



**Amir Hossein Zanjani**



 FOREWORD BY RAMIN SALSALI

When I first saw Amir Hossein Zanjani's work I was transfixed by the vibrant brushstrokes laden with emotion and energy that encompassed his large canvases. It was his *Destruction* series that first captured my eye precisely for a specific scene whereby a group of people were standing over a damaged bridge, disconnected from their homes, while a temporary bridge was being constructed nearby. It was an indescribable feeling – that of how one can observe so calmly a scene of utter catastrophe. Like most of Zanjani's paintings, the temporary bridge as well as the juxtaposition of vibrant colors, provides the viewer with signs of hope amidst a site of upheaval.

When I first arrived in West Germany during the mid-eighties, I found the best grounds for a case-study: a nation scarred by a brutal dictatorship that had been divided into East and West in 1945. I was prompted to ask the question: how had Hitler been able to manipulate the entire nation and conduct it into a destructive war for utopian ideals with the promise of Endsieg (final victory)? Also, how is it possible that again another ideological dictatorship, the former German communist regime (DDR), could continue the people's suppression using other methods?

The idea of submission to a force of power has always fascinated me. Every day of our lives we are confronted with this conflict. Whether it is on a small or large scale, the ideas surrounding one's submission and defeat to a force greater to themselves continually exists. Our human conflict is linked to our innate need to reject force in any form. The paradox lies in the fact that often we are enamored by this force that is greater than us.

I have observed these ideas relating to a human being's submission within the political sphere as well as in one's personal life. They've been the fruits of several discussions with Amir Hossein and the results of these talks have led to the work created for this show. Strong and vibrant scenes of abstract and destructed cities as well as an installation consisting of 700 pieces depicting the faces of soldiers from all over the world make up this exhibition. These works question the role of the perpetrator as well as the victims.

But more than scenes of war and agony, Amir Hossein's works demonstrate an invaluable lesson as well as the idea of hope within the act of submitting. We often surrender to forces such as love and power that are beyond our control. Our freedom therefore comes from our submission. As I myself have done many times over, the viewer can empathize with Amir Hossein's startling works as they portray an eerily real depiction of the thoughts and feelings that we all experience and which unify us in our quest for everyday resolution. Ultimately, we are free when we can let go.

 ARTIST STATEMENT

In the last few years, war has served as the underlying theme of my works. Undoubtedly, the main reason for my engagement with this issue is the year of my birth (1980) that I share with Iraq's invasion of Iran, an event that led to the outbreak of an eight year war. It was a period of hostility that marked one of the longest conflicts of the 20th century. Although the war coincided with my early years, I still bear within me a multitude of images and memories from this period.

Well over two decades have passed since the end of this war. However, the key factors that culminated in the conflict remain a mystery to me as well as to a great portion of my generation. Following such atrocious events, war and conflict have become commonplace in the Middle East - a region that has become indisputably one of the most sensitive political regions of the modern world.

I have revisited this historical event in my previous works and exhibitions. However, in the present exhibition I have focused somewhat less on war and have instead highlighted the military commonalities of various nations. I have also illustrated the features of totalitarian systems from an alternative perspective – the outcome of the common thread of thinking between Ramin Salsali, the Founder of Salsali Private Museum in Dubai, and me.

Together we watched over 50 hours of video reports and historical documentaries about the military, war and the enticement and seduction of force and power. We both came away asking the same questions: why do human beings have an innate admiration for power? Why do we submit when we love someone? Are there parallels between submitting to power and to someone that we love?

This show revolves mainly around the collective and national psyche of individuals and the formation of different regimes and armies that intrinsically conceive of certain ethnic, cultural, and geographic layers. The foundational inspiration behind the works in this exhibition was the various media that

have been recorded in a documentary fashion. A change in this media engenders a new and conceptual media in its own right and this is where the genre of photojournalism appears, offering the viewer with new forms of visual and historical documentation.

*Translated from Farsi into English by Dr. Hamid Marashi*

The 1980s can be regarded as a period that marked the return of painting to the arena of Contemporary art. After two decades of silence, painting breathed a new spirit into the art market. One notable feature of this enhancement is the fact that contemporary painting today shares more than ever an affinity with the medium of photography.

