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ART IN IRAN XI. POST-QAJAR

ART IN IRAN, History of

xi. Post-Qajar (Painting)

Chronological survey. The beginnings of modern art in Iran can be traced back to Moḥammad Ḡaffārī, also known as Kamāl-al-molk (A. H. 1268-1319 Š./1852-1940) the last court painter of the Qajar shahs. During the latter half of the 19th century, when Iranians were being gradually introduced to the marvels of new technology, and photography was a novelty, Kamāl-al-molk broke with the formal stereotyped painting style of his day, and adopted instead a naturalistic style that competed with the photographic lens in the rendering of fine detail.

Abu'l-Ḥasan Khan Ḡaffārī, another eminent Qajar painter, had visited Italy in mid-19th century to study European painting techniques in the museums of Rome and Florence, but what he had learned from the European Masters affected his own work only. Kamāl-al-molk's study, and adoption, of the academic style—undertaken first at Tehran's newly created polytechnic, the Dār al-Fonūn, and several years later at the Louvre (ca. 1320/1902) and elsewhere in France and Italy, created a more fundamental change that affected the norms of painting and its appreciation in Iran over the next several decades. The traditional mediums of miniature, manuscript illustration, and lacquer-work were finally replaced by Western-style easel painting as the Iranian artist's primary medium of expression.

Not only had Kamāl-al-molk's meticulously detailed canvases made him a legendary figure in his own lifetime, as the painter par excellence, but the school of fine arts, *Madrasa-ye ṣanāyeʿ-e mosṭażrafa*, that he established in Tehran in 1329/1911 and personally directed until his retreat to Nīšābūr in 1307 Š./1928, helped train and launch a host of disciples who popularized the new style at the expense of the traditional styles that still survived. All through the twenties, thirties, and even forties, while in Europe cubists, surrealists, expressionists, abstractionists, etc. changed places at the vanguard of modernism, in Iran the accepted types of "modern" painting were mostly academic renderings, in oils or water colors, of Iranian subject matter: family gatherings, street scenes, landscapes, and floral still lifes. Less serious practitioners made oil or water-color copies of Central European landscapes featuring snow-capped peaks, scenic lakes, and chateaus. Although suffering a severe decline, some of the traditional arts continued to be produced in the early decades of the 20th century and "popular art" continued to flourish. Murals and oil paintings were used to decorate local coffee houses, from which their appellation "Qahwa-ḵāna" painting is derived. They were used inter alia by local storytellers in their recounting of the stories of the *Šāh-nāma* and the accounts of the sufferings of the Shiʿite martyrs. Votive art, such as those employed in shrines and *saqqā-ḵāna*, banners, standards, and symbols of martyrdom used in the Shiʿite mourning ceremonies and processions, provided another level of expression for Iran's artists and would prove a rich source of iconography for later painters. The establishment of Tehran University in 1313 Š./1934, and the creation of its School of Fine Arts in 1219 Š./1938 where several disciples of Kamāl-al-molk occupied key positions, held back for another decade or so Iran's modernism to a level that would admit only the impressionists while miniature painting in the Safavid style would continue to be practiced by a residual school of artists best represented by Ḥosayn Behzād.

During World War II Iran was invaded (1320 Š./1941) and occupied by the Allied Forces, causing among other things contacts with Western culture to increase. In the wake of the war, many young Iranians traveled to Europe and America to pursue their education abroad, and some of them studied art. Meanwhile, a number of group exhibitions were organized in Tehran in which most of the practicing modernists participated. The most noteworthy of these were the 1325 Š./1946 exhibition at the [Iran]Soviet Cultural Society (VOKS), and the series of exhibitions held at Mehragān club, home of the National Teachers' Association during the early fifties. These shows were still

dominated by canvases of the Kamāl-al-molk school.

