

# episode

**Hoda Kashiha:**

***The Doubt Between Us Sways Like Hung Mirrored Eyes***

April 12–June 27, 2025

Opening Reception: Saturday, April 12, 6–8pm

episode is pleased to present *The Doubt Between Us Sways Like Hung Mirrored Eyes*, Iranian artist Hoda Kashiha's first New York solo exhibition, on view from April 12 through June 27, 2025. The exhibition brings together three works created during her 2024 Residency Unlimited (RU) in New York, alongside a newly completed painting from early 2025. In preparation for the exhibition, episode engaged in an extended dialogue with the artist, conducting three in-depth studio visits and several written interviews. These exchanges offer an opportunity to explore both Kashiha's earlier works and the new pieces on view at episode, while providing insights into her evolving artistic approach and perspective.

**episode :** Hoda, when we first met during your residency at R.U., I was struck by how your work conveys emotion so powerfully, even without relying on context. For those unfamiliar with your practice, could you briefly share how your journey—from Tehran to Boston to Paris to NYC—has influenced and reshaped your artistic language?

**Hoda Kashiha :** I'm glad you feel my work communicates emotionally, even without context. That's very important to me.

I realized I wanted to become an artist when I was 15. I used to draw people in grocery stores, buses, cafés—anywhere I went. That helped me develop a sensitivity for capturing emotion in my work.

To pursue my career, I attended the University of Tehran for my BFA. After graduating, I felt I needed more, so I decided to move to the United States. I came to Boston to earn my MFA. Boston is a small, beautiful, polite, and cozy city. While I spent most of my time isolated in my studio at school, I did enjoy being there. It was also close to New York, so I could visit easily. After graduation, I didn't want to stay in the U.S. because I didn't feel I had a personal story to tell, so I chose to participate in short-term artist residencies. This allowed me to travel between Iran and the U.S. Over the next two years, amidst the Trump travel ban, I began traveling more to Europe, which brought new influences, particularly from the Paris art scene. I exhibited my works mostly in France and Iran.

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, I moved to the suburbs of Tehran and had the opportunity to focus on my work in a quiet space. After three years, I felt the need to break the rules, to be in a more crowded, aggressive, and lively city. I thought New York would be the place for that, so I decided to establish a studio here and spend some time in the city.

Regarding the different places I've experienced, I'd say my practice is fragmented and doesn't have a singular identity. My work feels like a collage, taking from various parts of the world. It can be cartoonish, abstract, realistic, or geometric. But what's consistent is that I paint whatever crosses my mind—whether it makes me sad or happy—blending personal emotions with the social and political environments around me, without any filter. I believe this is what makes my work resonate emotionally with people.



Hoda Kashiha, *In Appreciation of Blinking*, installation view, presented by Nathalie Obadia Gallery at Art Basel Unlimited, 2021, courtesy of Art Basel, and Galerie Nathalie Obadia.

**episode :** As I reflect on your artistic journey, I am reminded of the immersive experiences found in literature, where readers connect deeply with characters' emotions. Your work seems to transcend narratives, inviting viewers into a space where emotions flow freely, much like the unfiltered expressions found in literary works.

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In your recent pieces, such as *In Appreciation of Blinking* (2021), *Another World Is Waiting for Us* (2023), and *Oh Butterflies!* (2024), you've chosen unconventional methods of presentation. Mounting paintings on wheels in a linear sequence, placing them upright on the floor, and integrating hand shadows evoke a sense of movement and theatricality. Could you share more about these choices and how they developed? What led you to explore these forms?

I've also been thinking about how emotions move through art. Recently, at Zwirner, I felt a sense of clarity and liberation from Raul De Keyser's paintings, while Lucia Nogueira's installation at Luhring Augustine left me feeling unsettled and in pain. Though vastly different in medium and emotional impact, both works deeply affected me. This shift in emotion made me reflect on the role of pure, unfiltered emotion in art. How do you approach this in your own practice?



Hoda Kashiha, *Another World Is Waiting for Us* Installation view at Galerie Nathalie Obadia Bruxelles, 2023. courtesy of Galerie Nathalie Obadia.

**Hoda Kashiha :** I appreciate your thoughts on narration, as it's a concern I also wrestle with. I often ask myself how I can dismantle linear storytelling and create something more like a maze. This is why I've been increasingly drawn to poetry, which I believe is the true foundation of creativity.

