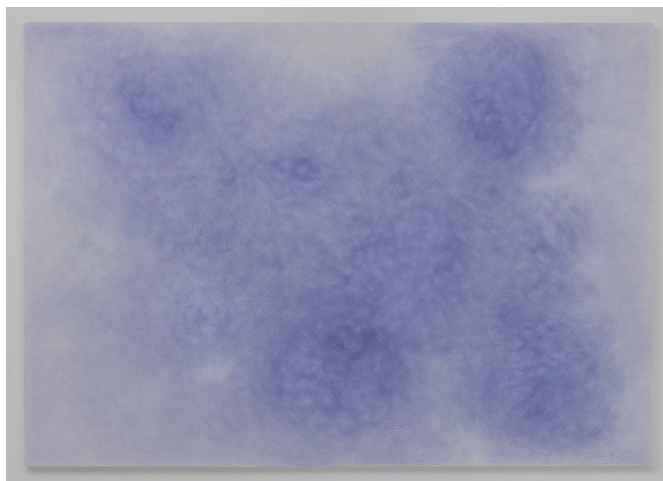


Experiencing Life Through the Eyes of an Artist

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Shirazeh Houshiary, *Nous*, 2012, Pencil, pigments and white aquacryl on canvas and aluminum, 74 3/4 x 106 1/4 in. (190 x 270 cm)

No Forms is an exhibition at the Hill Art Foundation curated by Margot Norton, Assistant Curator at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. This exhibition was a way to bring together works from across various mediums by many talented women and gender-nonconforming artists who engage with the ideas of Minimalism, an art movement developed in the USA in the 1960s that typically features artwork composed of simple geometric abstract shapes. Among the artworks in *No Forms* is *Nous* by Shirazeh Houshiary. It was created in 2012 with pencils, pigments, and white aquacryl on canvas and aluminum. Houshiary primarily uses intangible properties such as breath and different aspects of nature in her artwork. Through color, patterns, texture, and sensory images, Houshiary creates a variety of ways the viewer can judge and experience the world.

Nous is a large painting (74 3/4 x 106 1/4) that is installed on the wall. The artist created the work by layering pencil lines and pigment over white aquacryl, a type of watercolor paint that is luminous and translucent. Houshiary starts with a white background, and she layers various

shades of lilac-purple with a pattern of small blue and reddish-purple lines on top of it. The pattern is similar to that of scales on a fish which gives the work a rough and cold texture. To add to the cold feeling, the shift in the value of the lilac-purple color reminds the viewer of the vapor created by your breath on a window, especially during winter. With the added cold air in the gallery, you get shivers as you take in the visuals of the artwork.

Shirazeh Houshiary was born in Iran in 1995 and is currently based in London. She studied at Chelsea School of Art (1976–79) and had her first solo exhibition at Chapter Arts Cardiff in 1980. Houshiary takes inspiration from Renaissance paintings, Islamic and Middle Eastern art traditions, and a variety of intangible properties (breath, the mind, etc.). From this inspiration, Houshiary creates most of her artwork, including *Nous*, by using successive layering of pigments and lines, and building intricate patterns. As seen in *Nous*, she especially uses successive layering and patterns to build its cold and rough texture while incorporating breath, an aspect of nature.

Houshiary's artworks explore intangibility and she believes the viewer should experience the world at their own pace. Her ideas on this are described in a video from TateShots by the Tate Museum in London, England, "I'm trying to explore how we see the world. The idea of sight is very important. Perception is everything so, my whole development has been to explore the nature of seeing and how we see things and how we make our judgment in relation to what we see" (TateShots, 2014, 0:16). Houshiary uses her artwork to help provide the viewer with different ways to judge and experience the world. Her work also introduces the idea of broadening our viewpoints without being influenced by others. She does this by incorporating visual themes in her artwork. For example, in *Nous*, she uses visual perception and values. The work contains various light and dark pigments of purple across the canvas giving off a breath-

like perception. The use of these different values helps capture the viewers' interest. It snuffs out the background noises and the surrounding environment, leaving the viewer with a comforting white noise and an encompassing feeling.

Throughout her works, Houshiary incorporates and visualizes intangible subjects like nature to help reinforce the idea of experiencing the world. Her biography through Lehmann Maupin Gallery (n.d, para. 1) states that for each work, Houshiary attempts to visualize inherently intangible subjects—an echo, human breath, or memory. She uses this visualization in *Nous* with depictions of breath made via the color palette. The artwork appears similar to how breath shows up on a cold window. The use of values also comes into play as it changes the depth of the color as you look and move around the work, simulating breath on the window fading away. Her use of textures and color connects back to her theme of experiencing the world because you can view her work and encounter this wintry feeling or, based on the scale texture provided by the pattern, experience a cold ocean or cold beach. With the previous years of isolation and fear, it's refreshing to have a piece of artwork that allows you to imagine scenarios that you may long for or may feel connected to, which is something that Houshiary wanted to incorporate in her piece.

In conclusion, Houshiary's decision to use intangible subjects in her artwork helps provide the viewer with a chance to experience the world around them. Her usage of visual perception helps build the viewers' interpretations and captures their attention. Viewing her work and getting a chance to dive deeper into it helped my thoughts on her work to change over time. Originally, I saw the artwork as a painting that only conveyed one singular aspect, the idea of breath. After doing research and spending more time on the work, however, I could experience nature and the aspects of human life like breath, the sense of sight, and imagination. Overall, by

exploring intangibility, Houshiary can introduce an impactful experience in her artwork and spread the idea of viewing the world at your own pace and coming out with your own opinions.

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