

The background is an abstract, textured surface with a warm, earthy color palette. It features a mix of beige, tan, and light brown tones, with subtle variations in texture and color. There are faint, horizontal brushstrokes and some darker, more saturated areas of pink and red, particularly towards the bottom. The overall effect is that of a weathered or aged piece of paper or fabric, with a sense of depth and organic movement.

LETTING LIGHT IN

TAHA AFSHAR

TAHA AFSHAR LETTING LIGHT IN

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## SWEDISH LANDSCAPES SERIES: THE WORK OF TRANSFORMATION

by Alexandra Reynolds

“A painting, it’s all dirty material. But it’s about transformation.  
Taking that earth... and turning it into air and light.”

*Brice Marden*

Taha Afshar’s latest series of works expand on his October 2015 Swedish Landscapes. The 2016 series reflects key themes and painterly strategies from the previous year’s work including duration, iteration and an alchemical merging of inner and outer worlds. In process, technique and composition, the work carries echoes of Afshar’s earlier oeuvre. Nonetheless, the 2016 series is markedly, phenomenologically, perhaps quantitatively, different from the last.

Afshar’s 2015 series mapped a dialogue between inner and outer worlds, capturing light at various times of the day on an isolated lakeside in Alignsås, Sweden. The most recent work is framed by this same landscape, and was undertaken during a similarly intensive four-day period of production. However, the dialogue here has changed. In this series Afshar retreats much more fully into the meditative process of working, so much so that the lakeside is barely visible in many of the canvases. Light emanates out of this work not so much from the movement of the sun across the land, but from an inner, subjective space. Similarly, duration is primarily figured into the work through the building up and working through of material upon the canvas. In this way, although Afshar consciously returns to Alignsås to complete this series, its compositional setting becomes almost an intimation of itself, a sort of artistic scaffold or extension of the painter’s tools. Art historical antecedents also remain discernable here, alluding to histories of impressionism, expressionism and abstraction. However, the work’s motivation for personal transformation seemingly translates and internalises these influences, rendering them an essential part of the artist’s

inner journey. The external world thus acts within this series as a subtle second canvas upon which to navigate and visualize internal processes, documenting an exploratory inner search for light where worldly matter and historic facticity is of little consequence.

Perhaps most compelling in this series is the honesty with which Afshar's canvases portray their process. Light is the theme and the aspiration of the works, but hard work, dirt, split paint, fatigue, frustration and reaction are also documented here. This is no diluted or idealised oration of experience. The process of production is documented in all its difficulty and duration, and depicts the noisiness of the psyche and the bustle of automatic thoughts even in the still of the lakeside. In certain works, distress lines score the canvas like lines on the palm. These tracks will not be removed, only worked over as the canvas mutates and shifts towards higher levels of refinement, a process itself determined by the inner journey of the artist. Other canvases, recalling early work by Afshar such as *The Fern*, *The FT* and *The Crisis* (2008), bear the battle scars of process in a different way. Some have been thrown bodily into the sand or the water and left to dry on land before being cultivated again. The work thus remains in negotiation with a landscape which sometimes intervenes into the canvas itself. However, traces of the external here refer far more to a memory of subjective experience in developing the work and thus remain phenomenological rather than worldly in their essence.

Afshar's second Swedish Landscape series can be understood to document a momentary instantiation of a continuous process of development and growth by the artist. The paintings embody a subjectivity in duration whose development is always at work and underway. As moments within this existential journey, the paintings offer up a waypoint in development, signaling a moment in time. However, they also point to an unending process of psychic work and meditative labour which binds together aspects of Afshar's earlier work and wider oeuvre. Repetition of themes, processes and compositions help highlight this series as part of a developing narrative: a durational process of artistic interrogation which ultimately documents the work of subjective transformation itself.

## A FEW WORDS

by Taha Afshar

“I have to stay alone in order to fully contemplate and feel nature.... The painter should paint not only what he has in front of him, but also what he sees inside himself.”

