

For Immediate Release: Tuesday, May 7, 2019



MACKENZIE ART GALLERY TO PRESENT IRANIAN ARTIST MOREHSHIN ALLAHYARI'S MONSTROUS FIGURES AND ACCOMPANYING ARCHIVES

She Who Sees The Unknown on view from 25 May through 25 August 2019

Regina, Saskatchewan - Tuesday, May 7, 2019: The MacKenzie Art Gallery is pleased to announce *Morehshin Allahyari: She Who Sees The Unknown*, the most comprehensive exhibition to date of the New York-based Iranian artist's ongoing research project into female and gender non-binary monsters and jinn, of Middle Eastern origin. Using a four-part process involving research, 3D-modeling and printing, storytelling, and community involvement, Allahyari re-creates jinn figures and uses the traditions and myths associated with them to explore colonialism, patriarchy, and environmental degradation in relation to the Middle East. Curated by John Hampton, Director of Programs at the MacKenzie Art Gallery, *Morehshin Allahyari: She Who Sees The Unknown* is the first exhibition to bring together the three figures known as Huma, Aisha Qandisha, and the Laughing Snake, and will be on view from May 25 through August 25, 2019.

Started in October 2016 as part of Allahyari's residency at Eyebeam in New York City, the *She Who Sees The Unknown* project is part of a process Allahyari refers to as 'refiguring,' or the act of going back into the past to retrieve elements that have been forgotten or misrepresented over time, in order to help reimagine another kind of present or future. In this case, Allahyari revives the stories of various jinn who were seen as tremendously powerful figures but either came to be seen as negative, or have been written out of the canon of largely male "superhero" stories. Allahyari embraces the monstrosity of these figures and resituates them in contemporary narratives where their powers can change perspectives on the present and the future. For Allahyari, 'refiguring' is a ficto-feminist and activist practice that challenges today's power structures and social realities.

Allahyari begins her process by researching and collecting an archive of images and texts relating to each jinn figure. Following this, she 3D models—or scans—and prints an image of the jinn, modeling them on various ancient illustrations. Allahyari then creates new narratives for these figures in time-based medium, using storytelling to 'refigure' the figures into a new set of imagined possibilities for time and space. Finally, she animates them through a series of *Ha'm-Neshini* (Sitting Together) and Fabulation Stations: intimate public performances, events, and discussions that bring together fiction, theory, and activism in collaboration with artists, scientists, and activist women from the Middle East.

At the MacKenzie, the three figures of *Huma*, *Aisha Qandisha*, and *The Laughing Snake* will each occupy their own site-specific shrine-like new media installation. *Huma*, a jinn known for bringing heat to the human body and who is responsible for the common fever, will be exhibited among 3D-printed mashed-up versions of talisman sourced from Allahyari's research. *Aisha Qandisha*, a jinn known for possessing men and completely opening them to the outside world, will be displayed as a vertical projection in a reflecting pool of blood-like liquid. *The Laughing Snake* originates in the myth of a monstrous snake-like figure who takes over a city and begins killing animals and people, causing chaos until someone suggests the only way to kill a snake is to have it look at its own reflection in a mirror. Rather than dying, the snake laughs unstopably for many days before self-destructing. *The Laughing Snake* will be displayed suspended from the ceiling in a room filled with mirrors.

For each of these jinn, Allahyari has reappropriated the traditional mythologies and 'refigured' the jinn into new stories in the form of poetic spoken and video narratives. For example, Allahyari uses the concept of *The Laughing Snake* and the mirror to consider the laughter of the snake as a position of power, and her self-destruction as an act of agency over her own body and image. Each installation is intended to create a space of reverence for the "monstrous other;" recasting the supposedly negative and often misrepresented female figure into sources of strength, new balances of power, and ideas for alternate futures.

