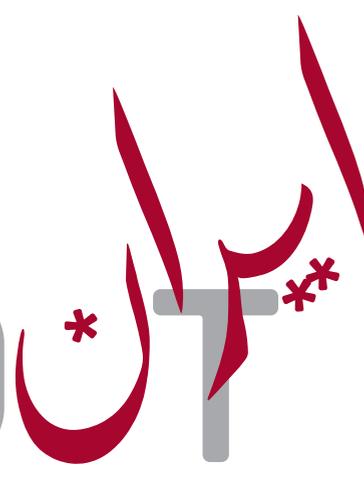


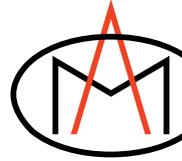
IRAN INSIDE OUT*

Influences of Homeland and
Diaspora on the Artistic
Language of Contemporary
Iranian Artists

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INSIDE OUT



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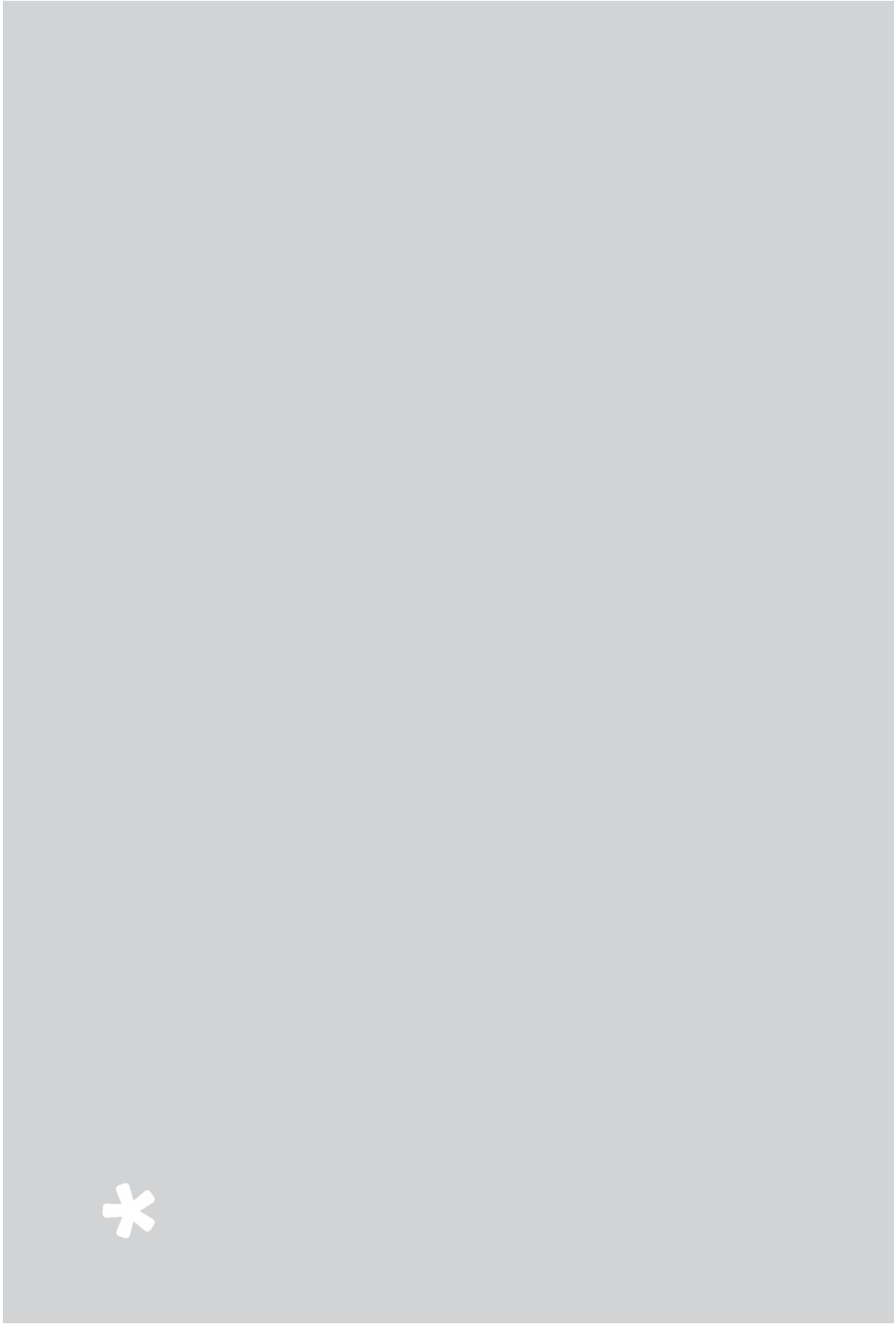
Design by Demetra Georgiou

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Forward

Till Fellrath

When I moved to the US from London in 2004 it struck me how the overall portrayal of the "Middle East" in general and of Iran in particular was one sided and negative. Much of it surely can be attributed to the mutually difficult relationship both countries have endured over the past 30 years. Many instances are in everyone's collective memory, including the Iran Hostage Crisis from 1979 to 1981, the US involvement in the Iran-Iraq war, the "Iran-Contra Affair" of 1986, the shoot down of Iran Air flight 655 in 1988, and the imposition of a complete trade embargo by the Clinton administration in 1995. And, as of yet, there is no official diplomatic representation between the two nations: the Swiss Government assumes representation of US interests in Iran, while Iranian interests in the US are represented by the Pakistani Government. Growing up in Germany my family used to do a lot of business with Iran until the 1970s. My childhood memories of Iran consist of pistachios and carpets on which I used to play with the children of my parents' Iranian friends when they came to visit. Of course this was a naïve image that abstracted from any political problems. But isn't it true that most of us experience another culture very differently when meeting individuals rather than focusing on what is so often suggested by media and politics? *Iran Inside Out* is not a political statement, nor a reflection on existing tensions and differences. Rather, it explores the individual human spirit from inside and outside a country that is at the center of a global controversy. In contrast to the proclamation of an "Axis of Evil" that negatively labeled Iran and a handful of other nations in a very specific way, this exhibition aims to promote the common humanity that binds all people together. By presenting over 50 artists, half of whom live within their homeland and half of whom live in the Diaspora, *Iran Inside Out* gives visitors the opportunity to formulate their own views on what makes up the people of Iran.

Iran Inside Out is a timely exhibition as we have seen a wave of interest in Iranian and "Middle Eastern" art over the past few years. 2009 marks the 30th anniversary of the Iranian Revolution and one generation of Iranians has come of age living and working in a divided community despite their common heritage. The viewpoints developed by the artists in the exhibition are a result of their individual reflections on their specific places of residence. While those inside the territorial borders of their homeland face restricted freedoms of artistic expression, those living in the Diaspora are reacting to their new environments and struggling to form a new identity. This exhibition represents, for the first time at an international arts organization, these two groups of artists side by side. As the exhibition demonstrates, ironically the artists living abroad often draw more on their cultural heritage, while those inside focus more on issues of everyday life without much regard to specifically Iranian references. Clearly no artist should be pigeonholed into a single category based on his or her country of origin or other such criteria. Each individual is comprised of many facets: gender, culture, sexual orientation, race, social class, and countless other factors that play a role in forming one's identity. Yet, it is surprising to see so many recent exhibitions reduce "Middle Eastern" artists, including Iranians, to a mere stereotype defined by their cultural heritage. Even worse, in attempting to overcome stereotypical portrayals of "Middle Eastern" art, many exhibitions end up reinforcing the stereotypes by presenting the artists only amongst their own kind, showcasing artworks with clear cultural references, and choosing expected titles. Meanwhile, in actuality the people of Iran, 70 million individuals, are far more complex than images of veiled women and what a handful of other emblematic images would suggest.

Iran Inside Out is not an Iranian exhibition as such, but rather an attempt to examine how a divided population has adapted on both sides. It is an exploration of the individual, with the country of Iran serving as a case study for divided peoples. Germany, for example, was divided from the end of the Second World War through 1989 during which time cultural differences emerged as artists reacted to their distinct environments and political frameworks. This dichotomy justifies presenting a country show such as *Iran Inside Out*, which despite showcasing artists that share a cultural origin, aims to be everything but. The second exhibition within the *East West Project*, which promotes cross-cultural dialogue and understanding, *Iran Inside Out* is embedded into a three-part project at the Chelsea Art Museum. The series' first exhibition, *Italia Arabia*, examined the influence of Italian artists on artists from Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Iran, and vice-versa. The series will conclude with the exhibition *Walking through Walls*, in which artists reflect on man-made structures that, when erected and/or destroyed, lead to either unification or separation of people. *Walking through Walls* will be on view in the fall of 2009 in commemoration of the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. As part of this ongoing project, *Iran Inside Out* offers insight through visual art into the people who comprise a complex country often marred by preconceptions.

Iran Inside Out is a statement against cultural prejudices and misperceptions on all sides: within the Iranian Community, between the US and Iran, and between the East and the West at large. While not intended to be political, the exhibition reminds us that people living under difficult circumstances are human nonetheless. Isn't it true that human beings across the world are united by shared goals and aspirations? As President Obama said in his Nowruz greetings to the Iranian People on March 20, 2009: "In these celebrations [of the new year] lies the promise of opportunity for our children; security for our families; progress for our communities; and peace between nations. Those are shared hopes. Those are common dreams." It is our hope that *Iran Inside Out* will contribute to the gradual thaw of cultural and diplomatic tensions by offering a platform of expression for Iranian artists in New York, and provide an opportunity for viewers to gain insight into the dreams and hopes of a people at the crossroads of an ongoing global conflict.



Till Fellrath
Managing Director
Chelsea Art Museum

Preface

Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller

Iran is more than a country. Iran is a statement!

For the last few decades, Iranian artists have been making their own major statements about Iran, about themselves, and probably most importantly about art!

Over the many years that I have spent working with a considerable amount of Persian artists from inside and outside Iran, their work has reminded me of the beauty and complexity that is inherent in the multifaceted nature of Iranian culture. Since 1982, I have been working with a very talented group of Iranian artists both, in Diaspora and living in Iran, exhibiting them alongside modern and contemporary international artists.

When Sam Bardaouil, the curator of *Iran Inside Out*, asked me six months ago to come on board the Chelsea Art Museum's vision for a contemporary Iranian art show, it was a dream come true! I had been working for years trying to change the image of this very rich culture and expose the beauty of Iran to a Western audience. I was so excited: "Finally... a major art institution will bestow a much needed and rightfully deserved attention on these artists who, in my opinion, are creating some of the most innovative and daring art on the contemporary scene."

Sam told me he was looking for a maximum of fifteen artists. (I was laughing on the inside...) I initially gave him a list of over a hundred artists, both from inside and outside Iran. He went on to look at another one hundred. With every new discovery I was witnessing a love affair unraveling! I had seen it happen before to several who came into close contact with those artists. Who said Iran was not radioactive?

Till Fellrath, the managing director of the museum was next in line. It turns out he had been exposed to Iranian culture as a child through the work and travels of his parents. He had been toying with the idea for this show for years. It was a match made in heaven... well in New York actually, but with one foot here and another in Iran the country, the nostalgia, the statement... Didn't I tell you Iran is a statement?

Nobody understands the power of statements better than Shirin Neshat. I immediately put her in touch with this dynamic team that was taking on board a major challenge. Any guidance was highly welcomed. Soon, Shoja Azari's insights and creativity were recruited and everyone was falling in love and in friendship all over again! To the quartet I say: "Don't go to Fanelli's without me!"

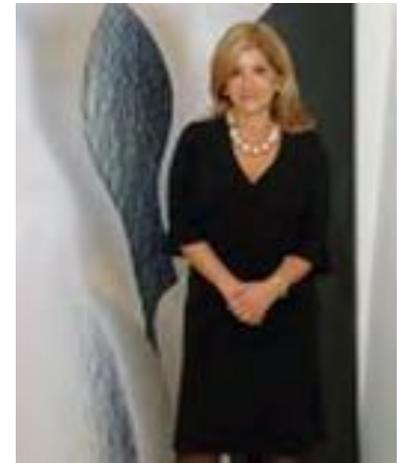
Iran Inside Out was beginning to take shape. Yet I knew that for the team to be complete, I needed a magician of sorts, someone who is capable of making things happen, and fast!

Maryam Homayoun-Eisler was that magician. On a dreary winter evening, she flew in from London and met with Sam and Till at my apartment. By the end of that evening, the stars were twinkling in our eyes despite the gloominess outside. Maryam became the first patron of the show and in turn hurled Till and Sam, or the "incredible two" as I prefer to call them, into a whole group of other Iranian artists living in Iran as well as other friends who in turn became patrons in their own right. From the beginning, my vision was that we needed to acknowledge and seek the help of the galleries in Tehran, as they have exhibited and promoted these artists with so much love and passion. For that purpose, we all traveled together to Dubai where Maryam played an integral part in promoting awareness about the show in that part of the world as well.

To the Iranian community in the US, Europe, the Emirates and in Iran, and to our friends, patrons and sponsors, I will be forever indebted to you. Thank you for believing in this cause. Also, my gratitude goes out to our Iranian supporters who are still in their 20s and early 30s, who have reached out to their friends all over the world to come on board. They have taken ownership of this project, and have helped to allow their rich heritage to be showcased in such a magnificent exhibition.

What else can I possibly say? It has been an honor and a privilege to work with Sam and Till: what they have done for Iranian contemporary art will be felt for the decades to come.

The rest is history that has been written on the walls of this bold museum in Chelsea with the consistent determination and pioneering vision of its leaders. To put it in their own words: "We believe we can change the world... even if just a little bit!"



Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller

Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller, the owner of the Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery, for over 25 years, received her B.A. in Art History and French Literature at Brown University. She then moved to London, where she earned a Masters at Sotheby's Works of Art Program. She also holds a Masters in Art History and Museum Management from George Washington University. Before opening her own gallery, Leila interned at the Hirshhorn Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, and was the art curator for The Securities Group, an investment bank in New York. She has served on several boards and on the committees of many institutions including the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Southampton Fresh Air Home, Parrish Art Museum, the Iranian Heritage Foundation, Southampton Hospital, Museum of the City of New York, Art Bridge Advisory Group, Magic of Persia, and Encyclopedia Iranica. Leila continues to promote cross-cultural dialogue by showcasing Middle Eastern artists, alongside modern and contemporary international masters, in the West.

Centralizing Margins and Marginalizing Centers

Diasporas and Contemporary Iranian Art

Anthony Downey

On March 20, 2009, on the occasion of its New Year celebrations, President Barack Obama recorded and broadcast, complete with Farsi sub-titles, a message to the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Although not without a degree of cajoling, in style and context Obama's speech was notably different to those of his predecessors. Choosing a corner of the White House in which the American flag was conspicuous in its absence, he began by citing Iran's "celebrated culture" before going on to observe that "over many centuries your art, your music, literature and innovation have made the world a better and more beautiful place." In a broader geopolitical sense, the speech also appealed to the Diasporic context of Iranian culture and its impact upon other cultures. "Here in the United States", Obama continued, "our own communities have been enhanced by the contributions of Iranian Americans. We know that you are a great civilization, and your accomplishments have earned the respect of the United States and the world." In the often non-existent climate of United States/Iranian diplomacy, even Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, whose views have been long associated with conservatism, was moved to note that "our [Iran's] behavior will change" if the United States held true to its stated aim of treating Iran with mutual respect. And mutuality of purpose would appear to underwrite, on the face of it at least, the significant sense in which cultural exchanges are being developed between both countries and, more generally, between Iranian culture and the West.

In the form of exchange of ideas and the development of dialogue, culture has long been a point of reference between the United States and Iran. Referring to "Wishes and Dreams: Iran's New Generation Emerges", an exhibition of Iranian art shown in Washington in 2007, the then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice commented that the artists in the show were representing "the great culture that Iran has, a culture that goes back for so many centuries", before going on to note that the "American people can see another side of Iran and see what the artists of Iran are doing." Implicit within both statements is a call for culture to do what politics has effectively failed to in three decades of fraught, if not downright belligerent, relations between the two countries: open up a level of cultural dialogue that is commensurate with political respect and a degree of mutual understanding. Obama's calls for dialogue based upon cultural respect, placed alongside earlier calls from figures such as Madeleine Albright, Bill Clinton's secretary of state, and Condoleezza Rice (the latter being representative of a government that was not particularly inclined to dialogue as such), also needs to be understood in light of Ayatollah Mohammad Khatami's earlier call in 1998. During an extended interview with none other than CNN, the then President of Iran, who was known for his reformist stance, called for a dialogue "between civilizations and nations [that] is different from political relations." Khatami, interestingly, went on to propose an "exchange of professors, writers, scholars, artists, journalists, and tourists." We seem to have arrived at a point where cultural exchange is being utilized as a *modus vivendi* to promote political rapprochement – and to such ends, I would suggest, culture often lends itself more easily and with more nuance than political rhetoric. And, it is within this context that we can begin to see both the cultural implications, if not socio-political ramifications, of a show such as *Iran Inside Out*.

We may want to ask, in light of these remarks, what this show actually tells us about Iran and its relationships to itself and the West. We may also want to pause and ask how a show that takes Iran, however discursively, as a starting point for its curatorial strategy can avoid the problems associated with the regionalist inflections of colonial and latterly neo-colonial discourse. This is to remind us that a favored colonial ploy was to homogenize regions such as the Middle East – whatever that term actually means – and thereafter promote a regional and ultimately uniform interpretation of what were in fact discrete political, social and religious entities. To avoid this, we must appeal to an expanded understanding of Iranian visual culture and the trope of Diaspora enables precisely such a de-regionalized, trans-national, heterogeneous, and multi-vocal sense of Iranian culture to emerge. Allied to this point is the further observation that Iranian art, long seen as geographically indigenous and outside of the Western canon, has become not only a global phenomenon but an increasingly visible and influential component of contemporary art practices. Artists such as Shirin Neshat, Nicky Nodjourni, Timo Nasseri, and Mitra Tabrizian, to name but a few, have long had followings outside of Iran and have enjoyed extended careers in cities such as New York, Berlin and London. We reach a crucial stage here within which to understand what is happening in contemporary Iranian art: it is a globalized practice with sites of production and reception that stretch from Teheran to Toronto, Shiraz to Sydney, Qazvin to Queens, and Esfahan to the East End of London. In its eclectic choice of artists – ranging from established names to lesser known figures – working within and outside of Iran, *Iran Inside Out* both revels in international and global developments and simultaneously reflects upon the often complex geopolitics that underwrites global cultural production and, more specifically, the socio-political ambiguities and aesthetic nuances of so-called Iranian visual culture.



Anthony Downey

Anthony Downey is the Programme Director of the M.A. course in Contemporary Art at Sotheby's Institute of Art, London. An editorial board member of *Third Text*, he has published essays, criticism and interviews in numerous international journals. Recent and forthcoming publications include "Diasporic Communities and Global Networks: The Contemporaneity of Iranian Art Today", in *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art*, forthcoming 2009; "Zones of Indistinction: Giorgio Agamben's Bare Life and the Ethics of Aesthetics," *Third Text* (Summer 2008); "At the Limits of the Image: Representations of Torture in Popular Culture," *Brumaria*, 10 (Spring 2009); and "Thresholds of a Coming Community: Photography and Human Rights," *Aperture* (February 2009). Downey is currently researching a book, *The Ethics of the Real: Politics and Aesthetics* (forthcoming, 2010).

I use the term 'so-called' here to draw attention to a curatorial gambit in this show: although billed as a show of art from within and outside of Iran, there is also an implicit question being posed here as to what exactly constitutes Iranian visual culture. Exploring issues such as western political labels (the so-called "axis of evil" that Iran is apparently included within), sexual identities, internationalism, the subversion of stereotypes, and the recycling of traditional imagery, *Iran Inside Out* is an investigation into the very term Iranian culture and its contemporary manifestations. And it is at this juncture that the critical purchase to be had in the term "Diaspora" becomes more apparent. To suggest, for example, that Iranian artists who are part of the Diaspora address international issues whilst artists living within Iran address local issues, as some commentators are prone to do, merely re-inscribes the old colonial binary tropes – parochial/cosmopolitan; national/trans-national; tradition/modernity; regional/international – and this should be resisted at all costs. We must, as this show does, both foreground the efficacy of the term Diaspora but also ask how it could, if used in an abbreviated context, merely reintroduce a regionalist discourse. To the extent that the trope of Diaspora has provided a way of decentralizing and thereafter internationalizing art produced in the Middle East, and thus usurping the regionalist inflection of colonial discourse, it can also merely reverse forms of regionalism by grounding Diasporas in, say, the United States or Britain. Iran, already historically displaced in the Western canon, is further removed in this schema and artists working there are seen as somehow wedded to a parochial form of traditional art practices. Likewise, artists who are working as part of the Diaspora are seen as somehow more cosmopolitan and contemporary in their metropolitan practices. It is at precisely this juncture that we need to address the issue concerning what exactly is being produced in contemporary Iranian visual culture, both inside and outside of Iran. The example of, say, Neshat's and Nodjoumi's work, both of whom left Iran in the 1970s, reveals the degree to which such binary opposition simply prescribe rather than elucidate their practices. For one, the legacy of Iranian culture, society and politics plays a role in both of their practices. Nodjoumi's paintings, although drawing on contemporary political events, also employ traditional Persian metaphors and Iranian iconography. The narratives that unfold in these works refuse any easy categorization, reacting as they are to the ambiguities and ambivalences of a geopolitical outlook that sees East and West forever pitched against one another. Likewise, Neshat's work addresses the social and moral codes of Islamic society through the refractive lens of cameras, both photographic and filmic. And yet both practices are indelibly imbricated within international debates concerning the politics of representation and the aesthetics of contemporary visual practices worldwide.

These comments, furthermore, need to be understood against the backdrop of Iranian artists living and working in Iran. To suggest that they are only, or primarily, concerned with local issues is to reduce their work to a series of neo-colonial heuristic models that sees the local in terms of backwardness or margins. It is a relatively sobering exercise, in light of my comments, to examine the conjoining of time with culture in Western progressivist narratives of history. Time, by which I mean Greenwich Mean Time, effectively figured Northern Europe as the locus of history. It localized and prioritized a Western take on historical developments to the extent that it could be mapped onto notions of place. In this context other temporal zones were figured not only as temporally marginal but, in historical terms, as existing behind the West. The riposte to such ideas (if not ideals) would be an examination of Farhad Moshini's career, whose work utilises forms associated with 13th century Iranian pottery, Farsi calligraphy, and the semiotics associated with mass-produced commercial products, not to mention his use of so-called slang found on the streets of modern-day Tehran and lyrics from popular Iranian music. Inherent within this practice is a questioning of apparent belatedness and an investigation into the artefacts of the present. Moshini's work, that is to note, is a hybridized and none-too-easily placed practice; it evades any easy prescription of it in terms of being either traditional or modern (it draws on both the past and the present), regional or international (it looks to both local and international phenomena) and, in its hybrid form, even the ideal of an authentic Iranian cultural artefact or visual cultural form.

To position contemporary Iranian culture in both a cultural and socio-political context, as *Iran Inside Out* has done, is to further register and indeed confront the problematic of deploying art in instrumentalist terms; as a stand-in, that is to note, for political dialogue that tends to subject art to political rhetoric. Art and politics, that is to observe, have not always been the most commodious of bedfellows insofar as so-called political art has not exactly given rise to either aesthetic or formal subtlety; nor, for that matter, have political movements viewed art as the most efficacious means for getting a message across. This brings us to a far more evident danger whereby we somehow reduce contemporary Iranian visual culture to politics as opposed to what it actually is: a series of aesthetic practices that are sensitive, in different degrees, to the socio-political, economic, religious, ethical and philosophical milieu in which they are produced, disseminated and interpreted.

When artists living in Iran do indeed address issues germane to living in an Islamic state, and a significant number of artists represented here do precisely that, there is a notable degree of directness to the works. In Shirin Fakhim's work we are presented with surreal doll-like figures that recall the work of Hans Bellmer and Louise Bourgeois. However, the surrealism of Fakhim's work has an immediate social context that refers to prostitution in Tehran. The role of women in Iran is also explored in Abbas Kowsari's photographs of a group of women who were the first female cadets to graduate from Iran's police academy in 2003. Leila Pazooki, who works in video and digital media (and between Europe and Iran),

explores the subject of fashion amongst Tehran's youthful population. The contemporary is never far from these images and that is all the more notable in the work of Newsha Tavakolian, who has been using photography to document life in Iran since she was 16, and has produced images associated with the Iran-Iraq war, the lives of women under Shari'a law, and transvetism in Iran. Most of these themes – including human rights, youth culture, sexuality, the politics of representation, and religious laws – transcend national boundaries, as do recent political events in the Middle east, not least the debates around the use of torture in Abu Ghraib. In the work of Arash Hanaei, tableaux of these events are restaged using action figures, the staged quality of the images chiming with the theatricality of the appalling abuse meted out to bound prisoners in Abu Ghraib. Whereas Hanaei works within Iran, Alireza Ghandchi's graphic photographs – which would also appear to refer to the torture of individuals – are largely produced in Berlin where he lives and works. That two artists, one living inside Iran and the other in Berlin, should look at similar issues should not, of course, come as a surprise. None of which is to say that there are not restrictions placed upon artists in modern-day Iran; however, in attempting to suggest that artists living within Iran are somehow only concerned with the local – or, indeed, the parochial – we elide the heterogeneous practices that do exist there. To propose as much is to argue that contemporary Iranian visual culture – from a variety of locations and perspectives – offers a degree of complexity when it comes to countering the binaries found in notions such as modernity (internationalism) and tradition (regionalism), the global and the local and, perhaps most notably, the aesthetic and conceptual divisions to be found in the so-called Western and Eastern canons.

Culture, as opposed to political rhetoric, has a way of opening up and disabusing us of our preconceptions and that is nowhere more clearly illustrated than when we look at contemporary Iranian art and its emergence as an international practice that defies the easy prescriptions associated with rubrics such as centres and margins, tradition and modernity, inside and out, local and international. The Iranian Diaspora, like all migrant communities, looks both westward and eastward, to the present and the past, to the legacy of tradition and the ever-pressing immediacy of the present and, ultimately, relates back to national practices within Iran itself – perhaps that is why it is often called upon as a countermeasure to what is often seen in the West as Iranian political isolationism and extremism. Likewise, cultural production in contemporary Iran, in its multifarious themes and forms, both informs the Diaspora and international art practices worldwide and is, in turn, informed by it. Culture is a global affair with increasingly reciprocal and sinuous lines of communication; and that is no where more clearly represented than in a show such as *Iran Inside Out*.



Curatorial Statement - Iran Inside Out

Sam Bardaouil

Pondering Iran Inside Out, I find no better way to express myself than through the very own words of the artists themselves... literally.

The story of History can be retold and "mistold" by its various presentations in our museums.

Between an Iranian culture that is fiercely proud and an American system that perceives Iran as a menacing failure, visual vocabulary and imagery get less literal, more complicated and in a way, more narrative oriented.

A single image cannot always escape the confines of its literal meaning.

Representing that which is interwoven and concealed is, at the same time, exhilarating and devastating, creative and alienating, boundless and narcissistic and private while being devoured by the public.

I have always looked with envy at artworks that are disconnected from political issues. "Why do Onions make us cry? - It is not the strong odor of the onion that makes us cry, but the gas that the onion releases when we sever this member of the lily family."

Spaces of heightened power, determination and euphoria which are simultaneously spaces of the absurd, the tragic and the threatening capture a mood that is quite familiar but at the same time completely strange and perhaps, that is why they invoke a certain sense of anxiety in the viewer.

Whenever imagination and fantasy are combined in painting with realism and reality, it is a starting point for a never-ending realm which can depict even the most unfounded and irregular phenomena in a completely fluid and influential manner.

You dream, and you are broken. You rise and dream again. Your father is a Persian cowboy. This love of horses informs your day. Days spent walking the mountains, fields of blue and yellow wildflowers. What can you do that will ever retell this story? How do you capture this reality in a humorous and childlike fashion where tragic deaths are called martyrdom and wars become children bedtime stories?

The ghettoization of the minority through perception, politics, propaganda and control...

Living in migration for many years and having an assortment of so-called identities...

Issues such as female genital mutilation, transgender orientation, homosexuality and cross dressing, without issuing a statement or offering slogans...

Iran, a country of contradictions that is in many ways still a mystery to me... The fundamental themes of society, popular culture and religion...

Epics and heroes as old as the history which takes centuries to be inscribed in the mind of a nation...

The condition of waiting that affects the entire Iranian society... The present moment, moments of suspension, and the merge between the playful and serious...

Samira Abbassy

Negar Ahkami

Shiva Ahmadi

Roya Akhavan

Nazgol Ansarinia
Shoja Azari

Mahmoud Bakhshi Moakher

caraballo-farman

Morad Saghafi on Saghar Daeeri

Alireza Dayani

Reza Derakshani

Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery on Kamran Diba
Ala Ebtakar

Shahram Entekhabi

Ministry of Nomads on Shirin Fakhim

Mehdi Farhadian

Golnaz Fathi
Isabelle van den Eynde on Bita Fayyazi

Siamak Filizadeh

Parastou Forouhar
Shahab Fotouhi

The challenge of creating a universal visual language, one that is independent of cultural and regional symbolism and free of today's culture-specific codifications, is continually at the forefront of my mind as I go about my work...

I think the message is that people have changed.

I see shifts and no anchors, no centers if you prefer... It's important to notice that I am not merely disputing the central as an opponent of the marginal.

Leaving no stone unturned in the pantheon of modern Iranian society, covering the social aspects of daily life is optically intoxicating...

Exploration of text and calligraphic abstraction as a needed historical documentation with different parts to play, such as the slogans and promises of the regime, goes beyond the realm of mere depiction, and instead provides us with a tangible sensual experience that guides the viewer through a reflective yet playful journey exploring the essence of the artistic spirit and one whose humor and buoyancy provides a satirical edge to an otherwise profound subject matter.

The tendency for the human psyche to subscribe to specific categorizations, or subcultures, in response to feelings of ambivalence, uncertainty and/or anxiety, all over the world, is not a riddle and should be understood by all.

Everyone is affected by society, politics and culture as well as personal history and life style. But I try to eliminate any half or undigested material since I think that the clarity, "mission" and social activity embedded within the artistic capability of an illustrator/activist are more powerful than the artist's concern with aesthetics.

Nationalism and contemporary politics...

The everyday concerns of ordinary people, and their cultural and social backgrounds...

A far more complex and paradoxical reality behind the surface, set against a continuous backdrop of ambiguity, allegory and irony, suggest an extremely delicate balance between the personal and the universal.

The cleansing of identity could be seen as a recurring backdrop and the common thread which goes through an indefinite landscape in an eternal time.

Well-made tastes, deep colors... you can nowhere find blue like the one you can find in Iran... The constant questioning of the "who I am", the "what and where is home", and the "why I am here..."

Ever since the beginning, it was very important for me to get acquainted with the shift between familiarity and newness.

