

**WELT<sup>am</sup> SONNTAG**

**GNYP**

**KOUR POUR**

Marta Gnyp for *Die Welt am Sonntag*, 25th January 2105

The 27 year-old artist Kour Pour has become known for his elaborated carpet paintings that play with familiar symbols of different cultures and universal concepts of beauty. In his studio in Los Angeles Pour talks about his art, the cultural context of his works but also about his attitude towards the art market, which has become an indivisible part of artistic practice of many artists of his generation.

MG: We are now in your studio in Los Angeles where we are talking about your upcoming exhibition at Depart Foundation in Los Angeles, your past exhibition in New York and the current exhibition in Dublin. When did it all start?

KP: I knew as a child that I wanted to do something creative. As a teenager I really loved hip-hop music, which I discovered in LA while visiting my relatives.

MG: You were born in England.

KP: Yes, but my father has family here so we would visit them as often as possible. My first memory of LA was hearing hip-hop music on the radio. I became fascinated by the sounds that were used in the songs and even had the idea of becoming a music producer. When I finally moved here I went to community college while waiting for recording school to start and took some art classes. Then it just happened to me, I fell into art.

MG: Do you still dream of recording music?

KP: Maybe one day but there is so much that I want to do in my practice, so I have to be focused. Even though when I'm making a painting with different imagery and layers, it is almost the same as making music. Especially with hip-hop where there is a lot of sampling from different sources that come together to create something new.

Gnyp, Marta. "Kour Pour." *Die Welt am Sonntag*, January 2015.



Caravan, 2014

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Memoirs of the Merchant, 2014

MG: Your paintings function as visual hip-hop.

KP: I didn't think about it until recently when I started to compose the designs on the computer. There are several different layers in my paintings and somehow they need to harmonize with one another and for this you use different effects and techniques, as with music. There are parallels.

MG: You wanted to be an artist; did you also have an idea about what direction it would take?

KP: Partially, the exciting thing about starting a body of work is that you don't necessarily know where it will lead you. You are always learning and progressing and you let the work take you to places without a map or a plan. When I started the carpet paintings I directly appropriated the images of rugs from catalogues. I didn't know that it would lead me to designing my own paintings.

Gnyp, Marta. "Kour Pour." *Die Welt am Sonntag*, January 2015.

MG: Why were you so fascinated by carpets?

KP: At the beginning I was very much interested in the public life and proliferation of meanings that images could hold. The design of a carpet starts off on crate paper – now they probably use the computer – the colors are distributed in squares, each square represents a knot or pixel so the weaver can use this image as a reference. Then a carpet is made and photographed. I would find the photograph and turn it into a painting, which is also photographed and displayed on my website. I was really interested in how these circles transform objects in different ways.

MG: Were the carpet paintings your first serious paintings?

KP: Yes. I made the first one in my last year of school. I tried a lot of different things at school before getting to that point.

MG: Do you intend to continue them as an ongoing series?

KP: Yes, especially now that I'm also designing them myself, it is so endless. For me there is a personal history with the carpets, the object is full of cultural references and I'm also interested in how it functions in the market place, as a produced object.

MG: Let's analyze the three aspects that you just mentioned: the personal, the cultural and the economical. Why do the carpet paintings have personal meaning to you?

KP: My father had a small carpet shop in England and I remember being in the shop when I was very young. My father moved to the UK from Iran when he was only 14 years old. He

MG: Do you identify yourself somehow with Iran or the Persian cultural tradition?

KP: It is weird. My father speaks Farsi but as he was working all day long I never learned from him. Besides, when you leave your country so young as he did, it is easy to become distanced from your culture. I can see it with my younger brother, he left England when he was 8 and grew up in American culture.

MG: You inherited a very exotic name, while you are a western American –English person. I could imagine that because of your name people associate you with something completely different than what you are.

KP: I'm not exactly sure what I am, but that makes sense. I know Iranian food and the culture but I don't speak any Farsi. On the other hand, I grew up in the South-West of England in a small city and never felt or looked very British. Now I live in Los Angeles and all of a sudden I'm British because of the accent. I remember going to Heathrow airport for the first time and feeling very much at home amongst the different cultures and people.

Gnyp, Marta. "Kour Pour." *Die Welt am Sonntag*, January 2015.



MG: How do you choose signs and symbols for your paintings?

