

A review of the new exhibition by Ali Zakeri¹

The Eliminated, a Narrative of Pre-Eternal Violence

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Translated by Roya Karimi

Everything has been developed intuitively for Ali Zakeri. Considering Zakeri's course of career, the present series, which is being displayed ten years after his last solo exhibition, enjoys remarkable success in comparison to his other works. In the present series, by offering an expressive description of an objective phenomenon, Zakeri achieves something beyond a simple report. To Ali Zakeri, like many artists of his generation, the painterly practice has always been a priority, and one must add that he is one of the few painters of his time, whose works, while preserving their aesthetic position, also take a conceptual turn.

One of the most important reasons for Zakeri's success in this series seems to lie in the strong connection between the form and the content, because he has done beautiful and successful paintings of nature, but the natural landscape – when compared to the boxers - is not an ideal theme for his expression. In this context, as his fist fighters become entangled with one another, the formal quality reaches its climax, since even his style of brushstrokes is in such a way that the brushmarks are interwoven together and the constant overlaps made by destroying and redrawing forms continues to the point where the painter stops working in a moment of intuition. It is in the light of such a process that, more than anything, the painterly act in Zakeri works becomes the agent of provoking the audience; an audience who has been often and largely deprived of such an experience.

In this series, some of the bodies or parts of them border with abstraction and become individual motifs. The main factor in this variation is *color*, which, unlike the previous works, which always directly or indirectly owed their existence to drawing, this time his figures come alive with successive brushstrokes and interplay of vivid colors. One can, therefore, place Zakeri along the line of color-oriented painters from Delacroix and Corot, to Matisse and Diebenkorn. It is the element of color which enables him to go beyond the existing photos of boxers. Zakeri's transition beyond the photographed images takes place through his interaction with them, and this is not possible in painting except by having a personalized form and acquiring a personal style which are found only in a few fellow Iranian painters.

Taking a glance at Zakeri's work periods, one can recognize, in his recent works, traces of some of the elements that have been transformed over an extended time into a similar element. The best example of this claim is the geometric and cubic chambers

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that have now become the boxing ring. From this perspective, it can be further understood that the abstract plains in the background of the boxers – which have replaced the audience – before representing an intact nature, are an evolved form of the abstract plains in previous works. An interesting, key point in Zakeri's works is that, over the past 10 years, he has reached out to the issue of violence and the existing content in his current works in a fully intuitive way and through formal approaches and interests. In such cases, the painter's subconscious takes control over the years, and he who now trusts his own senses finds the main path in a fully intuitive manner. Therefore, the process of creation from report-like paintings in close-ups and small scales, gradually transforms into a tragic space in an open, infinite view and large scales, and this same painterly transition in his works eventually leads to a harmony between his method of painting and the distorted faces and figures. In this space, human figures transform into one another and turn into colorful and textured motifs. Therefore, the prevailing atmosphere in these paintings takes an apocalyptic form in which two entities as the representatives of the human race beat each other up. Thus, the boxers in these paintings by Zakeri turn into a symbolic image, an image whose concepts are expandable throughout the time. One must admit that today one of the most important and most challenging tasks in painting is to create a symbolic image; a symbolic situation in which the subject of painting alludes to something beyond itself. In the tense atmosphere of boxing, the two boxers symbolize gladiators and in Zakeri's paintings, they are reminders of a pre-eternal violence, of an Abel-and-Cain sort of confrontation in loneliness and in a diaspora.

But the underlying point in the narrative of the boxers is that by painting scenes of boxing, which simultaneously contain human drama and the history of violence, Zakeri deals with some sort of *healing*: self-healing; healing for his own inquisitive soul. He certainly does not seek answers, because he knows that having a response will not make one feel any better; but one can react in the face of the phenomena. Among artists, there are those who stare directly into violence, not to condemn it, but in order to dispel the pain caused by it. If George Wesley Bellows once documented the mean-street scenes by painting pictures of boxers, today, by painting the fist fighters, Ali Zakeri criticizes the society which, in sheer indifference, puts up a show of an old habitude in new and pretentious ways.

¹ Hosseini, D. (2017, September 2). Negāhī be namāyeshgāh-e jadīde Ali Zakeri: hazf shodegān, revāyat-e khoshunatī azalī [A review of the new exhibition by Ali Zakeri: The Eliminated, a narrative of pre-eternal violence] (R. Karimi, Trans.) *Shargh* 2952.18.