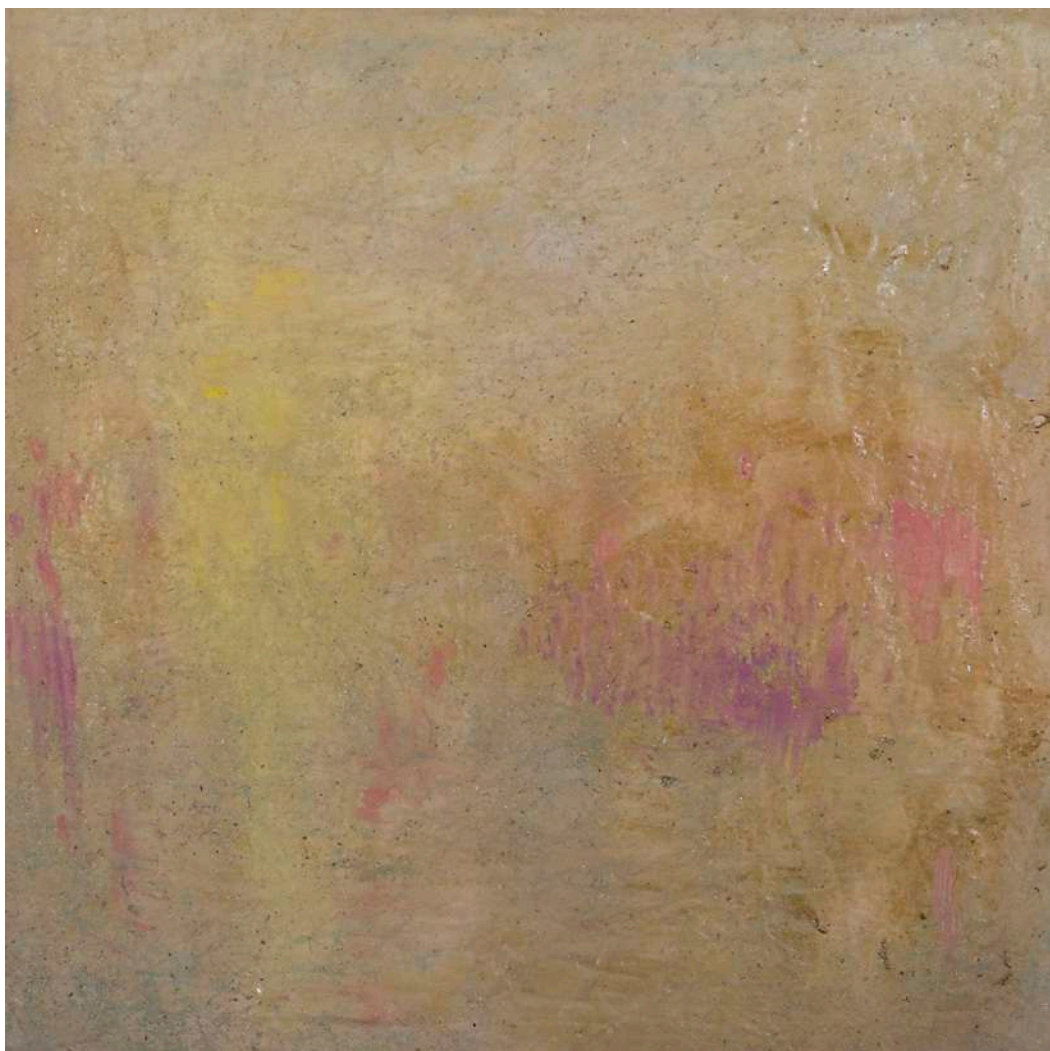
*Caspar David Friedrich*

Painting for me has always been a means to reflect and a vessel from which to explore greater truths. Some of these truths are derived from nature, whilst others are more personal. At the same time, it is a mechanism from which I can exert my creative impulse in order for it to be wholly expressed and absolved.

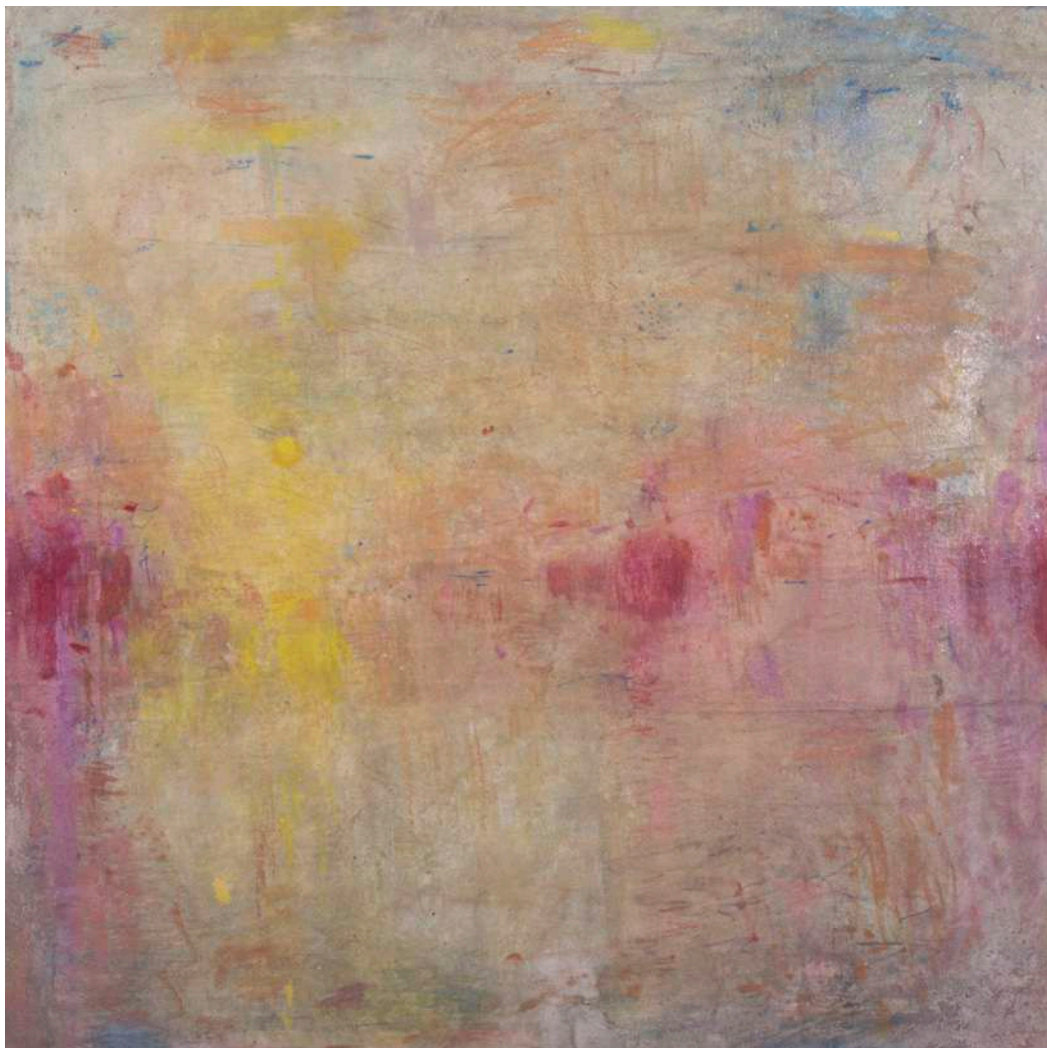
The purpose of the works for the *Letting Light In* series is to explore and illustrate an internal light, which is illustrated through the metaphor of the sun on the canvas. In the winter landscapes, the pure white canvas is blemished by my paint marks, and these stains act as an allegory for the tension between man and nature-the ego and the universal.

