



KALĀNTARI, PARVIZ

KALĀNTARI, PARVIZ (b. Zanjān, 22 March 1931; d. Tehran, 20 May 2016), painter, graphic designer, writer, and a pioneering illustrator of Iranian children's books ([Figure 1](#)).

Life. Parviz Kalāntari was the eldest child in a family of five siblings. His father, Bāqer Kalāntari (1907-94) was an employee of the Ministry of Transportation in Zanjān, and his mother, Moḥtaram Mollābāši (1906-2001) worked as a freelance dressmaker. When Parviz was three years old, the family moved to Tehran and he started practicing art by drawing on the walls of his middle-class family's traditional house (Kalāntari, 2014). During the last years of high school and prior to the [coup d'état of 1332 Š./1953](#), he published some of his caricatures in the satirical newspaper *Čalangar* (Kalāntari, 2014), and attended the meetings of the progressive Korus jangi art society through his acquaintance with the avant-garde artist and critic, [Jalil Ziapour](#) (Mojābi, 2016, p. 317). He entered the [University of Tehran's Faculty of Fine Arts](#) in 1951, and simultaneously worked as a part-time graphic designer for a number of advertising agencies in Tehran (Murizinežād, p. 4).

At university, Kalāntari was introduced to [Homāyun San'atizāda](#) and started a successful career with the [Franklin Book Program](#) on publishing educational textbooks for children. Along with colleagues Moḥammad-Zamān Zamāni and Gōlām-'Ali Maktabi, Kalāntari was among the pioneering group of Iranian painters who worked on textbook illustrations (Pakbaz, pp. 182-83). In 1954, he held his first solo exhibition in [Marcos Grigorian's](#) Gallery Esthetique, and a year later, published his first illustrated children's book, *Kadu qelqelazan*



(Mojābi, 2016, p. 317). In 1958, Kalāntari married Farah Yusofi (‘Azizi, p. 6).

Kalāntari received his Bachelor of Arts degree in 1959. A year later, Franklin Publications sent him to New York for a six-month training internship in textbook illustration and layout design. In 1962, he co-founded the Children’s Book Council, accompanied by fellow illustrators [Morteżā Momayyez](#) and Nur-al-Din Zarrin-kelk (Rafae and Shad Qazvini, p. 215). Kalāntari was subsequently offered a graphic design teaching job at the [University of Tehran’s Faculty of Fine Arts](#) by Hušang Seyḥun, the acclaimed architect and the then Dean of the Faculty (Murizinežād, p. 5).

In 1968, Kalāntari joined [Kānun-e parvareš-e fekri-e kudakān va nowjavānān](#), first as the director of the Center for Visual Arts, and later, as director of Art Education, where he played a pivotal role in transforming the institution’s art instruction curriculum by expanding its presence among the younger generations of various ethnic and social backgrounds (Murizinežād, pp. 5-6). In the same year, one of his works commissioned by the Kānun won the Children Book Council’s Best Illustration Prize (Mir-Hādi, p. 11; [Figure 2](#)), and his works were displayed in the “Iranian Modern Art” exhibition at Columbia University (Yarshater, 1968). From 1970 to 1977, Kalāntari shifted to the medium of clay in his art and held several exhibitions in Iran, Switzerland, and the United States, which earned him international recognition and positive critical reviews (M. Maleki, 2003, p. 9; Emāmi 2014, p. 202).

In 1985, in a collaborative effort with Tehran’s Anthropology Museum to study tribal traditions and costumes, his *Hamrāh bā ‘ašāyer* (In step with nomads) series went on display in Tehran, of which a selection was published by UNICEF as postcards and a stamp in 1988 (M. Maleki, 2003, p. 9; Kalāntari, 2012, p. 30). His works were put on exhibit by the United Nations in its headquarters in New York and Geneva, in 1998 and 2003, respectively (Maleki and Maleki, p. 16).

In his later years, Kalāntari spent most of his time writing memoirs and short stories often with humorous and surreal overtone. His *Niče na, faqaṭ begu Mašd Esmā’il* (Why Nietzsche, just quote Mašd Esmā’il; Tehran, 2004), contains recollections of his association with numerous eminent artists, including ‘Abbās Kiā-Rostami, Ja’far Ruḥbaḳš, and Morteżā Momayyez (Akrami, pp. 39-41). This work was followed by the publication of the short stories *Vali oftād moškelhā: čahār dāstān* (2004) and *Marg pāyān-e kabutar nist: majmu’aye qeššahā o tašvirhā* (2009) and an autobiographical essay (2012), *In šāka māl-*



e man ast (in Maleki and Maleki, eds.). On 20 May 2016, after convalescing for more than a year following a cerebrovascular hemorrhage, Kalāntari passed away in Tehran.

Works. Kalāntari's trajectory as a modern Iranian painter shows a vivid preoccupation with the quest for cultural identity, which informed his artistic vision and emphasized the primacy of the subject matter over his professional aspirations. Except a number of early abstract paintings, his work pivoted continually around the aesthetics of rural life and the traditional architecture of the indigenous tribes of Iran.