Real modernism intruded onto the scene with the return of a number of foreign-educated Iranian artists from France and Italy in particular. Fired by examples of rapid modernization in many aspects of Iranian life and culture, they too embarked on a course to inject avant-gardism in visual arts into the minds of the Iranian public. Jalīl Żīāʾpūr (1307 Š./1928-), a graduate of Tehran University's School of Fine Arts, who had freshly returned from a sojourn of several years in France, where he had studied with the Cubist painter André Lhote, started with the help of his friends an art club and a monthly publication called Ḵorūs-e Jangī (The fighting cock) [1328 Š./ 1949] which soon became the unofficial battle cry of modernism, and around which avant-garde painters, poets, and dramatists rallied. With the exhibition of quasi-cubist or -expressionist and even abstractionist canvases at Tehran's first art shows, a public debate on the merits of modern art got underway, which continued, side by side with the "new vs. classical poetry" controversy, for two or three decades.

About the mid-1950s, Iranian modernists started to receive official encouragement via the Department General of Fine Arts (later to become the Ministry of Arts and Culture). It had become apparent that a major exhibition, organized nationally on a regular basis, was needed to give impetus to the modern art movement while paving the way for the participation of Iranian artists in such international venues as the Venice Biennale. Marcos Gregorian (b. 1304 Š./1925), an Italian-educated Iranian modernist who initially worked in an expressionist vein but shifted to abstract earthworks, had returned to Iran in 1954 and pioneered in starting one of Tehran's first art galleries—Galerie Esthétique, became the moving spirit behind the organization of the new biennial exhibition, which came to be known as the Tehran Biennale.

Since each of the five Biennale exhibitions that were held in Tehran are landmarks in the short history of modern art in Iran, a brief review of these events appears in order.

First Tehran Biennale. Inaugurated on 25 Farvardīn 1337 Š./14 April 1958, it was held at the Abyaż Palace within the Golestān Palace compound. The show brought together the works of 49 artists—45 painters and four sculptors. Among the well-known participants—well-known then or now—one finds the following: Sohrāb Sepehrī, Jalīl Żīāʾpūr, Manūčehr Šeybānī, Nāṣer Ovīsī, Parvīz

Tanāvolī, and Marcos Gregorian himself. Judging by the exhibition catalogue one can find all the major modernist schools represented, with the quasi-cubist works having perhaps a slight edge.

Second Tehran Biennale. Held during Farvardīn-Ordībehešt, 1339 Š./April-May, 1960 at Abyaż Palace. The number of participants was increased to 68 and one finds the following among them: Bahman Moḥaṣṣeṣ, Sohrāb Sepehrī, Abuʾl-Qāsem Saʿīdī, Jazeh (Žāza) Ṭabāṭabāʾī, and Moḥsen Vasiri- (Vazīrī-) Moqaddam. Abstract canvases were on the increase while some artists exhibited, as in the First Biennale, explicitly Iranian subject matter.

Third Tehran Biennale. Held during Farvardīn-Ordībehešt, 1341 Š./April-May, 1962 at Abyaż Palace. The number of participants had once again risen, this time to 101. Some of the better known participants: Ḥosayn Kāẓemī, Ḥosayn Zendarūdī, Ms. Manṣūra Ḥosaynī, Ms. Leylī Matīn-Daftarī, Masʿūd ʿArabšāhī, and Bahman Borūjenī. Zendarūdī's paintings in the exhibition were the first specimens of a type that will bear the label of "Saqqā-ḵāna School" (see below). The majority of the works on display were highly diverse, a collection of clashing styles and techniques. The writer of the introduction to the Biennale catalogue, however, discerned "a vein of independent national art with local coloring."

Fourth Tehran Biennale. Farvardīn-Ordībehešt, 1343 Š./April-May, 1964, held at the Abyaż Palace. The number of participants now reached 113, amongst whom one finds Kāmrān Kātūzīān, ʿAbd-al-Reżā Daryā-beygī, Ṣādeq Barīrānī as well Ms. Behjat Ṣadr, Ḥosayn Zendarūdī and Ḥosayn Kāẓemī. The number of abstract paintings had increased, a phenomenon that the writer of the introduction to the official catalogue considered a natural consequence of the three previous Biennales and the prizes awarded to nonrepresentational works. But there was still a good deal of attention paid to Iranian subject matter and an increasing number of artists were seen to draw on the esthetic qualities of the Persian calligraphy in their work.

