



**Alikhaan Abdollahi & Mohammad Ariyaei: *Watching and Caring***

Vernissage: April 30<sup>th</sup>, 6pm-9pm

Exhibition Dates: April 30<sup>th</sup> – June 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016

XVA GALLERY, Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood, Bur Dubai

XVA Gallery, in collaboration with Morteza Zahedi, is pleased to announce their upcoming exhibition *Watching and Caring*, a two man show of outsider art. The exhibition will feature sculpture by Alikhaan Abdollahi and paintings by Mohammad Ariyaei.

**About the Artists:**

**Alikhaan Abdollah**

Originally from Afghanistan, Alikhaan Abdollahi moved to Iran twenty seven years ago and he is now fifty five years old. Alikhaan knows how to read and write on a very basic level - he only started learning both when he was thirty-five. Thirteen years ago, he took the position of caretaker for a ministerial building in Tehran. Alikhaan, his wife and his three children live in this building.

Getting to know the self-taught artist Hasan Hazer Moshhaar was an occurrence that sparked a significant change in Alikhaan's life. When Alikhaan would go out to water the trees in front of the building, he would see the eighty year old man set up his painting and sculpting equipment and get busy working. He was drawn to Moshhaar and would sometimes pour tea for him, and got to know him little by little. It is Hazer Moshhaar who Alikhaan credits with answering his deep-rooted concern for sculpture which he had dreamed about since his childhood, a dream he had not been able to follow because of certain situations and difficulties in his life. Finally he felt motivated to start sculpting. After seven years of effort and experimentation with various materials, Alikhaan found the main paste for his sculptures, this was without any consultation or guidance and he was not influenced by anyone in any way, it was only the result of his own creativity. Alikhaan realized that he could use recycled egg boxes and library paste, a natural kind of glue and a better choice than glue made from oil compounds, to make his sculptures. In fact, for Alikhaan, discovering this material was equal to discovering a gold mine.

The powerhouse functions as his workshop during the winter, and the rooftop of the building serves the same purpose during the summer. The heat of the powerhouse during winter and the radiation of the sun during summer help the sculptures dry quicker. Alikhaan makes his sculptures depending on his own imagination, none of the works start or end with a specific design and plan. The frame is made with wood and then the paste is added to it. His works are combinations of legendary, mythical and metaphysical creatures. After thirteen years of continuous work and effort, sculpturing does not only serve as artistic creativity, but has also become his job and the first source of his income.

**Mohammad Ariyaei**

Mohammad Hossein Ariyaei was born in 1987 in Golpayegan, Iran.

“Everything was rather different since the first days of my life. My mother was in her last days of pregnancy when my father took her to the midwife. It was at that time that I suddenly fell onto the snow and came into the world. When I was a child, I was not good at painting. I used to just draw my subjective visions with a pen, or pencil on paper, but I didn't know if they ever would have any value in the art world. During my childhood I had some imaginary friends with whom I used to talk and play. I didn't know if they were born out of my mind or if they were jinn or angels.

When I was in fifth grade, one day, instead of going to school I took a map and something to eat, and I climbed the mountain near our house, because I thought there was another world behind that! The dreams continued until I got my diploma...”

After getting his diploma, Ariyaei moved to Tehran and took a position as a building watchman. Ariyaei likes reading Harry Potter books and is absorbed in the world of fantasy. He attempted to learn English and took part in music training courses, but these activities weren't the key to solving the disquiet that he had felt since childhood. After four

years of staying in Tehran, Ariyaei lost his job and went in to military service. Finishing this task, he returned to Golpayegan and started working at Saipa company. Now he works in the Pegah dairy factory of Golpayegan. In 2013, during a stay at a friend's house, Ariyaei came to know an illustrator for childrens' books and was encouraged to start painting. The genre of Ariyaei's paintings is inclined towards the modern world. He attracts us with his dreamlike, delirious and nightmarish imaginings. A real self-taught surrealist whose expressions are like graffiti, his works are close to those of well-known artists of the Western world, from Hieronymus Bosch to Jean Michel Basquiat, and in the world of outsider art to the works of Carlo Zinelli.

**About the XVA Gallery:**

Established in 2003, XVA is one of the leading galleries in the Middle East that specializes in contemporary art from the Arab world, Iran and the Subcontinent. Exhibitions focus on works by the regions foremost artists as well as those emerging onto the scene. The gallery's artists express their different cultural identities and perspectives while challenging the viewer to drop prejudices and borders. XVA Gallery exhibits both locally and internationally; collaborating with galleries and participating in international art fairs, such as Art Basel Hong Kong, SH Contemporary, Singapore Art Fair and Abu Dhabi Art in 2014, in order to further expose Middle Eastern contemporary art.

XVA Gallery and XVA Art Hotel are located in Dubai's heritage district, now called Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood. XVA founded and organized the Bastakiya Art Fair from 2007- 2010 as part of its commitment to raising the profile of contemporary art practice in Dubai. For three years XVA was located in DIFC, and has now expanded its premises in Al Fahidi.

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