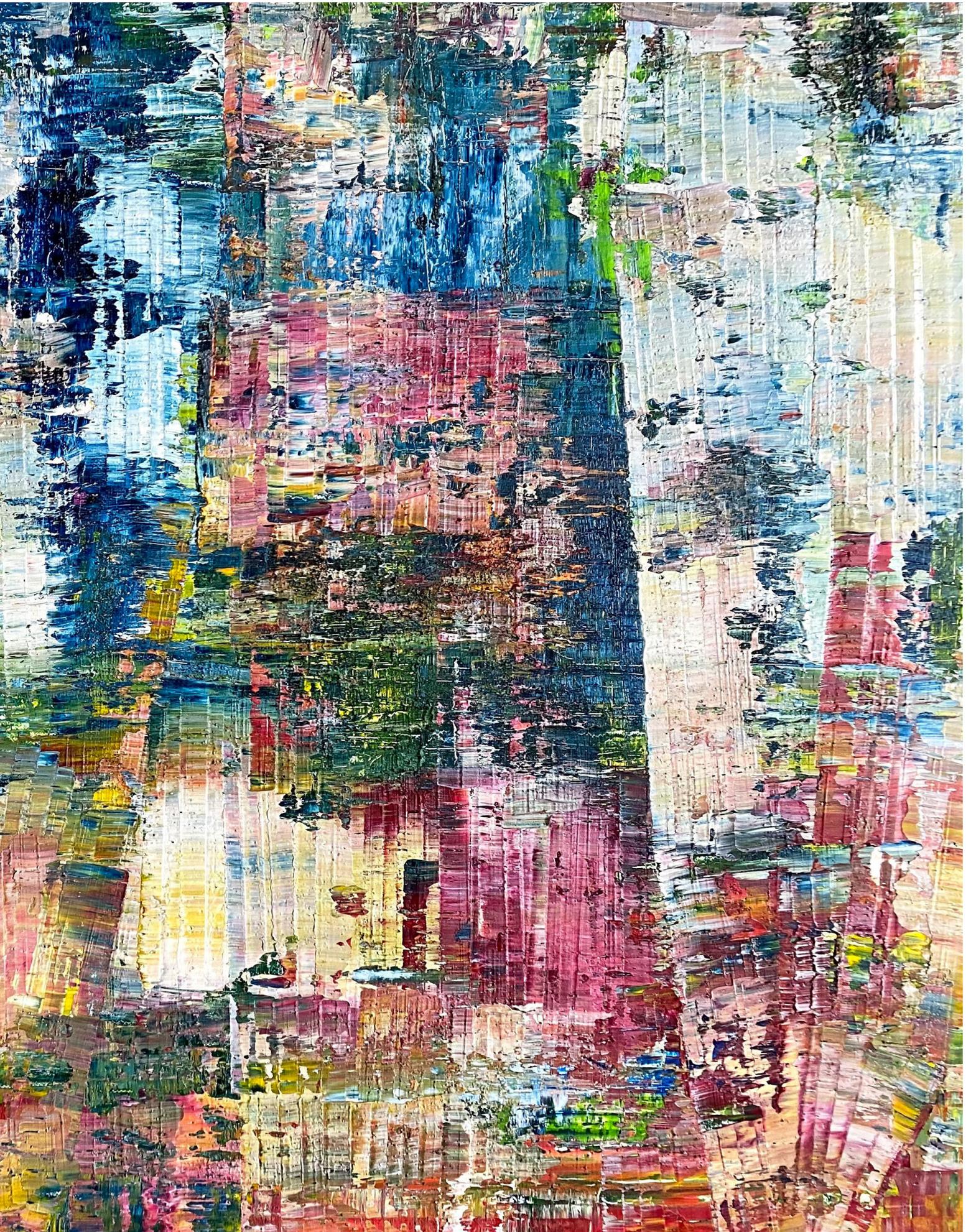


Above: Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar. A detail of *Path to Life*

Flow Within

Contemporary artist **Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar's** new paintings carry Ayesha S. Shehmir into a colourful universe filled with infinite mystery, revealing the beauty hidden within the darkness





Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar.
A detail of *In the Name of Life* GRBY. Facing page: A detail of *Breath, Breathing, Human, Being*

I mmersed in an intangible world of awe when he paints, for Paris-born contemporary artist Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar, knitting a new reality through spiritual affirmation is rooted within his expressionist style.

Swaying between abstract and figurative structure, each painting draws one into a condition of utter inner awareness, holding them firmly in a state of blissful stillness, if only just for a while. “A moment will come in your life when the sun shines for you at dawn so you can embrace a new reality,” says Sassan. “It is a matter of awareness, fact and life. To awaken to the eternal life you possess, to take advantage of your human opportunity and control your evolutionary destiny.”