Fifth Tehran Biennale. Tīr, 1345 Š./June-July, 1966, held at the Ethnographical Museum. The Biennale had become this time "regional," i.e., it had brought together modern canvases and sculpture pieces not only from Iran but also from Turkey and Pakistan, the country's partners in R. C. D. (Regional Cooperation for Development). The organizers of the event had high hopes of turning the Tehran Biennale into an Asian affair, and so considered its regionalization only "an intermediate step." 38 artists from Iran had been

joined by 37 artists each from Turkey and Pakistan. The Iranian participants had no doubt been cut down (from the record 113 in the previous Biennale) to create an equality of participation among the three neighboring states. The Iranian section appeared stronger as a result of the pruning job undertaken by the selection committee. The number of abstract canvases had decreased to make room for works with explicitly Iranian subject matter.

The Fifth Tehran Biennale was the final one in the series. The reasons for its demise were never publicly explained. Besides the Biennale, a number of galleries which opened in the 1960s and early 1970s helped stimulate activity in the art field. These included the galleries Qandrīz, Ṣabā, Negār, and Borghese, the Mess gallery, the Seyḥūn gallery, and, later, Zand and Sāmān. An unofficial avant-garde artists' club, the Club Rašt, founded by Parvīz Tanāvolī, the sculptor, Roxanna Ṣabā, and Kāmrān Dībā, an architect, painter, and artistic catalyst, served for a few years in the 1960s as a locale where ideas were traded between painters, musicians, and writers. Foreign cultural societies such as the Iran-America Society and the Goethe Institute also encouraged young artists by exhibiting their work. The interest and encouragement of Queen Faraḥ and of the government helped to impart to the modern art movement a measure of legitimacy beyond their grass-root support. Artists were sent abroad to study and given the means to participate in art exhibitions such as the Salon d'Automne in Paris and the Venice Biennale, and government ministries were encouraged to give public commissions to the artists. Eventually a number of museums concerned with modern art were founded. Moreover, by the 1960s the number of the private collectors of Iranian modern art was increasing, and by the 1970s even corporate collectors began to emerge. (The leading among them, the Behšahr Group, possessed by the late 1970s 400 works of contemporary Iranian painting.)

Two more landmarks in the history of modern art in Iran should be discussed further: the establishment of the School of Decorative Arts (Madrasa-ye honarhā-ye tazyīnī) in 1340 Š./1961, and the inauguration of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (Mūza-ye honarhā-ye moʿāṣer) on 30 Mehr 1356 Š./22 October 1977.

School of Decorative Arts. This was created to give degrees in the field of applied arts such as interior decoration and graphic arts to, among others, the graduates of Iran's Secondary Schools of Fine Arts for Boys and Girls who were not admitted to Tehran University's School of Fine Arts. A number of the

more successful Iranian modernists were graduates of the School of Decorative Arts, a fact that led some observers to give it higher marks than the School of Fine Arts as a breeding ground for artists. The first group of professors and instructors assembled at the College of Decorative Arts (as it was initially called) were in fact instrumental in instilling in the students a fresh outlook, especially when it came to the choice of subject matter and treatment of materials. Graduates of Tehran University's School of Fine Arts of the same generation were found to be more formal, and less flexible, in their approach to art.

Museum of Contemporary Art. The creation of the museum had been a dream of many artists, but it remained a long dormant project until it was finally allotted a plot of land in the park on the northern edge of Tehran University and construction work was started in the early seventies. The museum's collection, when it was finally opened in 1976 in a week-long gala-celebration that appears surrealistic in retrospect, included paintings and sculpture by many internationally known artists, from the impressionists down to the cubists, expressionists, and abstractionists. Since the museum was conceived as devoted rather to international modern art, works representing later movements such as Action Painting, Pop Art, and Op Art were also present. The museum continues to function even today (1984).