Whilst the lake reflects the sky, the illustrated landscape also carries with it reflections from my own internal experience. That is why I often refer to these lake paintings as “soulscapes”, where the stillness and calmness of my surroundings lend themselves to reflection of the highest order.

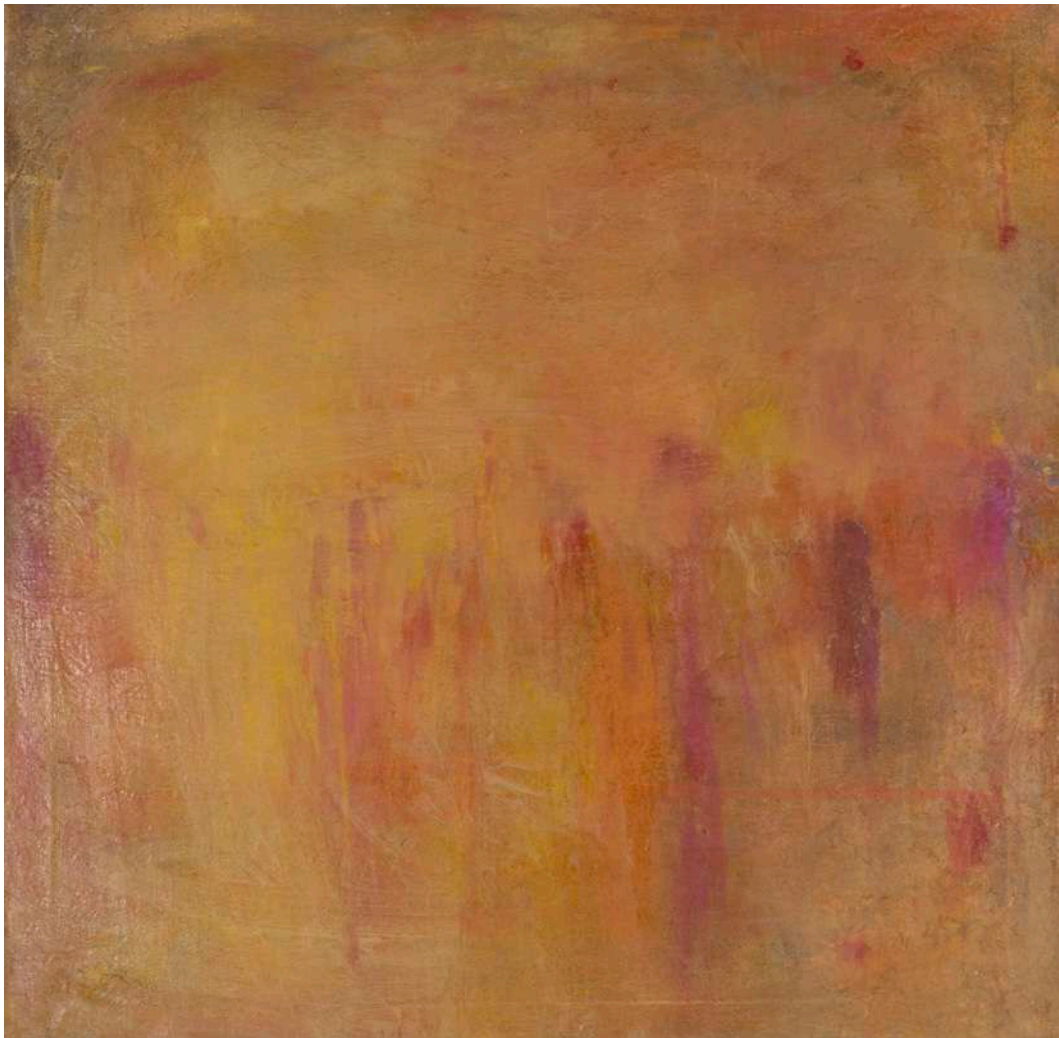




*The Light of Being*, 2016. 95 x 95 cm. Oil on linen.