During the last two centuries, the technology of photography was considered to be an enduring rival to the genre of painting. Today, not only photography, but other visual media, such as television, cinema, and the internet, has helped the painter create new visual landscapes.

Semiotically speaking, Gerhard Richter's photo paintings can be regarded as early instances of iconic signs taking the place of indexical ones through the inversion of their representative medium, transforming media and news photographs with no aesthetic and compositional significance, into artistic and conceptual forms.

Today one of the most important characteristics of contemporary painting is a work's regional and geographic specification. The painters of today, more than in the past, carry and challenge the political, historical and geographic issues in which they work. Living in regions such as the Middle East tends to politicize people's lives, set as they are against a background of warfare, religious dispute, displacement and emigration.

The main source of inspiration for my latest show is media and news imagery. My works are composed of images, informative and reportorial in nature, and especially those depicting military forces of different nations and totalitarian regimes. These images, through the process of painting with color on impressionable surfaces, illustrate, figuratively and symbolically, but without judgment, war victims of the hidden layers of politics.

*Translated from Farsi into English by Dr. Kian Soheil*

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ESSAY BY DR. HAMID MARASHI

Mass parades mobilized by the military in which not only conventionally well-attired troops, but also bizarrely half-naked soldiers are depicted; the ubiquitous species of military leaders from diverse races and creeds engaged in their incessant quest for gaining applause; semi-demolished residential buildings, alleyways, and places of worship left derelict following conflicts and torn apart bridges and pedestrian flyovers disrupting the everyday commuting of civilians striving to make ends meet - all of these images are in a way reminiscent of Roger Waters' memorable line in Pink Floyd's 1982 film *The Wall*: "The flames are all long gone but the pain lingers on." Indeed, the bleeding heart of the artist making his stand in these images is overtly beating, and thus in pain not for the war itself, but for its ongoing peripheries and aftermath.

But adjacent to all of these scenes of the destructive impacts and flamboyantly triumphant rituals of warring comes an entirely different theme: that of oil installations and workers. Far away from the turmoil of any conflict, the artist has illustrated men who are engaged industriously in oil rigs and plants. A woman is pictured as she walks, perhaps barefooted, on an oil pipe in what seems to be a wintry ambience, while in another image, a woman not adequately observing the obligatory dress code stands in the seaboard facing an oil rig from a distance.

It is of course not just the themes of the works but also the colors that unfurl before the audience in abundantly varying mannerisms. From strikingly bright orange and blue and red to prevalently gray and black, the choice of colors is astonishingly unpredictable. Ironically, this unpredictability of color is juxtaposed with predictable events and objects. There is hardly any sign of the surreal in the works of the artist who has perhaps opted to invest more strongly in colors in order to manifest his vision and sense.

There is work, there is war, there is destruction, there is production, there is vividness, and there is obscurity. Welcome to the multilayered realm of the idealization and visualization of the artist, Amir-Hossein Zanjani.

*Dr. Hamid Marashi*  
*Tehran – January 24, 2014*



#### STATEMENT BY THE SIENA ART INSTITUTE

Among one of the indeed few artists who have managed to win the prestigious globally renowned Celeste Prize is Amir-Hossein Zanjani. The work for which he won the recognition – *The Soldier* – is in effect, just as many of his other works, a perplexing conglomeration of both vigor and delicacy. The work depicts a soldier who is looking away into the never-ending horizon, while the audience, who is deprived of seeing his front appearance, can only resort to imagining his face. And the soldier is alone, which is perhaps the narrative of the solitude some artists experience in particular historical contexts such as the one Amir belongs to.

When Amir Hossein arrived at the Siena Art Institute for a study residency in the fall of 2012, he demonstrated his dexterity as a painter as well as his desire to experiment with different media including video and collage. Shortly after he came to Italy, he participated in the Giornata Europea del Patrimonio also known as European Heritage Days, with an exhibition at the Museo del Tartufo e Centro di Documentazione in San Giovanni D'Asso as part of the cycle of exhibitions *Arte e Grand Tour nelle Crete Senesi, Inaugurazione (In)Contemporanea*, which opened on 29 September 2012. For this exhibition, he created a series of collage works focusing on the themes of local food and culture. One of these works is now permanently on display in the museum.

