



PILARAM, FARAMARZ

PILARAM, FARAMARZ (Farāmarz Pilārām, b. Tehran, 21 Farvardin 1316 Š./10 April 1937; d. Maḥmud Abād, Māzandarān, Šahrivar 1362 Š./September 1983), modernist artist, educator and among the founders of the [Saqqā-kāna School of Art](#) (FIGURE 1, FIGURE 2, FIGURE 3).

LIFE

The son of Ašgar Pilārām and Ṭubā Āqābeyg, Faramarz grew up in a middle class family with his two sisters, Farideh and Paridoḳt. The family lost three sons to early childhood diseases. Faramarz attended Tehran's School of Decorative Arts for Boys (Honarestān-e honarhā-ye zibā-ye pesarān), founded in 1951 by Jalil Zia'pur (Jalil Žiā'pur, 1920-1999) and a group of artists. His teachers at the newly established school included Mahmoud Farschian (Maḥmud Farščiān), who taught him traditional miniature painting. He received his diploma in 1959 and went on to continue his art education at the Faculty of Decorative Arts, (Dāneškada-e honarhā-ye taz'ini), graduating in 1965 (Afšār Mohājer, p. 193).

Pilaram began exhibiting his paintings while still at college and was soon recognized as one of the most significant artists of his generation. In 1963, the journalist and art critic [Karim Emami](#) wrote a review for Gilgamesh Gallery, owned by the Assyrian-Iranian artist Hannibal Alkhas (Hānnibāl Alkāš, 1930-2010). Among the four artists, Emami identified Pilaram "as the core exponent" of the Saqqā-kāna School of Art (Daftari and Diba, p. 30; Tabrizi, 1999, pp. 88-89). Pilaram's career along with other Saqqā-kāna artists



coincided with the opening of the Tehran Biennials (Emami, 1987, pp. 641-42, Goudarzi, p. 142, Afšār Mohājer, p. 215). Their works went on to be celebrated in various national and international venues. Pilaram's works were included in almost all major Iranian modernist exhibitions (Afšār Mohājer, pp. 201-10).

Pilaram, along with [Mansur Qandriz](#), Šādeq Tabrizi (b.1939), [Morteza Momayyez](#), and Massoud Arabshahi (Mas'ud 'Arabšāhi, b. 1935), played a pivotal role in the establishment of Tālār-e Iran (Iran Gallery) in 1964 (Pākbāz, 2006, pp. 154-55; Tabrizi, 2005, pp. 26-27; Fouladvand, 2012a). He was also instrumental in the establishment of Iran's first interior design firm in 1964, which was closed after the premature death of Qandriz at the age of thirty.

Pilaram received his master's degree in painting and interior design from the Faculty of Decorative Arts in 1968. In the same year, two of his paintings were published in *Daftarhā-ye rowzan*, an artistic and literary journal. In 1971 he won a scholarship to study lithography and print in France for a year ("Be yād-e Pilārām," p. 199). He later held an exhibition in Galerie Cyrus at the Maison de l'Iran, Paris in 1972. Upon his return he became an associate professor at Dāneškada-ye 'elm o šan'at (Ašrafi, p. 38). In 1974 Pilaram along with [Marcos Grigorian](#), Morteza Momayyez, Ġolām-Ĥosayn Nāmi (b. 1936), Massoud Arabshahi, Sirāk Malkoniān (b. 1931), and 'Abd-al-Rezā Daryābeigi (b.1930) formed "Goruh-e naqqāšān-e āzād" (The group of independent artists; Pākbāz, 2006, p. 451). They held several significant group exhibitions for the next four years, including "Ābi" (Blue) and "Goj o gostareh" (Volume and environment; Daftari and Diba, pp. 69-71, Fouladvand, 2012b; "Bāzsāsi," pp. 6-7; Pākbāz 2006, p. 451). Pilaram married his cousin Homā Darrāti in 1974. The couple lived together for nine years and had three children, Ānāhitā, Negār, and 'Ali.

