

## Rokni Haerizadeh

(Teheran, Iran, 1978)

Born in Teheran during the revolution that led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic, Rokni Haerizadeh has not been back to Iran since 2009. His participation in a London show together with his brother Ramin, also an artist, cost him the hostility of the government by virtue of the subtly controversial nature of his work. The pictorial works of his early period, often presented in the form of diptychs, aimed at the very contradictions of many beliefs and traditions to be found in his homeland, such as for example wedding and funeral rites.

It was only at the start of his forced exile in Dubai, which is still ongoing, that the artist developed the style that made him famous. Following the development of the protests in the streets of Teheran against the re-election of President Ahmadinejad from a distance, he began to make slight pictorial alterations to the photographic images of the protests underway. Such interventions, performed using watercolours, chalk or ink, on the basis of images taken from television news reports or from the internet, create hybrid works that blur the borders between painting, drawing and collage.

Equally hybrid are his beings spawned by the artist's fervid imagination: the protagonists of the original shots – i.e. the protesters on the streets and the police forces intervening to repress the demonstrations – are transformed into animals, monsters and strange mythological creatures. Haerizadeh never covers the entire surface of the original images, which remain clearly visible albeit disfigured by large-scale manipulation and fading. The outcome is that of a new world, colourful and grotesque, which calls for an extra effort by the viewer so as to make out scenes already seen on TV. *Fictionville* is the first series created with this procedure in the wake of the clashes of 2009. After an initial set of drawings constantly increased over the years by new additions, Haerizadeh found the motivation to move away from modern-day Iran little by little in order to incorporate the most relevant news from the world. Be it of natural disasters, immigration tragedies, Islamic terrorism or even something far more mundane such as a royal wedding, his interest focuses on the media coverage of these events and on the means adopted by new and old information channels in order to shape imagery and public opinion. The same method is used in what he calls 'moving paintings': genuine film footage generated with a rotoscope, thanks to the succession of thousands of drawings.

With his brother Ramin and the artist Hesam Rahmanian, Haerizadeh shares a large house-studio-museum in Dubai. Although the three do not present themselves as a collective, they have undertaken an inclusive and collaborative heterogeneous creative practice, which through paintings, performances, videos and installations does away with individuality, being enriched by the contribution of others and encouraging them to question even the work that has been created.

RA