INTERVIEW
(HTTPS://BOMBMAGAZINE.ORG/FORMAT/INTERVIEW/)

Maryam Hoseini by Pramodha Weerasekera

Bodies that resist legibility.

JANUARY 5, 2026

(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Maryam-Hoseini-Pink-Distance-1.jpg)

Maryam Hoseini, *Pink Distance*, 2025, oil, acrylic, ink, and color pencil on wood panel, 48 × 36 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai.

I first saw Maryam Hoseini's painting *Pink Distance* (2025) while speaking with them on Zoom on a Sunday evening, which was morning for them in New York City. At first glance, I saw floral forms; then I saw limbs, breasts, thighs; and then, carnal forms merged with natural elements like flower petals, tree barks, insects, water, and volcanic shapes. Despite the quiet anxiety of my Sunday night with Monday approaching fast, the imagery stabilized my consciousness into a calm.

Hoseini's objects of desire move within and beyond their canvases, much like *Pink Distance* transformed my anxiety into calm. This instability is the stability, as each painting unveils bodies and nature that converge and disperse into the four corners of the surface. It is a paradoxical experience for the viewer: the eye's search leads to a literal and metaphorical space beyond the edges of the canvas. Yet there is a grounding in the tenderness of the figures, insects, plants, body parts, and architectures that float and fold in an almost fantastical yet natural universe.

Gravity is not taken for granted by the migrant self within Hoseini, who has been facing challenges of displacement for over a decade after moving from Tehran to New York. Their work is an ode to living and breathing in flux in foreign lands in a body that many attempt to contain and label.

Pramodha Weerasekera
Swells was the title of your most recent solo exhibition. The word *swells* reminds me of an in-between, an entryway or a portal that allows for organic, unexpected movement of and in human existence, architecture, affect, bodies, sexuality, and so much more. It can also mean that something is becoming larger.

Maryam Hoseini
Swells for me holds the sense of an in-between that is both intimate and expansive. I was drawn to the word because it suggests motion without resolution—a rising or a tenderness that can overflow. I always think about how queer bodies and bodies shaped by displacement rarely stay fixed. They multiply, blur, leak, stretch, or collapse. A swell is also like a wound or gesture. It can be physical, psychic, or tidal. I want the work to carry that quality of being on the edge of form, always shifting, never static: forms that are bursting out to become something else. So the figures become interruptions in the architecture, and the ground becomes ruptured.

I was also thinking a lot about movement and circulation while making these works; not linear movement with a beginning and an end, but the kind of repetition that exists inside the body, like the circulation in our blood system. Something vital and continuous. The paintings emerged as forms that repeat, accumulate, and sometimes break. They reference bodies caught in the rhythm of remembering in connection with other bodies, forms, and shapes. I wasn't trying to map a clear narrative or a path, but rather to stay in motion where memory pulses and fragments gather or dissolve. I was trying to find a way to hold that flux: the way identity, desire, and loss all move, never fixed, never resolved.

Detail of Maryam Hoseini, *Kinds of Water*, 2025, oil, acrylic, ink and color pencil on wood panel, 78 × 44 inches. Photo by Sebastian Bach. Courtesy of the artist and Green Art Gallery, Dubai.

PW

I think the notion of swelling can also allude to your particular style of combining abstraction and representation, which is a breaking of barriers. I am particularly interested in the way you do this with the body. While I can identify certain body parts like legs and thighs, I often get lost when trying to trace the rest of the body. It is as if those body parts have swollen into elements of the canvas itself. What do these semi-carnal figures signify to you? What do they do in your paintings?

MH

Breaking barriers is very much how I think about forms and figures—by questioning preexisting understandings held in our consciousness. The bodies in my work often resist legibility. They're always dissolving into the architecture of the painting, into plants, into patterns. Some parts stay recognizable, and they might be the last to remain before the rest dissipates. In this sense, swelling isn't just about transformation; it's also a method of undoing. The body swells until it can no longer be neatly contained or recognized. This process allows me to move between abstraction and figuration, not as opposing poles but as conditions that bleed into one another. I want the figures to function less like representations and more like interruptions. They carry desire, memory, pleasure, grief—but they don't resolve. They exist in a kind of spatial playfulness or ambiguity. And within that changing process, there's also rooting, curling, and blooming. This shift brings a different temporality into the work—one that is slower and cyclical. It blurs the line between human and nonhuman, and it becomes less about body depiction but performing something bodily.