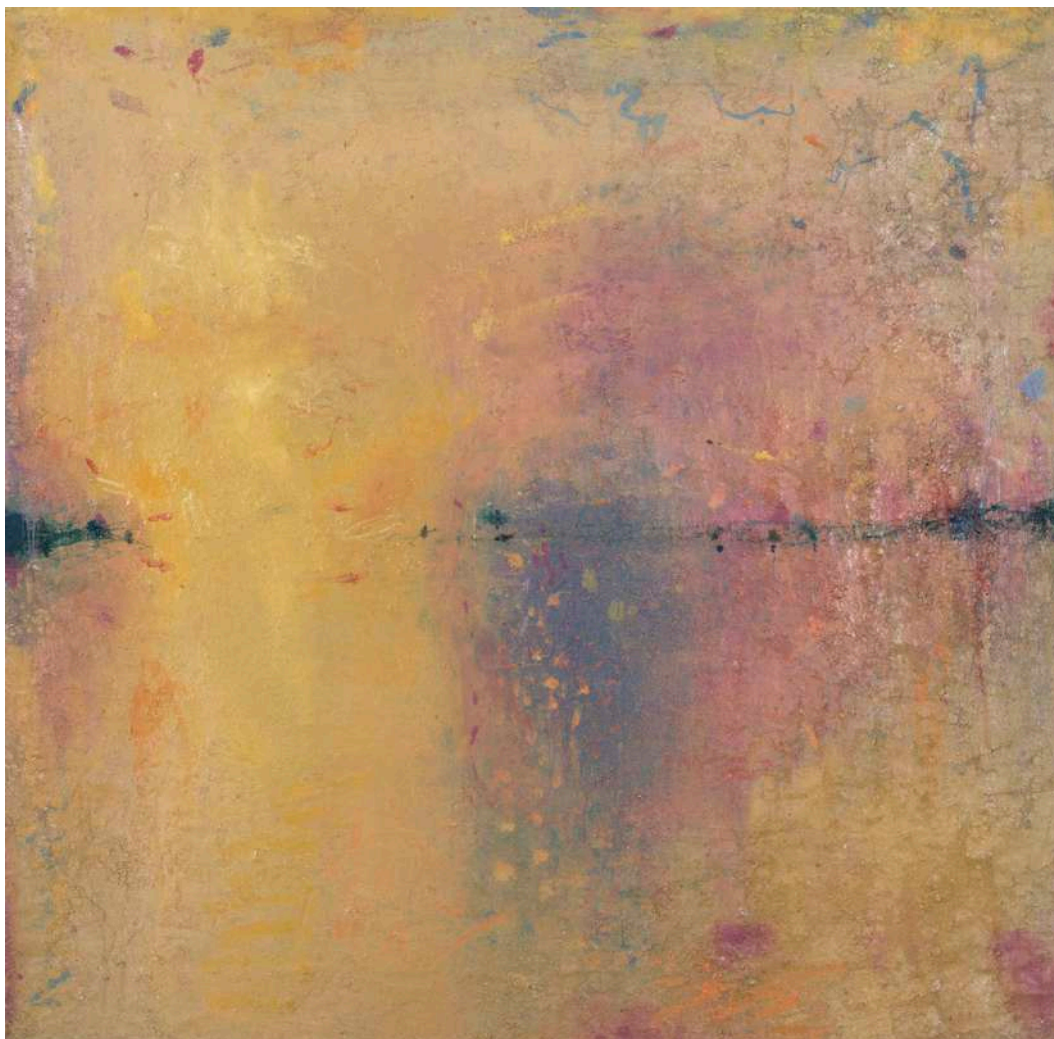


*Theophanic Forms: Light upon Light*. 2016. 95 x 95 cm. Oil on linen.



*The Sun is Your Spirit*, 2016. 110 x 110 cm. Oil on linen.