Amir Hossein's time in Siena marked a truly unforgettable period for me. I deeply enjoyed his anecdotes, his sense of humor, and most of all his elegance and refined manners. He is an extremely generous and talented artist and will continue to develop his poetic style of painting due to his vehemently committed passion for art as a way to approach social discourse. While everyone at the Siena Art Institute bears great respect for what he has already achieved, we are also impatiently looking forward to what his future work entails.





Blue Orchestra, 2013  
*Oil on canvas*  
200 x 360 cm



Mass Parade, 2012  
Oil on canvas  
175 x 300 cm



Korean Girls, 2013  
*Oil on canvas*  
45 x 64 cm



Russian Girls, 2013  
*Oil on canvas*  
45 x 64 cm



Red carpet, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
200 x 250 cm



Marathon, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
250 x 400 cm



The victory of the night, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
180 x 300 cm



Warm War, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
180 x 270 cm

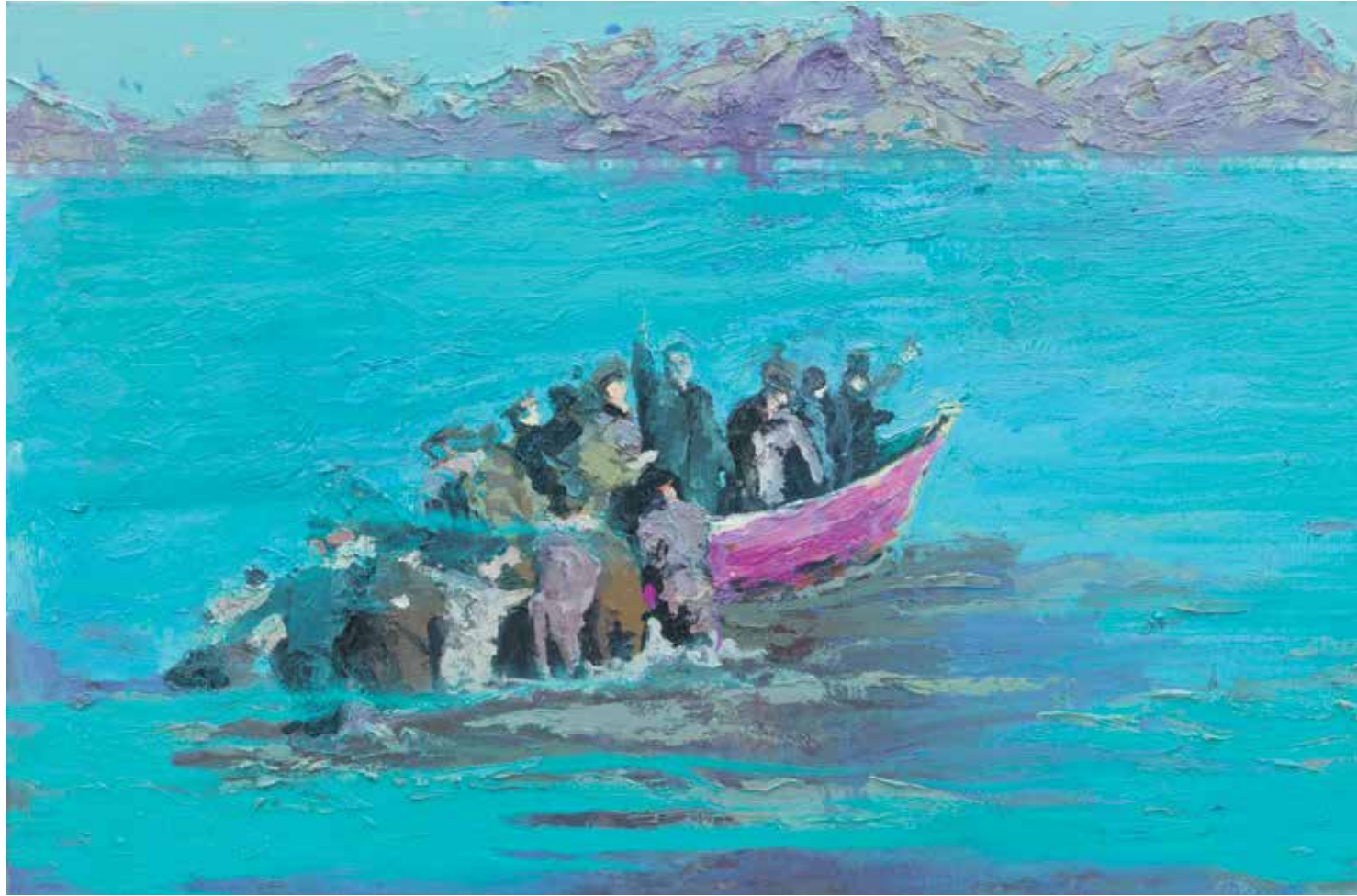


Cold War, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
180 x 270 cm



Do you have a lighter?, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
4 pieces each one 30 x 40 cm

