

***Beware of this Image:
Ramin Rampage Rides Again***

One morning, as Gregor Samsa was waking up from anxious dreams, he discovered that in his bed he had been changed into a monstrous verminous bug.

Kafka, *The Metamorphosis* (1915)ⁱ

In 2009 I wrote that in Ramin Haerizadeh's collages (*Today's Woman*) the artist depicts himself as a "simulacrum - a chaos of appearances" (as Jorge Luis Borges said of Citizen Kane)ⁱⁱ to emphasise a fractured self. Multiple cross-gendered self-portraits appear to celebrate a kind of triumphant bestiality. The artist uses the safety of humourous juxtapositions and candy-soft background colours to *contain and camouflage* the grotesque absurdity of *exposed* internal conflicts, highlighting schisms between on the one hand individual and internal and on the other external realities.ⁱⁱⁱ

In his new body of works the artist continues to depict multiple reproductions of the self, as fractured, mirrored, morphed, amorphous, cross-gendered, bestial, a Kafkaesque indeterminate creature with now a distinctly evolved phallicism. The frontal elevation of a mosque unashamedly, unabashedly stands for a handsome erect male organ, pointing skywards - as both do - ejecting an extending post onto which hangs the inverted harlequin-like collaged version of a Qajar entertainer balanced on a bearded chin in sailor/prisoner-striped pyjama/body suit. The composite Ramin-headed creature rides, poises and performs daringly. This archaic looking bas-relief-style hallucinatory hairy (and sometimes crowned) profile floats like a germ in a noisy, wordy, amniotic world, squalling his *vagitus uterinus*. Menacing rage takes over from humour in these monochromatic UFO landings, apparitional appearances, or verminous attacks.

In a direct response to the censorship imposed upon his works in both the city of his residence (Dubai) as well as of course his birthplace (Tehran), the title of the show *Beware of this Image* satirises, warns and entices. Like enlarged broadsheets, the monochromatic canvasses are a parody of censorship-subjected media pages. Acceding to actual, exigent officially imposed guidelines, prohibitive warnings appear stamped across the canvasses exactly as they do in English on real publications even art auction catalogue pages. The strategic and arbitrary use of the prohibitive warnings across the canvasses highlight both a painful absurdity and a restrictive reality and their relationship to the artist and his practice. Defying restriction, the spectre of the raging artist bursts and squeezes out of limbs like a prisoner granted temporary furlough.

The artist emphasises his point by apparent haphazard placing of signposts, drawing and diverting attention in disparate directions, intriguing and enticing. These signposts never in actuality hide indiscretions as the absurdist, fabricated formations are never real torsos but assembled images of the artist's arms. Whilst the signposts hark back to crude, even primitive exigencies of media censorship, the artist keenly highlights the reality that these are in actuality often imposed in exactly the same words by English-speaking expat employees whom in his own words are "busily, slavishly implementing official moral red-tapes". Paradoxically, the cut-and-paste pseudo-torsos are far from anything real to be worth a censor's ink. Humour is embedded in the conceit of the flirtatious bluffs.

The black, *meccaesque* cubic enclosure, segregated and isolated from sight and the outside world - the ultimate concealment - in which the works are quarantined is also an insular sanctuary. In the centre is a rotating sculpture of (the image of) a lone bearded veiled cross-dressed creature - another regular personification of the artist - on a deformed horse pulling (the image of) a lone and brave Queen back to power on a carriage mutilated by thirty years of graffiti. Having been conceived months ago and in no relation to recent events, in the context of the latest tragedy of the loss of the Queen's younger son, the piece assumes deeply tragic dimensions.

The brutally dark humour, the anti-coercive raging vendetta, the transformation and deformation of the semi-human figure (of the self), consciously or subconsciously, signal persistent internal combats with that which is allowed to be seen, shown or known. Haerizadeh uses concealment ambivalently, and the blacking out - whether the veil, the censoring signposts or the enclosed sanctuary - serves both as a metaphor for oppression and a container of safety. Safety itself constitutes a dual defensive avoidance of violence from within and without. Concealment in the works serves as both a literal obscuring of areas of the canvas from view and viewer as well as a self-reflective self-concealment. Obscurity itself is embedded within *near-explosive-but-not-quite-delivering* libidinal outbreaks - the boundary between the sublimated and the overtly sexual.

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ⁱ Kafka, Franz, *The Metamorphosis* (1915), as cited in H. Dabashi, *The Discrete Charm of European Intellectuals*, International Journal of Zizek Studies, Vol. III, No. 4, (2009).

ⁱⁱ Borges, Jorge Luis, *Selected Non-Fictions*, edited by Eliot Weinberger, Esther Allen, and Suzanne Jill Levine, Viking, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mahlouji, Vali, *Symbols of Transformation and Fantasies of the Imagination*, Raad-o-Bargh Exhibition, Galerie Thaddaeus Ropac, Paris, 2009.