

Vahakn Arslanian: Recent Work **January 13 – February 17, 2024**

Andrew Edlin Gallery is pleased to present a solo exhibition for Vahakn Arslanian, his fifth with the gallery. The show features recent works made by the artist during the pandemic, including paintings of birds, planes and a customized motorcycle.

Nonverbal and partially deaf since birth—he can hear the roar of airplane engines and the high-pitched chirping of birds—Arslanian was diagnosed with autistic spectrum disorder at age four, yet nothing has stood in the way of his unstoppable drive to create. He has been a productive, exhibiting artist working on his own for the past thirty years.

Predominantly self-taught in drawing and painting and working in intuitive ways with recycled materials, the initial source of his inspiration came from Julian Schnabel, who has mentored Arslanian for more than forty years. When Arslanian was five years old he smashed ceramic dishes for the celebrated artist's plate paintings—his early introduction to a creative career.

The four large-scale vertical paintings of birds in this concise show, loosely rendered with nail polish on paper, capture cardinals and blue jays joyfully perched on branches in what appear to be the four seasons; a fifth, smaller, horizontal painting pictures a gathering of blue jays in a snowy winter scene.

Presented by the artist in gilded wooden frames, *Red of Raining* (2021) depicts a curious red cardinal in flower-filled tree branches of a spring-like scenario and *Good Morning of Red* (2021) shows the bird in a grayer fall forest. *Red of Happy* (2021), in a brass frame, illustrates a full-feathered cardinal on the branch of a red-flowered tree on a foggy summer morning (with the artist's lead treatment of glass continuing the linear pattern of the branches).

Birds have been a favorite subject of the artist ever since he rescued a pair of doves from a live fowl butcher shop and brought them back to his studio. In this current group of paintings, they are seen sheltering in trees, which serves as a metaphor for the artist sheltering with family during the pandemic, when he was away from his studio and his usual materials, and resorted to using nail polish rather than paint.

Convair 240 Sabena (2020) presents another of his favorite subjects—an airplane—displayed in a silver frame made from a recycled airplane window. Depicting a Sabena Airlines plane (Belgium's national airline from 1923 to 2001) departing with passengers and the ground crew unloading baggage in front of the airport terminal, it captures a childhood memory of visiting family in Antwerp, where the artist was born in 1975.

Rounding out this overview of recent works, his painting *Prop Motorbike* (2022) features a customized motorcycle with an airplane motor mischievously attached at the front to give it more speed or perhaps the means to take flight.

Vahakn Arslanian's art has been exhibited in numerous venues in New York including Maccarone Gallery (2009), Vito Schnabel (2012) and regularly at the Outsider Art Fair. In

addition, his work has been shown at the American Visionary Art Museum, Baltimore (2009) and Marc Jancou Gallery, Geneva and New York (2013, 2015). His work was included in The Brucennial (2012), presented by the Bruce High Quality Foundation. His collaboration with Julian Schnabel, *The Ones You Didn't Write—The Maybach Car*, was displayed on the Grand Canal during the Venice Biennale in 2011.