

Khojasteh, A New Beginning

by Veronica Azzari

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For Amir Khojasteh, the landscape is never a place of tranquility. Trees, gardens, and forests become settings riddled with invisible tensions, where personal memory, political trauma, and imagination merge into images suspended between fairy tale and nightmare. With *May the Tree No Longer Burn When I Wake*, Dubai's Carbon 12 gallery presents the artist's first series of works since leaving Iran, a turning point that imbues his research with a new autobiographical dimension. Born in Iran in 1988 and now residing in Ghent, Belgium, Khojasteh belongs to a generation of artists who grew up in the shadow of the political tensions of the Middle East. After training in graphic design, he developed a highly expressive style of painting in which deformed figures, fantastical creatures, and symbolic landscapes address themes such as fear, power, violence, and the mechanisms of dictatorship. His language, influenced by art history, popular culture, and personal experience, often draws on dark humor and allegory to transform current events into imagination. While previous exhibitions were dominated by grotesque faces and hybrid figures, in this new series, nature takes on a central role. Trees, branches, and gardens are not simply elements of the landscape, but metaphors of belonging, uprooting, and rebirth. The title itself, *May the Tree No Longer Burn When I Wake*, suggests the desire that the fire - real or symbolic - inally belongs to the past, while leaving open the question of what remains after escape and loss. Khojasteh's painting maintains the gestural energy and expressive force that characterize his entire production, but opens up to broader, more contemplative compositions. The landscapes, punctuated by intense colors and enigmatic presences, seem to oscillate continuously between dream and memory, avoiding any purely documentary interpretation. Rather than describing a specific place, they evoke a state of mind in which nature becomes the space in which to process the trauma of exile. The exhibition confirms Amir Khojasteh as one of the most interesting

voices in young contemporary Middle Eastern painting. Without abandoning references to the Iranian political situation, the artist broadens his gaze, transforming the individual experience of uprooting into a universal reflection on fragility, memory, and the possibility of starting over.