



## HOSSEINI, MANSOUREH

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**HOSSEINI, MANSOUREH** (Maṣūra Ḥosayni Tabrizi, b. Tehran, 10 Šahrivar 1305 Š./1 September 1926; found dead, Tehran, 8 Tir 1391 Š./28 June 2012), pioneer modernist painter, writer, and gallerist, among the first Iranian artists who incorporated calligraphy in their modern works ([FIGURE 1](#), [FIGURE 2](#)).

### LIFE

Daughter of Mir 'Isā and Ẕadija, Mansoureh was born into an affluent family in Tehran. She entered the University of Tehran's [Faculty of Fine Arts](#) in 1944. Her teachers included 'Ali-Moḥammad Ḥaydariān (1896-1990) and Moḥsen Moqaddam (d. 1987), and among her classmates was [Manucher Sheybani](#). She graduated in 1948 and held her first exhibition at the British Council in Tehran (Pākbāz and Emdādiān, p. 17), and began teaching at the newly opened Tehran School of Decorative Arts (Honarestān-e honarhā-ye zibā). Her colleagues included, [Sohrab Sepehri](#), Mehdi Viškā'i (b. 1920), [Jalāl Āl-e Aḥmad](#), and Simin Daneshvar (1921-2012; Fouladvand, 2012).

Hosseini left for Italy in March of 1954 and attended the Accademia di Belle Arti in Rome, where her advisor was the renowned figurative painter and art critic Amerigo Bartoli Natinguerra (1890-1971), and among her teachers was artist and critic Virgilio Guzzi (1902-1978). In 1956 her work, along with that of [Behjat Sadr](#) and a few other Iranian artists, was selected for the Venice Biennial XXVIII. The next year Hosseini had a solo exhibition in Rome (Valerio Mariani, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 1957). In the exhibition of figurative arts in Frosinone, Italy in 1957, Hosseini received the first prize, and her participation



in “Asian Painters in Rome,” in the same year, won her a scholarship to continue her studies in Rome. In 1958, Hosseini sent her works to Tehran for the First Tehran Painting Biennial and received the Outstanding Painting Award.

A pivotal point in her artistic life occurred when she met Lionello Venturi (1885-1961), the celebrated Italian art historian and critic, who found her work too traditional and suggested she concentrate on more modern and abstract styles, and he encouraged her to incorporate Kufic calligraphy (see [CALLIGRAPHY](#)) in her paintings. “Kufic calligraphy is an abstract art in itself, why don’t you use that approach?” (Pākbāz and Emdādiān, p. 18). This meeting became a turning point in Hosseini’s quest for a contemporary visual language; she started experimenting with calligraphy thereafter (Hamzeiyi, part 1, 2012).

In 1959 Hosseini returned back to Iran, continued producing works in the same direction, and participated in several exhibits ([FIGURE 3](#)). In 1961 she took a trip to Southern provinces of Iran and worked on a series of landscapes depicting oil wells, drilling rigs, and refineries. The National Iranian Oil Company bought the series and displayed them on a traveling tour ([FIGURE 4](#)). In 1963 Hosseini went to Prague. On her East European tour she showed her paintings in Warsaw and visited the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, about which she later said; “I haven’t been able to create a lively painting after that visit. Black has become the brightest color for me” (“Maṣūra Ḥosayni,” 1963, p. 3; [FIGURE 5](#)).

After the 1979 Revolution, Hosseini continued painting and exhibiting at different venues nationally and internationally. Her last major exhibit was a show with Behjat Sadr held at Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in 2004 (“Gozāreš,” p. 465).

Mansoureh Hosseini suffered from heart complications for years. She was found dead by her neighbors on 28 June 2012, around 15 days after her death (BBC, 2012).

## WORKS.

In the art circles of Rome, the issue of figurative vs. abstract art was among the major topics of discussion when Mansoureh was attending art school. The neo-traditionalists of the time celebrated provocation of emotion and the artist’s



imagination. Depicting her new surroundings, using loose brushstrokes and a lyrical approach, Mansoureh embraced different methods of self-expression. “A number of Iranian painters followed the path of non-representational, gestural abstraction including Mansoureh Hosseini.” (Daftari and Diba, 2013, p. 35) As noted by art critics, Hosseini used both figurative style and abstraction simultaneously, parallel and in relation to each other (Pākbāz, 2012, p. 10), and was one of the first modern painters to incorporate calligraphy in her works (Ahmadi, 2012). “They are not intentional ... these circular forms have lived with us for years and I cannot disengage myself from them (“Moṣḥāḥeba,” 1976, p. 7; “Maṣūra Ḥosayni,” 1972, pp. 52-53; [FIGURE 6](#), [FIGURE 7](#)).

