

Figuratio u



MERAJI
09

The Drawers - Headbones Gallery

Contemporary Drawing, Sculpture and Works on Paper

May 7 - June 18, 2009

Figuration

Zachari Logan
Susan Low-Beer
Mahmoud Meraji
Mehrad Meraji

Commentary by Julie Oakes

Artist Catalog, Figuration
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Commentary by Julie Oakes
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Cover (detail): Mahmoud Meraji - Suicide - 2009, charcoal & pastel on paper, 51 x 76 inches

RICH FOG



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Figuration

Commentary by Julie Oakes

Figuring “It” Out

Each individual body creates a circumstance from which to respond to life. In the beginning, each human existence comes with built in potentials and disadvantages. Nature sets the stage as the genes forge a combination of the mother and the father with their ancestors also having fed into the pool. The location of birth with attendant nationality, financial strata, social status, climate, political and religious orientations affect physicality as nurturing, from dysfunctional to supportive, shapes health, energy and the sense of well being.

Narrowing to the specific influence of culture upon the man or woman; dress, celebrations, taboos, sexual orientations, family values, gender, age and many more variables influence appearance. When choosing the figure as the basis for individual expression, it is not only the artist but mankind in general who uses their 'look' to impart messages. Examples would be the vestments of a Catholic priest, suit of a businessman, uniform of a cook, chains and spikes of the punk, corporate branding upon the employee, protective gear of a construction worker or the beret and striped tee-shirt that immediately transforms the artist into a Picasso. Identification and message is imparted through the figure.

Remove the clothes and there is still

an abundance of information—age, health, gender. It is little wonder that the artist keeps returning to the body—the figure—as subject, for there is much to grapple with philosophically and even more to contend with when it comes to depiction.

The initial question becomes which part of this multifarious subject matter - the figure - will challenge the artist sufficiently to provoke grappling with it? In *Figuration* there is the common springboard of the figure as subject matter, but the reason for choosing the figure, which aspect of the figure is chosen, the presentation and how it is depicted is circumstantially specific to the artist.

There was a poster circulating with the slogan “Expose Yourself to Art” on it, a photograph by M. Ryerson. A man in a trench coat, back to the camera, front to a sculpture of a female, holds open his coat; supposedly exposing himself.



Zachari Logan exposes himself as an art piece. He has sculpted his body to near classical perfection. He further references the classics by assimilating the poses that models have traditionally assumed in studio art classes but he brings in contemporary clothing and props to alleviate the distancing of the formal pose and make for an unusual intimacy. The figures, larger than life size, hark to the grand works of the renaissance, Tintoretto, Rubens, or Titian, when they used figuration to evoke mythological and religious narratives. That Logan uses grandiose scale in conjunction with the quotidian set-ups

provokes a sense of voyeurism yet there is no allusion to sexuality other than the fact that the genitals are present and exposed. In fact, the sole allusion to the potential for penetration is in the rough hewn spear piercing the side of one of the figures in *The Invincibles*, one of the drawings from *The Crowd Series*.

Without the clue of the red drawing of two men kissing or the title referring to gay pride, there is no evident allusion to homosexuality, The ambivalence of the non didactic helps to 'normalize' a sexual orientation that could still be considered a marginalised one, although according to recent statistics, one in ten





Zachari Logan - Kissing 2007, graphite on paper, 18 x 27 inches

males are openly homosexual.

Although there is diversity within this series, there is a consistency that rules with unflinching surety. There are no women here. There are only men and each man is an archetypical, perfect specimen of maleness - Zachari Logan, a prince among men with an Apollonian body. His seemingly autistic, self centered concentration seems to rest easy with the sum of his selves absolutely sufficient.

Yet there is humility, a soft stance in his way of drawing with a manner reminiscent of romantic illustration. Flaunting a Spartan nakedness, these 'Logans' inhabit a focused world, each figure realistically modelled with dramatic

shadows adding clarity and dignity. Each version of Logan is concentrated on his task, unaware that he is inhabiting the frame with other aspects of himself. Each is hanging out with himself, so to speak, relaxed, naked - no problems. The drawings are larger than the normal concept of drawing. Drawing has a history as preparatory work, secretive intimate recordings, unfinished, undeveloped, partial ideas that have been given a cursory life on paper. Zachari Logan transcends both the physical and the conceptual limitations of drawings. He blows up the intimate and grants the subject a monumental, dignified bearing. Zachari Logan, figuring it out, has 'outed' the male figure.