The development of modern Iranian painting. An observer of the local art scene searching for significant trends in the course of the developments that have shaped the art movement in Iran during the 20th century is struck by the diversity of the works created during this period and often finds it very difficult to discern links between contemporary creations and Iran's cultural past. On the other hand, it would be much simpler to accuse many of the modernists of being copyists and faddists who have merely jumped on the latest fashionable artistic bandwagon and have completely forgotten their homeland's cultural heritage. Things are not of course all that simple, and Iran's modern painters and sculptors should not be judged in isolation. Similar trends are to be observed in many other art forms, poetry and drama in particular, and the whole question should be evaluated within the framework of Iranian society's experiences with Western-style modernization.

Qajar art was of course traditional, even though it was no longer so pure and unadulterated as, say, Safavid art which preceded it. In the course of the country's contacts with Russia and western Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, certain innovations had been introduced, but these were mainly in

the use of materials (for instance oils) or in the manner of execution (use of gradation instead of applying colors as totally flat surfaces of uniform intensity) rather than in outlook. When Kamāl-al-molk spent five years painting his famous canvas Tālār-e āyīna (Hall of mirrors), patiently observing and recording the reflections of light in each single mirror fragment, his more tradition-bound colleagues were still laboring over pen cases and jewel boxes, peopling their outer surfaces with idealized stereotypes emanating from the world of myths and legends, and not from everyday reality. Their subjective view of the scene determined the size of the personages depicted, and not the distance of the figures from the viewer.

Kamāl-al-molk introduced a basic change in outlook. He turned an objective eye on nature, and spared no effort in recording the minutest details of what he observed. Here was the artist as the master draftsman and as the supreme colorist. And he and his disciples could go on rendering the world in this way over and over again except that this “new” process, several centuries old in Europe, was already on its way out there. Just as Kamāl-al-molk was patiently reconstructing the world of reality on his canvases, the first cubists were breaking it down. And if the Iranian public was happy with the work of Kamāl-al-molk and his followers in mid-20th century, the aspiring artists and art students sent to Paris and Rome to study the new techniques could not be.

So, during the fifties and sixties all types of works executed under the banner of impressionist and post-impressionist schools were to be found in the exhibition halls of Tehran side by side with the naturalistic offerings of the modernists of an earlier generation. The art movements that had taken nearly seventy years to unfold were seen in action, amid much public outcry, almost simultaneously within the same decade.

A question that must have bothered many of the young modernists at this time was the quality or the properties that distinguished their work from the works of similar artists elsewhere. What was “Iranian” in their work? What was the relationship between the paintings and sculptured pieces that they were turning out and their country’s cultural heritage? They were encouraged in this soul searching by the officials of the cultural establishment who strongly desired the creation of a “national school,” with clear links with the glorious periods of Persian art: Achaemenid, Sasanian, or Safavid.

With these intentions or reservations, some aspirants turned their attention to the type of subjects that would be immediately recognized as “Iranian,” while

others tried to work with motifs or figures borrowed from the bas-reliefs of Persepolis or from the sumptuous pages of some ancient manuscript: a bazaar filled with turbaned men and čādor-clad women executed "prismatically;" a family gathered around a kerosene lamp painted "cubistically;" or the stylized form of a seated figure worked into an otherwise free-form abstract composition. This marriage of local materials with modernistic techniques did not always succeed, and it certainly won no major prizes from the Biennale juries, but efforts to do something "Iranian" continued.

Saqqā-ḵāna School. Saqqā-ḵāna is a small public watering place where passersby may help themselves to a cool drink. It is to be found in the older sections of every town and village in Iran. It is set up usually in a recessed niche—with its cistern and brass bowl—as a good religious deed in memory of Imam Ḥosayn, the third Shiʿite imam who was martyred with his followers at Karbalā (in present-day Iraq) in a battle with the forces of Yazīd, the Omayyad ruler in 61/680 in the course of two hot waterless days. The saqqā-ḵāna, therefore, is treated as a sacred place, where candles are often kept burning and green and black drapes are displayed. The protective wrought-iron grillwork and the sides of the cistern are all engraved with decorative motifs and Koranic words and the ensemble may be considered a specimen of religious folk art.