Alireza Ghandchi

Day Art Gallery on Daryoush Gharahzad

Barbad Golshiri

Isabelle van den Eynde on Ramin Haerizadeh
Arash Hanaei
Isabelle van den Eynde on Khosrow Hassanzadeh

Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery on Pouran Jinchi
Shahram Karimi
Abbas Kowsari
Behdad Lahooti
Nima Sagharchi on Farideh Lashai

Pooneh Maghazehe

Amir Mobed
Ahmad Morshedloo

Houman Mortazavi

Third Line on Farhad Moshiri and Shirin Aliabadi

Siavash Nagshbandi

Shirin Neshat
Nicky Nodjoumi

Reza Paydari
Kianoosh Vahabi on Leila Pazooki

Nazanin Pouyandeh

Majid Ma'soomi Rad

Sara Rahbar

Behrang Samadzadegan

Arash Sedaghatkish

I visit the Iranian artists' website. The background is a picture of himself looking extremely enthusiastic... I save the picture; it might come in useful for one of my projects.

His work is evidence to a fascination with the possibilities of fusing documentary with fiction and poetic and nostalgic realities.

This mode of experience; belonging neither here nor there, provides a sense of detachment as well as engagement where art is explained and defined... where we are fully aware that free expression will get us in to trouble; Where we have become these soft creatures that can slither between cracks and find their way through bends and corners.

Even if I try, I can't imagine those different times and locations of passion and madness entwined with love and rage; drenched in blood, empowered with raw emotions of love and loss.

So we're bound to see how good we can be ...

Vahid Sharifian

Silk Road Gallery on Arman Stepanian

Mitra Tabrizian

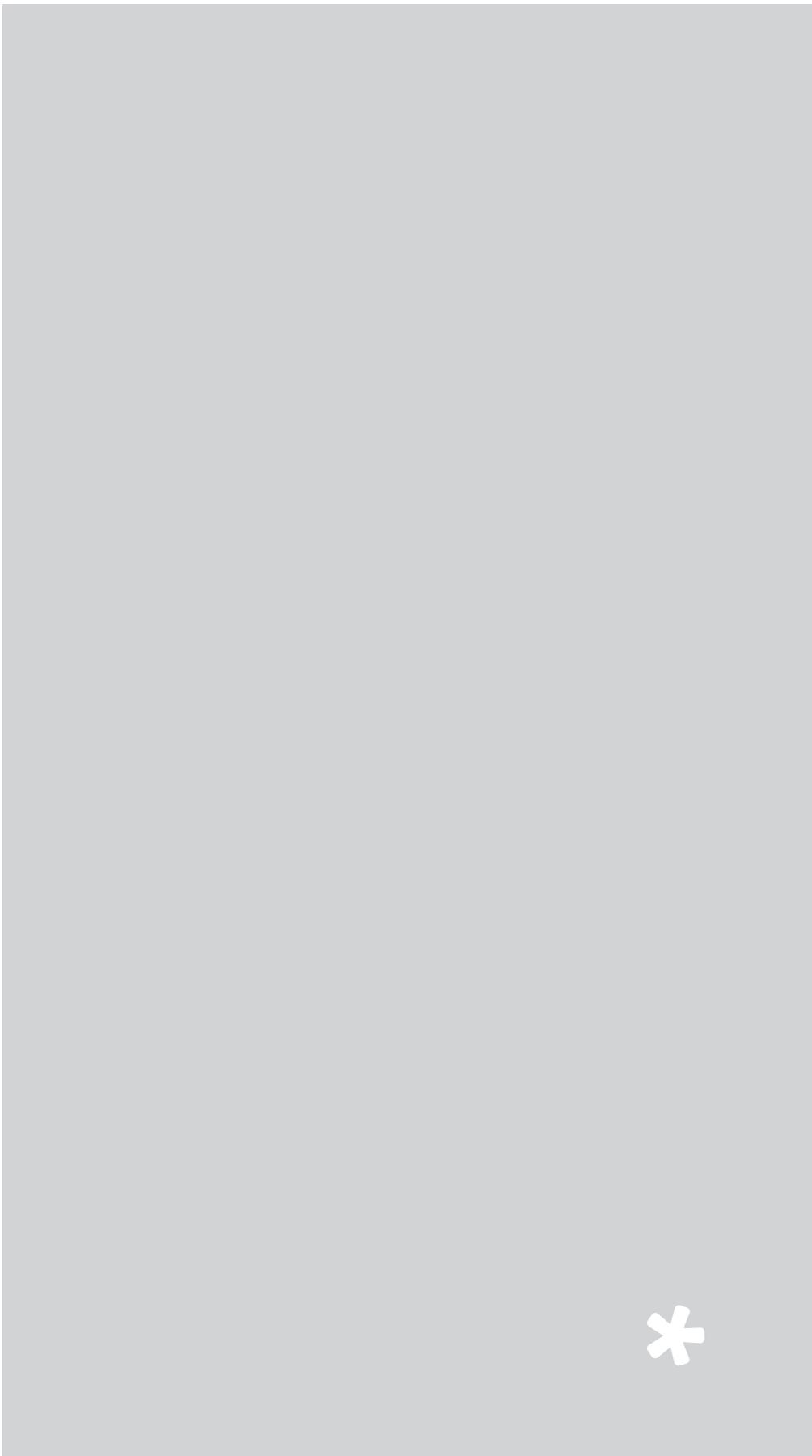
Jinoos Taghizadeh

Newsha Tavakolian
Sadegh Tirafkan

Darius Yektai



Sam Bardaouil
Curator
Chelsea Art Museum





(above) *Faded Glamour, Faded Glamour, and Sumerian Goddess*, from the *Archetypes & Their Specters at the Base of a Crucifixion* Installation, 2009, Mixed media, dimensions variable
 (left) *Slaughter*, from the *Eternal War* series, 2009, Oil on gesso panel, 12x12 in

opposite page
 (left) *Dismembered*, from the *Eternal War* series, 2009, Oil on gesso panel, 12x12 in
 (right) *Stream*, from the *Eternal War* series, 2009, Oil on gesso panel, 12x12 in
 All images ©artist



Samira Abbassy

As an Iranian-Arab immigrant in predominantly white Britain, I felt burdened by a need to interpret the culture of my parents, without wholly understanding it.

So I became a "Fictional Historian" as I reinterpreted stories about a homeland that I only saw as a child. To paraphrase Salman Rushdie, "... creating imaginary homelands and the cultural ground beneath my feet".. becoming the ambassador of my own "never-never land" from which I was exiled.

I began to excavate art that was considered outside the Western Canon: Indian, Persian, Tibetan, Hindu/Muslim/Buddhist. In particular, I found that the language of Religious/Sacred Art from all faiths better describes the metaphysical aspects of being human.

In this new series: *The Eternal War*, I examine mythologies around Martyrdom and Holy Wars throughout history such as the Crusades. "The Battle of Karbala" was the first great battle in Islam and defined the split between the Shia and Sunni sects. The grandson of the Prophet Mohammad, Imam Hussein, became the first Martyr of Shia Islam. I referenced various Shah-nama manuscripts (15th C), which depict battles across the Persian Empire. The story of the Imam's Martyrdom is brought into the focus of a sepia lens, showing the detrimental, the horrific and brings to mind Goya's *Disasters of War*.

There is also a sense of timelessness and the repetitive cycles of History: war, genocide, ethnic cleansing, occupation and exile. Wars tend to cleanse and then overlay cultures, histories and mythologies: the Old Testament, The New Testament and Islam. This piece is made up of twelve, 12 X 12 inch gesso panels, displayed closely together to reveal a fragmented overview of a deconstructed story. **The story of History itself can be retold and "mistold" by its various presentations in our museums.** The subject is as much about "History being retold by the victor" as of mythologies around war and Martyrdom.





Negar Ahkami

My art is maximalist. It pays tribute to the swirling, all-over patterns that permeate the Persian aesthetic. I view Iran's flamboyant visual traditions as acts of resistance against Iran's repressive systems that have tried to cloak its humanity. My emphasis on Persian pattern, texture, and color also aims to offset the mono-dimensional, depressing images of Iranians in the American media since 1979.

I embrace cultural baggage with a flamboyant pride: the baggage of my Iranian-American experience and my Persian art influences. My work celebrates high and low Persian visual traditions: miniatures, mosque tiles, handicrafts, and fashion. Through experimental applications of gesso, acrylic and glitter, I achieve rich surfaces that conjure Iran's ceramics and heavily made-up beauties.

In my narratives, I often subvert Western notions of Iranian exoticism with examples of Iranian fetishes of Western luxury. I portray beauty-conscious Iranian odalisques who are not that different from women in New York. These are views of Iranian women to which Americans do not have easy access. I revisit other Orientalist themes in American culture: buffoonish mullahs and menacing mosques.

I strive to capture a constant tension between visual richness and cartoonishness, sophistication and buffoonery, complexity and stereotype. Behind my need to explore tension is the experience of feeling caught **between an Iranian culture that is fiercely proud, and an American system that perceives Iran as a menacing failure.**

Since I was a teenager in the 1980s, I wanted there to be such a thing as "Islamic Expressionism:" a style that would speak in the jewel-like, complex, and rhythmic Persian art vernacular, but with an angry, visceral application, and socio-political critique similar to the German Expressionists. Many years later, I believe that such a phenomenon does exist and that my art is somehow a part of it.





(above) *The Fall*, 2009, Acrylic and glitter on gessoed panel 48x60 in
 (left) *The Source*, 2009, Acrylic and glitter on gessoed panel 48x54 in

opposite page

(right) *Islamables Mehrab Shelf*, 2004-2007, Mixed media on wood and \$3.99 bags worn by artist over 2 year period, 93x36x8.75 in
 (left) *Islamables Mehrab Shelf* (detail), 2004-2007

All images ©artist and Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



(top right) *Oil Barrel no. 4*, 2009, Oil on steel, 34.5x23.5x23.5 in
 (top left) *Pigs*, 2007, Gouache and watercolor on paper, 60x40 in
 (bottom left) *Horses*, 2007, Watercolor and gouache on paper, 37x27in
 (bottom right) *Boat*, 2007, Gouache and watercolor on paper, 40x60in
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



Shiva Ahmadi

As a Persian artist, two of the greatest influences in my life have been the Iranian revolution and the resulting war with Iraq. The war and its memories has inspired most of the work I have done in the past few years. The conflict with Iraq began when I was 6 years old. It was on an afternoon in September when Iraqis attacked Iranian air bases at Tehran's major airport. After that day the dominant memories of my childhood were the daily city bombings and their results: the handicapped children, the sobbing and screaming of the families who lost their loved ones, the black fabrics that appeared all over the city as a sign of national mourning. The eight-years of war between Iran and Iraq ended without a definitive outcome when Iran accepted the UN Security Council's resolution. This war was one of the bloodiest and most devastating events of the recent history leaving hundreds of thousands dead and handicapped, while causing staggering economic losses. The hardships and upheaval that I have experienced left me extremely sensitive to the suffering of other people and has now become the subject of my art.

Years later, after I moved to the United States, the US/Iraq war erupted. It brought back many dark childhood memories, and made me want to communicate about this personal history through my art. I started researching the concept of war and how it impacts society, from the emotional damage suffered by individuals to economic hardships to a sense of instability and uncertainty that hangs over all aspects of life. I embarked on a new body of work of large-scale watercolor painting using narrative images. The stories in my paintings are primarily told through the use of animal forms. Descriptive forms of headless animals painted with vibrant color and decorated with Islamic patterns combined with suggestive and ambiguous drawings of abstract forms of scattered objects, which are found after an explosion, communicate the instability and chaos that exists in a war zone. Many of my images are also influenced by Persian miniature paintings, a form of traditional Iranian artwork. I use watercolor on special heavy hand-made papers. The flowing, imprecise nature of water helps me to convey the concept of instability.

Recently I switched my work from two-dimensional paintings on paper to the three-dimensional works on steel oil barrels. The reason behind this move is my fascination with oil politics and the major role it plays in the world's political balance. I strongly believe that oil is one of the most important reasons behind current conflicts in various regions of the world.

As the war continues my **visual vocabulary and imagery get less literal and more complicated and in a way, more narrative**. This shift is caused by what is happening in the world. A single day does not pass without a horrible explosion or a suicide attack in Iraq or other parts of the world. I log into the Internet every morning, read the news and see the images of the objects that have exploded into pieces and parts. These pieces that once belonged to a whole are now separated without any distinct identity. There are stories behind all these scattered parts though. I thrive to catch these stories and narrate them in my paintings. I think through those narratives I engage the viewer in a playful process and help them to find deeper meanings in my art. These narratives somehow resemble my own life story and how wars, revolution and immigration turned it to pieces and how I am struggling to put them back together to define who I am. My art is what unifies these parts and creates a new language that enables me to communicate to other people in different cultures.





Roya Akhavan

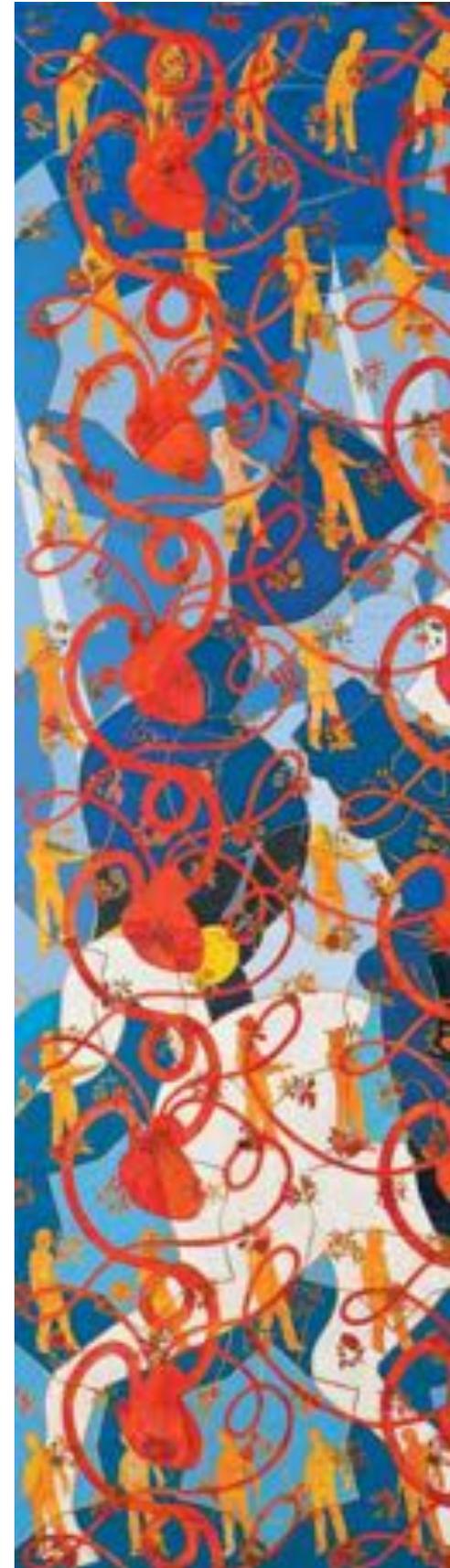
When I left Iran at the age of fourteen, I had no way of knowing that I would spend the rest of my life outside my homeland. But these decades of absence would reserve an even greater surprise: every step of my evolution as a painter has only deepened the imprint of the rich Persian artistic legacy on my work.

As many Persian artists throughout the centuries, I have chosen patterns as my instruments of metaphor. **A single image cannot always escape the confines of its literal meaning.** Through repetition, however, the transformation of images into patterns can allow a passage from the factual to the figurative, from the visual to the conceptual. By cleansing the shape of its denotation, reiteration can awaken a hidden multiplicity of meaning that spills beyond the boundaries of representation as the pattern multiplies through the painting. Repetition enables images to shed their immediate significance to bear the far more threatening realities of violence, oppression, subjection and venom.

The battles that rage across each of my paintings follow no iconographic or historical code. They are ageless, universal battles, irrevocably sentenced to the perpetual deferral of their outcomes. Their references, instead, are entirely conceptual: their chaos is a figure of uncertainty, of precariousness. The interplay between the rigidity of the geometric patterns and the fluidity of these battles presents a paradox between order and unpredictability.

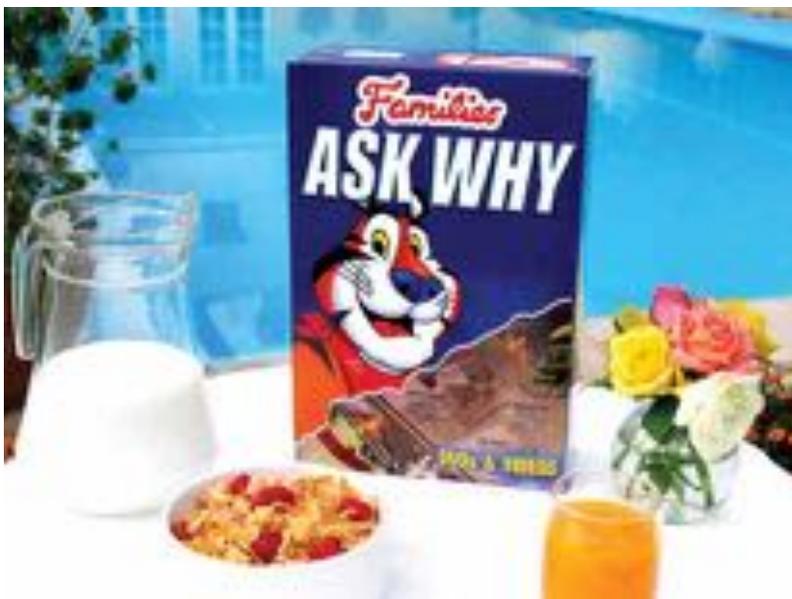
The miniature figures that populate the foreground of my canvases are the purest expression of form without flesh. Their smoothness, which is a silence, becomes their answer to humanity's ultimate dilemma, the conflict between materiality and the soul. And yet, in spite of their corporeal quietness, these characters' soundless voices echo across my paintings, as they contemplate and discuss the canvas they inhabit. They reflect on the scenes that surround them even as they reflect one another in their infinite procession, which extends in every direction beyond the boundaries of the painting. This endless passage shows that contemplation itself, so central to Persian art and thought, has the power, the ability, to transcend the limitations of materiality, time, and space.

My memory of Iran abounds with intoxicating perceptions both visual and intellectual, images of interlacing patterns juxtaposed with age-old philosophical riddles. With their curling lines and their orderly shapes, my paintings draw their harmony and their chaos from the interplay of these pictorial and theoretical layers.





(above) *Under The Bruised Sky*, (Triptych, middle panel), 2009, Acrylic on linen, 162x130 cm
(top right) *Struck*, Triptych (2), 2009, Acrylic on linen 162x130 cm
(bottom right) *Under The Bruised Sky*, (Triptych, right panel), 2009, Acrylic on linen, 162x130 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



(top left) *We Are All Americans*, Operation Supermarket Series, 2006, Ink Jet Print, 75x100 cm
 (top right) *Intifada Laundry Liquid*, Operation Supermarket Series, 2006, Ink Jet Print, 75x100 cm, Courtesy of The Third Line, from the private collection of Mr and Mrs Shehab Gargash
 (bottom left) *Families Ask Why*, Operation Supermarket Series, 2006, Ink Jet Print, 75x100 cm, courtesy of The Third Line, from the private collection of Mr and Mrs Shehab Gargash
 (bottom right & across) *You Are The Fearless Rose That Grows Amidst the Freezing Wind*, Operation Supermarket Series, 2006, Ink Jet Print, 75x100 cm, courtesy of CAM Collection Dubai

opposite page
 (top left) *Hejab Barbie*, Operation Supermarket Series, 2006, Ink Jet Print, 75x100 cm,
 (bottom right) *Tolerating Intolerance*, Operation Supermarket Series, 2006, Ink Jet Print, 75x100 cm, courtesy of CAM Collection Dubai
 All images ©artist and courtesy of The Third Line





Shirin Aliabadi + Farhad Moshiri

Operation Supermarket

Operation Supermarket is a collaboration between Farhad Moshiri & Shirin Aliabadi, which was commissioned by Bidoun magazine and Counter Gallery in 2006. The project was exhibited first at Counter Gallery in March 2006 and later in Antwerp. Operation Supermarket was displayed as a series of posters alongside a small number of supermarket commodities, mixing, in the words of the artists, "poetry with detergent." The emphasis here is on the commodification of mainstream media traits of the Middle East, but also on a wry parody of the mythical hopes still pinned on the commodity itself as a capitalist agent for change. With titles such as "Shoot First Make Friends Later" and "We Are All Americans", Moshiri and Aliabadi create double entendres of trite phrases from popular culture to take jabs at nationalism and contemporary politics.

Text provided by the Third Line





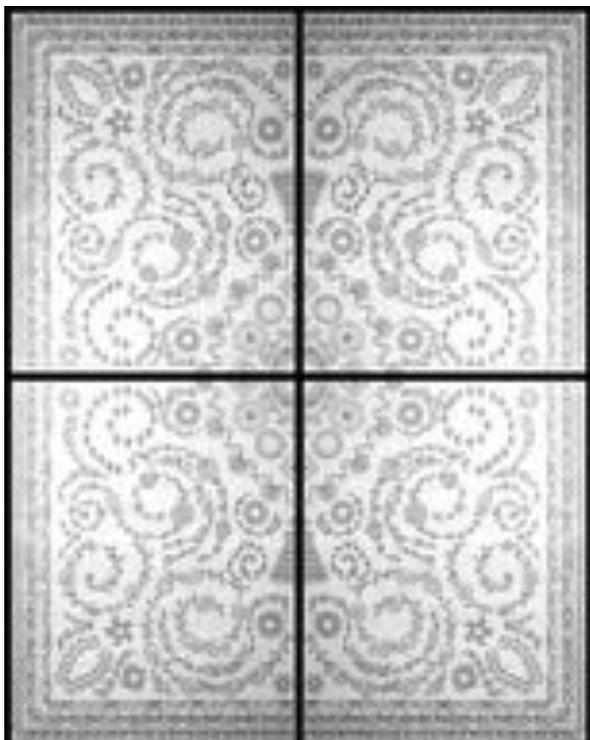


Nazgol Ansarinia

Representing that which is interwoven and concealed in our daily life is the main theme in my work. My projects are inspired by everyday objects, routines, events and experiences and their relationship to the larger social context.

Born and raised in Tehran along with the rest of my generation, I grew up in a unique situation of social and political unrest. This context confronted me with the complexities of meaning from an early age where nothing was as simple as it appeared and layers of meaning complicated the most simple aspects of life. Therefore a desire to reveal the extraordinary about the ordinary has led me to look for ways to expose and to represent the otherwise taken-for-granted. Through my work, I intend to understand the inner workings of systems and structures of modern-day life by examining, taking apart and re-constructing. What results is a revealing of the overlooked aspects of my subjects as well as elements and relations that are available for rearranging and for creating new meanings.

While my practice is informed by my experiences and immediate context, it also incorporates my interest in theory and use of various media. Working with different media such as drawing, print, video and installation, my medium is not predetermined but is defined by the processes of my work.



(above) *Untitled (do not give your opinion)*, 2006, video stills (part of installation)
(top left) *Untitled II*, from the *Patterns Series* (detail), 2008, digital drawings and ink on paper, 175x220 cm, courtesy of Rose Trust
(bottom left) *Untitled II*, from the *Patterns Series*, 2008, digital drawings and ink on paper, 175x220 cm, courtesy of Rose Trust
Above images ©artist

opposite page
Patterns Series, 2008, Digital drawings and ink on paper, 32x43 cm, (detail) ©artist and courtesy of Maheini & Faisal Kazi Collection

next page
Untitled I, from the *Patterns Series* (detail), 2007, Ink and digital drawings on paper, 175x220 cm, ©artist and courtesy of Hammad Nasar & Anita Dawood Collection







Shoja Azari

What mystery, wisdom or perhaps more accurately, diabolic plot, can be at the heart of the predicament of being an artist? Does an artist have any choice but to make art? The process of making art, and in this sense art itself, seem to contain numerous binary contradictions: **It is at the same time exhilarating and devastating, creative and alienating, boundless and narcissistic and private while being devoured by the public** and so forth. One could only hope, perhaps in vain, that the artist can be saved from such affliction!

Be it as it may, ever since I was old enough to make moral judgments and question the injustice of this world and henceforth the existence of God, such seems to have been my predicament! It is with such questioning that the world seemed at once engulfed forever in an impenetrable fog! With this, first came the wonderment of writing poetry, a form of art most innate to the Iranian soul, then the never-ending wealth and enigma of literature and theater, and yes, acting, through which I discovered my God complex, the bottomless pit of self-love.

They say, "Revolution eats its own children," alas, my destiny was to be dismembered by it! Political banishment, followed by exile added to the murkiness of an already opaque nascent identity, yet the opening of a new horizon. Presumably more food for the glutinous monster of art! The new land's offering was first, survival, and then cinema. In the late 1980's, I started making short films. I wrote my first feature script "Story of the Merchant and the Indian Parrot" based on a parable by Rumi, which I shot a short version of. In the following decade, I managed to make three feature films with modest international success.

Meeting Shirin Neshat in 1997 has proved the most fruitful event in my artistic life resulting in more than a decade of collaboration and intense creativity resulting in fifteen film installations and a feature film. Interestingly, this collaboration has resulted in a shift of interests for us. While, Shirin has become increasingly interested in narrative film, I have started experimenting with visual art. A number of "film installations" and more recently "video paintings" have been the fruit of this burgeoning interest.



(top left & across) *Phoenix from Windows Series*, 2006, One channel video projection
(top right) *A Room With A View*, One channel video projection, 8 minutes
(bottom right) *Lovers*, Film still, 2006
(bottom left) *Odyssey*, 2008, HD Video, NA

next page

Windows Animation, photos, 2006, Animation HD Video, NA

All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Tazhinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery







Shoja Azari + Shahram Karimi

"Coffee House" paintings in Iran are commonly known as epic, religious narratives usually focusing on the tragedy of Karbala, which is the martyrdom of Imam Hussein, and his followers. The national stories derive mostly from the 10th century epic masterwork known as *The Shahnameh* by Ferdowsi. These paintings are often used for theatrical purposes, so narrators may illustrate their stories.

Clearly these paintings depict a culture's search for 'faith,' an urge to revive ideas of 'heroes,' 'martyrs,' to get inspiration by the scenes of their bravery. Therefore "Coffee House" paintings functioned with a clear logic of fulfilling and respecting popular beliefs, to allow Muslims to be faced and worship images of their saints and heroes.

This particular video painting takes a classic form of 'Coffee House' painting and juxtaposes it with contemporary clips and images of Muslims around the globe. Here in this visual tapestry we are faced with a revelation; how over several centuries, religious fervor in Islam has remained constant. And we begin to detect how the contemporary images in Islam with which we are inundated everyday, maintain similar visual and metaphorical values in relation to the aesthetic representation that was once applied to the art of 'Coffee House' paintings.

Shirin Neshat



(top) *Spring Silence*, 2008, Projected video on acrylic canvas, 89x50 in,
(bottom) *The Burning Moon*, 2009, Oil on canvas with video projection, 89x50 in

opposite page
Coffee House Painting, Video projection on acrylic canvas, Concept by Shoja
Azari, Painting by Shrahram Karimi, digital imaging by Nariman Hamed
All images ©artists and courtesy of Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



(top) *Untitled* (from: *rosegarden*), 2008, Digital Print on Postcard, 64 panels, 19x23 cm each, (detail)
 (bottom) *Verdicts of Looking*, 2008, 5 Mannequins, 5 single-channel videos, lighting and music

opposite page
National Automobile, 2005, Iran Khodro car retrofitted by the artist, (detail of interior),
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Khastoo Gallery





Mahmoud Bakhshi Moakher

My main inspiration in my projects comes from political and social issues. Most of my projects are direct answers to situations I observe and connections I make with the historical past of my country. **I have often had conflicting feelings about this approach and have always looked with envy at artworks that are disconnected from political issues;** works that are beautiful and important simply from an art historical perspective. But, I was born in Iran, grew up after the Revolution and lived through the Iran-Iraq War. I have found it difficult to create artwork disconnected from my surroundings.

In *My land*, I have chosen to represent eight pieces of a map of a frontier line. Each one refers to a different place where a battle took place. Now, people living around those areas are nostalgic for a time, before the battles, when they think they were living a better life. I am interested in this nostalgic feeling, which, to me, refers to Zarathustra and his complaining that the past was better than the present, 3000 years ago.

In *Air Pollution of Iran*, I address the fact that in between 1983 and 1987, the Iranian government was able to kill between 3000 to 7000 political prisoners. Nobody knows about them; they are buried somewhere without any special icon, nothing. So, I used flags of the Iranian Republic to wrap up the corpses of the forgotten political prisoners and modified pictures of holy places to include them as martyrs. I also framed eight flags of the Islamic republic of Iran that had been dirtied by the pollution of the air in downtown Tehran.

In *Rose Garden*, I have taken pictures of flowers each night for four months. The result is 64 post cards with the name of the flower, date and place of photograph. This is a way to address the fact that Iranians always introduce themselves through the beauty of their heritage and how the Iranian Republic is following this pattern. Each of these flowers represents what the Islamic Republic wants to show, although the reality is very different.

In *Tulips Grown from the Blood of Our Youth*, I refer to the song of the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 that became especially famous after the Islamic Revolution and during the war. Tulips have been used more and more as a symbol of the Revolution. The neon tulips on the tinplate pedestal, look like the monuments you can see everywhere in Iran, except there are buttons on the pedestal that allow the visitor to turn them, change the direction and change the speed.

Finally, *Onion Grinder* is part of the series *Industrial Revolution* and keeps exploring the representations of Allah in everyday life. This time it is a kitchen appliance, an onion grinder, and the silver blade is made in the shape of a tulip.

"Why do Onions make us cry? - It is not the strong odor of the onion that makes us cry, but the gas that the onion releases when we sever this member of the lily family."



(top & across) *Regarding The Horror - The Heirloom Plates Series*, 2009, Wood shelf with gold leaf detail, 8 customized plates, 96in
(left) *Highway Sumo* (from the project *Twilight of the Idols*), 2007, Still, C-print
(right & across) *Regarding The Horror - The Heirloom Plates Series*, 2009 (detail)
All images ©artists



caraballo-farman

caraballo-farman is a team of two artists composed of Leonor Caraballo and Abou Farman. We were born continents away from each other but crossed paths in a city where people born far away from each other come to meet. On a cloudy day, we met in a sunny picture. It was too still in there for two restless people. We added time to the timeless and since 2000 have been working in video as well as photography and installation.

Our work in general explores the rituals of modernity as a medium through which people and the environment are transformed, creating unusual spaces – **spaces of heightened power, determination and euphoria, which are simultaneously spaces of the absurd, the tragic, the threatening.** Inevitably, we end up traveling down the seam that both joins and separates the individual and the group, unit and structure, resistance and power.

This is the first time we appear in a show with a regional identity. It is confusing because we have grown accustomed to the accidental crossbreeding of our identities: often people call us Abou Caraballo and Leonor Farman, the Iranian becomes the Argentine and the Argentine Iranian, and the male female and the female male and it's not so bad that way.



Saghar Daeeri

Here is Tehran. Tehran , the red chimney , the city in which asphyxia is expressed by exaggerated behavior.

My works are all about showing Tehran's girls' connection & communication with each other through fashion, the way they dress, choose their clothes and make up and their exaggerated behavior in Iran, the Islamic country.

