

An abstract oil painting on a textured, light brown canvas. The central figure is a person with dark, curly hair, wearing a dark cap with white pom-poms. The person's face is rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of purple, brown, and white. They are wearing a light-colored, possibly white, garment. The background is a mix of dark and light tones, with a prominent dark shape in the upper left corner. The overall style is gestural and expressive, with visible brushwork and a rich, textured surface.

Portraits

Dana Nehdaran

Curated By Roya Khadjavi

Interview By Joseph R. Wolin



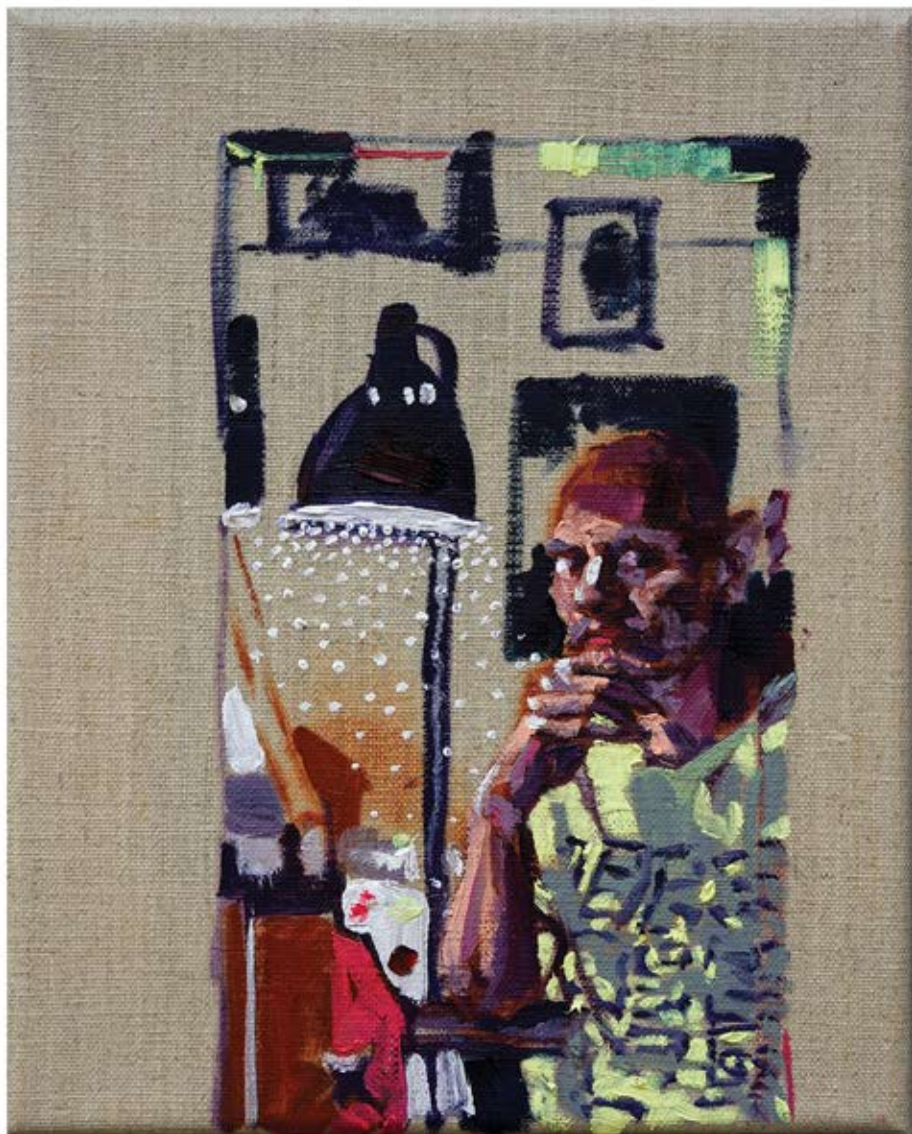


VOLTA New York, Sept 4Th-8Th, 2024
Chelsea Industrial
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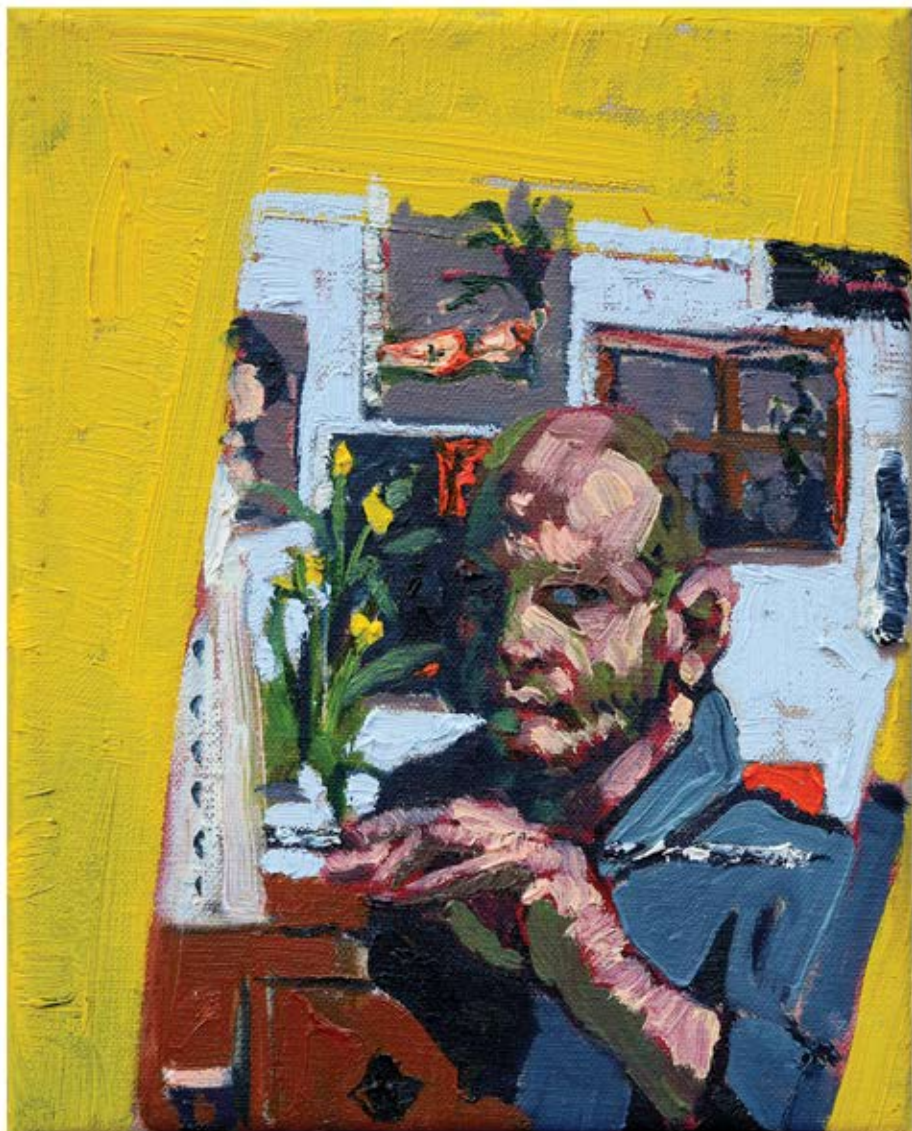



