

**ALEXANDRA KARAKASHIAN**

here they passed

18 . 10 . 18

17 . 11 . 18

smac



*Direct transcript of Vache Karakashian's unpublished autobiography<sup>1</sup>, Johannesburg, 1980.*

SMAC Gallery is pleased to present *here they passed*, a solo exhibition of new works by Alexandra Karakashian. In this exhibition, Karakashian employs unconventional materials within painting and installation to create an immersive space concerned with the loss of land and home. The works, which extend from the walls into the gallery space, reflect on current issues of exile and migration, investigating notions of mourning – both of an individual and collective nature – and the lamentation of those who have been 'unhomed'.

The images created in *here they passed* are intended to evoke an imagined space beyond the cube they exist in, threatening instability and subtle collapse. Karakashian makes reference to Abstract Expressionist 'colour field paintings' – both in scale and intensity, conceived of a field that appears to spread beyond the edges of the surface. And yet, while the works transform the setting into a landscape for spiritual reflection, the viewer is simultaneously brought back to the material world and the material itself. Expanding on South African artist Penny Siopis's proposal that "painting's multiple possibilities for materiality and form can evoke intense emotional content", Karakashian actively questions ideas of contemporary painting. Her experimental approach to choosing and manipulating the materials she works with affirms the conceptual possibilities of painting.

Located alongside the likes of Etel Adnan, Anna Boghiguián and Kitty Kraus – who share various histories of migration – Karakashian's work exercises a vocabulary of form, reduced colour palette and the use of commonplace yet unconventional medium. In exploring notions of displacement, fragility and landscape, Karakashian's choice of medium also emphasizes the very aliveness of the materials, as they hang suspended – alive and moving and polluting.

Karakashian's interest in these themes is rooted in her engagement with her personal and family history. Her unique background details her grandfather Vache's escape from the Armenian Genocide of 1915 and his family's migration south through the African continent, eventually settling in Johannesburg, South Africa. The artist is cognizant of her family's journey that saw them circumventing certain death in Armenia via the Black Sea, to be resettled in Romania. The family of textile merchants later relocated to Egypt, where they began their prolonged passage via numerous African countries to the city of Johannesburg.

**M**y name is Vache Karakashian (Karakashev). I was born on the 7th of December 1915 in Tireboli west of Trebizonde on the Black Sea.

*The land was fertile.*

*They grew tobacco, cotton, sunflowers, hazelnuts, figs and lemons. The countryside was filled with aromatics shrubs and pomegranates.*

*My fathers name was Krikor. He was born in Tirebolu in 1875. His father Hampartzerle left him a small home industry of 30 wooden hand looms, complete with preparations, winders etc. using imported yarns in all colours. The hand woven materials were used particularly for veils-called yashmak-for bedspreads and other materials. Besides this small weaving plant he had a hazelnut plantation and most of it was exported to various countries.*

*My mothers name was Turvense born also in Tirebolu in 1885. Her family name was Kilidjian and her father was a Mustantig, which is equal to a magistrate and as such he was a very respected man.*

*My parents had six children, Sirvart, Hampartzum, Elise, Anstranig, Genevieve (who died at one years old) and me, Vache. From here my grandfather and his family has to run away and, as a result of continual Turkish massacres and eventually established a new home in Trebizonde. Here they passed until 1915, the year of my birth.*

*I like however to relate my story only to my family as I was told over and over again by my father. A rapid and new wave of terror started*

*everywhere – people were disappearing from homes, taken away and killed.*

*Woman and children remained behind and faced the tragedy of war, the war of 1915 – 1918. The victims were enormous, in big numbers of Armenians and Greeks. They were all in danger.*

*This was taking place all over old Armenia, orders of destruction were coming forward. According to these orders, all children who were orphans of recent events had to be exterminated.*

*All kind of tragedy was happening. All this period our family, including my grandparents, uncles and aunties with their children, in all 35 persons were killed in various places around Trebizonde. My father's cousin, who was a priest, was taken into the centre of a square in Tirebolu and, in front of his family he was killed by pulling back his nails and being completely butchered. His family then, wife and three children, having witnessed this, went home and committed suicide by setting their house on fire.*

*During this period my Father was able to arrange and hire a small rowing boat to run us into the Black sea. I was just born, a few days old. We started on this small boat, father, mother, grandchildren, two aunties with another three children. All fourteen human beings running away from murderers and taking refuge far away on the sea, direction nowhere.*

<sup>1</sup>Verbatim transcript with original grammatical errors included.



