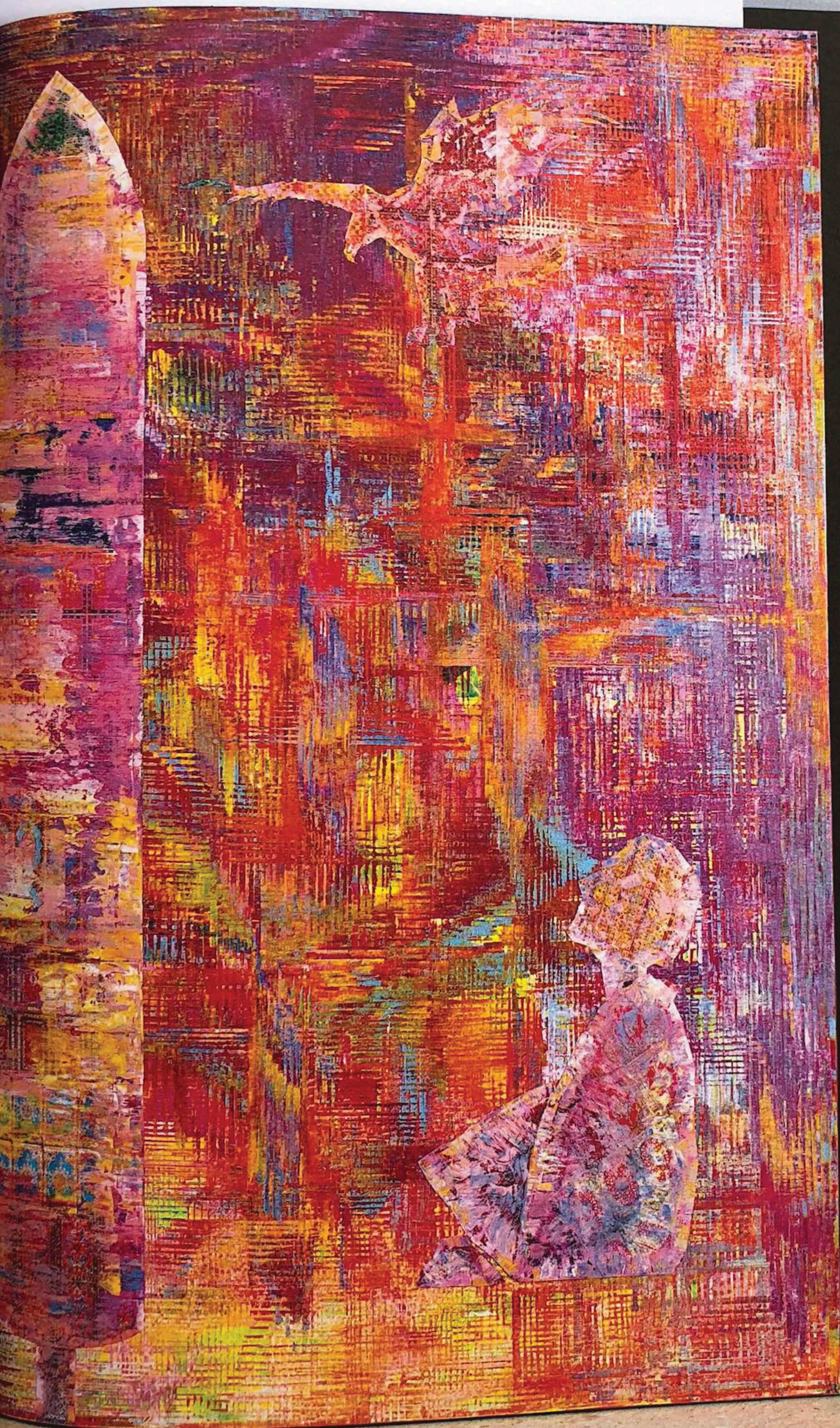


The background of the page is a large, vibrant abstract painting by Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar. It features a dense, multi-layered composition of colors including reds, yellows, blues, and purples, with visible brushstrokes and textures. In the lower center, there is a faint, stylized profile of a person's head and shoulders, rendered in a way that blends with the surrounding abstract forms.