My Studio Sink, 2024, oil on linen, 18x24 inches





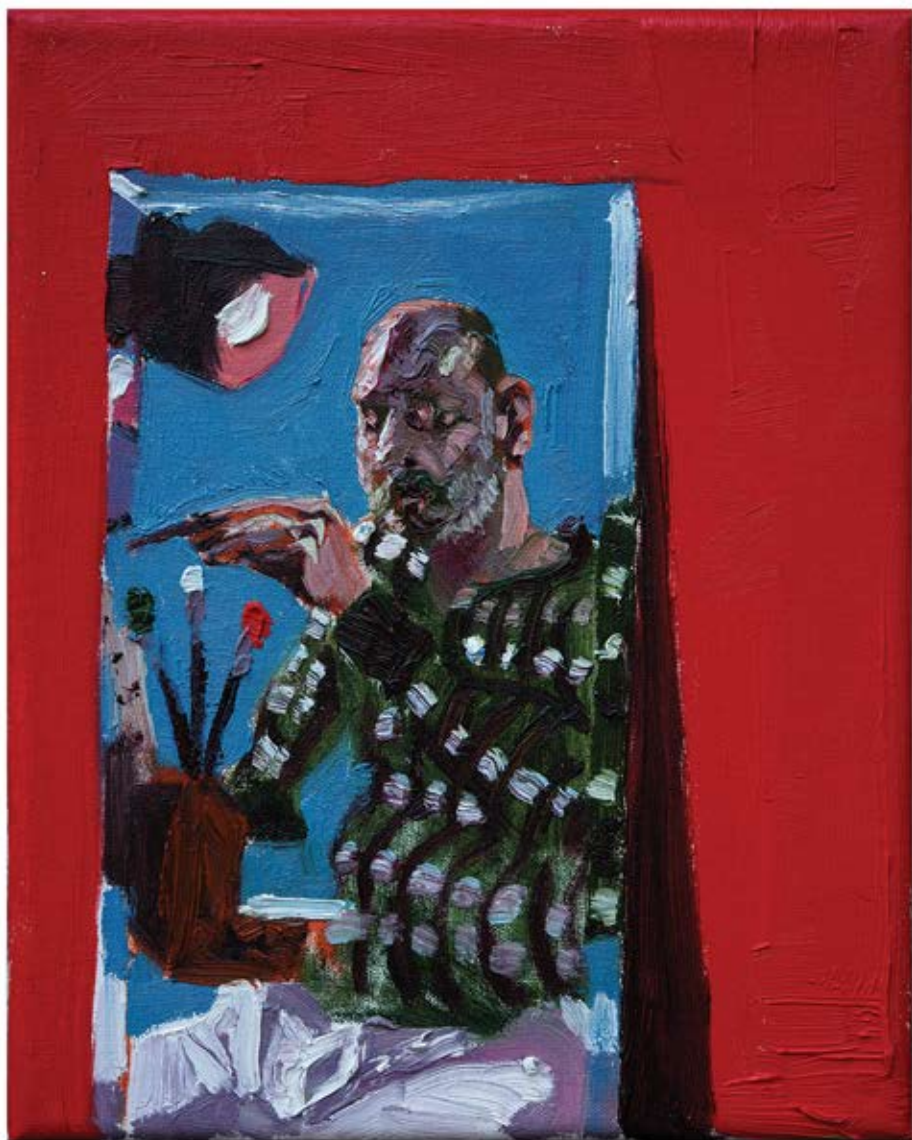
Pensive in Yellow T-Shirt, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



