

*Mirak Jamal*  
*'A Guest is a Blessing'*  
*21 Mar – 9 May 2026*

*Rose Easton*

Text by Gabriela Acha

Blues, yellows, whites and browns, set out in gradients and flat geometries across Mirak Jamal's painted interiors, invite a choice: to read them as colour blocks or as architectures from which varied narratives might unfold. Enigmatic shadows across walls, ceilings and floors leave one feeling lodged in a Kafkaesque, multidimensional setting, where things are not what they seem and several logics appear to operate at once. Yet the disturbance here is not the change in scale produced by Gregor Samsa's metamorphosis, but Jamal's deliberate play with proportion and skewed perspectives. His habitats can register as alien or familiar, but their exact architecture matters less than the terms they establish: the domestic realm, treated as a variable that might be exchanged with the public and the political.

If we zoom in on one of the walls, we begin to notice details that seem incidental at first: small clues threading their way through diaphanous rooms, or miniature stages, where figures merge with the geometry that holds them. These details, traced in coloured pencil as if intruding upon the layered fields of paint, propose a relation in which host and guest can no longer be cleanly distinguished. The pencil-drawn anecdotes timidly inhabit the sovereign, brush-worked spaces, yet their meanings seep into the painted architecture and begin to claim the eye's attention, much as the butterflies do when they brighten a room with erratic flight. How could one not give in to these intruders' misleading charm,

even when they have entered without invitation? The duration of their stay is unknown, and little can be done to expel them.

These self-appointed travellers invert the logic of a space prepared for a “proper” guest: someone to be flattered and attended to, perhaps with a bowl of fruit set on the table. A certain *savoir-faire* around that bowl can determine who truly commands the grammar of social encounters. The unwritten rules, coded deference and calibrated flattery make up the language of hospitality, one addressed by Persian poets going back as far as Ferdowsi (940–1020) and Saadi Shirazi (1210–1291). More recently, Parvin E’tesami (1907–1941) imagined the world as a house made ready for the presence of a guest:

خرم آن کس که در این محنت‌سرای  
میهمانی دارد و نانی بجای

“Joyful is the one who, in this house of sorrow [the world]/Has a guest to welcome and a loaf of bread to share.” In the intimate settings of this region’s cultural assemblies, the guest is a bearer of joy, a figure set against life’s unfavourable circumstances; even an absolute stranger will be offered tea or food. Though even in such an intimate setting, an encounter can harden into a struggle over dignity, status and territoriality. What follows when the guest refuses the offer or proceeds to consume it entirely?

The Latin *hostis*, meaning both “stranger” and “enemy”, collapses the line between hospitality and hostility in the figure of the host. Hostility is one of hospitality’s inherences, surfacing most sharply when the guest lacks command of the host’s language. Vulnerability begins in language itself – it can quickly recast a guest as an intruder, reaching a tragic pitch when the guest must say, “Please receive me.” Within the long-practised Persian art of polite offering, compliment and sustained courtesy known as *ta‘ārof*, a guest would never have to ask such a thing. Its manners, made of facial gestures and ritual refusals, would rather communicate to the guest: “Please be received.” As the saying goes, “a blessing enters with the guest” – unless the guest overstays, for the blessing belongs to the one who knows how to behave.

Mirak Jamal (b. Tehran, Iran) is based in Berlin and grew up between Iran, the USSR, Germany, the USA and Canada. He has exhibited internationally at numerous institutions and spaces such as Inge, New York; Kunsthall Oslo, Oslo; Galerie Sultana, Paris; Arken Museum for Moderne Kunst, Denmark; Brücke Museum, Berlin; Kunsternes Hus, Oslo; Union Pacific, London; Kunstverein Freiburg, Germany; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; The Loon, Toronto; 1857, Oslo, the 15th Istanbul Biennial at Istanbul Modern; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich. His works can be found in numerous private and public collections across Europe and North America.

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