I'm talking about "paradox" in Iran, about the subtle manifestations of the "underground" in public spaces. In my paintings, girls exhibit their feelings in a manner that comes across as modern and up to date with the latest trends, in a way that subdues the ever present Islamic dress code. Of course, I also refer to the "lesbian girls of Tehran" that are growing up in Iran!

My aim is to show that girls are girls anywhere, In Iran and anywhere else in the world.

Saghar Daeeri's work captures a mood that is quite familiar but at the same time completely strange and perhaps, that is why they invoke a certain sense of anxiety in the viewer. Yet, that strange familiarity is not the sole element creating the anxiety in her paintings. There are characters, who despite their colorful attire and feminine faces, contribute to that sense of anxiety. They are, at the same time, the stage actors, the directors and the audience of what is being played and directed: it is as though neither do they need anyone else, nor does a world exist beyond what they have created for themselves. The presence of the painter as an element apart from that atmosphere and what goes on in it, emphasizes the intimacy of that atmosphere. Despite their similar look, their intertwined bodies and their close interaction, Saghar Daeeri's subjects seem to have no connection with one another. It is as though they use each other to somehow compensate the lack of balance in their existence; a lack of balance that the painter skillfully captures with long and continuous streaks of color and the positioning of the bodies and objects.

Morad Saghafi

(top left) *Shopping Malls of Tehran*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x150 cm
(top right) *Shopping Malls of Tehran*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x150 cm
(bottom left) *Shopping Malls of Tehran*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x150 cm
(bottom right) *Shopping Malls of Tehran*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x150 cm

opposite page
Shopping Malls of Tehran, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x150cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery





Alireza Dayani

I regard the world around me in a completely unrealistic manner. In my opinion everything and everyone conceals themselves beneath a reality, which exists falsely and true reality appears only when I approach the imagination.

I regard the world around me through looking at people from within and at their relationships and visions of my own and others' spirit. And, in this manner, I search for the pure essence of every subject so that perhaps I will be able to combine it with imagination and depict the basic and primary principles of that imagination and of individuals' thoughts of a world full of associations, be they beautiful or ugly.

Whenever imagination and fantasy are combined in painting with realism and reality, it is a starting point for a never-ending realm which can depict even the most unfounded and irregular phenomena in a completely fluid and influential manner.

It is certain that Iran and the current situation of my society has, to a great degree, had a profound effect on my interpretations of my surroundings to the point that I can engage through my style in a critique of the standards and laws of the thoughts and beliefs of a unique group which influences the general public. I hope that by continuing on this path and creating my own works I can take steps in purifying the current situation and changing the way people see to a more open point of view.



(across top) *Untitled*, 2007, Ink on paper, 150x1,000 cm
(bottom left) *Untitled*, 2009, Ink on cardboard, 150x120 cm
Above images courtesy of Mah Art Gallery
(bottom right) *Madman*, 2008, Ink on cardboard, 150x200 cm,
courtesy of Eisler Collection London

opposite page
Untitled, 2007, Ink on paper, 100x240 cm,
courtesy of Mah Art Gallery
All images ©artist



A Collector's Perspective

Maryam Homayoun-Eisler
Art Collector

For how long have you been involved in the promotion of contemporary Iranian art and what drew you to it in the first place?

I have always had a keen interest in the art and culture of my country. However, I turned my attention seriously to collecting contemporary Iranian art in 2006. On a personal level, as someone who has lived most of her life divorced from her homeland, liaising with and supporting Iranian artists has allowed me to reconnect culturally with my own roots, my homeland and its heritage.

The vibrant and often passionate nature of Iranian contemporary art is nostalgic, drawing me to its center and to the memories of childhood. Parallel to this attraction to a distant past is my intellectual inquiry into the "whys" and "wherefores" of socio-political challenges facing fellow compatriots, as singularly expressed through their artwork.

Lastly but most importantly, I derive immense pleasure in discovering young talent from inside Iran and making sure that these findings are shared on a global artistic platform. Is it not a shame to keep the immense creative talent that thrives in Iran confined behind borders? I feel it is a calling - however small a role it may be - to introduce the art world to the immense richness of the Iranian creative genius; to share the passions and aspirations of Iranian artists with like-minded people around the world - as such, overcoming negative preconceptions and self-defeating propaganda. This is an opportunity, a timely reminder to the world at large that Iran is no cultural backwater, even when compared to the best of the international art oeuvres.

How does contemporary Iranian art differ from other Middle Eastern art?

Art, whether from the greater Middle Eastern region or Iran, offers an accurate expression and stylistic representation of the society within which artists live in - a snapshot of life as it is, representative of the state of mind of the people and the psychology of survival in difficult political times.

Iranian art does exactly that. In the case of artists living in Iran, however, the challenge of day to day living is particularly articulated within the artwork's message. The relationship between past and present, the paradoxical experience of women in the public and private arena, the dichotomy of government-supported ideology and themes, as opposed to full individual freedom of expression - these are some of the examples of challenges Iranian society faces. All of this is shown to the viewer through the eye and brushstrokes of the artist.

What is interesting, however, is that despite government attempts at censorship of free thought and visual expression, the present generation of Iranian artists is not afraid to experiment, often pushing against the envelope of social, cultural, political and religious boundaries- frequently, at great personal risk.

Can you describe the reactions that people usually have when they are exposed to the works of Iranian artists you collect?

The most common reaction is one of disbelief with regard to the quality of the works and to their thematic content and stylistic approach. Many viewers comment and say: "Wow, this looks like art from any other part of the world! I wasn't expecting this!" And my answer to them usually is to say: "Why wouldn't it? Why shouldn't it?"

Why is there a need to "ghettoize" art either geographically or philosophically? Art should be about vision, not division. It should go beyond religion, territorial borders and local mindsets or philosophies. Many Iranian artists have managed to achieve this objective, in seeking inspiration from their own origins and roots, whilst still remaining tuned into globalised concepts and art movements.

How do you explain the recent growing interest by the international art market in contemporary Middle Eastern art and contemporary Iranian art in particular?

Long considered a bastion of culture and creativity in the region, Iran has recently experienced a remarkable artistic revival in the midst of the most challenging of circumstances. Iranian artists, whether based inside or outside of Iran, are creating exciting works of art that reflect their country's social, political and cultural environment, whilst incorporating their own view points and those of their adopted homelands.

An array of socio-political factors have contributed to this rising interest. Most important among the catalysts firing this tendency is the intense nature of the geopolitical climate in the region, coupled with other top line newsworthy events such as the thirtieth anniversary of the Iranian Revolution and the election of a new US administration, which shows signs of attempting a new era of potential accord with the Iranian regime.

It still irritates me to read or hear about the recent "discovery" of Iranian art. We are talking about a nation with a 2500-year rich history, heritage and culture. Modern art, more specifically, was buoyant in the Iran of the 1960s and the 70s. It has taken recent political events to bring the focus back on the topic.

Art is an eternal symbol of hope in the face of overwhelming obstacles. Art is and should act as the vanguard of change. Perhaps the current generation of Iranian artists can contribute to this change.

Are there risks of underlying Neo-Orientalist attitudes in the works that usually make it into acclaimed "Western" circles?

Yes and no. Until recently, the subtext of most art viewed in the West as representative of Middle Eastern art has had a themed reference to the social origins of the art. A tired manifestation of this type of oeuvre can be seen for example, via the symbolic perception of the "veil", often ideologically coupled with repression: seen as a teasing object of exoticism and hidden desire in Western Orientalism, or more recently, symbolizing Muslim aggression towards the West.

On the other hand, there are many examples of art from the region acclaimed in Western circles, which are entirely in contradistinction- almost parodying Western art to escape "Orientalist" clichés or traps. Either way, we are faced with the danger of extremism, stifling the creative process, whether through cliché Western interpretations, or blind bigotry from fundamentalist Islam.

In his book, "Orientalism", Edward Said says that Orientalism creates a divide between the East and the West. "My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient...As a cultural apparatus, Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment and will-to-truth." I believe that Neo-Orientalism continues to shape actual knowledge of the "Orient" into a collection of fragments about the "East" in order to tame it. This is precisely where the risk lies, and this is why we need to move away from localization of art, beyond territorial and ideological boundaries.

How is this reflecting on the formal and thematic qualities of the works that are coming out from the younger generation of artists from Iran?

Contemporary Iranian art has, refreshingly, attempted to move as far away from Orientalism and Neo-Orientalism as possible. Whether living within the country or outside, Iranian artists pay minute attention to both global and local issues, whilst riding on dichotomous themes set against modernism as well as against tradition. The essence of the art largely focuses on issues of identity and spirituality, within the context of individuality.

As for form and technique, it is most varied, spanning all artistic mediums. What is interesting is that often there are references to traditional techniques, such as calligraphy. However, in the case of contemporary Iranian artists, calligraphy often takes an abstract form of self-expression, void of any actual verbal meaning.

What is the role that contemporary Iranian art can play in bridging the cultural and political divide between the East and the West?

Recent calls for cultural dialogue between Iran and the West seem to position art and culture as one means to address topics which politics has not been able to sort out in the thirty years since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Thus, it has always been that culture, as opposed to politics and war, has had a way of changing preconceptions about our Nations. Throughout history, the universal language of art has impacted across cultural divides, often leading to the amelioration of misconceptions and distrust. It is my hope that Iranian contemporary art will be no exception to this rule, and that its presence and its essence can help overcome East /West prejudices and barriers, opening minds on both sides to acceptance, tolerance and cultural reciprocity. It is my hope that creativity will overcome social and political barriers to change.



ABOUT MARYAM HOMAYOUN-EISLER

Maryam Homayoun-Eisler was born in Tehran, Iran in 1968. Leaving her homeland in 1978 along with her family, Maryam settled in Europe, studying in France and then at Wellesley College in the United States, where she received a BA in Political Science in 1989. After obtaining an MBA from Columbia University in New York in 1993, she embarked on an international career in investment banking at Credit Suisse First Boston, followed by a move to marketing at L'Oréal, and then at Estée Lauder.

Married with two small children, Maryam finally turned her attention to a lifelong passion - Art. In 2003, she began collecting contemporary art seriously. Her particular areas of artistic interest and expertise reside in the fields of Modern British Art, Chinese Contemporary Art and Contemporary Iranian Art.

Maryam is both a collector, as well as a patron of the arts, with close affiliations with the British Museum and Tate Modern where she sits on their Asia Pacific and Middle Eastern acquisition committees. She is also closely linked with London's Whitechapel Gallery, where she has contributed significantly to their major expansion program. She has recently linked up with the Chelsea Art Museum in New York, where she is assisting with the realization of the Summer 2009 exhibition *Iran Inside Out* - a first in the United States.

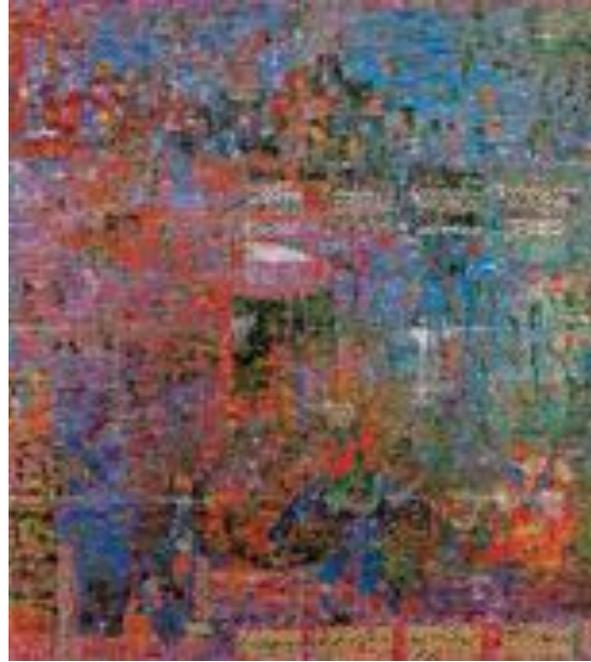
Maryam's curatorial expertise and love of Iranian contemporary art were effectively tested in her contributions to the making of *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art*, published in April 2009 by Thames and Hudson.

Maryam is currently engaged in the creation of *Unleashed: Turkish Contemporary Art*, due for publication in September 2010. She lives with her husband and two children in London.

(top left) *Yellow Hunting*, 2009, Mixed media on canvas, 200x180 cm
(below) *Shirin and Farhad*, 2008, mixed media on canvas, 79x71 in.

Courtesy of Eisler Collection London

(right & across) *Identity Crisis*, 2009, Mixed media on canvas, 12x12 in. (detail)
(bottom & across) *Identity Crisis*, 2009, Mixed media on canvas, (Sixty canvases) 12x12 in
All images ©artist





Reza Derakshani

you live your life pointed toward beauty, always.
small, a child growing up in a great black tent on the top of the mountain.
a thousand pin pricks of moonlight shining through holes in the tent.
a constellation of torn light.

you watch the red mountain, you are six years old. you wonder,
is god a man or a woman? you want to create a beauty that mountainous.
this life, these hours in afternoon light, the red mountain,
Damavand, snow-covered, like a clown in a white hat. roaming inside,
these hills, filled with resistance and beauty.

you dream, and you are broken. you rise and dream again. your father
is a Persian cowboy, this love of horses informs your day.
days spent walking the mountains, fields of blue and yellow wildflowers.

what can you do that will ever retell this story? how do you create a
beauty like this?

like talking with fairies, the echo of your high pitched child voice.
if you are a child, you sing like a bird, sing like a bird, a bird, a bird.
test the throat, try for a sound like flight, like laughter.

the big white dog is gone for good. shot. your father said it must be done.
tears in his eyes. the crackling of burning wood.
dogs bark. the horse is ready. your father will leave and never come back.

you are twelve. the light glints. there is a national art competition and
you are there.

there is nothing like this excitement.

she is there, in her white hat, like a painting by Monet. there in the green field of heaven.

you begin to win prizes. you fall asleep and miss award ceremonies.

you keep winning and still she floats there. you read van gogh's letters. in the afternoon light.
you shave your head and pack your easel, paint endlessly under the hot desert sun.

sneaking into every room in college dorm, painting the sleeping as if they were dead.

candle and drawing pad in hand. nineteen years old, first solo show.

drawings of sleeping people, everyone asleep. the light in them sleeping.

portraits of nightmares, waking to darkness, to turmoil. a war zone.

you want to paint flowers. the night is pregnant. you are running in circles.

you have to leave.

Rome in 1984 is gorgeous. history so potent it drains your creativity.

Los Angeles, the city of angels. light and beauty, don't know. New York is the place

of struggle, challenge, happenings. how do you survive?

where will the paint find its home?

in a freezing loft space in Patterson, New Jersey, stones shatter the window.

you are painting again. you come from somewhere else. nothing is certain.

you begin to play your music. the music takes over. poetry and music.

music and poetry. St John's cathedral, Montreux jazz festival, npr...

you need to paint. you miss the garden studio in Tehran.

birds don't fly high anymore. the attic is only four feet tall. you paint only

small pieces, but many.

in the three-story mansion, you begin to paint bones. you are alone again.

you lose family, find family, lose something again. your sons visit you.

you need to paint. you remember Persian miniatures, look again, something strong

and primitive about color, about identity begins to make sense. you have to leave.

Italy is beautiful, but something is missing. it's you; you are missing someone.

time flies like a red bird. you've found it again. warmth. love. chaos, inspiration. painting.

you need to paint.

back in the big apple. The Chelsea Art Museum, 2009.

the soul is dancing, forever.





Kamran Diba

Kamran Diba started his career in the U.S.A. in the 1960s. He participated in group exhibitions such as the Corcoran Gallery annuals in Washington D.C. and at Gallery Réalités, (Washington D.C.) where he also had a solo exhibition of his abstract paintings in 1963.

Although he painted in the States and adopted Abstract Expressionism, Iranian culture and civilization gradually influenced his work. The result was a series of paintings with the composition of Persian illuminated manuscripts and calligraphy. Before returning to Iran, he participated in the Tehran Biennial and several international biennials as well. His first show in Iran was an installation and audio visual work called Prodigal Waterman in 1966 at the Sayhoun Gallery.

Diba, who is also an architect, founded, designed, and directed the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in the 1970s. As a result, the museum boasts one of the richest collections of modern and contemporary art in the world.

Karim Emami, in the encyclopedia Iranica, refers to him as an art catalyst in the Iranian society of the 1970s. The Zand gallery (Tehran) represented Diba in the seventies. In addition to his paintings, he created in 1974 a performance or happening involving the public at the opening night.

After the Islamic Revolution, Diba painted continuously throughout the eighties and nineties; however, he chose not to exhibit his works publicly.

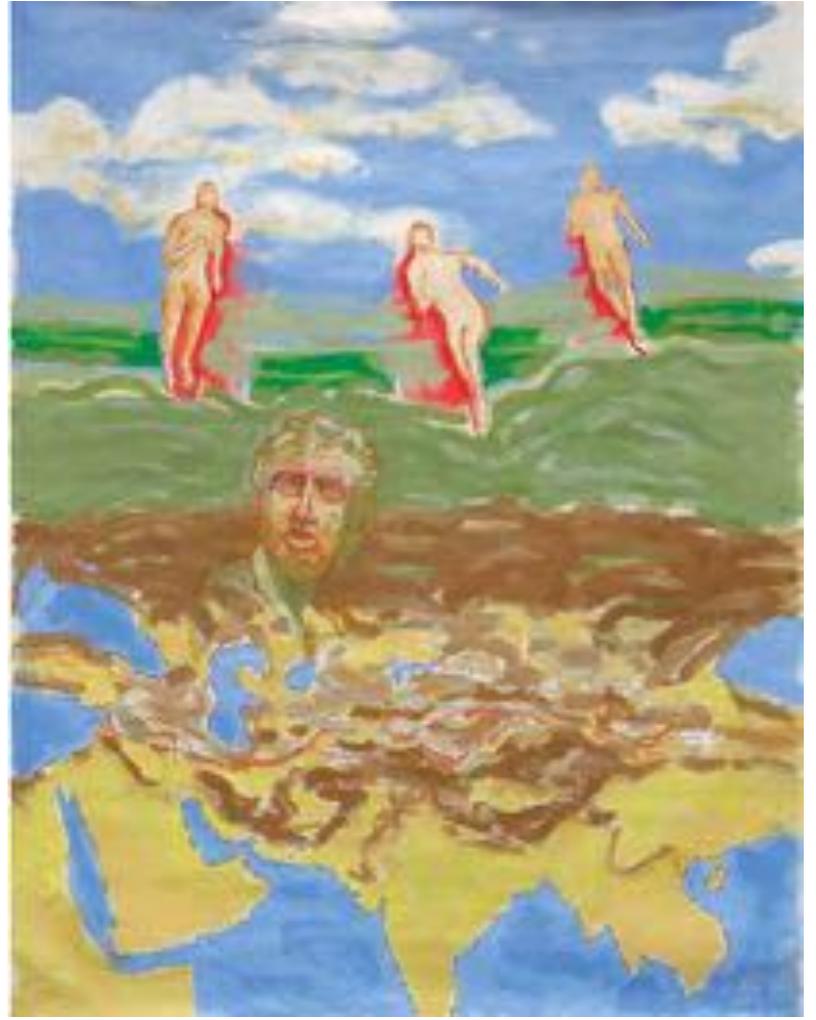
Diba's recent works relate to the collective memory of Iranians. The titles and images are somehow familiar to recent generations of the Iranian people. He has also created a series of photographic works depicting three decades of war and destruction in the Middle East.

In the past half century the Middle East has experienced an unprecedented level of violence: Lebanese civil war, the constant Arab- Israeli conflict, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq war, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the US-Iraq war-1, The US-Afghan war, the US-Iraq War-2 and continuous ongoing mini-wars and violence in this region.

The "Arrival series" is an attempt to **capture this reality in a humorous and childlike fashion**. The edited objects are borrowed from Bita Fayyazi, an artist friend of Kamran Diba, "Play Ground" courtesy of Espace Louis Vuitton.

Diba presently lives in Europe. His recent works have been exhibited in Tehran, in Dubai at the Ave Gallery and XVA Gallery, and at several European and American venues.

Text provided by Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



(top left) *Grounded*, from the Arrival series, 2008 C print, ed. of 5, 138x103 cm
(top right) *Run*, from the Silk Road series, 2008, Oil on Canvas 182x135cm
Above images ©artist and courtesy Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery
(bottom left) *Taxi II*, from the taxi series, 2008, C-print, 138x103cm, ©artist and
courtesy CAM Collection Dubai



(top) *Zire gonbade kabood* (Under the Indigo Dome II), 2009, Acrylic and ink on book pages mounted on canvas, triptych painting, 53.25x120.75 in
 (bottom & across) *The Invisible Fold*, 2002, Ink and watercolor on book pages, 17.5x54.75 in, Collection Driek & Michael Zirinsky

opposite page
Elemental, 2004, Installation, dimensions variable

next page
Ascension, 2007, Acrylic and ink on book pages mounted on canvas, 51.5x81in,
 Collection Driek & Michael Zirinsky
 All images ©artist and courtesy of The Third Line and Gallery Paule Anglim



Ala Ebtekar

My works are visual narratives that are a simultaneous deconstruction and reconstruction of time and space - a visual glimpse of a crossroad where present day events meet history and mythology, creating a "synthetic epic" with many possible interpretations and outcomes.

In *Elemental*, I am suggesting a merging of two cultural traditions - Iranian coffee house culture and hip-hop culture. Recognizing that both cultures provide a space for often marginalized groups to gather, share history, news and information, I sought to blend the two. I was deeply inspired by the paintings in Tehran coffeehouses, many of which are populist retellings of Persian legends, as well as the *Nazhali* (traditional storyteller) narrating the paintings with poetry recitations, and the cult of the traditional strongmen from the adjacent *Zurkhaneh* (gymnasiums). I saw in these parallels to the four pillars of hip hop: graffiti, MCs, DJs and break-dance. In *Elemental*, East does not just meet West, the cultures and generations are in conversation with one another, fusing styles, adapting mythology, and creating a hybridized narrative of time, space, and history.

Ascension stems out from an artistic practice that I have been engaged in for a while now. In the last few years, I have drawn and painted on antique sheets of Farsi and Arabic prayer text. My illustrations both illuminate and provide ironic contrast with the texts' purpose and meaning. For example, in "The Invisible Fold" two armies face off at the fold of a book, as though fighting over two interpretations of the same text.

A text instructs the reader in prayer: a bitter laughter and a comforting religion, with so many names throughout centuries, where the heavenly breeze is blown from fires in hell, and where tragic deaths are called martyrdom and wars become children bedtime stories.









(top) *72 virgins*, 2009, 2 video channel and photographic series project
(bottom left) *Islamic Star*, 2005, HD video, color sound 5.30 minutes.
(bottom right) *Mladen*, 2005, HD video, color sound 9.05 minutes.
Above images ©artist and courtesy of KunstBüroBerlin

next page
Islamic Carding, 2007, 605 prostitutes' cards, permanent marker on Ad,
each card 1.6x1.0 cm, (detail) ©artist



Shahram Entekhabi

As an Iranian-born artist who left to study in Europe, I am a product of Persian-Islamic culture enriched with a deep insight of European culture and its everyday life. As I travel the world and witness the similarities and differences between various cultures, I observe my surroundings without consuming them. People and their cultures intrigue me and in my study of them, of us and how we are, I attempt to also understand myself. Hence, I don't separate myself from my work.

My main interest is to reveal our sense of insecurity when faced with someone unfamiliar to us. My work therefore engages with our prejudices and suspicion of 'the Other', of our fear and delusions. I explore this by visualizing our fear and paranoia and the stereotypes we construct of 'the Other' because of color, religion or ethnicity; as well as how we try to separate 'them' from 'us' and in that process, how we participate in **the ghettoization of the minority through perception, politics, propaganda and control.**

I build my work via live art and performative elements, using videos, architecture, sculptures, drawings and photographs.

Throughout my journey and stays around the world, I've come to realize how our cultural belonging is to a large extent shaped by our childhood. For it is during our childhood that we are able to discover, understand and experiment in what is usually a secure and protected environment. At least for me, that was the case. My surroundings were deeply imbued with a strong sense of spirituality and this was where my impressions of self, of others and how I engaged with the world were formed.

My experiences continued even when I left for Europe, but my engagement with my surroundings shifted in that I had to adapt my behavior, which became more calculated and was often times, an after-thought. I had to think about everything. I would say I have always observed the West with my Eastern eyes.

I have always tried to strengthen my position as a medium between East and West. As such, I enjoy traveling across borders and discovering the space shared by these two cultures - a fascinating and exciting environment in which we are able to locate elements that may be different (and that's okay) as well as elements that are common and can be shared and celebrated. I endeavor to find a channel for people to communicate, to engage in a dialogue and not a monologue.

Living in migration for many years and having an assortment of so-called identities imposed on me, e.g. 'foreigner', 'Persian', 'Muslim', etc. has made me realize how one's personal identity is really a hybrid and not monolithic at all. We are who we are, made up of and influenced by a variety of inter-playing elements.

My consciousness about being an artist has definitely given me the opportunity to discover experiences of being in contrasting environments and understanding how this impacts one's identity. Fascinatingly enough, it has allowed me to come 'home'...Through reflection and introspection, I've come to appreciate how the spiritual, Muslim and Oriental aspects of my upbringing are very much a part of who I am as an individual.

Indeed, I see the artist as a hybrid, a very elastic sort of identity, of having access to what 'was' and 'is'. I also believe in the necessity of cultures opening up to each other and to mutually contributing towards the thought and production of contemporary art.

I am fascinated by notions of 'Iranian/Persian culture' - of its location beyond borders of time and geography. Perhaps this is due to my upbringing- a significant period of my life was spent in Iran and it was a happy one. Further, as one who is in a constant state of migration, I have always sought for a 'home' away from 'home'. It is amusing to note that the tendency to cast individuals within a single category is no different from how societies, cultures and even countries are perceived. Certainly Iran's position as a cultural and geographical corridor between the East and West has been overlooked.

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Shirin Fakhim

Shirin Fakhim's work *Tehran Prostitutes* uses absurd and sympathetic humor to address issues surrounding the Persian working-girl circuit. In 2002 it was estimated that there were 100,000 prostitutes working in Tehran, despite Iran's international reputation as a moralistic country with especially high standards placed on women. Many of these women are driven to prostitution because of abusive domestic situations and the poverty incurred from the massive loss of men during the war. In response to Iran's strict religious laws, some even consider the profession as an act of civil protest.

Fakhim's sculptures play on the duplicitous perceptions of streetwalkers, highlighting the hypocrisy surrounding the sex industry. Made from found materials, her assemblages are grotesque configurations, exaggerating rough-trade stereotypes of wig-wearing, melon-chested slappers contortedly stuffed into ill-fitting lingerie (in reality Tehran vice-girls wear hijabs and are identifiable through more covert and subtle signals). Fakhim farcically combines westernized hooker fashion with the codes of Islamic demur, torsos and heads made from cooking implements, adorned with make-shift veils and chastity belts.

Using ordinary objects and items of clothing, Fakhim exaggerates the less than flattering associations of floozy hygiene, her readymade materials driving home the punch lines of rude jokes. Blond wigs shoved down pants make for Sasquatch bikini lines, wayward bits of rope reveal pre-op transsexuals, and a carefully placed abacus reads more like a send up than evidence of financial acumen. Fakhim ironically stages this menagerie as a source of ridicule, provocatively placing items such as alms baskets and air fresheners to illustrate public scorn and social stigma.

Fakhim's ladies of the night approach the naked body as a source of taboo. The discomfort of looking at them is displaced through puerile, intolerant, and scapegoat humor, revealing more about public attitudes and ignorance than about prostitutes themselves. **Issues such as female genital mutilation, transgender orientation, homosexuality and cross dressing** are all awkwardly broached through her vulgar approximations of stitched up crotches and mis-matched private bits, confusing the brutal, illicit, forbidden and desirous.

Fakhim's life sized sculptures, *Tehran Prostitutes*, are strangely totemic, connoting a certain black-market power and ritual in their reference to the early 20th century fashion of 'primitivism'. With hour-glass figures formed from portable stoves and adorned with cheap market-stall wares, Fakhim's assemblages point to a commodification of necessity, their make-shift charm belied by associations to poverty, domestic violence, economic migration and human trafficking.

Approaching sculpture as an intrinsically tactile activity, Fakhim chooses her materials with a playful sensitivity. Crafted from the female stuff of fabric, clothing, and kitchen apparatus, her sculptures temper benign domesticity with a bawdy coarseness, creating a vaudevillian humor from over-stretched stockings, sickly green terrine masks, and exaggeratedly padded brassieres. Hardy practical tools such as stoves and pots create a physical contrast to the fussy adornments of lace and garters, creating an image of sexual prowess that's conspicuously ill-fitting, painful, and tragic.

Text provided by Ministry of Nomads



Tehran Prostitutes, 2008, Sculpture Series, Mixed media sculpture
All images ©artist and courtesy of Ministry of Nomads



Mehdi Farhadian

Backed by 19th century European academic techniques and innovatively fresh subject matter rendered in a pure and shining palette, Farhadian's works are the materialization of personal visual research and methods. His rich and pure colors laid down in multiple layers fill the expanse of his larger works and immediately involve his viewers, presenting them with the tenderness of the colors and reminding them of deeply rooted memories: memories which are either reminiscent of poetic hope or past accidents recalling the end of a nightmare and the beginning of a bright and beautiful dawn.

In his paintings Farhadian expresses and exposes his personal concerns, which are not limited to a specific geographical location. Through his works he explains the current sorrows and hopes of humankind in a poetic atmosphere. In every layer of his works the symbolic sociopolitical pains are visible, yet his canvases do not turn into social propaganda or politicized objects.

His technique and detailed execution, though clearly derived from the Persian painting heritage, are filled with his personal style and despite his young age, Farhadian uses his knowledge of Iranian and world art to create works brimming with intelligence and courage.

Text provided by Mah Art Gallery

In Painting

Strolling through painting, passing its alleys and standing in its squares, seeing its cities and experiencing the memories which can only materialize in liberty, stopping an image in the moment it is or isn't and ultimately critiquing my own historical memory and that of my society, are my purpose for using colors. **Without issuing a statement or offering slogans**, which will provoke discrepancies in the viewers' freedom:

"I have never been between the moon and the earth to then choose in which circles to move alone but in my mind I imagine a fiery stone which escapes from a black hole"



(top) *Azadi Stadium*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 150x200 cm,
courtesy of Eisler Collection London
(bottom left) *13th Day Out*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 150x190 cm,
courtesy of Mah Art Gallery
(bottom right) *Mehrabad Airport*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 180x130 cm,
courtesy of Mah Art Gallery

opposite page
Twins, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 190x150cm,
courtesy of Eisler Collection London
All images ©artist





Fire Implant, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 150x200 cm.
©artist and courtesy of Mah Art Gallery

Q
&
A

A Foundation's Perspective

Maria Vega

Executive Director, Ministry of Nomads, London

For how long have you been involved in the promotion of contemporary Iranian art and what drew you to it in the first place?

I have been involved for the last 18 months actively. I went to Iran with a desire to learn more about its culture and to explore the diversity of the creative industries in a country where the main market wasn't the focus. I have close Iranian friends and the history of the country has always highly interested me.

How Does Contemporary Iranian Art Differ from other Middle Eastern Art?