Mahmoud Meraji is exposing his cultural heritage and the changes that the new life that he has forged for himself and his family in Canada have wrought. He frames his subjects within the context of his past; first in his use of and reference to

court painter to Nasereddin Shah. He introduced the European style that was eventually perfected by one of his students, Kazem Ordoobadi, who founded the School of Fine Arts (Mostazrafe) in 1908 where the European



historical easel portraiture and second, by positioning his figures in relation to Iranian customs.

Easel painting was well known and respected in Iran since the late 1800's when the talented Iranian artist Kamal-ol-Molk, having studied in Paris, Florence and Versailles was appointed as the royal

style of painting was taught together with Iran's traditional painting. The modernist movement caught the imaginations of the next generation and produced world renowned artists such as Moshen Moghadam Vasiri.

Meraji has a dual art practice. He was included in the exhibition previous to

Figuration at Headbones Gallery, (*Ab-strak-tid*). He has used abstraction to further the release of his artistic identity within the Canadian context. The portraits, except for the fact that the sitters were often Iranian, did not overtly reveal his roots until the portrait titled *Nostalgia* completed in 2007 and included in the exhibition *Canadians Without Borders* at The Varley Gallery of Markham, Ontario. His son, Mehrad, sits with a crown of grass upon his head in front of a fish bowl. These are customary ritualistic items used in the celebration of the Iranian New Year but in the context of the European-style portrait they set up a surreal image. In *Mirage* the sense of a dream-like, psychological reality is carried even further as the artist and his wife, Amide seem suspended in space, hands on the floating fish as if there is an answer within. Meraji's well developed expertise in portraiture becomes subservient to the imagery. No longer just an easel painting - there is a narrative beyond the identity of the sitters that is being imparted. It carries through in *Mehrad* a portrait of his son daydreaming where the plastic dream state appears to have eked through to virtual reality.

In *Suicide*, this transcendence becomes even more unique. The Farsi word for self portrait is *khod keshee*. The word for suicide is *khod koshee*. Mahmoud Meraji is diving under a table on which rests the ritual fish bowl on a traditional piece of cloth. Caught

between the Persian carpet and the objects above he seems swept along by a current. His face is ashen white. He is naked with the point of the table cloth covering his genitals. He states that the reference to suicide is because he is killing his more conservative self so that from the cocoon of tradition he can emerge, chrysalis-like, and transform into a more liberated self.

There is a jerky, spastic, fractured aura in *Suicide*. Just as a word embodies a complete definition, so does a picture. And just as *Ab-strak-tid* became more abstract in its phonetic form, so does this new Meraji surrealism separate itself from it's original meaning to form a new aspect of itself, more conceptual than the historical surrealists of Europe. Like the phonetic *sur-real-ist*; Meraji's surrealism is separate, broken apart, deconstructed and not quite in common usage yet.



Meraji's use of the figure can now be traced back to Persian miniature painting which speaks of the large questions about the nature of art and perception. There is a resonance



between the miniature *Mollahs in the Presence of Nasser-ed-Din Shah Qajar*, executed in the Qajari style and *Mirage* for instance. Meraji has worked through the European style and gone back to posing psychological questions, figuring out the answers in a visual format.

Mehrad Meraji, the son of Mahmoud and Amide, is a step removed from the trauma of cultural transportation. He embraces both his identity and subjects with an open armed authenticity born of the fresh and un-polluted breath that the younger generation inhales. His milieu is multi cultural, his friends are of different ethnicities and so for him this is more the norm than the unusual—to be Iranian

and Canadian, to speak a second language with the brightened and advantaged brain that is a result of the effort.

The Meraji family's nurturing has produced an open and generous personality. At the peak of his curiosity and with a talented hand that has honed skills far beyond his years, Mehrad appears to view the world through art glasses that turn his friends into large blow-ups of cinematic proportions. It falls in line with his age when peers dominate attention and anything is possible. Not bucking at size, no hesitation in tackling monumental proportions, with a sharp eye, good balance and the bombastic

delivery of a gladiator, Mehrad has a stretch of life before him that enables his daring. If he makes a mistake, there is tomorrow to recover from it and hence, he bounds bravely forward for the self confidence of youth has room to mature. Mehrad is pickling in the well seasoned juice of an inspired and supportive home with an energetically artistic peer group and the worldly exposure of the Ontario College of Art and Design as it opens the minds of it's students to a larger art world enhancing the taste of his work. Mehrad is figuring it *all* out and is well up to the task.