When Ḥosayn Zendarūdī displayed for the first time in the Third Tehran Biennale canvases that brought together geometric patterns covered with talismanic writings on a base of colors (green, yellow, orange, red, and black) that reminded the viewer of Shiʿite religious ceremonies, the word saqqā-ḵāna was used (first by the present writer) to describe the mood invoked by Zendarūdī's new paintings (Saqqā-ḵāna, Tehran, Museum of Contemporary Art, 1977, p. 2). The appellation caught on and later became a label to distinguish the works of all artists who relied heavily on Iran's storehouse of decorative motifs and/or Persian calligraphy to create modern compositions, as distinct from other modernists who could be associated with specific European or American art movements or even from those who combined explicitly Iranian subject matter with modern painting techniques (see Yarshater, "Contemporary Persian Painting," pp. 367f.).

The Saqqā-ḵāna artists, who were also labeled neo-traditionalists, came closest to what had been a long sought-after goal, namely the creation of a "national" school, with works that were "modern" and "Iranian" at the same time, and drew positive responses from viewers, and jury-members, both inside and

outside Iran. The traditional motifs could be manipulated in many different ways, singly or in combination, to create visual rhythms or texture effects or even to make humorous statements. The flexibility with which the artist could use these motifs and patterns in conjunction with the colors of his choice was the key to his success, where others had failed before. And Saqqā-ḵāna canvases or sculpture pieces bore direct links with Iran's cultural heritage; these artists could be in fact considered descendants of Iran's famous craftsmen of earlier centuries—illuminators, goldsmiths, engravers, and calligraphers—who beautified a thousand and one utilitarian objects with intricate floral scrolls or calligraphic lines.

A few of the better-known names associated with this school are the following:

Ḥosayn Zendarūdī (b. 1316 Š./1937) was a graduate of Tehran's Secondary School of Fine Arts for Boys, and briefly a student at the newly-established School of Decorative Arts. From his earliest iconographic works he moved to calligraphic compositions which combined thousands of word fragments to create lattice-like visual rhythms over a base of shifting colors. During a later period Zendarūdī utilized seal impressions in his paintings to create similar effects. He is considered to be one of Iran's leading contemporary painters.

Parvīz Tanāvolī (b. 1316 Š./1937), the leading Iranian sculptor, has worked with different materials and highly diverse techniques. He is a graduate of Tehran University's School of Fine Arts and the Berrera Academy in Milan, where he studied with Mario Marini. His search for ancient Iranian sculptured pieces—in the absence of statues made during the Islamic period—has led him to a study of traditional metal-work, such as utensils, decorative birds, even locks. He is equally engrossed with the legend of Farhād, the rock carver of Bīsotūn who died for the love of Šīrīn and whose story is echoed throughout the pages of Persian literature. Tanāvolī's most typical Saqqā-ḵāna work is a pair of hands gripping the grillwork of a shrine in a gesture of beseeching. During one of his later periods, Tanāvolī created a series of sculptures in which the Persian word hīč (nought), laden with mystical connotations, is seen twisting and turning in space like some fantastic dragon.

Farāmarz Pīlārām (1319-62 Š./1937-83), a graduate of Tehran's School of Decorative Arts, was a modernist painter and an accomplished calligrapher. Initially he produced paintings in which geometric forms borrowed from Shiʿite iconography were painted yellow, gold, and silver and then embellished with seal impressions (one such work of Pīlārām's is now in the collection of

New York's Museum of Modern Art). Then he turned to calligraphy in compositions that were also characterized by bold coloring and large size. One of Pīlārām's last creations, before his premature death from a heart attack, was a gigantic word fragment made of wood.

Masʿūd ʿArabšāhī (b. 1314 Š./1935) is another graduate of the School of Decorative Arts. He works with ancient motifs borrowed from Achaemenian or even Assyrian and Babylonian rock carvings in decorative and colorful compositions. He has refrained from drawing explicitly on Shiʿite iconography, but is considered akin to the Saqqā-ḵāna artists in spirit and outlook. During the seventies he received several commissions to decorate walls and facades of public buildings (such as that of the Ministry of Industries and Mines) with bas-reliefs of his own design.

