

Henry Curchod: “The More You Know, the Less You Know.”

By Layla Leiman

Our preoccupation with nostalgia is something that interests Iranian-Australian artist Henry Curchod. Reflecting on the etymology of the word, Henry is interested in developing a rich visual language borrowing from myths and archetypal symbols that respond to the problematic nature of memory and our desire to return to an idealised—and often fictionalised—past. In each composition, Henry develops a complex narrative that plays out between an ambiguously identified protagonist and antagonist. The scenes resist moralistic readings and instead explore the space between comedy and tragedy and the secular and spiritual.

The symbolic subject matter of Henry’s paintings belies his serious approach to painting. He says: “It’s important to be conscious of every single stroke. Every gesture or stroke should be scrutinised and questioned. Paint’s application should not be too cavalier, as people are looking for meaning in the stroke.” To test the mettle of his painting, Henry dedicated two years to only painting water—typically one of the most difficult things to render in pigment on canvas. The outcome of this undertaking is less important than the deep understanding of paint and surface and light that Henry gained through the process and which he brings to bear in his current work. This is balanced with an equal acknowledgement of the need for spontaneity to maintain life and an element of surprise within a painting. Using fluid but precise brushstrokes, Henry’s paintings convey a sense of movement and poised tension. His colour palette is similarly emotive and deliberate adding textural layers to his symbolic language.

Today Henry lives and works in Sydney. He was the recipient of the Fortyfive Emerging Art Award and the Belle Magazine Art Prize amongst other achievements, and has presented his work nationally in both solo and group shows.

AMM: Hi Henry! Have you always painted or did you find your way to painting via other mediums? What have been some of the defining points that have shaped you as an artist?

HC: I wanted to become an architect, so I went to do a few weeks of work for a prominent Australian architect, who sat me down after two days and said that I should probably go to art school.

I was taught to draw technically by my uncle and grandmother. Their relationship with art continues to have a profound impact on me. They take it very seriously. The rest of my family are engineers, so I had a healthy obsession with Lego and building things. I think most children do. Most children stop and move on, and instead I think I just kept going. The obvious next step was painting. These two inherent but conflicting sides of me, the engineer and the romantic, are key to what has shaped me as an artist. I cherish this process of the imagination being respectfully crushed by the unforgiving starkness of manifestation.

AMM: Your paintings depict mythical or dreamlike scenes that suggest complex narratives. Please tell us about the subject matter in your art.

HC: Yes, the narrative allows me to conspicuously communicate with the audience, which I really like. They are very social paintings. But also I guess they are kind of disastrous fantasies. There’s often an antagonist and a protagonist, but like any traditional myth or story it’s often unclear as to who is what. Often the antagonist is a personified object. It’s more useful to personify an object than to objectify a person.

These dream-like fantastical elements allow the works to be disarming and invite a sense of curiosity. The narratives generally explore this space between comedy and tragedy, or the secular and the spiritual, where all good things sit. There are these situations in life that the more you know, the less you know; the great irony in everything; and these things make me smile, and they are worth painting about.

AMM: Is each painting a standalone narrative, or do you develop themes across a body of work?

HC: Each painting is its own story. I do develop broader themes and that’s entirely incidental. But in

a way each image is more a rebuttal to the image that was made before it. In that sense, they stand alone, and are in a sense more interesting on their own, and the larger body of work is one continuous argument.

I may experience a situation in the day to day that I find to be so perplexing or morally ambiguous, that it causes me to conjure up narratives around it. Small details of the before and after. Then I draw every outcome of that situation, and I may get attached to a certain gesture or feeling in one of those drawings, and so I try to build up the image around that.

The initial thought becomes a distant overarching theme, and as each chapter or painting comes to the surface, it reveals smaller things which are far more important than the moral of the story. And that's the beauty of the process: I let the contrivance of theme or subject go out the window and give way to something more honest and organic. And that's when things actually get interesting for me.

AMM: Who are the figures in your work?

HC: I guess they are sort of ghosts of people in my life. There's this thing whereby I will draw someone over and over again from memory. Slowly, their likeness is lost in this repetitive process of linear abstraction, until only what I see as their quiddity remains. Then by transferring this onto canvas and rebuilding onto this linear foundation with colour and form, I get a chance to reinvent this person. I really like that. I have painted my girlfriend as a demon and she has been very understanding.