Contemporary Iranian Art is really diverse and there are some artists whose work differs from any other Middle Eastern Art. In some cases, as in the photographs of Ramin Haerizadadeh, or the sculptures of Shirin Fakhim, art became a medium to express certain social limitations within their particular society.

Art is a way of expressing and stimulating emotions. In countries where the freedom has been limited, the art can become more interesting - more suggestive instead of purely representative.

Can you describe the reactions that people usually have when they are exposed to the works of Iranian Artists you collect?

It really depends on who is looking at it, and then naturally which particular piece they are looking at. Generally, people definitely find Iranian Art interesting since we still don't have much interaction or information about the country. I have also seen some reactions of surprise since people may have thought that there existed artistic constraints that would limit some subject matters i.e. the sculptures of Shirin Fakhim's Tehran prostitutes.

Would you say that their reactions differ when they are looking at works by an artist who comes from the same cultural background that they come from?

The reactions depend of their personal interpretations that are naturally influenced by one's respective cultural experiences. The Western world has been exposed to a big political mediatization of information about Iran and other Middle Eastern countries but it has been all from the Western perspective. This exposure influences the way that we perceive Middle Eastern countries and generally affects or shapes one's point of view. That is why it is so amazing that through Iranian art we are seeing another perspective, another side to the information that we receive through Western media.

How do you explain the recent growing interest by the international art market in contemporary Middle Eastern art and contemporary Iranian art in particular?

There is a high stream of energy focusing on the Middle East over the last few years, in an economic, architectural and cultural sense. This may be the result of the increasing internal efforts of most of the countries in the Middle East to have greater participation in the global political agenda.

The Western world seems to be waking up to the importance of recognizing and celebrating the many rich cultures in the world, even where political differences may lie.

Internet and globalization has opened our eyes to other parts of the world, and in turn, has lead to a greater understanding of other cultures. The terrible terrorist situations that have happened recently and the instability of faith are creating high levels of interest and encouraging people to examine places where there is conflict or where there is something to learn.

The whole Iranian community that had to leave their country after The Revolution is also regenerating their cultures in places like London, Paris and New York. The power and the sophistication of their culture can be found in many projects as a way of rescuing their land.

The anxiety and desires to have their culture close, has created the passion for Iranian Art and specially more than in any other country.

The Art Market can sustain itself. There are many collectors in Tehran who are investing a lot of money into property and art. Since they can't take the money outside the country they are investing in their own land this creates an inflation of the prices of property and art.

Are there risks of underlying Neo-Orientalist attitude in the works that usually make it into acclaimed "Western" circles?

Definitely, the "Western" circles had been exposed to old fashioned and prejudiced Western interpretations of Eastern cultures and peoples. These interpretations persist in a negative form. Many see Islam limited to the Middle East oppressing women and directed by radicals and extremists.

What is the role that contemporary Iranian art can play in bridging the cultural and political divide between the East and the West?

As briefly discussed in question 4, art is a fantastic vehicle to increasing our exposure to other cultures - it's often the most engaging and suggestive medium - it has an interactive quality that stimulates one's natural curiosity, and especially so with the Iranian culture that is still considered mysterious by westerners. The mystery is definitely part of the draw and allure to this art.



ABOUT MINISTRY OF NOMADS

Ministry of Nomads is a product of a great deal of work, collaboration, discussion and debate. The Ministry of Nomads was born in the London Studio, in the MON foundation's downtown Havana HQ "La Mina," in the satellite offices of downtown Tehran, many stops inbetween. As a result, MON has begun to spin the architectural web for a true nomadic dialogue.

Ministry of Nomads roams the earth looking for the most culturally active places on the planet. It then engages those scenes giving them exposure through MINISTRYOFNOMADS.COM and the nomadic events and gives back education and resources to young artists through the MON Foundation. MON is a globally accessible platform through an Internet portal that acts as a model for a sustainable system that subverts current art world mechanisms. The portal is intended to be used as a commercial, educational and philanthropic platform. The MON Gallery sells art from the regions that the MON Art Foundation is supporting. The funds received from the sale of artwork go to providing education and resources to young artists that are promising yet financially and / or educationally restricted. A percentage of the profit also goes to running Ministry of Nomads and to the sponsorship of Nomadic events.





Golnaz Fathi

I was born and grew up in Iran (Tehran), a country of contradictions that is in many ways still a mystery to me. Every city has its own history and culture, which makes it all the more interesting to know how much there is STILL to be seen. I am classically trained as a calligrapher, which is the kind of a work that needs constant practice for mastery of skills and techniques. In Iranian culture, since ancient times writing has always been considered of divine origin. To quote A.Bejea, in pope, A.U. (ED) 1938, "the brush strokes of the supreme calligraphers are divine, and divine in the specific sense that they penetrate the highest being." Throughout the years I have come to understand that an appreciation of the value of calligraphy is dependent on reading and understanding the written context, however this was not my ideal and so I changed the direction, a decision that changed everything in my life. In turning to abstractions, I started to break the rules, all the strict guidelines that I had learned, however remain thankful for all those years of studying traditional calligraphy. I learned all the structures of the alphabets by practicing 8 hours a day. This rhythm is inscribed in my mind forever and that is the main reason that I am able to treat the letters the way that I do. This is how I derive meaning from them and transform them into form and composition. Nothing is written.

The root of the recent works comes from SIAH MASHGH: repetition until blackened, a practice intended to train the hand and educate the eye. Here script becomes so abstract and the compositions borrow from the minimal tendency. Like a journey of sorts, I take the words up and down, moving to different places that end nowhere. I only know the origin comes from my meditations, perhaps sometimes it ends in stillness, a stillness which talks.



(top left) *Untitled*, 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 156x124 cm, ©artist and courtesy of Eisler Collection London
 (bottom left) *Untitled* (triptych), 2008, acrylic on canvas, 70x70 cm each, ©artist and courtesy of The Third Line Gallery
 (top right) *Diptych*, 2008, each 180x45 cm, ©artist and courtesy of The Third Line Gallery

opposite page
Untitled, 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 120x120cm, ©artist and courtesy of Eisler Collection London



Bitra Fayyazi

There Goes The Neighbourhood

Any project of Bitra Fayyazi starts with her capacity to share and understand another's 'state of mind' or emotion. Most of the time, it is only at the moment when her empathy turns into compassion that she feels mature enough to start shaping her subject. What Fayyazi has termed 'There Goes The Neighborhood' is a collection of disparate figures, at once typical, sincere and ironic. She captures the odd diversity of life that proliferates on the streets of her native Tehran and infuses each character with this particular detail that reveals the true self. Through and beneath the disguise of every figure, Fayyazi tackles **the fundamental themes of society, popular culture and religion.**

In a country as socially restrictive as Iran, where people's lives are ruled by an endless barrage of 'bans', the importance of demonstrating self-assertion, in one's life and to the world outside, is paramount. 'There Goes The Neighborhood' assembles the different experiences and attitudes of various people from the hustle and bustle of the Tehran streets into her vibrant characters, and thus into the gallery space. Captured in fiberglass and polyester and deftly painted, or 'dressed up', by Rokni Haerizadeh in bold, over-glossed colors, the various characters - mostly between 70 and 90 cm in height - provide a zealous evocation of their interior and exterior 'worlds'.

The individuals are characterized, for example, by the body builder who carries his baby with one arm and holds his over-dressed daughter's hand with the other. His head and feet are very small and contrast comically with his bulbous upper body, as if body mass can compensate for lack of mental capacity. Equally self-conscious and materialistically driven are the 'uptown' trendy boys smoking cigarettes. One Mohican - sporting boy and his girlfriend - both, we learn, from a fairly religious and traditional background - walk alongside each other, content that through their rebellious and angry appearance they have compensated for a general frustration with life. Fayyazi's bustling families bring yet another dynamic to the show. There is Haadji between his two wives playing with rosary beads, and then the three obese chadori sisters busy gossiping with each other. In another scene, one chadori mother is accompanied by her fashionable, spiky haired son, bedecked with a pair of hanging baggy pants, Bluetooth headset, multiple necklaces and bracelets. By contrast, we find a husband with his well dressed wife and daughter. The wife looks unsatisfied whilst his daughter, with a 'must-have' nose-job, looks utterly unhappy.

Walking down the streets of Tehran, one might inadvertently identify these different groups of people and soon after would surely associate them with Fayyazi's characters. One of her talents is to blithely record the innate qualities of her subjects; observing their flaws and vices while maintaining a rare objectivity. In reinterpreting them with her subtle sense of humor she breathes an almost cognizant life into each of the figures. This maternal sense of empathy is what characterizes Bitra Fayyazi's work best.

Isabelle van den Eynde



(top & across) Bita Fayyazi in collaboration with Rokni Haerizadeh, *The Purple Scream*, Fiberglass, acrylic and watercolor, 31x27x35 cm each, 2009
 (top right) Bita Fayyazi, *The Devil Came To Drink From The Pond And Fell In*, 2008, Bronze, 60 cm, ©artist
 (bottom left) Bita Fayyazi in collaboration with Rokni Haerizadeh, *The Trendy*, Fiberglass, acrylic and watercolor, 75x38x18 cm, 2009
 (bottom right) Bita Fayyazi in collaboration with Rokni Haerizadeh, *There Goes...*, 2009 Papier Mache steel Ready-made acrylic and watercolor 108x116x60 cm
 All images ©artists and courtesy of the Farjam Collection/Hafiz Foundation and B21 Gallery

next page
PlayGround Installation at Espace Louis Vuitton, Paris, 2007.
 ©artist and B21 Gallery and Espace Louis Vuitton,
 Photograph ©Mamran Diba







(top left) *Tabloid Tahmineh is pursuing Rostam 2 after he disappears following the wedding night, ROSTAM 2 The Return, 2008.*
 Photomontage digital print on canvas
 (top right) *Rostam 2 and Sohrab take their fight to tabloids, Rostam 2 The Return, 2008.* Photomontage digital print on canvas.
 (bottom right) *Tabloid Spiderman is pursuing Rostam 2 and demands revenge on death of Sohrab, ROSTAM 2 The Return, 2008.*
 Photomontage digital print on canvas
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Aran Gallery





Siamak Filizadeh

What has happened?

Epics and heroes as old as the history which takes centuries to be inscribed in the mind of a nation are fading away and replaced by new rivals.

'I am the one infamous in the city for his talent of falling in love
I am the one who never smeared his eye with sight of the ugly.'
By Hafez the famous 14th Century Persian Poet

What has happened?

Words which together for years formed the most beautiful combinations and poems are now juxtaposed in the following manner:

I want ya, baby, you pass me by
Whenever I come to see ya, I'm wearing a tie
Cause I'm crazy. Crazy for your look, am I?
The color of your eyes is that of my tie.
(A popular Iranian Song these days)

What has happened? Really now...



(top left) *Rostam Returns at age of 30 having been brought up abroad, ROSTAM 2 The Return, 2008, Photomontage digital print on canvas*
(bottom right) *Rostam fights the soldier of Evil empire, ROSTAM 2 The Return, 2008, Photomontage digital print on canvas*

next page

Zaal arrives to help Rostam, ROSTAM 2 The Return, 2008, Photomontage digital print on canvas

All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery





یونیسکو برای زمین بدون سلاحها



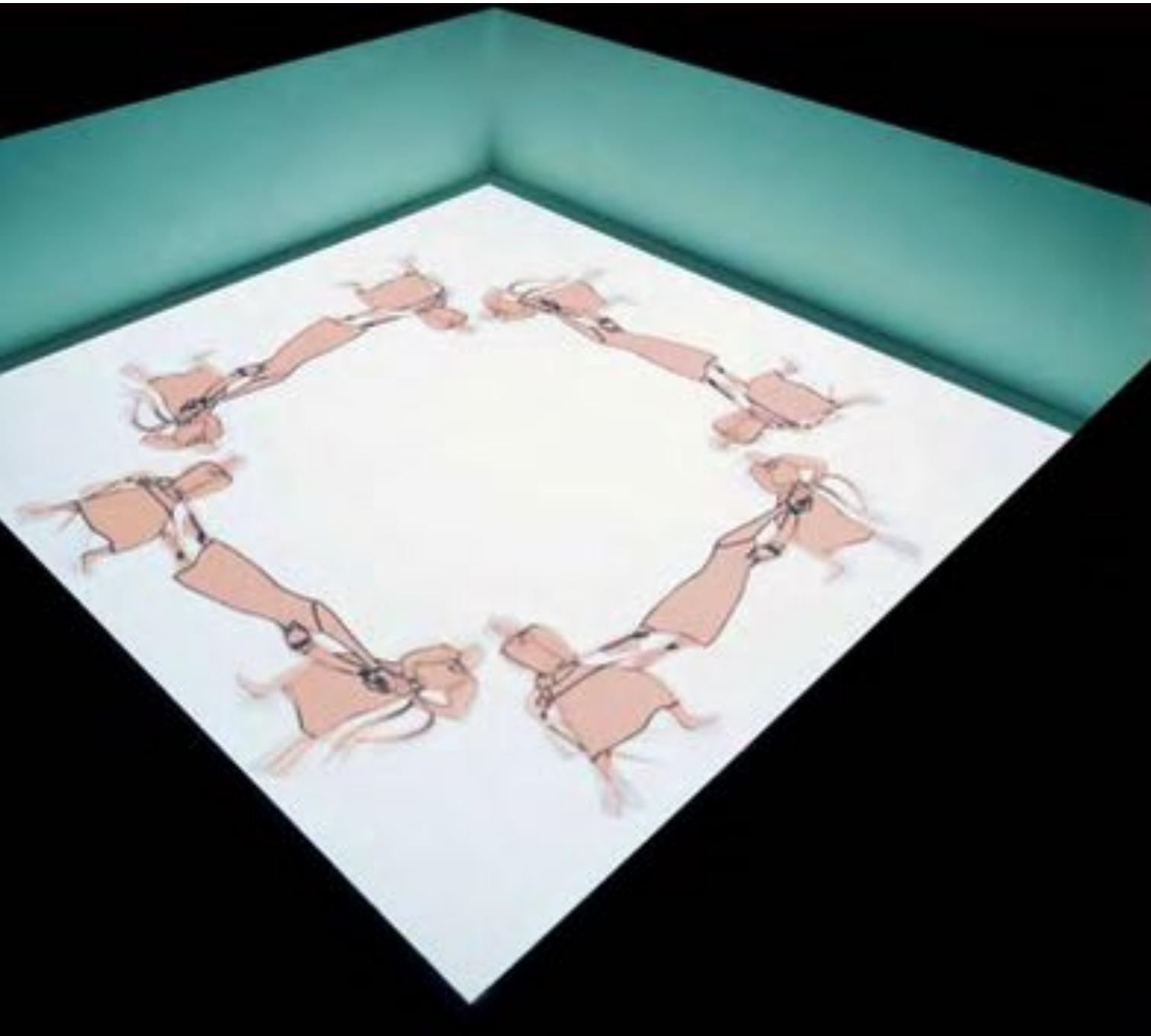
Parastou Forouhar

The Waiting Loop

Iran is in a waiting loop: The condition of waiting that seems to affect the entire Iranian society - with one group waiting for freedom, the revolution, and the intervention of the West or reforms staged by the totalitarian regime ruling the country. On the other hand there is the other group waiting for religious salvation due to the return of the "Mahdi", the "Imam of the times."

This waiting seems to be characteristic of the art world as well. It is shown in humble longing, in depression and lethargy. But it can also be seen as a time during which - thrown back to the one's own self - people analyze the present state, come to terms with their own history and its consequences, and start to identify potentials. Possibly the goal of this is the waiting itself, the willingness to stay, to persevere, in order to be present when the opportunity arises to rebuild the city!

It is this narrowed situation of long time waiting, which I try to visualize in my work "Spielmannszuege" - in a well of locked time. Like clockwork, the loop of animated figures turns inexorably. Tension builds up between the aesthetic form and the content portrayed. On the one hand, the theme of torture is shocking; on the other hand, the figures are displayed ornamentally as in a kaleidoscope.



(above) *Spielmannszuge 2*, 2005, Site-specific work
(left) *Written Room 03*, 2006, Valls Massimino Rome

opposite page

Friday, 2003, Photograph digital print on aludibond, 75x150 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of and Galerie Karin Sachs







Shahab Fotouhi

My multimedia works cover a range of video, photography, sculpture and their subjects are: **The present moment, moments of suspension, and the merge between the playful and serious.**

At the same time they are examples of free exchanges of expressions, ideas and arguments and counter-arguments hopefully with no terminal synthesis.

Security, Love & Democracy (for Export Only), 2006, Installation, ©artist and Raran Gallery



Alireza Ghandchi

As an artist resident outside of Iran for the last eight years I have a recurrent preoccupation with the extent to which my works are labeled as Iranian, which also begs the question of how "Iranian art" might be defined in the first place. The challenge of creating a universal visual language, one that is independent of cultural and regional symbolism and free of today's culture-specific codifications, is continually at the forefront of my mind as I go about my work.

My art has always been concerned not only with presentation and the effect it had on the viewer but also with the question of how it functions in relation to the work of other artists within a context that generates theories and how it is itself reflected in this contextualized space.

As well as participating in the Naqsh - An Insight into Gender and Role Models in Iran¹ Exhibition I also acted as its cocurator through my involvement in the selection of art works. My part in this interdisciplinary exhibition combining artistic and sociological perspectives was two-fold.

Firstly, we thought it was important to select work by Iranian artists who, as models of a visual language free of cultural specificity, are tackling universal gender issues as they apply to Iran. Secondly, my contribution was an installation in which my video, me and the woman's statue, based on Maryam Salour's sculpture *La marche vers la liberté* is exhibited in direct physical relation to the self-same bronze sculpture.

As complex as the development of contemporary Iranian art may be, with its sociopolitical constraints and the influence of, or its steering by, new art markets such as Dubai, one aspect is particularly noticeable - the leaning towards things exotic. This exoticism, with its conscious deployment of cultural and local elements, is designed to catch the attention of the wider world ...and is often expected nowadays. Whenever my works, created by an Iranian and labeled as such, are viewed parallel to works from an established, western art world, despite their forming part of a rich and diverse international body of art, I find myself forced to question this one sided reduction of art to a single geopolitical and social setting. Cultural pigeonholing is always, to some extent, contrived, a person's origin is only ever a fraction of his or her identity. Only to a very limited extent, therefore, can artists' work be related to their "background". A person's identity may be composed of many heterogeneous parts and may evolve with time.

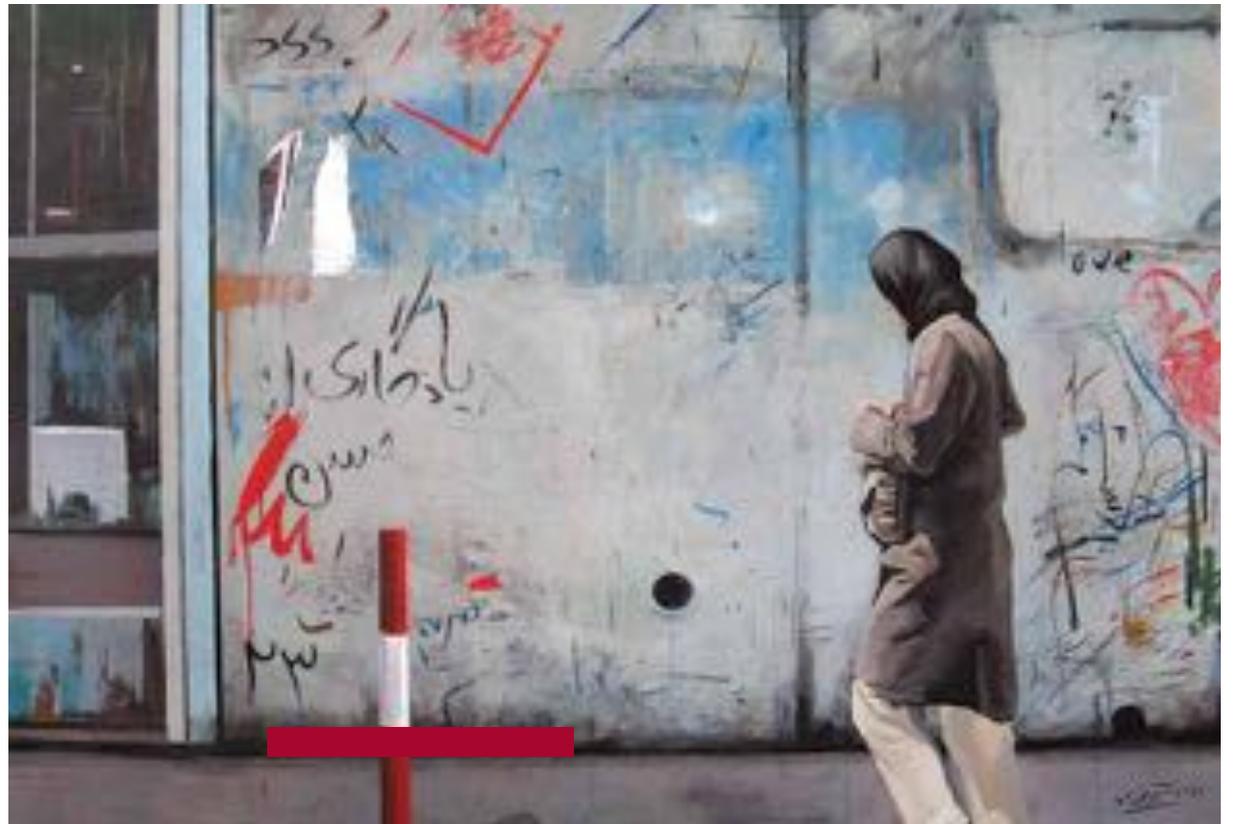


¹Museum für Islamische Kunst, Pergamonmuseum Berlin, 10th July to 7th September 2008.

(left) *Me And The Woman's Statue*, Video installation, monitor, 6.06 minute loop, 2006.
A collaboration with Maryam Salour, *La Marche Vers La Liberté*,
Bronze sculpture, 27 cm, 1988, overhauled 2008, ©artists



(top left) *Self Portrait*, Series Hands, 2004, Photograph, 40x30 cm
(top right) *Untitled*, Series Pathos-Cross Dh, 2006, Photograph, 50x40cm
(middle left) *Untitled*, Series Cartridge-P11, 2009, Photograph, 50x40 cm
(middle right) *Untitled*, Series Cartridge-P33, 2009, Photograph, 40x50 cm
(bottom left) *Untitled*, Series Pathos-Hand H34, 2006, Photograph, 50x40 cm
(bottom right) *Untitled*, Series Cocaine-M09, 2008, Photograph, 50x40 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Galerie Dieter Reitz



(below) *Stop*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x100 cm
 (top right) *Untitled*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 120x180 cm,
 ©artist and Collection Eisler, London
 (middle right) *Untitled*, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x150 cm
 (bottom right) *The Heart Of The Wall*, 2007, Acrylic on canvas, 150x100 cm

opposite page
Untitled, 2008, Acrylic on canvas, 100x80 cm
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Day Art Gallery unless noted



Daryoush Gharahzad

The work of Dariush Gharahzad captures the youth street culture in his native Tehran, drawing inspiration from the graffiti that has sprung up on walls all over the city.

"I think the message is that people have changed -especially the young people" he said. "There is a younger generation that is searching for something more interesting than whatever is within the parameters of their traditional culture."

Gharahzad focuses on women in his paintings and the contrast between their headscarves and the exaggerated make up on their faces. "If you have only your face to reveal yourself, what do you do? You make up yourself."

Text Provided by Day Art Gallery



A Gallery's Perspective, Tehran

Ferial Salahshour

Founder and Managing Director, Day Art Gallery, Tehran

For how long have you been involved in the promotion of contemporary Iranian art and what drew you to it in the first place?

My husband and I have been collecting fine art objects for 36 years; a tradition that has been running in my family as well for decades. Our main interests are in Safavid textiles, lithographic books from the Qajar Dynasty, contemporary Iranian Art, 18th century Japanese prints, African and Asian art and Western modern art.

How does contemporary Iranian art differ from other Middle Eastern art?

Iran is ethnically diverse, with different cultures and traditions such as Kurdish, Turkish, Arabian, and Baluch. Moreover, Iranian people were united for about 2500 years under dynasties such as Archaemenid, Sassanid, Safavid and others... many of whom were major patrons of the arts. This had a positive influence on the historical development of Iranian art.

Can you describe the reactions that people usually have when they are exposed to the works of Iranian artists you collect?

They are students, collectors, art critics, journalists and also ordinary people. It is especially interesting for me to observe the reaction of the last group. Sometimes they are astonished, but finally their curiosity in contemporary art wins them over. Abroad, people ask many questions about Iran and Iranians, they do not believe such different works can come from such a nation...

Would you say that their reactions differ when they are looking at works by an artist who comes from the same cultural background that they come from?

A layperson's reaction to contemporary Iranian art are the same anywhere in the world be it New York or Tehran. It is a mixture of surprise and appreciation.

How do you explain the recent growing interest by the international art market in contemporary Middle Eastern art and contemporary Iranian art in particular?

Contemporary Iranian art deserves great interest. Although a bit late, it is finally happening. The Middle East is the origin of some of the world's greatest civilizations. It has always been a hot spot, a crucial cross road between the East and the West. Iranian art can reflect a positive image of our culture, more accurate than the one portrayed in Western media.

Are there risks of underlying Neo-Orientalist attitudes in the works that usually make it into acclaimed "Western" circles?

My opinion is that numerous contemporary artists have long discarded Neo-Orientalist references in their works.

How is this reflecting on the formal and thematic qualities of the works that are coming out from the younger generation of artists from Iran?

International attention has a contradictory effect on Iranian Art, both positive and negative. But, it is not perpetual. Some younger artists are trying hard to show their own identities in their works.

What is the role that contemporary Iranian art can play in bridging the cultural and political divide between the East and the West?

Culture can play a magnificent role between the East and the West. This was extremely well felt during the exhibition *Masks of Shahrzad* in March 2009 in London. The reaction of the people and press was wonderful, they kept asking me about Iran, women artists, the life style in Iran and many other questions. It was great.



ABOUT DAY ART GALLERY

Day Art Gallery was established in Tehran in 2004 and is dedicated to the discovering and promoting of new talent alongside showcasing major national and international artists such as Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bill Brant, Yusef Karsh, Richard Avedon, and Diane Arbus.

Day Art Galley has exhibited new talents in Iran and its curatorial work on the introduction of Iranian contemporary arts has been recognized both by the Iranian Public and international audiences around the world. In addition, the gallery boasts one of the most comprehensive collections of Iranian contemporary art, which allows young artists referential access to some of the field's prime examples.

IRANIAN ARTISTS



Barbad Golshiri

Dear Hassan,

I hope you're doing fine. I wanted to speak with you more, but you were quite busy at your opening in Le Plateau. And I was in a rush myself for that was my last day in Paris.

I was asked to make a work for a project called "Central Asian Portraits". I made an anti-prologue for it. As we know, a pre-face is always a post-script, written after the main text. I wanted it either way.

I have dedicated the work to you and let us take this dedication as a praise of at least one nameless in the works of yours I've seen. There is nothing Gnostic about what I say. Shall I call this an essence? A substratum if you prefer, but **I see shifts and no anchors, no centers if you prefer.** The video is neither about you nor your works, but deliberately and partially about what I find in confrontation with those I've seen of you, of being *still* undercurrent. **It's important to notice that I am not merely disputing the central as an opponent of the marginal;** your works have set a good example for the poverty of this binary. And I take this dedication - and not the dedicated work itself, because, in the order of the plastic, it's not there to dialogue with your works - as paying tribute to impossibly simple experiences. This could be simply a matter of one careless look in the eyes of your G.R.A.H.A.M, or how his head meets haziness or
the time he lights his cigarette - I've been waiting for him to do so from the very beginning.

Although the epoch is weary of oxymorons, I cannot stop believing that I have dedicated this work to those moments where I saw you dealing with the impossibility of the possibilities in our old dreary plane of the feasible.

Am I saying it's all about how you have said it? "Do not despair: one of the thieves was saved. Do not presume: one of the thieves was damned." Perhaps, with no regards to what believers can *extract* from Augustine's brilliant words, the sliding about within this utterance lasts for seconds or even minutes. Probably that is to say, it *is* a matter of how you have said it (if you've ever said it) and you have said it, probably, with no anchors and within shifts or you have never pronounced it. I shall say.

Yours truly,
Barbad
Tehran, Nov 11, 2007



(top left) *mAmi-6*, 2008, video installation, 6min 38sec

(top right) *Middle East Impromptu*, Video still, 2007

(bottom left) *mAmi-2*, Video installation, 2008

(bottom right) *The Portrait of the Artist as the Winner*, 2005,

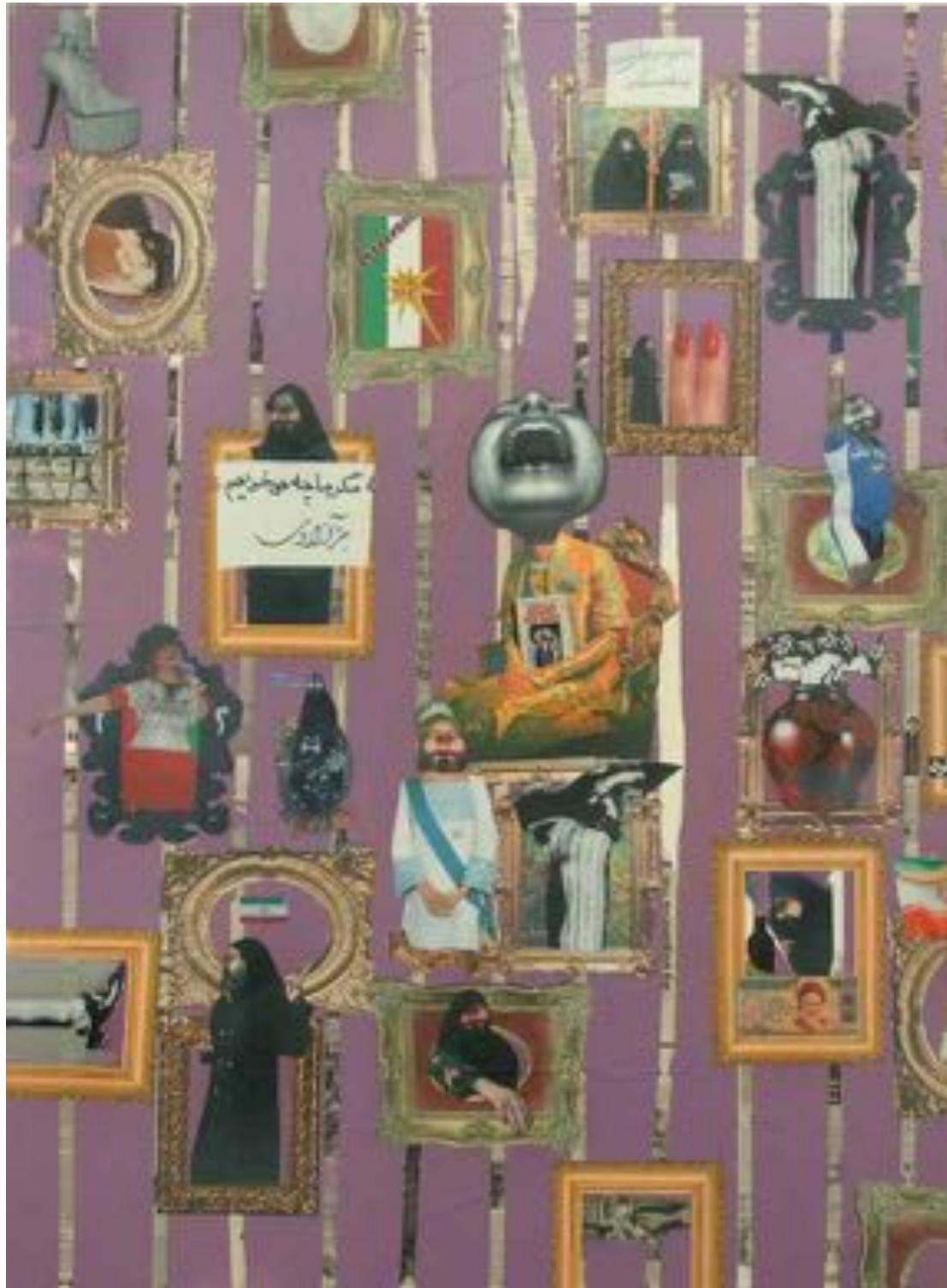
Pigment inkjet on paper, 210x150cm

(bottom right detail) *The Portrait of The Artist As The Winner* (detail)

opposite page

mAmi, video still, 2008, 6min 38sec

All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery



(above) *Memoirs*, 2009, Mixed-media on canvas, 220x200 cm
 (top left) *Theatre Group(03)*, 2008, C-print, 100x70 cm
 (bottom left) *Theater Group(12)*, 2008, C-print, 100x70 cm
 All images ©artist and courtesy of B2i Gallery



Ramin Haerizadeh

Ramin Haerizadeh's latest work tenaciously brings new life to familiar forms. With tremendous humour and a deft hand he has composed a new paradigm for artistic introspection with his elusively beautiful macro-scale self-portraits.