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*far away on the sea*  
2018

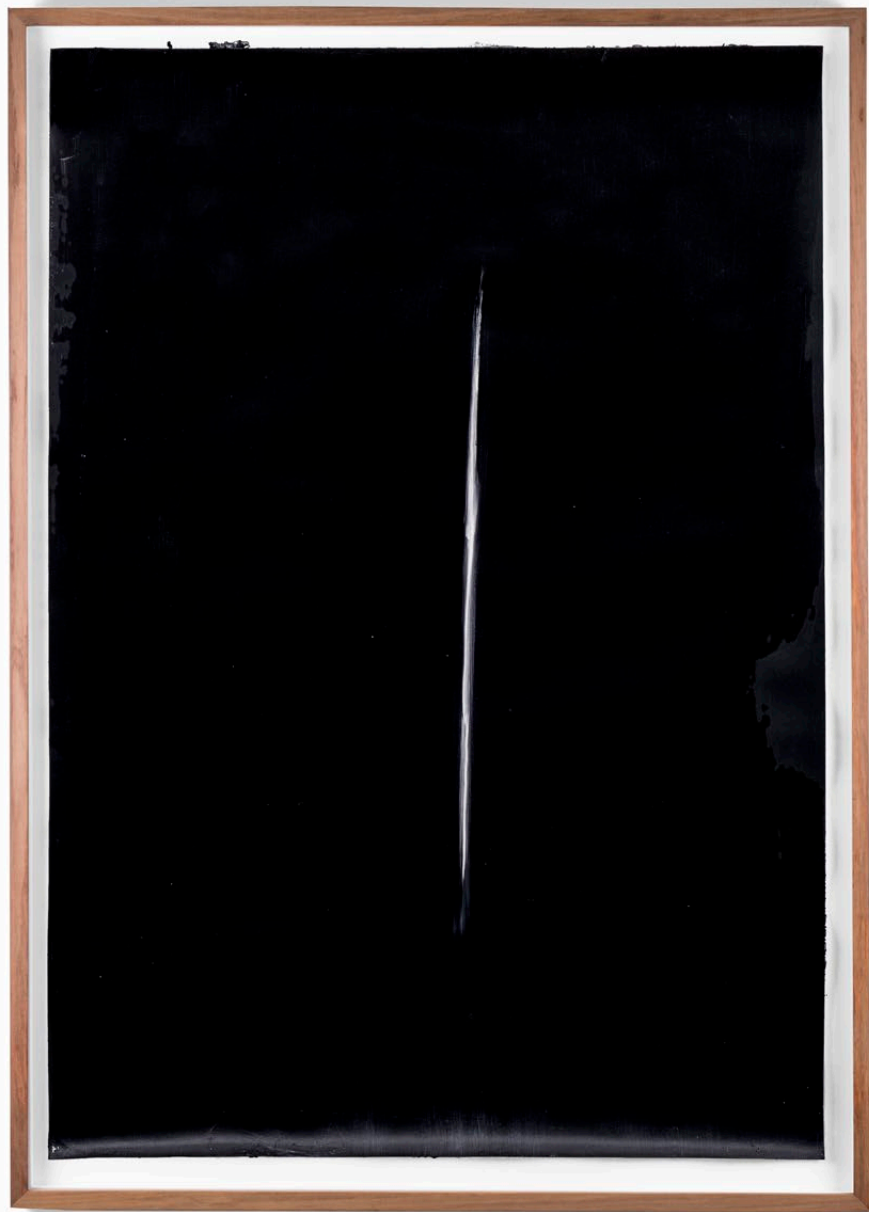
Used Engine Oil, Wood, and Oil on Sized Paper  
Dimensions of Installation Variable



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXV*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXVI*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXVII*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXVIII*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXIX*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm





