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Persian Heritage

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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The tenth anniversary gala of *Persian Heritage* magazine, held this past October, was once again a success. Your continued enthusiasm provides us with the encouragement we need to go forward. We hope to always be a vehicle of the Persian community to help keep our traditions and culture alive.

Over the past three months, the world has seen a number of significant events, some positive and some negative. We have plowed through them, but I wonder if we have learned anything from these events, especially on the subject of unity.

Regardless of the length of time we have been separated from Iran, we somehow continue to be threatened by statements and erratic behavior of Iran's present leaders. We fear that their actions will have a profound impact on our social and professional positions in America. And, we fear that these actions will impact our ability to one day fulfill our dreams of visiting our motherland.

As a group, we have been successful in assimilating ourselves into our new homeland. Most of us have won the hearts and respect of the people of our adopted home. Interestingly, however, with the passage of time Iranians have, amongst themselves, lost trust in each other and we continue to widen the gap that exists in our community.

To the public we give an outside appearance of unity, but internally turmoil is running rampant. Is it because of jealousy within our group or is it just plain ignorance? We, instead of encouraging individual enterprise, plant seeds to destroy it. Progress in our community seems to be destined for failure. Instead of valuing friendships and relationships, we are quick to cast them aside at the very hint of disloyalty. These actions continue to trouble me, and I hope also you.

As a group, we are a very interesting and loving people. While smart, we are also easily fooled and influenced by statements without verifying their truth. For instance, we were so quick to believe that Khomeini was a super-educated man who spoke five languages when we knew he was barely fluent in his mother tongue. When told his image was seen in the moon, it was accepted without doubt. During discussions and conversations we hear but rarely listen and we seldom digest or analyze the spoken word. Instead, we stand firm in our position and force our opinions on our listeners. We try to convince them that their opinions and positions are wrong, and leave no room for healthy debate. The fate of those individuals who do not fold to the opinion of others is too often despicable. They are never given deserved respect; they are cast aside and labeled "the enemy." We try in every way to fabricate and falsify their views and defame them every chance received. My friends, there is no positive in discounting another's opinion.

Unity is a part of our constant conversation but more often than not we disrupt, split and divide a united body before its roots are firmly planted. We seem never to allow a project to take a stronghold. Success in the Iranian community does not breed success. Sadly, success in the Iranian community has a tendency to breed division and hatred. We are so quick, and will stop at nothing to ensure a victory. We use the words traitor, collaborator, spy, dictator, conspirator, agent with such ease, never realizing that those words once spoken are more deadly than a bullet. This behavior will never bring us closer together but will certainly increase an already painful distance.

While we all share a genuine desire to hold a management position with a prestigious title, we are incapable of completing anything. Worse, if we are unable to obtain the title we seek, we all too often walk away and isolate ourselves. We react by claiming the groups we sought to lead are being non-deserving of our presence. Instead of being gracious and accept a defeat, we start to regroup and compile our army of destruction.

Our readers constantly criticize the editorial page of this magazine, especially when the editor pleads for unity. In fact, this editor has often been accused as the cause of an argument. I am not insulted by these accusations, yet most of us get so easily insulted and hurt by criticism. Criticism shouldn't be a reason for character assassination. Why do we avoid rather than search for solid solutions to our differences? Why are there constantly



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unnecessary obstacles to block our way? How can we be unified when it comes to preserving our culture in this society?

Unfortunately, today's environment allows an enemy to easily penetrate our walls. The results of these penetration break the unity, a unity that we all seek, yet, a unity that we rarely practice. We are made up of well-educated and professional people and still we are unable to diagnose and recognize the disease that is growing amongst us. We are unable to excise the cancerous social behavior from our healthy culture. Instead of definitive actions that will guarantee us success, we try to heal the cancer with prayers and niceties. Stop being mesmerized and charmed by the enemies that hide amongst us.

We, as a group, can continue to ignore the deep and eminent danger in our society and trust selfish leadership or we can stand up, and remove the individuals responsible for the threat for our survival. We all need to learn from the disaster of Katrina. Had those levies been secured as so often discussed and had priorities by the leadership been in proper order, so many of our countrymen would now not be suffering. Had the beautiful people of New Orleans, as a united group, stood up to the "politics that be" and demanded action, their lives would still be intact. That is what this community now needs in order to survive.

We all love to use the beautiful word "unity," yet none of us believe in it enough to make it a reality. We, as a group, must stop misleading individuals. We must begin to reevaluate our friendships and see them as precious possessions not relationships that are superficial and temporarily beneficial. We must begin to recognize the preciousness and wealth of a committed

friendship. True friends may have differences of opinion, but true friends will not and should not dissolve relationships because of that difference. True friendships seek the cause of a problem and correct it rather than allowing the problem to destroy the beauty of the relationship.

I ask you, if we cannot settle the differences between friends and small groups how do we expect to settle differences in our larger organizations. The success of Iranians in this country will not be measured by the victory of a single person. The success of Iranians in this country will be measured by our unity as a group and what the group is able to achieve. Unity as a group will only be achievable if we have more open and productive dialogue. We need to learn to become more tolerant of each other's opinion. Our politics and our faith are personal and should have no bearing on our goals as a group. Religion, politics, name calling and character assassination have no place in the goals of the Iranian Americans.

My intentions, dear readers, is not to insult, attack, label or destroy anyone; my intent is to get us all to think before we speak, act and react.

Once again, I and my entire staff wish you a very happy New Year. With the Iranian New Year approaching, we will have a chance for a new beginning. May joy and happiness be with you for years to come, and may you all enjoy a life filled with peace and love.

Shahrokh Alavi

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It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Third Annual Gala Dinner Dance Celebrating the institution of *Mirass-e-Iran* Magazine.

I also wish to extend a special welcome to the members of the Editorial Board of the Magazine as well as the members of the Gala organizing committee. Another special welcome goes out to Mrs. Goli Ameri, former candidate for the United States Congress in the great state of Oregon. Most importantly, it is both a pleasure and an honor to welcome our distinguished honorees this evening, Ms. Mahnaz Afkhami and Ms. Roxanna Zarnegar, and for the entertainment provided by Jamshid Alimorad and his orchestra.

There is an ancient Chinese proverb, which says, "It is better to light a single candle than to curse the darkness." Ten years ago, Shahrokh Ahkami saw a great darkness within the Persian-American community. He saw that those who had done so much and had come so far had lost the memory of the distance they'd traveled. He saw that a people whose history extends back to the Persepolis had forgotten that history.

