

An Eternal



Facing page: Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar. *Fabric of Life*. 2019. Oil on canvas. 116x89cm; This page: Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar

LOVE

*Brand new works featured at **Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar's** *Rebirth* exhibition serve to nurture the precious relationship between humanity and the universe. **Ayesha Shehmir** unearths the inspirations behind the works, which will inaugurate Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat's cultural centre*

Paris-born, French-Iranian contemporary artist Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar's latest solo exhibition entitled *Rebirth* is set to launch 4 June this year at cultural space Villa Namouna in Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, France, and will be held under the patronage of the Mayor of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, Jean-François Dieterich. The show will unveil the artist's newest works and will also mark the inauguration of two public sculptures which pay homage to the beauty of humanity and nature.

"Nature holds the secret to our intellectual, emotional and spiritual evolution," expresses Behnam-Bakhtiar. "My inspiration was life and the connection between nature and humans. There is value in understanding a harmonious way of life with our natural surroundings. In the words of John Muir, 'nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop away from you like the leaves of Autumn.'"

The new paintings presented at the *Rebirth* exhibition depict connectivity and the beauty of natural landscapes, which the artist has

witnessed in the surroundings of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, which are, as he says, “full of movement, light, feelings and memory.” The featured paintings serve to freeze precious memories, feelings and experiences which otherwise may fade away into the depths of time.

Works on display will include *Trees of Paradise* (2018/2019) and *Forest of Life* (2019), amongst others. “To walk amongst a space designed by nature, filled with tall Aleppo pines over a hundred years old under their protective shadows while letting enough sunlight graze your skin and the ground by the sea, gives you the feeling of taking steps in a small part of what we would image as paradise,” says the artist, sharing his inspirations. “Those few moments should be frozen and remembered, giving you a nudge so you understand that you can promote balance and harmony in your life by understanding your connection to nature, such as these tall old trees for instance which are dancing over the sea. Once, I took this walk and the first thing that came to my mind was the purity of these trees being here for a much longer time than me and my predecessors, still showing their strength, full of life and hope, dancing away with the other elements of nature. It was as if I felt some sort of an unexplainable protection while walking under them and I told myself, it feels like paradise here, and once I sat there and painted the canvas, I had to call it ‘Trees of Paradise’.”

Forest of Life notes inspiration from getting lost in the French Alps in Haute-Savoie during winter. The work is complete with hues of pink, blue and green, all intertwined gracefully to form a deep, colourful union of beauty. “When you hear nothing, but the sound of the wind going through the mountain pine trees for hours after hours, after sometime you feel that you are part of this natural experience and conversation, and it gives you a sense of belonging to something greater, a wide network present all around you which you tend to forget due to the modern way of life,” he says. “You feel alive and connected. I took a mental image of my experience and painted it when back at the studio, and it became my Forest of Life.”

Blue Immortal Rose Garden (2018) will be another work on view at the exhibition, a continuity from *Immortal Rose Garden* (2018-2019) which was showcased during the artist’s last solo show called *Extremis*, held at Dusseldorf’s Setareh Gallery in October and November 2019.

Below from left: Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar. *Blue Immortal Rose Garden*. 2018. Oil on canvas. 195x130cm; Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar. *Blue Fabric of Existence*. 2019. 130x97cm



The work represents old rose bushes dancing in Behnam-Bakhtiar’s old home in Tehran, Iran. “I wanted to paint its sister piece which represents old rose bushes growing close to my studio which reminds me everyday of those Tehran days during the war and those magnificent rose bushes that survived the fire from a bomb shell which fell in our garden,” he shares. “Blue Immortal Rose garden pays homage to the power of nature and the strength demonstrated by these plants; so fragile yet so majestic. We can learn a few things from them.”

Through the works, the artist is also striving to revive the art scene of the late fifties. “I find in the approach of Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar, who found here in Saint-Jean serenity, *joie de vivre*, and sources of inspiration through the incomparable nature of the peninsula, a certain continuity with the artists of the fifties, but with abstract inspiration,” expresses Mayor Jean-François Dieterich.

