

Shiva Ahmadi: Strands of Resilience Opens Jan. 28 at Manetti Shrem Museum

1st solo exhibition of a current UC Davis faculty member joins ongoing Deborah Butterfield, Malaquias Montoya exhibitions

New paintings explore the tension between beauty and horror as a form of truth-telling

DAVIS, CA (Dec. 18, 2023) — The Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at the University of California, Davis, is proud to present *Shiva Ahmadi: Strands of Resilience*, opening Sunday, Jan. 28. Ahmadi, a professor of art at UC Davis, uses painting as a form of truth-telling, combining luminous colors and mystical beings with violent imagery to draw attention to urgent global issues of migration, war and brutality against marginalized peoples.

This exhibition of all new works — Ahmadi’s first mid-career solo museum exhibition on the West Coast — focuses on female figures in fantastical land- and waterscapes. Her technical explorations with the temperamental medium of watercolor enable her to play with ideas of covering and uncovering. The recent incorporation of screenprints into her paintings allows her to deepen this temporal and physical layering between the actual and the imagined and the intersection of the two. By inserting images that read as ruins or clues to a deeper story, Ahmadi probes what lies hidden beneath the surface of the stories we are told, from ancient myths to childhood memories to the current news cycle. In *Unbound*, (2023), a 40-by-60-inch watercolor, a female figure rendered in vibrant purple, maroon and chartreuse tones strides into a tangle of splotches of paint that could be flowers, explosion or amoebas, while the corner of an upended multi-story building hovers like a mirage in the background.

“Shiva Ahmadi’s art has the power to engage the most important topics of our time,” said Associate Curator and Exhibition Department Head Susie Kantor, who curated *Shiva Ahmadi: Strands of Resilience*. “While her work has always been technically brilliant and political, this new body of paintings brings to the fore the global fight for women’s rights — an issue that touches all of us.”

Born in Tehran, Iran, Ahmadi grew up in the shadows of the Iran Revolution (1979) and the subsequent Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988). The role of women in Iranian society, including the requirement to wear a *hijab*, proved formative in her development as a young woman and artist. She moved to the United States in 1998 and began teaching at UC Davis in 2015. Ahmadi works across a variety of media, including watercolor painting, sculpture and digital animation. Consistent through her pieces are the ornate patterns and vibrant colors drawn from Persian, Indian and Middle Eastern art. Ahmadi’s animated work, *Marooned*, 2021, debuted in 2022 at the Manetti Shrem Museum in *From Moment to Movement: Picturing Protest in the Kramlich Collection*. This year, Ahmadi is part of several prestigious group shows: *Rising Sun: Artists in an Uncertain America*, a joint exhibition of the African American Museum in Philadelphia and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; and *Being and Belonging: Contemporary Women Artists from the Islamic World and Beyond* at the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.

Public opening on January 28

The museum's public Winter Season Celebration takes place from 3–5:30 p.m. Jan. 28. Ahmadi will take part in "Personal & Political: Artists in Conversation" (3:30 p.m.) along with fellow exhibiting artists Professor Emeritus Malaquias Montoya and Marcos Ramírez ERRE. The talk is moderated by Abram Jackson, director of interpretation for the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco. More info: manettishrem.org.

Two fall exhibitions focusing on UC Davis alumna Deborah Butterfield and Professor Emeritus Malaquias Montoya continue into 2024.

Deborah Butterfield: P.S. These are not horses

This career-spanning survey of Butterfield, one of the most important sculptors working today, celebrates 50 years of her work, ranging from her most recent wildfire sculptures to rarely exhibited pieces including ceramics made while studying at UC Davis. Butterfield is known for remarkable equine sculptures crafted from detritus and found materials such as mud, scrap metal, driftwood and fallen branches. With *P.S. These are not horses*, Butterfield's first solo museum exhibition in California since 1996, she returns to the place she considers her artistic and equine home. She graduated from UC Davis with a bachelor of arts degree in 1971 and a master of fine arts degree in 1973. Read a full [press release here](#). (On view through June 24, 2024)

Malaquias Montoya and the Legacies of a Print Resistance

The influential printmaking career of UC Davis Professor Emeritus Malaquias Montoya is explored in this vivid exhibition. Montoya helped found the field of activist graphics as part of the Bay Area social serigraphy movement of the 1960s, employing bold, inventive design in the form of political posters to advance civil rights, raise social consciousness and serve as "a voice for the voiceless." This exhibition focuses on 23 of his prints, grouped by five themes: A Better Tomorrow, U.S. Pride in Punishment, Imaginary Borders, Rise of the Farmworker, and In Political Solidarity. The exhibition also features works by Sandra Fernández, Juan Fuentes, Ester Hernandez, Juan de Dios Mora, Ramiro Rodriguez, Royal Chicano Air Force, Xabi Soto Beleche, Alicia María Siu Bernal and Elyse Doyle-Martinez, who learned from Montoya's artistry and commitment to activism. Read a full [press release here](#). (On view through May 6, 2024)

About Shiva Ahmadi

Ahmadi (b. 1975) moved to the United States from Iran in 1998 and has been based in California since 2015. She received her bachelor of fine arts from Azad University (Tehran), and master of fine arts degrees from Wayne State University, Detroit, MI, and Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, MI. In addition to solo exhibitions at the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, and Asia Society Museum, New York, NY, Ahmadi has been included in group shows at Rubin Museum of Art, New York, NY; Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; Arab Museum of Modern Art, Doha, Qatar; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; and the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada. Ahmadi's work has been collected by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, NY; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Dallas Museum of Art, TX; Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; Detroit Institute of Arts, MI; and Crocker Art Museum, Sacramento, CA. In 2016, Ahmadi was awarded the Anonymous Was A Woman Award and a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant. She is represented by Haines Gallery, San Francisco, and Gallery Rosenfeld, London. She lives in the Bay Area.

Art Wide Open

The Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art at the University of California, Davis, is a contemporary art museum for today, committed to honoring the past and shaping the future while making art accessible and approachable to all. It builds on UC Davis' legacy of exceptional teaching and practice of the arts to offer engaging experiences, exhibitions and educational programs that reflect and serve the community. The museum shares the university's core values of innovative research, interdisciplinary experimentation and a commitment to educational programming. A third of its 50,000-square-foot space is devoted to instruction, including a 125-seat lecture hall, classroom space and the drop-in Carol and Gerry Parker Art Studio. Opened in November 2016, the museum has earned LEEDv3-NC Platinum status and was recently named one of the 25 Best Museum Buildings of the Past 100 Years by ARTnews. 254 Old Davis Road, Davis; manettishrem.org.

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