Though the United States is a wonderful place with an innovative culture, and it is a place I am happy to call home, Iranian-Americans were letting their future obliterate the memory of their past.

Shahrokh Ahkami lit a candle in this darkness 10 years ago by publishing the first issue of *Mirass-e-Iran*. Since then, the candle has grown into a bonfire of art and literature and culture and history of which all Iranian-Americans can be proud. You have given us back something we lost, Shahrokh, and for that we are in your debt and thank you.

This connection to our glorious, just and peaceful heritage has never been more important, for we are too often grouped among those who would do this country harm. Therefore we must all work to promote the truth about our Persian heritage, all that has been accomplished and all that we stand for.

As we remember and promote these accomplishments, we must remember that they represent a fabric into which we are all woven, a fabric which must

hold strong.

As we all work towards democratic reform in our homeland of Iran, let us remember that our ultimate goal is the same; and that we all seek to honor the same heritage and build the same prosperous and luminous future.

It has been customary at this Gala to honor members of the Iranian-American community, who have excelled above and beyond what might be expected, and who serve as a credit to their community.

Our first honoree was born in Kerman, Iran, where she founded the Association of Iranian University Women and served as secretary general of the Women's Organization of Iran prior to the Islamic revolution, where she also served

expert on women's rights issues in the Middle East and North Africa, by such media as the Associated Press, Reuters, the BBC, National Public Radio, the New York Times, the Washington Post, CNN, Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Iran.

She has also lectured and published many articles and books on the international women's movement, women's human rights, women in leadership, women and technology, and women's participation in civil society building and democratization.

Today she serves as Executive Director of the Foundation for Iranian Studies, and is Founder and President of the Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development, and Peace. Please join me in applauding Mahnaz Afkhami.

Our second honoree completed her undergraduate degree at C. W. Post University in New York and her graduate education in Switzerland. After graduation, she accepted a position with Schenker, the European logistics conglomerate with more than 1,100 locations worldwide. She traveled extensively throughout Europe managing special events and developing logistics solutions for Fortune 500 companies.

After 8 years, she was promoted to lead operations for the Olympic Games logistics projects. She has lived in Salt Lake City and Athens for the past 4 years. Returning to New York, she has accepted a position with Christie's Auction House. This has afforded her the opportunity to deepen her community involvement, including work with such organizations as the Council for Logistics Management and the New York Olympic Bid

Committee. Please join me in applauding Roxanna Zarnegar.

As much as we are indebted to our heritage and homeland of Iran, we are also members of the American community in which we have chosen to make our homes. Therefore, we must look towards those devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as our brothers and sisters, and offer them our help. There is a box for donations to help in this relief effort, please give generously and show our fellow Americans that we stand with them....

Persian Heritage 2005 Gala:



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Introductory Remarks by Dr. Masood Khatamee

as Minister of State for Women's Affairs. She served as a member of Iran's High Council of Family Planning and Welfare, on which I also served; and on the board of trustees of both Kerman University and Farah University for Women.

In exile in the United States, she has been a leading advocate of women's rights for more than three decades, having founded and headed several international non-governmental organizations focused on advancing the status of women.

She is frequently interviewed as an

A REPORT ON A NEW WAVE OF PERSIAN GULF NAME ABUSE

Pejman Akbarzadeh*

In the immediate aftermath of National Geographic's inclusion of an improper label for the Persian Gulf in their latest 2005 World Atlas edition last year, we reacted by setting up a few exhibits of historical maps, renaming a street in south Tehran and calling a freeway hundreds of miles to the north the Persian Gulf Highway, rest assured that the world will now call this waterway by its proper name.

Perhaps we should all be thankful to National Geographic for including a bogus name for the Persian Gulf as it served as a catalyst to unite us against those who wish to change, undermine or ignore historical facts. Unfortunately, all the immediate uproar, renaming of roads, and setting up a few local exhibits, has mainly served a domestic audience and not translated into any meaningful action to combat the sources of such abuse which are outside Persian borders.

For the first time in Persia (Iran), I wrote about the National Geographic's new World Atlas and the larger European-Arab conspiracy to change the name of Persian Gulf by having a bogus name included in world's most influential publications, in an article that appeared in the Persian-language daily *Shargh* last year around this time. Within a short few days, hundreds of letters and articles from journalists, cultural/political activists, and ordinary people began appearing in Tehran's main dailies with different political affiliations pressuring the Iran's government to do something. That reaction finally came in form of denying entry to National Geographic staff until they corrected their mistake in the 2005 World Atlas edition. Government's action in this case was a direct result of a massive protest by ordinary Persians (Iranians) coming to realization that they longer can take their history for granted. What follows here is a report on the latest events worldwide in relation to this conspiracy that continues to endure.

Ancient Persia section of the Louvre Museum in Paris has hosted many Persian enthusiasts from all parts of the world. Yet despite all its educational and non-political façade, one is hard pressed to find the correct name of Persian Gulf in French (*Golfe Persique*) on any of its maps. Amir Naghshineh-pour, a member of Persian Gulf Online Organization from San Diego, recently visited the Persian section of Louvre Museum and writes: "A few months ago with help from Ashkan Gorji, a Persian student studying in France, we drafted and forwarded a letter in both English and French to Louvre museum which was dismissed outright by the director of Persian history section.

So I was surprised to see that a few of the maps were now displaying the *Golfe Persique* label on a more recent trip to the museum. I also noted that on the maps, which, during my previous visit, had the strange dual name *Golfe Arab-Persique*, an obvious attempt had been made to erase the word "Arab" from the label. My first thought was that this may be the work of some Persian visitors, but after observing the same exact work on

several other maps and considering the heavy security presence inside the museum, it was obvious that although the letter had not produced the desirable official response, it had gained enough attention to produce some positive results despite their continued use of the obscure word *Golfe* (Gulf) on some of the maps; as if there were no other gulfs on this planet!"

Almost all of the media outlets in the United States have used the proper historical name of Persian Gulf in all their stories in the past. But this may be about to change as well. In August 2005, a small group of Persians in the U.S. and Persia strongly objected to the use of the fake name "Arabian Gulf" by the Cable News network (CNN). It turned out that the story had originated from the Navy, which has adopted this new policy for all stories and reports originating from the host Arab countries on the southern shores of the Persian Gulf.