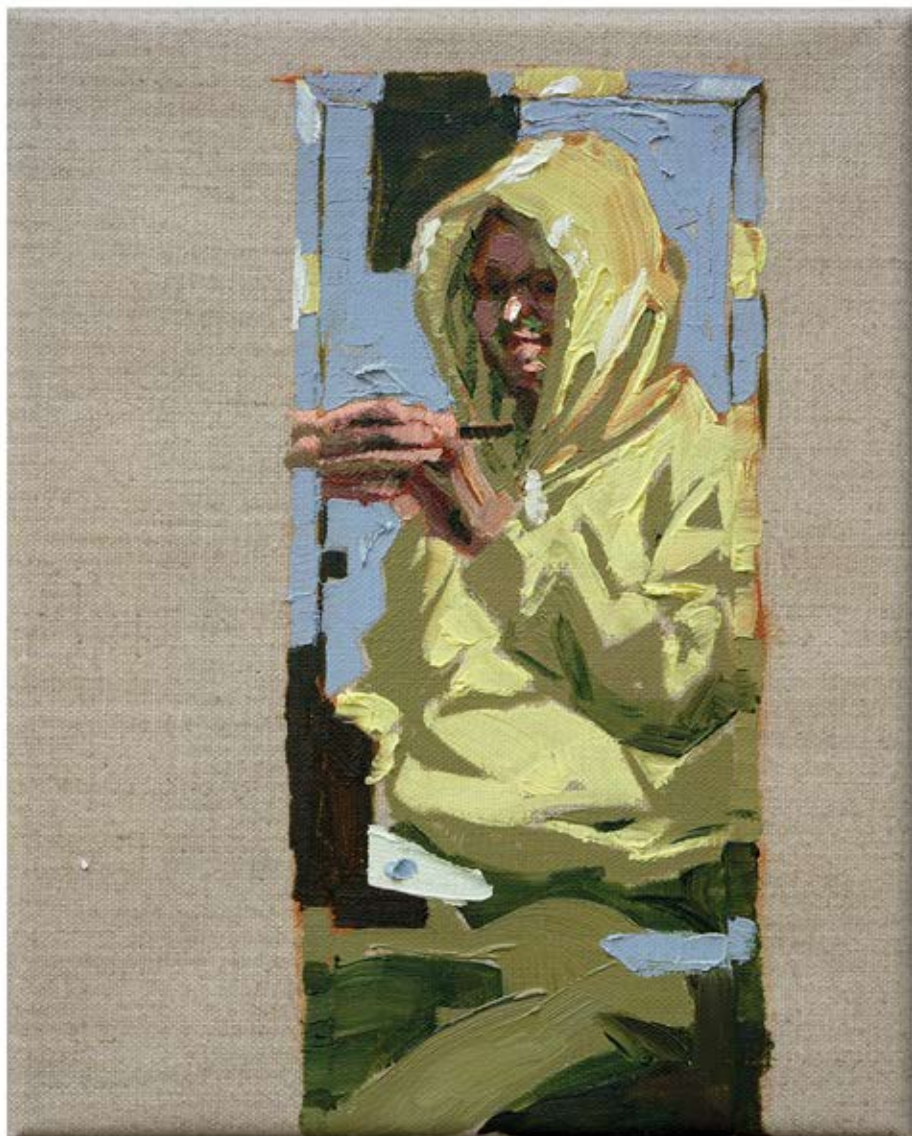
 *With Yellow Tulips, 2023, oil on linen, 10x8 inches*



 *With Brushes*, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches




In White Pajamas, 2023, oil on linen, 10x8 inches




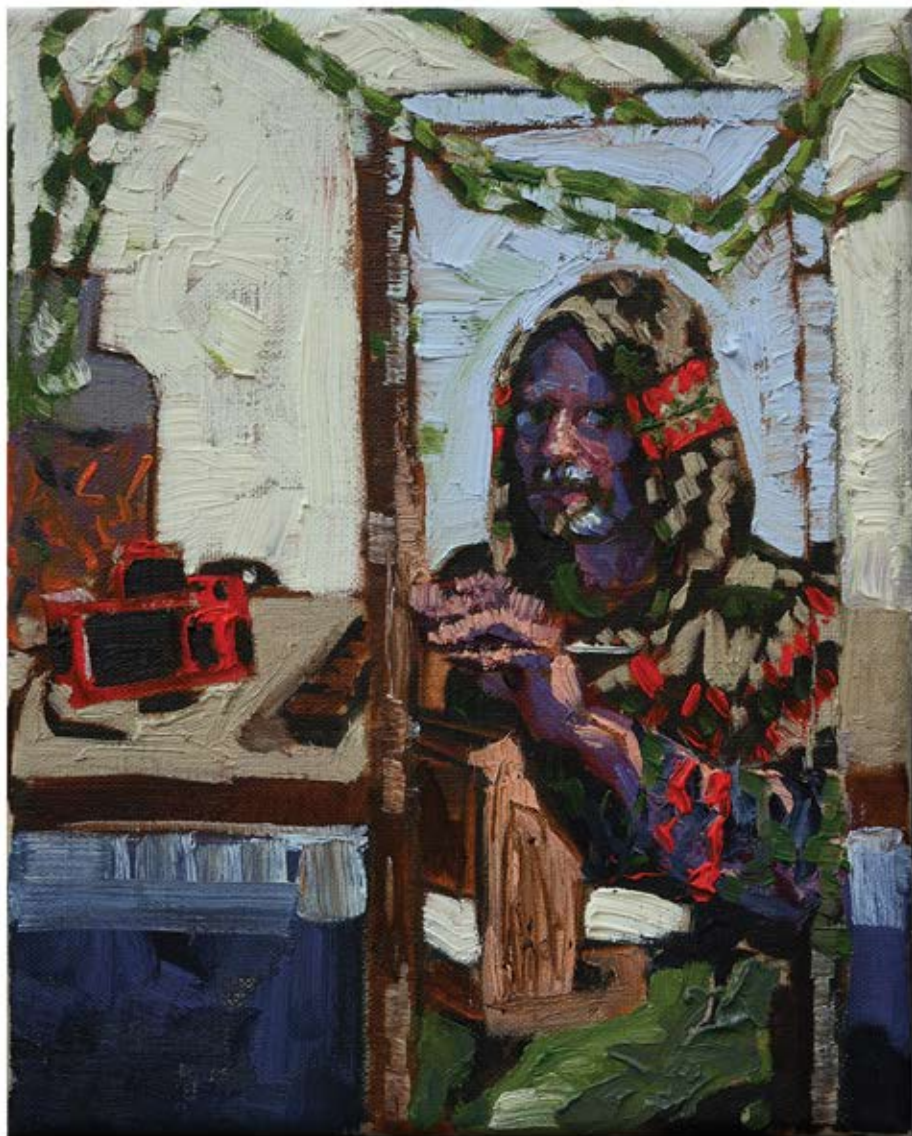
In Yellow Cotton Hoodie, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



