

SHIVA AHMADI

Crown of Flames

Exhibition Dates: March 13 - April 25, 2026

Opening Reception: Friday, March 13, 2026 | 5:30PM - 7:30PM

Haines Gallery proudly presents *Crown of Flames*, our second solo exhibition with Iranian-American multimedia artist **Shiva Ahmadi** (b. 1975, Tehran, Iran; lives and works in the San Francisco Bay Area). Conceived before the current Middle Eastern conflict, *Crown of Flames* features new and recent works that continue Ahmadi's longterm exploration of conflict, corruption, and instability, informed by her own experiences and the current news cycle. The works on view unfold as both personal testimony and global allegory, at once dazzling and devastating. Across painting, sculpture, and video, Ahmadi fuses formal beauty with an undercurrent of violence, drawing uneasy parallels between her brightly painted scenes and global issues of war, resource extraction, and the rise of authoritarian regimes—in the United States, Iran, Venezuela, and beyond.

Crown of Flames debuts Ahmadi's new video work of the same title, a two-channel animation comprising hundreds of individual, hand-painted watercolors that she transforms into vivid, moving images that pulse with life. The story unfolds across two parallel worlds: a lush jungle inhabited by playful monkeys on one screen, and a desert oil field and its looming, pumping machinery on the other. Temptation arises as fireflies swarm the forest, only to become flaming missiles as the monkeys swat and swipe at them. By the end of the five-minute work, the monkeys have abandoned their burning home for another, their greed and follies serving as a mirror of our own. Drawing from diverse storytelling traditions ranging from Persian miniature painting to George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, Ahmadi crafts a contemporary parable about land grabs and resource wars, and the consequences for individuals and the environment.

This entanglement of oil, capital, and bloodshed is similarly explored in *Oil Barrel #32* (2026), a repurposed steel drum embellished with paint and Swarovski crystals. Amid intricate patterns and fantastical creatures, the barrel is torn, punctured, and bloodied with red paint, viscerally invoking the true price of this precious commodity. This newly created work is exhibited alongside Ahmadi's *Pressure Cooker* sculptures. Here, the metallic surfaces of aluminum pressure cookers have been inscribed with delicate intaglio etchings, their bellies filled with nails and wire, making reference to real-world tools of violence, and more generally to the domesticity of terror. Across both bodies of work, the artist transforms and reclaims politically charged



Shiva Ahmadi, *Crown of Flames*, 2026
Dual channel animation (color, sound)
Edition of 3 + 2 AP



Shiva Ahmadi, *Oil Barrel #32*, 2026
Oil and Swarovski crystals on steel barrel
29 x 21 x 21 inches

objects through ornamentation, asserting beauty, care, and agency in the face of violence and extraction.

Ahmadi's newest watercolor paintings are centered upon female figures, a marked departure from the often faceless, genderless beings and animals that dominate her other works. The series began during the COVID-19 pandemic as explorations of bodily anxiety and trauma, and took on new significance after the death of Mahsa Amini, a 22 year-old Iranian woman who died in custody after being detained by the Morality Police for her "improper" hijab, and subsequent movement across Iran and the Iranian diaspora. "The female body—and hair in particular—has become a central site of resistance, vulnerability, and power in my work," the artist explains. Ahmadi's women are defiant, nurturing forces, powerful in spite of the spectre of the physical and psychic trauma that loom over the works. Set against luminous washes of color, they bear wings or wrestle serpents and leopards, their limbs and hair entwined with plant life, invoking mythological, religious, and primordial associations.

Taken together, the works on view in *Crown of Flames* offer a fable of our times. As Ahmadi reminds us, "For me it really doesn't matter where you live—whether it is Iran, Syria, or Detroit. My work deals with abuse of power and corruption." In a period shaped by increasing polarization and instability, the exhibition urgently suggests the necessity of seeing clearly—and refusing to look away.

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ABOUT THE ARTIST

Shiva Ahmadi's works have been exhibited internationally at museums including the Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia, PA; Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, Canada; Asian Art Museum, San Francisco, CA; Asia Society Museum, New York, NY; Grey Art Gallery, New York University, NY; Jan Shrem and Maria Manetti Shrem Museum of Art, University of California, Davis, CA; Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan; Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada; and Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK. Ahmadi has been awarded a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant, Anonymous Was a Woman Award, and a Career Achievement Award in Art, Art History, and Design from Wayne State University, Detroit, MI. *Shiva Ahmadi*, a monographic publication of her work, was published in 2017 by Skira.

PRESS INQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:

Irene Fung
irene@hainegallery.com / 415.397.8114



Shiva Ahmadi, *Eden's Keeper*, 2024
Watercolor on paper
30 x 22.5 inches



Shiva Ahmadi, *Green Veil*, 2023
Watercolor on paper
22.25 x 15 inches