Public relation officials in the U.S. military have responded to objections by Persians (Iranians) with such absurd explanations as "This waterway is also known as the Arabian Gulf in this region" or "Although Persian Gulf is the historical name used by the mainstream U.S. media, the military's policy is to refer to this waterway as the Arabian Gulf." Bryan Behrang Lahiji, a Persian-American student in Southern California, who has been openly at odds with this new policy states: "I contacted public relations of the Fifth Naval Reserve Fleet of the U.S. Navy via email.

I also wrote a letter to the U.S. Joint Military Command Headquarters which was responded to by a low ranking officer stating that instructions to use the wrong name for the Persian Gulf originates from the higher up. I then began a letter campaign to officials at U.S. embassy in Bahrain and several Senators in California. I soon came to the realization that without a large Persian-American presence in my part of the state, I'm hard pressed to get any help from the politicians. Other compatriots across the U.S., with the exception of a few who have followed this matter closely, do not treat this with the urgency it deserves or outright don't care. It is very unfortunate."

But on October 15, 2005 there was an interesting development — On that day there was a press release issued by one of U.S. Naval carriers in the Persian Gulf, which within hours appeared on many of the American web news outlets. Without much hope for a positive response, I sent an email to the Army News website requesting that they correct the blatant geographical mistake in their press release. Within minutes I received this response from a Kent Miller in Virginia who identified himself as the chief editor of the military online news: "That story appeared in our Unit News section, which consists of military press releases about things service members are doing. As such, it receives minimal editing. Our reporters use Persian Gulf. Interestingly, our Defense News reporters — we also own that paper — only use Arabian Gulf, because — they say — some find the name Persian Gulf to be offensive and an Americanism. I can certainly change it on the story you mention, and will pass along your info to Defense News."

A short time later, I revisited those same websites where the press release had been posted and noted that all had dropped the fake reference and used the proper name for the Persian Gulf. This proves that no matter how desperate and small an effort may seem, if presented in logical and courteous manner can indeed attain positive results.

Cina Dabestani, another active defender of Persian Gulf name, also received an interesting reply to his letter of protest from Ruden D. Calderon on another U.S. Naval carrier: "On behalf of my colleagues and myself, I apologize for the error that we have made. We have changed the error to read 'Persian Gulf.' Please understand that in no way did we mean to insult the Iranian heritage. I guarantee that this error will not happen again by myself or my colleagues."

Dr. Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, Professor of Geopolitics at the Tarbiat Modarres University of Tehran and Chairman of Urosecvic Research Foundation in London, also believes that we should concentrate our efforts on drawing the attention of US Navy to the importance of correcting the present trend in naming the Persian Gulf. He states:

"It is sad to see that a respectable establishment like US Navy would overlook proper protocols, strictly adhered to by both US government and non-governmental institutions hitherto for short term political considerations; that is alteration of historical names of geographical places for the sake of appeasing a rich sheik or two in that region. Unlike the British who, in this respect, quickly resorted to appeasement for commercial consideration, American institutes, both public and private, displayed respect for what is scientific principle and adherence to moral codes of social and scientific behavior. They, despite their country's friendly relation with Arab states in the past or at present, continuously proved that they would not give into the game of name change by others for political or racial hatred of each other. What US Navy is doing now in respect of using false name for the Persian Gulf is regretful and there appears to be two main reasons behind it; first, after the fall of Saddam, some of the Arab Sheikhs of the region found it necessary to continue his duty of anti-Persian campaign in the region to deepen hatred of Iran as a nation and a country, including changing the name of the Persian Gulf; second, the deteriorating US-Iran relations have allowed these Arabs to find a more receptive audience in some of the American military circles stationed on the Arab soils of these Sheikhdoms. Nonetheless, Persian Gulf continues to be the only official name recognized by the US government, and all US academic and cultural and scientific establishments. At present it is only some units of US Navy have adopted use of a false name for the Persian Gulf, probably as a result of pressure from local Arab political sources of southern Persian Gulf, and it is not clear who is giving and who is taking orders in that part of the world."

Finally it is worth noting that recently Grolier, Inc., publisher of academic books and a subsidiary of Scholastic Corporation, removed all passages on the Persian Empire and the citations of the Persian Empire on the chronological timeline in their latest publication titled "The New Book of Knowledge" without any given reasons. This action has faced strong objection from the Persian-American community especially academics, artists, professors, scholars, historians, and students. As of this writing, an online petition objecting this move has collected well over 1500 signatures. I ask all compatriots with Internet access to register their discontent by signing this petition.

* Representative of Persian Gulf Organization in Tehran.
English Translation by Daniel Pourkesali.

IRAN UNCOVERS MORE OF ITS WINEMAKING PAST

Archaeologists digging in southern Iran have found a pool and pots they believe were used about 1,800 years ago for large scale wine production, reinforcing the now-Islamic nation's status as the cradle of wine drinkers. "We have found an almost intact pool with a canal in the middle of it. This is where the juices from crushed grapes would flow and be collected later in pots for fermentation and turning into wine," said Ali Asadi, the head of the excavation team.

The team, which includes a group of Polish archaeologists, is digging at a site called Tange Bolaghi, near the southern city of Shiraz — a name also associated with fine wine.

Mr. Asadi said the team has also unearthed grape seeds, huge clay pots and remains of other similar pools in the area. "The size of the pots and abundance of grapes in the area suggests wine could have been produced for commercial purposes at the facility," he said.

Iran is already believed to be the country where wine was first made. A jar containing the remains of 7,000-year-old wine was found about 30 years ago in the kitchen area of a mud-brick building in Hajji Firuz Tepe, a Neolithic village in Iran's Zagros Mountains.

The country may have a winemaking heritage that is second to none but alcohol manufacture and consumption has been banned in the country since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

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Persia's Poetic Past

Amir Nasser

The sands of time have always known
That civilization which has grown
In that plateau we call Iran
Land of the lion, and the sun

Kouros brought unmatched glory
Dariush's Persepolis told the lasting story
Strength came from tolerance and freedom
Justice and nobility flourished in this kingdom

Wise words of Kouros, baked on a cylinder of clay
Respected foreign cultures, and the right to freely pray
Women were respected, and slavery abolished
Kouros was Great, for the human rights he polished

The greatest empire ever seen
Their lasting legacy was unforeseen
Masters of the world
The Persians' achievements must be told

And what of Marathon, Thermopylae, and Salamis?
Did the Greeks truly receive such bliss?
Herodotus embellished, told lies for the West
For the Persians, these were skirmishes at best

But every golden era must someday end
So too Achaemenes's dynasty would bend
Alexander's army won, but could not see
Win or lose, Persians' hearts always stay free

Revenge, envy, and wine made Alexander yearn
The pride of Persia, Persepolis, to burn
The labor of years, by a thousand artisans employed
Took one lunatic one night, for this jewel to be destroyed

Greatness comes, from a worthy contribution
To humanity, to art, to law, or a scientific institution
Those who burn and loot deserve our hate
So answer this, was Alexander truly Great?