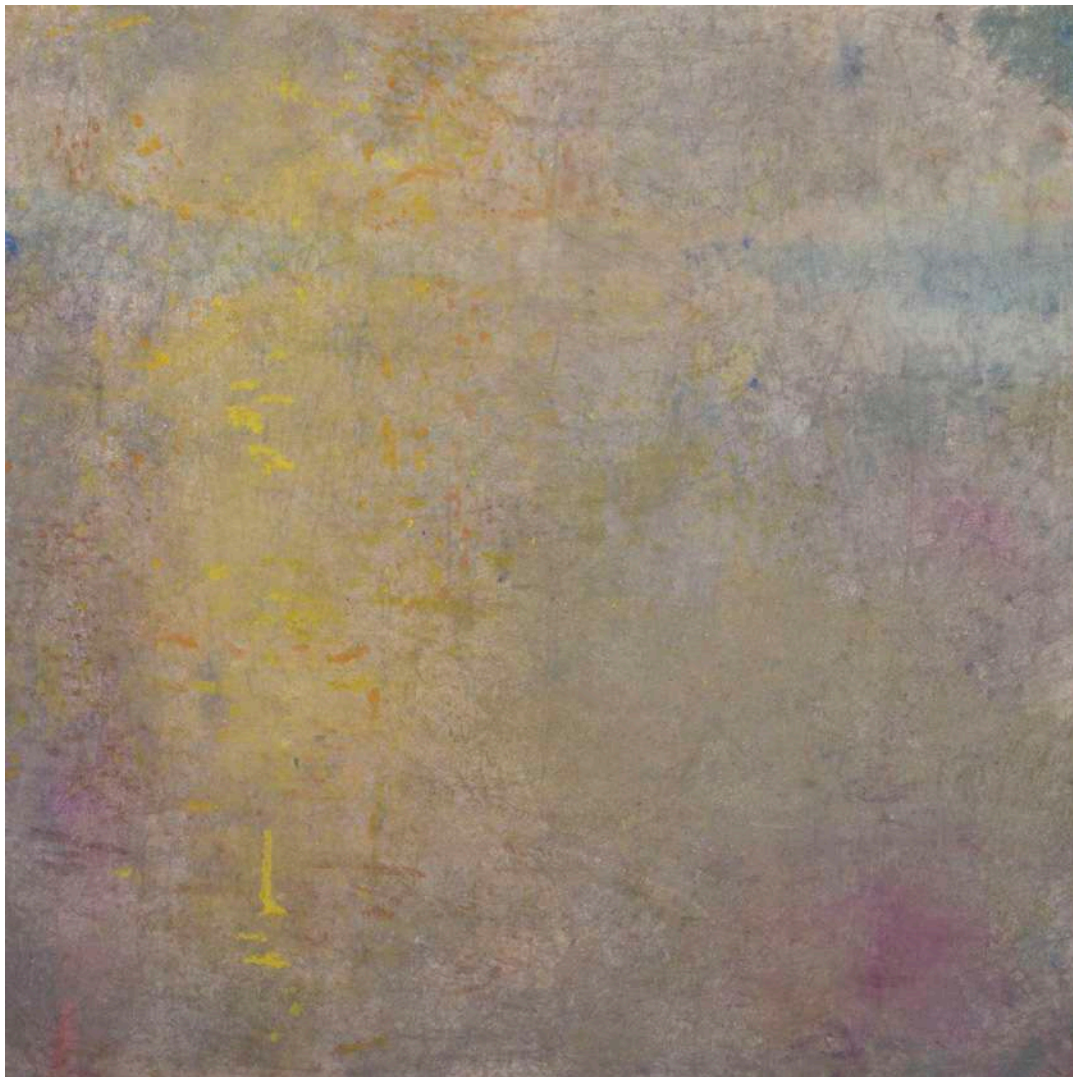


*The Lamp of the Heart.* 2016. 65 x 65 cm. Oil on linen.