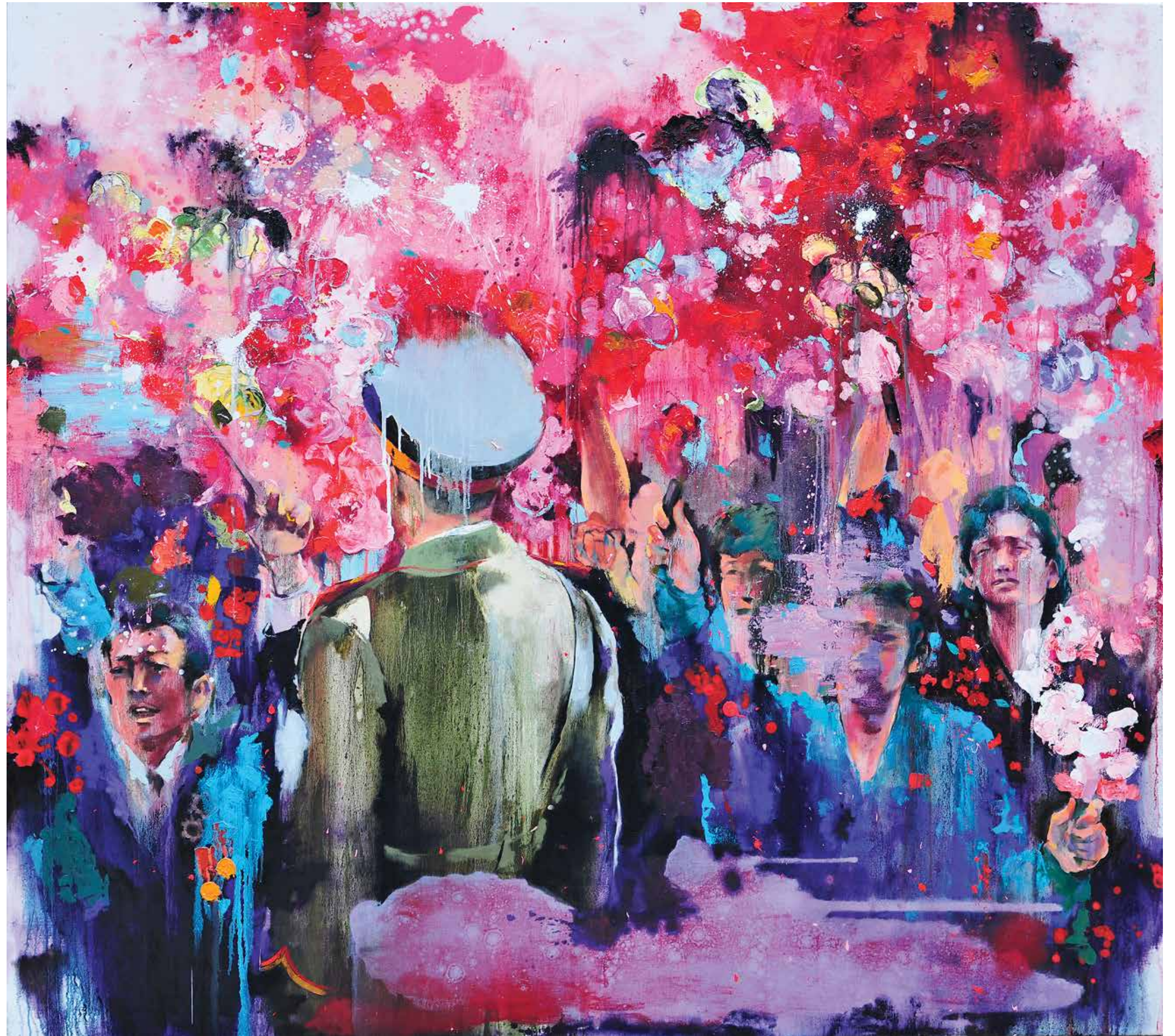




Korean leader survival, 2014  
Oil on canvas  
2 pieces each one 80 x 120 cm



Hiroo Onoda, 2014  
*Oil on canvas*  
180 x 130 cm



Conductor, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
180 x 200 cm



Alley, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
80 x 120 cm



