

art and cake

A Contemporary Art Magazine with a Focus on the
Los Angeles Art Scene

Studio Visit: HK Zamani – Capturing Ghosts on a Divine Wind

By Gary Brewer

“PANPSYCHISM PROPOSES THAT ALL MATTER, EVEN THE FINEST
PARTICLES, IS A BIT OF CONSCIOUSNESS, OR EVEN THAT THE
WHOLE UNIVERSE IS CONSCIOUSNESS.”

GERALD EDELMAN, BRIGHT AIR, BRILLIANT FIRE – ON THE
MATTER OF MIND

“ALL THE RADIANCE OF THIS MORNING WAS LEYLI, YET A
CANDLE WAS BURNING IN FRONT OF HER, CONSUMING ITSELF
WITH DESIRE. SHE WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GARDEN AND
MAJNUN WAS A TORCH OF LONGING. SHE PLANTED THE ROSE
BUSH; HE WATERED IT WITH HIS TEARS. ...LEYLI COULD BEWITCH
WITH ONE GLANCE FROM BENEATH HER DARK HAIR, MAJNUN
WAS HER SLAVE AND A DERVISH DANCING BEFORE HER. LEYLI
HELD IN HER HAND THE GLASS OF WINE SCENTED WITH MUSK.
MAJNUN HAD NOT TOUCHED THE WINE, YET WAS DRUNK WITH
ITS SWEET SMELL.”

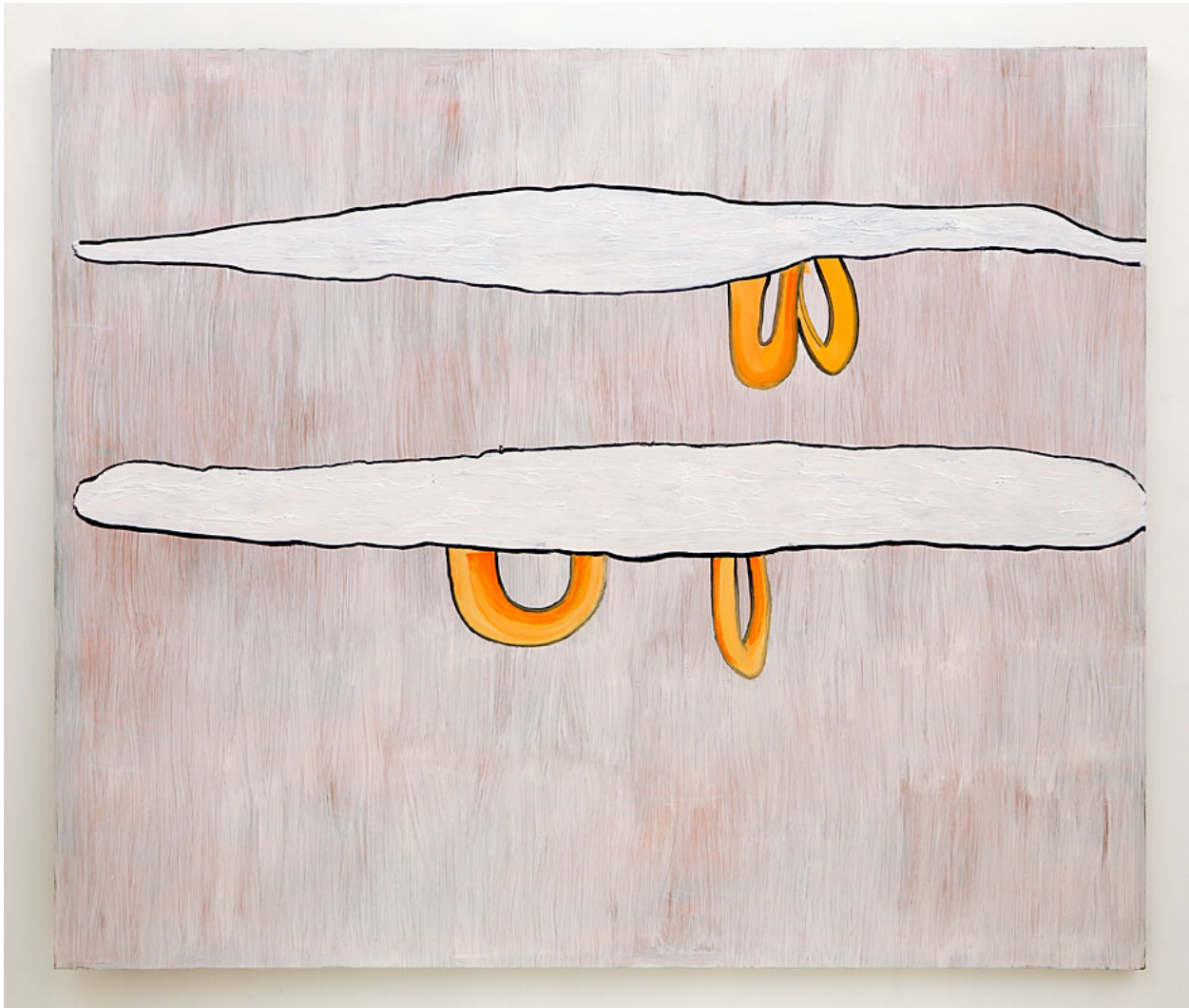
NIZAMI, LEYLI AND MAJNUN



We are seekers in search of meaning and the world is a palimpsest with layers of history embedded in everything we see and touch. Artists are a form of cultural antennae, sensing and searching for the thing that moves them; a form, an act, or a moment in time that awakens a memory and exhumes their personal histories embedded in the flesh. HK Zamani is a seeker of ghosts, of those fragments of thought and memory that resonate and awaken intense feelings. In his paintings, performance, music, and in his space PØST, which is an extension of his performance art, Habib allows subtle winds to direct his ideas and emotions.