Parthians picked up the torch of our land
Put Iranian rule back in Iranian hand
They showed Greece and Rome, to name just two
That Iran possesses great horses, and great men too

Like a Phoenix, from the ashes rising
The Sassanians arrived, with Iran reorganizing
Power, wealth, and wisdom again flourished
The rule of Ardeshir, Shapur, and Khosro let Iran be nourished

Life was based on three simple needs
Good Thoughts, Good Words, and Good Deeds
Monotheist religion, for all its evil and its good
Came from Iran, from where Zarathustra stood

Rome, for all its power and its legions
Couldn't touch Iran's vast regions
Many times Rome tried but failed
Every time cataphract armor thundered and hailed

But Sassanian wealth and beauty caught the eye
Of a desert tribe, whose religion was a lie
Like desert snakes, they ruthlessly attacked
Until beautiful Ctesiphon was sacked

Rostam-e-Farokhzad, the brave and capable general

Fought till the end, though his wounds were several
At Qaddisiya, he came to Iran's defense
Alas, the Taazi army was too dense

With coercion and the sword
Islam was able to spread its word
A dark and sinister force was born
That to this day brings Iran much scorn

Some to India had to flee
Iran's destruction was unbearable to see
Parsees, they are called to this day
Ahura Mazda, with them will always stay

But Iranian roots are strong and hard to kill
Iran was freed again, with such a thrill
The Saffavids would answer the nation's call
To make Arab tyranny shamefully fall

Don't mourn the Ashura, weep a Taazi's death
Hassan and Hossein were foreigners, who weakened Iran's breath
If mourn you must, then mourn, a national event
Like Gauguamela, or Qaddisiya, places of great lament

While Europe was stagnant in its Dark Ages
Persian scholars thrived, free from mental cages
From algebra, to astronomy, and architecture
Persians wrote the book, and gave the lecture

A time of great Persian thinkers had emerged
Where poetry and science, love and knowledge, easily verged
Saadi, Hafez, Rumi, Omar Khayam to name a few
Thanks to them, humanity exponentially grew

Who could forget Ferdowsi, the greatest poet ever?
He gave us Sam, Zal, and Rostam, heroes both brave and clever
The Persian language, so eloquently resurrected
As The Shahnameh was written with all Arabic words neglected

Many other invaders would come again, much the same
From Genghis Khan to Teimur the Lame
They would loot, burn, and murder
The cities too proud to surrender

Though Turks and Mongols had military strength
They were lacking in cultural length
The Persian culture was too rich, to be absorbed into theirs
Instead they settled in Iran, and joined her proud heirs

It's clear from this short and simple recap
That Iran had its share of glory, as well as mishap
Our generation is unfortunate, assigned the station
Of another dark chapter, in the book of our nation

Once again Zahak is in power
His snakes consume and poison every flower
He uses religion and superstition
To enforce his selfish and malicious mission

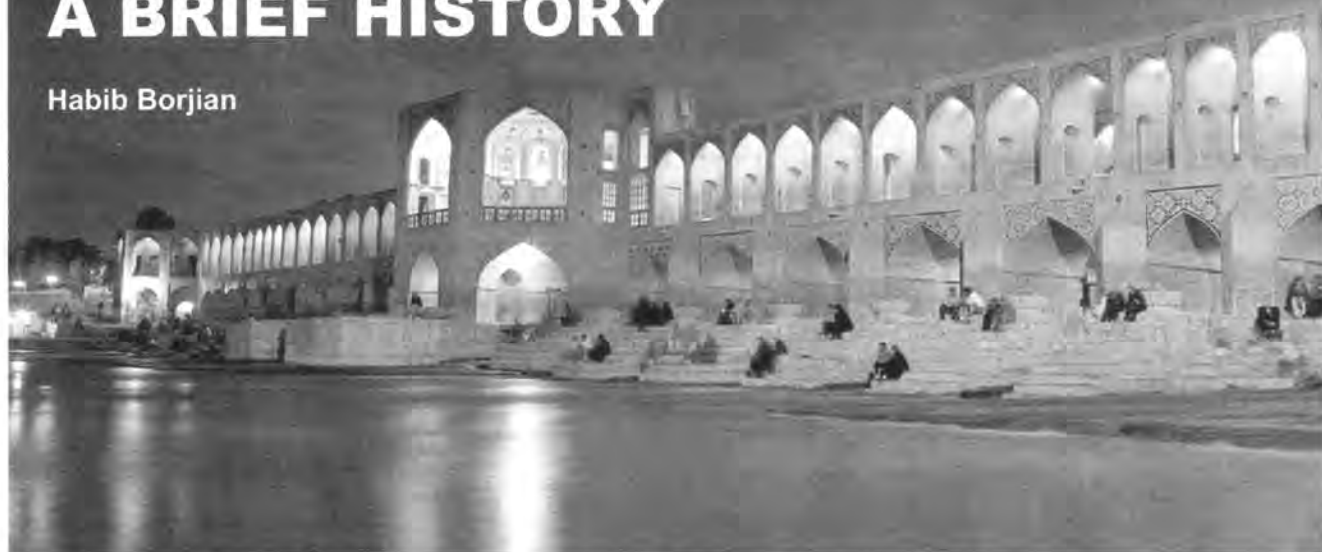
So once more dust off the Kaviyani banner
And fly it high, in a proud and fitting manner
Zahak and his snakes will die once more
And our nation we shall yet restore

Iran in its infancy reached the sky
Will faravahar's wings expand, will Iran soar that high?
Just lift the veil, you'll surely see
Iran's brightest days lie ahead, when the Aryans are again free

Forwarded by Mr. Kambiz Yeganegi

ISFAHAN: A BRIEF HISTORY

Habib Borjian



Due to its central position in the Iranian Plateau, its mild climate, and its immensely fertile plain irrigated by the river Zāyandarud, Isfahan has been an important urban center throughout most of Persian history. The city served as the capital of several provincial and imperial dynasties, above all under the Saljuqs in the second half of the eleventh century and then under the Safavids from 1597-1722. It was in the latter period that Isfahan grew to a celebrated world-class metropolis unmatched in the entire history of the country – “one of the greatest cities of the world,” to the European traveler, and Nesf-e Jahān “Half the World” to the Persian poet. The imperial monuments of Isfahan today constitute one of the most significant and complete architectural complexes preserved at the heart of a modern city that owes them much of its prestige.