**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XL*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



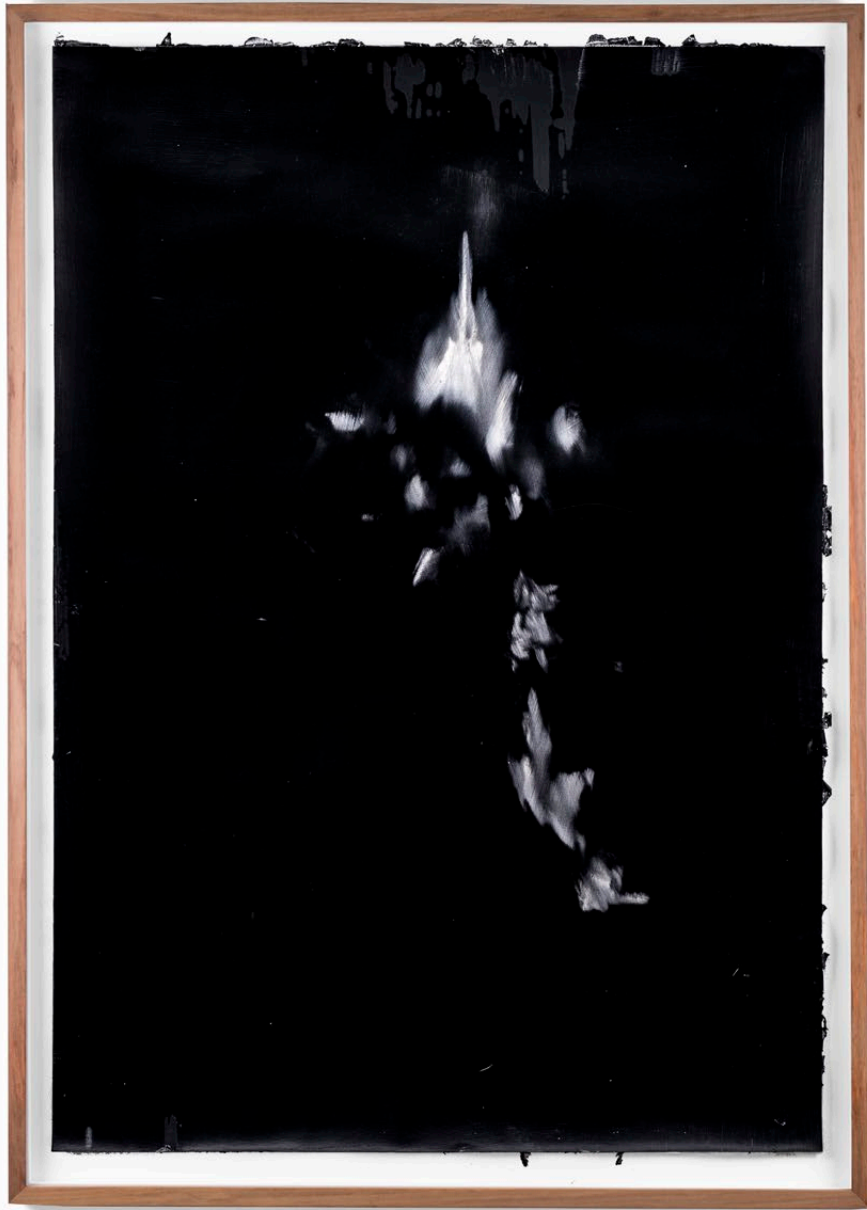
**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLI*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLIII*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLIII*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