Sun set, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
130 x 180 cm



Last Step, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
80 x 120 cm



Admire the great leader, 2013  
Oil on canvas  
installation- 20 pieces



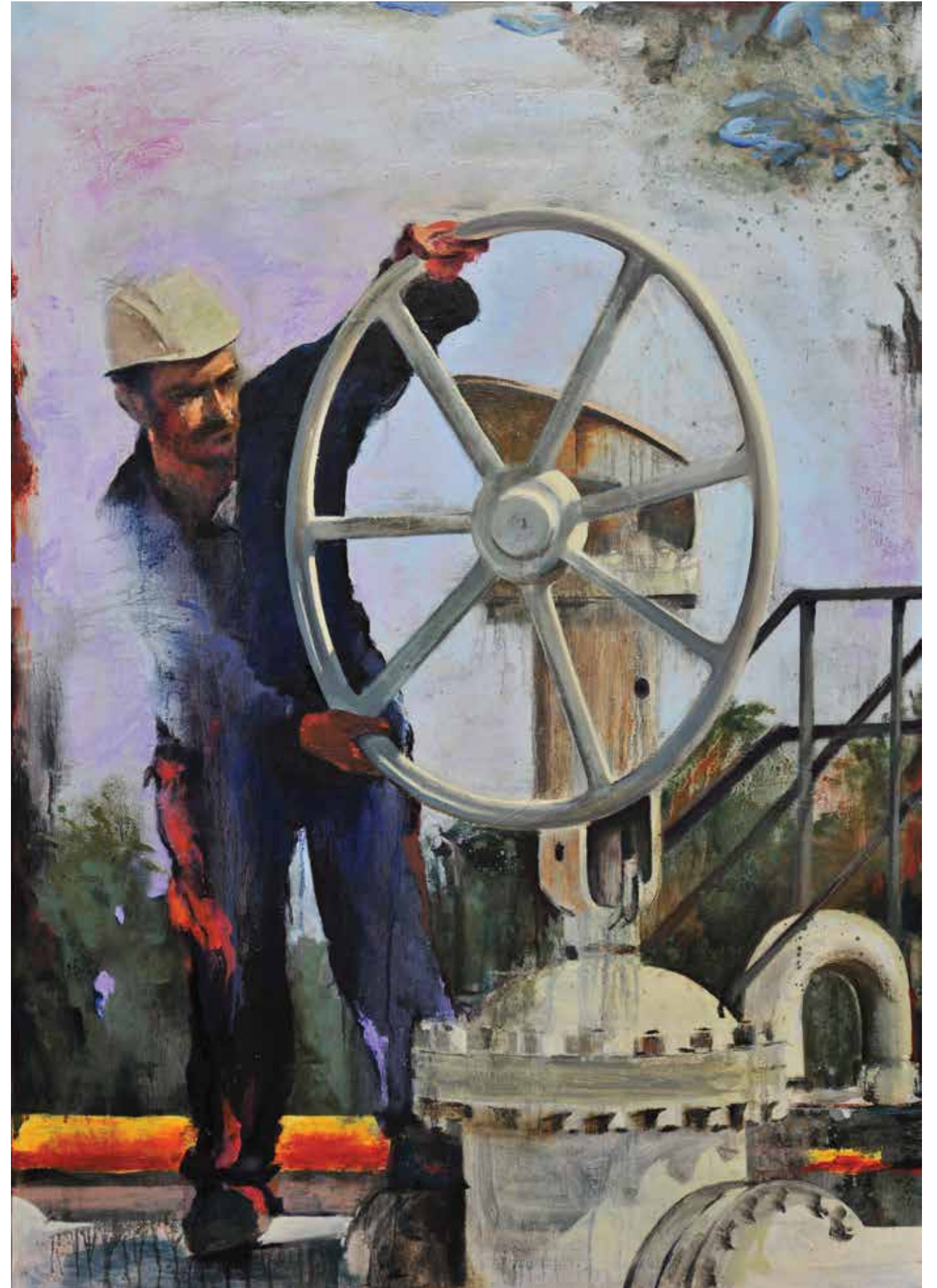
Oil Pipes, 2011  
Oil on canvas  
130 x 150 cm





