



HAMZIANPOUR & KIA

*The Night*

*Mania Akbari*

August 12- August 26, 2023, Los Angeles

Written by:  
By Nick Hackworth

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Mania Akbari (b. Tehran, 1974) is an internationally acclaimed intersectional feminist artist and filmmaker who gained early recognition in the Iranian underground art scene, seeking freedom beyond censorship. During the digital cinema revolution in Iran, she transitioned from a painting career to the camera as a mode of storytelling. Akbari delves into the webs of body politics by documenting personal narratives through the female gaze as a form of empowerment, encouraging critical reflection on bodily oppression and suffering. Concerned with the socio-political traumatization of female-identifying bodies, Akbari transforms lived experience into an act of resistance by uncovering hidden historical and cultural memory and examines the transgenerational transmission of trauma. Weaving through the relationship between the camera and the body, Akbari identifies the body as a metaphor, as a political message with a revolutionary capacity against the patriarchal status quo. Led by a therapeutic approach, Akbari's practice is often collaborative and participatory.

Akbari works with other women to question the ways their bodies are positioned and valued in society and to explore the relational confluence of embodied memory and gendered violence. Drawing on accounts of sexual assault, abortion, pregnancy, illness, body image, gender, and sexuality through archival material and biopolitical fiction, her films generate dialogues between past and present, between trauma and reflexive healing. Akbari is committed to highlighting the invisible with a fierce defiance against heteronormative socialization

. Her distinct filmmaking process reframes how we view personal and national histories and produces radical potentialities for women to regain control of their bodies through sharing, talking, and listening. Selected film awards include Feature Film (Digital Section), Venice International Film Festival (2004) for 20 Fingers (2004); New: Vision Award (2019) at CPH: DOX, Copenhagen, Denmark and FIPRESCI International Critics Award (2019), Flying Broom Festival, Ankara, Turkey for A Moon For My Father (2019).



Mania Akbari  
The Night I, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 47 in (80 x 119.4 cm)  
HK-0780.1



Mania Akbari  
Allegory of Fortitude I, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 23.5 in (80 x 59.7 cm)  
HK-0781.1



Mania Akbari  
Allegory of Fortitude III, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 23.5 in (80 x 59.7 cm)  
HK-0786.1



Mania Akbari  
Indominus II, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 47 in (80 x 119.4 cm)  
HK-0785.1



Mania Akbari  
Indominus I, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
39.6 x 31.5 in (100.6 x 80 cm)  
HK-0783.1



Mania Akbari  
Allegory of Fortitude II, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 23.5 in (80 x 59.7 cm)  
HK-0782.1



Mania Akbari  
The Night III, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 23.5 in (80 x 59.7 cm)  
HK-0794.1



Mania Akbari  
The Sleep Of Reason, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 21 in (80 x 53.3 cm)  
HK-0787



Mania Akbari  
The Night II, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
31.5 x 47 in (80 x 119.4 cm)  
HK-0784.1



Mania Akbari  
My Big Belly IV, 2017  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
12 x 8 in (30.5 x 20.3 cm)  
HK-0793.1



Mania Akbari  
My Big Belly III, 2017  
Edition 1 of 3 + 2 AP  
Photography, Giclée Print  
12 x 8 in (30.5 x 20.3 cm)  
HK-0792.1



Mania Akbari  
Allegory of Fortitude V, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 Unique Variants  
Photography, Giclée Print  
12 x 8 in (30.5 x 20.3 cm)  
HK-0789  
Framed



Mania Akbari  
My Big Belly I, 2017  
Edition 1 of 3 Unique Variants  
Photography, Giclée Print  
12 x 8 in (30.5 x 20.3 cm)  
HK-0790  
Framed



Mania Akbari  
Allegory of Fortitude IV, 2023  
Edition 1 of 3 Unique Variants  
Photography, Giclée Print  
12 x 8 in (30.5 x 20.3 cm)  
HK-0788  
Framed



Mania Akbari  
My Big Belly II, 2017 Edition 1  
Of 3 Unique Variants  
Photography, Giclée Print  
12 x 8 in (30.5 x 20.3 cm)  
HK-0791  
Framed

## PRESS RELEASE

Hamzianpour and Kia proudly presents The Night by acclaimed Iranian artist and filmmaker Mania Akbari. This marks Akbari's first solo exhibition in the United States. This intensely personal show presents fourteen variously allegorical and documentary photographic images that center on the relationship between trauma, threat, the self, and the body. The works on show exemplify a consistent focus of much of Akbari's creative work and are a powerful, raw, and demotically beautiful manifestation of art as a reflective and protean space in which the self can shape and express itself in the face of adversity and change.

Profound struggle has shaped much of Akbari's life and experience. Alongside many Iranian creatives, Akbari is a political exile who was viciously targeted by Iran's punitive theocratic regime. She is a survivor of multiple cancers, has undergone a double mastectomy, reconstructive breast surgery, multiple rounds of IVF and endured difficult personal and emotional issues common to the human experience. Akbari has made her experiences of trauma central to much of her work, sharing without fear or shame deeply personal physical and emotional intimacies with her audience.

In doing so, she transcends the narrative experience of the sufferer, becoming both artist and witness. The main body of work was directly inspired by the discovery of two of the earliest known depictions of breast cancer, the 16th Century paintings *The Night*, by Michele di Rodolfo del Ghirlandaio, and *The Allegory of Fortitude*, by Maso da San Friano. Akbari's response to these paintings comprises ten allegorically styled and dramatically staged photographs featuring herself as the central protagonist. Shot in the home that she shares with her partner and artistic collaborator Douglas White and their young son, the images delicately dance the line between the casual and the formal. The setting is everyday; a home, a couch, a kitchen, a child, however the compositions, in which Akbari's pose is typically the key element, are unexpectedly and captivatingly formal. In this compositional formality, the works recall the Renaissance paintings that informed them. In the images she is variously posed with her son, found pieces of wood, raw meat, flowers, and an oversized toy dinosaur, which features as both a harmless toy and a symbol of threat.

The domesticity of the setting, contrasted with the theatrical poses, imbues the series with knowing and gentle bathos. In contrast to earlier works, Akbari's nude body is apparently 'whole', the breasts reconstructed and decorated with an extensive floral tattoo. Combined with her seemingly calm, quietly confident demeanor, this gives the series a powerful sense of resilience and fortitude. Akbari, as a protagonist, has weathered the storms that have come and is in her space with her family, awaiting whatever the future might bring.

A series of four images from Akbari's pregnancy complete the show. At first glance, these seem a simple record of the body of a pregnant woman, the ultimate image of fertility and natural fecundity. In reality, however, they depict a body and natural process radically altered by disease. The breasts are reconstructed, the left nipple a tattoo, and the pregnancy is facilitated by reproductive technology. Accordingly, these images become a depiction of the will of the subject to regain her body and agency in response to forces that wish to remove them.<sup>[1]</sup>

By Nick Hackworth