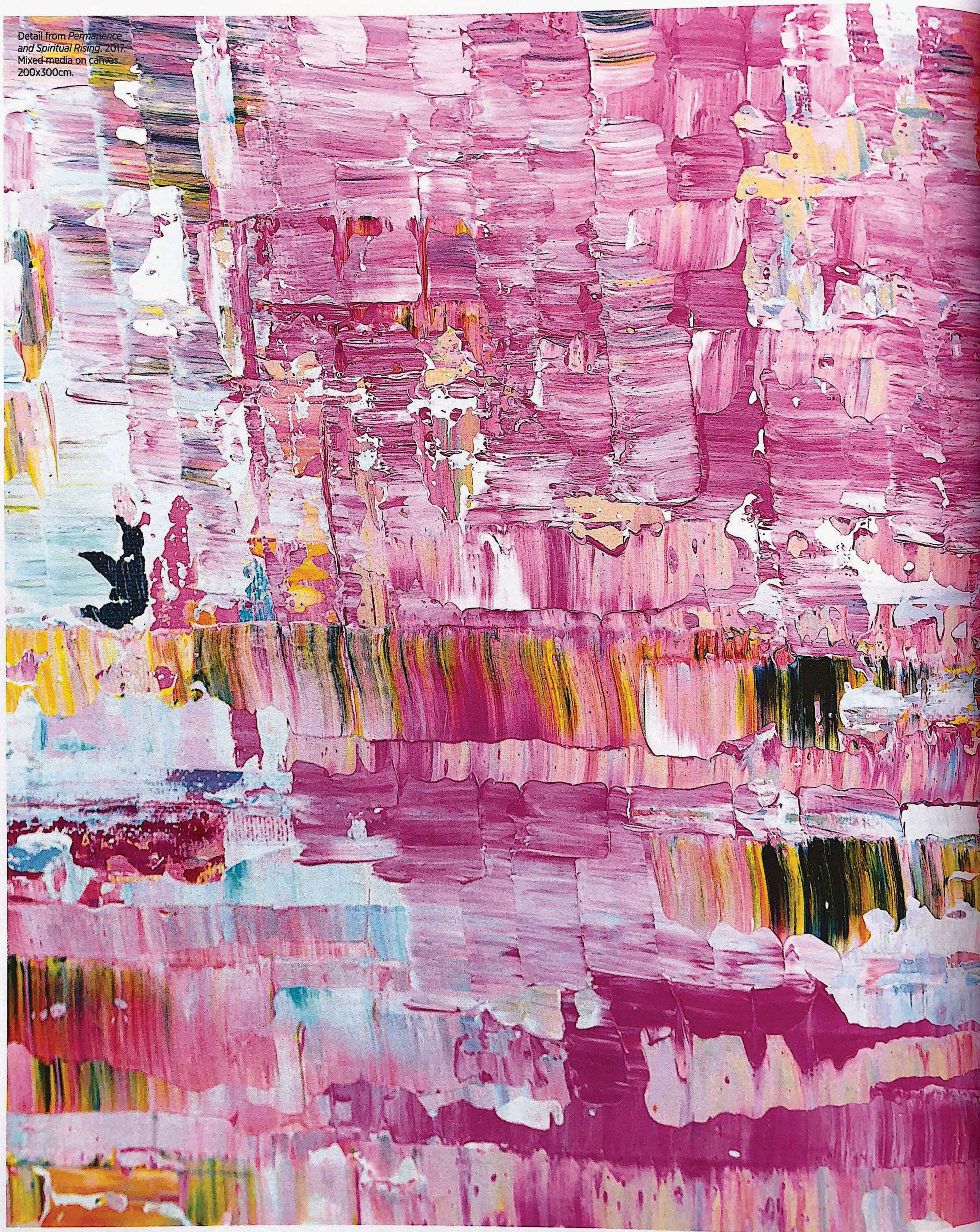
THE ONENESS

Franco-Iranian artist **Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar**'s upcoming exhibition at Saatchi Gallery in London explores ideas related to human existence and the eternal self, writes Rebecca Anne Proctor



Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar next to his artworks. Left to right: *With Nobility, Courage and Strength, We Shall Select a New Path*. 2017. Mixed media on canvas. 200x150cm; *The Guided*. 2017. Mixed media on canvas. 200x150cm. All images courtesy of Loic Thebaud.