Isfahan lies at an elevation of 5,150 feet, about 260 miles south of the capital city of Tehran. Among the population centers of the Iranian plateau, Isfahan is unique in being located in a riverine plain. An extensive irrigation system along the banks of the river Zāyandarud, which crosses the city, has been functioning since time immemorial. The city has been an important trading center on a major highway running north-south between the massive Zagros mountain range to the west and the central desert on the east. Consequently, the province of Isfahan has a varied landscape of plains and hills with equally diverse climate. In the plain of Isfahan, however, the seasons are extremely regular: hot summers and cold winters with long clement seasons in between. The humidity is low and the annual rainfall seldom surpasses seven inches. No major earthquake has been reported in the last millennium – the reason so many architectural monuments in the city and its environs are still standing. Isfahan ranks, together with Tabriz, as the third largest city in the nation, after Tehran and Mashhad.

Every Persian town has a mythical history and Isfahan is no exception. Zoroastrian legends attribute the foundation of the citadel to King Kay Kāvus. According to an ancient tradition

the city was founded before the period of the legendary Indo-Iranian hero Yama/Jamshid, it suffered much destruction from the Turanian king Afrāsīāb, was restored by Queen Homāy, the daughter of King Bahman, son of Esfandiār, and left untouched by Alexander the Great. The latter, according to yet another line of tradition transmitted by al-Tabari and other early Muslim historians, was the founder of Isfahan.

Isfahan is nearly as old as Persia herself. The oldest appearance of the name is *Aspadana*, a Greek rendering of Old Persian **Spādāna*- “of or related to the army,” that later developed as *Spāhān* in Middle Persian, *Sepāhān* and *Esfahān* in New Persian, and *Isbahān* in Arabic. The town and province were sometimes called in medieval sources by its alternate name *Gay* (Arabic *Jayy*), the *Gabae* of Greek writers. Strabo states that the Achaemenian kings had palaces, not only in Susa and Persepolis, but also in *Gabae*, which formed, according to Ptolemy’s map of Persia, the southernmost district of the super-province of Media. There are sporadic references to *Gabae/Isfahan* in the Seleucid and Arsacid (Parthian) era, but more detailed data is available from the Sasanian period (224-651 AD), when Isfahan is described as a large province with three to five thousands villages and three to seven towns – a condition that lasted throughout most of the later periods.

During the Sasanian rule the city of Isfahan comprised two adjoining towns: *Gay* or *Shahrestān*, a circular fortified town with 104 watch towers and four gates, on the eastern border of the present city, and *Johudestān* or *Yahudiyya*, a Jewish settlement on the site later occupied by central Isfahan. The establishment of the Jewish colony is generally attributed to the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, but a Middle Persian source attributes the founding of the colony to Yazdegerd I (reigned 339-420), who did so at the request of his Jewish wife Shōshandokht. In any case, the Jewish population of the city remained sizeable throughout the city’s history, of which remain twenty synagogues in the old quarter of *Jubāra* alone. The Jewish community is the only one that has preserved the original Median dialect of the city, otherwise lost to

Persian, the *lingua franca* of the Iranian world and beyond.

Owing to its central position, Isfahan has experienced most of the vicissitudes undergone by Persia since the Arab conquest of the mid-seventh century. For nearly a millennium the city was incorporated into successive empires ruled by the Arabs, Persians themselves, Turks and Mongols, before the Safavids revived the essence of Sasanian Persia. For most of this period the city held a principal position in the administrative, economic, and cultural affairs of the country. Under the Arab caliphs Isfahan served as the capital of the *Jebāl* ("Mountains") super-province, an area that covered much of ancient Media. As the temporal authority of the Abbasids waned in the tenth century, Isfahan passed under the control of the Persian Buyid dynasty, when it flourished as an extensive urban center, with splendid mansions, gardens, bathhouses, hospitals, and markets; its wealth and trade, especially its export of silk and textiles, surpassed all other cities in the *Jebāl*, save for Rey (modern Tehran). Based on a report of the daily consumption of meat in the town (2,000 sheep and goats and 100 heads of cattle), its population at this time can be estimated to have been well over 100,000. The renowned Persian traveler and poet Nāser Khosrow, who came to Isfahan in 1052, concluded his vivid account of the town by stating that Isfahan was the most populous and flourishing city that he had visited in Persian-speaking lands.

The influx of Turkic nomads from Central Asia into Persia brought to power the Saljuq dynasty, whose founder, Tughril, made Isfahan the capital of his domains in the mid-eleventh century. Under his celebrated grandson Malekshāh (r. 1072-1092), the city grew in size and splendor as the capital of an empire that extended from Transoxiana to the Mediterranean Sea. In those days Isfahan had a central quadrangular *maidan* surrounded by palaces and markets, and municipal, educational and religious establishments. At the northern corner of the *maidan* stood the Friday Mosque, also known as the Great Mosque, which continues to be an architectural glory of the city. In this extensive complex the two magnificent dome chambers built by Nezām-al-Molk and Tāj-al-Molk, the competing viziers (chief ministers) of Malekshāh, have survived in the midst of later constructions and modifications no less worthy of artistic value.

Not long after Malekshāh the Saljuqs moved their capital to Khorasan, and Isfahan began a period of decline that continued throughout the Mongol and Timurid periods. Tamerlane captured the city in 1387 and massacred a large number of its citizens. The city's decline was also due partly to sectarian strife that appear to have been a common feature of Isfahani life in mediaeval times. Malekshāh, Nezām-al-Molk, and a number of political and religious leaders of the city were murdered by Isma'ili assassins who had grown so strong in Isfahan that they possessed two strategic suburban fortresses and collected taxes from the neighboring villages, from which 30,000 men were recruited into their uprising.

In those days the townspeople of Isfahan were predominantly Sunni, but divided into two rival sects: the Shafi'is who lived in the quarter of Dardasht and led by the influential Khojandi family, and the Hanafis who resided in Jubāra, municipally administered by the house of Sā'edis. It was only the treachery of the former that, in 1240, delivered the city into the hands of the besieging Mongols. Nearly a century later, when the renowned Arab traveler Ibn Battuta visited Isfahan (1327), the city was still split by divisions: he wrote in his *Rahla*: "Isfahan is one of the largest and fairest of cities, but is now in ruins for the greater part, as the result of the feud there between the Sunnis and Shiites". After the adoption of Shiism under the Safavids, the city's internal divisions remained

along similar lines, but defined in different terms: factional strife arose between Heydaris and Ne'matis, who dwelled, exclusively, in the aforementioned quarters of Dardasht and Jubāra.