 *After the Sunset, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches*



 *Renaissance Man*, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



 *With Bamboo*, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



With Easel, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches




Mysterious, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



In the Striped Pajamas, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



 *You Want it Darker, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches*



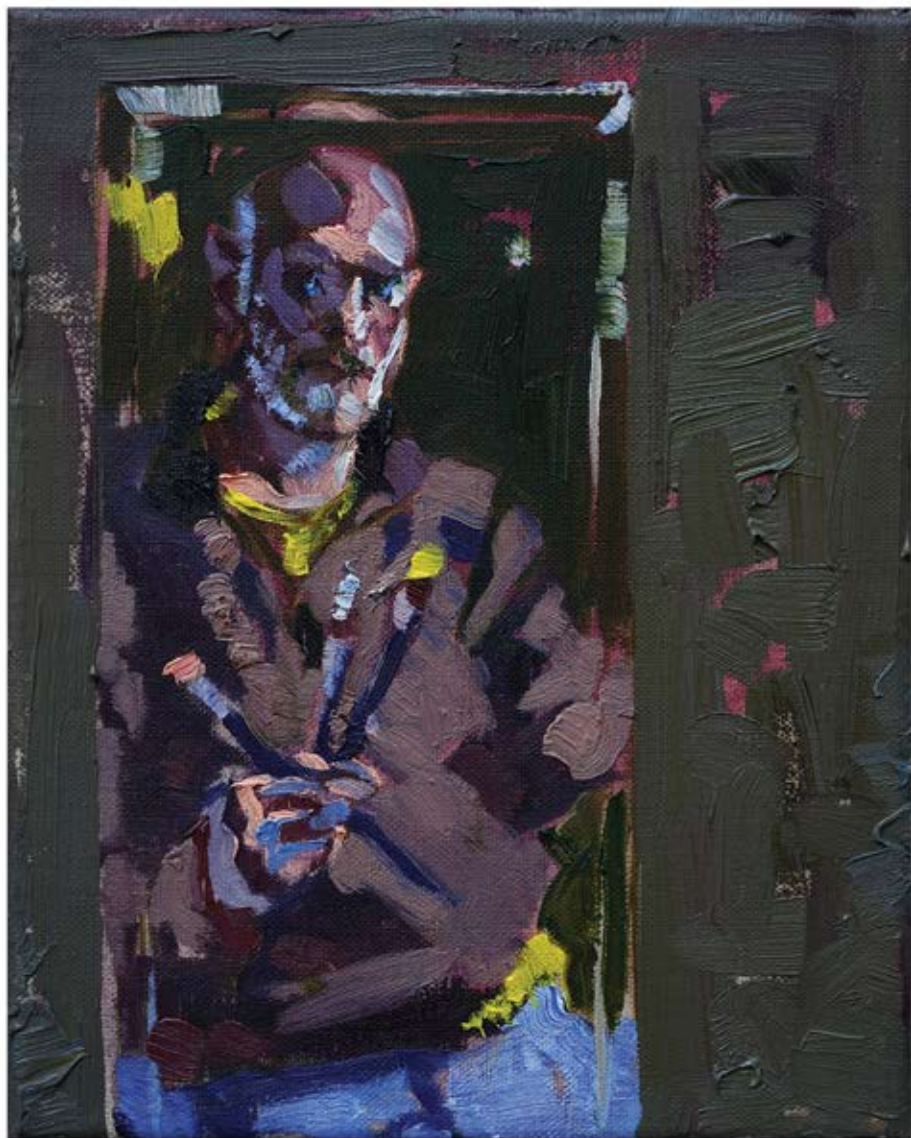
Light Rain, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



In Blue Striped hoodie, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches




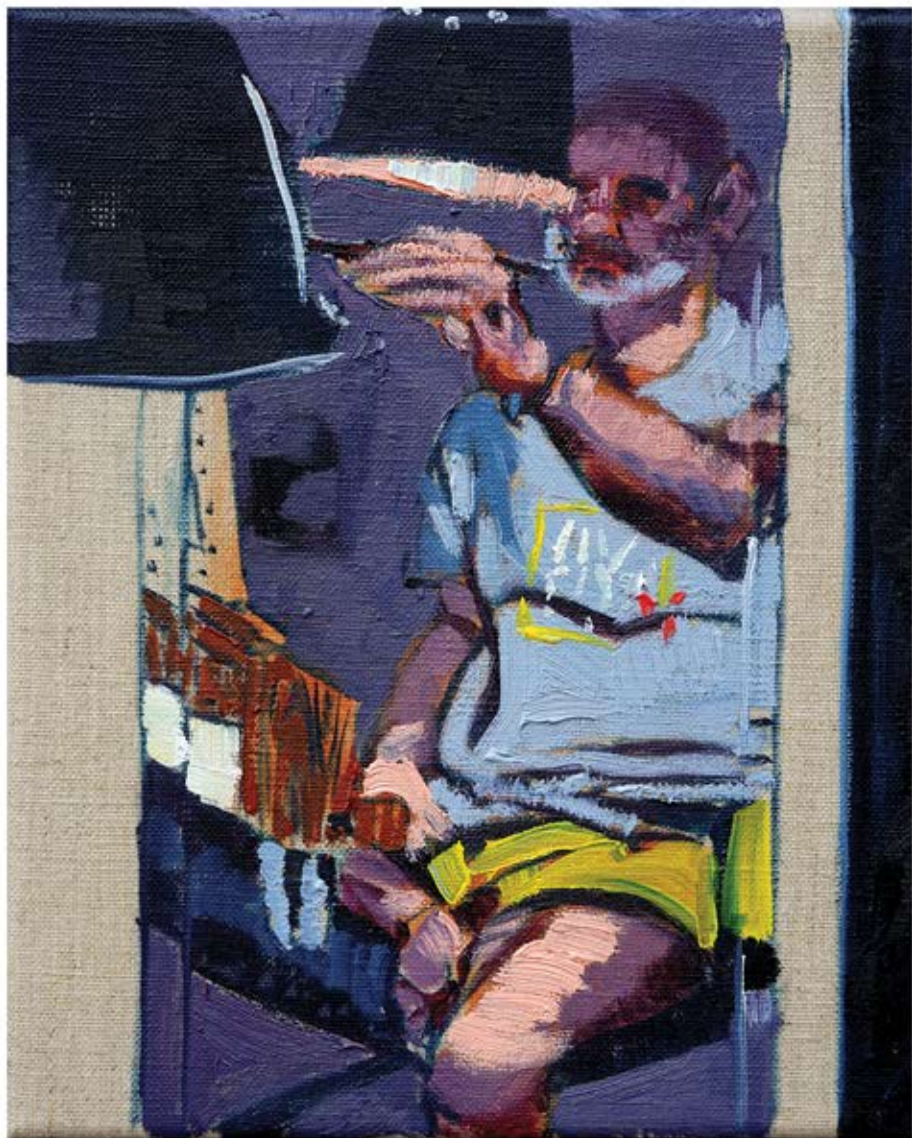
In Indigo T-Shirt, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