Looking back on childhood, there is a vague haziness that perfects remembered images, crystallizing the body into a more miraculous, realized holistic substance. As a child, distracted by the exertion of growing up and hindered by self absorption, the freedom of a leap into the air is taken for granted, gauged against the difficulty, accomplished as one is able and then it is let go to be relegated in importance to the back burner of things done, time past. The age-old saying that "youth is wasted on the young" has elements of truth that art can grasp when life cannot as in Susan Low-Beer's ceramic installation *State of Grace*. Low-Beer slows down the disintegration of dissemblance that is created as time changes the present into the past. The continuous layering of experience upon experience, age upon age, day upon day would be lost to the



individuality of memory if it were not for the consolation of art.

Low-Beer was inspired by a photograph of a child jumping, the abandonment of the serious pull of gravity overcome by the joy of a jump in the air. To decide to capture this leap of faith that defied the call of the earth in clay - the metaphorical material from which the Creator built and to which man metaphorically returns - and from this to build lightness, necessitated overcoming the inherent rigour of the medium. Like alchemy, the material becomes more precious as it opens worlds other than the physical.

The figure is acknowledged as home of the spirit (body as temple). The sculptures become more than the sum of their physical parts so that the resulting sensation is solely of The Jump. The group of children are oblivious of anything other than themselves. Even their fellow leapers are of no consequence to them and yet their silent partners, all engaged in the same boisterous act, strengthen the feeling of an insularity as if they are engaged in a self absorbed ritual of concentration.

This dichotomy between the unsophisticated freedom of the jump and the quiet immobility of the ceramic sculptures makes for a spooky, yet thrilling disconnect. *State of Grace* is an installation that makes good use of awe.

There's something about the honesty of one's circumstance that sets

the scene for powerful images. We are all involved through our physicality in a conversation with figuration but the personal range of specific experience is varied. As Mahmoud Meraji harkens to his Iranian roots with the use of symbols framing portraits of his family, self and friends; his son, Mehrad, aggrandises friends and family with a positivism born of the undaunted belief that talent lends to a fresh artistic career. Zachari Logan's triplet nude self portraits radically poise the mundane while Susan Low-Beer's ceramic children leap in trance-like suspended animation. Each artist, 'figuring' it out, brings to bear the authenticity of personal practice and life orientations.