Pilaram was expelled from his teaching job at 'Elm o šan'at University in 1981. Disappointed by the socio-political upheavals of the time, accused and disrespected by students whom he had cherished for years, Pilaram became extremely despondent in the final years of his life (Kalāntari, pp. 22-32; [FIGURE 4](#)). In 1983, he died of a massive heart attack in Maḥmud Ābād, Māzandarān, and was quietly buried in the Behešt-e Zahrā Cemetery in Tehran. His untimely death was a severe blow to the Iranian art community (Kīāras, 2013).

With the upsurge in the monetary value of Iranian modernist trendsetters in recent years, some prominent auction houses have had to withdraw Pilaram's works from their sale due to forgery concerns, pending additional research



(Seifi, 2013).

WORK

Pilaram was among the first group of Iranian artists who focused on Iranian heritage and mythical motifs, making him one of the founders of the Saqqā-kāna movement. (Pākbāz, 1974, p. 33, idem, 2006, p. 307, Emami, 1965, pp. 46-48; idem, *Exhibition Catalogue*, Borghese Gallery, Tehran, 1966; [FIGURE 5](#)).

In the 1960s, the appeal of concepts such as “national” and “Iranian identity” contributed, largely, to the popularity of the Saqqā-kāna School of Art (Yarshater, 1979, pp. 363-77). Neither the passive recipients of the European modernism, nor the simple imitators of local narratives, Saqqā-kāna artists were well informed by Western tradition and yet turned to ethnicity and popular culture within a new aesthetic context (Fouladvand, p. 36; Issa, pp. 17, 19; Keshmirshekan, 2005, pp. 607-30). Pilram’s early works of the 1960s explore motifs from Shi’ite popular art and flat geometric forms to calligraphy and illumination (Diba, p. 58; Goudarzi, pp. 104, 211; Afšār Mohājer, p. 198; [FIGURE 6](#)).

Pilaram’s works incorporated royal blue, gold, and silver on paper, celebrating tribal arts and religious iconography ([FIGURE 7](#)). His early works were characterized by a distinct method of using stamps (originally used as signature), and decorative ornaments in a repetitive form. Pilaram’s use of calligraphic forms in his later modern paintings, distinguishes him as a pioneering figure in calligraphic painting (Naqqāši-kaṭ; Tanāvoli, p. 6), who has played an instrumental role in popularizing the potential of script as an element to create modern works (Nāmi, p. 7; [FIGURE 8](#), [FIGURE 9](#)).

Pilaram used bold and expressive colors along with abstracted scripts to epitomize fresh modernist compositions. He was among a handful number of innovators who manipulated traditional paintings and calligraphy, as raw material, to transform the elegant Persian letters into ‘nonsensical writing’. As such, “in a 1972 work by Faramarz Pilaram the dancerly forms never resolve into readable text” (Robin Cembalest, Artnews online, 2013).

In 1975, twenty-six of Pilaram’s paintings were shown at Iran-America Society. “The combination of calligraphic elements and other forms create a unity in my mind that creates the reality of my painting... I am searching for ways to promote an authentic Iranian art.” (Pilaram, *Exhibition Catalogue*, 1975)



While Mansoureh Hosseini (1926-2012) incorporated Kufic inscriptions and Charles Hossein Zenderoudi (b. 1937) used fragmented scripts, Pilaram abstracted the Persian calligraphy and brought it into play in his paintings. Along with such calligrapher painters as Mohammad Ehsai (Moḥammad Eḩṣāi, b.1939) and Reza Mafi (Rezā Māfi, 1943-1982), he deconstructed the traditional script from its recognizable shape and gave it an individualistic fresh approach. Reminiscent of Ehsai, who kept many of the formal esthetic aspects intact, giving an architectural approach to script, Pilaram focused on rhythmic repetition and the phonetic aspects, de-familiarizing calligraphic elements to further collapse the traditional formalism. Pilaram's de-valued words suspended recognition of the traditional language and suggested various innovative visual alternatives. His works distorted the margins between calligraphy and typography even more (Fouladvand, 2008; [FIGURE 10](#)).