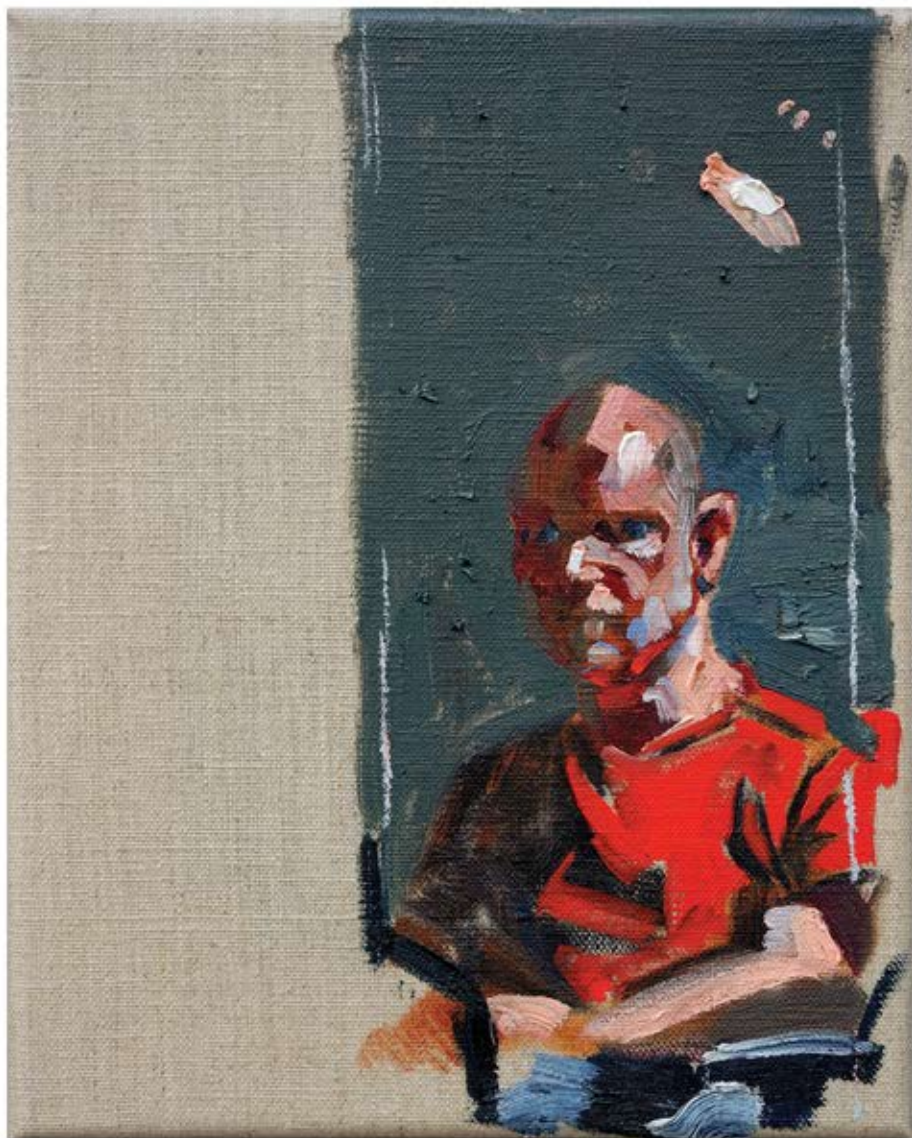
Suspicious Minds, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



 *In Yellow Cashmere*, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



Mirror Mirage, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



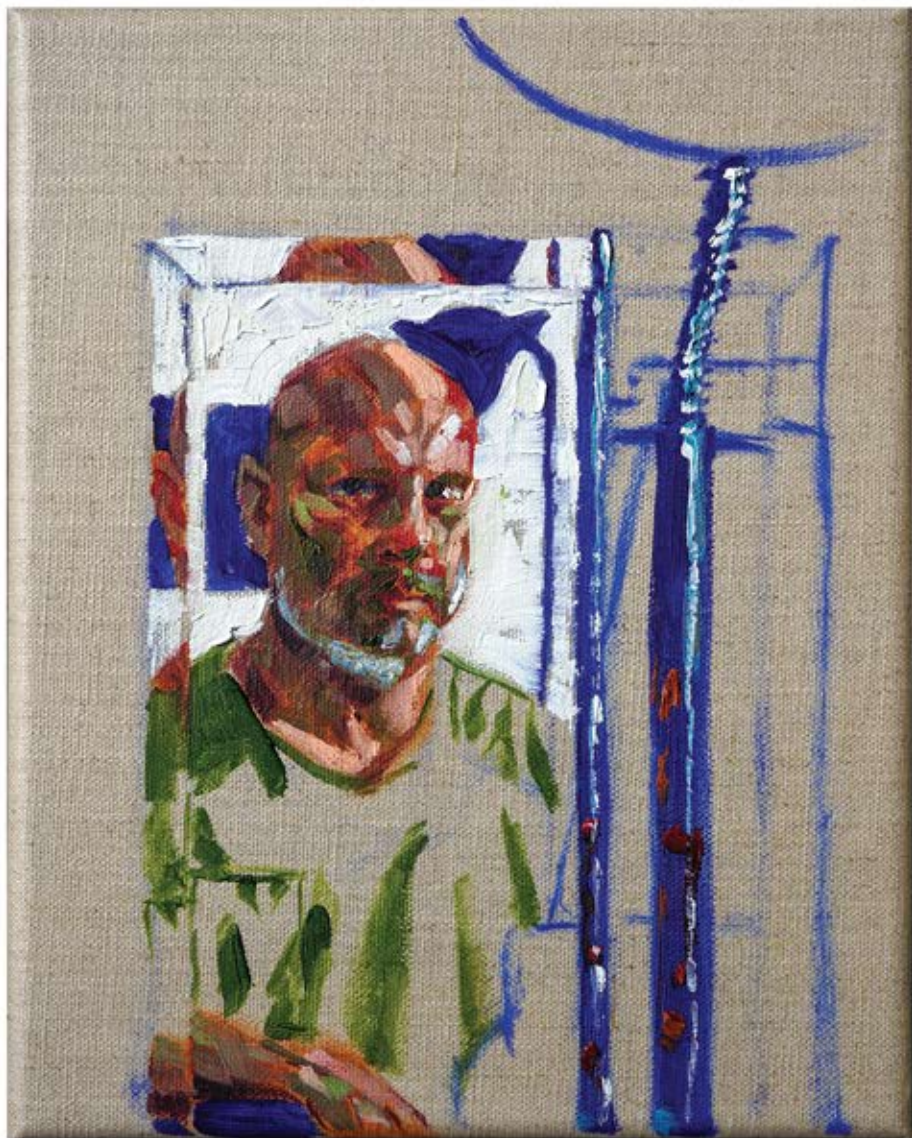
In Red, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



