

**There is a narrative and quite cinematic quality to both of your individual practices - In line with this, who or what do you consider the narrator or narrative force in your works for this show?**

**Sofia:** Having started as an animator, I often return to the way painting holds space for contemplation in a way animation rarely does. I find myself constantly comparing the two—how they shape time, how they guide the viewer, and how they tell stories. A painting invites lingering. Its meaning shifts depending on when you look at it, how you feel, or what you bring to it. It exists in a state of quiet permanence, where every detail, every shadow, and every gesture stays in conversation with the viewer for as long as they allow it. Animation, by contrast, sets its own pace. It pulls the viewer along a rhythm, frame by frame, where each moment builds on the last and quickly gives way to the next. There's less room to pause, to wander, to return. And yet, I'm still drawn to how the two forms overlap. Both rely on composition, rhythm, and a sense of movement—even in stillness. A good painting feels alive not because it moves, but because it carries the suggestion of a before and after.

Recently, a close friend—someone not from the art world—asked me what excites me most in a piece of art. For me, it's always the narrative within it. Whether it's found in a quiet gesture or a densely layered image, it needs to move me, make me feel something, invite empathy. At the core, it's always about storytelling. What stays with me is when I sense the artist fully owning their narrative—making deliberate choices, and opening up a space for connection through their work.

This series in particular is quite personal. It turns inward to explore my relationship with my sister. Growing up, we had what we called the “pink sistership”—a closeness that felt larger than just being siblings. At times, she took on the role of a mother—not because our own mother wasn't present, but because cultural and language gaps sometimes made it difficult for our mother to reach us in the ways we needed. Now, watching my sister become a mother herself, I feel our bond shifting—growing fuller, more complex, and tender in ways I hadn't expected. I began working on these paintings while she was giving birth to her second daughter. It felt incredibly moving, like I was not only reflecting on who we were, but also witnessing the beginning of a new pink sistership forming.

Reflecting on how nurturing female relationships are, have pushed my work to dig closer and zoom in—both emotionally and visually. In the most vulnerable moments, the gestures of the figures are blown out, closely tied, and intimate. In other moments, the canvases become smaller, the figures more simplified—a quiet homage to the simplicity that childhood and adolescence evokes when we look back on it.

**Morteza:** Whether there are cinematic/theatrical qualities in my pictures or not, I certainly am greatly fascinated with both media. The storyline, narrative, dialogues, characters, sound, and music are usually the secondary elements for me, and a great

film or play works for me the best in the moments it constructs impactful singular frames that can be looked at, explored, and more importantly experienced without the elements I just mentioned. In other words, if I am not struck by the visual qualities within singular shots of that movie or play, there is not much for me there to engage with. I am fascinated by those fleeting moments when the arrangements of all the visual motifs in a scene can tell me something about the character/s or any other elements within the *mise en scène*. This, to me, is far more interesting and profound than simply following a series of events in 90 minutes or so. The main storyline of each film or play can be described in a couple sentences, more or less. I believe, a great movie (take any of Antonioni's trilogy for example) can tell its 'story' through every single frame rather than simply showing me the actions and reactions of its elements and characters. And this is perhaps where my work could be influenced the most by performative media such as theater and/or cinema. I should also mention that photography, specifically fashion photography and photojournalism, are equally important to me and find their ways into my pictures.

I think the narrative force in my work in general, and for this show, is the psychological and emotional state of the protagonists I let lead in my images. The figures, regardless of what they appear to be doing and their relations to their surroundings, are captured in the moments that beg the questions of who they might be, where they came from, what they may have been doing and will do right after the moment seen in the picture. At least that is what I aspire to do and hope my images are able to provide most importantly to and for me if not for the future viewers. Male characters and their behaviours used to be the sole players of my images until very recently. I think that will remain a key part of my work for some time as the concepts of manhood, masculinity, and our collective understanding around it has been an everlasting fascination for me. It is neither admiration nor critic of manhood per say, rather its entirety and complexities with all its pathos - that also is deeply woven into sexuality, power dynamics, identity, and so many other aspects of what it is to be a human - that keeps me drawn to this subject. However, a new shift has occurred in the works for this show and that is the appearance of several female characters and their competitions with the male characters to dominate the pictures. This is something that I have never experienced in my work in the past at least on this level. It feels like that - metaphorically - I have just introduced a completely new series of colors into my palette that expand the possibilities for different kinds of narratives in my work. The change in perspective and point of view from one piece to another in particular have been extremely interesting to me due to this new shift.

