Penetrating the Silence
Hayv Kahraman

The New Tate Modern
A conversation with Frances Morris

Black Friday
Mall Culture with Sophia Al Maria

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MEN ARE BABIES

Laura van Straaten caught up with the Tehran-born artist who, in new artworks on view around the globe, gives men a taste of what misogyny feels like.

According to Artist Tala Madani
The animator and figurative painter Tala Madani has pulled off an interesting feat this year, managing to be practically ubiquitous. The artist, who lives in Los Angeles, has a show of new paintings at her London gallery Pilar Corrias on October 5th (through November 12th), right on the heels of her debut solo museum show in the US at the MIT’s List Visual Arts Center.

Madani's presence in so many group shows around the globe has gotten everyone wondering, “How can she be in so many places at once?” This year alone, Madani has shown her work at the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard College in upstate New York; the Kunsthalle Darmstadt near Frankfurt; Nicodim Gallery at Cantacuzino Palace, in Bucharest; Marlborough Chelsea in New York; Galerie Eva Presenhuber in Zurich; and the all-film and video show Mixtape 2016 at Pilar Corrias.

In New York, her pieces were the standouts of Hauser & Wirth's summer group show where several collectors and journalists were seen thumbing her name into their iPhones to learn more about her. On opening night, people blocked the hall to crowd around the small screen playing Madani's violent video, Wrong House (2015) in which each digitally animated visitor is beaten to death after knocking on the door of a nude, balding, bearded, painted guy—in sum, a classic Madani man.

This summer, I spoke with Madani by telephone from her home near the Highland Park area of Los Angeles, as her infant daughter Imra giggled and squawked in the background. The artist was born in Tehran in 1981 and emigrated to the US in 1994 when her mother began doctoral work in computer science at Oregon State University. Madani graduated from the same university ten years later with a double bachelor's degree in art and political science before receiving her MFA from Yale immediately after. Madani's studio is in the same Lincoln Heights building as that of her husband, Nathaniel Mellors, the sculptor and video artist who will co-represent Finland at next year's Venice Biennale.

In her work, Madani's main subject matter is very much on trend for women artists: men. Just down the street from her work at Hauser & Wirth at Cheim & Reid is The Female Gaze Part 2: Women Looking at Men, a sequel to a successful group show.

In Madani's case, she portrays men as vulnerable babies whose gestures, expressions, and stances are at turns plaintive, silly, angry, and clamouring. Many of the works depict men exhibiting or playing with bodily matter such as vomit, urine, and feces. “My interest is to subvert a particular overfl owing masculinity,” Madani in a conversation with fellow artist A.L. Steiner published in Prestel's new monograph on the artist. “There is also another aspect to my work. As an immigrant, I became very aware of being perceived as other. I'm really interested in otherness. There is a lot of play in the works with this perception of otherness.”

In many works Madani infantilises and feminises her male subjects. For instance, in Twins the men have breasts full of milk, or they play out the mother and baby role in the pietà as in Adoption (both from 2015). “Twins and Adoption are playing off Christian iconography, Madani explains in the book. “In Twins, the guy is lactating. There is no Madonna, no Mary, so he is the replacement. These works were very much affected by my being pregnant.”

"People really associate caricature with some kind of belittling, whereas it is actually a form of engagement. Satire,
Another man, unceasing bewilderment by women, says her work reminded him of his to whom I show Madani’s monograph necessarily without affection, in with women nodding knowingly, and not to respond differently to Madani’s work, Museum St Louis in Missouri, where a exhibition with the Contemporary Art the show at MIT, which co-organised the Huldisch, while giving a private tour of signature themes, “says Henriette overall they announce very clearly Tal’a’s pain...