



Walking into “After Midnight...” you are immediately struck by the solace and companionship portrayed by the figures in the artwork. The figures, sitting in their quiet world, look directly at you. You are an unfamiliar face to them, they are understandably cautious of new visitors.

Helia Chitsazan intends for the viewer to feel as though they are watching an event that they were not invited to or are looking into a private room in a house that is not their own. In doing so, the paintings are full of emotional strife and uncertainty.

Born and raised in Tehran, Chitsazan earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the Art University of Tehran before pursuing a Master’s in Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts in New York. Her background in painting shines through the sprawling compositions currently hanging at Fou Gallery. Chitsazan’s paintings encourage the viewer to ponder and connect with the subjects to understand their experiences better.

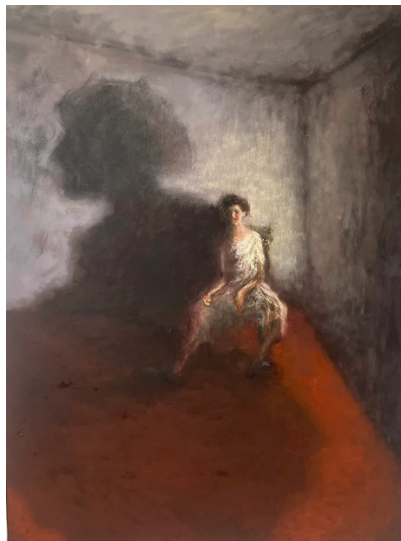
Growing up in Iran, where various interpersonal relations are illegal, Chitsazan paints what happens behind closed doors. In depicting these scenes, she is allowing us to peek into the houses and apartments where various members of society decide to coexist and interact regardless of their legal stations. Her paintings are the doors of the meeting places of brave members of society. She has invited us to join only briefly, to share her experience of growing up in such an unforgiving atmosphere.

For example, “When I Heard That He is Gone,” adds complexities to the circumstances of the social meeting bringing attention to the complete absence of male protagonists in Chitsazan’s body of work. It seeks to describe the familiar topic of a woman longing for a man she cared for, but the circumstance of their relationship is not specified. Instead, the women in the work and their shadows can be interpreted through the lens of their companionship and support for one another. The shadow motif is prevalent throughout the work of Chitsazan, notably in further works such as “We Are Brave and See” and “You Are Still Here With Me.” For Chitsazan, the significance of shadows varies depending on the work while simultaneously serving as a distinct quality that threads her entire body of work together.

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“We Are Brave” uses a unified shadow for two subjects. This factor implies that both women share the same guilt and risk when deciding to meet and spend time together in the literal and figurative shadows. Although they are two different people, they are the same. “See, You Are Still Here With Me” continues the narrative of loss and longing for another as the shadow of the figure directly represents the other and their absence in the life of the subject. The straightforward and literal titles of works such as these are compelling in supporting the overall composition while offering viewers a glimpse into the complex cultural context these works were created within.

The physical composition of the figures in Chitsazan’s paintings is an additional detail that supports the subject matter. The meticulous selection and design of the facial expressions and body language of the women in each painting confirm a careful and intentional approach to their depiction. In doing so, Chitsazen can evoke innate human reactions from the viewers upon seeing certain emotions expressed. When seeing the concerned glare toward the viewer by the figure in the back of “After Midnight”, or the devious smile and shriek in “Post Match,” the viewer has no choice but to react. It is through these moments of weightlessness and natural human response that Chitsazen’s work shines the brightest. The overtly expressive works are indicative of Edvard Munch, while the bare and honest figurative works are reminiscent of Lucian Freud. However, Chitsazen has burrowed between various genres of art and found a niche that is distinctly and undeniably her own. She places gentle interactions in a comfortable living room while placing a lonely figure in a sterile, empty environment. She is the arbiter of her memories and the painterly world she has created and generously decided to share with us.



Images above: (left) Helia Chitsazan, *See, You Are Still Here With Me*, 2023, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 in. (right) Helia Chitsazan, *After Midnight*, 2022, oil on canvas, 54 x 56.7 in. (Header) Helia Chitsazan, *When I Heard That He Is Gone*, 2022, oil on canvas, 48 x 60 in.

Images courtesy of the artist and Fou Gallery, NY

<https://www.tusslemagazine.com/chitsazen>