Susan Low-Beer



State of Grace #15, 2008, 134 x 29 x 34 cm, ceramic and metal base

Susan Low-Beer

State of Grace #8, 2008, 144 x 29 x 34 cm, ceramic and metal base



Susan Low-Beer

State of Grace #4, 2008, 132 x 28 x 30 cm, ceramic and metal base



Susan Low-Beer

State of Grace #6, 2008, 123 x 23 x 30 cm, ceramic and metal base



Susan Low-Beer

State of Grace #7, 2008, 143 x 30 x 30 cm, ceramic and metal base



Zachari Logan

Crowd 1, 2008, graphite on paper (two panels), 102 x 84 inches



Zachari Logan

Crowd 2, 2008, graphite on paper (two panels), 102 x 84 inches



Zachari Logan

Invincibles, 2008, graphite on paper (two panels), 102 x 84 inches



Zachari Logan

Installation photo: Galerie Jeanroch Dard, Paris, France - 2009



Mahmoud Meraji

Nostalgia, 2006, 29 x 21 inches, oil on panel



Mahmoud Meraji

Levon, 2008, 48 x 36 inches, oil on panel



Mahmoud Meraji

Mirage, 2008, 40 x 43 inches, oil on panel



Mahmoud Meraji

Suicide, 2009, 51 x 76 inches, charcoal and pastel on paper



Mahmoud Meraji

Mehrad, 2009, 46 x 92 inches, oil on panel



Mahmoud Meraji

Julie, 2007, 48 x 36 inches, oil on panel



Mehrad Meraji

Yan, 2009, charcoal on paper, 96 x 50 inches



Mehrad Meraji

Amideh, 2009, charcoal on paper, 96 x 50 inches



Mehrad Meraji

Henry, 2009, charcoal on paper, 86 x 50 inches



Mehrad Meraji



Installation Photo: Headbones Gallery - 2009

Mehrad Meraji



Kevin 1, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



Amy 1, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



Vasiri 1, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



Amy 2, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



Kevin 2, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



Vasiri 2, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



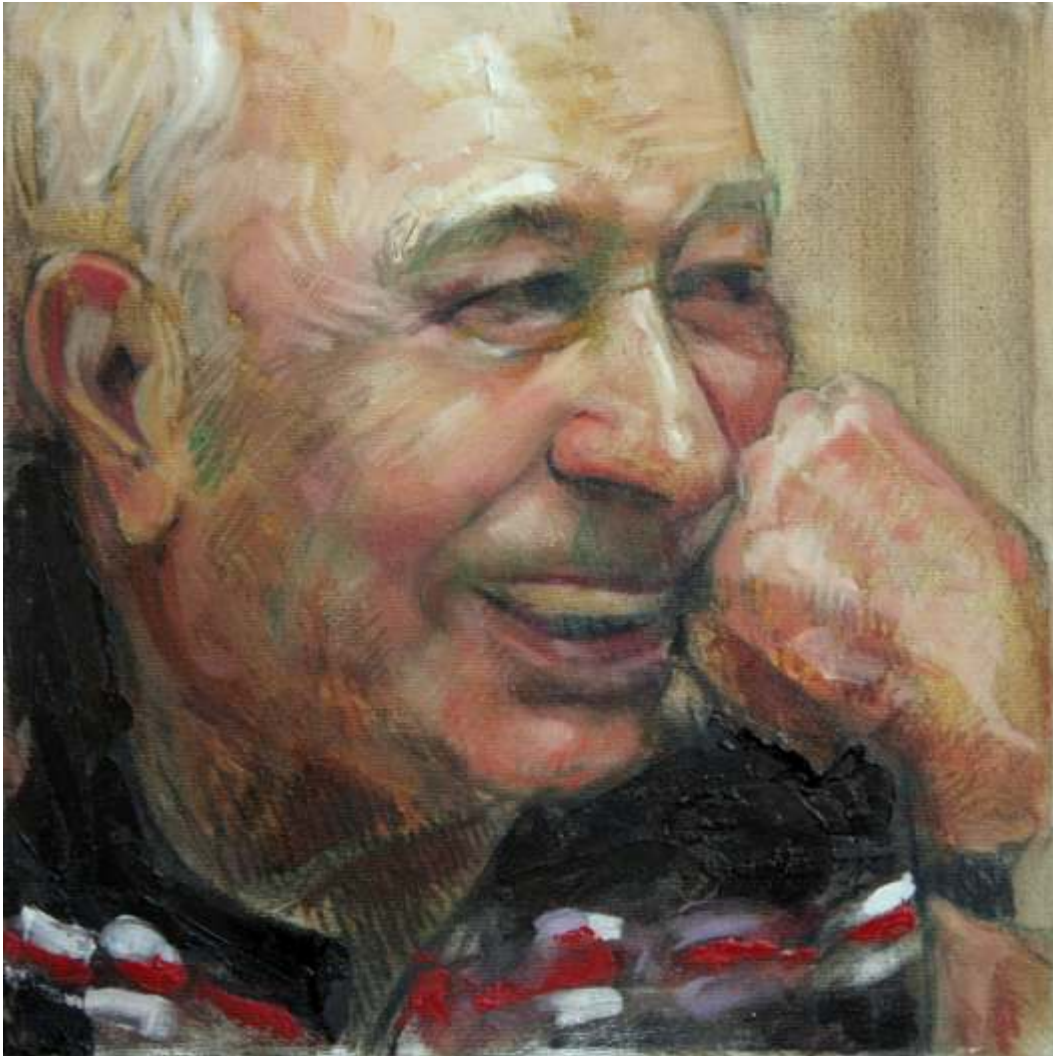
Kevin 3, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



Amy 3, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Mehrad Meraji



Vasiri 3, 2008, oil on Canvas, 12 x 12 inches

Susan Low-Beer

Education

- 1965 B.F.A., Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, Canada - Painting
1967 M.F.A., Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, U.S.A. Painting

Solo Exhibitions (selected)