In each of the three series presented - Theater Group, Men of Allah and Today's Woman, clear elements of his cultural heritage emerge as the elegant foundation for his strong graphic sensibility. He playfully appropriates the traditional Persian ornamentation, patterns and compositions found in his country's architecture, carpets, mirror works and miniature paintings. The static image rarely achieves the amount of visual energy that Haerizadeh imbues his digital canvases with, balancing an implied animation and textural warmth with the cold precision of his technical capacity.

Yet Haerizadeh does not dwell on his chosen material nor is he searching for a means to reintroduce the time-tested visual themes of a great civilization. His is rather a process distinctly removed from chronology and convention, a process that began with a collection of images called Theatre Group.

For this series, Ramin found inspiration in 'Taaziye' theatre, the religious plays popular during the Qajar period (and still active today during Ashura celebrations), whose particularity was that women's roles were played by men, who are still considered the only sex suitable for the profession. One of the most popular scenes was the wedding of the brother of Imam Hossein; Ghassem in which the character wearing the white bridal gown is, notably, a bearded man.

Taking off on this farce, Ramin has placed his own portrait (himself a thickly bearded man) within the guise of a chador-clad female. Challenging the norms of contemporary Iranian society by digging up its rich, and very often conflicting, cultural history, Haerizadeh offers a resourceful and pointed criticism with his characteristic sense of humour.

During this same period, Ramin produced his collection 'Wonders of Nature' - a strange, dark, day-glo world, full of deception and skewed reality. It was in this series that the public first saw his unique practice of digital manipulation, where nothing is quite as it seems and which leaves the viewer perplexed and intrigued. His photographs reflect the colours and composition of everyday life.

However, through techniques and devices, he proceeds to trash the absolute realism of photography by subverting the image, literally from within. By splitting, mirroring and twisting his images, disorientating and unseen depths come to light - engaging the viewers to reconstruct reality for themselves. Combining his signature style of photo manipulation and his penchant for performance, the Men of Allah collection reaches to the roots of his talent. A bizarre pastiche of scanned images of Haerizadeh's own face and body parts, Men of Allah blurs our conception of gender and form. Bearded faces are set atop bloated bellies scarcely concealed by brilliant swaths of patterned fabric (most borrowed from his mother's wardrobe). Sheer beauty is offset by momentary revulsion as flesh and fabric compete for the eye's attention. He uses symbolic decorative motifs like the ancient lion and sun, the emblem of the Islamic republic, and Persian architectural details with the same discretion as subtly placed erotic accessories or an improvised jester's hat.

Haerizadeh likes to think of this series as a response to Shirin Neshat's 'Women of Allah', in which women are captured in black and white photographs in typically tough, 'male' situations. Paradoxically, in Haerizadeh's compositions the characters are captured in playful and colorful situations set against confining black backgrounds. Haerizadeh has also called these creatures the 'Closet Queens', rising to the occasion with themes that address broader political and social issues that are still unacknowledged in Iran.

Stemming from the artist's desire to express the full range of his experiences, Haerizadeh's arresting mixed-media collages in his latest collection 'Today's Woman' are no less provocative. **Leaving no stone unturned in the pantheon of modern Iranian society**, his free-form arrangements play upon the subjects and covers of pre-revolutionary woman's magazines. Employing his own images and drawings, he organizes symbolic details that provide clues to an underlying content, mixing them with found images referring to a defined cultural, historical and political environment. Some works deal directly with life in and around the Iranian art scene, featuring notable artists, gallerist, and critics, while in other works one sees the Shah driving a motor bike or the disguised artist getting caught by the wrevolutionary police in the streets of Tehran. As a new body of work in a new medium for the artist, it is reassuringly faithful to Haerizadeh's humorous but sharp criticism of the political and social situation in Iran today.

This upcoming exhibition eloquently captures Haerizadeh's untamed creative force, one that has intensified markedly in recent years. I am confident that he will continue to explore his own sensibilities and use his images to go deeper than any political or social satire, providing us all with a momentary escape from the severity of the real world. To enter into Ramin Haerizadeh's world is to risk dissection but, like seeing a strange shrouded beauty, it offers one a glimpse of a unique mind at work.

Isabelle van den Eynde





(above) *Murals in Tehran*, 2009, print 180x120 cm
(right series) *Abu Gharhib (or How To Engage In Dialogue)*, 2004,
Installation view, model toys framed as light boxes, 50x50 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery





Arash Hanaei

I was only one when the Islamic Republic of Iran came to power in 1979. My childhood coincided with the Iran-Iraq war, which lasted eight years. Consequently at university I was interested in the research and practice of documentary photography, covering the social aspects of daily life. At the same time I was working with the Tehran Avenue website, as a columnist, writing articles on society.

After graduation, I started working on studio photography. My method at the time was to transform and deconstruct objects, especially dolls and fortune telling messages, to represent the state of our social life and the cause of our daily life's chaos: war and politics.

I first used the dolls in the series *The Benefit of Vegetarianism* which was inspired by the burned corpses that were documented during the extensive use of Chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war. Later I used action man dolls to depict the victims of Abu Ghraib. Soldiers who have no fear of war are suspended in a Dark, endless, empty space as used in comic book illustrations and animation.





Khosrow Hassanzadeh

Ready To Order

Works from both *Ready-to-Order* and *Ya Ali Madadi*, are intended to be at once sentimental, patriotic, quaint, spiritual, and inspirational. Representing many aspects of Iranian culture, the result is **optically intoxicating** as Hassanzadeh proves himself to be the hero of Iranian pop and kitsch!

The first word that comes to mind having discovered Khosrow's seven boxes is most probably 'kitsch'. It is a word often used but what is its full meaning? Turning to the dictionary, we find kitsch is 'associated with sentimentalism and bad taste' and describes 'works of art and other objects (such as furniture) that are meant to look costly but actually are in poor taste'. Whether it tries to appear sentimental, glamorous, theatrical, or creative, kitsch is a gesture emulating the superficial values of art.

Why then is it so popular? Thomas Kulka, in his book *Kitsch and Art*, explains it as follows: 'They play on basic human impulses irrespective of religious beliefs, political convictions, race, or nationality. They exploit universal subjects such as birth, family, love, nostalgia, and so forth.' And Hundertwasser says 'The absence of kitsch makes life unbearable'. If kitsch has always been embraced in the popular realm, it is now unmistakably ensconced in the world of fine art. *Ready-to-Order* can be interpreted as a gross parody of Iranian society and its aesthetics but also as an earnest effort to raise the craft of the unrefined artisan to the high street.

One can see 'Ready-to-Order' slogans all over the city of Tehran, on banners at the entrance of restaurants and hospitality halls, in daily newspapers and advertisements. The phrase is aimed at the typical Iranian habit to 'commission and order' on the occasion of all sorts of celebrations. Whether for a wedding, a birthday, a memorial for lost loved ones and religious martyrs or a funeral, what matters is that the host has 'ordered' a lavish banquet, a socially meaningful token of affluence. Initially inspired by the small boxes found in the holy birthplaces of Imams and the tombs of martyrs, Hassanzadeh likes to think of these custom boxes as shrines, his bespoke homage to unrecognized or otherwise uncelebrated subjects.

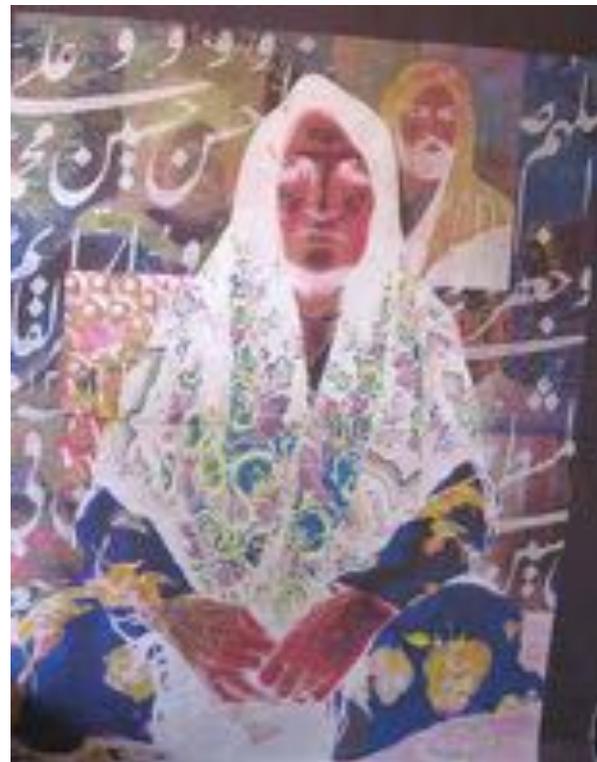
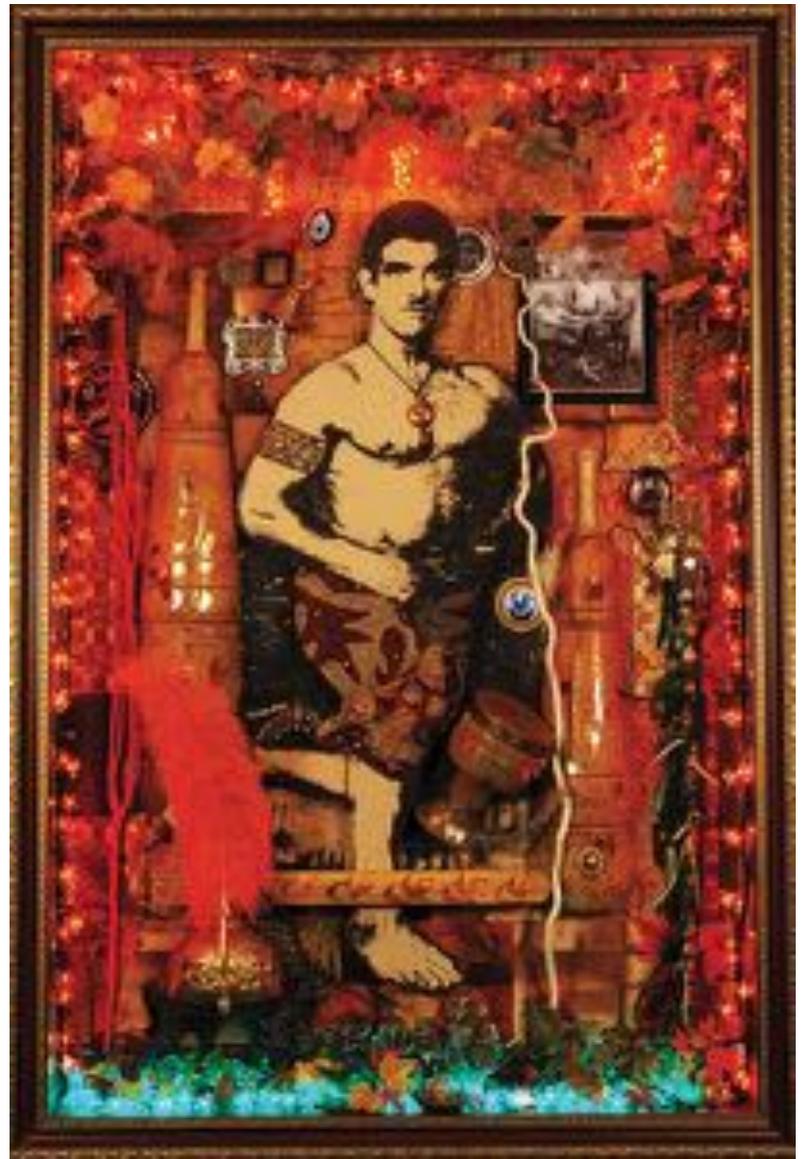
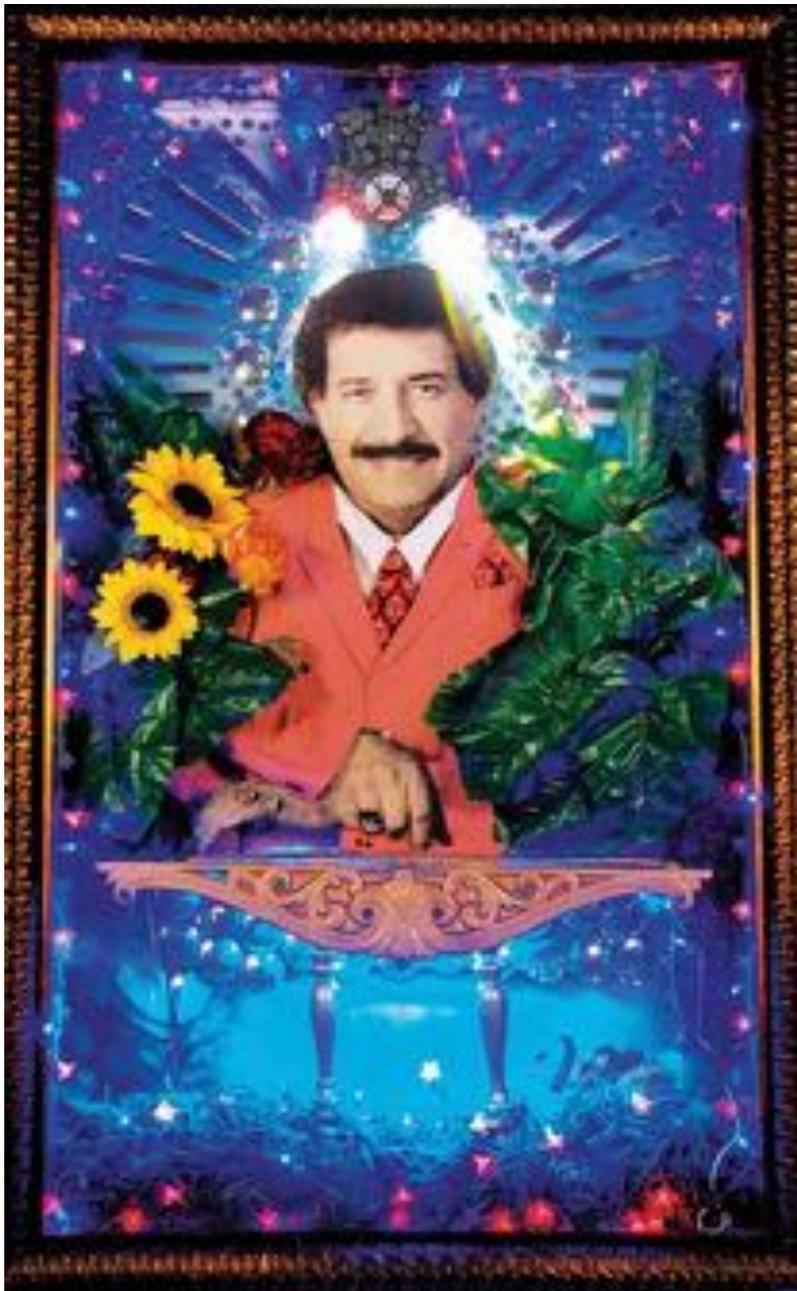
His choice of subjects for portraiture began with ordinary people like his mother, his friend, or himself and eventually evolved towards popular icons. In one remarkable example, the famous diva Goozooosh appears from behind a beaded curtain, wearing her myriad glamorous accessories: a diamond tiara, a shiny costume with heavily jeweled belt, and a white boa. The background complements this opulence with fake flowers and blue lights. Another box is consecrated to the popular singer Javad, whose name has become an adjective which means 'kitsch' in Farsi. Wearing his best orange suit and tie, his edified figure adorned by lavish lily pads and sun flowers, he smiles amidst a background of mirror work and wallpaper depicting swans quietly swimming. The Pahlavan: beloved wrestler, paragon of physical and moral strength for the local population, carries serenely his championship medals and traditional costume while his instruments, photos and lucky charms crowd his box. Fired by passion, Hassanzadeh has explored every stable of the downtown bazaars to find the right objects to properly pay tribute to the diva, the pop singer or the pahlavan.

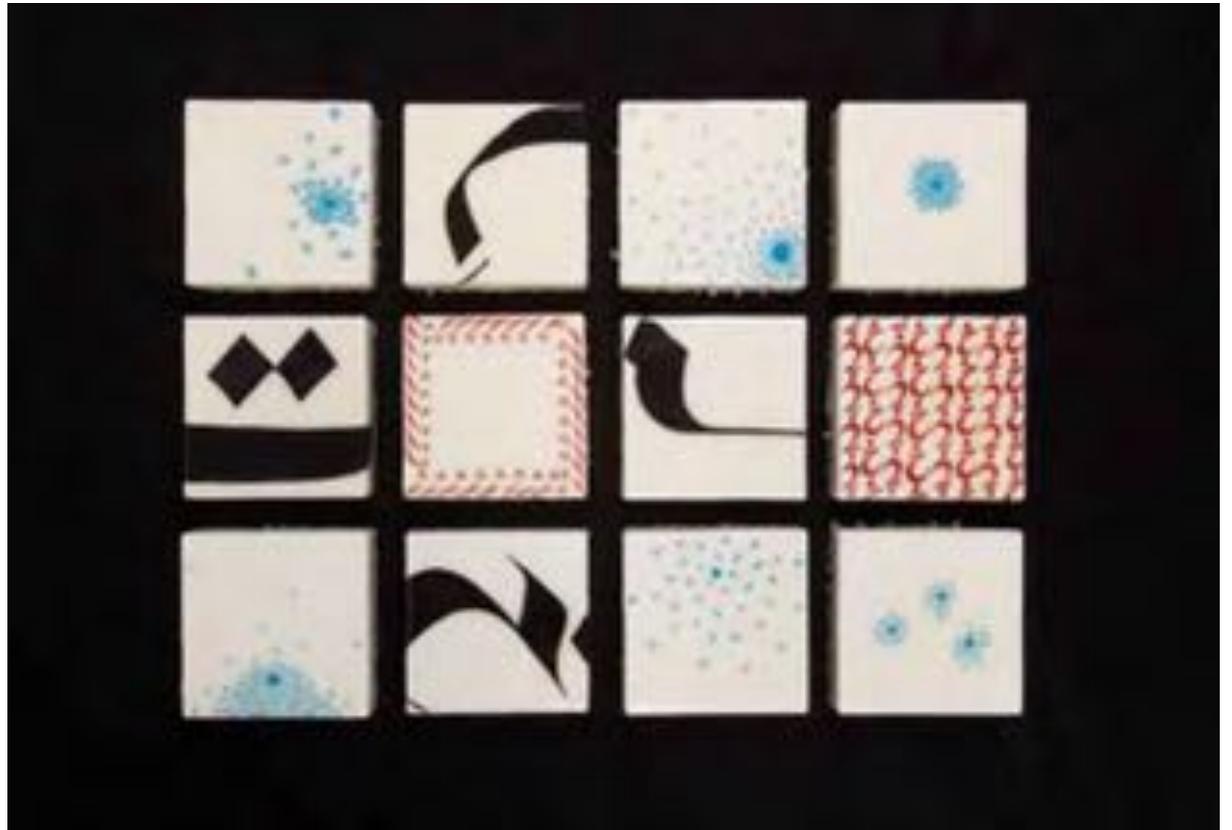
Yet, as democratic artist, he is known to be inspired by the ordinary people of his daily entourage, and even more by the disadvantaged and abused, whom he is always ready to defend (see his *Prostitute* and *Ashura* series). That being said, Khosrow is willing to extend his services to anyone who would like to see themselves *Ready to Order*.

[Don't hesitate to inquire at B21!]

Isabelle van den Eynde

(top left) *Javad, Ready to Order*, 2007-2008, Mixed media box, 21.3x13.4x25cm
(top right) *Pahlavan II, Ready to Order*, 2008, Mixed-media box, 19.3x13.2x25 cm
(bottom left) *Ya Ali Madadi (03)*, 2008, Silkscreen and acrylic on canvas, 17.4x17.5 cm
(bottom right) *Terrorist Reyhan*, 2004, Silkscreen and acrylic on canvas, 32.0x20.0 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of B21 Gallery





(top) *Alef Series*, 2004, Elmer's glue and Ink and varnish on canvas, 5x5 in each,
 (middle right) *khe-kh (Red)*, 2004, Elmer's glue and Ink and varnish on canvas, 5x5 in each, installation detail
 (bottom right) *khe-kh (Black)*, 2004, Elmer's glue and Ink and varnish on canvas, 5x5 in each, installation detail
 (left) *Presidential Carpet*, 2008, Video projection
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery and The Third Line



Pouran Jinchi

For *Iran Inside Out* Pouran Jinchi, an Iranian painter based in New York, presents two separate works, which in two very different manners both draw upon and refuse to be limited by her Iranian identity.

Presidential Carpet, a reproduction of a Persian carpet for the Oval Office of the President of the United States, subverts both traditional American and Iranian iconography, playing off symbols of patriotism and power from both nations. Projected onto the floor of the gallery, the piece invites visitors to walk through the installation while at the same time remaining distant, a reproduction of a reproduction without any physical form.

Since the days of Harry Truman, the elliptical carpet of the oval office bearing the seal of the President has been a powerful national icon. In recent years many administrations have, with the assistance of interior designers, created their own carpet, which at the end of their term is often relocated to the outgoing president's official library. With the *Presidential Carpet*, Jinchi presents an imagined redesign that includes Iranian motifs and evokes the status of Persian rugs - a juxtaposition that directly responds to the current global positioning of US-Iran politics. The Persian carpet itself, as a luxury item and a celebrated symbol of national identity, evokes both nostalgia for historic authenticity and a class distinction. However Jinchi's unsolicited offering to the White House subverts both nations' symbolic trappings of patriotism and power and the rituals associated with them. This is seen most clearly in the Presidential Seal, which she personalizes by trading the one mythology for another, converting the American Bald Eagle into the *Faravahar* or *Simurgh* (a winged creature from Persian mythology) and translating the Latin phrase "*e pluribus unum*" ("out of many, one") and translating "Seal of the President of the United States" into Farsi. She further modifies the image by removing the arrows (a symbol of military might) while keeping the olive branch, an unmistakable suggestion for the rulers of both countries.

In Jinchi's second body of work she draws upon her decade long **exploration of text and calligraphic abstraction** with a sequence of 40 small titles meticulously created out of Elmer's glue, ink and varnish on canvas. The paintings of the '*Alef Series*', named in reference to the first letter of Farsi, Arabic and Hebrew alphabets, celebrate the intrinsic beauty of Farsi script by focusing on individual letters. The meditative repetition of the characters' forms responds to the Islamic tradition of the spirituality of text as well as Islamic manuscript painting. This repetition also lends an almost performative aspect to the works, while the intimate size creates the feeling of an intensely personal interaction with the artist. Regardless of your familiarity with this language, your confusion in the face of them is part of the desired effect: where exchange is impossible, the beauty of the symbolic language comes to the fore.

With layer after layer of hardened and polished Elmer's glue, ink and varnish, the paintings have a sculptural quality and texture reminiscent of traditional Islamic architectural tiles, while the classroom materials and the painting's bold colors and direct lines evoke a child's earliest introduction to letters and reading.

About Pouran Jinchi

Born in 1959 in Mashad, Iran Pouran Jinchi first studied Engineering at George Washington University, Washington D. C. in 1982 before studying painting at the University of California, in Los Angeles in 1989, followed by studio painting at the Art Students League in New York in 1993.

Jinchi's work often employs a mixture of calligraphy and Abstract Expressionism that intertwines Islamic geometry, Iranian traditions and contemporary aesthetics, with a unique lyricism. Jinchi's early paintings were large scale and heavily layered abstractions, whose flowing lines of saturated color and rolling waves of calligraphy brought to life the form as well as the content of the text to which she was responding. With successive series, Jinchi narrowed her focus to single words, repeated over and over to create the very object they signified, or aesthetics distilled from a single letter, emphasizing the building block of language and thought. In a recent series through large scrolls of Suras from the Qurans written only with pronunciation markers, Jinchi continues to explore the musical rhythm inherent in the text, the echo of each letter lifting and falling on the page. Her works see form and word blur, the text becomes a pattern and the pattern (Eastern and Western textile forms for example) themselves become unreadable text.

Jinchi has exhibited extensively and has had eight solo exhibitions in New York alone. She has exhibited internationally with shows in Japan and Germany and is featured in the permanent collections at the Federal Reserve Bank in New York, The Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C and the Sprint Corporation in Kansas City, MO. She now lives and works in New York.

Text provided by Leila Taghina-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



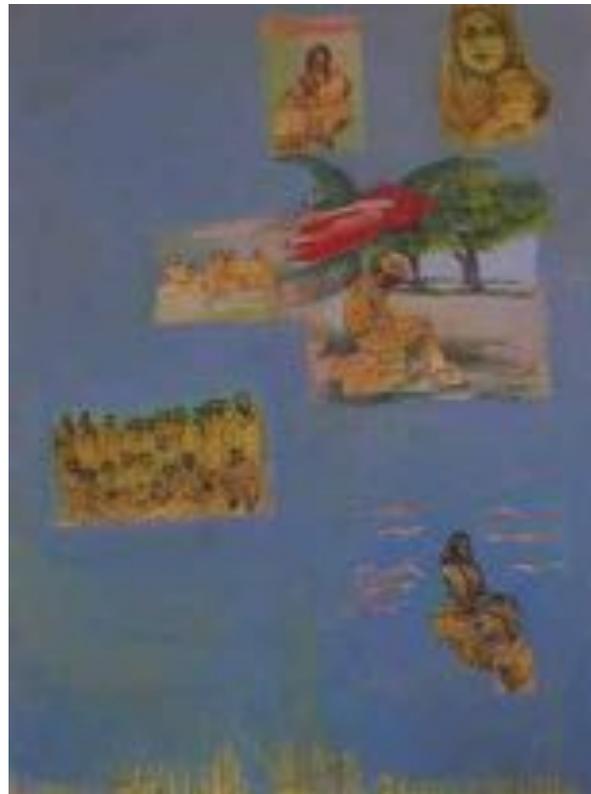
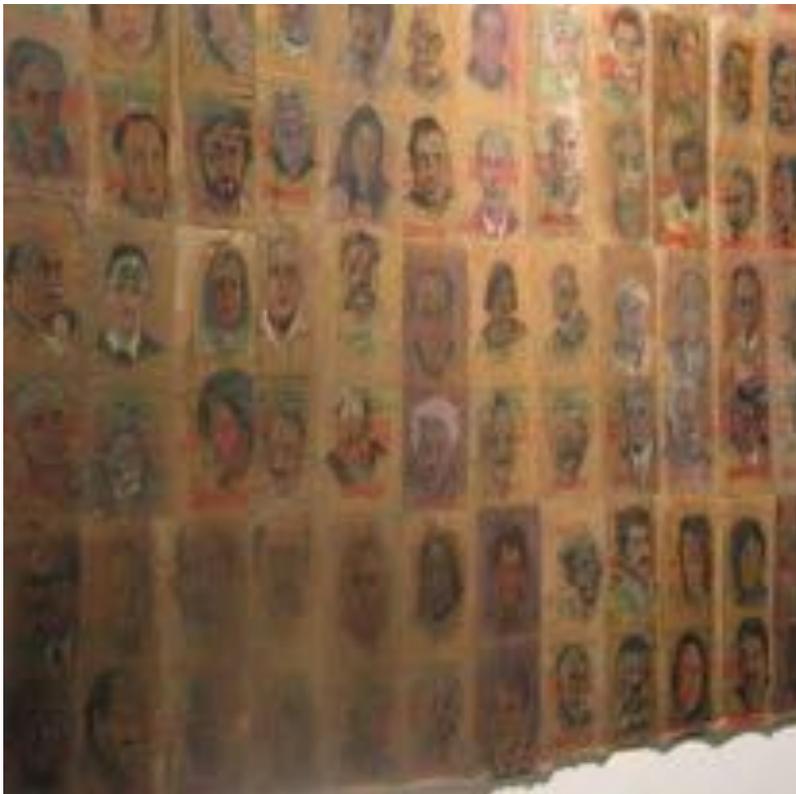


Shahram Karimi

In the past 100 years Iranian society has grappled with the idea of modernity, a painful journey, often followed by dramatic setbacks.

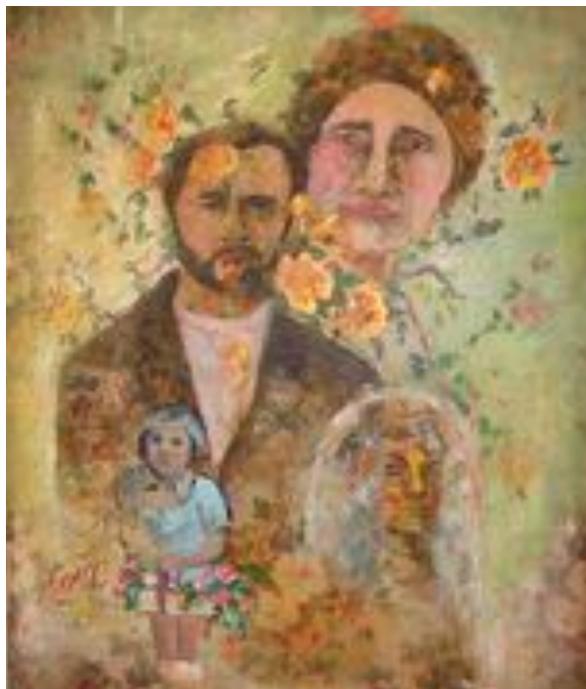
In this struggle, intellectuals, poets, artists, writers, and cultural and political activities have lost their lives. They have been forced into exile or intended to be erased from public life and collective memory.

Conceptually, "biography" itself, is a modern phenomenon that has only recently been made **as a needed historical documentation**. *Traces* is a visual biography of those individuals whose lives and work represent the troubled and collective struggle of a nation towards modernity.