KP: The early ones were based on the patterns that I grew up with; the later ones that I showed at Untitled in New York were more specific because I chose carpets mostly from the 16th century. You can see images of dragons, monks and Portuguese sailors. These carpet designs were influenced by the experiences of trade and exchange with the Europeans, Indians and Chinese. Partly because these carpets are very rare to find and I had exhausted my material, and also because I was interested in the carpet format as a kind of historical record, I started designing my own compositions on Photoshop using imagery that I could find on the Internet. I see my own designs as records of the way we collect and exchange information today.

MG: Do you have special rules on how to structure an image? For example here we see a few ancient Egyptian gods, Roman buildings and horses from Persian miniatures. Do you intend to speak a global language of images?

KP: Before I started these works I thought that I could do them in one of two ways: one would be to tell a specific story and place certain images next to one another to recount historical moments, myths and stories. I'm not necessarily trying to tell a particular narrative, so I decided for the second option, to use these signs and images as formal elements, freely placing one thing next to another on the same plane.

MG: Is a formal harmony very important to you?

KP: I want to make a strong and beautiful painting but what is also interesting for me is the way that I'm finding the imagery by clicking from one link to the other; I feel as if I'm travelling through time to different locations. I'm drawing from a lot of universal and iconic images that are sometimes related, or have nothing to do with one another and making compositions that flatten time and space.

MG: Is this lack of specificity a reason why your work is so appealing?

KP: With the new work I think that people can relate to all the different images, in that sense perhaps they are more universal and represent a global audience. During my show in NY I noticed that people responded to the formal and decorative aspects of the paintings. Many people react emotionally to the carpets because they are nostalgic objects from their childhoods and family. The carpet is also an iconic image in itself.



Masters of the Sky, 2014

MG: You want your paintings to be beautiful. Don't you mind that the idea of beauty has long been abandoned as a concept that is relevant for modern and post-modern art?

KP: Appearance in my practice is important as I enjoy visual pleasure and stimulation, but it is only one element of the work. When people come to visit me at the studio they realize that there is a conceptual side to my practice, which is growing and changing in different ways. Art can be beautiful, smart and interesting all at the same time.

MG: Do you think that the idea of beauty has entered the art field again?

KP: There are fashions and trends in art like anything else, but at this point I think that art can be open to anything. I don't know if there are any real movements or specific ideas to react against in the same way that artists did in the past. In this sense I think that it is unnecessary to limit yourself to one way of making and thinking.

Gnyp, Marta. "Kour Pour." *Die Welt am Sonntag*, January 2015.



MG: What are you looking for?

KP: What is interesting to me are the images and objects that I am referencing in my work. Some are thousands of years old and the people who created them, often with their own hands, believed that they had real meaning or some sort of spiritual or magical power. I really love that.

MG: Would you like the viewer to stand in front of your painting and cry as Rothko did?

KP: I don't want them to cry necessarily. I do want them to feel an atmosphere, or an aura as Walter Benjamin put it.

MG: You are using reproductions to create an aura. You would confuse Benjamin...

KP: I like that! I think it goes back to the cycle of images again. The reproductions that I'm using used to hold power and meaning, and when I find them in clip art catalogues that are used for graphic design, they definitely don't feel special. I guess that in some way I want to recharge them and bring them back to life.

MG: Does the atmosphere of LA stimulate your work?

KP: My studio is in Inglewood, very close to LAX airport so I see the planes fly by every couple of minutes. I like thinking about all the different people flying in and out of the city, so maybe that is influencing me in some way.

MG: What does the LA scene mean to you?

KP: There is a history to it with all the schools here such as Cal Arts and UCLA. A lot of important artists live and work here also. I think it can be quite insular at times, which is funny because LA is such an international city. I think that it is slowly starting to change though with all the artists and galleries moving in from other places.

MG: What about your position in the market? You are very young but your works were already auctioned. I know that you are pragmatic about your early appearance in the art market but not many artists had their works auctioned at the age of 27.

KP: Age doesn't say a lot about a person. I think that I've had a few life experiences that made me grow up very quickly. My mother passed away when I was sixteen. She was very young herself, only 40 years old. Through this experience I learned that life moves very fast and that you should spend your time by doing what you want and love. Maybe this is why I'm so focused.



Installation in the Ellis King Gallery, Dublin, 2014

MG: Don't you think that art needs time to become mature?

KP: I just had my first show this year but I started studying art in 2006. From 2007 till 2010 I was in art school and had a very good peer group. From 2010 to 2014, apart from having a full time job for the first couple of years, I was here in the studio every day. That's a lot of hours that I've spent developing. It's the 10,000 hours rule that Malcolm Gladwell talks about in his book *Outliers*.

MG: It seems that you were even playing with the market in your works.

