



SYNECDOCHE

LALEH KHORRAMIAN



Synecdoche, the idea that the whole is present in every particle, lies at the core of Laleh Khorramian's creations. **Ali Meghdadi** explores the poignancy of scope in her works and discovers how much physical and psychic proximity completely reorder the understanding and experiencing of the work.

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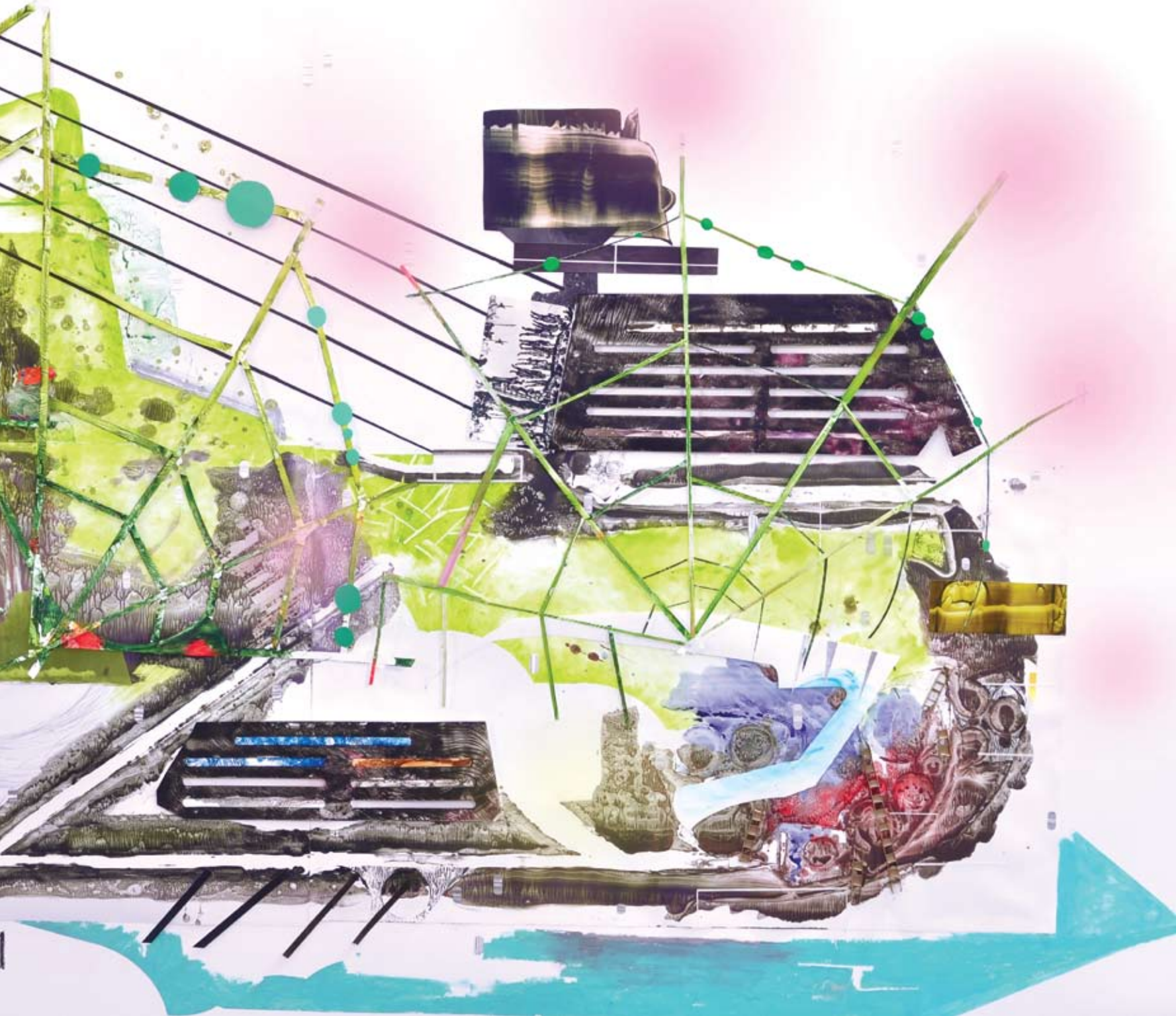
ainter, filmmaker and sometime sculptor, Laleh Khorramian was born in Tehran in 1974 and from the age of two grew up largely in Orlando, Florida. She studied painting and film at the Rhode Island School of Design and received her Bachelor's of Fine Arts degree from the Chicago Art Institute, where she focused on film, performance and printmaking and later earned a Master's of Fine Arts degree from Columbia University. Sensing talent in his daughter, Laleh's father encouraged her to make several drawings each day and it wasn't until the age of 20 that she began to look at art as a viable career path for herself. Khorramian admits that eventually something stuck. While she has been influenced greatly by cinema, she also cites the Persian miniatures of her Iranian heritage as contributors to her unique aesthetic. Working in several media, her works are at once theatrical and surreal.