However, not all critics concurred with Hosseini’s use of Kufic calligraphy in her abstract canvases. In an article titled “Scripts without communication,” [Karim Emami](#) noted, “Perhaps a more sophisticated Nasta’liq calligraphy [see [CALLIGRAPHY \(continued\)](#)] would have suited Miss Hosseini’s work better. Time will be a better judge of Kufism!” (Emami, 1963, p. 6).

Hosseini highly benefited from her involvement with the Scuola Romana. “She blended the aura of our paintings with the decorative and fanciful complexity of Persian art (Lorenza Trucchi, p. 7). As held by [Parviz Nātel-Kānlari](#), “Although Hosseini’s works are varied, there is a common bond between them. Her portraits are alive and attractive, and her abstract paintings seem to be sleepy images of the same faces and the same landscapes” (Kānlari, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 1959)

Using a personal and harmonious color palette she created vivid impressions of the southern landscapes and oil refineries. Abstraction and fluid distortion of subjects played a large role in her works. “The work of a color virtuoso, [yet] this is not to imply that Mansoureh is a symbolist” (Lima, p. 6). Characterized by rhythmic movements and intense colors, Mansoureh’s poetic visual language incorporated sacred Persian calligraphy and gestural expressions (Narāgi, p. 128).

Hosseini displayed her works in many solo and group exhibitions in Iran, Italy, Brazil, China, and most countries of Eastern Europe. She received numerous awards, including the Gold Medal at the Rome exhibition of figurative arts in 1957, and the Rome Quadrennial in 1958. She also received prizes at the First, Second, and Third Tehran Painting Biennials in 1958, 1960, and 1962, respectively (Mohājer, pp. 1-15, and Emami, 1987, pp. 640-46). Her



paintings are held in the Collection of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, and many private collections.

Mansoureh Hosseini had a well-developed writing skill and wrote several of her own exhibition brochures, in addition to other artists' catalogues. In 1968 she began teaching art criticism at University of Tehran's Faculty of Fine Arts, and in 1971 she published a novel titled *Putin-e geli* (Muddy boots). She opened Mansoureh Hosseini Gallery in 1973, where she held exhibitions of her own works along with the works of modern artists. In 1976 Hosseini started writing articles and reviews, often with a harsh overtone, for the section of "Honar-e emruz" (Today's art) in *Eṭṭelā'āt* newspaper, using "Doktor Asad" as her pen name (Pākbāz and Emdādiān, p. 23). She was also a jury member of the Fifth "Tajalli-e eḥsās" exhibition in 1998.

#### Selected Exhibitions:

- 1957 Galleria Del Vantaggio, Rome
- 1959 Bargozida-ye āṭār-e Maṣūra Ḥosayni, Tālār-e Reżā 'Abbāsi, Tehran
- 1960 Second Tehran Painting Biennial
- 1962 The Venice Biennial, Italy  
World Biennial, Sao Paolo, Brazil  
Third Tehran Painting Biennial
- 1964 Fourth Tehran Painting Biennial
- 1970 Second UNESCO Festival (with Behjat Sadr, Gōlām-Ḥosayn Nāmi, and Moḥammad Reżā 'Adnāni), Tehran
- 1974 Taḳt-e Jamšid Gallery, Tehran
- 1987 Iranian Contemporary Art: Four Women, Foxley Leach Gallery, Washington, D.C.
- 1994 Tajalli-e eḥsās (Revelation of emotions), Niāvarān Cultural Center, Tehran
- 1997 The Fourth Painting Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran  
Čahāromin Tajalli-e eḥsās (Exhibition), Niāvārn Cultural Center (she also wrote the introduction to catalogue)
- 1998 Bāztāb-e sonnat dar naqqāši-e nowgarā-ye Irān" (Reflection of tradition on Iran's modern painting), Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran
- 2000 First International Painting Biennial of the Islamic World, Tehran  
The Fifth Tehran Painting Biennial, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran
- 2004 Pišgāman-e honar-e Mo'āṣer Iran: Maṣūra Ḥosayni and Behjat Sadr (5th Exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran)



- 2009 Masques of Shahrazad (Iranian women artists of 3 decades), Candlestar Gallery, London
- 2012 Negāhi digar (Alternative view), Pardis Mellat Gallery, (Exhibition of works by 47 Iranian women artists honoring the memory of Mansoureh Hosayni, Tehran

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