



IRAN
INSIDE OUT

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

THE
FARJAM
COLLECTION



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Shiva Ahmadi
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HAFIZ
FOUNDATION

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The Hafiz Foundation was founded in 2008 to support outstanding initiatives within the visual arts, with a special emphasis on the greater Middle East. With the city of Dubai as its base, the Foundation aims to become a centre for production, preservation, and promotion of the arts at large. At the heart of the Foundation's goals is the development of educational opportunities for young Middle Eastern artists, students, scholars, curators, and art enthusiasts.

As a partner to both local and international cultural initiatives, the Foundation's recent activities include having supported the founding of the award-winning Middle Eastern arts magazine Bidoun, support for local arts education programmes, as well as the organization of a series of exhibitions displaying selected works from The Farjam Collection.

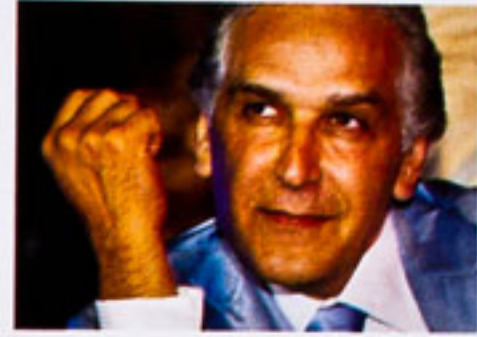


ART REORIENTED

Art Reoriented is a curatorial practice specializing in contemporary art from the Middle East. Founded in 2009, it operates from its offices in New York and Munich, while drawing on its extensive network of individual and institutional partners throughout the Middle East and beyond. The core mission of Art Reoriented is to instigate a constructive cultural discourse through creating innovative multidisciplinary exhibitions and public programs. Art Reoriented is equally dedicated to the improvement of the cultural infrastructure within its geographical focus areas.

The team of highly specialized professionals offers diverse academic and managerial expertise in various fields, including art history and the performing arts, as well as economics and political science. This unique combination allows for a comprehensive approach to its services. Art Reoriented has produced numerous international exhibitions and programs, and has contributed to various publications. It has an extensive list of clients including non-profit organizations, government agencies, museums, corporations, galleries, and private collectors.

FARHAD FARJAM THE FARJAM COLLECTION



Art has played an instrumental role in my life. It has offered me moments of happiness, as well as consolation in times of hardship. Over time, as my collection grew in scope and depth, art has also given me an impulse to share these pieces among a wider public.

With this ambition in mind, I opened The Farjam Collection in Dubai. *Iran Inside Out* marks The Farjam Collection's first anniversary - we opened our doors on March 11, 2009 - and the culmination of a year of initiatives designed to empower, educate, and engage new audiences in the arts.

Against the backdrop of our three major exhibitions this year, *Highlights of Islamic Art from The Farjam Collection*, *The Holy Quran*, and our recent exhibition *From Matisse to Warhol: Works on Paper by Modern Masters*, the works in *Iran Inside Out* resonate as the product of a rich heritage of artistic production and a wide spectrum of influences.

This exhibition is particularly close to my heart. As both a collector and patron of Iranian art, this exhibition is an opportunity for me to share with others works that I believe in. They speak to the wealth of Iranian art production today and anchor the artists as important players on an international art platform.

Education is a priority at The Farjam Collection, and as always, a range of educational materials and programmes will be offered to complement and inform the works featured in *Iran Inside Out*. Through these, audiences will have the opportunity to discover the rich legacy of art that these artists honor, as well as their own powerful contribution to the writing of art history.

I am very pleased to host and support *Iran Inside Out* at The Farjam Collection and invite you to join me in celebrating the kind of art that reminds us both of who we are and who we can aspire to be.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of stylized cursive letters that appear to read 'Farhad Farjam'.

Farhad Farjam

Foreword

TILL FELLRATH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR ART REORIENTED



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 a diverse group of 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. More than 30 years have now passed since the Iranian Revolution and one generation of Iranians has come of age living and working in different environments while sharing 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 work within their own cultural and political setting, those living in the Diaspora are reacting to their new environments and struggling to form a new identity. This exhibition represents the first time an international arts organization presents 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 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 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. *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

different circumstances are human nonetheless. Isn't it true that human beings across the world are united by shared goals and aspirations? As the US American President Barack 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. 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.

Iran Inside Out was originally shown at the Chelsea Art Museum in New York in the summer of 2009, where the exhibition received an overwhelming response by international media and welcomed record visitor numbers. During fall 2009 the show continued its highly successful showing at Chicago's Depaul University Art Museum. We are now very excited and honored for the opportunity to showcase highlights of the exhibition in Dubai at The Farjam Collection. Our thanks go to the Hafiz Foundation, the entire team of The Farjam Collection, and its founder and most generous patron of the arts, Dr. Farhad Farjam.

Curatorial Statement - Iran Inside Out



SAM BARDAOUIL CURATORIAL DIRECTOR ART REORIENTED

While pondering the state of contemporary art produced by Iranian artists, both in the homeland and Diaspora, I felt that my essay, similar to my curatorial approach for this exhibition, should be an honest reflection of how they wish to represent themselves. I have therefore constructed my essay based on direct quotes from more than fifty artists with whom I have met and engaged in some extremely rigorous discussions. Enough curatorial interventions. It is my hope that through this non conventional slant, I will allow the artists to literally speak for themselves.

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.

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

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 Hamran Diba
Ala Ebtekar

Shahram Entekhabi

Golnaz Fathi

Isabelle van den Eynde on Bita Fayyazi

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...

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.

Siamak Filizadeh

Parastou Forouhar

Shahab Fotouhi

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



Samira Alikhanzadeh

Alikhanzadeh's early work featured many windows, focusing on the effects of light on interiors when filtering through windows. The methods have changed in her current work, but she retains the concept of looking through windows as she takes the position of an observer by creating window-like openings to the interiors within her compositions.

Human figures and forms are introduced in 'found photographs'. Purely by accident, Alikhanzadeh chanced upon a box of old photographs, depicting mainly women and children, which she took home and began applying to her canvases. To these she often applies shards of mirror and through the resulting reflections, she incorporates the viewer into her pieces, and so encourages us to think about our identity and heritage. She explains that "the viewer in turn becomes a part of the composition and possible descendants of the subjects, looking into a past, or perhaps like me, satisfying their voyeuristic urge to enter the lives and memories of generations gone by." Although her subjects are unidentified, they are infused with philosophical questions of identity, existence and time.

*Untitled, 2008, Print, acrylic and mirror on board, 150x150 cm,
9 pieces total, Courtesy of The Farjam Collection*

