

LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

"A personal exhibition by Aida Mahmudova opens in New York." *Vestnik Kavkaza*. (June 1, 2015).



A personal exhibition by Aida Mahmudova opens in New York

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In the Leila Heller Gallery in New York a personal exhibition entitled 'Passing By...', by the famous Azerbaijani artist Aida Mahmudova took place. The gala reception on the occasion of the opening of the exhibition took place on May 28, 18:00-20:00, at 568 W 25th Street.

Opening day was May 28, and it coincided with the 97th anniversary of the proclamation of the Republic of Azerbaijan, which gave the event a special symbolism. On this day the first democratic republic in the Middle East was created. Aida herself stressed: "Being parallel with the glorious date gave me a special impetus."

The opening of the exhibition took place in a democratic format, as is the custom in New York. The lack of official speeches and ceremonies was compensated for by the informality which prevailed at the event. Guests moved around a spacious exhibition space, vividly discussing the work which was brought to their attention, sharing their impressions.

Shirin Neshat, a famous artist:

I know Aida as the founder of the Yarat organization, and very happy today that I discovered her paintings. The work looks simply amazing, and I am sure that the exhibition will be a great success in New York – here people are fond of painting!

Emilia Kabakov, artist, wife of Ilya Kabakov:

This is a significant and important exhibition, which consists of large canvases. Especially nice to visit it after we saw the project Yarat in Venice – it was one of the best in the whole Biennale. I'm sorry that Ilya was not able to join me and see this show, but he had a good reason. We congratulate Aida from our hearts!

Benjamin Genochchio, writer, critic, editor in chief of the portal ArtNet.com:

The works are stunning and very much remind me of the landscapes of Absheron. I went to Baku two and a half years ago to one of the events of the Yarat, but I had not been to Aida's studio. The more pleased I am now to see her works, which are impregnated with the spirit of Baku. I believe that she is able to see the scenic, sometimes forgotten corners of the city and reflect their aesthetics in her works.

Leila Heller, gallery owner:

Landscape is a universal phenomenon itself, sea and trees in the works of artists are not uncommon, but in the paintings of Aida an artistic image of Azerbaijan, Absheron, Baku absolutely clearly lurks.

Artist Aga Huseynov:

In the exposed project 'Passing By...', there are installations of paintings and three-dimensional objects, which are harmoniously merged: the idea, analysis, development and implementation are remarkable.

In today's art in the age of repetitions and citations from the recent past, in the works of Aida the viewer sees an artist with a strong identity, with a sharp private eye.

Her paintings, with all the emotional and very truthful expressionism, seem like diagrams, where the artist skillfully constructs her memories, experiences and reflection on the strange and wonderful world around us.

Aida Mahmudova is a graduate of Central Saint Martin's University of the Arts in London. A participant in numerous art exhibitions in Azerbaijan, Europe and now in the United States. In one of his articles the Italian artist and curator Pietro Finella called New York's Chelsea neighborhood a phenomenal project in contemporary art. In these days installation of Aida Mahmudova "Passing By ..." is part of this unique project.

Nargiz Pashayeva:

I would not be mistaken if I say that my daughter Aida is one of those people who are more able and do more than tell and show. She has been drawing from an early age. But this is not important, because as a child and even after almost everyone is painting, but Aida is a true professional who has managed to combine the academic, theoretical basic knowledge, which she received while studying and living in London for a long time, with the innate talent of an artist. For me the important thing is that she now has the moral right to call herself an artist. And it did not happen suddenly, as during her entire adult life she has been moving towards this step by step, learning, working tirelessly, for almost 20 years. I appreciate professionalism and steadfastness in people, selfless love for one's profession, whatever it may be, whether artist or bus driver – if he is a professional, be sure he always deserves more. A professional is never afraid to say – I do not know how, I do not know why, I won't do it. But this differentiates him from the amateur, who always say – I can, I want to and I will.