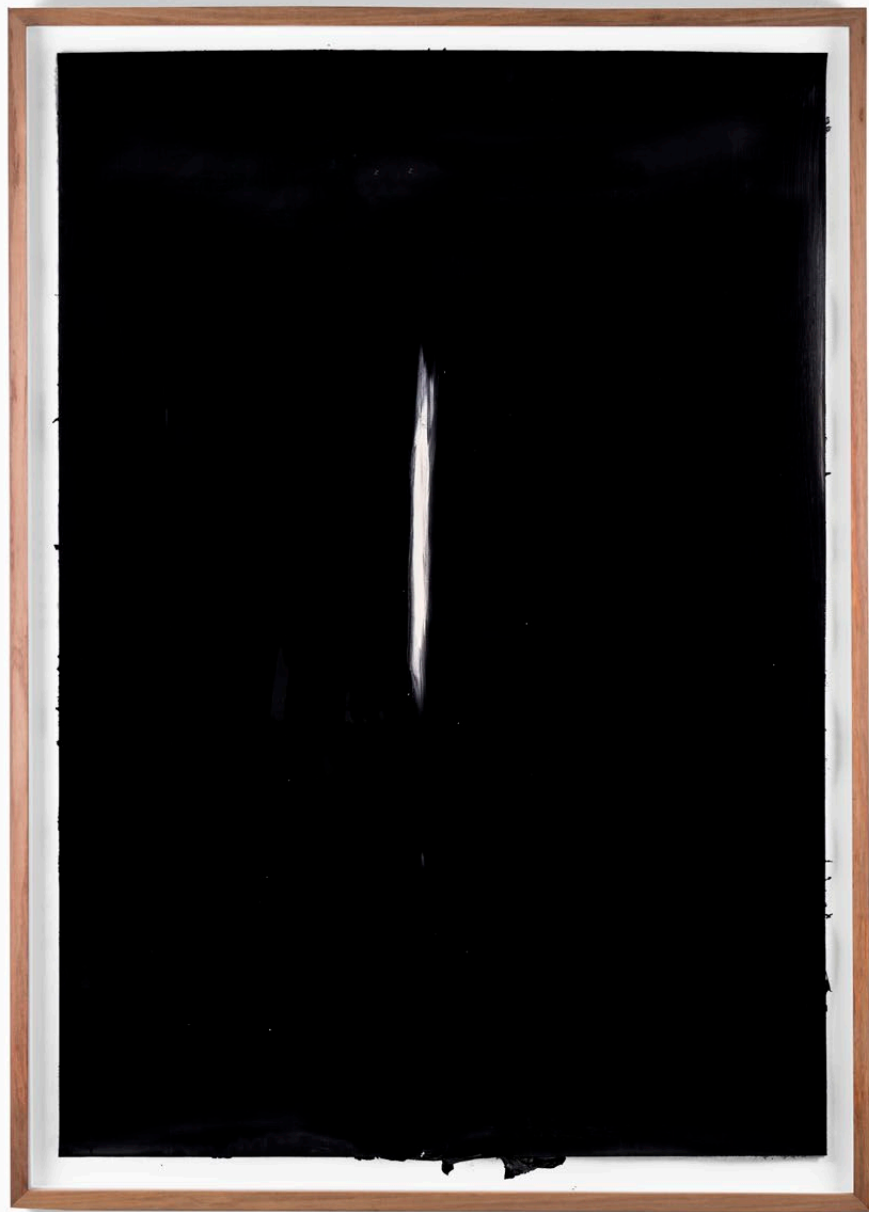
**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLIV*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLV*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLVI*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLVII*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm





**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLVIII*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XLIX*  
2018  
Oil on Sized Paper  
99 x 70 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying (Study) IV*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
25 x 20 cm