That her primary medium is the monotype print perfectly manifests how even in the very act of creating her work, she tells a story with another equally intriguing one just underneath it. Images are painted on glass; a piece of paper is laid over the wet paint, which is then pulled away, taking with it the fresh residue of the inverted image. The glass is then wiped and painted over with another image. Each image is unique. Because many elements are left to chance – the running of the paint, the variances in the force she exerts on the glass, the tilt of the table and so on – the works unfold in a mingling of process and fate. The possibility for ruin is ever present, yet it is precisely from ruin that Khorramian is able to unmask possibility. "The monotypes are a factory of complete surprises. The strangest images are generated," explains Khorramian; "You could never predict what would come before or after." The creation of the works premeditates and inspires the stories that become the works themselves. Her body of work unfolds as process and product conspire in myriad narratives that echo, fuse, divide and draw from each other.

Opening spread: (Detail)
Green as A Heart. 2008.
Glass, lead, wood, stain,
neon and vellum. 96.5 x
96.5 x 12.7 cm.

Above: (Detail) *LJW-009*
Zenith Mobile Lab. 2011.
Oil, oil crayon, paper,
cardboard, charcoal and
polypropylene on museum
board. 215.9 x 144.8 x 3 cm.





TRANSCENDENTAL JOURNEYS

Khorramian explores vessels of being – containers that carry things from wherever they are to anywhere they could be, both conceptually and physically. *LW-009 Zenith Mobile Lab* is one such work. A massive piece that monopolises the wall, it has the look of a powerful entity that is used to being gawked at. From afar, a giant collage of multilayered monotype prints and sashes of

paper present the whole image as an easily recognisable spaceship, but it is only up close that the layers and various dimensions reveal clandestine passageways and unexpected constellations. The bizarre and unexpected reside here, within these floating and hovering forms. Yet the form itself is ancient. As one moves forwards and backwards, context and content participate in a continuity of unravelling meaning.

Concepts and images often echo and reappear in Khorramian's various works.

Woven through Khorramian's work is a stirring need for escape – to be freed from the bonds of time, space, gravity, society, category and convention. What drove her to use film, she explains, was a sense of confinement imposed by the borders of paper. In film, borders do not exist as limits but as a viewfinder, a portal. Following on from her desire to explore the transcendence of form and medium, Khorramian drew inspiration for *Green as a Heart* from the frames of her own 2008 animated meditation on fire, *I Without End*, the third in her series of short films based on the elements of earth, air, fire, water and ether. Originally a simple window in the background of the house in which the animation's narrative is set, Khorramian extracted the two-dimensional image from

her film and literally recreated it in green glass as a larger-than-life sculptural light box built out of stained glass etched with tiny drawings. "I made the glass window green on account of the healing quality of green filtered light," she adds, reflecting on a single meditation she did over months, visualising a specific green colour.

Concepts and images often echo and reappear in Khorramian's various works. She connects them as if members of a community engaged in a fusion of horizons. Spanning across all of her films are little black figures. "They are simple human forms, no clear gender, race or origin, but lifelike blots and smears turned into frantic movement," she explains. In one film, they are swinging from trees in impossible directions, in another, they fly with skirts turned upward over their heads and in yet another, they march laboriously across a coastline. Their ubiquitous presence signals that place and time are not fixed but rather, are infinite and perpetual. This continuity of figures invites an appropriate connecting of the works: they appear as a constellation of ideas born from a consciousness that is radically dislodged from the trappings of any particular time or place.