- 2009 *Selves*: The Visual Arts Centre of Clarington, Bowmanville, Ontario
2008 *State of Grace; recent sculpture*, David Kaye Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
2006 *Tools for Daily Living*, The Japan Foundation, Toronto, Ontario
2005 *Tools for Daily Living*, Materia, Quebec City, Quebec
The Force of the Moon, Rebecca Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
2003 *Tools for Daily Living*, Karsh Masson Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario (brochure)
Susan Low-Beer: Recent Work, Lafreniere & Pai Gallery, Ottawa, Ontario
Tools for Daily Living, Galerie McClure, Visual Arts Centre, Montreal, Quebec
2002 *Rocksbreath*, An Improvisation, Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario
2001 *New Paintings by Susan Low-Beer*, Harbinger Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario
1998 *mouvement, danse et geste*, Galerie de la Ville, Dollard Recreart, Montreal, Quebec
1997 *Mutible Selves*, Art Gallery of Mississauga, Mississauga, Ontario (catalogue)
Susan Low-Beer Recent Works, Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo, Ontario (catalogue)
1996 *Susan Low-Beer*, Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario, exhibition travels in 1997 to Mississauga and Waterloo (catalogue)
Recent Sculpture, Prime Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
1995 *Susan Low-Beer*, Sculptor's Society of Canada Gallery, Toronto, Ontario, invited artist
1994 *Ceramic Sculpture*, Sybaris Gallery, Royal Oak, Michigan
Susan Low-Beer, Art Gallery of Algoma, Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario
1993 *Alliances*, The Latcham Gallery, Stouffville, Ontario
1992 *New Work by Susan Low-Beer*, Galerie Barbara Silverberg, Montreal, Quebec
Still Dances: Recent Ceramic Sculptures, The Craft Gallery, Crafts Council, Toronto, Ontario (catalogue)
1991 *Susan Low-Beer*, Galerie Barbara Silverberg Contemporary Ceramics, Montreal, Quebec
1989 *Susan Low-Beer Sculptures* The Justina M. Barnicke Gallery, Hart House, University of Toronto, ON
1988 *Susan Low-Beer*, Galerie Barbara Silverberg, Montreal, Quebec
1987 *Uncommon Objects*, Harbourfront, York Quay, Toronto, Ontario
1980 *Ceramic Sculpture: Susan Low-Beer Parsons*, Keystone Junior College, La Plume, Pennsylvania
1979 *Susan Low-Beer*, Lycoming College, Williamsport, Pennsylvania
1971 *Susan Low-Beer*, Dominican College, San Rafael, California

Zachari Logan

Education:

Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA) - University of Saskatchewan (Distinction)

Masters of Fine Arts - University of Saskatchewan (Distinction)

Solo Exhibitions:

- 2009 *Artist Project: New Drawings* Envoy Gallery, 131 Chrystie St. New York, NY.
The Myth of Pants Galerie Jeanroch Dard, 13 rue des Arquebusiers 75003, Paris, France.
- 2008 *The Anxious Actor* Gordon Snelgrove Gallery (MFA exhibition) Gordon Snelgrove Gallery, University of Saskatchewan campus, Saskatoon SK.
- 2007 *Play Boys*, Craig Scott Gallery, 95 Berkley St. Toronto Ontario.
Rough Trade, Avenue Gallery, 203 - 220 3rd Avenue South, Saskatoon, SK
- 2005 *Circumference*, Mendel Art Gallery, 950 Spadina crescent, Saskatoon SK.
Variations on Postcard Art, Magnum Opus Gallery, 126 20th St. E, Saskatoon, SK.
Beautiful Creatures, St. Thomas More College Gallery, Saskatoon SK.
- 2003 *Same Difference*, (BFA Exhibition) Gordon Snelgrove Gallery, University of Saskatchewan campus, Saskatoon SK.

Group Exhibitions:

- 2009 *Self, Identity 1: MFA NOW Exhibition*, Praxis International. Miami, Florida.
Figuration Headbones Gallery, The Drawers. 260 Carlaw Ave. Toronto, Ont.
New Works, Craig Scott Gallery, 95 Berkley St. Toronto, Ont.
Salon Du Dessin, Galerie Jeanroch Dard. Palais de la Bourse. Paris, France.
NEOPRIEST, Headbones Gallery, The Drawers 260 Carlaw Ave. Toronto, Ont
- 2008 *FLATLANDERS*, Mendel Art Gallery, 950 Spadina Cres. Saskatoon SK.
Toronto International Art Fair, Headbones Gallery: The Drawers
Go Figure: The Marvels of Portraying the Person, Craig Scott Gallery, Toronto, ON
That's So Gay IV, Dominion Building, 249 2nd Ave. N, Saskatoon, Sk.
The 1950 Ford Show, Group show curated by Anthony Easton, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton, Ab.
- 2007 *Play Boys*, Craig Scott Gallery, 95 Berkley St. Toronto Ontario.
Body Language, Lehmann Leskiw Gallery 626 Richmond St.
- 2006 *Works on Paper*, Neutral Ground Gallery, 203-1856 Scarth Street, Regina Sk.
Exotic/Erotic, Headbones Gallery: The Drawers, 260 Carlaw Ave. Toronto,
- 2005 *That's so Gay*, Mendel Art Gallery, 950 Spadina Cres. Saskatoon SK.
Inaugural Drawers Selection, Headbones Gallery: The Drawers, Toronto, ON.

