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FROM TWO, ONE.

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LEFT: "5:30 a.m. In the Basement," oil painting on canvas overlaid with video projection, 60" x 36", 2018. CENTER: Safarani Sisters at interview, NY, Oct 19, with "Twilight reincarnation," oil painting on canvas overlaid with video projection, 108" x 72", 2018. RIGHT: "Late Afternoon Gaze 2," oil painting on canvas overlaid with video projection, 60" x 36", 2018.

by Nancy Nesvet

Seeming to reference Edward Hopper's interiors and Gerhard Richter's "Woman Descending the Staircase" (1965, after Duchamp), with a bit of Vermeer's Dutch Master technique and figurative expertise thrown in, the Safarani sisters' video paintings, in their solo show "Reincarnation," surpass and contemporize these past masterworks.

Presented by Roya Khadjavi Projects, Iranian twin sisters, Bahareh and Farzaneh Safarani, master of fine arts graduates from Northeastern University with bachelor of art degrees from Tehran University in painting, literally set the stage for the slow contemplation of domestic scenes featuring themselves. The video projection of wavering sheer curtains onto the oil paintings doubles the doppelgänger effect of two sisters

appearing in and simultaneously painting the canvas. From the earliest paintings shown, layers of curtain increasingly part and cover to reveal by turn the twins' figures, until they are exposed both figuratively and psychologically. As their eyes open, in "Late Afternoon Gaze 1" (2018) they confront us with their gaze, exposing their world and thoughts. In "Late Afternoon Gaze 2," the figure again seeks the cover of the curtain, appearing the ghost of the preceding painting.

In a measured progression, "Blue Curtain" (2017) shows the back of a woman, surrounded and caught in the folds of a curtain looking out the window, face unseen. Even more covered and startling, "Reveal" shows the figure surrounded by and holding up a black curtain, in a pose that could be of a dance. Her facial features are in the dark; legs and feet are not distinguished at all, but melded into the skirt of the curtain, recalling the dance of a bride or a ballerina or only a woman parting and holding back the folds of a drape. "Twilight reincarnation" (2017) reveals the face upturned, with hand pointed down, a figure under the light of the window; the second painting of "Twilight reincarnation" shows a standing figure, looking down at the floor and out of the painting, posed next to a mirror and furniture, marking her surroundings and showing a curtain reflected in the mirror, but no longer covering her. "Awake" (2018) shows a woman lying on the floor, under a curtained window, covering her eyes with her hand.

This is beautiful work. There is a mystery and a dark history unfolding here. It holds you in its grasp, eventually in its gaze, and begs you to look, and analyze and empathize and question what you are empathizing with, ultimately understanding where it comes from, but not yet where it might go. The subtle, brown and grey tinged colors throughout, project an aura of age, but the minimal interiors make a feeling of transience, with room to add future accoutrements of life and living. For now, the only accessories are mirrors and clocks, reflecting back, recording the time. Might these sisters go into the modern world, with their video and performance work, signified by the camera and tied back hair in "My Sister's Picture" (2018)? "My Sister's Picture," with the mantel clock in the background, recording the time to go and which has been, showing the camera held by one twin, not only documents the process and origin of these paintings, but reminds us that the photograph records one millisecond of time, while the painting process extends it by days and weeks, and the finished painting, forever.

Might the twins' future hold a domestic, contemplative life as seen in 8 a.m. "Kitchen View," (2018), window covered with curtain and leg caught under an old wooden table, in conversation with self? From where came the blood the twin is wiping up in 5:30 a.m. "In the Basement," (2018)? Is that menstrual blood, symbolizing this month of womanhood being erased, cleaned up, gone forever, without a trace?

The work tells stories but if also asks questions and implores the viewer to consider the entire saga. It is a saga, of two Iranian twin artists coming to America, and slowly revealing and merging themselves in their art and their culture, and their imaging from two countries' methods of depicting into one.

“Reincarnation,” part of Asia Contemporary Art Week, is open until October 31, at Elga Wimmer Gallery, 536 West 26th Street, 3rd floor, #310, New York, NY, 12:00–6:00 p.m. or by appointment at Roya.khadjavi@gmail.com.

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