Joconde's Smile, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



In Floral, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



In Linen T-Shirt, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches




Before a Mirror, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches




Pink on Palette, 2024, oil on linen, 10x8 inches



 *Anne on My Couch*, 2022, oil on canvas, 48x60 inches






 *Bert on My Couch*, 2024, oil and pencil on linen, 12x16 inches





 *Sara and Sara on My Couch*, 2024, Oil on Linen, 30x40 inches






Joseph on My Couch, 2023, oil on linen, 30x48 inches





 *Wandering Jew*, 2023, oil on linen, 24x30 inches



Making the Painting More Painting: A Conversation with Dana Nehdaran

Joseph R. Wolin

Joseph R. Wolin: The tradition of artists making self-portraits dates back at least to the Renaissance and Jan van Eyck. Later painters, including Rembrandt and Van Gogh, completed multiple self-portraits, making the genre an integral part of their production. Portraits in general form an enormous part of your own practice, but even within their profusion, self-portraits still comprise a special category, far in excess, I think, of all your other modes. What is it about depicting yourself that causes you to return to that activity over and over again? Is there a kind of obsession with the self or are you just the most available model? Do you think about your self-portraits in terms of their historical lineage?

Dana Nehdaran: I remember the first portrait of me was sketched by my mother, who worked in a beauty salon and is still a wonderful tailor. I began doing portraits as a kid, drawing my teachers and classmates. I painted self-portraits occasionally during university, usually only once or twice a year. When I moved to New York from Tehran, I started painting abstractly, in series, which was very challenging and also very joyful, but I missed painting figurative works.

I sketched people on the train, relying on their focus on their cellphones to keep them still and unaware. I also started painting and sketching self-portraits during my time painting abstractions. I know exactly how to light my face to create good shadows and how to stay still, so I don't worry about a model getting tired, hungry, or needing a bathroom break. I believe a mirror is the best model, and I'm very comfortable with it.

During COVID-19, I contracted the virus and had a stroke ten days later. My doctor advised me to do nothing for three months, so I stayed home and sketched and painted self-portraits. After the pandemic, when I could see people again, I asked my friends to pose for me, but I painted self-portraits when they left. I find it very relaxing, like meditation. Nothing is better than painting a self-portrait if I have had a bad day. I don't need to talk to models or worry about them getting bored. I just start painting and keep going, with no idea how the final piece will turn out. This element of improvisation is what I love about painting.



1433- Jan van Eyck
1628- Rembrandt
1888- Van Gogh



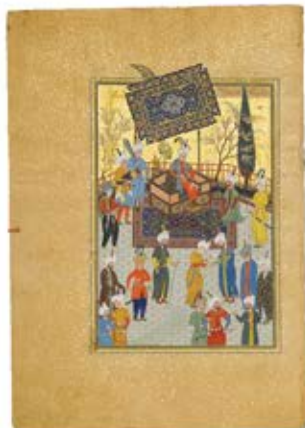
JRW: One thing that has always struck me about your self-portraits is that you make yourself look older in them. Is this something you have noticed? Is it a deliberate strategy?

DN: No, I did not notice! Now that I look at them again, I see you are right. Maybe the high contrast makes them look older. Details of the drawing might make the face older, as might brush strokes.

JRW: The mirror is a necessary part of making a self-portrait and you frequently include it in your paintings. When you do, you usually take great pains to indicate its space as realm separate from the space outside its reflection, often painting the areas outside the mirror in monochrome or even leaving them as just unpainted linen. Do you mean the looking-glass world to be read as a place of a different order than the “real” world? What kind of a space is it for you?

DN: Mirrors make three dimensions into two dimensions. My mirror is 48 x 12 x 1/8 inches, with a 3/8-inch beveled edge. It cuts the space from its original position and from what is behind it and shows a fragment of space in front of it, the space that I am part of. The beveled edge around the mirror distorts and refocuses pieces of what we see in the mirror. For example, I can see a slice of my head on the top edge, my ear in the right corner, and my nose in the left edge. Now, as you said, I like having a very crowded concentration in the rectangle of the mirror and I choose to make the empty space behind it, which was once part of the wall, a solid color with paint or using just the linen. I like this paradox. We can see similar compositions in many things, such as wearing a busy, patterned tie with a solid suit and shirt; this huge volume of solid shirt and suit exists to show this tie, and this tie points to the face. You can also see a composition like this—the empty space around the dense composition of the mirror—in many Persian miniatures.