Oil games, 2012  
Oil on canvas  
70 x 100 cm

Oil games, 2012  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 70 cm



Oil Platform, 2012  
*Oil on canvas*  
180 x 130 cm



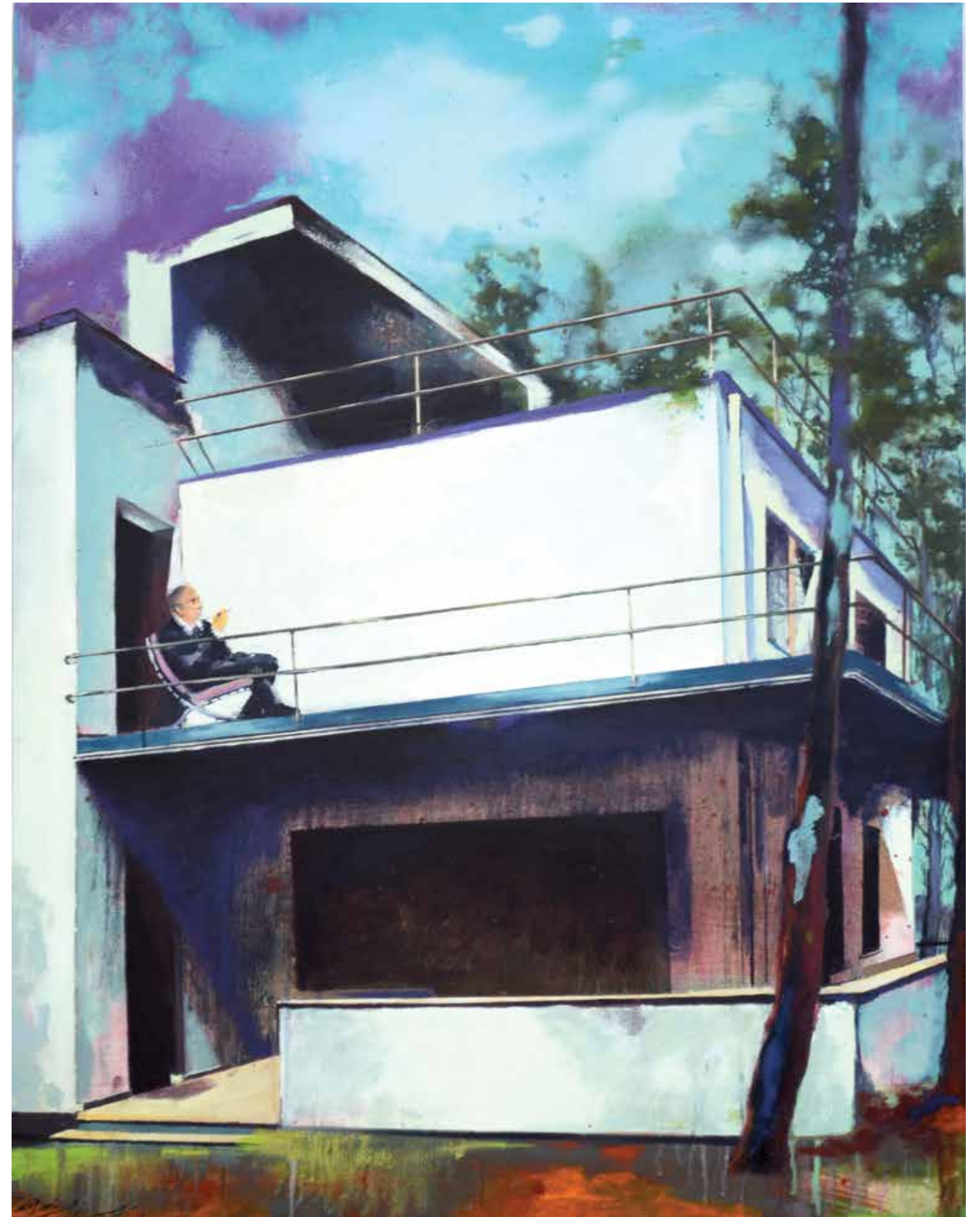


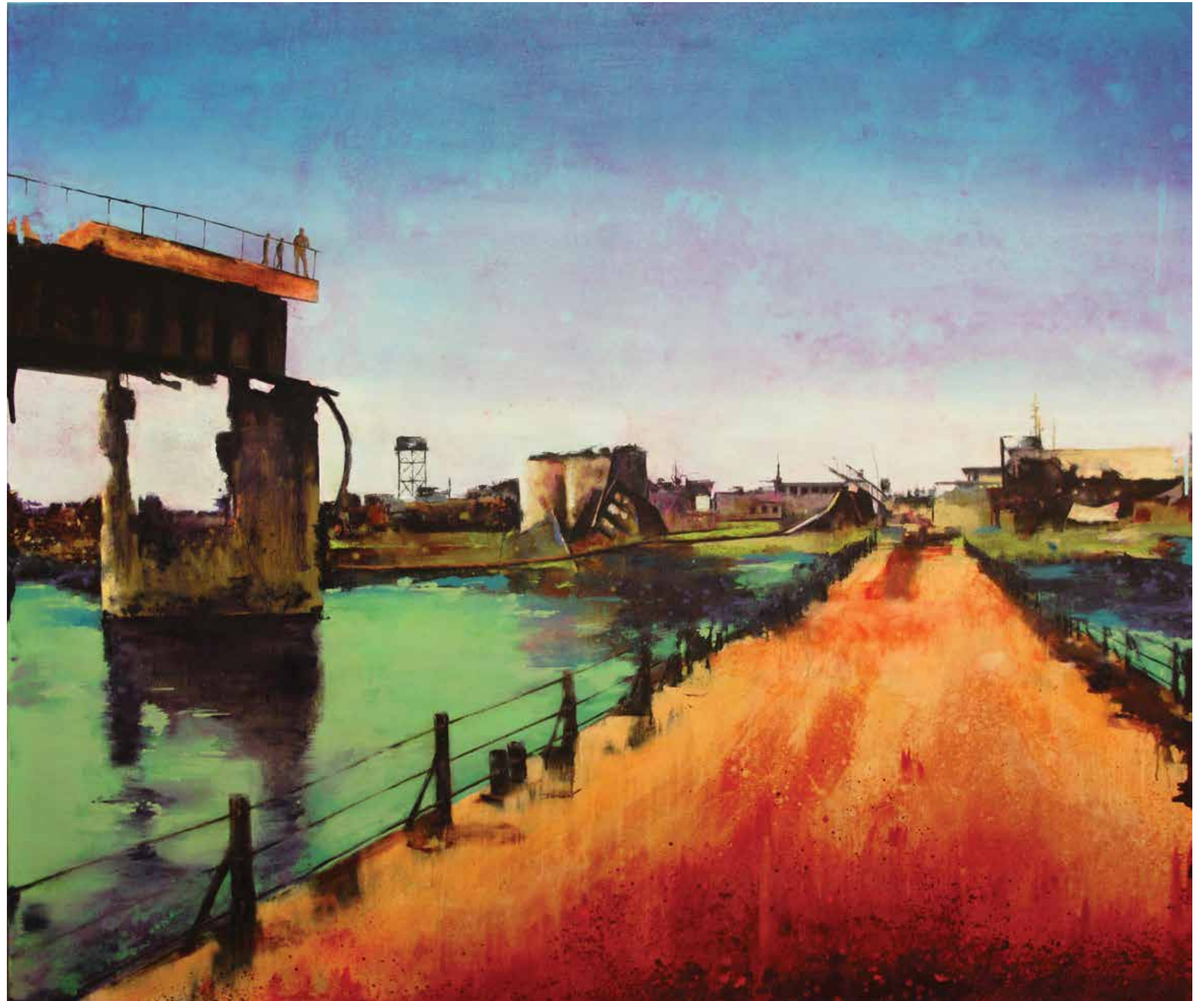
Oil Game Series (6 men), 2012  
Oil on canvas  
100 x 70 cm