AMM: What themes or ideas are you currently exploring in your work?

HC: At the moment I'm really interested in the way we experience nostalgia. Traditionally, nostalgia is this escapist affection for memory and the past; generally positive. The word nostalgia originally comes from the Greek words 'nostos' (homecoming) and 'algos' (sickening), which is actually more a sentiment of loss. We have this tendency to actively seek nostalgia when looking at images and often it's a very

confused experience. It becomes a sort of hunger for uncomfortable sentimentality.

I do this all the time when looking at paintings. So, I'm really exploring this in my construction of images. Both technically and conceptually, I am trying to find symbols and cues that engage this idea of a confused familiarity. I think that by illuminating the visual triggers of this 'paradoxical nostalgia', there is a valuable opportunity to confront what we fear and what we've left behind or tried to conceal.

AMM: What is your process of working? Do you sketch and plan out your compositions or follow a more fluid and spontaneous process?

HC: The way I work is kind of similar to baking in that I produce work in clear stages and batches. Initially, I sketch from my imagination, without any tangible reference, for a month or so. No painting. I then flesh out, or collage the drawings into a series of images. I then slowly start to build the images up with paint. I develop this dialogue with each individual work, where I'm forced to abandon whatever plans I had for it and let it become its own thing, and I work hard to justify that process to myself and to the work.

AMM: What does a typical day in studio look like for you?

HC: Physically it's sporadic. I'd say it's 50% just sitting there and staring at the works, forcing myself to have difficult internal conversations about minor decisions. Each decision leads to a new challenge and I must face that as it comes. The more finished a work becomes, the more challenging, complex and intense these internal conversations become. That can be quite a difficult time. When I've finished having these initial 'morning' conversations, I am ready to paint. Then I'll paint for hours and hours. At some point I stop and kick myself out of the studio, before I ruin everything. But when I'm in the studio, it's all about painting. There's no recreation or procrastination. It's strict.

AMM: Your use of colour and fluid brush strokes creates a very emotive quality in your paintings. Can

you tell us more about this?

HC: I'm glad they seem emotive, but they are very considered. Which I think is the opposite of emotional? It's important to be conscious of every single stroke. Every gesture or stroke should be scrutinised and questioned. Paint's application should not be too cavalier, as people are looking for meaning in the stroke, so we must give every stroke as much meaning and purpose as possible. If you are vacant whilst painting, it shows. But that thinking can also give way to tight and emotionless painting, so often it's an intense battle between the civilised and the primal. I know every serious painter has a different relationship to this idea.

AMM: The titles of your paintings are very descriptive without actually giving anything away. How do you go about titling your work?

HC: Naming works is fun. I'm not in the market for misleading people for the sake of it, but I'm generally against pure reiteration. It's a chance to be poetic, or a chance to make a joke or it's a chance to finally finish the painting.

AMM: You spent two years painting water. What was your intention for this and what did you gain from the process?

HC: I was trying to make the perfect painting of water, as the sublime subject of all subjects. It's a long time to undertake an impossible task, and of course I consider it a failure. But in that time I learnt more about the materiality of paint and the process of dilution and restraint than I could have done doing anything else. Layering and patience and gesture. I studied paint's strengths and boundaries. I still think they are good paintings, but I'm not as hard on myself as I was then.

AMM: How does your personal history influence you artistically? Does this come through in your work?

HC: For a long time I was reluctant to explore my Persian heritage. Iran has a lot of problems, and I am not qualified to get politically involved. But the

rich history of the aesthetic, and carrying it through to modernity is something I am interested in. The Persian side of my family were all thrown out during the revolution, so there is this embarrassment and shame that went along with that. The aesthetic has started to come through a lot, which I'm really exploring. I used to make drawings from the Disney film Aladdin when I was really young. I loved Aladdin. It was this safe, mainstream, Americanised connection to my culture. Pop-exoticism. Of course now I realise that it had nothing to do with Iran. It was just blanket Middle-Eastern references. It's riddled with cultural misappropriation, which I tend to find more amusing than offensive. But looking back, Disney films had a huge impact on me.