KP: Some of my earlier paintings are based on photographs of carpets from Sotheby's and Christie's Oriental rug sale auction catalogues. Now I see my paintings in the contemporary sale catalogues, which is a very surreal thing. It's pretty funny really, and goes back to my interest in the cycles of images.

Gnyp, Marta. "Kour Pour." *Die Welt am Sonntag*, January 2015.





MG: What about your audience? Are you aware of them?

KP: There are so many audiences really. I'm getting emails from people in Europe, Japan, Middle East. There are so many eyes because of the Internet. It changes the meaning of work as well because it doesn't pursue one central artistic canon. I'm now reading a book about Chinese landscape painting, and they have different ways of creating and experiencing an image than we do here in the West.

MG: I'm reading now the biography of Willem de Kooning. In the 40s and 50s he and some other artists formed a group in New York, who met several times per week to fight and discuss art and who had a sense of a small community and a exclusiveness of their artistic ideas. Does it differ a lot to the current practice?

KP: I also have artist friends who live down the street whom I see every day. The idea of a community is still there. We discuss art together but at the same time I can also have discussions with people that I've never even met through email and Skype, so the idea of community is a lot wider than before. Abstract Expressionism was very specific and reacted to something very specific. What I make is very different to what my peers make, it's a diverse group of people with diverse ideas about art. I think that what's interesting are the in-between or liminal spaces of polar ideas.

Gnyp, Marta. "Kour Pour." *Die Welt am Sonntag*, January 2015.

MG: What is your next project?

KP: Well, I just had my show in Dublin last month for which I made a body of works based on woodblock printing. I made paintings, clay sculptures and aluminum reliefs using the lost wax process.

MG: Why is it so appealing to you?

KP: I wanted to address the ideas of recording, sharing and distribution in a more direct way. I like the history of woodblock printing because it was the earliest form of reproduction. It was used to print patterns onto fabric, and texts that were responsible for spreading ideas about religion and philosophy, such as Buddhism. Both clay and wax were also very early materials used to record information such as trade transactions or governing rules of civilizations. I also enjoy that with woodblock printing you see the negative space of the image, the part that has been carved away becomes present. I'm open to using different processes and materials that take the practice to new places. In my next show I'm going to introduce incense powder.



## KOUR POUR'S FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION OPENS

Text by Michael Slenske | January 29, 2015



The artist standing in front of his work at West Hollywood's Depart Foundation.  
Photo courtesy of Kour Pour

Growing up in southwestern England, Kour Pour got an early education in textiles from his Iranian-born father, who owned a carpet shop during the late 1980s. "They were always around," says the artist, who has incorporated his intimacy with woven materials into his own work. Pour, now based in Los Angeles, made the first of his paintings of traditional carpets for his college graduation show using found images from museum and auction catalogues of Oriental rugs.

"I was thinking about the carpet and its role in the world as an object of craft—people weaving in a community, the history, the patterns, the figures, and even its place as a commodity being traded," he says. "[Carpets] are also an iconic image that everyone recognizes, so I was attracted to it for those reasons and personal ones."

Thanks to the power of Instagram, sold-out shows at New York's Untitled gallery and Dublin's Ellis King, and Pour's relationship with the controversial art dealer Stefan Simchowicz, his works have become hotly traded commodities in their own right. "It's the cycle that I'm interested in," says Pour. "For the early paintings I made, I would find the images from Sotheby's catalogues, and now those paintings are starting to show up at auction, so that carpet has gone from being a real carpet to a photograph to a painting back to a photograph, and now it's in a contemporary art sale. Things transform over time; they become new things with different meanings."



Pour's *Future Buddha*.  
Photo courtesy of Kour Pour

Slenske, Michael. "Kour Pour's First Solo Exhibition Opens." *Daily AD*, January 2015.



from place to place and put it into this format where past, present, and future are all rolled into one. They're records of the way we collect information, and it's also about taking these images out of their original context."

To further tweak the notion of art as commodity, Pour is installing a wall in the gallery's back room of seven 14-foot-tall panels flocked with golden powdered incense titled *Light Will Someday Split You Open*, which will stand opposite piles of burnt black incense. "I'm interested in the ceremonial aspect of it, but it's also very minimal—and that," Pour says, pointing to the front room of paintings, "is very maximal." Entering the back room is almost an act of purification; the ashes, he says, are death. Visitors will exit the space the same way they came in—a rebirth, Pour says, so "you look at the paintings differently than you did when you entered."

