

ULTERIOR

Maryam Amiryani

What I Love

November 2–December 1, 2019



Left: Seal Pup, 2019, 4 x 6 1/8 inches. Oil on linen over wood. Right: C-3PO and R2-D2, 2019, 7 1/2 x 4 3/4 inches.

Ulterior is pleased to present *What I Love*, an exhibition of new paintings by Maryam Amiryani. The exhibition opens on November 2 with a reception from 6 to 8 pm.

The twenty-five paintings on view in the exhibition date from 2019 and in sum comprise a series that Amiryani has titled *What I Love*. Of the genesis of the series, Amiryani explains:

When I turned 50 last year, there was a biological awareness of time... I have less years ahead of me than what I have lived. A question of what immediate dreams do I want to realize, came up... While I had these personal realizations and quests, there was also the awareness of living in a tumultuous time with depressingly inadequate people in power. My self question, as a painter, was: do I want to add to the sorrows of the world, or do I want to tap into what I love and share that?

What followed from this “self question” was the decision to paint animated characters, children’s-TV creatures, and animal figures that have meant a lot to the artist over the years. To depict this cast of characters, Amiryani decided to forgo photographs and instead ordered online (usually on eBay) a collection of small plastic figurines. These she posed in her studio to create portraits. Amiryani’s subjects will be familiar to most everyone who came of age in a certain period in the West. There are multiple Muppets (Kermit, maniacal Animal at his drum kit, a pair of Beakers striking hip-hop poses); intrepid cartoon dogs such as Scooby-Doo and Snowy from *Tintin*; R2-D2 and C-3PO and, looming largest in this portrait gallery, Darth Vader. Numerous animal figures round out the group: a panda, a pig, a kangaroo, and a hippo, among many others.

Amiryani’s portraits are of modest size (the largest, Darth Vader’s, measures only 6 x 8 inches) and are variously oriented vertically or horizontally. The subjects generally stand on a platform or stage at the bottom of the painting, set before an evenly colored backdrop. The portraits are all life-sized in that the artist paints her sitters (the plastic figurines) to scale. Amiryani depicts her subjects with her characteristic delicacy, building up thin layers of color and allowing traces of the underlying canvas to show through. The careful scrutiny she brings to bear on the figurines is at once respectful,

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affectionate, and perhaps a bit melancholy. These intimately familiar, absurd little figures, frozen in ebullient, eager-to-please poses, evoke powerful childhood associations and have the pathos of discarded toys. We invest in miniatures potent condensations of memory and emotion. Amiryani's portraits of movie robots and kids'-TV creatures evoke this pressurized mix, which always contains a trace of yearning, while her images of a frog and a polar bear hint, however obliquely, at a larger scale of loss.

Maryam Amiryani was born in Shiraz, Iran in 1967. Following the Iranian Revolution in 1979, Amiryani and her family relocated to Paris, France. Several years later, she moved to the United States, where she completed her education, obtaining a MFA in painting from the New York Academy of Art, New York, NY in 1995. She also holds a BFA in Graphic Design from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, CA, and a BS in Asian History from Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. This is her second solo exhibition with the gallery. Amiryani lives and works in Marfa, Texas.

For further inquiries, please contact Director Takako Tanabe: takako@ulteriorgallery.com or 917-472-7784.