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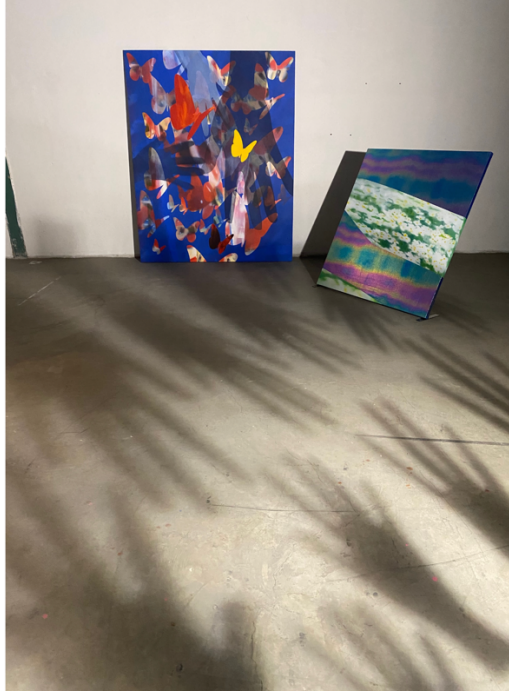
Regarding *Another World Waiting for Us* (2023), and *In Appreciation of Blinking* (2021), a few years ago I began thinking about how to extend my canvas into space. When my works are installed on the wall, people often view the canvas as a passive surface, merely a medium for painting. I wanted to change that by making the canvas an active participant in the space. This led to the idea of creating a kind of playground where both the canvases and the viewers actively engage with the artwork. A friend of mine, Lillian Davies, published a book titled *Playground*, which explores how artists are inspired by playgrounds—it's a fascinating read.

As for creating a theatrical atmosphere, I've always loved the energy of performance. If I weren't a painter, I think I would have pursued performance art. While I'm not a great singer, I love singing, dancing, and using my body in performance. I enjoy any form of instant expression that can affect the world around me.

For *In Appreciation of Blinking* (2021), I began with the general idea of blinking. I wanted to depict a series where the paintings, beginning with vibrant colors, are gradually overtaken by darkness. To convey the idea of blinking, I knew they had to be installed in a row so that viewers could experience the entire process at once. *Another World Waiting for Us* (2023) came from different concepts, such as power, narcissism, self-destruction, and other forms of destruction. It began with a few paintings and expanded into a larger idea, incorporating elements like a broken bed, a painting resting on a small table, and a metal sculpture. I wanted to illustrate how narcissism and obsession with power can destroy everything, leaving only fragmented beauties to be discovered among the ruins. My aim was for viewers to find beauty amidst the chaos of the installation.

I'm glad you're thinking about the emotional impact of my paintings. I tend to paint everything that crosses my mind—anything that makes me laugh or cry. To me, painting is like a trash bin where I throw whatever comes to mind, without filtering or censoring it, and then I move on. Sometimes, when I'm painting, I ask myself, "Isn't this idea or painting too sentimental?" But then I think—who cares? Let's see what happens.

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Hoda Kashiha, *Oh Butterflies!*, installation view, 2024, courtesy of Dastan Gallery.

**episode :** I'm intrigued by how you transform the canvas from a passive surface into an active presence within the space. This shift, where the canvas becomes a dynamic element, feels almost playful. Do you find this playfulness an inherent part of your practice, or is it something you intentionally cultivate in your work?

Your work also carries a raw, unfiltered emotional intensity, almost as if it's a form of performance. Do you view painting as a type of performance? How do you think the experience would shift if your work were presented in a theater setting, where the act of viewing becomes an unfolding, immersive experience?

I found your exploration of blinking especially compelling. I recall reading somewhere that blinking serves as a kind of reset for the brain, even influencing how we communicate. In that light, your paintings, which gradually fade into black, evoke fragmented moments we try to reset or memories we can't fully hold onto. They also remind me of how images can be submerged for various reasons—whether in protest, mourning, or erasure. Much like a curtain falling or a screen fading to black, they seem to convey both an ending and a hint of something just beyond reach.

I'm fascinated by your description of painting as a “trash bin” for emotions and thoughts—unfiltered and free. As you continue to experiment with this approach, how do you balance the experimental, spontaneous aspects of your work with the more commercial demands of the art world?



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**Hoda Kashiha :** I'm not sure if playfulness is instinctive or something I consciously push for—it's probably both. When I take art too seriously, I feel confined by a framework, but playfulness gives me the freedom I need in my creative process.

I do think of painting as a performance. The movement of my body while painting feels like an act of presence, something I engage in daily. I love feeling my body and presence, and I try to reflect that flow of existence in my work.

I was particularly struck by your description of blinking, especially the idea of "fragmented moments we try to remember." For me, all my works are like fragmented moments or experiences brought to life on canvas. That's why I explore various directions—from abstraction to figuration, from cartoons to realism—while also delving into art history in search of missing pieces of a puzzle I'm trying to put together.



Hoda Kashiha, *Mirror*, 2024, in the artist's studio, Brooklyn, New York. Photo credit: Hoda Kashiha

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During my time in New York last year, I faced limitations in time, space, and access to tools like compressors, airbrushes, and spray guns. This led me to shift my artistic approach. Rather than focusing on layering, process, and precision, I worked quickly with expressive brushstrokes, creating pieces that exist between painting and drawing. I embraced imperfections and captured ideas as they came. This process mirrored my experience in New York—adapting quickly, moving fast, and accepting that things wouldn't always go as planned. When I returned to my studio in Tehran, my experiences in New York brought new ideas and changes into my work.

Now that I'm back in New York, I've sublet a larger studio and re-established my usual setup. I've been thinking a lot about how an artist's environment and studio space influence their practice, and this is something I'm exploring in my current exhibition.