I should say that, in addition to this narrow mirror, I really care about my lamp. I use its neck to move around my head and find the best lighting—the best lighting to me, the Renaissance lighting—before I start.



Khusrau Seated on his Throne
Folio 64 from a Khamsa
(Quintet) of Nizami
A.H. 931/A.D. 1524–25



The Story of Prophet Ibrahim
Unknown artist
Sa'di's Boustani (2189), 16th century
Golestan Palace

JRW: Along with your self-portraits, you are showing four full-length portraits of other people, friends and acquaintances, each sitter arranged in the same pose as that of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney in Robert Henri's famous 1916 portrait of her, now in the collection of the Whitney Museum. In one work, there are two figures, one leaning against the other, and their poses are a reversal, from left to right, of Whitney's. Although derived from a centuries-long European tradition of reclining figures, often nude, of Venuses, courtesans, odalisques, and majas, Henri's painting can be seen as one of the most quintessentially American portraits of the twentieth century, with its stylish depiction of a prominent American artist and patron in the guise of a modern, liberated, and frankly casual woman. Why has this particular picture been important to you?

DN: I remember the first time I visited the Whitney this piece moved me. I could not stop looking at it. Every time I went to Whitney for other exhibitions, I finished my visit with her. When I wanted to paint my friend Anne, I asked her to pose like Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney. Anne is an American filmmaker who, like Whitney, collects art. After her, I asked others to pose the same way. The subject of *Bert on My Couch* is actually another American art patron and collector. The two women in the double portrait are both named Sara, and they are both Iranian artists. In all three of these canvases, the sitters are wearing outfits of the same colors. The only difference is the size.



Robert Henri
Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney
Oil on canvas, 49×72 inch, 1916

JRW: Why do you always leave these reclining portraits unfinished?

DN: The portraits are painted from live models, who get tired after some hours and then leave. These paintings are improvised, and I believe that if I paint more on another day, I risk destroying what I built. This has happened before. So, whatever I paint in that moment is good enough. In other portraits, when I have later painted in the background, even with just a solid color, it feels wrong, because I am no longer the same person, and the painting and I have moved past that moment. It is like the time has expired.

JRW: I was the sitter for the fourth portrait in the series, and you—or, I guess, we—decided to return Henri's composition to its origins as a classical odalisque. I found the process of posing for you to be largely a conversational one, and I think that this comes across in the (un)finished picture. Is a sense of rapport with your subjects something important for you to try to convey?

DN: Over the last few years, I have painted more than 250 portraits on 16-x-12-inch canvases. I made each one because of something I felt or saw in the subjects that made me want to capture their likeness. Having a conversation with them helps me paint with my subconscious, making the painting more painting. Plus, the process becomes more enjoyable. What could be better than chatting and painting at the same time?



Some of the portraits, each 16-x-12-inch oil on linen

Born in 1982, [Dana Nehdaran](#) studied painting at Soureh Art University in Shiraz, Iran, after having studied carpet design in Isfahan, the rug capital of the world. *Esther's Children*, his exhibition of paintings based on late-nineteenth-century images of Iranian Jews, was shown in 2011 at Shirin Art Gallery in Tehran and in 2013 at Rira Gallery in Dubai. A reflection on the photographs of E.J. Bellocq's Storyville portraits, *A Preservation of Light*, was exhibited at Spillman/Blackwell Fine Art in New Orleans in 2023. Nehdaran's work has also been included in exhibitions in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Paris, Monaco, and Toronto, and featured in *Magazine*, *Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art*, *The Huffington Post*, *LA Weekly*, *The New York Times*, and *ArtDaily*. A member of the Iranian Painter Association since 2007, he lives and works in New York.

[Joseph R. Wolin](#) is an independent curator and art critic based in New York, and Consulting Curator and Editor at the Museum of Art and Design at Miami Dade College. He teaches in the MFA in Photography program at Parsons and the MFA in Visual Arts program at Lesley University. The curator of more than thirty exhibitions around the world, his recent projects include exhibitions at Clamp and Jane Lombard Gallery in New York, and at Sean Horton (presents) in Dallas. His writing about art and artists has appeared in exhibition catalogues, journals, and magazines,

 [jrwolin](#)

Roya Khadjavi, a social entrepreneur focusing on contemporary Iranian Art, is a gallerist, independent curator and cultural producer based in New York City. Under Roya Khadjavi Projects, she has organized over 30 exhibitions since 2014 with over 60 artists and has participated as speaker and sponsor in numerous conferences, industry panels and art fairs in the US and internationally to promote the emerging and mid-career Iranian artists living in Iran and the diaspora. She has largely focused on the work of these artists, seeking not only to support their artistic endeavors but also to facilitate awareness and cultural dialogue between artistic communities. As a collector and a patron of the arts for over 20 years, Roya has actively led exhibition committees focused on the art of the Middle East for institutions including Asia Society, where she sat on the steering committee of the critically acclaimed exhibit *Iran Modern* (2013), and the Guggenheim Museum.

Prior to her support and promotion of Iranian art, Roya had a 20-year career in the Fashion Industry. She was Vice President of Sales and Marketing North America for Yves Saint Laurent from 1994 to 2000 and Vice President, Divisional Merchandise Manager of Women's Designer, Eveningwear and Bridge Collection at Lord and Taylor from 1990 to 1994.

Khadjavi co-founded the Institute of International Education's (IIE) Iran Opportunities Fund in 2008 for which she has continued to fundraise and to contribute as a donor herself. She served as a Trustee and later President of the Board of Trustees of the acclaimed New York based non-profit Art in General from 2012 to 2020. Roya also served as a Trustee of The Lycee Francais de New York, where she served as Chair of the Development Committee and Co-Chair of the Strategic Planning Committee from 2002 to 2011. Roya has served on the Leadership Committee of the Iranian-American Women Foundation's New York Chapter since 2014.

