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ARTFORUM

Tala Madani

by Frank Expósito • October 14, 2013

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Tehran-born artist Tala Madani can't get middle-aged men out of her head. For the artist's debut museum exhibition, "Rip Image," the bumbling follies of aging masculinity—baldness, beer bellies, incontinence—are pictured in paintings and animation between 2005 and 2012. Together, the show portends imagemaking as an exercise in disobedience.

In the painting *Aaaa*, 2010, a middle-aged man crouched over with pants down repeats the letter "A" as if stuttering to say "anus"; in one instance, the capital letter sprouts a leg that kicks the middle-aged man over onto his knees. In the continuous narrative of *Ding, Boom!*, 2012, a rotund figure blows a mucus bubble that progressively grows so big the character can fit inside it. While in a fetal position, he faces mortality by regressing back to childhood and an old fixation. The dark space around him is barely discernible as the inside of a rectum, which we only come to see given the sole light of a crude star orbiting above.

The furthest wall of the exhibition displays some of Madani's latest works, which employ a greater use of color, particularly fleshy pink. *Morris Men*, 2012, reimagines Morris Louis's series of "Unfurled" paintings from the early 1960s as arrangements of splayed legs that are synchronized Rockette style and capped off by the brief outline of pointed feet. In between the v-formations, Madani places bald, disembodied heads; the limbs' colorful sweats splash onto their squinting faces. As in her previous paintings, "humor" here plays a dual role—as both a fluid and a joke. If Madani's brushwork seems hasty, it's because she paints for the pun, arriving at figures that appear in only a moment of abstraction. In this work, she unabashedly exposes the relationship between Louis and Helen Frankenthaler—whose staining technique he borrowed. Lying supine, man is made submissive to the willful pooling of a woman.