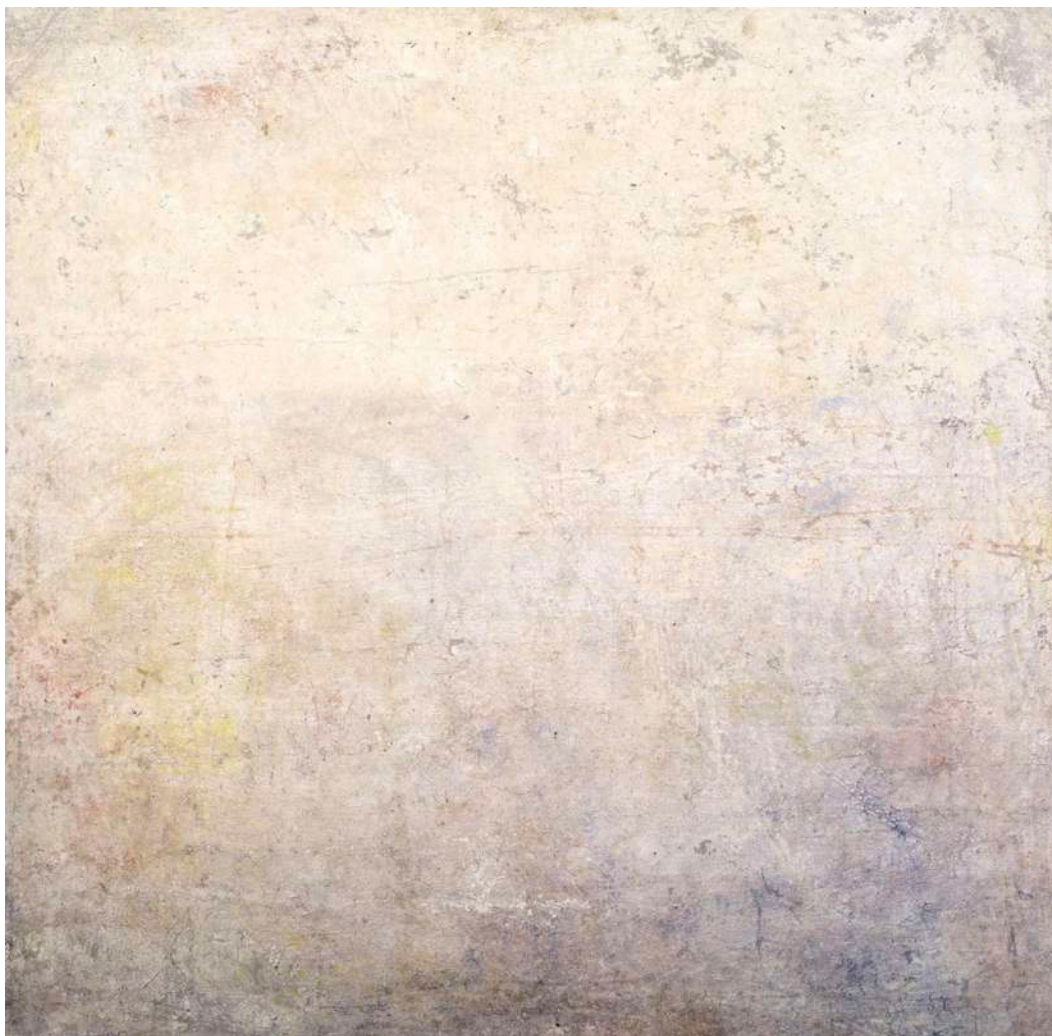


*Forever Illuminate the Eyes of all Hearts.* 2016. 65 x 65 cm. Oil on linen.





*This Is Our Garden.* 2016. 110 x 110 cm. Oil on linen.



*The Heart's Mirror*. 2016. 110 x 110 cm. Oil on linen.





*Unity's Sanctuary*. 2016. 65 x 65 cm. Oil on linen.



*Letting Light In After Klimt - Study 1*. 2017. Oil on paper. 234 x 234 mm.



*Letting Light In After Klimt - Study 2*. 2017. 234 x 234 mm. Oil on paper.





*Reaching out to the Simple White Winter Lakescape.* 2018. 65 x 65 cm. Oil on canvas





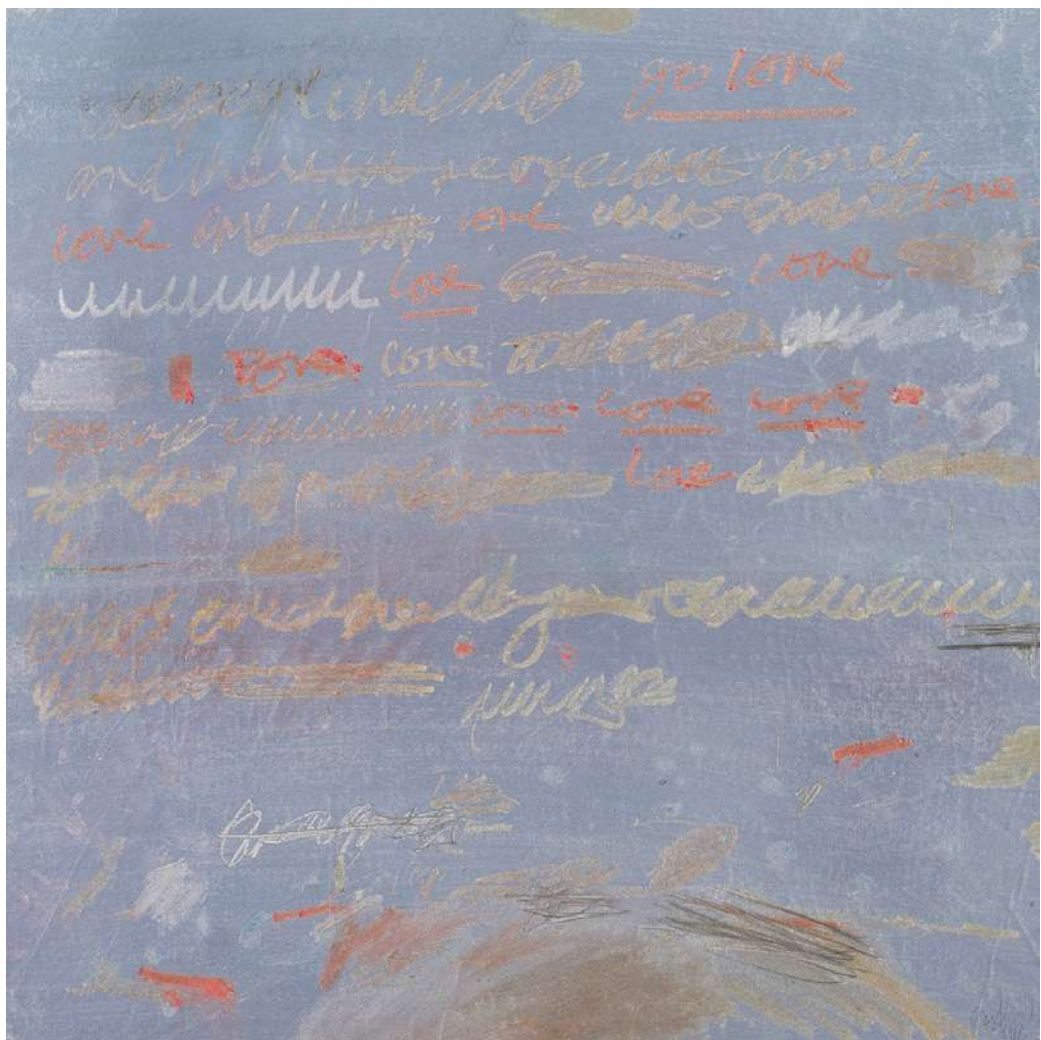
*Marble Beige Winter Lakescape*. 2018. 121 x 168 cm. Oil on canvas.