Isfahan's golden age began in 1597 when the Safavid Shah Abbās the Great (ruled during 1588-1629) chose it as his capital and planned and rebuilt it into one of the greatest cities of the time. While the old quarters remained intact, a new quarter was added in the southern part of the city, at the center of which laid the Royal Square, also known as the Square of Naqsh-e Jahān (Image of the Universe), an immense courtyard that measures 557 by 180 yards and framed by a wall of blind arcades. Four structures stand on this well-preserved *maidan*: to the south is the majestic Royal Mosque¹ clad all over by colorful tiles; to the east is the mosque of Sheikh Lotf-Allah, used by the king for his private devotions; to the north is Qeysariya, the monumental gateway of the royal bazaar that leads to the old (Saljuq) *maidan*; and finally to the west of the Royal Square stands the palace Āli Qāpu (Lofty Gate), a six-story building in the form of an archway that is crowned in the forepart by a large covered balcony that served as an audience hall and as a vantage point from which the king and his guests could watch games of polo below in the *maidan*. UNESCO has designated the Royal Square complex as a World Heritage site.

It takes well over one day for a tourist to visit the Safavid monuments of Isfahan. Not far from the Royal Square are the palaces of Chehel Sotun (Forty Columns) and Hasht Behesht (Eight Heavens), and the architectural complex of Mādar-e Shah (Royal Mother) built by the last of the Safavid kings Shah Sultan Hoseyn for his mother. It consists of a *madrassa*, with a splendid arabesque dome, adjoined by two endowments: a lineal bazaar which is still functioning as a two-story shopping mall, and a caravanserai which is remodeled into the modern Abbasi Inn. All these structures are within the "royal city" that stretches from the Royal Square to the Chār Bāgh (Four Gardens) avenue, another Safavid construction that traverses the entire length of the modern city. The Chār Bāgh runs southward to the Zāyandarud, which it crosses by means of the "33-span bridge" built by Allāhverdi Khan, the Armenian Marshal of Shah Abbās. Further downstream there is yet another fine bridge, Pol-e Khwāju. Arthur Pope, the renowned American expert on Persian architecture, called the Khwāju bridge "the culminating monument of Persian bridge architecture and one of the most interesting bridges extant ... (due to its) rhythm and dignity"; Pope is buried in a park named after him at the foot of the bridge. To the south of the river lies the Armenian quarter of Julfa with more than a dozen churches dating from the Safavid rule.

Jean Chardin, who lived for ten years in the Safavid capital, offered, in his *Voyages*, a detailed and vivid description of "the greatest and most beautiful town of the whole orient," in which there were to be found followers of all religions and merchants from the whole world. Indians involved in the banking business alone numbered no fewer than 10,000. The commercial character of the Safavid metropolis can be seen in other statistics offered by Chardin: there were 273 bathhouses, 48 *madrasas*, 162 mosques, and 1,802 caravanserais within the city walls and 500 more caravanserais without. Accordingly, for every mosque there were more than eleven inns, a ratio that has become almost reversed today: 73 inns of all ranks vs. more than 1,500 mosques in the district of Isfahan (2003 data). Moreover, according to Chardin, there were twelve to fourteen thousand prostitutes publicly registered with as many more who worked on their own — and this was in a city that was the capital of Shiism, attracting religious scholars and leaders from all Muslim

lands. The population of this enormous city, estimated by Chardin to match that of London (i.e. circa 650,000), grew to well over one million, according to other reports, by the end of Safavid rule.

In 1722, after a six-month siege, the city fell to the Ghelzai Afghans who sacked it and destroyed its infrastructure. For many decades afterward most of the city was a heap of rubble, and its population dwindled to a fraction of what it had once been. During the subsequent reign of Afsharid, Zandid, and Qajar tribes, Isfahan was eclipsed by the capital cities of Mashhad, Shiraz, and finally Tehran. Successive massacres and famines contributed to its decline, but there was also the general economic decadence experienced by the region during the period of European imperial expansion. The south and west Asian civilization represented by the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal empires saw a continuous decline in favor of the emerging powers of Western Europe, symbolized by the Portuguese, Dutch, and British battleships and commercial vessels crisscrossing the world's oceans. Land trade routes, the backbone of Persian economy, became less significant to global trade as goods were shipped more often by sea. Isfahan was left behind as a living museum of Persian civilization.

Isfahan had a leading role in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 that opened a new chapter in the history of Persia. Recovery began during the reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi (1925-1941) who curbed the power exerted by religious authorities and the surrounding nomads on the city. An industrial suburb was built and the textile industry thrived once more, so successfully that Isfahan became known as the Manchester of Persia. In the following decades, Isfahan emerged as a major industrial center of the country with large steel mills, cement factories, defense industry plants, and an oil refinery. The extensive restoration of the city's historical monuments led to the emergence of a new generation of tile makers, miniature painters, and calligraphers, among other artists. As the city grew into a center of tourist

attraction, handicrafts such as metal work, inlaying, enameling, calico, illuminating, brocading as well as rug weaving, flourished. The progress has continued during the years following the Islamic Revolution of 1979; however, the new demographic realities have been detrimental to urban planning as construction codes have systematically been violated in favor of a demanding population that has grown nearly threefold. Nor the new cultural tone encourages international tourism.

A Selected list of the literature on Isfahan in English:

- Cambridge History of Iran*, 7 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968-1991 (esp. vols. 1 and 6).
Encyclopaedia Iranica. Edited by Ehsan Yarshater. Columbia University, New York, 1983-present (many articles on individual monuments, but especially the series of articles s.v. "Isfahan").
Iranian Studies (special annual issue on Isfahan). 2 vols., 1974.
 Wilfred Blunt and W. M. Swaan. *Isfahan: Pearl of Persia*, London, 1966.
 Arthur U. Pope (ed.). *A Survey of Persian Art*, 6 vols. London: Oxford University Press, 1938.
 Ronald W. Ferrier (tr. and ed.). *A Journey to Persia: Jean Chardin's Portrait of a Seventeenth-century Empire*. London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 1996.
 S. P. Blake. *Half the World: The Social Architecture of Safavid Isfahan, 1590-1722*. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda, 1999.
 Anthony Welch. *Shah Abbas and the Arts of Isfahan*. New York: Asia Society, 1973.
 Oleg Grabar. *The Great Mosque of Isfahan*. New York and London: NYU Press, 1990.
Abbasi Hotel: Museum within a Museum (illustrated volume photographed by R. N. Bakhtiar, with introduction in English and Persian by Houri Borjjan and Habib Borjjan). Tehran: Iran Insurance Company, 1997.

