

ALMINE RECH

Iran without border curated by Negui and Kamran Diba

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"In order to have an accurate perspective of today's young Iranian contemporary art scene, both at home and abroad, one needs to go back a few years. It is indeed after the general election of 1997, which brought political reform and impetus toward a more open atmosphere that visual art, which had been almost dormant during close to twenty years, suddenly flourished and expanded rapidly. Young artists, quite a lot of them women, entered the scene; museums and art institutions became more active. Consequently galleries were formed to represent these artists and encourage visitors to turn collectors. Slowly but surely, Iranian contemporary art was re-emerging. Although works had appeared here and there, either in private collections or in small group exhibitions, the artists had not yet been properly discovered. By the end of the twentieth century, time was finally ripe for them to get the western exposure and recognition they deserved. In April of 2001, the Barbican Center organized a group show of Iranian artists, under the care of Rose Issa, and with the collaboration of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMOCA), under the supervision of Alireza Sami-Azar, the then director of the Museum. [...] It is with great joy and pride we discovered how this cultural Iran blossomed and flourished to the level we are witnessing today.

In fact, ever since the Barbican event, Persian artists were never absent from the international art scene. On the contrary, they started being more and more visible in London, Paris or elsewhere, either in galleries and institutions or at public events such as Venice Biennale 2005, where installations by two major woman artists, Mandana Moghaddam and Bita Fayyazi were shown at the Iranian Pavilion.

During the last decade, we first saw Iranian galleries outside Iran focusing on their country's art and courageously trying to promote their artists. Among these gallery owners we could name Leila Taghinia, who even in the early post-revolutionary years where lack of interest vis-à-vis Iran's contemporary art prevailed, was already struggling to convince artists to create enough work to enable her to organize decent exhibitions in her small up-town New York gallery. Of course, later on she was, duly, one of the most successful dealers, as much Privately and as in international art fairs. Then, in parallel, we saw older as well as younger generation artists works appear in prominent auction houses sales, mainly in Dubai and London. At the same time, some European and New York galleries started representing the more internationally renowned artists such as Shirin Neshat and Y.Z. Kami respectively at Barbara Gladstone and Gagolian, both in New York or Shirazeh Houshiary at London's Lisson Gallery.

In January 2009, the Saatchi Gallery's second event since its opening a year before, was titled "Unveiled: New Art from the Middle East". It featured, among others, 11 Persian artists all from a new generation of young men and women, with original and fresh ideas and styles. This event, much noticed in the media, was a prologue to a row of commercial group shows in private galleries. These included the exhibition "Raad o Bargh" at Thaddaeus Ropac and two months later a 5 artists Iranian show at Ghislaine Hussenot, both Paris galleries. The Almine Rech Gallery's "L'Iran sans frontiere" is the third of the series in Paris and most certainly not the last.

As we began studying the possibilities lying ahead of us in regard to the final selection of artists and their works, we realized what a hard task it would be, considering the enormously active and diverse art scene in today's Iran.

Conclusively, we decided it would make things easier if we proceeded by creating parallel groups and then somehow relate them together.

After seeing works by hundred of artists, these groups started taking shape naturally by themselves. For instance we noticed that although majority of artists still lived and worked in Iran, a lot of them were also expatriates living abroad. Therefore, we first decided to differentiate them as artists of Iran and those of the western world while we tried in the meantime to break the frontiers. Then we addressed the question of age, so our second grouping became that of younger and older generation artists; in other words we somehow mixed the more established with the emerging. Last but not least, we created a "mélange" of diverse media and artistic visions that would in result, bear a flavor of a small well rounded show including paintings, sculptures, videos and photos alongside one another."

Negui Diba