(top left) *Traces*, Mixed media on imported rice bags, 9.5x3 m.
(top right) *Red Angel*, 2007, Mixed media on canvas, 180x135 cm
(bottom right) *In The Garden*, 2009, Mixed media on cloth, 140x170 cm

opposite page
Red, 2008, Mixed media on canvas, 180x135 cm
All images @artist





Abbas Kowsari

It is said that the world is a stage and that we are merely players **with different parts to play.**

I too am playing a part: That of the viewer. I like my part very much...

My aim is to see and not just look. I do not wish to be a mere spectator.
My hope is to show what I see carefully.

Picturing life is beautiful... with its many players...



(top left) *Shade of Earth*, 2008, Photograph
(top right) *Masculinity Series*, 2006, Photograph
(bottom left) *Women Police Series*, 2007, Photograph
(bottom right) *Shade of Earth*, 2008, Photograph

opposite page
Women Police Series, 2007, Photograph

next page
Women Police Series, 2007, Photograph
All images ©artist and courtesy of Raran Gallery





A Gallery's Perspective, Dubai

Isabelle van den Eynde
 Director, B21 Gallery, Dubai

For how long have you been involved in the promotion of contemporary Iranian art and what drew you to it in the first place?

It all began many years ago when I moved to Dubai with my family in 2003. My husband took a business trip to Tehran and driven by a passion for 'treasure-hunting' the unknown art of a region, he came back home with photographs by Abbas Kiarostami and Shadi Ghadirian. I was so impressed with the works that I decided to take a trip myself and check it out! This trip was a huge eye-opener resulting in my first exhibition presenting 6 Iranian contemporary photographers shortly followed by the first exhibition of Farhad Moshiri in Dubai. I realized that Iranian artists have been living in a bubble; isolated from the rest of the world, entrenched in the political, cultural and social upheaval inside their country. I felt that the time had come for them to express themselves to a wider audience and I started traveling around Iran regularly, meeting artists in their studios and discovering a wealth of talent. Most people thought "but this woman is Belgian..." Indeed I am not Iranian and that has not been a problem at all. You don't need to be Iranian to appreciate their art and from my first visit to Tehran I have been moved by the sincerity, authenticity and relevancy of the works of the young artists I was meeting. However if Karma exists; I might have been Iranian in a previous life!

How does contemporary Iranian art differ from other Middle Eastern art?

Simply by WHO they are. First of all, we should take a step back in time to when the area of modern day Iran was called Persia. 'The Cradle of Humanity,' as it was also known has always been responsible for an enormous diversity of works. Persepolis invokes a history that extends back far beyond 1979, and beyond the Islamic regime with which Iran has come to be identified as today. So, the cultural legacy has an incalculable influence on contemporary production.

However, having been torn by The Revolution and then by the eight years of war with Iraq, this part of Iran's modern history has also been formative for the expression of the latest generation of artists. Born in the years before, during or immediately after The Revolution, their art reflects the dialogue between the artist and the identity issues emerging from life in Iran during these dramatically transformative times.

Can you describe the reactions that people usually have when they are exposed to the works of Iranian artists you collect?

Surprise! Even now that Iranian art is gaining its place on the global art scene - people keep being surprised. We often think of artists in terms of their origins. This is a problem when you are talking about artists from Iran, particularly in light of the intense attention currently directed towards this country by the media. The time has not yet come when journalists ask about the content and idea behind the work, whereas questions about where an artist can show his or her work, what risk s/he is taking when s/he trespasses the regime censorship guidelines, how the works physically cross the borders of the country, etc proliferate.

However, it's only a matter of time. More and more, we see initiatives with a genuine intellectual approach to understand the art emerging from this country.

Would you say that their reactions differ when they are looking at works by an artist who comes from the same cultural background that they come from?

I believe that Iranian artists address global issues, just as art originating from the West. As described earlier, there are a number of common ingredients feeding Iranian artists' reflections but what matters is how an artist develops individually even though s/he is sharing a common cultural background. The criteria of originality is key for an artist to gain recognition on the global art scene regardless of his or her origin.

How do you explain the recent growing interest by the international art market in contemporary Middle Eastern art and contemporary Iranian art in particular?

Alongside the art markets of China and the Indian Subcontinent, I strongly believe that the art of Iran and the Middle-East offers art collectors great potential and much enjoyment. So far, the international audience has sampled just a small taste of what this vast country offers in terms of contemporary art and the promise that the future holds for it.

Are there risks of underlying Neo-Orientalist attitudes in the works that usually make it into acclaimed "Western" circles?

Like Orientalism, Neo-Orientalism continues to shape actual knowledge of the "Orient" into a collection of fragments about the "East" in order for the "West" to interpret and domesticate them.

Classic traditions in Islamic art practice that have become well-known in the West including calligraphy, miniature painting, and carpet design have shaped the Western perception of Iran, which unfortunately has not. It's limitative but by continuing to promote contemporary Iranian art through major exhibitions, like *Iran Inside Out* at the Chelsea Art Museum and through galleries efforts, perceptions might eventually widen.

What is the role that contemporary Iranian art can play in bridging the cultural and political divide between the East and the West?

It is true that politics have generated a great deal of curiosity about Iran. As a result, its art scene is benefiting from this attention as well. The country's artistic movements are bursting with vitality and continue to attract the attention of Western art curators who wish to promote their work outside Iran, contributing to a wider appreciation and understanding of the country. Basically, art is one of the few positive signals emanating from Iran today.



ABOUT B21 GALLERY, DUBAI

In November 2005, B21 Gallery opened its doors to the public in a warehouse in Dubai's centrally located industrial area, Al Quoz.

Since then the gallery has showcased an intense and dynamic program, emphasizing the importance of risk-taking in contemporary art and challenging its visitors and collectors to unfamiliar terrain.

B21 focuses on a concentrated and eclectic group of artists emerging from the Arab and Iranian contemporary art scenes. These selected 'rising talents' are leading the way in a burgeoning and exciting young art movement, the ideas and practice of which manifest powerfully in their work.

کنکور

گوجه فرنگی

تورم مسکن ما
جوانان ۹۶

تسهیلات

جوان

جوانان
جوانان

جوانان

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پذیرش آگهی

جوانان
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گوجه فرنگی

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فرهنگ

انجام کلیه امور
مجسمه سازی
بهداد لاهوتی
۰۹۱۲۳۱۹۷۳۴۵

رسانه بهداد
۰۹۱۲۳۱۹۷۳۴۵



Behdad Lahooti

I think that mass media nowadays is "the" tool to attract the attention of the audience, using every means available to do so.

In this process it's not necessary for the news to be real. It's only important to have a catchy headline, the bigger the advertisement the bigger will the message be and more global.

In line with mass media's ability to be so powerful and profitable through the use of repetitive words and attractive headlines, I decided to build my own media.

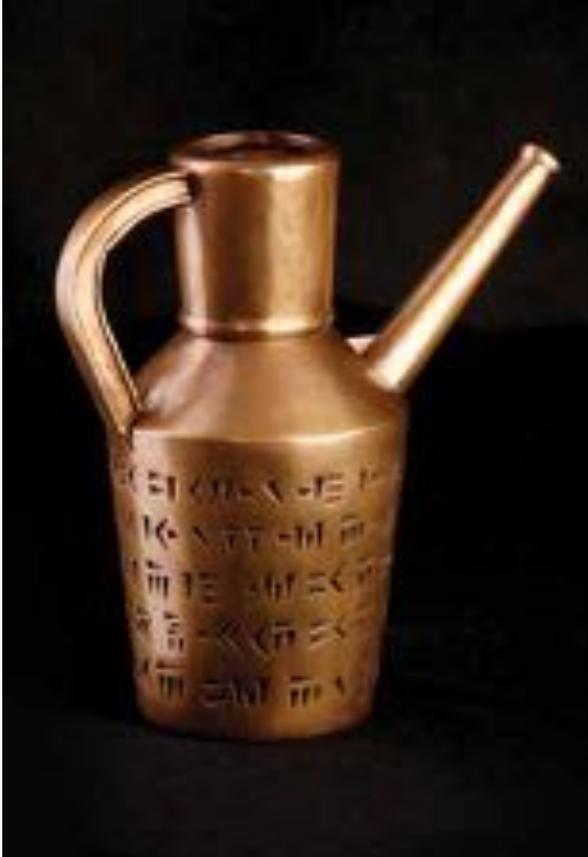
Behdad's media is an Iranian toilet but has suitable space for advertising.

"Youth. Housing. Jobs. Inflation. Employment. Easy Loans."

Basically, all of these are opportunities for the young generation which are fleeting **such as the slogans and promises of the regime** here...

The medium employed in this case is used regularly during the day and therefore the impact of advertising can even be greater. Therefore it is arguable that my media, Behdad's media, is a daily tool of life that the audience is in dire need of it and that the social issues printed on it can have an even bigger impact.

Maybe in the future, once I have earned money with my media, I would be able to advertise even on a global scale.

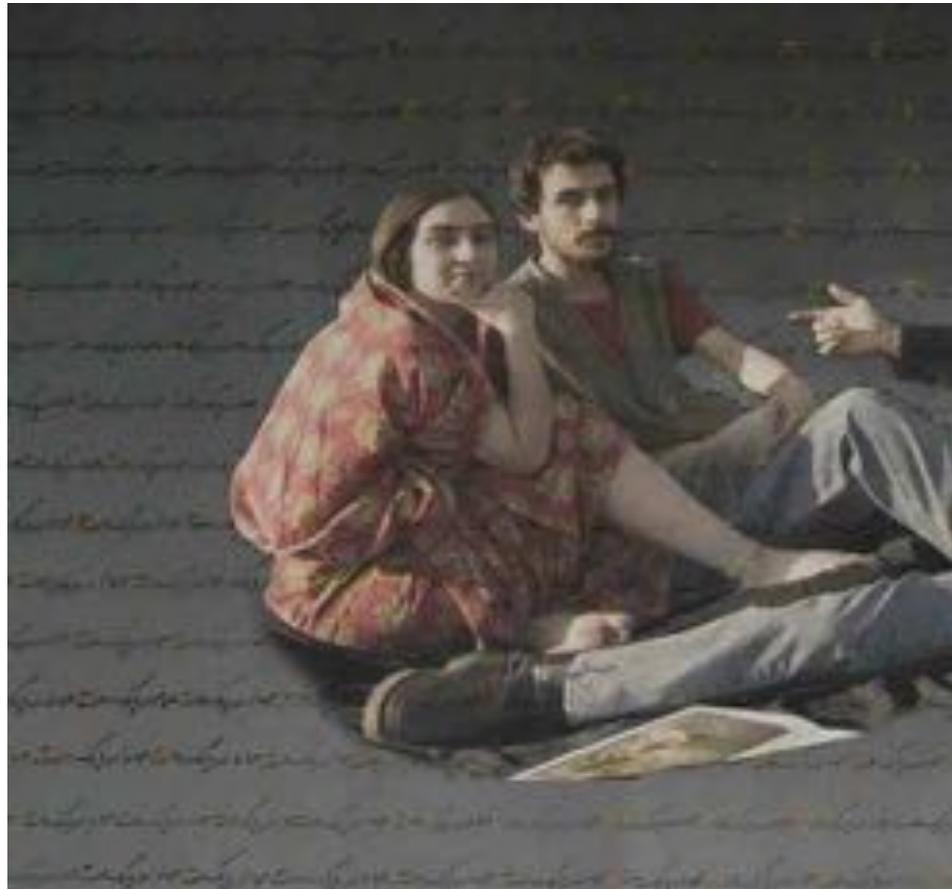


(above) *Appliance Used In Traditional Toilets*, From the series, *Chahandchah*, 2008-2009, Cast bronze, 40x20 cm
(top right) *Peace For Thy Neighbor - Chalk Bands*, 2007, Chalk bands casted by hand, cast life-size body parts, 2m in diameter
(bottom right) *Preoccupied With Numbers*, 2007, Chalk casting and numbers labeled on floor, 4x4 m, legs 90 cm

Opposite page

A Cliché For Mass Media, 2008, Ceramic with print over, 57x42x22 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery





Farideh Lashai

A great European master miniaturist and another great master artist are walking through a Frank [European] meadow discussing virtuosity and art. The more expert of the two says to the other: "painting in the new style demands such talent that if you depicted one of the trees in this forest, a man who looked upon that painting could come here, and if he so desired, correctly select that tree from among the others."

I thank Allah that I, the humble tree before you, have not been drawn with such intent. And not because I fear that if I'd been thus depicted all the dogs in Istanbul would assume I was a real tree and piss on me: I don't want to be a tree, I want to be its meaning.¹

The master miniaturist, a veritable mystic in his own right, when he brings to life the great Myths of Leyli and Majnun or Khosrow and Shirin, does so with the aim of relating numinous mystical concepts such as the souls yearning for a transcendental beloved, and as such, the visual language of the miniaturist becomes secondary to his conceptual agenda, demonstrating the power of meaning over appearance. As such, whether we are face to face with the delicate and precise miniature works of Medieval manuscript illuminators, or the wholly abstract, free flowing representations of Expressionist painters, we are aware that these outwardly divergent modes of expression are irrevocably bound by a metaphysical artistic agenda which manifests itself in a multiplicity of guises.

Farideh Lashai's fascination with trees is a manifestation of this same reflective endeavor. Though the viewer is inclined to interpret the invasive forms as elements of nature, they are ultimately abstract and her choice of subject matter extends beyond the physical entity of the tree form and into its conceptual significance as a giver of life, a timeless observer of history, and a living growing artifact of nature. As the artist herself states in her autobiography: "I became inflicted with the magic of orange trees and never overcame it. The trees took hold of me and never let me go, with thousands of hands, thousands of embraces".²

¹ Orhan Pamuk (Erdag M. Gonkar); *my name is red*, London, p.51

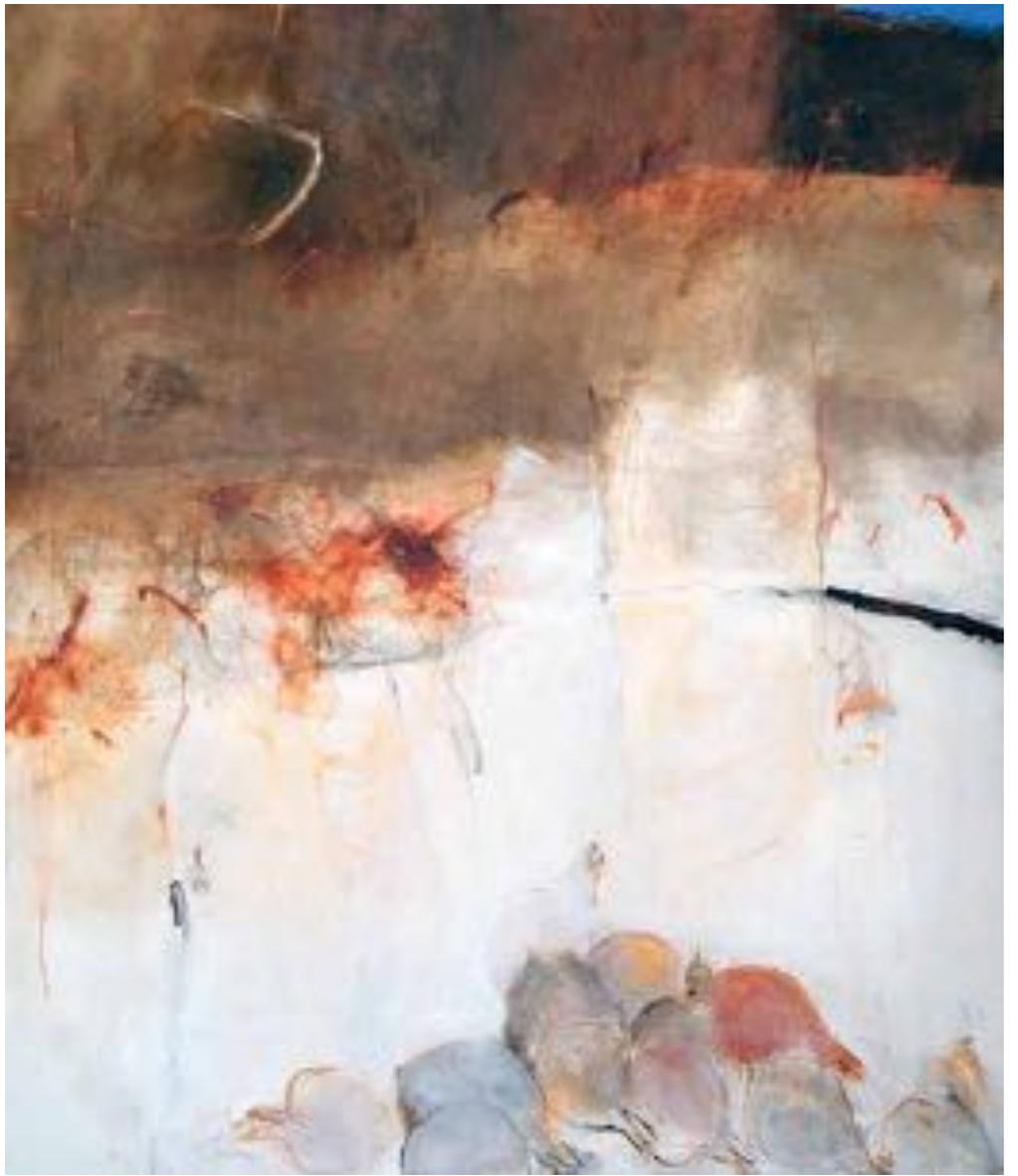
² Farideh Lashai. *shal bamoo (The Jackal Came)*, Tehran, p.3

The work as a whole acts as a confluence of various meditations on the nature of artistic depiction, the contrast between appearance and essence, and the relationship between objects and their environment, all done within a visual makeup rich in cultural imagery and literary ornaments.

Ultimately, in the present work, Lashai goes beyond the realm of mere depiction, and instead provides us with a tangible sensual experience that guides the viewer through a reflective yet playful journey exploring the essence of the artistic spirit and one whose humor and buoyancy provides a satirical edge to an otherwise profound subject matter.

Nima Sagharchi





(top left & across) *I Don't Want To Be A Tree*, 2008, Video Still
(bottom left & across) *I Don't Want To Be A Tree*, 2008, Video Still
(right) *Pomegranates*, 2008, Oil and acrylic on canvas, 180x160 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Taghnia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



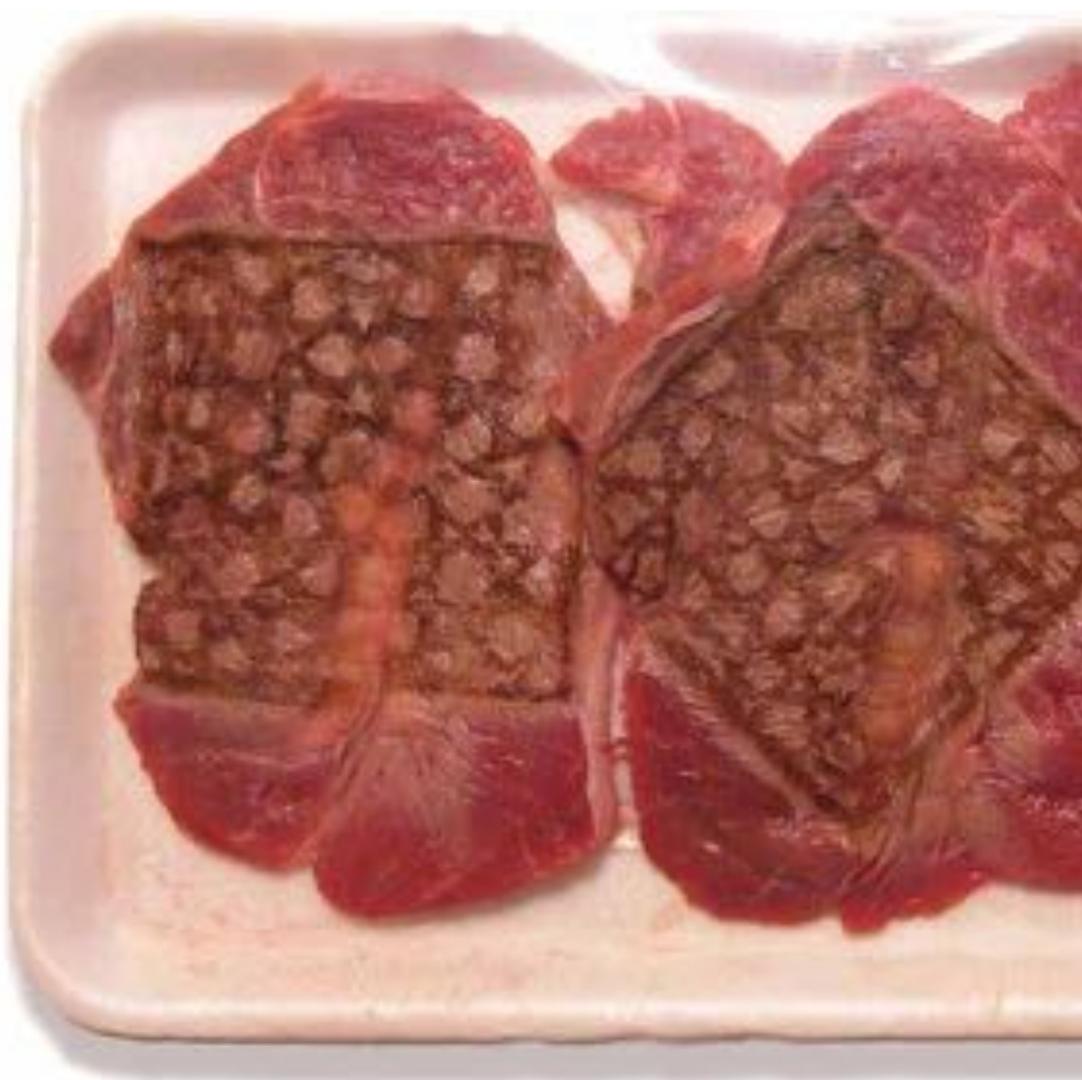
Pooneh Maghazeh

Before 2003, I introduced myself to the world as Lisa. Lisa was Catholic, taught Sunday school in her latter adolescence while being completely absorbed in Puerto Rican and hip-hop cultures. These assimilations functioned as self-preservation, seeking tolerance in an intolerant, blue-collar, neighborhood in suburban Pennsylvania. But in fact, I was born into a Shiite Muslim family of Iranian descent and raised in the United States. Naturally, the delicate balance between bi-culturalism and assimilation felt palpable. Through frequent travels to Iran, I was also intrigued by the way that theocratic symbolism functions when implemented in the public sphere. These reactions have formalized in the creation of garments and in hot-iron brandings.

In my work, the use of symbolism, dress and/or terminology presents the co-packing of cultural iconography, implicating an overt sense of loyalty to specific ideologies. My use of the Amish dress serves as a starting point and an analogy for the role of the veil in Iran. Each sculpture is autobiographical, bearing narratives of my personal history. In a rabid combination of embroidery, all-American hot iron branding, Amish garment, sacred Islamic geometry, and "gangsta-bling"; my current work envelops a narcissist pledge of allegiance to subcultures that I have espoused. At its core, my work investigates **the tendency for the human psyche to subscribe to specific categorizations, or subcultures, in response to feelings of ambivalence, uncertainty and/or anxiety.** As a subcomponent to this concept, I have adopted a fractal Islamic pattern commonly used in architectural detailing in both new and old construction throughout Iran. Over the past eight months in New York City, I have been offering free, voluntary brandings of patrons' personal items. Utilizing a propane torch and a custom made branding iron inscribed with this fractal pattern, an act of re-contextualization implies the historic representation of cattle branding, offers a metaphor for migration, references mass-marketing and alludes to branding identities or logos. Moreover, the possibility is created for a reinvention, producing either a strengthening or an erasure of the symbol's significance.

I intend to use myself as a case study in defining the use of cultural assimilation on a societal level, and the psychosocial constructs on which it is enshrined. I will to explore both these concepts in the context of a social or performative act. Moreover, in understanding Lisa specifically, I plan to investigate the concept of theatricality and the scripted character. Here, I see the relevance in performance as a social gesture, an additional method of sculpture and as a natural progression in my creative process.

Estrangement and altered re-engagement with anxiety provoking environments have forced me to create coping constructs. I plan to exhume Lisa, learn her ostentatious obsessions, strip her, record her, and expose her ulterior conflicts. Transporting between the two identities, I intend to collapse sculpture and performance, to better develop the transmission of symbols as cultural iconography, and to seize the isolation, deprivation and eventual glorification of an overtly dramatized persona.





(top left) *Untitled*, 2009, Performance still, digital c-print, 12x16 in
 (bottom left & across) *Pioneer 1*, 2009, Pioneer branded beef chuck, 12x6 in
 (top right) *Hell's Puerto Rico*, 2008, Performance still, digital c-print, 18x24 in
 (bottom right) *Hell's Wash*, 2008, Performance still, digital c-print, 18x24 in
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Tazhinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery



(above) *Part 1 of UTOPIA GRAPHY Collection*, Spring -Summer 2005, video performance, DV / 28 minutes
 (top right) *Part 2 of UTOPIA GRAPHY Collection*, Summer 2007, video photo, DV / 5 minutes,
 (right) *Part 2 of UTOPIA GRAPHY Collection*, Summer 2007, video photo, DV / 5 minutes

opposite page
Part 3 of UTOPIA GRAPHY Collection, Winter 2008, video photo, DV/ 3 minutes
 All images ©artist



Majid Ma'soomi Rad

I was brought up in a high-density cultural atmosphere, just like the mythical taste of Ghorme Sabzi (traditional Iranian food). Rare tastes and scarce smells have filled my nose.

Well-made tastes, deep colors... you can nowhere find blue like the one you can find in Iran. So I am myself considered as a high-density person.

Once in an unsuccessful student movement (Tir, 18th, 1378), I was lying behind bars and firing my bills to lessen the effect of tear gas. On the other side of bars, there were soldiers acting, I remember distinctly, in a manner very related to the way anyone would. Since then, my outlook on life has turned towards a more rebellious one: I decided to object! I have tried to transform political issues into artworks in different places in order to evaluate the quality of objection. This is because, as far as I am concerned, objection is more beautiful than its adrenalin-infused consequences.

I tried to have projects which made me analyze "the act of objection" in natural atmospheres. In one collection, I killed butterflies and put them on my favorite flowers, then photographed them so that no one could comprehend the link between the two. I even gave the photographs as post cards to my friends. Most of them had no clue! But when I told some people the truth of matter, beautiful natural photos became a reason for political discussion.

In some big exhibitions I investigated the notion of the uselessness of technology as a metaphor for the support that is bestowed on our "nice" museums by our religious and political leaders. Then I continued with some projects to deliver even more extreme ideas about the act of objecting. For 2 years, I took on the persona of a different character and I painted. It was too difficult. At the end, I had an exhibition of all the works and then set the unsold works on fire. This event occurred at the same time of Aghajari's corporal punishment sentence because of suggesting Protestantism in an Islamic society. Metaphorically, I found a new sight of objection.

Later on, after several chain murders in Iran and the killing of seven active political writers, I decided to create a performance art work, which I conducted over a period of four months in public places in Tehran such as Tehran University and the Molavi amphitheater. The projections of which the piece comprised were eventually destroyed due to objection from censor groups. Yet, through it all, I was learning resilience and the harshness that surrounded me opened my eyes to a beauty of a different kind.

I think that certain tastes are only effective in their birth place, so I have never had the desire to eat Mac Donald's outside the US. I have also never become too tired to continue creating despite the ongoing closing down of my exhibitions. Once, because of a poster illustrating Christ crucified for having mercy on a woman, an exhibition of mine was closed by a religious group in Qom. I was happy, not thrilled, but happy because I could explore a new face of objection in my culture. So, I went to court with the poster to ask for my rights. I will never forget the first hearing because it was spent explaining to the judge what a poster is. This time I could follow an objection to judicial ground. I found another aspect of objection.

Today, there seems to be a growing focus on art that is political. A few years ago, I was younger and more idealistic. Back then, I was running crazily on the red lines in my country with skateboarders, with no fear... Today I am still bold, but increasingly aware of the dangers around me.

In recent works, I pay more attention to understanding. The more I object for the sake of understanding the more I dive into new aspects of social awareness. I am, as a result, more aware of the foolishness of society and my own foolishness at that. My analysis of objection in street or literary forms has become a sort of obsession with the futility of political action and how through its pretences people can be misused. But objecting through art can be promising. It is a window through which a much needed morality can be introduced to both art and politics.



(right) *100% Wool Self Portrait*, 2008, Photograph
(bottom) *100% Wool Self Portrait*, 2008, Photograph

opposite page

(left) *Boycott 2 Sprays*, 2008, Mixed media, 25x6 cm

(right) *Virginity*, 2005 (detail)

next page

Virginity, 2005, Installation, apples, white color spray, hair, tissue
All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery





Amir Mobed

Virginity

In this installation, Mobed used real apples, symbolizing femininity, upon which he sprayed a layer of white color. He arranged the apples in two divided spaces. In this arrangement we see a row of intact apples with plaited hair, symbolizing the innocent virgin girls. The second arrangement of a square of cut apples with messed up hair, symbolizes the outraged, raped and abused girls and the loss of their innocence.

This installation refers directly to the girls who turn to prostitution because of the pressures of poverty, **all over the world**. The tissues piled up in one corner are reminiscent of the age old practice of showing stained sheets on first night of marriage to prove virginity.







Ahmad Morshedloo

I have spent the most basic and mundane moments of my life within my own personal space, creating works of art with subject matter that surrounds us constantly and around which we constantly move without ever noticing their aesthetic value or regarding them with an admiring eye. The "Still Life" is a favorite genre of mine.

I also capture people's involuntary loneliness and their forced solitude reflected in their means of escape - deep slumber. My subjects are unaware of their observers; they are caught at their most vulnerable and in their most personal of attire, poses and pensive states. Some faces are always present; my mother, sister and other members of my family.

I capture those moments which fill our lives and which we think unimportant because nothing tangible takes place. Aesthetically, my subjects are not the most pleasing but if I don't have a reason to paint something or someone, I don't. I want my work to reflect that purpose and I would like the viewers of my work to recognize it because a good work does not need to have bizarre or unusual subject matter. A work of art **is not a riddle and should be understood by all**. My technique is precise and realistic. I work mostly in oil and charcoal, though my ballpoint pen works have had a continued presence in my career thus far. ***

Ahmad Morshedloo owes his unique standing in Iran's contemporary painting scene to his power of subjective representation in which he illustrates the most ordinary scenes, individuals, events and phenomena of our modern world. What impresses viewers at first is the realistic aspect of his work. Then, gradually, his staging begins to take shape, and as the spectator of a live performance on stage, the viewer's gaze turns away from the faces and sees the painting as a play in which the painting is staged. It is in the last phase that the viewer becomes the audience of an unfamiliar story that seems to be told for the first time despite its familiar components and recognizable elements: the story of a child lost in a city, a difficult puberty, a young woman facing her inescapable fate that is nothing but the recurrence of the lives of former generations, and dozens of other stories the painter is determined to recount.