*Pure White Lakescape*, 2018. 61 x 112 cm. 61 x 112 cm. Oil on linen.

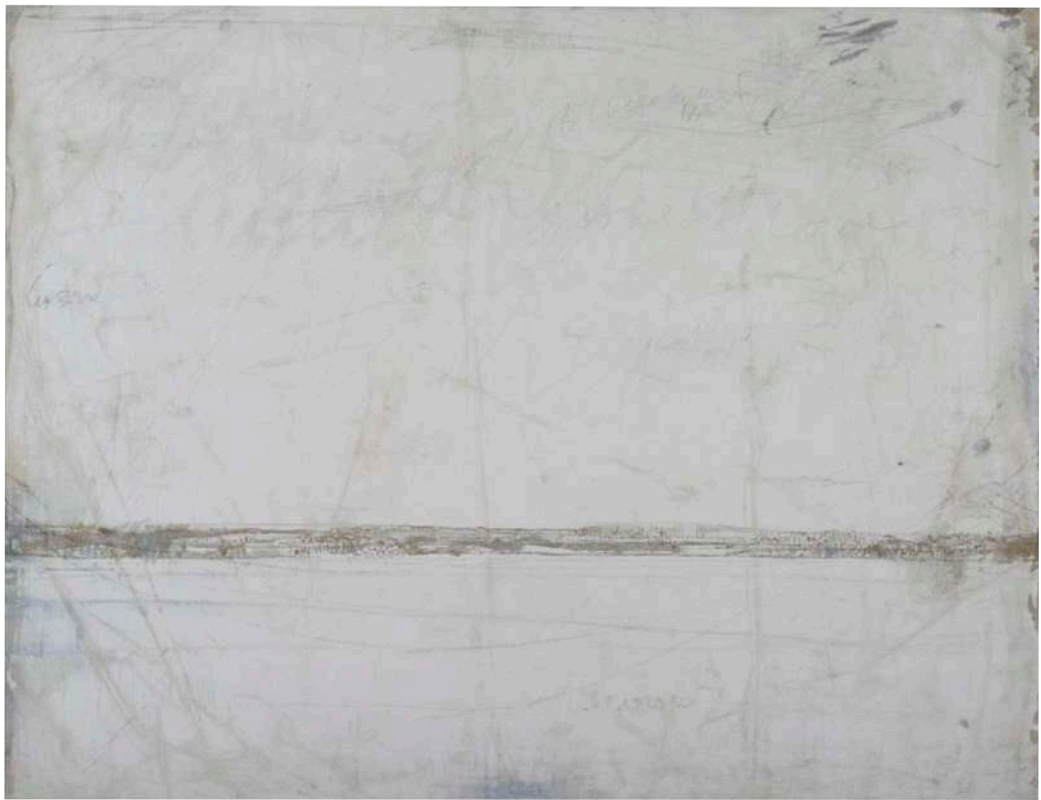


*Winter Lakescape With Love*, 2018. 112 x 71 cm. Oil on linen.



Repeated and automatic: Gold Writing on Lakescape. 2018. 65 x 65 cm. Oil on canvas.





*Plain white simple snowscape.* 2018. 92 x 112cm. Oil on canvas.

## BIOGRAPHY

*1983*

Taha Afshar is born in Winchester, England, on June 2nd. His father, Dr Karim Afshar, was born in Ahwaz, Iran, and his mother in Tehran, Iran. Karim Afshar, was a tea merchant, who helped found Ahmad Tea, the world's third largest tea brand, along with his brothers. The family company was established in Hampshire, England in the 1980s after the family was forced to flee Iran after the revolution.