Kalāntari's simultaneously childish and realistic drawings for folkloric stories and fables in children's literature textbooks were particularly significant for their pictorial simplicity that made the stories appear ever more attractive to elementary school children (Akrami, pp. 26-28; [Figures 3, 4](#)). His native-inspired drawings perfectly matched indigenous related contexts, such as [Mohammad Bahmanbeygi's](#) *Boḳārā-ye man, il-e man* ([Figure 5](#)), and were published as cover art for both children and adult books ('Azizi, pp. 105-06). Kalāntari's contributions were also crucial to the advancement of the art of illustration in mid 1960s, when many writers of adult literature, including [Gōlām-Ḥosayn Yusofi](#), Sirus Ṭāhbāz, and Aḥmad Šāmlu, cooperated with the newly established [Kānun](#) to produce books for children (Rafae and Shad Qazvini, p. 214).

While teaching at the University of Tehran, and as a result of frequent educational field trips to the architecturally-rich cities of [Kashan](#), Yazd, and [Bam](#), Kalāntari's paintings evolved towards a more natural depiction of traditional thatched round domed rooftops, vaults, and wind towers, by eliminating the pictorial illusion of mortar, and spreading actual adobe across the canvas as a foundation for acrylic paint, thus enhancing the visual sensation by unifying the material and subject matter in the most unadorned fashion (Mojābi, 2014, pp. 438-39). In using cob (a raw clay masonry made of mud and straw) as a medium material, his *kāhgel* paintings were inspired by Marcos Grigorian and his pioneering "earthwork art." While Grigorian used clay and mud for minimal, abstract creations with a cosmopolitan sensibility, Kalāntari—aptly self-described as the "painter of sandy landscapes" of his homeland—contextualized these earthly elements with reference to their ubiquitous presence in the local nature, architecture, and culture (M. Maleki, 2000, pp. 240-42; Kalāntari, 1989, p. 64; Maḥjub, p. 15).



In some of Kalāntari's early modern compositions, the aesthetics of desert architecture are monochromatically depicted with cubist-style straight lines cutting spaces into half and making contrast between bright colored scorching façades and darker, cool interior spaces (Mojābi, 2014, pp.192-93; [Figure 6](#)). In the later *Hamrāh bā 'ašāyer* series, he captured colorful scenes of nomadic life in southern Iran, from the arduous annual migrations on horseback to the tranquility of tent interiors, and often rendered motifs found in [Qašqā'i](#) carpets and [kelims](#) (see [CARPETS](#); Sabahi, p. 19; Maḥjub, p. 15). His versatility in depicting ethnic lifestyles captured the attention of a non-native audience, and in 2005, he was commissioned by a subsidiary of the United Nations Human Settlements Program for a post-modern triptych painting that was displayed at the United Nations' regional headquarter in Nairobi, Kenya (T. Maleki, p. 25).

Kalāntari is also known as a pioneer of collage art in Iran. He extensively used this technique in conceptual works by incorporating everyday objects, such as pendulum clocks and televisions ([Figures 7, 8](#)), with his iconic earth based materials in sentimental undertones (Issa, p. 20). In the remarkable *Martīya-i barā-ye pedar-am* (An elegy for my father; [Figure 9](#)), he laid tiles and a violin on canvas, and covered them by a cob-coated cloth, signifying the final resting place of his father, and his love for the instrument's sound (Mojābi, 2014, p. 449; Murizinežād, p. 4). Some of his mixed media collages also incorporated symbols and archetypes associated with [Saqqā-kāna School of Art](#), including ancient religious iconography of seals, metals, textiles, and ceramics ([Figure 10](#)). Although Kalāntari created his Saqqā-kāna works decades after the original movement, in the words of the art critic Karim Emāmi, his creations were "genuine achievements of a longtime traveler, returned with a handful of familiar images" (Emāmi, 2012, pp. 66-67).

Exhibitions:

Major solo exhibitions:

1951: Gallery Esthetique, Tehran

1961: University of Tehran

1972: Seyḥun Gallery, Tehran

1973: Kerman Museum, Kerman

1975: Seyḥun Gallery, Tehran

1987: Ketāb-sarā Gallery, Tehran

1990: Ketāb-sarā Gallery, Tehran

1991: Hourian Gallery, San Francisco



2004: Māh Gallery, Tehran
2005: Golestān Gallery, Tehran
2009: Shams Gallery, Tehran
2010: Sārebān Gallery, Tehran
2010: Nicolas Flamel Gallery, Paris

Selected group exhibitions:

1964: Fourth Tehran Painting Biennale, Tehran
1968: Iranian Modern Art, Columbia University, New York City
1970: 25 Years of Contemporary Iranian Art, University of Tehran
1974: International Exhibition of Art, Tehran
1974: Asian Games Exhibition, Qandriz Gallery, Tehran
1975: Iranian Contemporary Art: From the Beginning to Present-Day, Iran-America Society, Tehran
1977: International Art Fair, Basel, Switzerland
1978: Wash Art, Washington, DC
1983: Pacific Asia Museum, Pasadena, Cal.
1992: Taijan Expo, Seoul
1993: Lalit Calā Art Exhibition, New Delhi
1993: Second Tehran Art Biennale, Tehran
1995: Third Tehran Art Biennale, Tehran
1997: Wagner Gallery, Berlin
1998: United Nations Headquarters, New York City
1999: First Drawing Biennale, Tehran
2000: Aztec Gallery, Madrid
2001: Contemporary Iranian Art Exhibit, London
2002: A Breeze from the Gardens of Persia: New art from Iran, Los Angeles
2003: United Nations Headquarters, Geneva
2003: Center for Visual Arts, Doha
2003: United Nations Headquarters, Geneva
2008: Van Gogh's Ear Art Exhibit, Dah Gallery, Tehran
2011: Seyḥun Gallery, Tehran



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