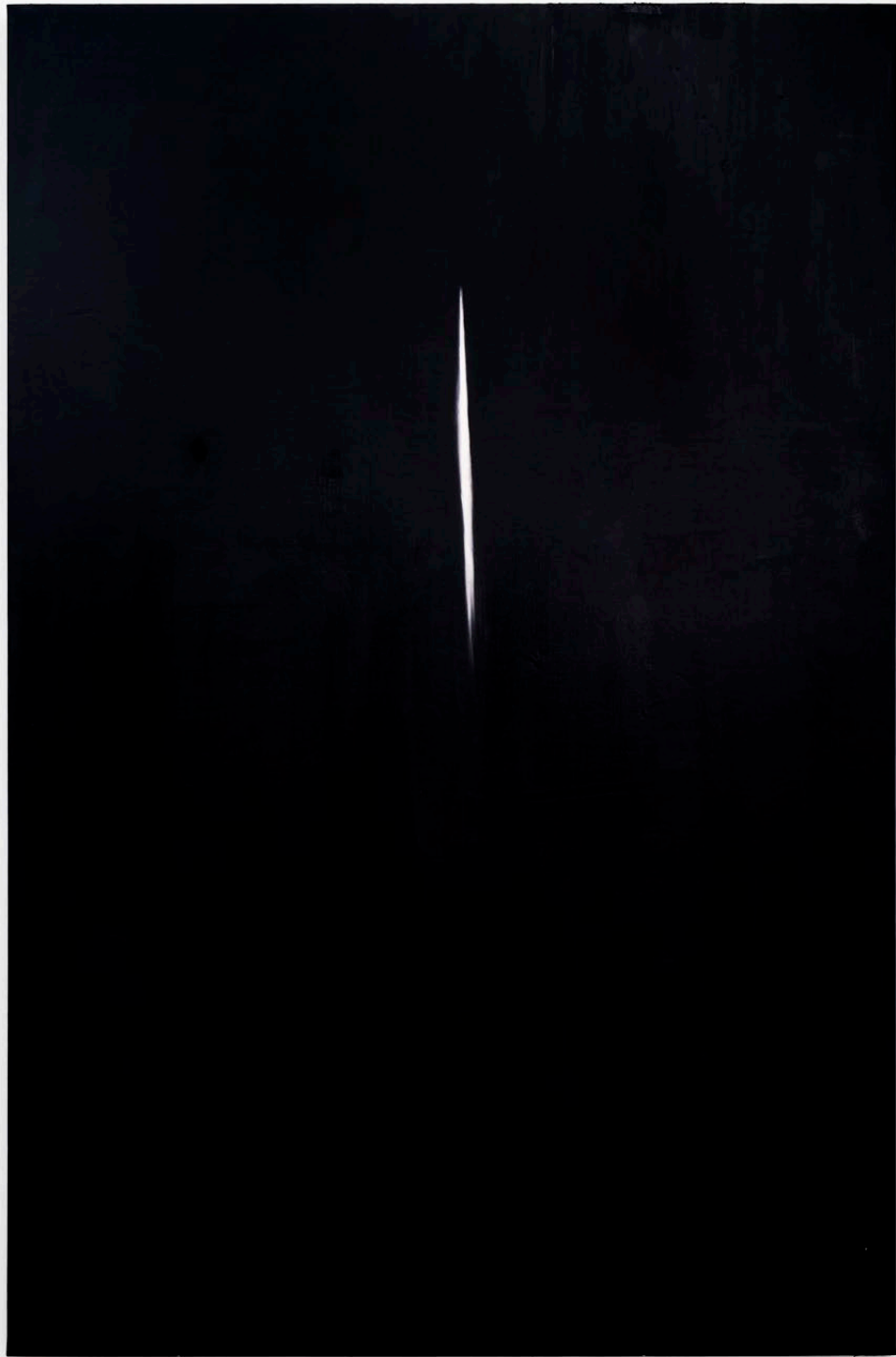
**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying (Study) V*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
25.5 x 20 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Refuge*  
2018  
Used Engine Oil on Linen  
200 x 300 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Refuge*  
2018  
Used Engine Oil on Linen  
200 x 300 cm  
Installation View