AMM: Besides art, what are some of your interests?

HC: I am very passionate about cooking. Cooking a meal is the precursor to sharing a meal, which is life's simplest primal pleasure. It's like this wonderful alchemy born of survival. The amount of time I spend thinking about cooking might be considered unhealthy.

AMM: What is the Australian art scene like? How do you feel like you fit in (or not)?

HC: Australia is beautiful island in the Pacific that has been blessed with the internet. It's also an amazing place to live. The art world here is just like anywhere else now, because of the internet. There are many fantastic artists who are constantly pushing the boundaries. I think a lot of people here are working hard to bring the Australian public up to speed. Sport is big here and people are very comfortable. And comfort can make people complacent. The void here between the decorative and the academic is huge. It's a bit of a tug of war in a way, or two opposing sides. It's come from underfunding in the arts and no respect for arts education. It creates a divide. But it will even out with a bit more internet.

AMM: What inspires and influences you artistically?

HC: What inspires me and what influences me are two very different things. In terms of influence,

I'm influenced by everything: the people in my life, the internet, other artists, books, myths, anything. Painting is a sort of digestion for me. I take everything in my life and churn it through this grinder and try to come out the other end with some pictures. The more interesting my life becomes, the more interesting my work becomes. Then there's inspiration. Inspiration is a hard one as I don't really get inspired until I'm deep into the process or act of painting. What motivates me to get to that point is so difficult to say. It's very hard to describe the feeling. It's more of a frustration or internal swelling. For example, once I saw this man crying on the bus. I couldn't wait to draw it. I drew it in my head over and over. Then, when I finally got a piece of paper I started to play with it and manipulate elements of the image until the drawings were nothing like what I experienced. I drew 'crying men' for months until I finally made a painting. Anyway, there's no feeling like having a gesture or image in your head and not having materials around to invent it. That's what drives me. That's inspiration. I still love drawing 'crying men'.

AMM: What have been some of the high points or learning curves of your career thus far. Do you have any advice to share with other young artists?

HC: The entire thing is a giant high/low. Being an artist is equal parts terrifying and thrilling. What a thing to just take these very personal and important things and show them to everyone and wait for a response. And many people don't like your work and that's hard. It has been difficult understanding that you're never finished learning. There is no finish line and you're only as good as your last painting. So there's this infinite mountain ahead, and it gets higher and higher and it's there forever.

My only real advice is to always assume everyone else around you knows something that you don't.

AMM: Do you have any new projects coming up that we should know about? What's next for you?

HC: Yes, there are some things developing around Europe and locally. A few great things in the oven. I

can't really talk much about them yet but really I'm trying to stay focused in the studio, just make good work. That's all that matters. I've got this one black book of drawings that are going to be paintings soon. I'm very excited.

Interview by Layla Leiman for ArtMaze Magazine.

亨利·柯桥德：知道的越多，才知知道的越少 —莱拉·雷曼 (Layla Leiman)

伊朗裔澳大利亚艺术家亨利·柯桥德 (Henry Curchod) 对我们的“怀旧”情结有着强烈的兴趣。他追溯了“怀旧”一词的词源，并从神话和原型符号学中发展出丰富的视觉语汇，对当代社会渴求回归到一个理想化的——通常是虚构的——过去的需求给予回应。在每幅画作中，艺术家都会在一组身份模糊的主角和对立角色之间，展开一段复杂叙事。这些画面抵抗着道德层面的解读，反之，探索了喜剧与悲剧、世俗世界与精神世界之间的空间。

亨利的画作中富有象征性的主题，掩盖了他对绘画所抱有的严肃态度。他说：“重要的是，要留意每一个笔触。每一个手势或笔触都应被细致观察和质疑。涂抹颜料不可太过轻率，因为人们在笔触中寻觅意义。”为了检视自己的画技，亨利用了两年时间来画“水”——这通常是最难在画布上用颜料表现的事物之一。相比于结果，更重要的是，艺术家在这个过程中对颜料、表面和光线有了更加深刻的理解，并将它们运用到他现在的作品中。这些作品既肯定了维系着画面生命力的自发性，同时也加入了惊喜的元素，并抵达了平衡。借由流畅而精准的笔触，亨利的画作传达出一种动感和蓄势待发的张力，他的调色也同样情绪饱满、充满深思熟虑，为他的符号语言增添了富有层次的肌理。

