

# PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

## THE GARDEN OF MYSTERY 700th anniversary exhibition at Asia House, London Wednesday 22 November – Friday 1 December 2017

'The Garden of Mystery' opens at Asia House, 63 New Cavendish Street London W1G 7LP from **Wednesday 22 November to Friday 1 December 2017**, in celebration of the 700th anniversary of Gulshan-i Raz, one of the greatest works of Persian (Sufi) poetry, written in the early 14th century by Mahmoud Shabistari. Featuring contemporary art by young emerging British artist, **Taha Afshar**, the selling exhibition is supported with additional work by one of the most prominent Iranian artists of the contemporary period, **Monir Farmanfarmaian** from Tehran and **Y.Z. Kami**, who lives and works in New York. The works on display, by artists born in disparate decades and living in Britain and internationally, differ in style and execution but share a connection and resonance with core themes within Sufi literature and practice.

In addition to the art on show and for sale, a number of eminent experts are gathering for a **panel discussion** on the subject of *The Garden of Mystery, 700th anniversary and the influence of Sufism in contemporary visual arts*, which takes place on **Tuesday 28 November 2017** at 18.45, introduced by **Mariam Neza**, Curator of Arts and Learning at Asia House:

**Dr Ladan Akbarnia**, Curator, Islamic Collections, British Museum

**Dr Sussan Babaie**, Andrew W. Mellon Reader in the Arts of Iran and Islam, The Courtauld Institute of Art

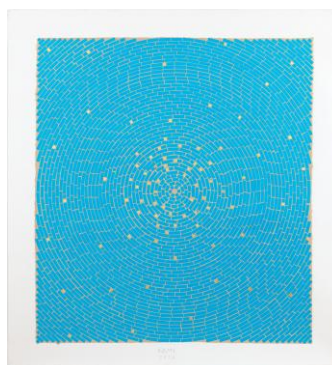
**Dr Leonard Lewisohn**, Senior Lecturer, Iran Heritage Foundation Fellow in Sufi Literature, Exeter University

**Dr Taha Afshar**, exhibiting artist.

**Y. Z. Kami** (b. 1956) is an Iranian born American painter based in New York. Kami is known for referencing core concepts of different religious faiths and philosophies in his artworks. Though the subjects in his oeuvre span from painted portraits and devotional subject matter to abstract domes and architectural elements, the artist continually returns to themes of introspection, subjectivity and contemplation. There will be both figurative work and paintings from his Dome series for sale. The connection is through the meditative experience and expression of light.  
<https://www.gagosian.com/artists/yz-kami>



*Untitled (Hands) I*, 2012 by  
Y.Z. Kami  
oil on linen  
30" (76.2cm) x 16"  
(40.6cm) unframed  
(KAMI 2012.0010)  
© Y.Z. Kami.  
Photography by Rob  
McKever.  
Courtesy Gagosian.



*Blue Dome IV*, 2016 by Y.Z. Kami  
mixed media on paper with gold leaf  
54" (137.2) x 50" (127cm) framed  
(KAMI 2016.0064)  
© Y.Z. Kami.  
Photography by Rob McKever.  
Courtesy Gagosian.

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**Monir Farmanfarmaian** (b. 1924) was the subject of a major career retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 2015. Her work relies on mirrors to reflect and redirect light, as used to embellish shrines to elevate the sanctity of holy spaces. Whilst decoratively complex, the use of geometric patterns and tessellations point to a far deeper conceptual agenda. The proliferation of arabesque abstract decoration enhances a quality that could only be attributed to God, namely, the doctrine of Tawhid, or Divine Unity. Farmanfarmaian's work not only relates to the tradition of Sufi literature by means of the aesthetic references to decorate architectural motifs associated with Sufism, but also conceptually through its play with light. The mirror of the heart is referred to by Shabistari and other Sufi authors as a metaphor. <http://www.thethirdline.com/artists/monir-shahroudy-farmanfarmaian/biography/>



*Two of the artists, Monir Farmanfarmaian and Taha Afshar, whose art is exhibited in The Garden of Mystery at Asia House this November*

Works presented by **Taha Afshar** (b. 1983) explore ideas of illumination of the heart from reflection and contemplation of the divine, a central theme in Shabistari's Garden of Mystery. The abstract lake-scapes invite us to reflect over their watery surface, which intentionally glow from a central point – the sun – a metaphor for the divine essence. The set of works explore the notion of the light within the human heart and soul. The landscape as a backdrop is a metaphor; these are internal landscapes. The gold leaf and mirror in these works all serve symbolic purposes of the alchemical process of prayer and reflection. Shabistari writes: "Go polish the tablet of your heart, so that an angel will dwell near you." <http://www.tahaafshar.com/>



*Go Polish the Tablet of your Heart* by Taha Afshar, 2016, oil and mixed media on linen, 95cm x 95cm. Photo: Paul Pescoe



*Forever Illuminate the Eyes of all Hearts* by Taha Afshar from *Letting Light In* series, 2016, oil and mixed media on linen, 65cm x 65cm. Photo: Paul Pescoe



*The Verse of Light* by Taha Afshar, 2016 oil and mixed media on linen 110cm x 110cm x 3cm. Photo: Paul Pescoe

Further press information and high res jpeg images:  
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## **Notes to editors:**

- Event:** 'The Garden of Mystery'
- Venue:** Asia House, 63 New Cavendish Street London W1G 7LP
- Dates:** Wednesday 22 November to Friday 1 December 2017
- Opening Hours:** 10.00 – 18.00 (Monday to Friday) and 10.00 - 17.00 (Saturday 25 November). Entry free.
- Preview Evening:** Tuesday 21 November 2017, 18.00 – 20.30 in the presence of Taha Afshar.
- To register for free, book here: <http://tinyurl.com/y8kloe9f>
- Journalists should email Gail McGuffie PR: [MGailMcG@aol.com](mailto:MGailMcG@aol.com)
- Panel discussion:** *The Garden of Mystery, 700th anniversary and the influence of Sufism in contemporary visual arts.*
- Tuesday 28 November 2017 at 18.45, followed by reception.
- General admission: £10, Concessions: £8, Asia House Arts Members: £5
- Tickets bookable only through: <http://tinyurl.com/y6wrw5qf>
- Journalists should email Gail McGuffie PR: [MGailMcG@aol.com](mailto:MGailMcG@aol.com)
- Social Media:** Twitter: @asiahousearts
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/asiahouse/>
- Instagram: asiahouseuk
- Supporters:** Gagosian, Asia House, Rose Issa Projects, Ahmad Tea
- Website:** **[www.asiahousearts.org](http://www.asiahousearts.org)**

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