Bauhaus series, 2012  
*Oil on canvas*  
100 x 70 cm

Bauhaus series, 2012  
*Oil on canvas*  
100 x 70 cm





Bridge, 2011  
Oil on canvas  
170 x 200 cm



Silk Road, 2010  
Oil on canvas  
200 x 280 cm





## ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHY

Amir Hossein Zanjani

Born: 1980, Esfahan - Iran

Education: Master of Arts in Painting, Art University - Tehran

Bachelor of Arts in Painting, Azad University – Tehran

### Solo Exhibitions:

2012: Siena Art Institute,  
Siena - Italy

2011: Exhibition and Lecture about Persian Painting at Stroganov University,  
Moscow - Russia

2011: Celeste Prize 2011, Painting Finalists Exhibition & Awards,  
New York - USA

2010: Mah Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2009: Mah Art Gallery,  
Tehran – Iran

### Awards:

2012: Siena Art Institute Celeste Prize Scholarship, Semi-finalist,  
Siena - Italy

### Group Exhibitions:

2012: Documentary of Sea - XVA Art Gallery,  
Dubai - UAE

2012: Show off, ( Salsali Private Museum )  
Dubai - UAE

2011: Selected as a finalist in Celeste Prize Exhibition,  
NY - USA

2011: Dubai Art Fair, Bait Muzna Art Gallery,  
Dubai - UAE

2011: Group Exhibition, Bait Muzna Art Gallery,  
Muscat - Oman

2010: Group Exhibition, James Gray Gallery,  
Los Angeles - USA

2010: Landscape, Aran Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2010: Obligatory Military Service, Mohsen Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2009: Painting, Hoor Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2008: Mah Art Gallery, an Impressive Representation by 50 Artists,  
Tehran - Iran

2008: Painting, Creek Art Fair,  
Dubai - UAE

2008: Painting, Hoor Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2008: Painting, Mah Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2007: Iran Contemporary Drawing Festival, Imam Ali Museum,  
Tehran - Iran

2006: The 4th International Painting Biennial Islamic World,  
Tehran - Iran

2006: Selection of New Generations, Homa Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2006: Hand Making Prints (chalcography), Jamshidiye Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2005: Painting, Saba Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2004: Drawing, Kamaleddin Behzad,  
Tehran - Iran

2004: Annual Contemporary Drawing, Barg Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran

2003: Annual Contemporary Drawing, Barg Art Gallery,  
Tehran - Iran



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

### To Friends and Supporters

Mehmoush Fatholahi, Figen Keil, Dr. Hamid Marashi, Jumana S. Ghouth, Leila Farahmand, Ali Zanjani, Ramin Salsali, Rebecca Anne Proctor, Teddy Carlos Sulit, Benson Carlos Sulit, Naima Sulit

### To our collectors

Private collectors and museums from Middle East, Europe and North America.  
Salsali Private Museum. UAE  
Museum of Serre di Rapolano, Italy