Ahmad Morshedloo's capability in using a range of techniques such as oil, watercolor, charcoal and pen, has helped him benefit from the advantages of Neo-Realism as a common aspect of his works - a kind of Neo-Realism that neither makes pretentious statements nor traces the works of the world's masters of painting. Instead, it invites the viewer to judge the world readily with humility and tolerance. Ahmad Morshedloo's subjectivity in depicting the most ordinary scenes - scenes we all encounter - is so noticeable and presented so simply and honestly that viewers, too, are encouraged to express their subjectivity towards the world around them. Ahmad Morshedloo tells his story in a way which encourages viewers to tell theirs.

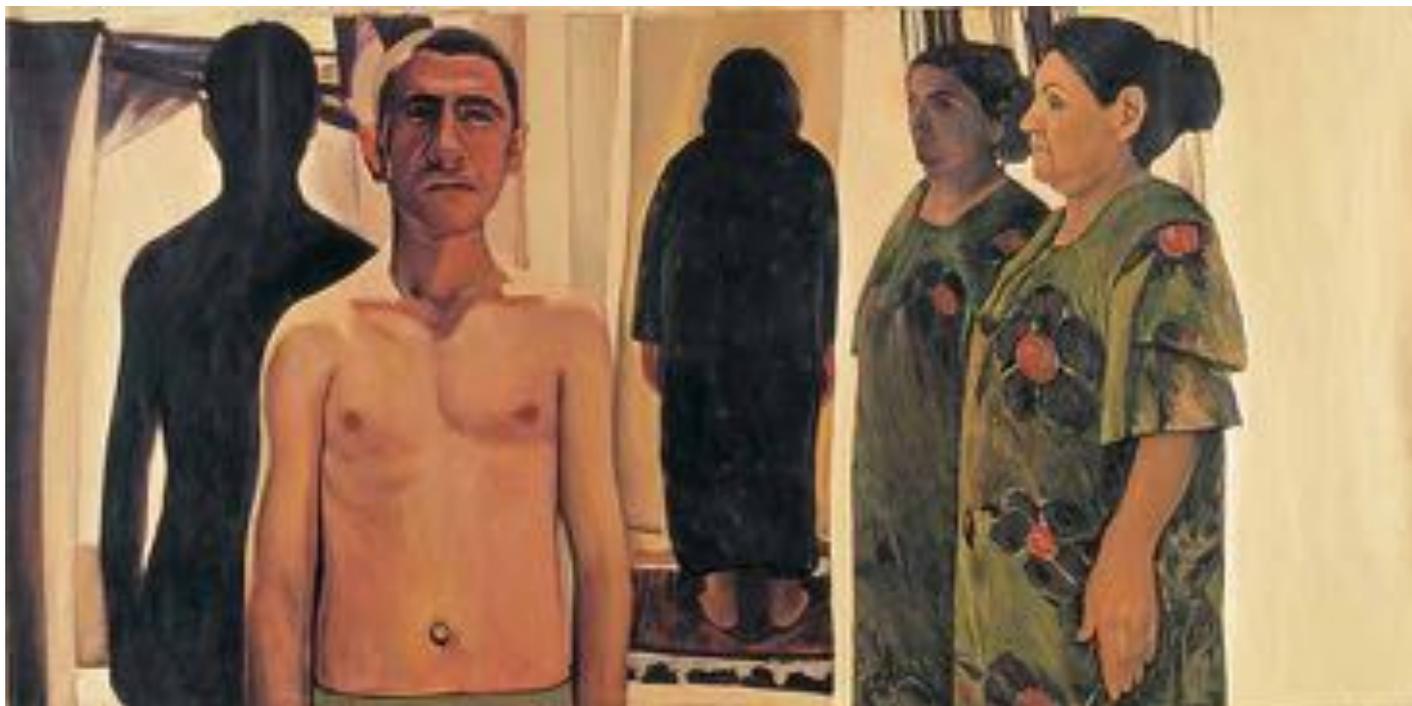
Text provided by Leeni Ojaniemi

(top) *Untitled*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 178x366 cm, courtesy Morad Saghafi Collection
(bottom) *Untitled*, 2007, Oil on canvas, 130x334 cm, courtesy of Mah Art Gallery

opposite page

Untitled, 2008, Oil on canvas, 225x190 cm, courtesy of Mah Art Gallery

All images @artist







Houman Mortazavi

During the Iran-Iraq war, Tehran's cemetery, known as Behesht-eZahra was one of Tehran's major urban hubs. My discovery of "objects as art" was in the Martyrs section of this vast cemetery.

On each grave there is a shrine, built by the deceased father, brother or son and decorated and maintained by his mother, sister, wife or daughter. Each shrine consists of a metal structure holding up a glass cabinet. The content of each window display is almost identical to the next. A blood stained Quran, nail clippers, ID cards, unsent letters or photos extracted from pockets of the deceased, as well as sports memorabilia, awards, plastic wedding cake grooms and pictures of happy smiling boys next to images of their corpse. Decorated with cheap plastic flowers and candle holders added by the family. A bizarre collection of objects, multiplied by thousands, all telling one story. The story of a life cut short!

The workmanship is not significant and surely there has been no artistic intention behind them, but the impact of each shrine, their ability to convey their message could stand up to Joseph Cornell or any other contemporary artist.

At that moment I realized that artistic craftsmanship is nothing more than a facade. I lost my respect for decorative art and my understanding of beauty and what is beautiful was derailed for good.

For the past two decades I have been rediscovering objects, simple physics and personal/human instinct through assembling objects. I have preferred boxes for the sense of mystery and enclosure they convey, and believe that no matter what fantastic story line I might have, the "non-lazy" viewer's version will be just as acceptable as mine, if not better. Stories, words and concepts in an art work are there to convey an indescribable mental image which is detached from all other accessories an artist can add on to his or her work, especially since each and every person has a different understanding of objects. One sees a gold fish as a symbol of Norouz while Homer Simpson calls them "unprocessed fish sticks!"

As for the work process, I usually start each art work (or series) with an event, a mental picture or personal issue. Gradually the literal story line develops and disintegrates or fades leaving behind a sense of the assembled material that transcends my explanation. Usually this leads to an ability to connect with the viewers on an emotional level. This is when I assume the artwork is finished.

Almost all of my artworks are untitled. Names distract or over explain art. But I do name series just to make sure the viewer is not totally lost.

My work just like myself and almost everyone else is affected by society, politics and culture as well as personal history and life style. But I try to eliminate any half or undigested material since I think that the clarity, "mission" and social activity embedded within the artistic capability of an illustrator/activist are more powerful than the artist's concern with aesthetics.

My work is to be touched, wound up and played with. Handling the material, which is inherent to third-world-class craftsmanship, is a part of the artwork as well as of the viewer who, in this case, becomes the last missing piece.

(right) *Stranger*, 1993, Mixed media, 14x10x10 cm

opposite page

(top left) *Fortune (Coffee Cups)*, 1 of a 4 piece series, 2008, 11x6x6 cm, Porcelain coffee cup, porcelain paint

(top right) *Fortune (Coffee Cups)*, 1 of a 4 piece series 2008, 11x6x6 cm, Porcelain coffee cup, porcelain paint

(middle right) *Untitled*, from the *Stranger* series, 2002, Mixed media, 10x11x15 cm

(bottom right) *It Hids (Bache Marouf)*, 2007, Mixed media, 13x17x4 cm

(bottom left) *It-Hid 1*, 2008, Mixed media, 18x20x7cm

All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery





Farhad Moshiri

In the painting *General Understanding*, Moshiri uses the traditional medium of embroidery to comment on commercialism and culture. As Moshiri explains, "One way to learn more about a certain culture is by reading their classified ads. When I read them, vivid images flash before my eyes. It is absurd that imagination can be triggered by a disposable medium such as a classified ad, but given their inherent quality to cause illusions, I was tempted to tamper with their suggested scenarios by switching words and phrases. I then fetishized the entire ad page by recreating it as a work of intricate embroidery, in an attempt to freeze what was once just a transient announcement."

Continuing his exploration of ironic interpretations of traditional Iranian forms and popular culture, in his 2008 painting titled *Love Letter* Moshiri installed a curtain of disassembled chandelier crystals over the work's entire surface, coating the painting with a glistening layer of sweet fantasy. The flat, monotone image of two figures huddled around a *Love Letter*, which is set behind the ornamentation is purposefully presented as one-dimensional and simplistic, referencing the syrupy love obsessed songs and movies so prevalent in contemporary Iran.

Text provided by the Third Line

Woman under Electric Blanket refers to Moshiri's continued eclectic interest in popular culture, in this case his idea to compile a visual scrap box which he kept and from which he derived his inspiration. The woman in question is one whom he dug out of a 70s European magazine for no other reason that it simply was appealing to the artist.

Text provided by Maryam Homayoun-Eisler



(top left) *Kennedy Salt and Pepper Shaker*, 2006, Oil and acrylic on canvas laid on board, diptych, 210x160 cm, courtesy of Eisler Collection London

(left) *General Understanding*, 2007, Embroidery on canvas, 170x130 cm, courtesy of The Third Line and CAM Collection Dubai

(below) *Love Letter*, 2008, Oil paint, crystal and metal hooks on canvas mounted board, 189x148 cm, courtesy of Eisler Collection London

opposite page

Woman Under Electric Blanket, 2007, Embroidery, glitter and oil on canvas mounted on MDF, 120x160 cm, courtesy of Eisler Collection London

All images ©artist



(series) *Kiosks*, 2007-2008, Digital camera printed on paper
All images ©artist and courtesy of Aram Gallery





Siavash Nagshbandi

Movie Stars, Soccer champions, charge cards for phones, foodstuff, internet cards, etc... the everyday concerns of ordinary people, and their cultural and social back grounds.

These windows are frames showcasing today's culture of urban life in Iran, which will change by time but will always be revisited.





Shirin Neshat

Ever since I began my artistic career in the mid 1990's, my art seems to have gone through drastic transitions both thematically and formally. I have moved rather quickly from still photography, to making numerous video installations and presently to releasing my first feature length film.

From 1993-1997, I produced a series of photographs titled "Women of Allah" which were conceptual narratives on the subject of female warriors during the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1979). These stark black and white photographs became iconic portraits of Muslim women willfully armed. Yet, every image - each woman's submissive gaze - suggested **a far more complex and paradoxical reality behind the surface**. The female body (eyes, face, hands, feet and chest) was inscribed with Farsi calligraphy. The content of the text was poetry by contemporary Iranian women poets, who had written on the subject of martyrdom and the role of women in relation to the revolution.

By late 1997, I found the urge to move beyond still photography and to expand my interest in text and image into the arena of the moving image, where I could consider highly conceptual, yet slightly narrative pieces.

Since 1998, I made numerous short film installations, including "Turbulent" (1998), "Rapture" (1999), and "Fervor" (2000,) essentially experimented with an unusual fusion between the languages of cinema and visual art. While silent, these films are created as visual narratives, relying on the strength of the 'image' to convey the narrative. Many of these films are designed with more than a single channel projection in order to physically surround the viewers.

In 2003, I began to re-adapt a well known novel, written by Iranian author Shahrnush Parsipur into my first feature length film, called "Women without Men". This ambitious project, which has just been completed in 2009, is another attempt to infuse visual art aesthetic together with the cinematic language. The film is fully narrative and designed for theatrical release. Frame by frame each shot is carefully designed to have visual and symbolic resonance but always in relation to a larger narrative as a whole.

opposite page

(top right) *Turbulent*, 1998, Video Still

(bottom right) *Turbulent*, 1998, Video Still

All images ©artist and courtesy of Gladstone Gallery







(above) *Women Without Men (Woman knitting)*, 2004, C-print, 91.4x234.3 cm

next page
Untitled (Rapture series - Women Pushing Boat), 1999, Gelatin silver print, 44x68.25 in
All images ©artist and courtesy of Gladstone Gallery





A Gallery's Perspective, Munich

Karin Sachs

Director of Galerie Karin Sachs, Munich

For how long have you been involved in the promotion of contemporary Iranian art and what drew you to it in the first place?

The first Iranian artist I exhibited was Parastou Forouhar in the Spring 2006. I presented her works "Blindspot" and "Spielmannszüge" (Brass Bands). Parastou Forouhar's art is strongly influenced by her history and the quest to have the politically motivated murder of her parents clarified. In terms of form, Parastou Forouhar follows the conceptual art route and in doing so consciously opposes traditional Iranian art that, as religious art, makes use of allegories.

How does contemporary Iranian art differ from other Middle Eastern art?

For me, Iranian art is exciting when it is controversial and when it tackles complexities in society. When it breaks stereotypes and fails to live up to the international art market's expectations of certain "Third World Art" clichés. To do this, artists work with painting, object art, sculpture, video, installations and photography. Of course, Iranian art describes the country's political situation. But there are also universal themes such as striving for freedom or sexuality and prostitution, as depicted in works by Shirin Neshat.

Can you describe the reactions that people usually have when they are exposed to the works of Iranian artists you collect?

That again depends completely on the extent to which the artist is willing to let the viewer "be in the picture". In her works, the artist Parastou Forouhar raises the issue of identity and individuality in a country shaped by the interdependence of the Iranian administrative machine and religiously motivated fundamentalism. In an exhibition in Europe, Forouhar's works consciously confronted viewers with cultures alien to them. In her installation "SHOULD NOT SHOULD", she even lets the viewers themselves identify with what is alien in the form of a vestment hanging open.

How do you explain the recent growing interest by the international art market in contemporary Middle Eastern art and contemporary Iranian art in particular?

I wouldn't say that the demand has increased that much, rather that Iranian art has taken on a new significance in comparison. It has now become an important part of the global-cultural process of exchange. Since the 90s, Iranian art has contributed to our idea of international art and conveyed something of its culture. Non-Western artists and curators play an important role in redefining contemporary art.

Are there risks of underlying Neo-Orientalist attitudes in the works that usually make it into acclaimed "Western" circles?

As I said, the presence of non-western art today has to do more with an interest in the works and the particular context than the approach, as back in the 80s, of exposing contradictions or wanting to follow an exotic fashion.

How is this reflecting on the formal and thematic qualities of the works that are coming out from the younger generation of artists from Iran?

Pattern, ornamentation and allegory are playing an important role again in contemporary art. Forouhar makes use of the ornamentation from Persian tradition and provides the dynamics of form and content with new appeal. She works with contrasts, with concealing and revealing. The work "SHOULD NOT SHOULD" consists of a suspended priest's vestment decorated with an ornamental pattern on the inside that forms the English words and that is composed of small knives.

What is the role that contemporary Iranian art can play in bridging the cultural and political divide between the East and the West?

We live in a world that is growing closer and closer together in both space and time. There are various influences responsible for this such as the media, migration or the exchange in large cities. It is precisely artists like Parastou Forouhar or Shirin Neshat who cross the borders between different worlds, their art creating and moving in new cross-cultural spaces.



ABOUT GALERIE KARIN SACHS

Galerie Karin Sachs was founded in 1986 in Munich. Since the start, the gallery's programme has focused on painting, drawing, photography, sculpture, video and installations. In June 2007 the gallery moved into a new space in Augustenstrasse, next to Lenbachhaus and Pinakotheken.



Nicky Nodjoumi

The subject matter in my paintings mostly deals with power structures and power struggles in intentionally nondescript situations. I challenge the inherent limitations of the multilayered content of my works by crossing cultural and sociopolitical boundaries. Each painting acts as a singular critique of society in general without being specifically political.

My paintings present theatrical stages with scenes played out, in which costumed characters, animals and props engage in an ongoing dialogue. Animals appear throughout the works as both, gestural metaphors and/or ambiguous aggressors or victims. I use them in a mythological sense as representations of the emotions that are associated with cruelty, innocence and at times despotism. Referring to animals helps me to maintain the unity of thinking and feeling. They collectively, with the other props, add to the spiritual and psychological dimension of my paintings.

Throughout my work, uniforms of Western business suits and Iranian clerical garments portray the authority of a male-dominated world. The discourse of these elements integrates humor, which operates to humiliate political leaders and their violence, while pointing out the eminent weaknesses of the human condition. I employ lines of divisions in my compositions as well as visible cuts across the figures and their surrounding environments to reflect not only oppression, but a sense of dislocation. Furthermore, I reference eroticism to investigate the prevailing hypocrisy and duplicity in patriarchal societies, especially those of the Middle East.

In the process, this simultaneously seductive and subversive visual vocabulary works to create a cohesive and dramatic narrative. These representations, set against a continuous backdrop of ambiguity, allegory and irony, suggest an extremely delicate balance between the personal and the universal.



(above) *Searching for the Golden Triangle*, 2002, Acrylic on canvas, 244x155 cm
(top left) *Noble Fight*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 216x165 cm
(bottom left) *Night Watch*, 2008, Oil on canvas, 216x165 cm

opposite page
Push and Pull, 2008, Oil on canvas, 244x305 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Priska C. Juschka Fine Art





Reza Paydari

Purgatorials

This collection is about my friends, classmates and other students who studied Art at Azad University. We have all witnessed the same social changes that were brought about by the revolution of Iran and saw the Islamic Republic of Iran and observed the war between Iran and Iraq.

During such times culture is the last thing on peoples' minds. Our government was preoccupied with war and politics, not art! It closed all of the doors in the face of any form of cross cultural engagement with another country. Our only means of connecting with other cultures was through VHS tapes that were brought into the country. Through these films we discovered "the other" and in doing so defined who we were and were not. Many teenagers growing up during those times chose to model themselves after the stars in these movies instead of the expected behavior required by the surrounding Islamic culture.

These identity-searching adolescents became my friends and classmates at the University. When I used to see them, I would trace the elements of stardom after which they had modeled themselves in an attempt to cleanse themselves from that which was forced upon them.

This is what purgatorials is all about: **the cleansing of identity.**

Text provided by Silk Road Gallery.

(top left) *Purgatorials, 11, 2005, Photograph, 50x50 cm*

(top right) *Purgatorials, 15, 2005, Photograph, 50x50 cm*

(bottom left) *Purgatorials, 18, 2005, Photograph, 50x50 cm*

(bottom right) *Purgatorials, 26, 2005, Photograph, 50x50 cm*

All images ©artist and courtesy of Silk Road Gallery





Leila Pazooki

The works of Leila Pazooki may seem to take different directions and have various themes, but the concept of "borders" could be seen as a recurring backdrop and the common thread which goes through all her projects. It starts in her early research on potentials of expression through visual modifications, manipulating the conspicuity of "forbidden" images and challenging the "borders" of visual work in terms of "acceptability". Her visual explorations include the strategies of multi-layering and partial elimination of "illicit" images, mingling the "borders" of "tolerable" and "forbidden" figurative representations.

The challenge of imposed visual "borders" was developed in a broader discourse when she set out to question the "borders" in a rather sociopolitical approach in her Tehran Fashion series of works with photography and video. The "borders" between the artist and the people who have been filmed or photographed casually in Tehran are seen as a barrier in inter-human relationships, which the artist tries to blur through mutual contemplative observation, which changes the settings of regular urban encounters. Pazooki has been apparently searching for another means to cross the "borders" that define common protocols of approach in a rather personal manner, while the project is also taking up another pictorial direction as a chance for observation and representation of social statuses.

Some of the videos and photographs in the Tehran Fashion series address both domestic and international challenges of cultural confrontations and exchanges in the light of globalization, where we can find the implications of Western consumerism modified and manipulated in some way to fit within new "borders" and backdrops. A good example of this approach can be seen in one of Pazooki's videos showing a young girl from Tehran on a sidewalk speaking swaggeringly about her clothing and belongings from various famous brands.

Tehran Fashion photographic project in its recent format, which combines two previously separate series set up a complex stage for comparison and contemplation. Although the first layers of the content presumably deal with the specific condition of women and the "borders" for manifestations of body in Iran as an Islamic state, there is more to be found in these works. De-contextualization of codes and reproduction of "borders" in a different condition is a source of absurdity in the series of staged photographs, which are even driven towards surrealism with combined figures of the model and the mannequin. The chosen outfit for a professional model posing in the "safety" of a studio changes the discourse of the actual means of cover and suggests a less explored aesthetic aspect in that, regardless of the political or social power behind the existence of the "original". On the other hand the imported and de-contextualized elements of "fashion" in documentary photographs from Tehran girls imply another form of absurdity especially when one knows about the challenges involved in breaching the "borders" in that real context. She speaks of an observation of "contradictions" in these works where the global culture of consumerism crosses the "borders" and enters a different environment, which is either ideologically or culturally opposing that in some ways. Juxtaposing the two series leads to the notions of absurdity in consumerism and globalization which is realized in different forms within the two contexts and the aesthetic aspects of "cover" as a kind of "border" or a means of "censorship" which Pazooki has taken up as a topic for research later on. "Aesthetics of Censorship" as a research project is rooted in Pazooki's investigation of reinterpretations, which give room to discovery of beauties in unexpected ways, where "borders" or "covers" may acquire aesthetic values and be favored. She talks about a "remaking" process in the course of the censorship, specifically in her series of photographs from censored books, where personal choices, preferences and attitudes of the people in charge of censorship have added another layer of creativity to the "original one", resulting in a new object of art, which is again redefined through Pazooki's observation and reproduction. He underscores the aesthetic aspect of the censorship process when "illicit" features are less hermetically defined and when individual creativity and fantasy add personal touches over a presumably "finished" or "perfect" object.

In her recent works Pazooki continues the research in the realm of media, questioning the validity or reliability of the messages which cross the "borders". She disintegrates the visual and textual elements in the newspapers and journals through a process of "exclusion" akin to censorship, which tries to set the image free as an independent medium again. Although we are already aware of the existence of the original medium and might have some predispositions over the content or probable connotations within those specific contexts, we are invited to look at the images differently. She considers this approach as a way to open up some ways for personal reinterpretation of images, which were originally bound to the accompanying textual content, hindering unbiased observation of the image in the media. One could possibly discover a hidden layer of narratives in the new visual compositions resulting from the "exclusion" process.

Pazooki's continual research is apparently ascending into a more abstract level in her latter projects. These projects suggest an inclination towards global concerns about the role of media and information in our perceptions and mindsets, cognitive processes, inter-human relationships and other subjects that are not essentially bound to geographical or political "borders". Her works could be seen as a contribution to the battle against dogmas and "borders," which have been shaping the world through ideological and political prejudices.

Kianoosh Vahabi



(right) *Pomegranate*, 2008, Video still, 120x80 cm, 2008
 (below) *Tehran's Fashion - Untitled*, 2004-2008, C-print, 100x100 cm, edition of 5
 (bottom right) *Untitled*, 2008-2009, (Still-Tulum, Mexico, 2006-1min 04 sec), digital video, edition of 5

opposite page
Overprinted Man Ray, 2004, 27x34x2 cm, digital c-print, edition of 4
 All images ©artist and courtesy of B21 Gallery





Nazanin Pouyandeh

I am hungry for images. Living in Iran until I was 18 years old, the world of images was a closed and controlled environment. The internet did not exist and the illustrations in magazines and newspapers were limited. Billboards were non-existent. Since arriving in France, I began to discover all types of images, which have influenced my work to different extents. My painting is a result of the accumulation of visual information belonging to many different cultures. It is based on visions and mental imagery that haunt me and are directly related to my unconscious. They develop with time and in a manner that surprises me.

The characters of my paintings are immersed in imaginary environments. These worried characters are witnessing an event that has not yet unraveled. Each character is confronted by other characters as a result of their juxtaposition with one another. It is the composition, rather than the situation, that creates conflict between them. I portray elements of reality, but it is not reality itself that I seek to paint. For me, realism is a means to a pictorial illusion. I seek for viewers, when in front of my painting, to imagine that they are witnessing realistic scenes, but what they see are improbable situations.

The spectator cannot really distinguish the origin of the characters that inhabit my canvases; Western faces are deformed, as my memory is full of Persian faces.

Since the end of 2007, I have usually painted female nudes. Sometimes I cover their bodies, or the background of my paintings, with tattoos or motifs derived from miniatures; these elements are inspired by Persian, Indian and Mongol sources. These women are sometimes viewed through Eastern theatrical masks. These female personalities evoke Madonnas, and adapt the attitude of classical painting. They are contemporary Venuses and Virgin Mary's enrobed in tattoos or bondage. Thus, I try to deepen the link between Ancient art, and contemporary mankind. Mankind is always haunted by ghosts from Ancient civilizations. This is a way for me to work as a female artist and maintain my relationship to my native country of Iran.

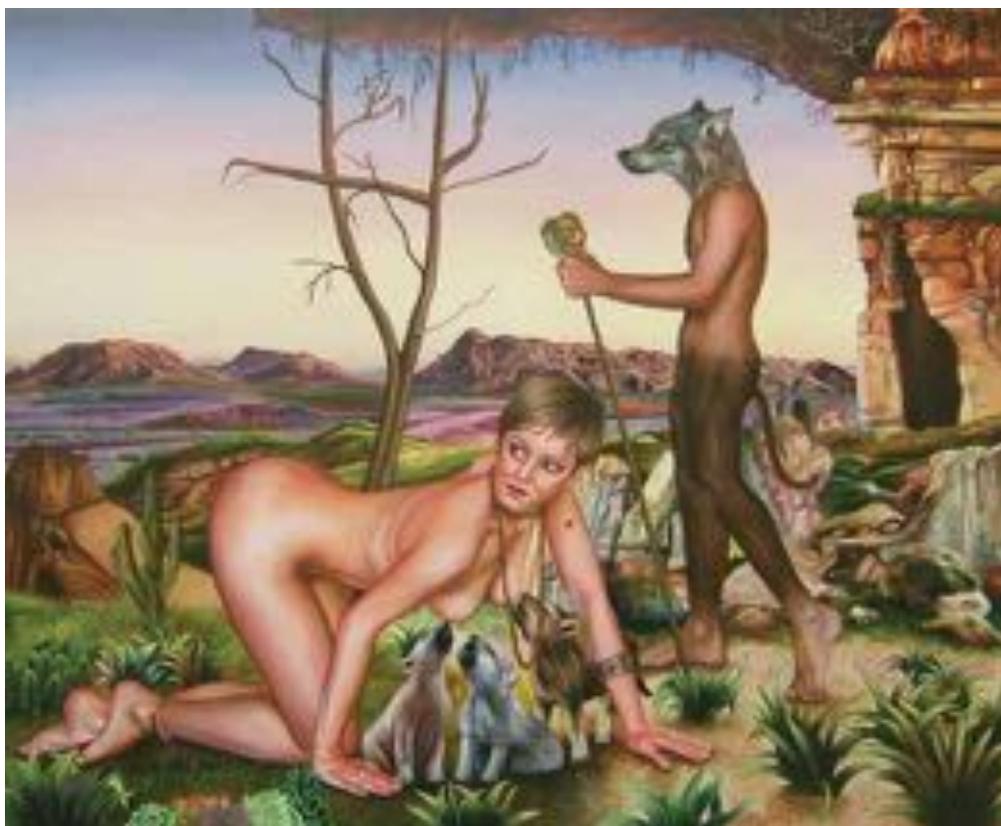
My models are my friends, young women of my age that I frequently see in my life. For me, female nudity represents an affectionate, beautiful, and sensual phenomenon. It also shows women in their most savage, animalistic, and archaic forms. This mix of beauty and the forbidden creates an excitement that interests me. The process of elaboration in each painting is an important part of my work. I organize photo sessions and demand my friends to pose, sinking into the skin of my personalities. They usually pose with accessories, jewelry, and makeup. During these sessions the mood is theatrical, yet intimate. I then try to recreate this mood. All of this helps to enhance the mystery in my paintings.

In my work today, contemporary mankind is present, surrounded by majestic and detailed landscapes (influenced by Renaissance painting) - **an indefinite landscape in an eternal time**. The work seeks its identity and reason by communicating through different myths, fables, legends and fairytales. The double entendre in these works is that the grand landscapes are mental terrains of the unconscious, upon which mankind, who searches for his reason for being, through mythology, becomes the hero himself. The immediate idea that comes to mind when we think about the ancient man is a wild and exotic landscape.

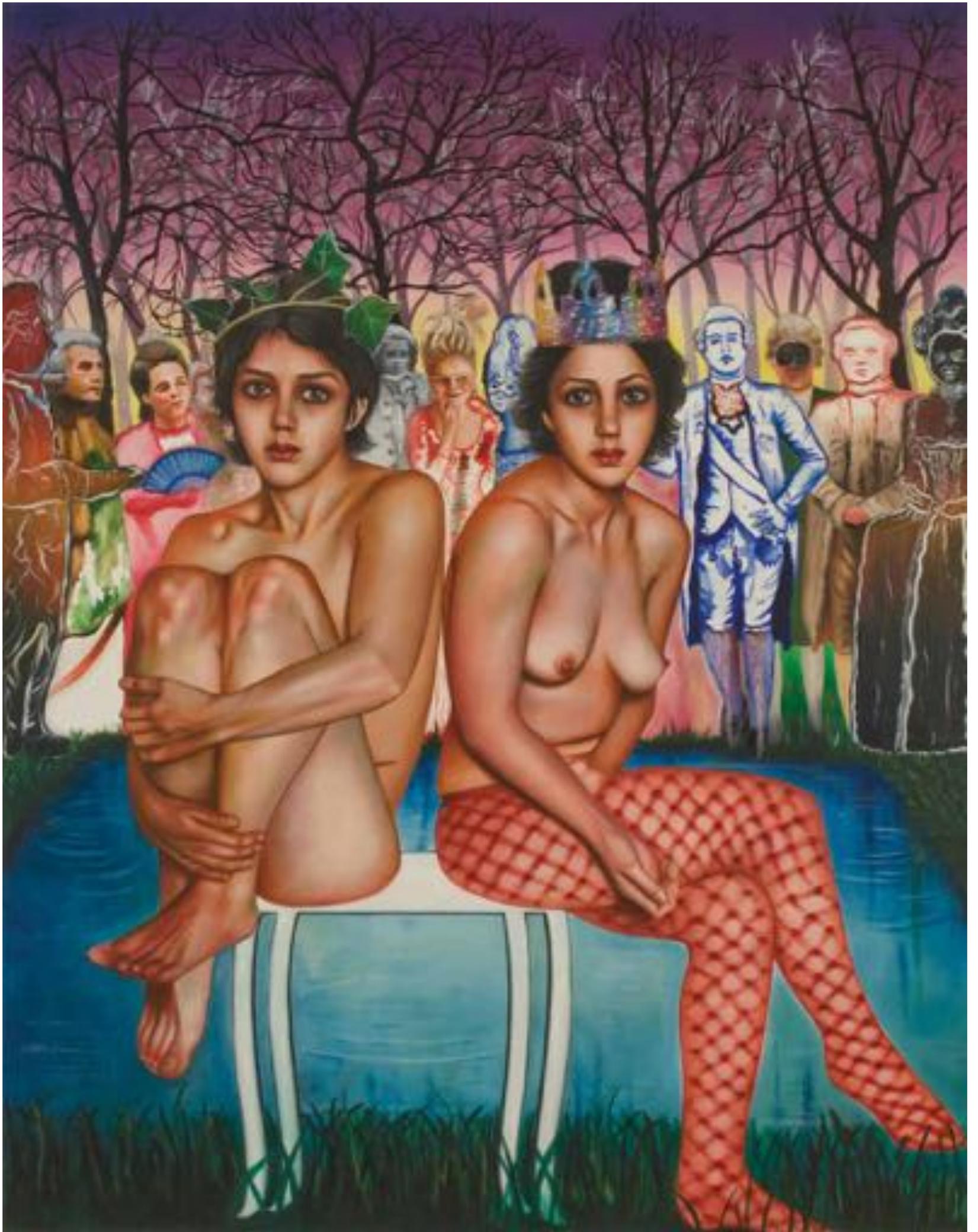
There are also scenes of women and men in extreme situations, where they get closer to an ancient and primitive state through ecstasy and trance, such as war.



