

CHARLES DESMARAIS *Art*

Talepasand on pleasure, Iran

Serious art galleries don't seem to know just what to do with the work of Taravat Talepasand, and I can't say I blame them. Nudity is easy, but art that references pornography is harder to present in a polite venue. Drugs, ditto.

Toughest of all, however, is the matter of blasphemy, as it might be interpreted by some conservative adherents of Islam. Not that I would be the one to judge, but Talepasand uses religious symbols in much of her work, as she does in "Yeki Bood, Yeki Nabood, Once Was, Once Wasn't," an exhibition at Jack Fischer Gallery through June 30.

The daughter of Iranian parents, Talepasand was born in the United States in 1979. She is now the chair of the painting department at the San Francisco Art Institute. (Full disclosure: She was appointed to the SFAI faculty well after my tenure as president there.)

There have been some excellent small exhibitions of her work in the Bay Area — this is one of them — and it was announced this week that her work would be included in the

Taravat Talepasand: "Yeki Bood, Yeki Nabood, Once Was, Once Wasn't": 11:00 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Tuesdays-Saturdays. Through June 30. Free. Jack Fischer Gallery, 1275 Minnesota St., S.F. 415-522-1178. www.jackfischergallery.com

important "Bay Area Now" exhibition at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts this fall. Yet the complexity of ideas and breadth of themes, treated in a wide variety of media, makes me think that this is an artist ready for a broader survey — all the more called for because each show is quite different from the last, and there's no overarching verbal rap meant to neatly tie it all together.

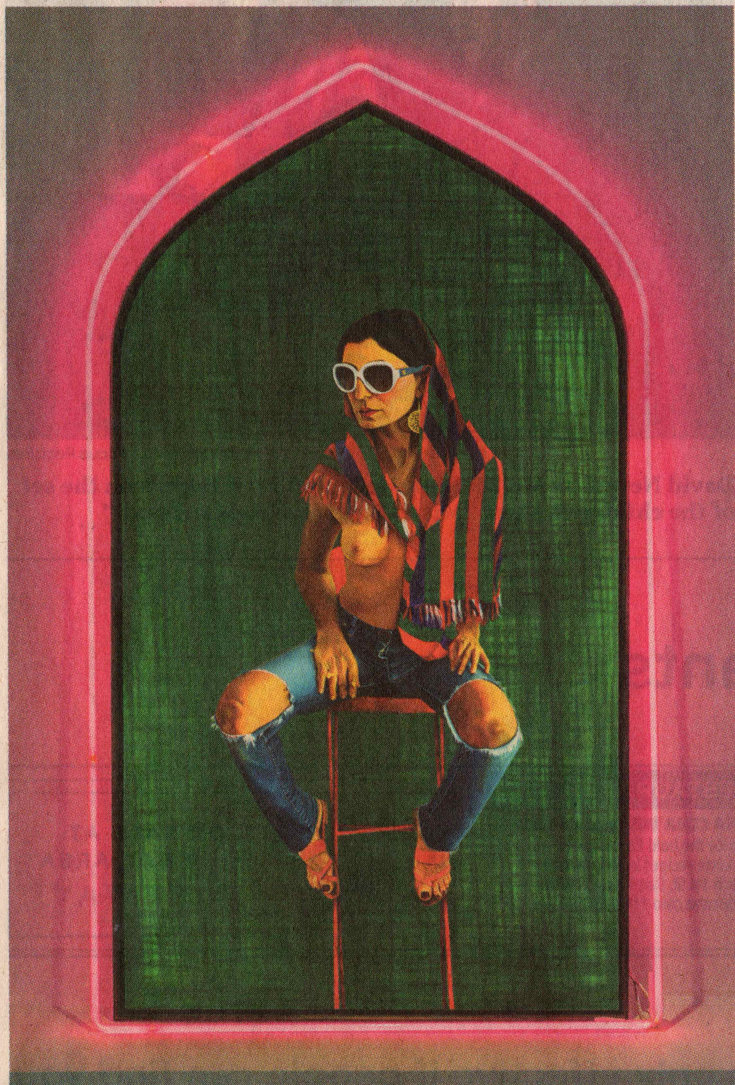
For this outing, the artist expands on the Persian tradition of "Fal-e Hafez," or consulting tarot-like illustrated cards based on the writings of the 14th century Sufi mystic and poet Hafez. Lurid pink canvases painted with blue legends in Farsi, bedecked with images of beautiful young women, line two walls of the small gallery. At the end of the room

is a gaudy portrait of a woman with a shawl on her head, torn jeans and a bared breast (the artist's self-portrait), under a pointed arch of pink neon.

Reading translations of the texts with their references to wine and pleasure, those familiar with the Old Testament might think of the Song of Songs, the Bible's sexy metaphor for divine love. Talepasand's art deals in symbols, too, where the free pursuit of pleasure stands for self-determination. She has made here a sacred space of a sort, but one that is assuredly out of step with current official Iranian policy, as we understand it, on alcohol, popular culture and the place of women.

Which helps explain the title, which can be read in joyous terms or baleful, of that colorful picture glowingly commanding the room. "Westoxicated" is its name.

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Jack Fischer Gallery

Taravat Talepasand, "Westoxicated" (2018)