(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Maryam-Hoseini-Cruel-Alphabet-R-R-3.jpg)

Maryam Hoseini, *Cruel Alphabet (R-R),* 2024, acrylic, oil, ink, and pencil on wood panel, diptych, 44 × 78.75 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

PW

Swelling over can also suggest moving beyond a physical and psychological space where a person feels like they belong. You depict this discomfort with such a tender, delicate color palette. I, for one, feel calm in that discomfort. Is this paradox deliberate?

MH

I'm interested in how painting can hold paradoxical states at once, such as how a surface can be both calm and unsettled, soft and sharp, intimate and strange. When these oppositional poles bleed into one another, something begins to shift. I'm drawn to that tension between tenderness and discomfort where chaos and calm coexist. For me, color becomes a vessel for those contradictions; it is both seductive and interruptive, and a site for longing and resistance. It can draw viewers in while simultaneously forcing them to question their looking. Color is a material with weight and dimension. It shapes composition and holds tension. In my work, color operates in a space that is both emotional and architectural. Sometimes it is slow and intimate, sometimes bruised. It's never purely symbolic or decorative; it's spatial, bodily, and psychological. There's also a temporal layer to how I think about color. I often turn to historical materials such as miniatures, tilework, and textiles in order to reflect on how time has altered our perception of color. These pigments have absorbed memory, erosion, and light, not in a nostalgic sense, but in a way that allows them to hold both history and its undoing.

(https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/bomb-images/_hiresolution/Maryam-Hoseini-and-WangShui-The-

Demon-and-the-Muse-DM-4.jpg)

Maryam Hoseini and WangShui, *The Demon and the Muse (DM)*, 2025, oil paint, ink, and pastel on vinyl. Commissioned and produced for the 12th SITE Santa Fe International 2025.

PW

In *Swells*, you alluded to your diasporic consciousness as an Iranian artist based in New York. How do you activate this consciousness within you and your audience with your canvases?

MH

I think of diasporic consciousness as a sensation that is collectively experienced. It's a rhythm and a kind of ongoing disorientation that moves through the body, through memory, through space. For me, it's something like breathing in and out: a repetition that's involuntary and never quite complete. I wasn't trying to portray identity but to work through the conditions it produces. So if the work moves viewers emotionally, I think it's because they're not being asked to interpret a fixed story but to feel their way through a shared and collective instability.

"Bodies are expected to align with normative paths, desires, and directions. The figures in my work move against those lines. They fold into and out of space."

— Maryam Hoseini

PW

The nude body has been central in art for thousands of years. In your paintings, the nude body defies gravity and floats and flies in landscapes of nature and architecture.

MH

Gravity has often worked to pin the body down to the ground, to the gaze, to objecthood. In my work, I try to undo that pull. Refusal of gravity becomes a refusal of enclosure: of how the body should be seen, read, or held. Sometimes these bodies collapse into architectural space; sometimes they stretch across multiple panels like elastic membranes. That weightlessness is a way of reclaiming movement, but also of creating a different psychic or affective space where bodies are not fixed but fluid and free. Gravity, for me, isn't just physical; it's social, psychological, and historical. It's also connected to queerness and ideas of orientation. Bodies are expected to align with normative paths, desires, and directions. The figures in my work move against those lines. They fold into and out of space.

This spatial resistance is also rooted in the visual language of historical works like Persian miniature or medieval paintings that I am interested in. In those works, perspective is not fixed, and gravity is conceptual. Architecture tilts; bodies float in celestial or metaphorical space; and time collapses into layered surfaces. I've always been drawn to works that create multiple vantage points at once. The suspension in my work is both formal and political. It's a refusal of containment, of gender, of geography, and narrative.

Maryam Hoseini's work can be seen in the 12th SITE SANTA FE International: Once Within a Time (https://www.sitesantafe.org/en/once-within-a-time/) *in Santa Fe, New Mexico, until January 12.*

Pramodha Weerasekera is an art writer and curator based in Sri Lanka. She writes regularly about feminist artistic practices and occasionally about art books from South Asia.