PØST is just down the hall from my studio. Some time ago, late at night, a deeply rhythmic and soulful music was drifting down the hallways of the Bendix Building. The building was empty and I wandered in the direction from which the music was coming. Looking through the window of PØST, the lights were off and there was Zamani, strumming his guitar creating waves of rhythmic sound that filled the space with an ecstatic acoustic aura. He was walking slowly as he played, in a contemplative manner, his body and mind enveloped in the sounds he was making. When he saw me, he paused and spoke briefly in the quiet tones in which he speaks. "Playing the guitar and making this kind of music puts me in a trance-like state. It helps to put me in a frame of mind where I can engage with my paintings, to search for the elusive thing that moves me"



Intense feelings and intense states of mind guide Zamani to explore duration and endurance in his performance, which he describes as 'being within the extended field of painting', and to experience being both the observer and the observed. In his paintings he searches for ghosts, something that reveals itself to him while in a state of mind open to subtle forces. He applies skill and craft to bring the image into being, employing layers of scraping, brushing and pushing the medium to build the paint up and to arrive at deeply felt paintings. They have an eccentric charm and suggest both landscape and still life. There is something playful and at times cartoon-like in these paintings, yet there is also a somber tone that one senses, evincing a poetics of memory and melancholy.

In his performances he uses duration and endurance to push past acting or storytelling. "I want to push the limits of my physical and psychological endurance, to push my body past a threshold, to have an experience that the observer can feel. I want the audience to be drawn into my experience and feel something, to share the intensity that I am feeling, to push past the body and into an altered state." During a recent performance at LACE, Zamani was wearing a red Hijab and stood absolutely still with a steady gaze. I walked right past without realizing that it was him. His intensity and presence obscured his identity. It was a strange feeling when, while watching the performance, I realized that it was Zamani. He was a shape-shifter embodying both another gender and another identity; the observer and the observed oscillating between perception and recognition.



While in school, Zamani was studying and focused mainly on painting. I asked him when he was first drawn into performance and of how it fit into his practice as a painter. He said, "Many years ago while in school, a friend of mine bought a catalogue on the work of Chris Burden. It was a revelation both because it was so unusual and fresh, but it also brought up memories from my childhood in Iran. There is a ritual that is practiced once a year where men walk together chanting and beating their two hands flat against their chest, forcing the chant out more powerfully. There was also self flagellation involved. It is a form of purging and purification. As a child when I saw this I was drawn to the physical endurance and the psychological depth of their state of mind. When I read about Chris Burden and the ritual like endurance performances he was doing, it brought back those memories from my childhood and I was immediately drawn into the idea of performance."



We spoke a great deal about motive and intention. HK Zamani is searching for ghosts and the hidden currents in a divine wind that moves with the universe. It is a metaphysical pursuit, an alchemist-philosopher in pursuit of the intangible to express the ineffable. Artists are drawn to create with a passion that at times verges toward madness. It is an intoxication with the beloved, the living muse that captures the memories and imagination of those who came before us and leaves us with this sensual feast of art and culture, to engage with and to illuminate our soul. We are all seekers toward this flame.

PØST itself is a form of performance, an extension of Zamani's practice as a performance artist in an exhibition space. It is a way to give back to the community and to create a venue that engages with artists without the pressures that commercial galleries exert on them. If PØST is performance, then the Kamikaze exhibits, 31 shows in 31 days, is an extended form of performance, an endurance ritual, it is a marathon of documenting each exhibit and preparing the space afresh for each new day. I was involved in two shows from this last Kamikaze series, participating in one and curating another. I made my way to another four or five exhibits during the month. To see Zamani filming and photographing each exhibit, posting them on Facebook, and then adding them to the PØST website, building the history and the memory of each show, was truly impressive. Each night after the shows came down, he would patch the holes in the walls and paint over each area where it was needed, getting everything ready so that the following day another artist would arrive to install the next show. His movements in doing this day after day became a form of ritual, never hurried, with a methodical calm to his actions. It was an 'action', the ritual of an exhibitor, the purveyor of an exhibition space doing three years of normal gallery exhibitions in a single month. It is a performance of physical endurance and expresses a sense of humility and an appreciation for the number of talented people who live and work in LA. "I feel humbled by the amount of creativity that comes through the space. It is an honor to be able to create an opportunity for so many people to exhibit in a month." As we spoke I could sense that this generous act and the endurance and fatigue required to accomplish it was in itself a form of purging and purification.

