

Wishes and Dreams

Iran's New Generation Emerges

An exhibition organized by Meridian International Center,
Washington, DC, in cooperation with Tehran Gallery,
Tehran University, College of Fine Art, Tehran, Iran

Participating Artists

Shahriar Ahmadi
Farnoosh Ahmadishirazi
Samira Alikhanzadeh
Elham Eslamian Arangeh
Pooya Aryanpour
Mina Azarmand
Bahar Behbahani
Morteza Darehbaghi
Amir Hossein Ebnoddin
Arash Emdadian
Samira Eskandarfar
Maryam Farhang Jahromi
Golnaz Fathi
Amirali Ghasemi
Maryam Ghaziani
Rokneddin Haerizadeh

Vahid Hakim
Nargess Hashemi
Farid Jahangir
Behnam Kamrani
Mitra Kavian
Rashin Kheiriyeh
Alireza Masoumi
Mina Moosavipour
Ahmed Nadalian
Afshin Pirhashemi
Amir Rad
Mohammad Rahimi
Omid Rooshenas
Hamed Sahihi
Mehdi Seifi
Maryam Shirinlou
Shahnaz Zehtab

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at

Meridian International Center
Washington, D.C.

Presented by
Meridian International Center

in cooperation with the Tehran Gallery,
Tehran University, College of Fine Art
Tehran, Iran

Surviving Poetically

“No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive”

—Mahatma Gandhi

Looking at the recent developments in the cultural scene in Iran, it appears that a basic change in the social role of art is underway. Among the driving forces behind this historic development is the rise of contemporary art as a public medium, in a society where art is traditionally controlled by dominant ideology and politics. Contemporary art in Iran is usually viewed against a backdrop of a continuous socio-political movement, which has frequently swung between satisfying the demands of a modern society and maintaining traditional identity.

Beginning in the 1940s and culminating in the 1970s, a period of modernization aimed to sustain and absorb western cultural achievements. This effort appeared in the form of varied attitudes and their social demands. The period saw the increasing establishment of art institutions, such as art academies, museums, and galleries, providing the groundwork for an expansion of modern trends in the visual arts. It was paradoxically parallel to a major attempt by some Iranian artists to launch a growing campaign toward an independent modernity, a trend which was in opposition to the global art canon.

Then, in 1979, a revolutionary period containing fundamental Islamic rules came as a reaction to what was claimed to have constituted a subtle destruction of traditional culture and Islamic values due to a policy of westernization.

The new fundamental atmosphere, which was then intensified by the 8-year war with Iraq, witnessed the strong desire of cultural authorities to root contemporary art in the soil of its past and forge a national and Islamic spirit in the artistic creations.

Against this highly conservative situation, the landslide victory of President Khatami in 1997 emerged as the starting point of a reform movement intended to create a balance between traditional aspirations and modern social requirements. That policy held a certain promise that governmental controls over the public sphere in general and the arts in particular would be relaxed. In the light of what some have called a cultural *glasnost*, artists and art activities have received greater encouragement and, after two decades of relative isolation, the windows have

been gradually opened up to the outside world.

Tracing the current strands of these developments, the exhibition of *Wishes and Dreams* focuses on the new generation of artists, mostly born and raised under the Islamic Republic, but surprisingly inclined to embrace the universal language of art. While many artists from the revolutionary years and the war period were proud to express contempt for western culture, this new generation is quite eager to connect with the outside world and is thrilled about any cultural exchange opportunity. They have proven their promising aptitude and have captured the eyes of the public, which were for so long cast toward the glorious past and its pre-revolutionary artists.

The emerging generation of artists is keen on applying new media, such as installation, video and photo, not only as an instrument of great potential for expression of their views, but also as a means for creating art in a more fashionable manner. Even in applying the classical medium of painting, which is widely represented in this exhibition, they tend to make issue-based art as a political tool, intended to magnify the significant role of art in social reform.

The growing presence of women artists, which is rightly reflected in the selection of artists presented in this exhibition, is also an important phenomenon in Iranian society today. During the 1980s and 1990s, the influence of female artists was limited, as both the revolution

and the war were extremely male-oriented. The works of young female artists are relatively more innovative and often critical of the society, mostly with respect to women's situation. What adds to the importance of this phenomenon is the growing number of women in the art scene of the country: some 64% of the entire student body in the field of art is female. There are growing signs that, despite upheavals, there is a vivid cultural movement emerging in Iranian society, a direction which seems irreversible.

This exhibition owes immensely to the remarkable efforts of the Meridian International Center to bridge the gap between different cultures, as was demonstrated with the successful exhibition of *A Breeze from the Gardens of Persia*. This new exhibition, *Wishes and Dreams*, will surely create hope that, despite some differences, there is a growing voice for mutual understanding. In this regard, I must single out for special thanks Ms. Nancy Matthews, without whose insight and efforts the realization of this initiative would have been impossible.

I sincerely hope that this is just one part of an increasing dialogue between the two nations, and that such a valuable experience will work both ways so that a similar exhibition opens doors on American contemporary art in Iran.

Dr. A. R. Sami Azar
Co-Curator, *Wishes and Dreams*;
former Director of the
Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art
Tehran, Iran

Samira Alikhanzadeh

In my recent works, I have used old pictures to create nostalgic compositions by juxtaposing a collage of pictures and using different materials.

Human figures and forms, mainly of children, girls, and wedding images of brides and grooms, in the form of found photographs, render the passage of time a melancholic truth. Yet, they also express the humor found in most old photographs reflected by hair and dress styles of the day, just as our photographs may be found amusing to viewers in the not-too-distant future.

Born in 1967 in Tehran, Iran; **Education:** MFA, Painting, Azad University, Tehran



Scattered Memories • Mixed media on board • 2006