Detail from *Permanence
and Spiritual Rising*, 2017.
Mixed media on canvas.
200x300cm.





Slabs of vibrant paint are aligned one on top of each. Their gestural application signals a sense of movement, mystery and a unique sense of calm. There are no figures in these works—just large shapes that at times might resemble faintly human or animal forms. It's as if the artist has painted the energy all of us feels but never sees. These new works by Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar mark a departure from the artist's previous collage and figurative works to embark on an exploration into the depiction of a higher state of being. Entitled *Oneness Wholeness*, the exhibition which will soon go on show at London's Saatchi's Gallery presented by Nina Moaddel Art Advisory, is the result of the artist's seven-year search for an evolved state of being through the discovery of energy balancing practices and meditation. "There is nothing more satisfying for a human being than feeling complete, supported and loved by the universe, and to be able to transfer it to other people and living things creating better communities for a better future," says Behnam-Bakhtiar. The works in this show aim to offer peace and harmony through artistic form.

Born in 1984 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, and of Iranian extraction, for the last several years Behnam-Bakhtiar has been known for his collage works that combine traditional Persian motifs with black-and-white photography, archival material and fashion aesthetics—all of which resonate in some way with his heritage. While such previous works incorporated an edgy mix of artistic genres and historical references, the artist's new series offers a mature understanding of abstract form through a rhythmic and meditative pairing of various colours. They are works that echo Behnam-Bakhtiar's inner journey towards peace—a voyage that has taken him away from the chaotic frenzy that grips contemporary times. "This modern way of life scares me," he says. "We are not doing anything right at the moment. I see people and what they do to their loved ones and their peers and I want to say 'Wait!' We have been going in the wrong direction and we need to now be happy as human beings." It's the natural landscape that surrounds him that gives him much happiness. "When I wake up in the morning I look at the garden and the sea and it makes me happy. It gives me the happiness that we all take for granted. Money, money, money and social identity—we are not made for this! I believe we are ready to take that next step in our revolution—and that is a spiritual path."

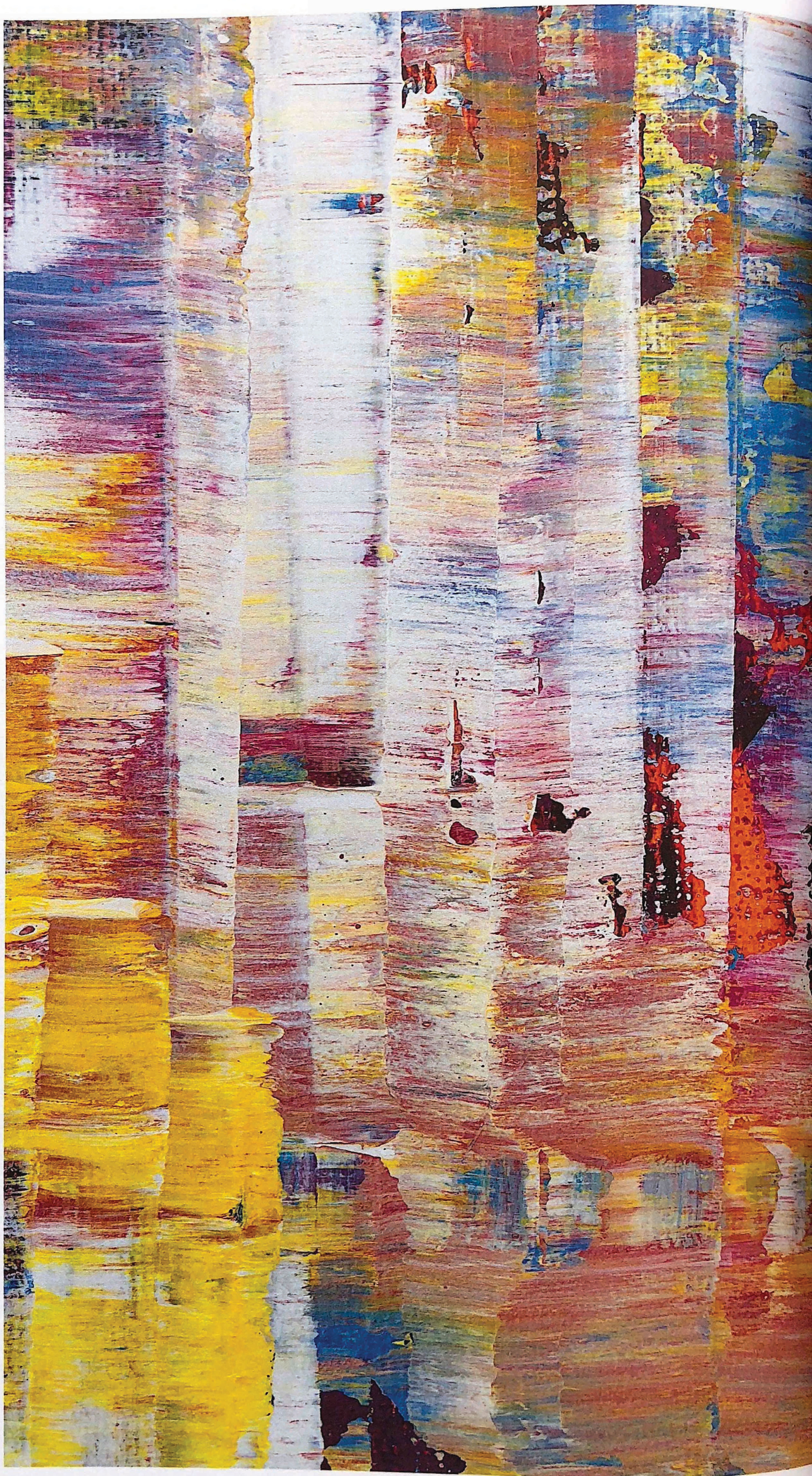
Deeply contemplative, Behnam-Bakhtiar's latest works derive their inspiration largely from nature. In *Tree of Life*, mixed media forms could be either trees or human limbs. The specificity doesn't matter—it's about energy and being connected to all life forms for Behnam-Bakhtiar, linking people with their eternal selves in order to bring about positive change in the world. Through such contemplative serene works, the artist calls upon us to stop, pause, rethink and focus on the right values and relationships. He