Collections:

University of Saskatchewan, Gordon Snelgrove Gallery Collection.
Saskatchewan General Insurance (SGI) Corporate Collection.

Awards:

Headbones Award, Headbones Gallery.
MFA Now, International Painting Competition winner.
Graduate Thesis Award, Discipline of Humanities and Fine Arts, University of Saskatchewan.

Mahmoud Meraji

Born 1958, Tehran, Iran

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2007 Mystic Iranian Curves, Six weeks of Iranian Art Toronto, ON
- 1997 The Iranian Community Association of Ontario Toronto, ON
- 1997 Arya Art Gallery Tehran, Iran
- 1996 Arya Art Gallery Tehran, Iran
- 1993 Golestan Art Gallery Tehran, Iran
- 1991 Golestan Art Gallery Tehran, Iran
- 1985 Niyavaran Cultural Centre, Tehran

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 Figuration: Headbones Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2009 (ab-strak' tid): Headbones Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2009 The Canadian Portrait: Today and Tomorrow Toronto, ON
- 2008 International Arts Festival- Miracle of the Portrait Toronto, ON
- 2008 Buddha Composed (collaboration), Varley Gallery of Markham, ON
- 2008 Tiregan, Iranian Festival, harbourfront centre, ON
- 2007 Iranian artists' cultural reunion, Six weeks of Iranian Art, Toronto, Ontario
- 2007 Varley Gallery of Markham, Canadian Artists without Boarder, Markham, Ontario
- 2007 Ethnic Convergence Headbones Gallery, Toronto, ON
- 2006 Headbones Galley (Iran, Iran, I ran with Bogos) Toronto, ON
- 2005 John B. Arid Gallery Toronto, Ontario
- 2004 Metamorphosis, Scarborough Art Council, Toronto
- 2003 Drawing 2003, John B. Arid Gallery
- 2002 Illuminary Art Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
- 2001 Annual Juried Show (S.A.C.), Scarborough
- 2001 Art at the heart (Arts week2001)
- 2001 Odyssey (SAC) Scarborough, Ontario
- 1998 Transition: Changing States (S.A.C.), Scarborough

GRANTS/AWARDS

- 2008 Grand prize 2008 International Arts Festival- Miracle of the Portrait
- 2008 Art/ Humanities National Ethnic Press & Media Council of Canada
- 2002 Honorable mention Award, Scarborough Art Council, Toronto,
- 2001 Honorable mention Award, Art at the heart, Toronto, Ontario
- 1993 First Prize: Iranian Fair of Flowers & Nature, Tehran, Iran

COLLECTIONS

- David Miller (Mayer)
- St. Michael Hospital
- Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts Tehran, Iran

Mehrad Merji

Group Exhibitions

July 2007	Figuration, Headbones Gallery, Toronto, ON
July 2007	<i>Six Weeks of Iranian Art, Iranian artists' cultural reunion</i>
April 2007	<i>Peel Gallery , Brampton , Canada</i>
February 2007	<i>The Figure Show</i> , OCAD, Toronto, Ontario
June 2006	<i>Iran Iran and I ran with Bogos</i> , HendBones Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
April 2006	<i>Result of the Head Hunt</i> , Headbones Gallery, Toronto Ontario
March 2006	<i>Creation</i> , Scarborough Art Council, Toronto, Ontario
March 2006	<i>Second Year Painting</i> , OCAD, Toronto, Ontario
January 2006	<i>Drawing 2006</i> , John B. Arid Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
January 2005	<i>First Year Show</i> , OCAD, Toronto, Ontario

Awards

2006	First Place Award, <i>Drawing 2006</i> , John B. Arid Gallery, Toronto, Ontario
2004	Art Purchase Award, Sir, John A Macdonald, Toronto, Ontario

Education

2004 - Present	Ontario Collage of Art and Design
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