"I am thrilled that audiences will be able to experience these three installations together for the first time at the MacKenzie," said Allahyari. "While they have been exhibited before individually, bringing them together creates new possibilities for a dialogue between them and their narratives; a chance for *Huma*, *Aisha Qandisha*, and *The Laughing Snake* to come together in a ficto-feminist world where their monstrosity is embraced as a force for alternative possibilities."

Alongside these three installations, the MacKenzie will be displaying the first stages of Allahyari's growing archive monstrous and jinn figures in a research-oriented reading room. Since no such archive currently exists, Allahyari is undergoing active

research with collaborators and first-hand texts and objects, which will eventually be compiled into a book that will be freely distributed through a web archive. Visitors to the MacKenzie will be able to explore this archive on iPads provided in the reading room.

“Morehshin Allahyari’s work tackles essential questions facing how we understand culture, materiality, sovereignty, tradition, and innovation,” John Hampton, the museum’s Director of Programs and curator of the exhibition. “Allahyari’s research-intensive practice also helps re-ignite the traditional knowledge embedded in these stories, ensuring they are alive and relevant for contemporary audiences while preserving the source material from this unique piece of Middle Eastern history that has been somewhat obscured. Allahyari’s work is a perfect example of the MacKenzie’s belief that presenting the radical diversity of art, culture, and experience, can help expand our understanding of ourselves, each other, and of the world more broadly.”

Allahyari will be in Regina on the evening of May 24 for the official opening of *She Who Sees The Unknown* and will be giving an Artist’s talk. Visit mackenzieartgallery.ca for more details on the events surrounding this exhibit.

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About Morehshin Allahyari:

Morehshin Allahyari is an artist, activist, and educator. Allahyari was born and raised in Iran and moved to the United States in 2007. Her work deals with the political, social, and cultural contradictions we face every day. She thinks about technology as a philosophical toolset to reflect on objects and as a poetic means to document our personal and collective struggles in the 21st century. Allahyari is the co-author of *The 3D Additivist*, published on December 2016 online in 3DPDF format. Her modeled, 3D-printed sculptural reconstructions of ancient artifacts destroyed by ISIS, titled *Material Speculation: ISIS* and her current project *She Who Sees The Unknown*, have received widespread curatorial and press attention and have been exhibited worldwide.

Allahyari has been part of numerous exhibitions, festivals, and workshops around the world including Venice Biennale di Architettura, New Museum, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Pompidou Center, Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal, Tate Modern, Queens Museum, Pori Museum, Powerhouse Museum, Dallas Museum of Art, and Museum für Angewandte Kunst. She has been an artist in residence at BANFF Centre (2013), Carnegie Mellon University’s STUDIO for Creative Inquiry (2015), Autodesk Pier9 Workshop in San Francisco (2015), the Vilém Flusser Residency Program for Artistic Research in association with Transmediale, Berlin (2016), Eyebeam’s one year Research Residency (2016-2017) in NYC, Pioneer Works (2018), and Harvest Works (2018). Allahyari is the recipient of the leading global thinkers of 2016 award by Foreign Policy magazine.

About the MacKenzie Art Gallery:

The MacKenzie Art Gallery is Saskatchewan’s original public art gallery: an immersive centre for engaging people through transformative experiences of the world through art, with an ongoing focus on Indigenous culture and diversity. The MacKenzie is located in Regina’s Wascana Park, Canada’s largest urban park and home to the Provincial Capital Commission. It is located within Treaty Four territory, the traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Assiniboine and Metis, and a home to the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota people. The permanent collection, which includes the University of Regina’s extensive collection, as well as the Kampelmacher Collection of Indigenous Art, contains over 5,000 works of art spanning 5,000 years of art history.

In reimagining the role of a public art gallery, the MacKenzie Art Gallery seeks to become an immersive, community-engaged centre for art, focusing on visitors and artists, Indigenous culture and diversity, and engaging people in transformative experiences of the world through art.

The MacKenzie is grateful for the support of the South Saskatchewan Community Foundation; Canada Council for the Arts; SaskCulture; the City of Regina; University of Regina; Saskatchewan Arts Board.

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