

avish khebrehzadeh  
'where do we go from here?'

preview 6 oct 6 - 8 pm  
exhibition 7 oct- 12 nov 2011

23 heddon street  
london w1b 4bq



For her first solo show at Sprovieri Gallery, London, Avish Khebrehzadeh produces three interconnected spaces comprising of a large installation in the main space, an animation projection and a further space of drawings.

The centrepiece installation entitled *Where Do We Go From Here?* features an animation in Khebrehzadeh's distinctive paired down style projected directly onto a circular formation of coarse grain sea salt spread onto the gallery floor. The white salt acts as the screen or paper surface shimmering in the light of an overhead projector. Resting in the centre of the salt plain is a circular clear glass vessel containing a fish swimming in water. Circumventing the live fish is a projection of an animated image of an airplane and its shadow. The plane glides, dives and ascends, followed by its shadow that connects it to the surface of the salt. In characteristic simplicity, the repetitious cyclical motion creates a meditative poetic effect contrasting with the live, random motion of the fish. Surrounding the central installation hang large format drawings of trees. These trees refer directly to Khebrehzadeh's personal and mythological worlds: the Hawthorn is an enchanted tree associated with the spiritual realm of the heart; the Dogwood is a local tree and a direct reference to Khebrehzadeh's adopted home in Washington D.C. *The Tree of Life* - the archetypal tree - imbued with all the mythical essences of nature, connecting the Earth to the divine, is a most enduring symbol of existence, as old as man himself. By incorporating the tree drawings in the same space, operating as a conceptual forest or a familiar dreamscape, Khebrehzadeh has intentionally promoted a dialogue between the works.

In *Where Do We Go From Here?* the confined fish is circumnavigated by the inconclusively repetitious and cyclical motion of the airplane. The concentric spatial elements - the fish vessel, the suspended rotational motion of the airplane, the salt formation - define interconnected modalities of circularity and wholeness, the impossibility of a convergence, communion, resolution or elucidation. The elemental and essential powers of salt, water and light formally and spatially bound within concentric dimensions proposes an existential enquiry. On one level, *Where Do We Go From Here?* operates as a mandala of abstracted celestial, cosmic and universal associations. The intrusive man-made airplane ceaselessly searches for an ambiguous, unknown, unnamed or impossible destination, perpetually revolving in an eternally unfulfilled orbit to a fish that fails to illuminate either path or destination. The fish itself carries symbolic potencies as the final constellation of the celestial zodiacal order, the archaic mythological guardian of the original submerged tree of life (a precursory prototype to Noah's Ark), and later an adopted symbol for Christ himself. Its placement on a bed of salt highlights its vulnerability. Salt, an essential stabilising biological element of life is revered equally as preserver and destroyer of life. Used in rites, consecrations, ritual purifications as a symbol of healing and of Earth, a preserver of life, salt has been associated with the growth of civilisation, wealth and the promotion of economic power on the one hand. It has been at the centre of wars and served as currency. Salting the earth, on the other hand, is a long standing ritual - dating as far back as Assyrian times - of strewing salt on a conquered city to symbolise a curse on its rehabilitation. Famously, legend has it that the City of Carthage was ritually ploughed over and sowed with salt. In Khebrehzadeh's installation, the haloed reflectivity of the ground strewn with salt is a pointer to the fragile vulnerability of life as embodied by the fish, in all its existential ennui, suspended in its confined precarious reality. "Yet, despite the unknown, as the flight orbits", in Khebrehzadeh's own words, "our search for a promised destination persists".

In the adjacent space is installed a hand drawn animated projection entitled *Unnamed Dream*. Taking taxidermy as its concern and Ionesco's Rhinoceros as its inspiration, the narrative depicts the transformation of a hippopotamus into a rhinoceros at the hands of a pair of taxidermists. Drawn in her very distinctive spare style, Khebrehzadeh employs a minimal aesthetic and restrained line to create her narrative, subjects, individuals and the lone animal who all hover against a background, which is plain and luminous, intensifying their solitude. Khebrehzadeh says, "I like to be frugal in giving the visual information to viewers. I want each viewer to participate and finish the story with his or her own imagination." The four scenes of the video projection depict in theatrical succession the following stories: a pair of acrobats perform; a pair of taxidermists enter with a hippopotamus, engage in preserving but ultimately artificially transforming the animal into a rhinoceros before presenting their transformed feat on a revolving stage; in a fury of excitement the taxidermists are seen mounting their creation, madly tickling each other; finally, a little person enters, wishfully attempts to transform himself into a rhinoceros, plants a rhinoceros horn on his own forehead, climbs a ladder and sings. The free-associative nature of the narrative sequences owes itself to a fascination with the Theatre of the Absurd.

The soundtrack of *Unnamed Dream* is created in collaboration with the Russian-born bass/baritone singer Evgeny Nikitin who sings a Russian folk song. Music for scene three is borrowed from an original sketch by the early 20th century comic Karl Valentin whose absurd plays and performance style were admired by many of the playwrights of the Theater of the Absurd, influencing their style.

The third room of works exhibits a series of animation drawings and paintings featuring amongst other characters, an antelope whose horns are either deformed or caught in a web or come to resemble vegetation, the rhinoceros, an elephant whose majesty is subjected to the tools of the taxidermist who paints and prepares it. Hand drawn stills from *Unnamed Dream* are also exhibited. In her depictions of man and nature, Khebrehzadeh is consistently scrutinising existential distractions of the human condition, directly or as projected onto the animal or nature, evoking discomfiting angst, alienation, absurdity. The power of the image is exemplified by the frugal simplicity of her lines, narratives and gestures.