"I don't really want to create a specific fantasy, but create the same premise that triggered one for me."





Facing page: *I Without End*. 2008. Video still. Six minutes and 20 seconds.

Left: (Detail) *The Post War Dream*. 2008. Ink, oil, crayon and collage on polypropylene. 167.6 x 116.2 cm.

INVENTING HISTORIES

Khorramian's fourth film and most recent work in her five-part study of the elements, *Water Panics in the Sea*, is constructed through a process of iterative magnification and manipulation of minute details derived from monotype prints and drawings. The film follows a ship as it sails through a surreal ocean and, again, the familiar constellation of images, figures and metaphors weaving through Khorramian's works appear as guides and reminders that this is yet another particle in a much larger body. The film questions our preconceived perceptions through an intricate interplay of scale, distance, time and space. She obsessively mines from within the prints, examining the agency of raw elements – paint, paper, glass and gravity – in search of a new conversation that resurrects a lost vocabulary. The more one gazes, the more is revealed. "New contexts allow for new interpretations that then unfold into newer contexts," explains Khorramian; "This further presents alternate interpretations which again unfold forever, or rather, for as long as I'm driven or willing to sink inside the process."

By collapsing a series of frames to reveal artifice posing as structure, Khorramian cultivates a new language underpinned by the indistinct yet unspeakably familiar. The film functions in many ways as a neologistic journey for the discernment of a language that studies the structure of consciousness while pushing against its periphery. She thereby attempts to harness the sublime essence of subjective experience, both as translator and traitor, and to expose common experiences within a foreign context.

PROFILE

Below: *LW-006 Canvas Ship (Abandoned)*. 2011.
Oil, ink and paper on
canvas. 236.2 x 154.9 cm.

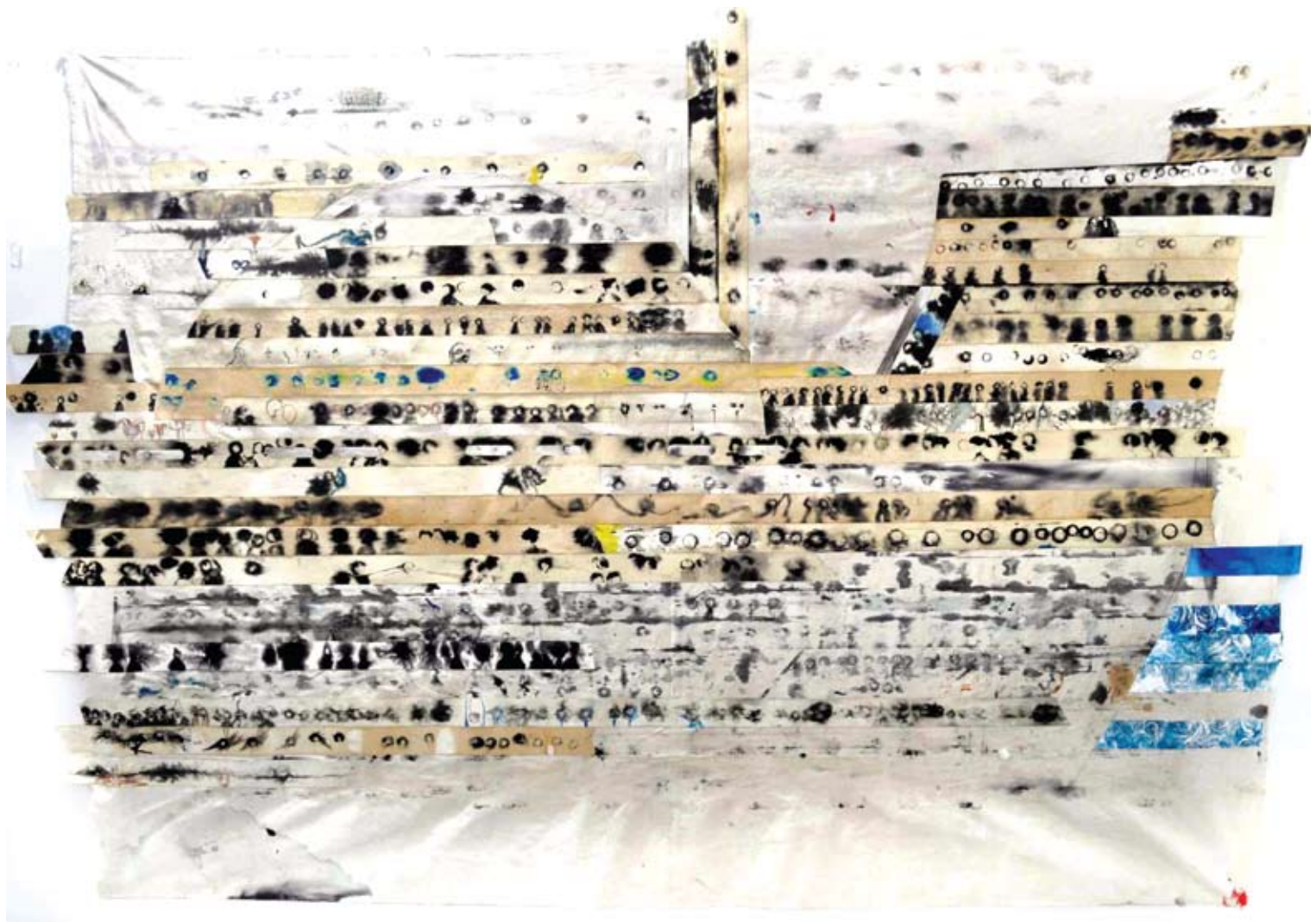
Facing page: Stills from
Water Panics In The Sea.
2011. Digital stop-frame
animation. 14 minutes.