Khadjavi is the recipient of IIE's 2009 Women's Global Leadership Award for her pioneering efforts to advance, support, and promote international education, and the Order of Academic Palms (Chevalier dans L'Ordre des Palmes Académiques) by the French Minister of Education. Roya graduated from Wellesley college with a Bachelor of Arts degree.



Education

2007 - BA Painting, Soureh University, Shiraz, Iran

2002 - Associate degree, Carpet design, Isfahan, Iran

Solo Exhibitions

2022 – A Preservation of Light, Spillman Blackwell Gallery, New Orleans, LA, USA

2016/2017 - Agitations of Pleasure, Shirin Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2013 - Esther's children, Rira Gallery, Dubai, UAE

2011 - Esther's children, Shirin Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2010 - My Mona Lisa, Nar Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2008 - The Inside Layers, Morteza Momayez Gallery, Iran Art Organisation, Tehran, Iran

Group Exhibitions

2024 – At Face Value, Station Independent Projects, Toronto, Canada

2024 - Face & Figures, Jim Kempner Fine Art, NY, USA

2023 - Persian Art, Ezra Gallery, Hampton, NY, USA

2023 - Summer time, Spillman Blackwell Fine Art, New Orleans, LA, USA

2023 - BRAZIL X IRAN , High Line Nine Gallery,, New York, NY, USA

2020 – Self-reflection, High Line nine Gallery, New York, New York, USA

2019 - Material Culture, Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, New York, USA

2018 - Art Brief IV, SOMArts Culture Center, San Francisco, California, USA

2018 - A Tale of Two Cities, Bonhams, Auction House, Los Angeles, California, USA

2018 - A Tale of Two Cities, Kamil Art Gallery, Monte Carlo, Monaco

2018 - The World is My Home, Advorcartsy gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA

2017 - Art Show for a Cause, Mim Gallery, Los Angeles, Ca, USA

2017 - Art Brief III, The (UN)DRAPED WOMAN, Arena 1, LA, Ca, USA

2017 - The First Bayaan, Bayaan Art Gallery, Isfahan, Iran

2017 - Red, Negar Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2017 - Perception, Fereshteh Book City Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2016 - States of Being Abstract, Elga Wimmer Gallery, New York, USA

2016 - Art Brief II: Iranian Contemporary North America, Los Angeles, California, USA

2016 - Untitled, Smash Gallery, San Francisco, USA

2016 - On Figures, Vista Gaallery, Tehran, Iran

2016 - The Young Artist, Sareban Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2014 - Eraser, Shirin art center, Tehran, Iran

2013 - History Game, Etemad Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2012 - WONDERLAND, Shokouh Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2012 - Opening RIRA gallery, Dubai, UAE

2012 - Jinn (painting), Seyhoun Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2012 - Haft Negah (painting), Farhangsara Niavaran, Tehran , Iran

2012 - Magic of Persia, Art Exhibition & Auction Gala, Salsali Private Museum, Dubai, UAE

2012 - Iranian Contemporary Artist (painting), Middle East Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2011 - 1st Modern & Contemporary Visual Art Auction, Tehran, Iran

2011 - Cutting Edge Artists (painting), Mellat Cinema Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2011 - Iranian Painter Association (painting), Contemporary Arts Museum, Isfahan, Iran

2011 - The first Tehran painting market: Barg Gallery, Tehran, Iran

2011 - little dancer (painting), Henna Art gallery, Tehran, Iran
2010 - Young Avant-garde (painting), Mellat Cinema Gallery, Tehran, Iran
2010 - Encyclopaedia Iranica (Charity Art Exhibition), New York, USA
2010 - Auto-portraits II, Silk road gallery ,Tehran, Iran
2010 - Untitled (painting), Art Center, Tehran, Iran
2010 - Untitled (painting), Neel Gallery, Tehran, Iran
2009 - 1001 Colours (painting), Canvas Gallery, New York, USA
2009 - Colours for the Green (painting), Mellat Cinema Gallery, Tehran, Iran
2008 - Global Generation Freiburg Group Exhibition, Freiburg, Germany
2008 - Untitled (painting), Nar Gallery, Tehran, Iran
2007 - Photography Expo, Esteqlal hotel, Tehran, Iran
2007 - Eternal Papers (photography), Contemporary Arts Museum, Isfahan, Iran

Professional Experience

2010/2013 - Graphic design for Ofogh-E-Bina Journal (Tehran Jewish Committee)
2008 - Painter for stage/set for feature film, 'The Remember', Iran
2007 - Painter for stage/set for TV series, The Forbidden Fruit, IRIB, Iran

Membership

2007-Present - Member of the Iranian Painter Association

Competitions

2012 - Selected for 9th Image of the year Festival, Short Film Category for 'Last Supper' Iran Art Organization, Tehran, Iran
2011 - Selected for short list of MOP CAP, Traffic gallery, Dubai, UAE
2008 - Selected for Damoonfar Festival, Tehran, Iran
2006 - Selected for Damoonfar Festival, Tehran, Iran

Art Fair

2024 – Volta, NY, USA
2023 – Aisa Now, Paris, France
2018 - If so, what? San Fransisco, CA, USA
2016 - Art Miami Basel, Miami, Florida, USA

Biennial

2017 - Venezuela, Caracas

Museum

Salsali Private Museum, Two Pieces from Esther's Children series, Dubai, UAE
DD Art & Cultural Center, Six pieces from The Inside Layers series, My Mona Lisa series, Esther's Children series and Agitation of Pleasure series, Mazandaran, IRAN

Awards

2004 - Winner of Special Prize in Persian New Year Photography, Isfahan, Iran
2003 - Winner of Special Prize in Sketching, Hafezieh Competition, Shiraz, Iran

Auction

2017 - artnet, Advorcartsy gallery, Los Angeles, CA, USA
2014 - Third Tehran Auction, Parsian Azadi Hotel, Tehran, Iran
2013 - Second Tehran auction, Parsian Azadi Hotel, Tehran, Iran
2012 - First Tehran auction, Parsian Azadi Hotel, Tehran, Iran

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~Jehdarak~ 10 MAY 2024

~Jehdarak~ 25 MARCH 2024

~Jehdarak~ 10 MAY 2024



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