目前，亨利在悉尼生活和工作。除其他成就外，他曾获得“45新锐艺术奖” (Fortyfive Emerging Art Award) 和 Belle 杂志艺术奖 (Belle Magazine Art Prize)，并多次举办个展和群展。

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ArtMaze 杂志 (AMM)：你好，亨利！你是一直都在画画吗，还是从其他媒介转向了绘画？你成为艺术家的决定性因素是什么？

亨利·柯桥德 (HC)：我本来想成为一名建筑师，所以我去给一位澳大利亚的著名建筑师工作了几个星期，但只过了两天，他就跟我说我也许应该去上艺术学校。

我的舅舅和祖母教会了我绘画技巧。他们与艺术之间的关系一直对我影响至深。他们对待艺术的态度是非常严肃的。我家里的其他人都是工程师，所以我对乐高和建造东西有着很合理的痴迷。我想大多数孩子都是这样，只不过他们大部分都停了下来，转而去别的事，而我却一直在坚持。接下来，显然就是画画。工程师和浪漫主义者——这两个与生俱来但又相互冲突的侧面，是塑造我成为艺术家的关键因素。我很珍视这个想象力冲撞

向冷峻严肃的表现形式的过程。

AMM：你的绘画描绘了神话或梦境般的场景，它们指向了复杂的叙事。请向我们介绍一下这些作品中的主题。

HC：嗯，叙事让我能够与观众直白地进行交流，我很喜欢这种方式。它们是深嵌在社交维度的绘画。但我想它们也是灾难性的幻想。通常都会有一个主角和一个反角，就像任何传统的神话或故事一样，但是，谁是主角、谁是反角却往往都是不确定的。通常，反角会是一个人格化的物体。将物体人格化比物化一个人更为有效。

这些梦境般的奇幻元素让人们消除了顾虑，并引起他们的好奇心。通常情况下，这些叙事探索了喜剧与悲剧、世俗世界与精神世界之间的空间，所有美好的事物都存在于此。生活中存在着这样的情况：你知道的越多，也就知道的越少；一切事物中都包含着巨大的讽刺；这些事情让我微笑，它们值得我去描绘。

AMM：每幅画都有一个独立的叙事吗，或者这些主题是从一系列作品中发展出来的？

HC：每一幅画都有自己的故事。我确实发展出了更宽泛的主题，但那完全是偶然的事情。不过，在某种程度上，每幅画都更像是前一幅画的反驳。从这个意义上说，它们是独立的；从另外一个意义上说，这让它们本身更加有趣，而一个作品系列则构成了一个持续演变中的论点。

在日常生活中，我有时会经历特别令人不解或道德上模棱两可的情况，使我不得不围绕它们展开叙事，想象它们前前后后的细节。然后，我会把每一种可能性都画出来，画面中的某些姿态或感觉可能让我情有独钟，于是我就围绕它们来构建图像。

最初的构想变成了一个遥远的总主题，在每一个章节或每一幅画中浮现出来，它揭示了远比故事的寓意更为重要的小事情。这就是过程的美妙之处：我放开那些精心雕琢的主题或题材，使其让位于更诚恳、更有机的东西。这时，我才觉得事情变得有趣起来。

AMM：你画中的这些人物是谁？

HC：我猜它们是我生命中的幽灵。我会根据记忆一遍又一遍地画某一个人。在这个不断重复的线条抽象化的过程中，画中人物与现实人物之间的相似之处慢慢消

解，直到只剩下我眼中的他们的本质。然后，我会把这个形象转移到画布上，在线条的基础上用色彩和形式进行重塑，这样我就有机会再现这个人了。我很喜欢这种方式。我曾经把我女朋友画成了恶魔，但她很理解我。

