

Intro

Presenting “We Keep Reviewing” at Art Dubai 2020, Saradipour Gallery invites us to revisit the familiar, nostalgic and contradictory school environment; an all-boys school in Iran with its similarities and peculiarities. The new series by figurative artist, art educator and researcher in visual arts, Moslem Khezri (b. 1984, Iran) was created from 2015 to 2019 and consists of empty and populated scenes painted and drawn in various wide or square frames, each sensitively staged with nearly theatrical lighting.

Moslem Khezri has, for years, been exploring the human face and figure in various states, under various lights and in different spaces. Looking at his previous drawings and paintings, one can trace his layered efforts first to master the human anatomy as a structure made of flesh and skin and bones (by depicting nearly naked, sometimes life-sized bodies), then to reflect different moods and emotions on their skins (by shedding strong chromatic lights onto bodies and faces) and, ultimately, to explore the interaction among humans and between humans and their real or imagined surrounding spaces; spaces that are often so cold and claustrophobic that the viewer might associate them with the inside of a coffin or a morgue. Khezri’s works are also playfields for contrasting warmer and cooler tones, a strong visual language of vertical versus horizontal in often static, lying positions of the figures, as well as the tension between organic body forms, straight lines and mostly rectilinear geometric shapes.

With its actual spaces, complexity of colors and different depiction of figures compared to the artist’s earlier works, the “We Keep Reviewing” series might surprise us at first glance, but soon we find out that this series is a continuation and, in fact, perfection of those previous efforts. Some may think of drawing bodies in clothing as a compromise as opposed to depicting naked figures, yet the truth is, tracing the anatomy of a naked body is like navigating using a detailed map, while an inexperienced painter may simply lose their sense of proportion in the folds and wrinkles of fabrics – especially where thick winter clothing is concerned. Thus, accepting the challenge of drawing students’ figures clad in the jackets and wearing backpacks indicates the maturity and confidence of a figurative artist. Here, there are no signs of abstract lines, sharp colors, experimental elements or improvised scratches on human bodies. Each work is clearly the result of a series of crucial decisions from taking photographs to the painterly restructuring of images on canvas and paper, echoing the artist's mastery of the subject and his firm, somewhat obsessive take on composition; a naturalistic obsession for the figures’ gestures and their arrangement in space to appear as realistic and random as possible. The artist enjoys full authority over all the relationships in forms and space, yet neither he nor his camera seems to attract any attention; a god out of sight. Thus, we may join the artist as the invisible guests of

these halls, classrooms and courtyards, wandering around, secretly watching these students; students whose varied moving and static figures together with the contrasting geometric architecture and furniture around them all come to life in a light-and-shadow play, creating scenes that are somewhat reminiscent of the spectacular, dramatic staging of Baroque paintings. These works, however, are ultimately realistic both in terms of form and content. Here, the sharp tension between those strong warmer and cooler colors of the earlier works has turned into a hushed, elegant harmony that is the fruit of the chemistry of blue and gray touches with warmer glazes and marks. Throughout these tableaux, a bittersweet and nostalgic story – from adolescent camaraderie and playfulness to unspoken worries, uniforms and long midday hours – is narrated, line by line and form by form, by the long, pale fingertips of winter sunlight.

Those who once went to these schools, listen on silently as they find themselves immersed in the dry smell of pencil shavings and the half-sweet scent of ink coming out of a blue pen; their hands slide over the names scratched on the desk, their right shoulders slightly hurting under the weight of a backpack. While others, who might be new to such environments, curiously explore the school architecture, the schoolboys' hairstyles, the color of their uniforms, or just about any other details from a Middle Eastern single-gender school. "We Keep Reviewing" is a prism of realities that casts back a slightly different color into each pair of eyes.