I am happy that Aida is a serious, hard-working and self-critical person in her profession. Beside her you can feel confident, because she deserved her success by herself. The New York exhibition has once again shown and proved it. I saw her there being recognized and accepted to the professional circles of the city – the center of the world of contemporary art. At the exhibition, many do not know that I am her mother, so they approached and asked if I knew her closely, and then sincerely and truly praised her work, praised her as an artist. On this day, I also want to praise her, the more so because, as a rule, I don't do it very often, and say, "Bravo".

Opening day was attended by representatives of museums and institutions, critics, gallery owners, artists and well-known diplomatic figures. Among the guests were well-known artists Shirin Neshat, Shoji Azari, Afruz Amiga, Emilia Kabakov, director of the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington, Melissa Chiu, Dr Habil Balaga Shiva, director of the Barbara Gladstone Gallery Carolyn Ray and other representatives of the world art community. Also among the guests was the permanent representative of Azerbaijan to the UN, Yashar Aliyev, and the Azerbaijani Ambassador to the US, Elin Suleymanov. To celebrate the opening more than three hundred people came.

The exhibition attracted a lot of media attention – the magazine Interview, founded by Andy Warhol in 1969, took a long interview with the artist, and the authoritative resource PaperMag included 'Passing by...' on the list of ten best new shows in New York. The exhibition will run until July 3.

The exhibition presented eight new works to the public. These paintings, like her previous works, thematically built on issues such as nostalgia and memory. Aida Mahmudova draws inspiration for her work from nature and the landscapes of Absheron in Azerbaijan, where she was born and currently lives and works.

This series of works by Aida Mahmudova explores the passing nature of the world. In these paintings lurks nature, urban environment, the architectonics of Azerbaijan – a background that is subject to continuous and rather rapid change. Where someone would rather see the contrasting image of sparkling new buildings next to the historical heritage of Islamic architecture, Mahmudov focuses on a habitual invisibility to ordinary urban buildings that merge with trees, occupy its own unique niche in the form of an ensemble and her native city. By placing these forgotten corners in the foreground of her works, she emphasizes the importance of diversity in her native land. Impregnated with a stable fine sense of nostalgia, her works offer a socio-anthropological view of the evolving urban landscape.

The central component of the works of Aida Mahmudova is her view on memory, the relationship with the identity of the memory, and how these two factors can be continuously modified and "rewritten" with time. Here's how Aida Mahmudova explains it herself, "the images in my work highly charged my personal attitude. It's not just these individual corners of Baku, but the corners of Baku, Absheron, which are memorized and outgoing, and the Baku of my imagination. Each picture shows a still image from the chronicle of an ever-changing urban background." This tension of a combination of the imaginary with the real in her works is achieved through the merger of abstract and figurative forms, by creating images which attract and disorient at the same time.

The Leila Heller Gallery is located in the Chelsea neighborhood, well known for its galleries and spaces dedicated to contemporary art. The gallery has been supporting the development and careers of artists representing regions such as the Middle East, Turkey, Central and Southeast Asia. The works of artists working with Leila Heller are in the collections of various museums in the world, including such as the Victoria and Albert Museum and the British Museum in London, the Metropolitan Museum in New York Cultural Center, the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris, as well as in many private collections.

Aida Mahmudova was born in 1982 in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, where she currently lives and works. Aida graduated from Central Saint Martin's College, has extensive experience in exhibitions, including participation in the 56th Venice Biennale as part of the group exhibition VITA VITALE. Her sculptural installations and paintings were shown at many international exhibitions, including: «Here Today» in London; «Love Me, Love Me Not» in the framework of the 55th Venice Biennale; «Fly To Baku», exhibited in London, Paris, Berlin, Moscow, Rome; «Merging Bridges» at the Museum of Modern Art (Baku, Azerbaijan). Her works are in private collections and the sculpture «Recycled» is installed on Baku Boulevard. Aida Mahmudova is the founder and artistic director of the nonprofit organization YARAT, which was created in conjunction with a group of artists in 2011. YARAT aims to promote the development of modern art and its popularisation in Azerbaijan, as well as to create a platform that ensures representation of the creativity of Azerbaijani artists in the country and abroad. At the last Venice Biennale, which opened in early May, YARAT successfully implemented the project 'The Union of Fire and Water'.