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Amir H. Fallah

Better a Cruel Truth Than a Comfortable Delusion

January 8 - February 20, 2021

Denny Dimin Gallery is pleased to announce a solo exhibition by Amir H. Fallah, *Better a Cruel Truth Than a Comfortable Delusion*, running from January 8 to February 20, 2021, at its New York location. This is the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery.

An Iranian-American artist based in Los Angeles, Amir H. Fallah and his parents came to the United States in the wake of the Iranian Revolution. Fallah is best known for richly detailed portraits of people whose families and identities were similarly formed by immigration, assimilation, and otherness. In his past work, the artist explored the traditional conventions of portraiture while masking his subjects' physical characteristics with fabrics and a standardized skin tone. Instead of physically representing his subjects, he allowed them to narrate their own stories through the objects they chose to include and how they situated themselves within their spaces or alongside their family members.

Fallah's new body of work, exhibited in New York for the first time in *Better a Cruel Truth Than a Comfortable Delusion*, is a more personal and immediate reimagination of his approach to portraiture. These works remove the individual figure from the portrait and instead examine how a person is defined by the value systems they hold. In one non-hierarchical picture plane, the artist ties together various vignettes of appropriated imagery from fine art to children's books, advertising and popular culture, synthesizing the relevant ethical issues of our time. Fallah conceived of this series as an expansive how-to manual for his five-year-old son about moral values in a world that is being impacted by climate change, consumerism, and xenophobia.

Each work originated with a text from a wide range of sources—from song lyrics and poetry to film and history—that serves as a warning or reminder to Fallah's son, such as "Absolute Power Corrupts," "Ideas are Bulletproof," and "They Will Trick You For Their Own Rewards." These statements are the basis for the imagery and serve as the paintings' titles. Like the titles, the imagery is often ambiguous, cautionary, and strangely familiar, such as the multiple meanings of the beautiful but dangerous scorpion and cobra in "Absolute Power Corrupts" and "When Push Came to Shove No One Cared." "Dying for Invisible Lines, Killing for Invisible Gods" contains a giant, flower-covered key in the hands of a smiling woman, but when paired with the chain-link fence-covered silhouette in the background, the key's meaning shifts from access to imprisonment. Fallah explores representation and race directly in these new works,

with Middle Eastern characters (i.e. the genie) and the old logo of the football team formerly known as the “Redskins”, alongside other symbols that draw their meaning from nuanced juxtaposition. Each detail in the paintings can be explored extensively for its multifaceted meanings and significance in relation to other elements.

Fallah planned much of this work prior to the onset of the global pandemic and completed it over the turbulent course of 2020. The feeling of acute relevance of the work is a reminder that the issues that have come to a breaking point over the past year—such as skepticism of science, division, immigration, climate change, and racism—were already with us. The artist posits that many of these issues are connected and embedded in our societal fabric. Fortunately, he offers these complex paintings as a trail of breadcrumbs, not only for his son but for all his viewers, through this bewildering time.

Amir H. Fallah was born in 1979 in Tehran. He received his MFA from the University of California, Los Angeles and his BFA from the Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore. Fallah has had solo exhibitions at the ICA San Jose, MOCA Tucson, South Dakota Art Museum, Schneider Museum of Art, Nerman Museum of Art, Shulamit Nazarian, Denny Dimin Gallery, The Third Line, Dio Horia, and Gordon Gallery. Additionally, his work has been shown in numerous international group exhibitions including *We Must Risk Delight: Twenty Artists from Los Angeles*, 56th La Biennale di Venezia, Venice, Italy (2015) and the 9th Sharjah Biennial, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2009). Fallah has been featured or reviewed in *The New York Times*, *Artforum*, *ARTnews*, *GQ*, *The Art Newspaper*, *Whitewall*, *Harper’s Bazaar Arabia*, *Hyperallergic*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Apollo Magazine*, and *The Guardian*.