Ṣādeq Tabrīzī (b. 1317 Š./1938), is another successful graduate of the School of Decorative Arts. He has tried his hand at pottery, collage, and painting, drawing on elements borrowed from calligraphy, folk art, and the more formal figures of Persian miniatures with equal success. His earliest paintings were executed on parchment in lively color combinations. Later on he shifted to relatively large canvases. An element that pervades his works in all its different periods is a strong sense of humor.

Manṣūr Qandrīz (1314-44 Š./1935-65), was a student of the School of Decorative Arts; his life was cut short by an automobile accident. From quasi-surrealistic paintings he moved to a period in which he would combine decorative motifs, taken from a wide range of sources, to create synthetic ensembles. By contrast, he was economical during this period in his palette and would often limit himself to two or three key colors.

Nāṣer Ovīsī (b. 1313 Š./1934), a modern painter who has pursued, all the while, a diplomatic career. Ovīsī works in a figural style reminiscent of Saljuq, Safavid, or even Qajar art. He embellishes his figures with calligraphy or decorative patterns directly transferred from the wooden blocks of the qalamkār (printed cotton) maker. His idiom has remained more or less constant, but his style has gradually evolved from relative simplicity to elaboration, with a profusion of silver and gold in his later works. After a "Spanish period" in the late seventies resulting from his diplomatic post in Spain, he has returned to his old motifs in which figures of women and horses are prominent.

Jazeh (Žāza) Ṭabāṭābāʾī, painter and sculptor. Jazeh may be reluctant to call himself a Saqqā-ḵāna artist as he started to draw on motifs borrowed from Iranian folk arts a year or two before this school had a name. He is also one of the pioneers of the modern art movement in Iran, having established a gallery (the Iran Modern Art Gallery) which was very active during the sixties. In his paintings, Jazeh often satirizes Qajar stereotypes, combining them with decorative elements taken from different sources—qalamkār blocks, book illustrations , calligraphy metal engraving, etc. Jazeh's sculpture pieces are also combinations of different elements found in the scrap heap but imaginatively and humorously put together. In this fashion, Jazeh created a number of "fantastic" dragon-birds that adorned the exhibition halls of the last two Tehran Biennales. Among his other works the doors for the shrine of Imam Reżā (1971) may be mentioned.

Besides the Saqqā-ḵāna school artists, a wide range of tendencies could be discerned among other contemporary artists. Some took their inspiration from nature, often with elements from the Iranian landscape.

Sohrāb Sepehrī (b. Kāšān 1307 Š./1928, d. Tehran 1359 Š./1980) was a leading contemporary painter and an outstanding modernist poet. A graduate of Tehran University's School of Fine Arts (Dāneškada-ye honarhā-ye zībā), he participated in the first and second Tehran Biennale, studied lithography at the Beaux Arts, Paris, in 1336 Š./1957, and woodcut techniques at Tokyo in 1339 Š./1960. A year later he held his own exhibition of paintings at Tālār-e Reżā ʿAbbāsī, revealing clear impressions of Japanese designs. In the next two decades, he created a large number of paintings—which he showed at various exhibitions, and several collections of poems, proving his earnest preoccupation with both means of expression. His paintings attracted attention both in Iran and abroad, following successful participation in such group shows as the Venice Biennale (1337 Š./1958), the Sao Paolo Biennale (1963), and solo exhibitions such as those held at the Benson Gallery in New York (1971) and Galerie Cyrus in Paris (1972). Sepehrī worked in a simple, semi-abstract style with a watercolor effect that reflected the landscapes of the countryside around his native city of Kāšān and in his later years concentrated his attention on a series devoted to tree trunks. The stark simplicity and serenity of his paintings were illuminated and complemented by his poetry.

Abuʾl-Qāsem Saʿīdī (b. 1305 Š./1926) was trained at the E´cole des Beaux Arts in Paris and eventually specialized in highly colorful, light-filled renditions of trees in bloom, often with a strong calligraphic quality to his line.