All images courtesy the artist
and *The Third Line, Dubai*.

Experiencing the world rooted in the temporality of existence, the being and its situation are defined by their unfolding relationship of understanding. "I'm constantly imagining that where I am standing was once submerged in liquid or sediment," she adds; "What once filled the void of seemingly empty space. So anywhere you look could hold a history. I like to imagine or invent what that was." Khorramian's work feels like an invitation to participate in a sense of continuity: whether collage, charcoal or video – the medium is beholden to the meaning. She tries to elude time and speak across the ages, yet Khorramian's creations generate ideas of significance that allow, demand even, reflection on the very conditions of reflection. It's not that there isn't anything in the seemingly absent space, rather, she is opening our eyes to intricate communities – ones that are not necessarily too microscopic so much as heterotopic. "I don't

really want to create a specific fantasy, but create the same premise that triggered one for me," she says. "And for me, what I'm bringing to it is more satire than fantasy."

Such play is also manifested in her involvement in music and soundtrack production. Khorramian has collaborated with New York-based composer and performer Shahzad Ismaily on several films. They work together through dialogue to create a soundtrack, which is then handed over to her to "completely deform and deconstruct or leave as is; it's awesome to have someone trust you like that." At first glance, *LW-006 Canvas Ship (Abandoned)* appears as a series of paper strips glued together to form a ship. Inspired by Mayan codices that illustrate the culture's rituals, history and quotidian habits, the strips are pocked with dollops of paint smudges that resemble knots in the hull's lumber, portholes or tormented faces peering in from a paral-






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lel dimension. These strips are pasted onto a slack piece of canvas draped on the wall. In fact, Khorramian and Ismaily have worked together for the past four years, resulting in other projects such as her animation, *Liuto Golis* in 2010 and another upcoming film in her *Golis Galaxy* series. Most recently, they worked together on *Atom Fables* in October 2011, featuring sound performances by Ismaily to film sequences by Khorramian, their first live performance together. She has also curated, including the exhibition *Turning Points: Seven Iranian Artists* along with Media Farzin in 2004 at the LeRoy Neiman Gallery at Columbia University, the result of a trip to her homeland

and the desire to introduce her compatriot artists to the international market.

Whether in her unearthly landscapes, at once awe-inspiring and intimate, or in the fascinating interplay of two curling orange peels, what Khorramian consistently achieves is the creation of a new universe, one which evokes feelings both familiar and unfamiliar, a probing look within ourselves, as, ultimately, we, like Khorramian, are both within and without simultaneously. 

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