

MIT List Visual Arts Center

The MIT List Visual Arts Center

presents

*Tala Madani: First Light*

On view: May 20–July 17, 2016

Opening Reception: Thursday, May 19, 2016, 6-8 PM

**April 6, 2016 (Cambridge, MA)** –The MIT List Visual Arts Center presents the first American solo museum exhibition by Tehran-born, Los Angeles-based artist Tala Madani. *Tala Madani: First Light* premieres a series of new paintings as well as a stop-motion animation made expressly for her presentation at the List. The exhibition was organized in collaboration with The Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis (CAM).

For more than a decade, Madani has developed a practice centered on playful yet provocative representations of men. Her paintings, drawings, and films combine a lyrical and gestural figuration with mature and sometimes disturbing subject matter. These deadpan and often hilarious works satirize conventional notions of masculinity, recasting the male figure in various scenarios that both mock virility and redistribute the dynamics of power. Bright pastel color fields form the ground for group scenes in which balding, rotund, and mustachioed middle-aged men blindly follow each other in circles, undergo interrogation, and perform various humiliating acts. Unflinchingly scatological and abject, Madani's consistent rendering of bodily fluids and human waste encourages a larger consideration of authority, desire, and shame.

*Tala Madani: First Light* encompasses the full scope of her larger related body of work, titled *Smiley Has No Nose*, alongside selected works from earlier series. This exhibition and the accompanying publication are the first to highlight Madani's engagement with the cinematic. Many of the paintings feature the presence of illumination, for example, light beams directed at group of kneeling men in *Projections* or car headlights in *The Primitive* (both 2015). The notion of projection connects her work not only to cinema and its presentation of images through light and dark but also to art history, from formal strategies like chiaroscuro to allusions to Christian iconography including the Crucifixion and the Pietà. Madani's work in stop-motion animation, by contrast, is in conversation with such diverse traditions as animated cartoons and the filmic experiments of the avant-garde in the early twentieth century. In making reference to the improbable physics of cartoons, where flattened figures can bounce back into shape and physical boundaries are infinitely elastic, Madani's paintings and videos open up an unruly, anarchic space examining pervasive gender, racial, and ethnic visual stereotypes. Spanning medium, historical period, and culture, this amalgam of references enriches Madani's larger investigation into human fantasy and folly.

*Tala Madani: First Light* is co-organized by Kelly Shindler, Associate Curator, Contemporary Art Museum St. Louis, and Henriette Huldish, Curator, MIT List Visual Arts Center.



A full-color, 112 page-catalogue published by DelMonico Books/Prestel with contributions by the curators, Madani and A.L. Steiner is forthcoming in July 2016.

**Tala Madani** (b. 1981, Tehran, Iran) lives and works in Los Angeles. Her solo exhibitions include Nottingham Contemporary, Nottingham, UK (2014), and Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2013). Selected group exhibitions include the 2014 Taipei Biennial; *Made in L.A. 2014*, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; the 5th Marrakech Biennale, Marrakech (2014); *Greater New York*, PS1, New York (2010); and *The Generational: Younger Than Jesus*, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York (2009).

Exhibitions at the List Center are made possible with the support of Cynthia & John Reed and Rick & Terry Stone.

General operating support is provided by Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the Council for the Arts at MIT, the Office of the Associate Provost at MIT, the MIT School of Architecture + Planning, the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and many generous individual donors. The Advisory Committee Members of the List Visual Arts Center are gratefully acknowledged.

The exhibition catalogue is generously supported by the Elizabeth Firestone Graham Foundation. Special thanks to David Kordansky Gallery, Los Angeles, and Pilar Corrias, London.

### **About the MIT List Visual Arts Center**

Located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, the List Visual Arts Center is a creative laboratory that provides artists with a space to freely experiment and push existing boundaries. As the contemporary art museum at MIT, the List presents a dynamic program of six to nine special exhibitions in its galleries annually, a program of evolving site-specific work by emerging artists known as the List Projects, as well as a broad range of educational programs, events, and scholarly publications. Beyond the full slate of special exhibitions and projects it presents each year, the List also maintains and adds to MIT's permanent collection; commissions new works through the MIT Percent-for-Art program, a collection of more than 50 site-specific artworks throughout the campus; and oversees the Student Loan Art Program, which lends more than 500 works of art annually to MIT undergraduate and graduate students.

Originally named the Hayden Gallery, MIT established this center for the visual arts in 1950 to provide a dedicated structure upon which to build the university's existing relationship to the arts. It was renamed the List Visual Arts Center in 1985 in recognition of a gift from Vera and Albert List, and relocated to its current, expanded location in the Wiesner Building on the campus of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which was designed by MIT alumnus I. M. Pei (B.S. Architecture, 1940) and Partners Architects. This year the List Visual Arts Center celebrates 30 years as MIT's contemporary art museum.

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