

House of CoHit

Thorns In Your Side

July 11 - August 11, 2025

Opening Reception Friday, July 11 from 5 to 9 PM

House of CoHit Gallery, Hollywood Hills

Featured Artists

Haniko Zahra, Affsoongar

Press Release

House of CoHit is pleased to present *Thorns In Your Side*, a two-person exhibition featuring new works by Iranian-born artists Haniko Zahra and Affsoongar, on view July 11 through August 11, 2025. This is the first time each artist is working with House of CoHit, and it marks Affsoongar's first U.S. showing.

Affsoongar's small-scale line drawings, rendered in a limited color palette, and Zahra's larger oil-on-canvas paintings share a fascination with storytelling, symbolic imagery, and the complexities of interior life. Both artists build their visual universes from small, seemingly ordinary moments or materials, transforming them into charged, layered tableaux where humor, violence, and desire intermingle. While distinct in style and sensibility, both sets of work explore the tension between surface innocence and inner unease, crafting visual worlds fraught with vulnerability, danger, myth, and memory.

Tehran-based artist Affsoongar constructs intricate narrative scenes from modest and everyday materials – pencil, crayon, marker, gouache. Her line drawings are deliberately executed in a naive, childlike manner, yet their thematic weight is unmistakably adult: defiance against restriction, the assertion of female agency, and the reclamation of myth and history for personal expression.

While Affsoongar draws inspiration from poetry and music, her visual language is rooted in Persian miniature painting, a tradition she consciously appropriates and subverts. Where classical miniatures centered heroic male figures, her protagonists are women—often versions of herself, marked by her signature unibrow—who act as the heroes of their own mythic narratives. These figures appear unshielded, unprotected, naked in untamed landscapes, surrounded by animals and trees imbued with subtle anthropomorphic cues. Nature in her work is not a backdrop but an active, witnessing presence.

For Affsoongar, this act of self-mythologizing is personal. Raised in a traditional family and constrained by Iran's prohibitions against nudity and taboo subjects, she created the persona of "Affsoongar" to shield her identity while exercising her creative freedom. Her graffiti practice under this name serves as a parallel form of self-assertion in public space.

The works in this exhibition are marked by both softness and severity. Their childlike surfaces give way to bitter undercurrents: themes of control, resistance, and the endurance of the feminine spirit. Her process begins with loose, rough layouts, and it is only through the drawing process itself that the color, composition, and symbolic charge emerge fully formed. Mythical animals, folkloric references, and poetic gestures infuse the works' modest materials and scale with a sense of grandeur.

In contrast to Affsoongar's light, paper-based works, Haniko Zahra presents a series of lush, unsettling oil paintings that transform mundane moments into scenes of psychological tension and ambiguity. Zahra's paintings begin with ordinary observations—a passing glance, a fragment of film, a childhood memory—but what emerges is far from simple documentation. Each canvas refracts these sources through an emotional and imaginative process that unearths buried fears, contradictions, and desires.

In *Magician*, a magician's rabbit is being stolen while he sleeps. Zahra chooses to evoke not the wonder of stage performance but the creeping dread of losing something precious in a moment of inattention or distraction. In *Infinity*, swings meant for play are anchored immovably to the earth, and what is normally a joyful act becomes imbued with undercurrents of melancholy, inertia and futility.

Zahra's use of animals as recurring symbols gestures toward something primal and unspoken—the wildness that lurks beneath our most domesticated personae. These animals, often tucked into corners or frozen mid-movement, act as witnesses or provocateurs, subtly destabilizing the already-fraught human figures they accompany.

Zahra's color palette is vibrant, but the mood is rarely light. Humor and menace coexist; violence is hinted at but never fully shown. This friction—between the surface pleasures and the deeper discomfort—forms the core of her practice. Each work hovers between satire and confession, constructing a space where nothing can be trusted at face value. The paintings are akin to visual riddles, hinting at meaning but never resolving into complete, clear stories. They offer enigmatic aphorisms rather than narrative resolution, leaving the viewer unsettled.

Despite differences in scale and media, both artists begin with a preliminary sketch that loosely lays out the composition; details, colors, and forms are allowed to emerge gradually as the work takes further shape. Their practices also share a quality of emotional excavation — turning inward to process the tensions of selfhood, femininity, and cultural memory, then offering the results as uneasy gifts to the viewer.

Haniko Zahra (b. 1989, Tehran, Iran) is a figurative painter based in Los Angeles. She received her MFA in Painting from UCLA in 2024. Zahra's oil paintings blend radical figuration, surreal narrative, and psychological exploration, touching on themes of identity, vulnerability, violence, and humor. Her work has been included in various group exhibitions and is gaining recognition for its conceptual depth and painterly innovation.

Affsoongar (b. 1999, Tehran, Iran) is a self-taught painter and photographer based in Tehran. She studied architecture before turning to analog photography and later drawing as her primary medium. Her works combine personal narrative with mythic references and social critique. Affsoongar also works in graffiti, using public tagging as a form of self-assertion. Unable to exhibit openly in Iran, she has increasingly turned to international platforms to show her work. This is her first exhibition in the United States.

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