**How does your work and these narrative elements then relate to perspective vs. perception? As in, in your work how do you think about (or maybe even try to manipulate (or not)) the viewer's perception — their sensory or emotional response — versus (and perhaps in relation to) the perspective you're channeling, or challenging through your work?**

**MK:** I assume this idea/debate about and around the artist's intention/s vs. the viewer's perception/s has been discussed forever. I can not say if I have ever given it any meaningful thought, nor does it have anything to do with me as an artist. As far as I know, I make the things I make for me, and only me. However, I do not completely rule out the possibilities of unconscious desires and motivations that I might have regarding the future viewers and the ways they may or may not perceive and make sense of my work. I can not speak for my unconscious motives. Making images for me has never been a tool to 'communicate' any clear ideas or messages. If communicating a coherent and clear message was ever my desire or need, I would have chosen writing. Making images is simply the tool I use to explore and make sense of things that, for whatever reason, tickle my curiosity, emotion, and perception. This involves both formal and conceptual matters, both equally important to me. I dare to say that I do not think or pay attention to what the viewer's perception may be. I do not believe - nor is it even possible, even if I try - that it is my responsibility to think about the viewer at all. When I am done with an image and it leaves my studio, I think my job is over. It is, in a way, an internal conversation I had with myself; certain things have been said, shown, and looked at, and now the conversation is over. The moment the viewer looks at the work, it is no longer my conversation. It is the viewer's dialogue with the work that may or may not ever happen, but regardless, it has nothing to do with me. I really believe in this, therefore, any attempts by me to think or comment about the viewer's perception are irrelevant. This does not mean I am not interested in what others see or feel when encountering my images. It is rather amusing and meaningful when I hear what sort of dialogue any viewer has had with my work; the wilder and further away from what I had ever had in mind, the better!

**SP:** In my work, I think of perspective as something rooted in lived experience; relationships, memories, and the emotional textures that shape them. Perception, on the other hand, belongs to the viewer, and the space between the two is where the most interesting tension unfolds. I would go so far as to say that the average viewer is well-versed in reading images, especially since we live in such a visual world. To me, this opens up space to explore how perception can be stretched—through gesture, scale, and composition, which together form the visual language I use to communicate.

This world tends to sit somewhere between flatness and depth—graphical yet dimensional. That in-betweenness isn't just aesthetic; it echoes a feeling I know intimately. It speaks to the diasporic experience of existing in translation, of navigating between cultures, of performing coherence in environments where you never quite fit in. There's something artificial in that, but also poetic—something constructed, but no less true.

So while I don't try to control how someone interprets a piece, I do think carefully about how to create just enough friction or softness in a composition to invite someone to linger. That lingering is key—it's what allows perception to stretch, shift, and settle in unexpected ways. It mirrors how I move through my own memories: sometimes sharp and clear, other times soft, and uncertain.

Color plays a quiet but vital role in shaping the emotional rhythm of the work. Every painting begins with a blue underpaint—specifically, a tone inspired by Persian blue. It gently simmers beneath the layers of paint, offering a subtle continuity, much like how Persian culture simmers beneath my lived experience. This blue carries a sense of nostalgia, becoming an emotional undercurrent that deepens the atmosphere. In this series, I've scaled back the use of recurring motifs that once served as storytelling cues across canvases. Instead, I've stripped things down—letting the simplicity of gesture and scale do the narrative work.

This particular series feels especially intimate because it touches something even broader than the diasporic condition—it speaks to the emotional architecture of sisterhood and, more expansively, the female experience. At its core, these paintings are about women being a home to one another. It's about sisters finding shelter in each other, about care being both quiet and immense. The gestures are tender, sometimes protective, sometimes intertwined to the point of becoming one shape. I want the viewer to feel that closeness—not just observe it. Whether it's through the nurturing postures, the compressed space between figures, or the way softness and strength live side by side, the goal is to create a sense of emotional recognition. A kind of visual empathy. This is about women holding space for one another across time, across generations and across cultural dissonance.

