



## Tala Madani: First Light

May 20 – July 17, 2016





COVER *Projections*, 2015, oil on linen, 80 x 98 1/4 x 1 3/4"  
 Courtesy the artist; David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles; and Pilar Corrias, London  
 ABOVE *The Dance*, 2015, oil on linen, 16 x 23 x 1 1/4"  
 Collection of Laurie Mitchell and Brent Woods  
 INSIDE *First Light*, 2015, oil on linen, 46 x 35 x 1 7/8"  
 Collection of Anousheh and Ali Razi  
 All photos: Josh White



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MIT List Visual Arts Center  
 20 Ames Street, Building E15  
 Cambridge, MA 02139  
[listart.mit.edu](http://listart.mit.edu)

## Tala Madani: First Light

Over the past ten years, Tala Madani has developed a distinctive painterly vocabulary centered on playful yet provocative representations of men. In paintings, drawings, and animations, she combines gestural figuration with mature and often disturbing subject matter, bracingly satirizing conventional notions of masculinity. Bright pastel or dark color fields form the ground for base group scenes in which balding, rotund, and middle-aged men behave atrociously: they spit and bleed, they bellow and bash each other. Men are entangled in self-inflicted situations that are variously funny, macabre, or humiliating. Unflinchingly abject, Madani's works encourage a larger consideration of authority, desire, and shame.



Cinematic light is a recurrent motif throughout this exhibition. Many of the paintings feature the presence of illumination: *Projections* (2015) shows a group of kneeling men spotlighted by video projectors and a man with raised arms is caught in the beam of a car headlight in *The Primitive* (2015). The notion of projection connects Madani's work not only to cinema and its presentation of images through light and dark but also to art history, from formal strategies like chiaroscuro to allusions to Christian iconography including the Crucifixion and the Pietà. In addition, Madani's short stop-motion animations, like *Eye Stabber* (2013), are in direct conversation with such

diverse traditions as animated cartoons and painted film. Her consummate art historical references wear their symbolism lightly; evoking Old Masters, gestural abstraction, or Color Field painting, Madani roundly debunks the masculine hubris associated with some of her predecessors.

Throughout her work, Madani recasts the male figure in various scenarios that both mock virility and redistribute the dynamics of power. And yet, her bevy of interchangeable males is also infantile and bedraggled. In *Love Doctor* (2015), a man with a luminescent smiley face cradles an uncomfortably reclining patient while dangling a pair of scissors over his head, and in the video *Oil Factory* (2014) a man crawls like a baby and builds piles of mud (or poop) that are intermittently thrown in the direction of the camera. In discharging bodily fluids, like the lactating man in *Twins* (2015), some of Madani's depictions are typically associated with the feminine. In other words, these gendered figures may be far more ambiguous and

Hayden Gallery May 20 – July 17, 2016

anarchic than they appear on the surface. In making reference to the improbable physics of animated cartoons, where flattened figures regularly bounce back into shape and physical boundaries are infinitely elastic, the bawdy imagery in Madani's work is continuously thrown into comic relief. Ultimately, her work presents a larger reflection on human cruelty, fantasy, and folly, coupled with the wary recognition that humans are somewhat ridiculous and grotesque, just because they're human.

### ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tala Madani (b. 1981, Tehran, Iran) lives and works in Los Angeles.

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### PUBLIC PROGRAMS

**Public Reception**  
**Thursday, May 19, 6–8 PM**

For more information about upcoming events and programs, visit: [listart.mit.edu/events-programs](http://listart.mit.edu/events-programs)

### SUPPORT

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