*1997*

From the age of 14 to 18, Afshar attends Winchester College, where he studied Art and History of Art in the classes of Lawrence Wolff, who attended the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford. During his time, the art school produced several professional painters, such as Nicholas Hatful and Oliver Osborne, who both went on to study at the Royal Academy.

*2000*

Afshar exhibits for the first time in a local gallery, the Maltby Art Gallery in Winchester, winning a local young artists prize. He also exhibits work at Bell Fine Arts, a local commercial gallery. All of the works are sold.

*2001*

He is then awarded the Drew Art Travel Scholarship, with Merrick D'Arcy-Irvine. He produces 27 oil on canvas paintings for an exhibition at the Angelus Gallery, Winchester. All works are now in private collections.

*2002*

He studies a BSc. Economics at University College, London, followed by MSc. in Management at the London School of Economics (LSE). Whilst at university, he continues to produce work out of the studio, "the shed", at

the back of his parents' garden. At university, he forms friendships with art curators Carson Chan, Nadim Samman and Mila Askarovia.

*2008*

After taking 2 years out of academia to travel and work in finance, he returns to the LSE to complete his PhD in Management, where he studies Corporate Philanthropy in the UK and US. In the September prior to starting his PhD., he works on a series of process driven conceptual works at the peak of the economic crisis. The works draw a comparison between economics cycles and the cycles of nature.

*2011*

After completing his PhD, he travels to Sweden for a painting trip to Svansö, completing 5 paintings. He joins the family tea business.

*2013*

He marries Laila Afshar, and they move into Chilworth, Hampshire, where they both grew up. He sets up a studio in his new home.

*2015*

In October, he stays near Alingsås, a town in central Sweden. He rents a cottage by the lake and creates his first body of work with the

intention of selling for the first time since 2000. The 18 paintings are mostly completed on site en plein air. Each painting is from the same position but executed at a different time of the day, which is documented in the titles of the paintings.

*2016*

Exhibits recent work in 5 galleries. Revisits remote location in Sweden to complete "Letting light in" series.

*2017*

Exhibits works with two of the most renowned contemporary Iranian artists, Monir Farmanfarmaian and Y.Z. Kami, in an exhibition entitled "The Garden of Mystery" at Asia House in London, which celebrated the 700th anniversary of a Sufi poem by Persian poet M. Shabistari. The exhibition was complimented by panel including Dr. Ladan Akbarnia from the British Museum and Dr. Sussan Babaie from the Courtauld Institute of Art.

## SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2018, *Letting Light In*, Solo Exhibition, The Minster Gallery, September, Winchester.

2018, *Artsdepot*, Group Exhibition, London.

2018, *Fascination of World Art and Colour*, “Kulturbunker”, Cultural Center Cologne-Mülheim, Cologne (March), Germany. Show will then go to Weißenthurm (April) and Koblenz-Gondorf Town Halls (May), Germany.

2018, *Art and Music at Mobray House*, Group Show, Janet Rady, London.

2017, *The Garden of Mystery*, Group show with Monir Farmanfarmaian and Y.Z. Kami. In collaboration with Gagosian Gallery and Rose Issa Projects. Gallery at Asia House, November, London.

2017, *Letting Light In*, Foyer at Asia House, May, London.

2017, *Vices and Virtues*, Group Show, Notes Gallery, April, Southampton.

2017, *Solent Faces*, Group Show, Solent Showcase Gallery, February, Southampton.

2017, *Swedish Landscapes*, Group Show, Minster Gallery, September, Winchester.

2016, *Swedish Landscapes*, The Minster Gallery, September, Winchester.

2016, *Spring Show*, Cadogan Contemporary, April, London.

2016, *New English Art Club*, Annual Exhibition, Mall Galleries, June, London.

2016, *Green and Pleasant Land*, Group Show, Jonathan Cooper Gallery, Park Walk, July, London.

2002, *Tuscan Landscapes*, Angelus Gallery, Winchester

2001, *Autumn show*, Bell Fine Arts, Winchester.

2000, Maltby Art Gallery, Winchester.



## PRIZES AND AWARDS

2018, *Royal Society of Marine Artists*, Shortlisted.

2018, *Sunny Art Prize*, Shortlisted.

2018, *Artsdepot award*, Shortlisted.

2017, *Nature Art Award*, Special Recognition Artist, painting category.

2017, *Palm Art Award*, Nominee.

2017, *National Open Arts*, Shortlisted.

2017, *Royal Society of Marine Artists*, Shortlisted.

2017, *Royal Society of Portrait Painters*, Pre-selected.

2001, *Awarded Drew Art Travel Scholarship*, Winchester College.

2000, Winner of Maltby Young Artist prize.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following galleries and individuals for making this exhibition possible: Ines Graham, Fiona Waters, Alexandra Reynolds, Lawrence Wolff, Laila Afshar, Ali Afshar, Ahmad Tea, Dr Hussain Assarian and Prof. Abdol Hamid Ganjavian.

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The Minster Gallery