Nāṣer Assar (ʿAṣṣār; b. 1370 Š./1928) another Paris-based artist also paints large, almost monochrome canvases in soft hues.

Artists such as Marcos Gregorian, Parvīz Kalāntarī (b. 1310 Š./1931), and Sirak Melkonian have all been drawn to the desert and local village architecture as formal sources.

Other artists should more properly be called artist-calligraphers: Moḥammad Eḥsāʾī (b. 1318 Š./1939), Reżā Māfī (b. 1322 Š./1943), and Ṣādeq Barīrānī can be numbered among artists who took their inspiration from the Saqqā-ḵāna formal idiom but in the mid-70s concentrated solely on script.

Monīr Farmānfarmāʾīān developed the decorative and formal possibilities inherent in the glass painting of the 19th century to create modern mixed-media work combining painting and sculpture.

Although modern Iranian painting is generally more decorative and concerned with formal questions, there were young artists who could be called expressionistic and produced powerful works of art—Nīkzād Nojūmī, Bahman Nāyfar (b. 1324 Š./1945), Hānībāl Alḵāṣ, the cartoonist Ardašīr Moḥaṣṣeṣ, (b. 1317 Š./1938), and Nāhīd Ḥaqīqat.

Qāsem Hājīzāda (b. 1326 Š./1949) is a young artist who in the 1970s put to innovative use old 19th-century photographs as the basis of highly personal representational paintings.

All of the above artists to one degree or another draw upon Iran's past in their search for a contemporary statement but there are others , reckoned among the more established, who work in a thoroughly international idiom, among them Manūčehr Yaktāʾī (b. 1301 Š./1922), who creates still lifes and portraits with a strong abstract-expressionist flavor, Bahman Moḥaṣṣeṣ (b. 1309 Š./1930), who developed a forceful personal imagery of minotaurs and nightmare creatures in landscapes of despair, Behjat Ṣadr, an abstract painter of rhythmic geometric designs whose signature style can be seen in a series of paintings based on the artist's brushstroke, and Mortażā Sāzgār, whose painting has led to basically geometric designs worked into fine textures.

To sum up: during the 70s, some fifty-sixty Iranians considered themselves full-time artists, holding at least one exhibition a year in the ten-twelve art galleries that were active at the time in Tehran or some key provincial center, such as Shiraz or Isfahan. There were also some artists who made impressive

gains in the fields of applied arts—as illustrators of children's books (e.g., Faršīd Met¯qālī, Bahman Dādḵᵛāh, Parvīz Kalāntarī) or in the field of graphic arts (e.g., Mortažā Momayyeż and Qobād Šīvā), or in making animated films (e.g., Nūr-al-dīn Zarrīn-kelk).

The artistic scene is very different ever since the 1978 revolution. With the market, and the official patronage of avant-gardism gone, practically no ultramodern works mimicking the very latest European or American styles are produced. The Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art has been sponsoring a number of group shows for works that may be classified, for convenience, as revolutionary art, wholly naturalistic (harking back to Kamāl-al-molk) and propagandist, side by side with surrealistic canvases illustrating the theme of martyrdom. This last genre combines pictorial elements with the same sort of source material that the Saqqā-ḵāna artists have been tapping—elements from Shiʿite folk art and the Persian/Arabic script. As a matter of fact, calligraphic paintings (best exemplified by the works of Reżā Māfī) are the only type of work that have received no setback.

Of the remaining painters still active in the country, a few are producing still lifes (e.g., Maḥmūd Javādpūr, Bahman Dādḵᵛāh, Parvāna Eʿtemādī), some are painting landscape (e.g., Ḥosayn Maḥjūbī), while some others try to explore the relationship between the country's cultural heritage and present-day realities by reinterpreting the formalism of the traditional art forms [e.g., Aydin Aghdashloo (Āydīn Āḡdāšlū)]. The canvases have shrunk in size, no public exhibitions of such works are held, and so for the time being it is difficult to pass judgment on the quality of the art which is being produced in post-revolutionary Iran. But a soulsearching and reappraisal is definitely in progress.

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