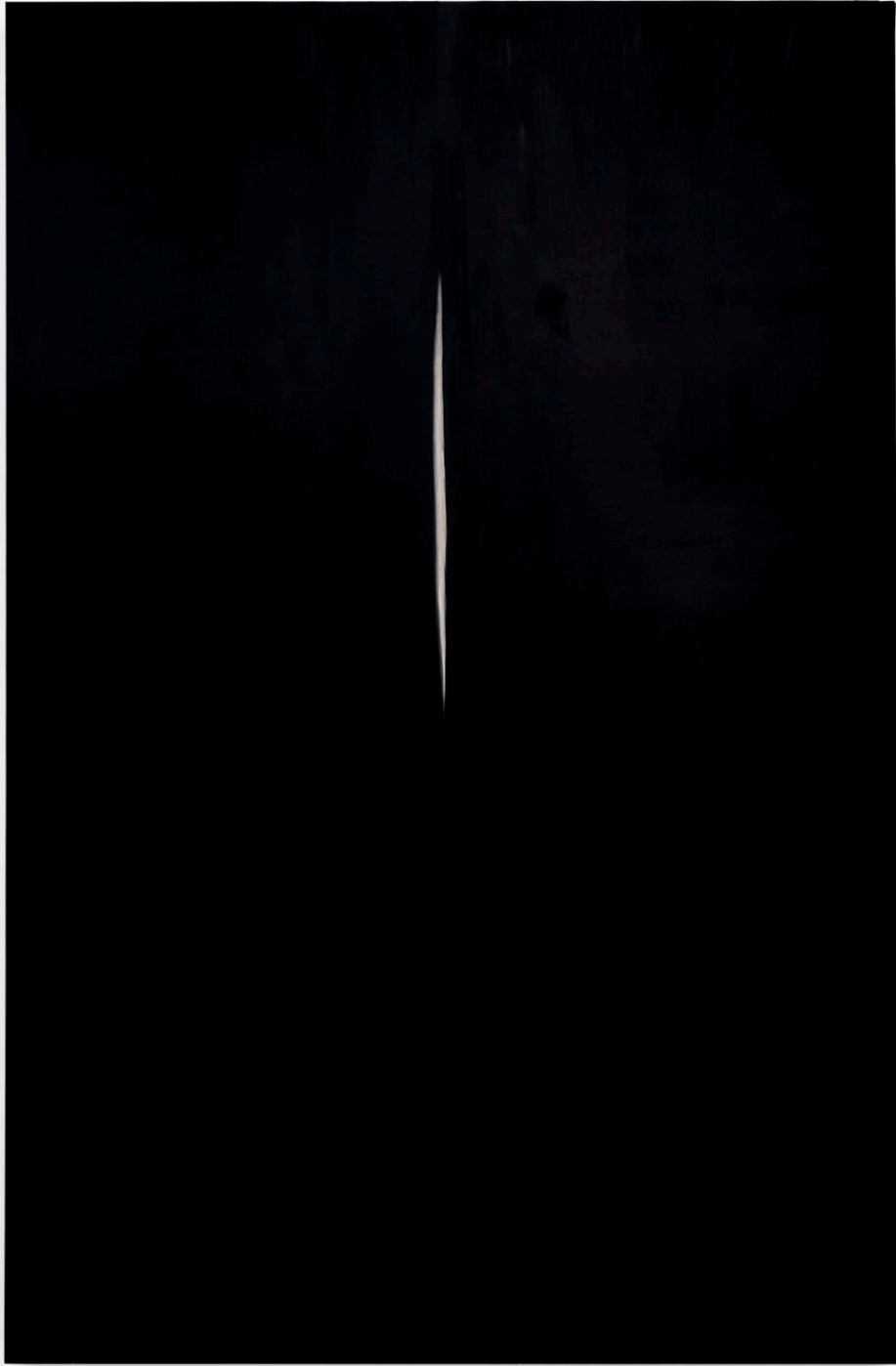
**Alexandra Karakashian**

*here they passed I*

2018

Oil on Canvas

280 x 180 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*here they passed II*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
280 x 180 cm







**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*orphans of recent events*  
2018  
Wrapped Canvas, Fabric and Wood  
Dimensions Variable



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*without*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
59 x 42 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**

*passing*

2018

Fabric and Wood

Dimensions Variable



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Yashmak I*  
2018  
Oil on Paper and Textile  
Dimensions Variable



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Yashmak II*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas and Textile  
Dimensions Variable



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
weep  
2018  
Textile and Wood  
Dimensions Variable



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXX*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
91 x 62 cm





**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXI*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
91 x 62 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXII*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
91 x 62 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXIII*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
91 x 62 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXIV*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
91 x 62 cm



**Alexandra Karakashian**  
*Undying XXXIX*  
2018  
Oil on Canvas  
91 x 62 cm

## ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Alexandra Karakashian was born in 1988, in Johannesburg, South Africa. She currently lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa. In 2011 she obtained her Bachelor of Art in Fine Art degree the Michaelis School of Fine Art at the University of Cape Town. On graduation she was awarded both the Judy Steinberg Painting Prize and the Simon Gerson Distinction Award. She went on to graduate with a Masters in Fine Art degree from the same institution in 2015.