I think when artists present their work in a gallery, there's often an expectation to showcase the best version of themselves—flawless, unchanging. But in experimental work, artists allow themselves to make mistakes, explore, and embrace imperfection. They give themselves the freedom to forgive, learn, and grow through the process.

**episode :** Your view of painting as a performance, where the movement of your body becomes an act of presence, really struck me. It reminds me that art is not just about the final image but the act of making itself. You also touch on the balance between spontaneity and control—how playfulness can both free us and challenge us. I'm curious, how did your experience in New York last year, with its limitations, influence your artistic approach? Now that you're back in New York with a larger studio, are you navigating a new balance between the speed of last year and your usual precision? Your reflections on the expectations of gallery settings make me think about the vulnerability of presenting work. Does this urge you to push boundaries and challenge those expectations even more?

**Hoda Kashiha :** Your thoughts and the way you express them are truly inspiring to me. I agree with your perspective that “art is not just about the final image but about the act of making itself.”

During my time in New York, I felt a wonderful balance between the fast-paced environment and the routine life I have in my studio in the suburbs of Tehran. It evokes snapshots of different memories from my past, not from long ago, but from just two months ago in my studio in Tehran and the studio I had in New York last year. I find myself somewhere in between, feeling lost in the various layers of my life.

This notion resonates with the themes I explore in my paintings—layers building upon one another, where each new layer obscures the previous one, yet the vanished layers still exist, even if they are not visible to the viewer.

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As you mentioned, I would like to ask: How does the environment and space significantly impact an artist's work? I believe that an artist should cultivate a harmonious dance with their surroundings rather than insist on their own ego. To me, this approach reflects a feminine perspective.

**episode :** I agree with you entirely—it's less about imposing one's self onto a space and more about responding to it, being in dialogue with it. The relationship between an artist and their environment is more about listening than controlling, which echoes the more feminine approach you mentioned. This kind of exchange shapes the work in a way that's always evolving, rather than asserting dominance over it.

On that note, I've been thinking a lot about the title of your upcoming exhibition, *The doubt between us sways like hung mirrored eyes*. What inspired this title, and what does it mean to you in relation to your work?

**Hoda Kashiha :** The title comes from themes I've been reflecting on recently—separation, reflection, and narcissism, which are ideas that often influence my work. After my time in New York, I've found myself contemplating the tension between separation and reflection. Geographically and politically, Tehran and New York are worlds apart, yet in my mind, the distance feels much smaller. It's a strange experience, almost like existing in overlapping layers that are both separate and connected at the same time. I don't feel homesickness because I know my time here is temporary, but when I return to my country, that too will be temporary. I feel like I exist in a space that is both here and there. The title, *The doubt between us sways like hung mirrored eyes*, evokes this tension of being both present and distant, a reflection of myself existing somewhere in between.

**episode :** We've had some discussions about the layout of your works. We're planning to feature four pieces, and I would love to hear more about each of them. Could you walk me through *Folding gaze* (2025), *The hole* (2024), *Mirror* (2024), and *The nightmare* (2024)? How do each of these works relate to the themes you've been exploring in your practice?

**Hoda Kashiha :** One of the main themes I explore in my work is the tension between the male and female body. I enjoy delving into art history and filtering it through my own interpretation. Traditional art history has largely been shaped by the male gaze, with male artists portraying female bodies from their perspective. I aim to shift this dynamic by giving female bodies a dominant, active role—rather than depicting them as passive figures defined by male authorship.



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*The Hole* (2024) and *The nightmare* (2024) emerge from this idea. These works explore the tension between male and female bodies, using the idea of giving a dominant, active role to female bodies, shifting away from the traditional male perspective.

Visually, I was also drawn to episode gallery, particularly its two cemetery windows that mirror each other. Inspired by these ideas, I created *Folding gaze* (2025) and *Mirror* (2024) based on these overlapping feelings of separation and reflection.

**Hoda Kashiha** (b. 1986, Tehran, Iran) received her BFA from the University of Tehran in 2009, and a MFA from Boston University in 2014. Recent solo exhibitions include *Another world is waiting for us* at Galerie Nathalie Obadia, Brussels (2023); *I'm Here, I'm Not Here* at Passerelle Centre d'Art Contemporain, Brest (2022); and *In Appreciation of Blinking* at Parallel Circuit, Tehran (2021). She has participated in major group exhibitions such as *100 Years* (Gagosian and Jeffrey Deitch, Miami Art Week, 2022); *Dogtooth* (Helena Anrather, New York, 2022); and *City Prince/sses* (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2019).

Kashiha's work has been featured in publications including *Art Basel* (2023), *Artforum*, *Frieze*, *FAD magazine*, and *Art in America* (all 2022). She is a recipient of several awards, including the Joan Mitchell Foundation Grant, the MacDowell Colony Fellowship, and the Esther B. and Albert S. Kahn Career Entry Award. Her work is included in the collections of the Commonwealth Hotel and the Howard Gotlieb Archival Research Center in Boston.