Javād Mojābi, the art critic and poet, considers three major periods in Pilaram's artistic career: figurative, decorative and calligraphic, although he regards calligraphy as a "decorative element" in Pilaram's paintings. As held by Mojābi, what Pilaram achieved, was to take the enjoyment of calligraphy and expand it further into abstracted painterly shapes, where form and color came to align to create fresh new movements (Mojābi, 1991, p. 81). Pilaram's large-scale sculptures inspired by *nasta'liq* script (see [CALLIGRAPHY \[continued\]](#)) made him one of the most important modernist artists before the Revolution (Kāšefi, p. 84). His recurring rhythmic forms are informed by "the phonetic aspects of Persian calligraphy while his three-dimensional wooden sculptures, in particular, are the peak of his career and his utmost dynamic works (Mojābi 2010, p. 7; Afšār Mohājer, pp. 201-06; [FIGURE 11](#), [FIGURE 12](#)).

Pilaram was the recipient of several national and International awards including the 1962 Gold Medal at the 3rd Tehran Biennial, the Silver Medal at Venice Biennial at the same year, the First Prize from the Ministry of Art and Culture at the 4th Tehran Biennial 1964, and the First Prize for a Special Stamp issued by UNESCO for the "World Liberation of Hunger" in 1968. Pilaram's works are included in the collections of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art; Tehran Fine Arts Museum; Jahān-namā Museum at Sāḩeb-qarānia Palace; Grey Art Collection at New York University; Museum of Modern Art, New York, and Queen Farah Pahlavi's Private Collection.

MAJOR SOLO EXHIBITIONS



- 1962 – Farhang Hall, Tehran
- 1966 – Borghese Gallery, Tehran
- 1967 – Seyhoun Gallery, Tehran
- 1968 – Negār Gallery, Tehran
- 1969 – Seyhoun Gallery, Tehran
- 1972 – Galerie Cyrus, Maison de l'Iran, Paris
- 1975 – Iran America Society, Tehran
- 1976 – Šahr Gallery, Tehran
- 2009-2010 – “Ātār e Farāmarz Pilārām (A Retrospective), Gallery 66, Tehran

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 1962 – The Venice Biennial
- Third Tehran Painting Biennial
- Iranian Contemporary Painters, Le Havre, France
- 1963 – Iranian Contemporary Painters, Monaco
- 1964 – Fourth Tehran Painting Biennial
- Iranian Contemporary Painters, Tel Aviv
- 1965 – Iran-Italy Cultural Center, Tehran
- 1966 – Tālār-e Iran, Tehran
- Iranian Contemporary Painters, Montreal
- Consortium of Petroleum Exporting Companies, Tehran
- 1968 – Iranian Modern Art, Columbia University, New York
- International Human Rights, Iran-e Bāstan Museum, Tehran
- 1969 – Iranian Contemporary Painters, Week of Iran, France
- Pan-American Exhibit, Washington, D.C
- 1970 – Iranian Contemporary Painters, Turin, Italy
- Iranian Contemporary Painters, Milan, Italy
- 1971 – Iranian Contemporary Calligraphy, Paris
- 1972 – European Painters, Athens
- 1973 – International Painters (47 nationalities), Cité des Arts, Paris
- International Exhibition of Art, Tehran
- 1975 – “Ābi,” Taḳt-e Jamšid Gallery, Tehran
- “Gonj o gostareh” (Volume and environment,” Iran-America Society, Tehran
- 1976 – “Gonj o gostareh-2” (Volume and environment II), Sāmān Gallery, Tehran
- 2001 – “Iranian Contemporary Art,” Barbican Center, London
- 2002 – “Between Word and Image: Modern Iranian Visual Culture,” Grey Art Gallery, New York University, New York



2013 – Iran Modern, Asia Society, New York
– Basel International Art Fair

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