

# GLADSTONE

Shahryar Nashat, "There's much to be learned from our animal counterparts. As Shahryar Nashat's images show, it's possible to get close without clashing.", Family Style, June 24th, 2026

FAMILY STYLE

ART

## Keep Score

There's much to be learned from our animal counterparts. As Shahryar Nashat's images show, it's possible to get close without clashing.

*Words by Meka Boyle*

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Shahryar Nashat, *Untitled (Two Tigers Fighting)*, 2026. Image courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

Intimacy and aggression exist hand in hand for Shahryar Nashat. Yet their harmony, as the Paris-based artist sees it, is thrown off by human intervention: It drives wars and social conflicts, amplified and documented online—circulated on message boards and forums and never-ending timelines, slipped between selfies and fit pics and infographics. So what is there to do? Find ways to channel, and question our motives. For Nashat, animals offer an apt foil. “They don’t carry the past into the present the way we do,” he explains. “Their

nervous systems don't keep the score the way ours does." As one example Nashat points to tigers: "They'll roar, posture, and bite, and a few minutes later, one flops down and grooms the other." If only it could be that easy for humankind, but it's not that simple. As his work suggests, beyond the instinctual, our reactions have taken on a life of their own, embodied and emboldened by technology.



Shahryar Nashat, *Self-portrait at Seventeen*, 2026. Image courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

Nashat's new exhibition at Gladstone Gallery in New York began with this premise, inspired by a clip of two cats fighting that he saw while scrolling online. "It was a flash of conviction, or illusion, that this is *à propos* the world right now," he explains of the scene. The resulting series of untitled works, all made in 2026, feature close-ups of felines and tigers, each in pairs, mid-spar, rendered in glowing lavender or baby blue U.V.-cured ink. Face-to-face the beasts appear both menacing and intimate. In one scene, framed by white cardboard, two house cats are depicted in an up-close stand-off, mouths inches apart and open in snarls. This situation unfolds again and again across the series, alternating between the domestic felines and their wild counterparts. With every image, the cats collapse more and more into one overarching visual in which closeness and combativeness fold into each other.



Shahryar Nashat, *Mothers*, 2026. Image courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

Also on view, Nashat's wall-mounted cellulose polymer sculptures called "Mothers" address this duality more abstractly. Yet the muted yellow and pink shapes boil down to the same twinship of intimacy and aggression that hovers over his cat series. In each sculpture, two sides meet at the center as if pushing through the material to touch. Depending on how you see the work, the mirrored shapes look like pelvis bones, organs, flowers, faces, or wings. "It's Rorschachian," Nashat agrees.



Shahryar Nashat, *Untitled (Two Cats Fighting)*, 2026. Image courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery.

So what do all the images of cats and fragmented body-like pieces mean? How do we reckon with physical existence when it is mediated, and sometimes superseded by, digital avatars? It's a question Nashat has been exploring for the past two decades in his sculpture and video work. "It can be terrifying for the human, but fascinating for the artist," he says. For Nashat, modern technology is an engine that fuels violence and desire. Or, as he puts it, it creates the conditions that artists work within. He cites the military and the

pornography industry as the first big drivers of technological innovation. “Artists follow close behind, either embracing or critiquing what emerges,” he adds. As for what we can learn from cats: “You can get close without clashing,” he explains. “The off-switch is real.”

*"Shahryar Nashat: Beast in Both Palms" is on view through August 8, 2026 at Gladstone Gallery at 130 E 64th St, New York, NY 10065.*