Footnotes:

- ¹ Renamed the Imam Mosque after the 1979 Islamic revolution, as was the maidan itself and many other historical monuments.

NO STRANGER TO THE MIDDLE EAST

Bruce Feiler is not a stranger to the Middle East. He has frequently visited the region researching the roots of Western religion and has authored two books on the subject, "Walking the Bible" and "Abraham."

A popular news magazine sent him to Iraq last year looking for insight to the hatred that exists between faiths. His most recent visit to the region took him to Iran.

In an article in *Parade Magazine* September 11, 2005 he describes his arrival as "reaching the dead end of freedom." He was only fifteen years old when Iran experiences the religious revolution so I do not know how much of the actual event he recalls in comparison to what was learned from research, but I am also not sure this matters.

What is of great importance is what he and his wife discovered on their visit. Feiler states that the Bible describes Iran (Persia) quite differently from most modern articles. It was valiant and tolerant as shown in the conquer of Babylonia in 539 BCE when the Israelites were freed from their exile and allowed to return to Jerusalem, which saved monotheism.

He describes Teheran as a city built in a natural amphitheater with an explosion in population from 210,000 in 1925 to ten million today. He sees the area as not being able to handle this number of people in a short period of time and the prime example of this is the horrid smog hanging over the city and buildings.

Interesting enough he and his wife discovered that despite the murals of "Islamic" advertisement and the portraits of Khomeini and other martyrs, that the intensity of the revolution has faded and the strict rule of Islam once imposed has softened. Women are now wearing makeup, there are Internet cafes and hand holding on the rise.

The openness he saw in Teheran "melted" as they journeyed from the city. Qum still holds strict Islamic tradition. Despite the heavy religious influence in Qum avenues of dialogue are beginning to open with the locals and the religious leaders. There is expectation that they will meet a happy medium. Feiler reports that it appears that modernist and extremists are on equal heading.

What is moving about Feiler's perception of his visit was the beauty he saw and described. Shiraz, Pasargadae he sees as the greenest place in the middle east. From his visits to the museums he learned the Persian influence of tolerance and the similarity of Persians and Americans who both have learned to draw strength from their diversity.

After a brief education on Cyrus and Darius, Mr. Feiler and his wife concluded "...now that I am here, I have this feeling of wanting to go deeper into the past. Cyrus and his idea of the mingling of cultures are so inspiring. For the first time I feel a sense of hope."

Interview with M. K. SADIGH Iranian Artist, Art Critic and Researcher



Shahrokh Ahkami

This interview is a great opportunity for the readers of our magazine who know M. K. Sadigh through his extensive research inquiries, articles drawings and paintings. This is an introduction to his social and artistic life and achievements as an Iranian artist residing abroad for a long time, who never returned to his homeland. This interview manifests the perseverance of our artists who break the social barriers, and gain the dignity that our people and our culture deserve to be known for it.

Before we start this interview, I am grateful and thank you for your support and enthusiasm in promoting, introducing, and advocating the Persian arts and culture and I appreciate your efforts and concern. Indeed this deep concern comes from the sincerity, love and respects that you and your family have shown for Persian culture in the past and never subsided. This manifests the fact that your feelings are genuine and real. Our readers and whoever loves and is concerned about our national and cultural dignity will cherish your fidelity and commitment.

I would appreciate if you briefly talk about your social and artistic life.

I was born in Khorramabad a city in the province of Lurestan. As long as I remember, I had a great interest in the cultural activities, arts, and especially drawing and painting. My grand father from my mother's side was a man of cultural interests in literature, and arts. He was my mentor, motivator and sup-

porter. He gave me all the encouragement I needed to pursue my desire of being a professional artist.

My father's position as an administrator in the ministry of justice always took our family to a different province and region of Iran and we lived among different ethnicity with different cultural and social structures. This mandatory fluctuation and changes in our life in spite of its inconveniences, it was a great and strong motivation toward raising our family's social consciousness, particularly for me to get acquainted with different cultures and gain a deep knowledge of their cultural characteristics, which later on reflected in my drawings. In fact these differences from any aspects are the constituents of the totality of Iranian nationality.

After years of migration and constant changes, finally we settled down in the capital, Tehran. I went to Kamal-al-Molk's art school where I studied drawing and painting under two masters, whom both were the deciples of Kamal-al-Molk. Beside this opportunity I was exposed to new ideas of those European-trained and

younger generation of Iranian artist-teachers, teaching and working in educational institutions. These artists created the motivational factors for cultural advancement, and introduced the progression of the European enlightenment of the twentieth century, including a complete different mannerism in arts. Their effort revolutionized the whole conception of aesthetics and artistic activities far different than the old Iranian mannerism in that era.

I was involved in a dynamic world of change, and after four years my father took us to Isfahan where he was given another major assignment. In Isfahan, I enrolled in polytechnic school of Isfahan, which originally was established by Germans. There another master and the student of Kamal-al-Molk was the dean of the art department. I studied for four years as a high school student which art was the major part of our curriculums and training.

We returned to Tehran and I got a degree from Hadaf College, as a requirement to enroll in the matriculation of the Tehran University and the faculty of fine arts. I studied, worked and participated in art shows, and exposed to a complete learning process, which took me to an atmosphere of social and intellectual changes, influenced by the modern Iranian intelligentsia.

In the process of attendance in the university programs I also worked as an illustrator for advertising, publishing agencies, and participated in different group shows and exhibited my works in solo exhibitions. It was at the last year of my university study that I was employed by the American mission in Iran called "Point 4" as an illustrator and worked in that position until 1963 when I decided to go to Europe or United States to continue my education and expand my technical knowledge.

They compare your works with Francesco Goya's works, which show us two sides: the dark side, and the light side of our lives.