believes that individuals today are lacking humanity in their lives. "I think that the conscious development of the mind and spirit are the next steps in evolution that will take us towards being who we are supposed to be," he says. "Seeing and understanding who we truly are and what our true needs are enables us to connect to our eternal self and transcend to that evolved state of being." Behnam-Bakhtiar believes that ultimately everyone is looking for spirituality these days, whether consciously or unconsciously. "And that spiritual mind-set is what will set everyone free."

Yet what led Behnam-Bakhtiar to embark on this spiritual and artistic journey of self-reflection? For years he's been working with spiritual masters and this past summer he says how he learned to open his third eye. "Everything changed for me; I felt free." These paintings capture his transformation. Until now, he's focused on his photography and the Saatchi Gallery show will signal the first time that he exhibits his work on canvas at this scale. "Some of the paintings show trees or human forms, while others are entirely abstract and show, for example, a mirage of a community or group of people who have forgotten why they are here and who have unfortunately gotten stuck," he says, almost disapprovingly. "We are not made to live in a concrete jungle. We must keep the correct focus as a human and transcend in reality—if I would use one word to describe this body of work: transcendence." And transcend these paintings certainly do the more you look at them. The abstract forms and rhythmic layering of paint offers a meditative pause to all who behold them. "We need to take care of nature the same way that nature has to take of us. There's no difference between you and me and the trees outside—we are all living creatures."

Soft, light and airy, these new works by Behnam-Bakhtiar are poetic both in aesthetic and ideology—and their titles are too. *The Guided, Permanence and Spiritual Rising, With Nobility Courage and Strength We Shall Select a New Path*—reading like proverbs, they guide us, and the artist, on a journey towards spiritual enlightenment. "There is so much missing even though all is already present for us to thrive and evolve as human beings," says Behnam-Bakhtiar. Colour, form, texture and movement—through use of such elements, Behnam-Bakhtiar depicts the indefinable—the energy that surrounds and connects us to all living beings. "It's the simple things that should make us happy—like being in love with your soul mate. We really are much greater than we think we are—more powerful." ■

Oneness Wholeness runs 14-27 May 2018 at the Saatchi Gallery, London. Saatchigallery.com





*With Nobility, Courage and
Strength, We Shall Select a
New Path*, 2017. Mixed media
on canvas, 290x300cm.