AMM: 你目前在作品中探索的主题或想法是什么？

HC: 我最近对我们体验“怀旧”的方式特别感兴趣。通常意义上，怀旧是一种逃避现实的、对记忆和过去的情感；总的来说是积极的。然而，“怀旧”一词，最初源自希腊语“nostos”（回家）和“algos”（痛苦），所表达的却更多是一种失落感。我们在观看图像时，往往会主动寻求怀旧感，这通常是一种非常令人困惑的体验。它变成了一种对不舒适的感伤的渴望。

我在看画时总会这样。所以，我在构建图像的过程中尤其探索了这一点。无论是在技术上还是在观念上，我都试图寻找符号和线索，用以表达这种令人困惑的熟悉感。在我看来，开启“矛盾的怀旧”这个视觉触发点，我们将拥有一个宝贵的机会，来面对我们所恐惧的、我们所遗忘的或试图掩藏的东西。

AMM: 你的创作过程是怎样的？你会画草图或设计构图吗，还是会保持一个更流畅自发的创作过程？

HC: 我的工作方式有点像是烘焙，我会按照明确的阶段、分批次地完成作品。起初，我按照自己的想象来画草图，而不参照任何有形的材料，这个过程会持续一个月左右，但只是草图。然后我会把画面充实起来，或是转化成一系列的拼贴图像。

再之后，我开始慢慢地用颜料来构建画面。我与每一件作品展开对话，然后被迫放弃原本的所有计划，我会努力向自己和作品证明这个过程是合理的。

AMM: 你在工作室里典型的一天是怎样的？

HC: 我的工作比较分散。可以说，我有一半的时间都只是坐在那儿，盯着作品看，强迫自己与内心进行艰难对话，从而做出一些微小的决定。每个决定都带来了新的挑战，我必须面对它。作品的完成度越高，内心对话就越具有挑战性、复杂性和紧张感。这有时是一个特别艰难的阶段。当我结束了这些初步的“晨间”对话，我就准备好画画了。然后，我会画上几个小时。在某些时候，我会停下来，把自己赶出工作室——在我想要毁掉一切之前。但当我在工作室里时，一切都只是画画。没有娱乐，

没有拖延。我对自己很严格。

AMM: 你运用色彩、以及流畅的笔触，赋予这些绘画以极强的感染力。能否向我们介绍一下这个方面？

HC: 我很高兴它们看起来富有感染力，但它们都是经过深思熟虑的。在我看来，这恰恰是情绪化的对立面。重要的是，要留意每一个笔触。每一个手势或笔触都应被细致观察和质疑。涂抹颜料不可太过轻率，因为人们在笔触中寻觅意义，所以我们必须尽可能赋予每个笔触以意义和目的。如果你在画画时头脑一片茫然，这会显现出来。但这种思考也有可能让画面变得拘谨和缺乏情感，所以，这归根结底是文明与原始之间的一场激烈对决。我知道每一个严肃的画家都与观念之间有着不同的关系。

AMM: 你作品的标题具有很强的描述性，但其实它们又没有透露任何信息。你是如何命名自己的作品的？

HC: 命名作品是一件很好玩的事情。我不是为了误导别人才这样做，但我大体上反对纯粹的重述。这是一个创造诗意的机会，或是一个开玩笑的机会，或是一个让画作最终完成的机会。

AMM: 你花了两年时间画“水”。你这样做的初衷是什么，从这一过程中收获了什么？

HC: 我一直试图创作一幅完美的“水”画，这是所有主题中最崇高的主题。我花了很长时间去完成这个不可能的任务，而我当然承认自己是以失败告终。但是，在那段时间里，我对颜料的物质性有了更多了解，更熟悉了关于稀释和克制的过程，这是其他任何事情都不可比拟的。层次，耐心和姿态。我研究了颜料的力度和边界。现在，我仍然认为它们是很好的画作，但我不再像以前那么苛求自己了。

AMM: 你的个人经历对你的艺术创作有怎样的影响？这是否体现在你的作品中？

HC: 很长时间以来，我都不愿意探索自己的波斯身份。伊朗面临很多问题，但我没有资格参与政治。然而，我感兴趣于它丰厚的美学历史及其在现代的延续。我家族中的波斯人都在革命时期被驱逐，因此有一种尴尬和耻辱感一直萦绕在我们生活中。这种美学开始在我的作品中大量涌现，我现在也在不断探索。在我很小的时候，我经常根据迪斯尼的电影《阿拉丁》画画。我很喜欢阿