(above) *Le Trésor*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 130x162 cm
(right) *Agate*, 2009, Oil on canvas, 130x162 cm



opposite page
Yassaman and Nastaran, 2008, Oil on canvas 146x114 cm
All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Tazhnia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery

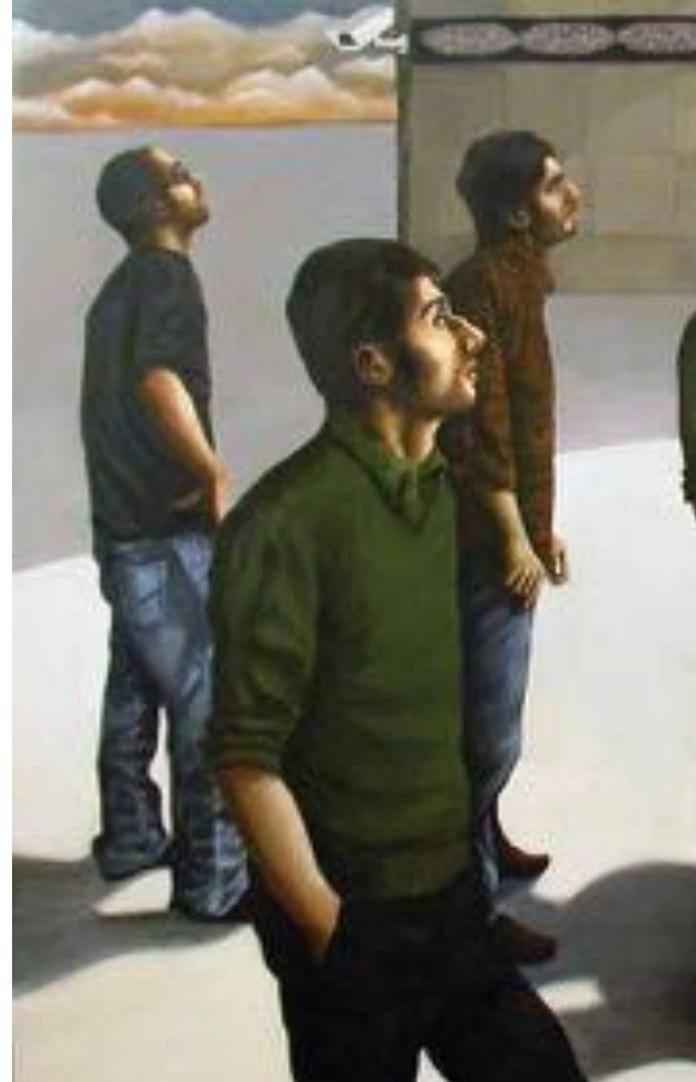




(left) *Flag #3*, 2006-2008, Mixed media textile, 65x35 in
(right) *Barriers Of Separation And Distance, Flag #29*, 2008,
Mixed media, 79x47 in

opposite page
Did You See What Love Did To Us Once Again, Flag #32, 2008,
Mixed Media, 73x47 in
All images ©artist







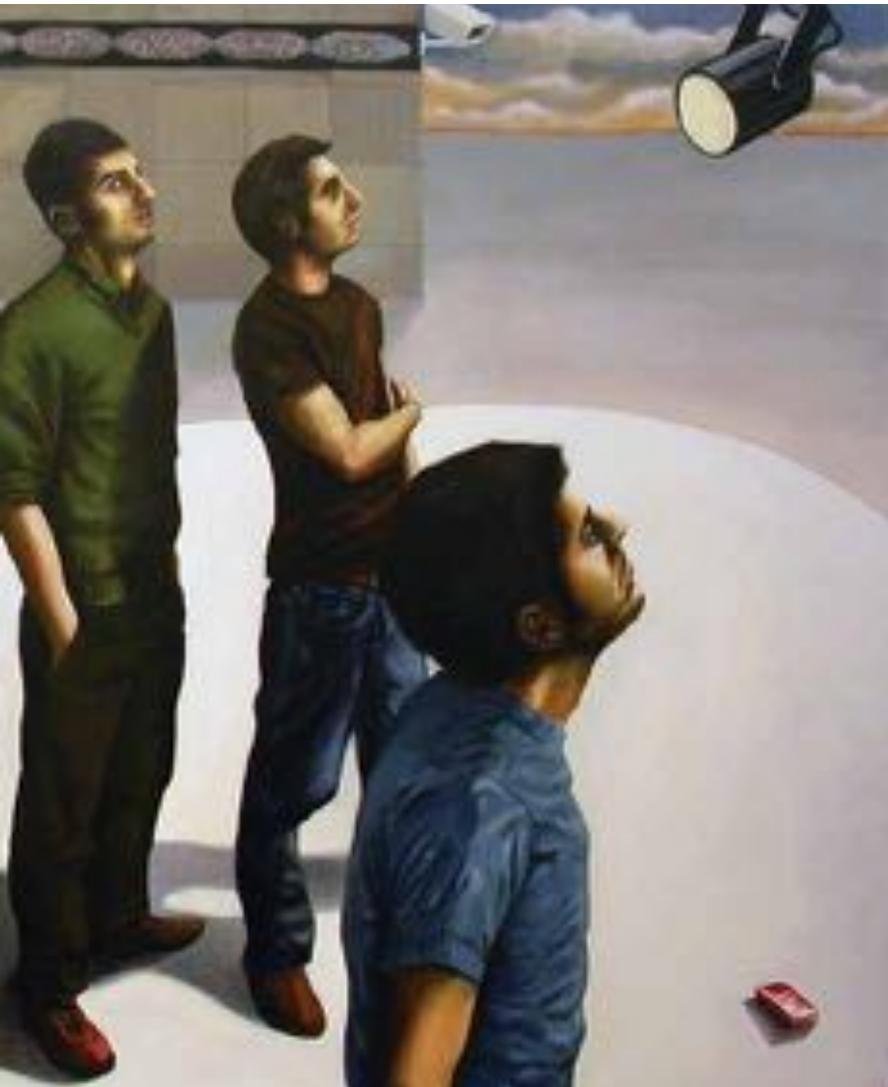
Behrang Samadzadegan

I was born in 1979 in Tehran. I hold a BFA and an MFA both in painting. I decided to become an artist when I was 14 and at first began to study Graphic Design in high school. After entering University, I continued my career by focusing on painting professionally. Gradually, I expanded my artistic experiences to other media.

Since 1999, I have participated in almost 30 Group Exhibitions and workshops in Iran, and have had 4 solo shows since 2000. *A Consumption of Justice* in Turkey, in 2004, was my first experience of a show outside of Iran. Since then, I have attended 19 exhibitions or workshops in different countries, including the First Contemporary Art Biennale of Thessaloniki (Greece) and the 1st International Media Art Forum for Youth "IMAFY" in Cairo, where I won the Golden Feather Prize.

Ever since the beginning, it was very important for me to get acquainted with the different layers of my society. I was always curious about what was happening around me, the people whom I live with and the community which I am part of: issues related to the past and present, to what has happened to my nation over the ages, to the traditions and cultures within different levels of my society and to how modernity is dealt with. These were key items to me, as I believe they represented constructive units of my identity. However, I was soon to discover the incoherence that exists between the traditional culture of my people and global modernity. To me, it was a new era about identity. I extended my focus to hybrid aspects of culture and identity, multi-faceted post modern thoughts and Janus-faced approaches to life in societies like mine. In other words, I turned towards the infinite combinations of old and new beliefs. These, plus the determinant role of power and its everlasting existence in such societies, led me to reference daily issues that people are involved in and deal with, as the inspiration of my work. I pursue, analyze, appropriate and then show things in a self-paraphrased outcome.

I usually work with different media based on the concepts within my works. Generally, my approach consists of a visual reference to masterpieces. Therefore, I usually use them as basic structures that underlie my compositions, or hint at them as emblems to the whole idea. My work *Olympia* is an example of this approach where I referred to Manet's *Olympia* not only visually, but also as a paradoxical allegory.



(above) *Olympia*, 2008, Oil on canvas
(left & across) *Under the Spotlight*, 2008, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140x200 cm, courtesy of F&A Projects

opposite page
(top left) *Ramyar Doesn't Reach the Truth*, 2008, Acrylic and oil on canvas, 140x200 cm, courtesy of F&A Projects
(left) *There is No One Here but Me*, 2006, Acrylic on Canvas, 190x140 cm
All images ©artist



Arash Sedaghatkish

"I believe that art is made to explore the world and culture, to explore the chosen medium, to explore one's self."
Stephen Shore

As a contemporary artist I always tend to work with subjects that are somehow a reflection of my time, society and culture. Meanwhile the traditional art forms like painting and drawing or even photography and their history attract me. How they historically underwent extreme changes and how sometimes these extreme changes lead us to forget how conservative they still are.

What do you expect from a Pakistani artist? Isn't it the kind of stuff that you have seen before from that part of the world? Do you think that it would have oriental aspects or decorative patterns perhaps? I know several well established Pakistani artists who are quiet famous on the international art scene. Yet several people including myself could still recognize their geo-cultural affiliations at first glance.

This for me is an indication of an ongoing sense of conservativeness in art. On the other hand the art market requires certain ability to reinvent one's self. The art world asks the artist to present new ideas and fresh concepts in art forms that are nevertheless recognizable. This means that I, the artist, have to infuse my work with "the new" while keeping it recognizable.

However, I believe that art knows no boundaries. It is an act of questioning without limitation. Exploring the **shift between familiarity and newness** is the subject of my work: what it is that triggers in the artist the urge to move in either one of these two directions. Although lots of important questions were asked in the past, like the necessity of figure, lots of other minute, but in depth questions are waiting to be asked.

Through my watercolors, I am trying to explore the boundaries of the medium, the conviction of scale in watercolor and the necessity or therefore lack of the background. I choose to paint Iranian students in their everyday life. How they try to express themselves by dressing like the youth anywhere else in the world, and how, in the case of Iran, their fashions are almost on the verge of opposing the legal dress codes.



(left) *From the series City...Tehran*, 2007, Ink on Cardboard, Set of 6, Top 10x10 cm, lower 15x10 cm

(bottom series from left to right)
Untitled, 2007-2008, Water color on paper, 180x75 cm
Untitled, 2007-2008, Water color on paper, 180x75 cm
Untitled, 2007-2008, Water color on paper, 180x75 cm

opposite page
From the series City ...Tehran, 2007, Ink and marker pen on cardboard, 10x15 cm each
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Faran Gallery





(top left) *Untitled, from the series Queen of the Jungle (If I had a Gun)*, 2007-2008, digital print on metallic paper, 23x34 cm
 (top right) *Untitled, from the series Queen of the Jungle (If I had a Gun)*, 2007-2008, digital print on metallic paper, 20x30 cm, 50x50 cm
 (bottom left) *Untitled, from the series Queen of the Jungle (If I had a Gun)*, 2007-2008, digital print on metallic paper, 60x90 cm
 (middle right) *Untitled, from the series Queen of the Jungle (If I had a Gun)*, 2007-2008, digital print on metallic paper, 34x45 cm
 (bottom right) *Untitled, from the series Queen of the Jungle (If I had a Gun)*, 2007-2008, digital print on metallic paper, 40x53 cm
 All images ©artist and courtesy of Khastoo Gallery



Vahid Sharifian

I wake up early. I put the kettle on to boil so that I can mix the water with last night's tea to line my stomach with something while I smoke my first cigarette of the day.

I turn on the TV. It's showing Pink Panther walking towards the camera, his mustache dripping with oil. So much oil that the screen is blackened and then it switches to the news broadcaster. All the news is about America.

A summary of today's headlines:

Beverly Hills is rife with poverty and deprivation.

One thousand addicts have gathered in front of the White House to smoke up

Bush has said: I wish I was an Iranian so that I could vote for Ahmadinejad

Ahmadinejad has said: We can relieve the world's poverty with nuclear energy

Cultural news:

Architects have successfully built a mosque

An Iranian calligrapher has written all of Lenin's books in the Naste'aliq script

I turn off the TV and turn on my computer to check my emails. A few people have left me offline messages in Yahoo Messenger. One of the messages is from a bitch who has invited me to view her webcam. Another is from a bland Iranian artist whose work has sold for over \$100,000 in an auction, and he's given me his website. The third is a joke: An electrical company has warned people to be diligent with their water usage.

I visit the Iranian artists' website. The background is a picture of himself looking extremely enthusiastic amidst the Arabs who have bought his work. I save the picture; it might come in useful for one of my projects. A message flashes up on my screen:

Hi
I reply:
Hi, who are you?
- Miranda, 24, NY
- Vahid, 27, Iran
- O my god
- O your god?
What time is it there?
- 7.30 am
- You're an early riser!
I decide to fool around a little:
- It's because I can't sleep
- Why?
- I'm afraid
- Why are you scared?
- I keep thinking that America is going to invade Iran any minute
- We hate Bush too
- But I like him, you underestimate him. Anyway, talking to you about these things won't help me sleep

She is silent for a while. Then starts crying. Her tears make my whole monitor wet. My computer crashes. While it's restarting the electricity cuts out, but the telephone starts ringing. Someone's called me to say they've just returned from Dubai. I say: ok, so? He asks me for Andy Warhol's telephone number; someone told him that I have it. I say: what do you want it for? He says: I want to see his work. I say: he's an American artist. He says: someone told me that you have everyone's number. I say: you're mistaken, Andy doesn't answer the phone anymore, he's been dead for years. He says: don't you have his mother's, sister's number, or anyone who has his work? I say: he has no one and his work is in a museum. He says: what's the museum? Do you have the museum's number? I give him my aunt's number who is looking for a rich husband. He is happy, thanks me, and hangs up.

As soon as I replace the receiver, the phone rings again. It's from BBC Persia. They want to talk to me about my work. I say ok. They say: you're playing with political ideas in your work, right? I say: in which pictures? They say: In your 'Queen of the Jungle (If I had a Gun)' series. I say: what political ideas are you talking about? They say: Iranian politics. I say: Iranian politics has nothing to do with my life. They say: how is that possible? Don't you live in Iran? I say: no, I live in my own house. They say: what about the issue of identity then? I say: it stops in my room. They say: can you explain? I say: imagine that the population of New York is one person - in that situation what meaning does identity have? They say: really? I say: yeah. They ask: who has influenced you most in your work? I say: God. They say: seriously, let's stop joking. I say: I've been serious from the start. They ask: in what conditions do you create your work? I say: before and after masturbation, but not while masturbating. They say: you're an artist who has been influenced by the media. I say: yeah, especially BBC Persia. They laugh. They ask: what are you working on now? I say: on my latest work. I suddenly realize that I'd left the kettle on to boil. I hang up and run into the kitchen. The kitchen is filled with smoke and there's a fire. At that moment I hear a fire truck siren from under the window. I open the window and a jet of water throws me back. I am soaking wet. I say: you got here so fast! They say: we were just passing. I say: I thought so.

I smoke a cigarette on an empty stomach while my clothes dry, and then, dreaming of a better world. I begin my work.



Arman Stepanian

Arman Stepanian's passion for photography has led him to be involved in extensive research regarding the history of photography. His work is evidence to a fascination with the possibilities of fusing documentary with fiction and poetic and nostalgic realities.

His vision is to bring back to life the work of legendary poets and artists, thus creating a pathway to the future. This explains why Arman uses his camera as a tool to create a way to bring out his own inner feelings and thoughts towards the human emotions of sadness and worry.

Text provided by the Silk Road Gallery



(above) *Old Lovers*, 2005, Photograph
(top right) *They Are Nice, Ring the bell*, 2005, Photograph
(bottom right) *Armenian Cemetery Tehran*, 2008, Photograph

opposite page
Armenian Cemetery Tehran, 2008, Photograph
All images ©artist and courtesy of Silk Road Gallery



(top) *Surveillance*, 1988-89, Photograph, courtesy of CAM Collection Dubai
(bottom) *Tehran '06*, 2006, Photograph
All images ©artist



Mitra Tabrizian

My practice consists of both photographic and film work and is concerned with what we may call the crisis of contemporary culture.

Having been born in Iran and educated in England, going back and forth has given me the advantage of observing both cultures from an outsider's point of view. **This mode of experience; belonging neither here nor there, provides a sense of detachment as well as engagement** and thus an understanding of the role of fantasy and narrative in the cultural and social processes.

My work, *Surveillance* from 1990 uses three periods in history to indicate both the role of the West and the clergy in Iranian politics.

1953, the CIA under British supervision created a coup d'état in Iran, which overthrew Mossadegh, the Prime Minister at that time, who attempted to nationalize Iranian oil, which for a long time had been under British control. The British 'proposed' the idea to the Americans and after the success of the operation, the Americans took over the oil and left the British out.

In 1979, the Iranian Revolution which brought Khomeini to power with the ambivalent role of the U.S.A. as 'supporter' of the Shah!

The 1980's were the post revolutionary period with its anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist discourses, which rediscovered Islam as a new form of identity independent of the West and its capitalist system.

The title *Surveillance* is used here as a metaphor to indicate the relation between God and his subjects, the colonizer and the colonized. Iran has never been an 'official' colony, but has a long history of exploitations by the Russians, the British and the Americans.

However, *Surveillance*, as a theoretical concept cannot be reduced to an unproblematic notion of control, but resistance within control. In this image, while the tableaux in the foreground expose different regimes of oppression, in the background, hundreds of people are gathered in the street protesting. What are they protesting against: the West? Or is the protest against the way history is constructed in the popular memory?



Jinoos Taghizadeh

When we were children, Geography was not an important lesson; it was Mathematics and Literature that we were keen to learn. When we grew up everything changed.

Geography became important and defined everything else: identity, emotions, and our share of the world. And we learned another language to be able to approach the rest of the world.

As a grown up now, I know that Mathematics is not a part of my daily life. Numbers, which are not great sums do not require scientific knowledge.

But Persian Literature made me realize that I should always find other forms of expression through using symbols and signs. Beyond my borders, where art is explained and defined, what is required from eastern art is to be mysterious, to be strange, engulfed in a magical cloth, whilst the West has adapted the straight forward expression in its own art.

This has not been our choice, but our dilemma. We have been forced to find different ways of expression, where we are fully aware that free expression will get us in to trouble; where we have become these soft creatures that can slither between cracks and find their way through bends and corners.

The child of yesterday is now tired of silence and whispers through the everyday game of hide and seek: I am tired of strange rules imposed at all corners of the world! The child now wants to open the windows and tell her stories, without fear, force or considerations. She whispers: "I do not need the stamp of approval from beyond the borders, yet I can't talk beyond the curtain anymore for I do not care to keep the magic and secret codes of the East."

Alas it seems that Algebra (Synonymous in Farsi, FORCE) was the only lesson that we were supposed to learn at School.



(above) *Cheetah & Deer*, 2007, from the series *Letters I Never Wrote*, part of an on going project, Ink Jet print on back of actual stamps, Actual size of stamps, in 1-2-4 stamp blocks

(right) *Rock Scissors Paper Series*, 2009, On Lenticular print, 50x35cm

opposite page

(left) *Rock Scissors Paper Series*, 2009, On Lenticular print, 50x35 cm

(right) *Rock Scissors Paper Series*, 2009, On Lenticular print, 50x35 cm

All images ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery









Newsha Tavakolian

Even if I try I can't imagine my life without my camera. Photography has opened so many doors for me that have remained closed for others. From Tehran's transvestites to the inner circle of Mecca's Grand Mosque, my camera has been "The Key" in my life. It has enabled me to touch other peoples' lives and to document their way of living; in other words to tell their story.

It has empowered me as a woman and now I can tell the world about their stories, which otherwise would have gone unnoticed.

(series) *Maria*, 2007, Print on Photography Paper
 ©artist and courtesy of Aaran Gallery Tehran



Sadegh Tirafkan

My work spans photography, video and installation and is mainly focused on my culture, identity and gender. I am an artist whose core body of work is based on how people perceive each other. As an established artist, I have explored Iranian historical space in the context of my artwork, and now I would like to situate my work in an international context. I take inspiration from my surroundings. Since I am Iranian, my previous projects reflect my identity, my heritage, the city I lived in and so on. In a society that inspires me in different ways, I try to fuse my eastern influences with those of the western art world.

My work, *Sacrifice*, is about three stories that happened at **different times and locations**. Those stories are all about crimes **of passion, madness entwined with love and rage**.

According to a number of religious texts, when Abraham was about to sacrifice his son to convey his devotion to God, an angel offered a sheep as he placed the blade against his son's throat.

Similarly, In the tragic story of Sohrab and Rostam from the Shahnameh, (Book of Kings) by Ferdowsi, Rostam realizes that he has killed his own son in battle, a son he had never seen before the day of their encounter. Rostam holds his son, **drenched in blood, empowered with raw emotions of love and loss**.

In the Shia sect, a branch of Islam, on the anniversary of Hussien's (grandson of Prophet Mohammed) death and martyrdom, followers wound themselves with metal machetes, offering their blood in his honor and memory.

The photographic series that I have named "Sacrifice," along with the video of the same title, is my artistic interpretation of the emotional impact these stories have had on me since childhood.





(top) *Sacrifice Series*, 2003, Final 4, Film still
(middle) *Sacrifice Series*, 2003, Final 1, Film still
(bottom) *Sacrifice Series*, 2003, Final 3, Film still
All images ©artist



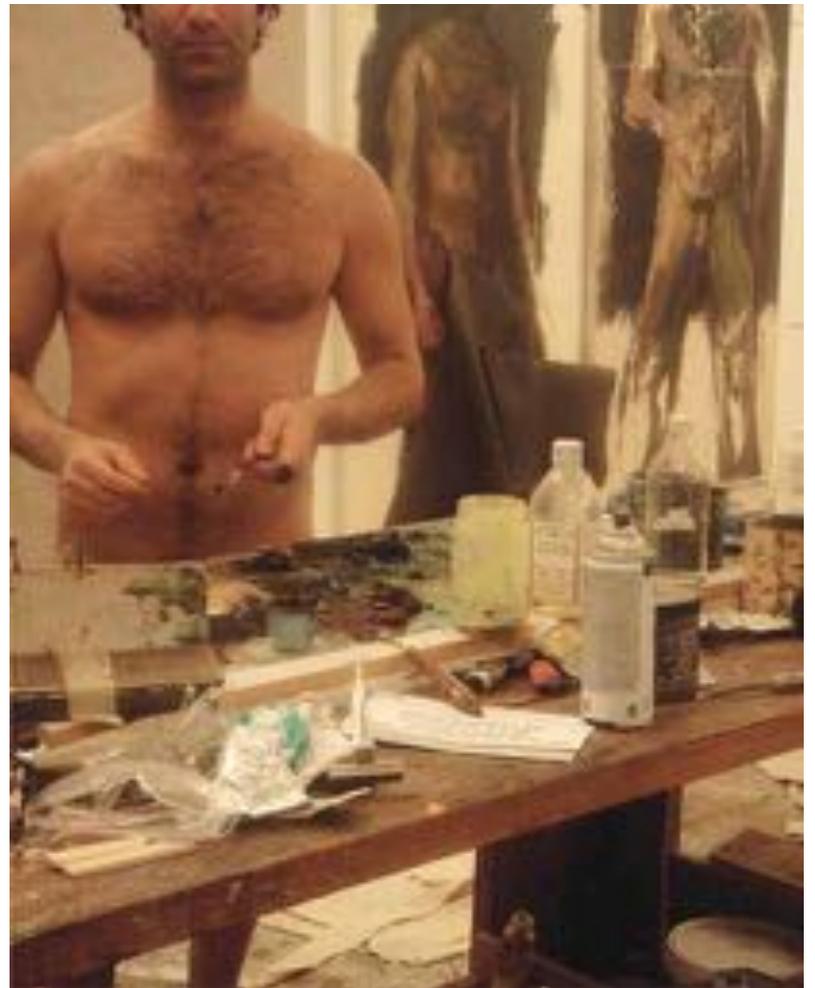
(above) *Father Son Father*, 2009, Oil on linen, 46x64 in

(below) *On the path*, 2009, Oil and linen on linen and panel, 68x84 in

(right) *Self Portrait, Day 2, Looking Like Le Serf*, 2009, each panel 84x36 in © artist

opposite page

With My Kids: Running Down The Mountain Into The Sun, 2009, Oil on linen, 80x48 in
All images ©artist and courtesy of Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery





Darius Yektai

Looking at You

Looking at you, and you're looking at me
And we're gonna see
If we can protect us

And I'm coming at you, and you're coming at me
For all to see
And it's awful crazy

And for all men, when the clouds come, you're defenseless
It's in the parrot tomes
The parrot tomes
Well everything is on the fence but we're gonna cum

Looking at you while you're looking at me
So we're bound to see
How good we can be

I'm cumming at you and you're cumming at me
And all this is wrapped up in times gone crazy

And why, baby why, did you come, to decide
That for all this hope, to bear my soul,
I would bare you my soul

While you're looking at me
And if it's all that you said, then
This time baby

And looking at you, you were looking at me
And it's awful crazy
All that I wanted to be
All I wanted to be
Wanted to be
So why were you looking at me?



A Gallery's Perspective, New York

Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller

Founder & Director of the

Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery, New York

For how long have you been involved in the promotion of contemporary Iranian art and what drew you to it in the first place?

After studying art history and museum management in college and in graduate school, I opened my first gallery on Madison Avenue in New York in 1982. It was at this time that many artists who were actively exhibited and being collected in Iran had moved and were moving to Europe or to the United States and were looking for galleries to exhibit their work. Some of these artists included Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, Nicky Nodjoumi, Monir Farmanfarmanian, YZ Kami, Massoud Arabshahi, and Ardeshir Mohassess. It was only natural that I, being Persian, had a strong interest in their work and had an audience that appreciated and desired such art. As a gallerist, I have thus promoted contemporary Iranian Art throughout the entirety of my career in my gallery that specializes in international contemporary art.

How does contemporary Iranian art differ from other Middle Eastern art?

Iranian heritage and culture is rich and has a history that dates over 3,000 years. Iranian artists are closely connected to their environment, whether it is being inspired by the beauty of their heritage, or by the socio-political milieu of their time. That is why there is tremendous depth and meaning in their art. I also believe that having amazing museums in Iran has helped expose contemporary Iranian artists to great art that has been their source of inspiration.

Can you describe the reactions that people usually have when they are exposed to the works of the Iranian artists that you represent? What are your observations on the overall perceptions or expectations that the general public associates with Iranian art in your city?

New York City is the capital of the art world, and so I deal with a very sophisticated, educated, and learned audience, who have been exposed to art from all over the world. Museums and galleries exhibit an immense array of art forms from all periods and countries, and thus, the New York art aficionados, be they American, Iranian, or of other nationalities, appreciate and enjoy the new groundbreaking developments and trends that are coming from Iran. They are so fascinated by the daring and emotionally charged art work that deals with politics, censorship, religion and gender on the one hand, and poetry, spirituality and beauty on the other.

Would you say that their reactions differ when they are looking at works by an artist who comes from the same cultural background that they come from?

New York is a melting pot, and people in the city are fascinated and riveted by anything new and different. To the New York public, Iranian art is either from a far away land of epics, fairytales and miniatures, or from a very politically charged region. Their reaction to this art of course depends upon the artist, as different artists choose to portray, or seek inspiration from, a wide variety of historical, spiritual, and political references. The book, *Different Sames: New Perspectives in Contemporary Iranian Art*, which includes 115 contemporary Iranian artists, was just published and has a most appropriate title, alluding to the common shared history of these artists, yet pointing out the differences of their art.

How do you explain the recent growing interest by the international art market in contemporary Middle Eastern art and contemporary Iranian art in particular?

For centuries Iran has produced extremely talented artists, and the contemporary times are no different. These artists have been active, very prolific and extremely successful both in their country and internationally. They have been showing in galleries in many different cities, and arguably some of the best art has come from this region. There are always trends in the art market. For example, around 15-20 years ago, there was a tremendous interest in Latin American art, and about 5-7 years ago, there was an explosion of interest in contemporary Asian art. In the last 2-3 years, Middle Eastern art, and particularly Iranian art, has become the trend. But I think it's important to realize that these artists have been making great art even before this trend began. They are only just starting to be recognized as their works become much more accessible in a globalized world. In recent times cross cultural dialogues have increased tremendously, and thus there is an increased exposure of artists from this part of the world to the West.

Are there risks of underlying neo-orientalist attitudes in the works that usually make it into acclaimed “western” circles?

You can not separate the heritage and identity inherent in Iranian art. Of course these artists draw on their background and nationality as sources of inspiration in their art. But of course there are also risks of overusing certain imagery, i.e. the veil, and feeding upon ghettoizing imagery and other Western stereotypes. Many contemporary Iranian artists are balancing their cultural heritage with Western artistic practices to create art that is clearly inspired by their cultural tradition, yet also an innovative force in the contemporary art world.

How is this reflecting on the formal and thematic qualities of the works that are coming out from the younger generation of artists from Iran?

A number of artists draw from tradition, in their technique, style and iconography. What they have learned from past masters is important - it's a chain of command, or what we refer to in Farsi as "Selseleh". Much of their inspiration comes from the past, as they reference their masters, and their history, including Persian miniature painting, and calligraphy in their work. Others are influenced by politics, religion and the limitations of the society that they live in, and seek to make commentary on these issues in their art. The theme of the show currently at my gallery, co-curated by myself and Dr. Layla Diba, explores these two poles, of *Selseleh* and *Zelzeleh*, or *tradition* and *tremor*, in the works of contemporary Iranian artists.

What is the role that contemporary Iranian art can play in bridging the cultural and political divide between the east and the west?

There has been an existing dialogue between Iranian artists, filmmakers, actors, singers, etc. and the West. I have found that many Iranian artists have drawn major audiences here despite the political differences of our countries. Art is universal and art speaks the same language. Even now, despite political differences, many American institutions, including universities, foundations, and museums are initiating a dialogue with Iran. Overall I think art plays a major role in bridging the gap between the East and West.



ABOUT LEILA TAGHINIA-MILANI HELLER GALLERY

The Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller (LTMH) Gallery was established in 1982, and ever since has become known for providing a springboard for young international artists who went on to become icons of the new millennium. Artists such as YZ Kami, Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, Nicky Nodjourni, Monir Farmanfarmaian, and Massoud Arabshahi, all had their first one-man shows in the US at the gallery in the 80s. For over 25 years, the gallery's mission has been to inspire dialogue between collectors, artists, museum curators and art critics. The gallery takes pride in the important role it continues to play in the international art market by exposing new artists alongside modern masters through exhibitions at the gallery, as well as in major international art fairs and institutions around the world.

Acknowledgements

Iran Inside Out has been a collaborative process between several truly amazing individuals. They have each brought unique richness and insight into the various aspects of this exhibition.

Leila Taghinia-Milani Heller for being the first one to rise up to the challenge and recruit all her friends and artists in the process. Leila's profound commitment to the realization of the show has been essential

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