The richly layered and textured composition invites the onlooker to surrender to an unseen, dreamlike realm, one which brims with wonder and mystery; beautifully imperfect in its messily aesthetic lines and melange of dark and light.

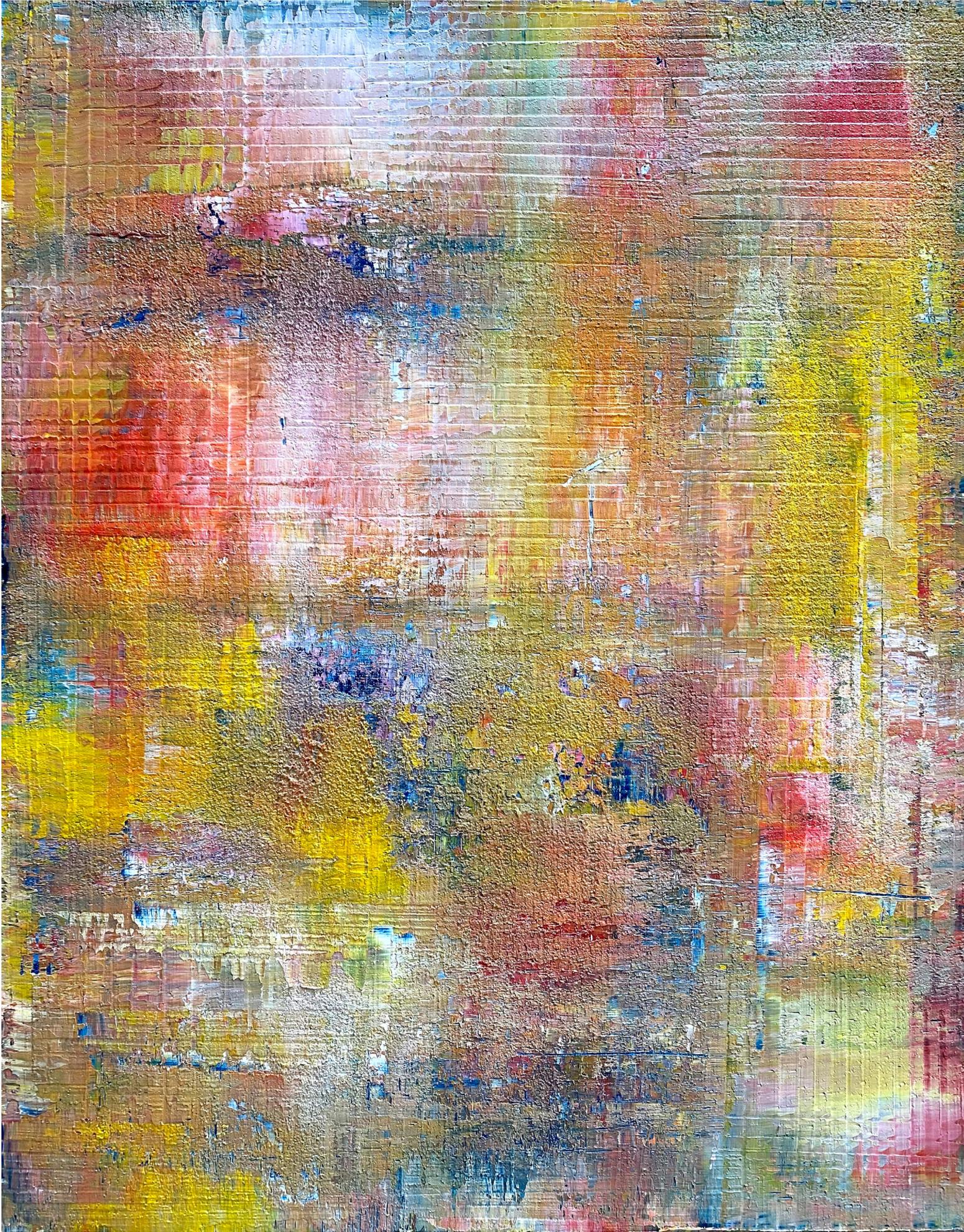
Entitled *Flowers of the Soul*, the French-Iranian artist’s new body of work comprises vivacious, raw brushstrokes on canvas portraying flowers; symbols of longevity and hope which were engrained in him since childhood.

“A MOMENT WILL COME IN YOUR LIFE WHEN
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Crippled with fear after enduring a struggle no man should, a new sense of purpose blossomed within the artist. “The energy cultivated from my being started bringing me strength and

confidence. I was deprived of water and food for a long time so feeling that was extraordinary,” he recalls. “I could feel the energy move through my body. I found balance and peace internally, which effected my external world.” Desperately seeking solace during his darkest hour, Sassan pictured himself as a child running through the magical fields in the mountains North of Tehran. “That gave me a sense of peace and belonging, to something greater at play.” Depicting the human transformation that is realised in a space between the conscious and unconscious mind, the works featured in the *Flowers of the Soul* series propel the psyche to unearth the knowledge, intuition and human sensitivity buried underneath the distractions of the physical realm. “For me, these shapes and flowers are symbols from a place deep in the human soul,” expresses Sassan. “Symbols trying to manifest things hidden deep in our beings. Things that can change the very essence of our humanity. Things that belong to a realm of energy. Belong to us





Facing page: Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar. *In the Name of Life*; Right: A detail of *Breath, Breathing, Human, Being*; Below: *Bridge of Life*



and are within us.” Supported by Setareh, *Flowers of the Soul* will be unveiled at London’s Saatchi Gallery in 2021.

