

Samira Abbassy
Artist's Statement
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The subject of much of the work evolves out of the question: *How do I create a figure that embodies the metaphysical aspects of the figure?* The work is an inquiry into how to reveal the figure as a psycho/emotional being, encountering its various internal states: the violence, ecstasy, and epiphany within.

The key to my approach in painting the figure lies in an idea taken from Dante's *Inferno*; that figures are "*contorted according to their sin.*" This implies an embodiment of psychological states, where the physical states mirror psychological dilemmas. Rather than portraits, the figures are archetypes, revealing themselves from the inside out; showing how it feels to be human, and their specific identities help uncover elements of a more universal Self. At times, the figure is represented as many selves, or many aspects of one unified Self, expressing an array of psychodynamic and existential realities. This multiplicity is part of Hindu iconography, and can also be found in the figure of the Many-Headed Angel in *Mohamad's Night Journey MS*.

The study of Qajar Court paintings(19th C) has been central to my work for three decades, and my interest lies specifically in how the Qajar artists translated their visual language in such a short space of time and adjust to the paradigm shift from the manuscript to large scale oil paintings. Their intriguing appearance is due to a '*misinterpretation*', and a slippage of language. Just as the Iranian artists were translating into the language of European painting, I find parallels in my own biography and my efforts to translate myself back into my indigenous culture, adapting western painting techniques to the language of Persian painting.

From an interview in Cultural Politics (Deb Frizzell, date , issue #....)

I'm quoted: *"We all are products of cross-cultural pollination. Maybe in my life it's more obvious and recent, but the very idea of culture is that it's a growing, living thing that feeds on cross-pollination. A stylized Chinese cloud floating into compositions relates to the influence of Chinese painting on Persian art, conveying the idea of the porous nature of cultural influence and migration, both historically and in contemporary times. After a European art education, I decided to focus on art outside the Western canon, starting with Indian and Persian miniatures. I was then led to Hindu iconography and viewed it in parallel to that of Christian and Muslim to find common motifs. I also took Jung's theory of "the collective unconscious" as a premise to uncover common and divergent ideas instilled in the human psyche."*