In 2017, Karakashian presented her solo exhibition, entitled *unbecoming*, at SMAC Gallery in Johannesburg to coincide with the release of her self-titled publication, with text by Khanya Mashabela. Karakashian was the artist in residence at Capo d'Arte in Gagliano del Capo, Italy in 2016. The residency culminated in a solo presentation, self-titled *Alexandra Karakashian*, at the Villa Medici in Gagliano del Capo. Additional solo presentations in 2016 included *Passage*, a special project at 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair in London, UK; and *GROUND* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town, South Africa. In 2015 Karakashian presented *Shifting Grounds* in Cape Town, South Africa; and collaborated with performance artist Buhlebeswe Siwani in *Land*, a performance piece selected for Infecting the City Public Arts Programme. Karakashian was included in SMAC Gallery's presentation at ARTISSIMA in 2017, other recent group shows include; *X:Part III* at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch, and *A Painting Today*, in Cape

Town during 2017; *UPSTART/STARTUP* at SMAC Gallery in Johannesburg, and *Pastoral Abstraction* in Cape Town in 2016; *Back to the Future II- Abstract Art in South Africa: Past & Present* at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch, in 2015; *Only Parts* in Johannesburg; and *Paperwork: An Exhibition of Contemporary South African Works on Paper*, at SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, in 2014.

Karakashian is represented in numerous private and public collections including: the Iziko South African National Gallery, South Africa; the Spier Collection, South Africa; the Darvesh Collection, UAE ; The Royal Portfolio collection, South Africa; and the Luciano Benetton Collection, Italy.

In 2018 Karakashian was included in group presentations at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City, USA, titled *Ravelled Thread* ; SMAC Gallery's presentation at FNB Joburg Art Fair at the Sandton Convention Centre in Johannesburg, South Africa as well as *Back to the Future III - Abstract Art in South Africa: Past & Present* at SMAC Gallery in Stellenbosch, South Africa. Karakashian's solo exhibition, *here they passed* at SMAC Gallery in Cape Town will run until November 2018 followed by a solo exhibition at Mariane Ibrahim Gallery in Seattle, USA, titled *Undone*. The exhibition will run until December 2018.



smac

Alexandra  
Karakashian

**CURRICULUM VITAE**

# ALEXANDRA KARAKASHIAN

C.V

## BIOGRAPHY

Born 1988, Johannesburg, South Africa.  
Lives and works in Cape Town, South Africa.

## EDUCATION

- 2015** Master of Fine Art Degree (MFA), Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2011** Bachelor of Fine Art Honours Degree (BFA), Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.

## AWARDS & RESIDENCIES

- 2016** Artist in Residence, Capo d'Arte, Gagliano Del Capo, Italy.
- 2014** The Talents' Archive Project, curated by Double Decker London, Onassis Cultural Centre, Athens, Greece.
- National Research Foundation Innovation Scholarship for Masters Study, Pretoria, South Africa.
- Maclver Scholarship, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Jules Kramer Music & Fine Arts Scholarship, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2013** Top 10 Young African Artists, Business Day Wanted Magazine, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- National Research Foundation Innovation Scholarship for Masters Study, South Africa.
- Jules Kramer Music & Fine Arts Scholarship, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Maclver Scholarship, Cape Town, South Africa.
- Invited and awarded student, Between the Lines Symposium and Exchange between the Michaelis School of Fine Art & the Braunschweig University of Art - Organised by Colin Richards & Candice Breitz, Michaelis School of Fine Art, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2011** Judy Steinberg Painting Prize, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.
- Simon Gerson Distinction Prize, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.