Another new series of work entitled *In the Name of Life* (2020), which focuses on mindfulness and the psyche, will be showcased online during a solo show at Setareh in December. As a prominent gallery in Europe with three major spaces in Düsseldorf, Setareh represents several contemporary Iranian artists including Sassan. “Unfortunately, Iranian contemporary art is very regulated and constricted in its own country, yet at the same time, there is a new generation of extremely gifted artists who are yearning to present their work to the global art community,” says Samandar Setareh, owner of Setareh gallery. “Until this day, for many of them this means leaving their country to start an international dialogue. We represent wonderful artists from different generations who were able to take this risky step. All of them are inspired by their cultural background, but have created a language which reaches an international canon. Setareh has the pleasure to enjoy a very international collector base. Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar at the same time speaks a language of abstraction and sometimes figurative-influenced colour painting, which easily overcomes any boundaries of cultural meditations. In that sense, international projects with Behnam-Bakhtiar develop naturally and we look forward to exhibitions in London and Paris in 2021.”

Rather than fixating on an artist’s geographical heritage, the gallery’s vision extends beyond material boundaries. “This is the beautiful reality of our world; Human expression is always on the move,” says Samandar. “Behnam-Bakhtiar’s paintings are composed of frequencies of colours in which he virtuously composes his abstract fears. They are bases of any visual realisation of existence in each of us and there is just a little chance of not feeling an immediate reaction while standing in front of his work. Meeting Sassan was like meeting an old friend or relative, as we immediately trusted each other and were able to establish a bond based on our cultural life experiences. Assuming the possibility of holding art fairs in the first half of 2021, we look forward to showing up in Monte Carlo with a selection from our gallery program, including major works by Sassan, Gregor Gleiwitz and others in combination with post-modern masters like Hans Hartung and Jean-Michel Atlan.”

Alongside two major solo shows set to take place in London and Paris in 2021, Sassan will be part of several new initiatives in the year ahead. In June, a new book extensively surveying the *Flowers of the Soul* series will be published, written by art critic and curator of Modern Forms, Nick Hackworth, who says: “When I look at Sassan Behnam-

Bakhtiar’s works, each one becomes, in my mind’s eye, a world of its own. They’re like mosaics with their patterns of irregular squares and rectangles and intersecting, scrape-lines. Each one is an intense field of myriad contrasts and harmonies, of colour and texture, flowing and clashing into each other. They are full of drama and beauty.”

In September 2020 the artist inaugurated the new cultural centre of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat in the South of France with *Rebirth*, an exhibition held under the patronage of the Mayor of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Jean-François Dieterich. The paintings on view, comprising his signature style of scraped painting, noted inspiration from the raw connection between the universe and humanity. As Samandar penned, “Through his intercultural Franco-Iranian background, Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar holds a lot of ancient, cultural knowledge, simultaneously he is very much ahead as a contemporary visionary. His work teaches lessons of energy and frequency which is an immediate soul-connector. I feel there is a deep yearning for unity, compelling his productivity as an artist.”

Today Sassan’s work is housed within some of the largest contemporary private art collections in the world and is adorned on the walls of several collectors’ homes, with whom he has established an unbreakable bond with over the years. Collector Andrea Morante is one such example, who owns around 30 of the artist’s works. “Sassan’s paintings have only one drawback,” admits Andrea. “They are the only objects of art for which my partner Caroline and I regularly fight for - who saw it first and where is it going to be exposed - London, Milano, Rougemont? The layers of the colours say it all.”

Andrey and Natalia Klinovskiy, also admirers and collectors of the works, formed an intimate bond at first glance. “When we saw the work during Sassan’s latest exhibition, it was love at first sight,” they share. “It is always a warm, sunny emotion that you get from his work, even on a sad rainy day.”

Flowing as do musical patterns, the beautiful clash of pixel-like shapes, colours and layers is reminiscent of a psychological state of undisrupted peace. The alluring paintings wrestle between love and darkness, as he wrestled between life and death. As a rising star who has successfully joined the French-Iranian art firmament, there’s no doubt Sassan’s future is brimming with possibility. ■

In the Name of Life will be shown at Setareh in December 2020 and *Flowers of the Soul* will be shown at Saatchi Gallery in London, 2021. setareh-gallery.com

