

GARDEN OF PEACE BY MICHELLE SAKHAI: A REVIEW

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Michelle in front of *Garden of Peace* and *Revival*.

Upon walking into the Alex Rosenberg Gallery on Hofstra University's campus, I was taken into a daydream. Michelle Sakhai's latest series *Garden of Peace* is that and so much more. The impressionistic florals amplified by the metal leaf decorated canvases take the viewer into a mesmerizing, even euphoric state.

The paintings portray a delicate abundance with impressionistic floral clusters stacked on top of each other, in a variety of colors and shapes, showing possibilities of bouquets, fairy dust, constellations, or gardens depending on the viewer's imagination. One on-looker posed they saw a peacock in the diptych painting titled after the show, *Garden of Peace*. Basking in Sakhai's art, anything is possible.

As I admired Sakhai's artistry, Sakhai commented that she created many of these paintings during quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic, hoping to bring some light into the world after months of confusion, uncertainty, and social isolation. The state of the world lives in dark contrast to Sakhai's creations in *Garden of Peace* and the space

she has crafted with these pieces is deeply welcome. I overheard a handful of people in the gallery say these pieces sparked happiness in them, a word we do not often hear in 2020.

Sakhai's practice, a former Plein air painter, focuses on natural light. Sakhai told me she only paints during daylight, her Instagram account often showing her at the canvas illuminated by natural sunlight. As you move through the show, the gold or silver metal leaf canvases reflect the viewer's shadow creating a ghostly specter. With the canvas as a conduit, it is as if the viewer can journey into the peaceful mind of the work by seeing themselves reflected through it, even if only by their shadow.

Sakhai's artistic brand uses quotes by herself and others that are featured in her art books and on her Instagram, altogether they share Sakhai's manifesto of positive affirmations focusing on creative freedom and trusting intuition. These phrases radiate off Sakhai's painting as well, every stroke feels guided by this sense of artistic liberation, further welcoming the viewer to enjoy Sakhai's light and energy.

The show *Garden of Peace* feels like play but one inspired by passion, intention, and spirituality. The works invite you into a bright and hopeful space. In particular, the painting *Revival*, 72 x 48-inches on metal silver leaf asks to be meditated on. The painting depicting vibrant oranges, yellows, and reds balanced with gentle pastels of lavender and periwinkle blue working together with the metal leaf to create a heavenly brilliance. The painting revives a sense of light and color to one's consciousness after a year that has felt deflating and hopeless.

Another painting titled *Reincarnation*, held my attention for quite some time. In one word, the painting is ethereal. The elongated 39 x 133.5-inch canvas told a story of movement illuminated by the shimmering gold metal leaf. Every time I circled back to this painting, I found something new: a new stroke, a new color, a speckle of red I had not noticed, or the impression of fish flying through a stream. While times are dark on this planet, *Reincarnation* gives hope of eternal beginnings and reminds me of one of Sakhai's quotes, "Trust the magic of new beginnings." I cannot help but trust the magic of *Reincarnation*.

One of Sakhai's affirmations on Instagram reads, "If we are to have true peace in the world, we must first find it within ourselves". In Sakhai's show *Garden of Peace*, Sakhai shares her inner peace with the world and gives us the beautiful opportunity to begin that journey with ourselves.



Installation view of *Reincarnation*.

You can see Michelle Sakhai's *Garden of Peace* by visiting Hofstra Universities Alex Rosenberg Gallery in Hempstead, New York from October 12th to November 22nd. For more information, visit her website at MichelleSakhai.com or follow her Instagram @michellesakhaiart.