthropic benefits gained from their sales contribute to a better world. In future, the space will see a range of exhibitions by artists from around the world, established and emerging. "We are planning an array of exciting exhibitions with artists that we source all over the globe, many of whom will make history by representing the artistic voice of their native country for the first time in the Principality of Monaco," says Behnam-Bakhtiar. *Conveyance of Joy by Marie-Cécile Aptel is on view from 26 March until 22 May 2020 at Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar, Monte-Carlo, Principality of Monaco* ■ *mariabehnambakhtiar.com*

Clockwise from left: Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar; Marie-Cécile Aptel. *Untitled*. 2017. (Recto/Verso) 186x 134cm. Acrylic and Oil Sticks on Canvas; *Untitled*. 2006. Acrylic on Canvas. 215,5x225,5cm; Facing page: Marie-Cécile Aptel. *Untitled.* 2013. Acrylic on canvas. 150x150cm

Images by Loic Thebaud. Courtesy of Galerie Maria Behnam-Bakhtiar

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