## SOLO EXHIBITIONS & PRESENTATIONS

- 2018** **[upcoming]** *Undone*, Mariane Ibrahim, Seattle, USA.
- here they passed*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2017** *unbecoming*, SMAC Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- 2016** *Alexandra Karakashian*, Villa Medici, Gagliano del Capo, Italy.
- Passage*, 1:54 Contemporary African Art Fair: Special Project (SMAC Gallery), Somerset House, London, UK.
- GROUND*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2015** *Shifting Grounds*, Michaelis Galleries, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.
- Land*, in collaboration with Buhlebeswe Siwani, Infecting the City: Public Arts Festival, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2012** *Passages*, The Black Box, Cape Town, South Africa.

## GROUP EXHIBITIONS & PRESENTATIONS

- 2019** **[upcoming]** *+one*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2018** FNB Joburg Art Fair, Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.
- Ravelled Thread*, Sean Kelly Gallery, New York City, USA.
- Back to the Future III - Abstract Art in South Africa: Past & Present*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- Investec Cape Town Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Cape Town, South Africa.
- 2017** *X: Part III*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.
- ARTISSIMA*, (SMAC Gallery), OVAL Lingotto Fiere, Turin, Italy.



# ALEXANDRA KARAKASHIAN

# CV

FNB Joburg Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

*X: Part I*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

*A Painting Today*, STEVENSON, Cape Town, South Africa.

Cape Town Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Cape Town, South Africa.

**2016** *SUMMER SHOW '16*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

FNB Joburg Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

*UPSTART/STARTUP*, SMAC Gallery, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Cape Town Art Fair, (SMAC Gallery), Cape Town International Convention Centre (CTICC), Cape Town, South Africa.

*The Art of Humanity at The Pratt Institute*, The Rubelle and Norman Schfler Gallery- Pratt Institute, New York City, USA.

*Recent Masters*, Michaelis Galleries, University Of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.

*Nothing Personal*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

*Pastoral Abstraction*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

**2015** *LUSH*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

*MAP OF THE NEW ART*, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, Italy.

*Defining the Narrative*, Gallery MOMO, Cape Town, South Africa.

*Back to the Future II - Abstract Art in South Africa: Past & Present*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

*Empire*, Everard Read Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

*Claim of the Land*, Association for Visual Arts (AVA) Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

*STELLAR*, Salon91, Cape Town, South Africa.

**2014** *Imago Mundi: The Art of Humanity*, [Travelling Exhibition], Museo Carlo Bilotti, Rome; Casa Dei Carraresi, Treviso, Italy.

FNB Joburg Art Fair (SMAC Gallery), Sandton Convention Centre, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Sasol New Signatures Finalists, Pretoria Art Museum, Pretoria, South Africa.

*Only Parts*, Wits Substation, University of The Witwatersrand (WITS), Johannesburg, South Africa.

*Paint Matters*, Barnard Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

*Paperwork: An Exhibition of Contemporary South African Works on Paper*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

**2013** *In the Night I Remember*, STEVENSON, Johannesburg, South Africa.

*The Xmas Show*, SMAC Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

*Back to the Future - Abstract Art in South Africa: Past & Present*, SMAC Gallery, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

*Between the Lines*, Michaelis Galleries, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.

*Small Canvas Project*, Benneton Foundation, Venice, Italy.

**2012** *Impression: Sunset*, Salon91, Cape Town, South Africa.

*Guest Resident*, Nirox Project Space, Johannesburg, South Africa.

*Outside the Lines*, WHATIFTHEWORLD, Cape Town, South Africa.

**2011** *Michaelis Graduate Show*, Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.

*Thresholds*, Michaelis Galleries, University of Cape Town (UCT), Cape Town, South Africa.

*Passing Through*, STEVENSON (Project Space), Cape Town, South Africa.

# ALEXANDRA KARAKASHIAN

CV

## COLLECTIONS

Iziko South African National Gallery, Cape Town, South Africa.

The Royal Portfolio Collection, Cape Town, South Africa.

Capo d'Arte Collection, Gagliano del Capo, Italy.

The University of Cape Town Art (UCT) Collection, Cape Town, South Africa.

Luciano Benetton Collection, Treviso, Italy.

Spier Art Collection, Cape Town, South Africa.

Knights Bridge International, Los Angeles, USA.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact SMAC Gallery for more information regarding the availability of the works included in this portfolio, or for any other queries.

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