拉丁。这是一种安全的、主流的、美国化的与我的文化的连接；流行的-异国情调。当然，我现在意识到了这和伊朗毫无关系。它只是粗浅地借鉴了中东地区。它充满了文化误用，但我倒觉得这很有趣，而不是冒犯。但是回过头来看，迪士尼电影的确给我带来了巨大的影响。

AMM: 除了艺术之外，你还有哪些兴趣爱好？

HC: 我对烹饪充满热情。烹饪是分享美食的序曲，而分享食物是生活中最简单的原始快乐。这就像是在生存中炼就的美妙炼金术。也许，我在思考烹饪上所花的时间是有点过量了。

AMM: 澳大利亚的艺术圈是什么样的？你觉得自己适合（或不适合）这个圈子吗？

HC: 澳大利亚是太平洋上一个美丽的岛屿，并且有幸能够与世界接轨。这里也是一个非常宜居的地方。由于互联网的存在，这里的艺术圈就像其他地方一样。这里有很多出色的艺术家，他们不断挑战着艺术的边界。我想，很多人都在努力让澳大利亚的公众跟上世界的步伐。运动在这里是件大事，人们也都过得很安逸。但是，安逸会让人安于现状。在这里，装饰艺术和学院艺术之间存在着巨大的沟壑。这就像是一场拔河赛，或者是两个对立面。这种现象很大程度上反映了对艺术投入的资金不足，以及对艺术教育不够重视。这导致了分歧。但是，只要互联网能够更加普及，分歧就会减少。

AMM: 是什么给了你艺术上的灵感和影响？

HC: 对我来说，启发和影响是两件截然不同的事。在“影响”方面，一切事物都在影响着我：我生活中的人、互联网、其他艺术家、书籍、神话，任何事物。绘画对我来说是一个消化的过程。我把生活里的一切都放到这个研磨器里，并试图从另一端收获一些绘画。我的生活越有趣，我的作品也就越有趣。然后才是“灵感”，这就比较难说明白了。因为，只有当我深入到绘画的过程或行动中时，我才有真正找到灵感的感觉。很难说是什么推动着我到达那一个点的。这种感觉很难描述。它更像是一种挫败感或自我膨胀。例如，有一次我在公交车上看到一个人在哭。我迫不及待地想把它画出来，并在脑海里画了一遍又一遍。直到我终于拿到了一张纸，我开始画着玩，摆弄画面中的元素；最后，我画出来的东西已经与我所经历的全然不同。我画了几个月的“哭泣的男人”，最后我终于完成了一幅画。总之，没有什么感觉能比得上脑海中有一个姿态或图像，却没有材料能够把它实

现出来的那种感觉。这就是我的动力，我的灵感来源。我现在仍然喜欢画“哭泣的男人”。

AMM: 你在职业生涯中经历了什么样的学习曲线或最佳状态？您有什么建议想要与年轻艺术家分享吗？

HC: 这整个过程就是一个剧烈的高低起伏。做艺术家这件事既令人恐惧又令人兴奋。把对自己来说非常私人又极其重要的东西展示给人们看，并等待回应，这是一件多么痛苦的事情呀。并且，会有很多人不喜欢你的作品，这真是煎熬。你必须得明白，学习是没有尽头的。这里没有终点线，下一幅画永远得比前一幅画的好。因此，你所面对的是一座看不到尽头的高山，它越来越高，并且永远都在。

我唯一能给出的建议就是，你永远要假定你周围的每个人都知悉一些你不知道的事情。

AMM: 你最近有什么新项目可以与分享吗？你接下来有什么计划？

HC: 嗯，我最近在欧洲和澳大利亚都有一些项目在进行。有几个大计划正在酝酿之中，但我现在还不能透露太多。总之，我想把精力都放在工作室里，做出好作品。这才是最重要的。我即将把这本黑色素描集画成油画。这让我非常兴奋。

—由莱拉·雷曼为《ArtMaze》杂志采访