Selecting to only express the pleasant and beautiful side of life was and still is the intention of that segment of humanity who wants to see nothing but pleasure and therefore, ignores the reality and the totality of life. The history of art introduces documents, from the early Christian arts which they portrayed the suffering of their martyrs, Francesco Goya reflected

the dark side of his time, in his after-wars etchings and drawings, Kathe Kollwitz expressed the destitution of German people, Dadaism and Surrealism rebelled against the bourgeoisie's paradigms, and even Picasso clearly and profoundly expressed the dark side of human life in his *Guernica*. All these artists tried to present the aesthetics in its unfettered reality and in a holistic definition. I am the disciple of these leaders of truth and I do my share to express the reality of my own people's lives.

What was the reason and the circumstances that caused you to leave Iran?

The dynamic decade of restlessness and intellectual activities of the sixties, affected the whole world and particularly, in Europe and United States the elements of changes in every aspects of our lives actively were creating new and different cultural configurations. It was impossible for those who were moved by or were participated in this dynamic to stay away from it.

This strong motivation took me to Germany and from there to United State. For two years I learned about the new aesthetics and art movements, from all available sources, starting from art student league to the museum of modern arts of New York, I worked hard, participated in any shows which were some how different from ones I knew and participated before, and prepared myself for new and different intellectual activities. For my earning, I worked as a textile designer, which never took it seriously as an artistic profession and commitment.

I returned to Iran and arranged a solo exhibition of my new works, which were strongly influenced by the works of the modern artists, ranging from Victor Vasarely, Geoseph Albers, and others. My black and white paintings, which were

influenced from our Iranian calligraphy, did not reflect the content, as the works of many other Iranian artists that used calligraphy in their works before me. In my black and white paintings, I used the interaction of negatives and positives with out any consideration of the content as my main objective. Later on, in my refined optical paintings, originally influenced by the works of Vassarely, Bridged Riely, eventually became my own style.

The Persian media, specially *Kayhan* and *Ettelaat*, reflected the significance

Company of Montreal. It was February Forth 1966, when we arrived in Montreal. After several days I started working in my job, followed by arrangement of my studio to produce the large black and white optical-calligraphic paintings for solo and group shows. As ongoing serious task continued for the whole first year and I produced a good numbers of works for presentation.

After a hard networking, I finally found a gallery called Gallery Libre owned and directed by a French lady who was a knowledgeable art critic and she visited my optical-calligraphic works and accepted me as one of her artists to present me and introduce my works.

The result of my hard work was great and in 1967 the Canadian Centennial project launched an art competition for an art exhibition, which, out of five thousand Canadian artists, they chose only ninety artists, and I was one of them. They bought two large black and white works to be shown at the art gallery of Ontario in the general exhibition at the opening of the ceremony. Later on, the whole collection exhibited all across Canada and was eventually donated to different museum as the centennial gift to be kept in their collections.

My two large black and white paintings became my passport and my identity to enter and participate in most of Canadian and international artistic activities, which Gallery Libre introduced me to, such as Barcelona Bienal Exhibition.

All the artistic achievement brought me recognition and some financial support,

but by far not a total security to allow me to devote my time to my art. Therefore, the obligation to work as a textile artist, always considered as a great challenge. Finally after ten years, I resigned from Dominion Textile and opened a gallery called "Vanguard II," with the Canadian Government support for arts. Later on I opened an advertising art studio called "Vanguard Studio" which with a group of



of the exhibition and many considered it as motivation for artists that later on called their works "*khatashi*," which is a combined word of "*naghashi*," meaning "painting," and "*khatati*," meaning "calligraphy."

After two years I received the admission documents from Canadian Immigration with a letter of acceptance of employment by Dominion Textile

Canadian artists, we worked and taught drawing, painting and print making, and occasionally did commercial projects.

What kind of obstacles and barriers did you face which prevented you from progression and how did you overcome them?

The political upheaval of the province of Quebec over the separation from Canada forced many businesses and professions out of economical balance and that put halt to contribution of any assistance and support in the domain of the artistic activities. I decided to go to United States for new and better opportunities. After a long effort and perseverance to establish myself in New York the city of tremendous dynamic and opportunities where I was familiar with its potentials, I rented a desk space in a group business studio and started hustling for costumers. My residence was a limited space but sufficient to produce and continue my work.

In order to find artistic connections, I started my weekly visit to the galleries, museums, universities, and participate in the art student league and reunion with the old sources and acquaintances. I enrolled in the post graduate program of Columbia university in art education which prepared me for art criticism and updating my technical ability, at the same time being part of a great and prestigious educational institution itself was a key for acceptance.

The Iranian revolution followed by Iran-Iraq disastrous war was the most determinant factors in my artistic life. In spite of an expressive language that could enable me to reflect the events and suffering of the daily incidents happening all over the world particularly in Iran.

The Iran-Iraq war resulted in a

vast destruction and destitution for my people, whom I lived all my childhood among them. Those who are familiar with the region and its people can clearly see their characteristic, in my drawing series of refugees. My deviation from purely abstract to expressionistic depiction, happened as a responsive urge and from the beginning of the eighties I created thousands of drawings and etchings which they have been widely published as "political art" in Iranian and European publications

an avant-garde, a leader, an innovator, because as a creative practitioner of art he over rules the established norms and replaces them with his intuitive output, as for example Picasso did in his works. At the same time this practitioner of art himself is the product of the totality of the holistic structure of the society he was born and grown in it.

The fact is that deviation from the mediocrity and traditions is not rebellious against nationality or traditions or denunciation of their values, but re-

orientation of them toward perfection, it is an undeniable natural antithesis, which should bypasses the thesis in order to create the enhancement of the future. I am part of a generation of sixties that created the ground to bypass the older generation and bring the drastic changes resulted in the ever changing world of technology, the younger ones should be forward the advanced maturity of their culture to the richness of the future. All the changes, no matter they are pleasant or adverse, will be embedded in a totality that all of us are part of.

Every change no matter how it did occur, was an input in the totality of our culture, which embedded into the whole fabric of our cultural existence. Any artwork or literary contribution could not possibly come to being, if it did not get its replenishment from such rich fertile ground. In repayment or reciprocation, if the products of the artistic activities possess any values to enrich and advance its culture, their works should be embedded

as part of the totality of our existence, which will take us to perfection and dignity. But if they are repeated of the existing mediocre works with no significance, nothing is going to happen, but cultural stagnation. The artist should be conscious and capable to distinguish his position in the history of his own culture.



such as "Die Brücke" in Germany for the last twenty years.

How do you deviate from mediocrity and imposed traditions which generally inhibits creative capacity?

The artist in its real definition is