*"Samsara," through March 7 at Depart Foundation, 9105 W. Sunset Blvd, Los Angeles;*

**Forbes**

### **2015 30 Under 30: Art and Style**



**Kour Pour, 27**

British-Iranian, Los Angeles-based Pour makes intricate large scale paintings of Oriental carpets that include images of Silk Road merchants, Chinese dragons and Victorian wallpaper patters. In 2014 his first New York solo show sold out before it opened. He has also exhibited in Dublin, Ireland, and is showing in L.A. in early 2015.

Admas, Susan. "2015 30 Under 30: Art and Style." *Forbes*, January 2015.





Image via Kour Pour / *Dragons & Genies*, 2013, acrylic on canvas over panel, 96 x 72 in. (Courtesy the artist © Kour Pour)

## Kour Pour

**Born:** 1987 in Exeter, England

**Location:** Los Angeles

Part British and part Persian, Kour Pour grew up in the South West of England before moving to Los Angeles, where he graduated with his BFA from Otis College of Art and Design in 2010. In explaining the impetus behind his popular series of carpet paintings, he says, "Carpets were a part of my childhood growing up in England. I remember my Father's rug shop, and how he would hand-dye sections of carpets that had faded away, in order to bring them back to their original vibrant colors." Each painting can take several months to complete and incorporates many techniques including an under-painting using a broomstick, silkscreen printing, sanding and meticulous hand painting. The images depicted in the paintings range from Chinese Dragons to Portuguese sailors, Genies and Silk Road nomads, all meeting together on one picture plane. The youngest artist on this year's list, Kour Pour has participated in group exhibitions at Roberts & Tilton and Steve Turner Gallery in Los Angeles. Following the "2014 Artists to Watch" exhibition at the M Building in Miami, he will open his first solo show at UNT/TLED in New York.

"Kour Pour." *Complex Art & Design*, January 2014.

# flatsurface

## Kour Pour

### Artist Statement

I am part British and part Persian. Carpets were a part of my childhood growing up in England. I remember my Father's rug shop, and how he would hand-dye sections of carpets that had faded away, in order to bring them back to their original colours. I felt that in doing this, my Father was making an effort to maintain all their history and meaning, as if he was bringing the carpets back to life. When I first moved to Los Angeles I had feelings of displacement and much like the faded carpets, I too felt a part of my history disappear. I started the carpet painting series and noticed how art and objects could play an increasingly important role in our diverse society. Through making these paintings I am constantly learning more about my background and the rich mix of culture that surrounds me and the carpets.

Before starting a painting, I find an image of a carpet from an auction catalogue, which is then scanned into the computer and burned onto a silkscreen. The first step of the painting process begins with the creation of an under-painting (made with a broom) which simulates the texture of the "warp and weft" of a carpet. The next step is to screen print the image of the rug on top of the under-painting. Once the silkscreen has been printed, I begin the painstaking process of hand painting every detail of the carpet, which can take up to two months for a large-scale piece. To finish the works, I use an electrical sander to erase the painted surface and expose the layers of the under-painting.

Through this process, I am able to highlight ideas about globalization, history, production and craftsmanship. The carpet weaving tradition has changed over time through the introduction of artificial dyes and commercial fabrication. Parts of my painting process such as the silkscreen print, in juxtaposition with the hand-painted, attempt to demonstrate the tension between tradition and modernization. The sanding of the painting also contributes to creating a sense of nostalgia and loss. The worn effect implies a history, as if the works are archeological excavations emerging from the dust, almost forgotten forever.

"Kour Pour." *Flatsurface*, January 2014.





"Kour Pour." *Flatsurface*, January 2014.





## Kour Pour

The British-Iranian artist finds fresh inspiration in the ancient.

June 26, 2014 8:05 AM | by Fan Zhong



One of Kour Pour's earliest memories is playing on a Persian carpet in his childhood home in Exeter, England. Later, at Otis College of Art and Design, Pour, 26, began making hyperrealistic paintings of carpets that he found in catalogs. "They started from a personal place," says Pour, who is British-Iranian and lives in Los Angeles. "But they've grown into something else." His first New York solo exhibition, a suite of seven intricately detailed eight-foot-tall canvases, at Untitled gallery earlier this year, sold out before the show even opened. The sudden market demand, Pour says, only plays into the themes in his work. "The narratives depicted in these carpets are often about commerce on the Silk Road," he explains. Pour plans to start creating his own carpet designs for upcoming shows at Ellis King gallery in Dublin this fall and the

Mistake Room in Los Angeles in 2015. His source material? The Internet—though he won't search for anything made after the Victorian era. "The images are old, ancient even. But the way they're all gathered from different places speaks to our world today."

Zhong, Fan. "Kour Pour: The British-Iranian artist finds fresh inspiration on the ancient." *W*, June 2014.