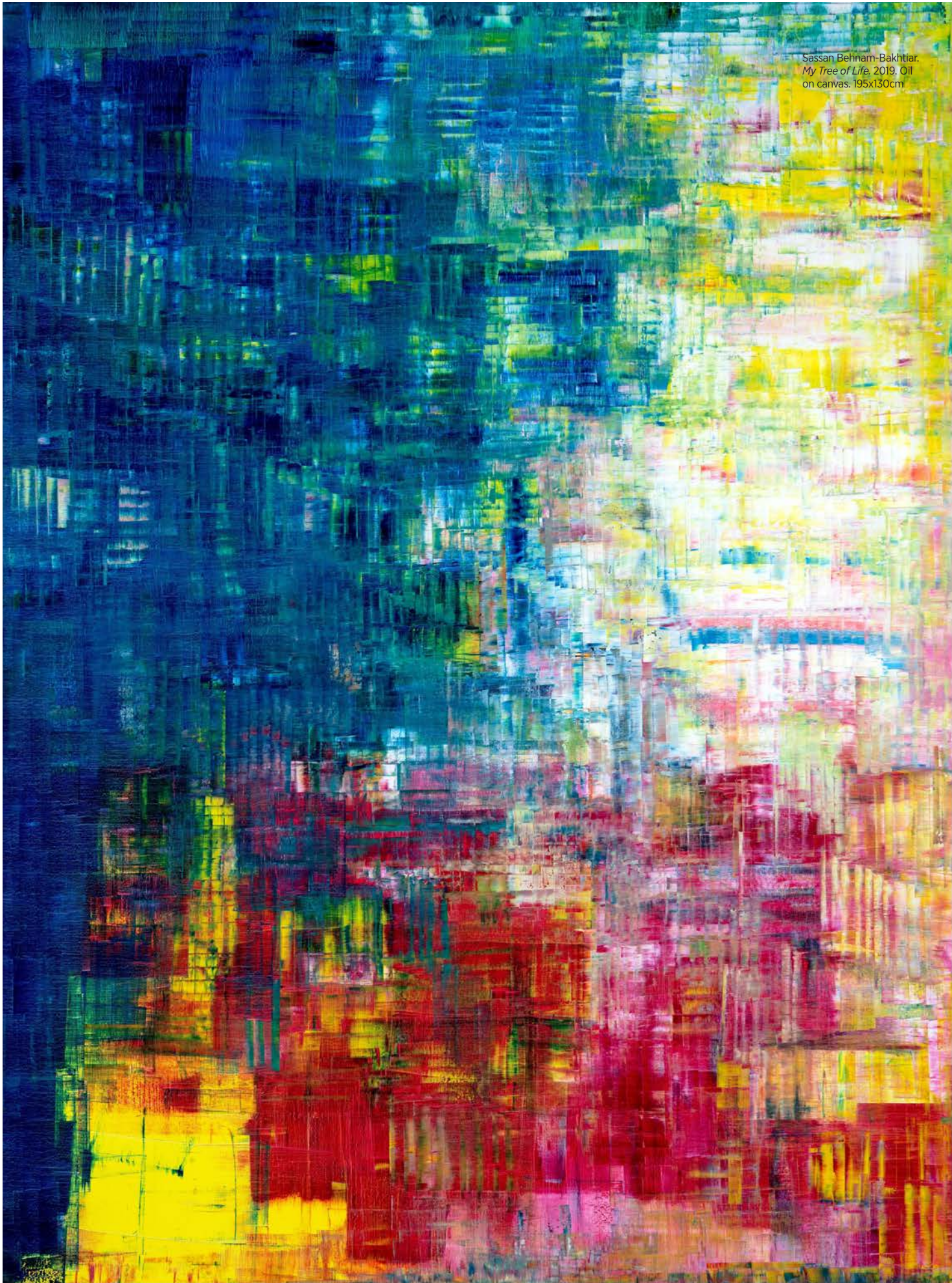
Two brand new sculptures by the artist which have been commissioned by the city will also be unveiled – one on the Cap Ferrat itself facing the Grand-Hotel du Cap-Ferrat and another in the port of the city – made from treated wrought iron and paint, a testament to harmonious living with nature. “Behnam-Bakhtiar has been on a continuous journey since 2016, promoting his vision of life and humanity with multiple exhibitions in London, Cap Ferrat and Dusseldorf via his art,” says the mayor. “The message of the artist, his constant effort on human evolution and their connection to their own energy and nature, resonates with the city, hence why we selected him for the commissions. His bigger sculpture entitled *Rebirth* stands for a harmonious living with nature – in this case the unique nature of our commune – while transferring the necessary correct values to future generations in order for them to understand the importance of life in connection with nature.”

The 3D installations are the embodiment of unity, love, family and memory. “This sculpture stands for a harmonious living with nature,” says Behnam-Bakhtiar. “The white colour represents goodness, light, completeness, purity, perfection, new beginnings and illumination.”

The mayor encountered Behnam-Bakhtiar’s paintings during a recent visit to the artist’s studio. “It felt like I was standing in a space filled up with energy bouncing off the surface of each canvas,” says the mayor. “The energy network represented by his hand on these new paintings was something to experience. The new paintings have lots of movement, light, colour, contrast and energy painted in Behnam-Bakhtiar’s signature style of *peinture raclée* which involves an intricate style of scraping, relaying and spreading of numerous blends over particular points.”

Through the new works, the artist hopes to spark an infinite, universal relationship with us and the environment, humanity and nature. “You are part of nature and the environment and the sooner you feel that and plug in with this universal network present all around, the better you will live, the more healthy and happy you will be, while having your focus on the things that really matter and to start your real journey in life,” he says. “We all require a needed evolution and connecting to nature is an easy vital first step for everyone.” sassanbehnambakhtiar.com

Rebirth is on view at Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat Cultural Space (Villa Namouna) from 4 June until 30 June 2020 ■



Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar.
My Tree of Life, 2019. Oil
on canvas. 195x130cm