

KOUROSH SALEHI'S ORDER IN CHAOS

By: Janet Rady

To harmonise the chaos, to confine the disorder, orbit the indiscriminate and a Dance or a trance around the chaotic turmoil.

Kourosh Salehi's new portfolio, whilst seemingly departing from the figurative imagery of his previous work, continues the theme of contrast and conflict. The splattered /splashed background paint overlaid with a well-defined circle(s) serves to represent contrast and contradiction, thereby conveying a strong binary message.

It is an emotional response to the socio-political turmoil and unrest felt by the painter: the artist clearly seeking to overlay order and contain disarray.

I first met Kourosh at the time of his exhibition in London entitled 'Turquoise Memories' in 2009 and was immediately enthralled by his work. Here was an artist whom I initially found difficult to place. Trained in the classical mode in Iran, Kourosh left his homeland in 1978 to continue his instruction in London, originally as an artist and subsequently qualifying as an architect in 1993. Unlike other Iranian diaspora artists whose work is often steeped in sentimental mythology, Sufi practice or blatant politics, Kourosh's was none of these. His hybridity of belonging, evident in both the form and content of his work, evinced a meticulous cross-fertilization of cultures, transcending ancient and modern, east and west.

Born in Iran (Abadan), raised in London, searching for his artistic roots, like many artists of his generation Kourosh Salehi is familiar with displacement. Identity plays a significant role in Salehi's work. He is part of a group of post-revolution Iranian artists who have merged East-Western traditions and have invented a new language of exile, and in this regard is considered as one of the most significant painters of his generation.

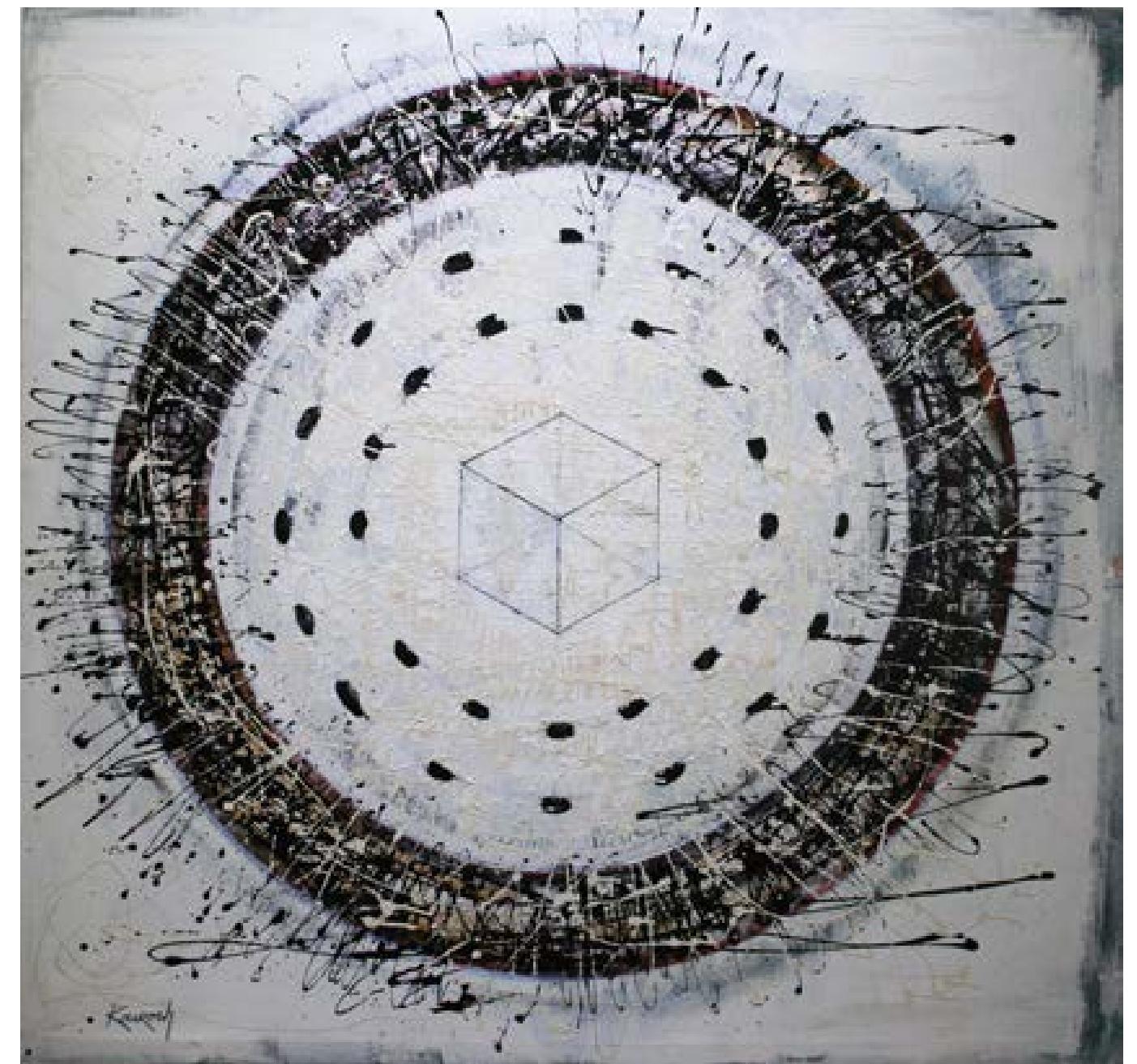
Kourosh chooses to combine his childhood memories and mementos, extracts from letters, diaries and photographs with hints of western consumerism in raw painterly compositions and haunting videos. Often featuring single or repetitive figures of women shrouded in chadors, maybe juxtaposed with the quintessentially Iranian pomegranate, or a female portrait draped in the American flag (with eyes obscured, reminiscent of the American artist John Baldassari), we are led into a subtly disturbing world.

We are drawn into the canvases and try to read his personal letters written in obscured text. We witness his family albums and become an observer in the process where old photographs, along with precious letters have been exhumed and displayed for all to witness.

This is not a simplistic social commentary on the status of women in Iran or indeed in the West, indeed it is to be read on a higher plane. Here nostalgia clashes with insecurity, cultural tradition with inevitable globalization. Despite the work's ostensibly Iranian iconography, Kourosh delivers a universal message, reminding us that we are all products of our past, with which we need to come to terms in order to navigate our future successfully.

ABOUT THE WRITER

Janet Rady is a gallery director, curator and specialist in contemporary art from the Middle East, with over twenty five years' experience of the International Art Market including Leading Auction Houses and Major commercial Galleries.



Trance 1, 2015, oil on canvas, 150x150cm. Courtesy of the artist and Salwa Zaidan Gallery.