Orkideh Torabi

Kings and Conquerors
April 10 - May 16, 2026

ASYA GEISBERG GALLERY

Asya Geisberg Gallery is thrilled to present "Kings and Conquerors," an exhibition of paintings by Iranian-born, New York-based **Orkideh Torabi**. This will be the artist's first exhibition with the gallery. Torabi has long worked within a continuum from historical to modern-day patriarchal societies, undermining male-dominated hierarchies by positing masculinity as farce. She grounds her work in the style of Persian miniatures and books such as the Shanahmeh, an astoundingly long epic with tales of heroic exploits of kings and warriors. But in Torabi's world, men become dependent, slighted, vulnerable, and without purpose, clueless to their comical gapped teeth or buffoonish noses. Rigid geometric pattern, a sign of authority and tradition, girds the figure-heavy narratives. Festive yellows and pinks glow with the luscious liquidity of her dye-based technique, and rounded softened edges further undermine the men's encrusted authority**.**

Torabi's signature moves include gender-role reversals, exaggeration, scale absurdity, and gendered paradigm shifts of active/acted upon, the viewer and the observed, the controller vs the powerless. A female magician stands proudly, saw in hand, her red pumps atop the large male assistant captured inside the box. A bouffant-ed grand dame rests her hand on top of a pint-sized man as if he were a pet or a toy. A cowboy-booted vixen takes the reins of her motorcycle, relegating her bald bespectacled partner to the back. The joking juxtapositions and inversions carry a bite, as they point out patriarchy's fragility and absurdity. The paintings inherit a tradition of criticizing social and political systems that must be masked in sarcasm or humor - inherently risky even now, as the saying goes - men's worst fear is being laughed at, while women's worst fear is being killed.

Torabi's multi-character scenes play with historical representations of groups: firmly footed in allegory, each man, like in Rembrandt's Night Watch, is individually rendered, yet always cartoonishly disempowered. In "The Performance of Sunday," a group of men are busy in raucous competition, intensely performing masculinity for each other. In "Under the Table," the artist explains that "Just like the hidden narratives tucked away in the details of Persian miniatures, the true story here happens where you aren't supposed to look. The irony of using the noble, 'Heroic' style to paint a group of cheaters highlights the gap between the grand myths of the past and the dishonest reality of these figures." In "Blanket Toss," barefoot women do as they wish, laughingly bouncing up a business-suited frightened man. In "Still Point," the woman as a Pygmalion-esque sculpture is the anchor around which the rest of the men revolve. In Torabi's version, the men become the true, chaotic spectacle at her feet, while she poses as the steadfast ruler above them.

Torabi's technique is time-consuming and deliberate, but prone to slippages. The artist paints on a screen with dye and then transfers the image with a squeegee onto canvas. Each color is masked and printed separately, so that sometimes a work has nearly a hundred layers of paint. As her process is full of imperfections, "Rather than trying to erase these marks, I have learned to adapt and build upon them. This also reflects my lived experience. In Iran, I often felt that I had no control over my circumstances and had to accept limitations and work within them." In the context of repression in modern Iran that has targeted women, and backlash and regression of the "manosphere" within the US, Torabi's project is both urgent and necessary.

Orkideh Torabi received an MA and BFA from The University of Art, Tehran, Iran, and an MFA from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, IL. Torabi had a 2021 solo exhibition at The Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, IL, and selected solo exhibitions include Nino Mier Gallery, Brussels, Belgium and Köln, Germany; Half Gallery, New York, NY; Western Exhibitions Gallery, Chicago, IL; Sean Horton Presents, New York, NY; and Richard Heller Gallery, Los Angeles, CA. Selected group exhibitions include Galerie Droste X KPM Berlin, Germany; Spurs Gallery, Shanghai, China; Chicago Cultural Center, IL; and Fredericks and Freiser, NY. She has completed residencies at Wassaic Project Artist Residency, Wassaic, NY; Field/Work Residency, Chicago Artist Coalition, Chicago, IL; Acre Projects Residency, Steuben, WI; Bemis Center for Contemporary Arts, Omaha, NE; Ox-Bow Artist Residency, Saugatuck, MI; and Salzburg Künstlerhaus Artist residency, Salzburg, Austria. Her work has been reviewed by The New York Times, AnOther Magazine, Canvas Magazine, The Brooklyn Rail, Gallery Magazine, Elephant Magazine, Los Angeles Times, Hyperallergic, and Juxtapoz, among others.

Orkideh Torabi
"The Performance of Sunday", 2026
Dye on canvas
59.50h x 56w in | 151.13h x 142.24w cm

Orkideh Torabi
"Under Supervision", 2026
Dye on canvas
52h x 36w in | 132.08h x 91.44w cm