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## Letters to the Editor

The article by Mana Behbin touched my heart. In this country we tend to believe that people in other parts of the world do not love, laugh, or feel pain as we do in this country. Her article zero's in on our teaching prejudice without uttering a word, simply the power of suggestion. I am referring to the part in which she describes a sixth grade project that hung in the hall of her high school. It was a map which had historic monuments (symbols) representing different cities of the world. Iran, however, was represented by a man holding a rifle. Is this how we want to teach our children? I am not Iranian but I do know that there are many beautiful monuments in Iran that are a truly symbolic of the country. Shame on the teachers of the school, shame on all of us, shame on the children for not questioning this and  
**CONGRATULATIONS TO YOU MS. BEHBIN** for having the courage to bring this to our attention.

Melody Pratt

Recently the father of one of my dear friends passed away. At his memorial service she read a poem that her father had sent to her while in college. She had expected to receive an award and did not. The next day she received a postcard from her dad "My dear one, if I could have thought of the following words I would have said them to you that day. Read them anyway and always follow their meanings. Love, Daddy".

As she read them I was overwhelmed by their power. When I got home that evening I read the words to my children. As Persian Americans we have had to

overcome many hostilities I hope that these words will help all of us become the best we can be despite the obstacles life places before us.  
Deeply touched.

### "Anyway"

**People are unreasonable,  
illogical and self centered.  
Love them anyway.**

**If you do good, people will  
accuse you of  
selfish ulterior motives.  
Do good anyway.**

**If you are successful you win  
false friends and true enemies.  
Succeed anyway.**

**The good you do today will be  
forgotten tomorrow.  
Do good anyway**

**Honesty and frankness  
make you vulnerable.  
Be honest and frank anyway.**

**People favor underdogs  
but follow only top dogs.  
Fight for some  
underdogs anyway.**

**What you spend years building  
may be destroyed overnight.  
Build anyway.**

**People really need help but  
may attack you if  
you help them.  
Help people anyway.**

**Give the world the best you  
have and you'll get kicked in  
the teeth.**

**Give the world the best  
you've got  
Anyway**

Dear editor:

This summer the world once again came together for two brief weeks at the Olympic Games. Our spirits were dampened by the fate of TWA Flight 800 and the pipe bomb at the Centennial Park. Some say that it was the business aspects of the games that caused them to continue with great success. I believe it was more than money. I believe it was the human need of the simple folk around the world and their need to find world peace. Strangers at the opening were now comrades at the end. Flags intertwined as did the spirit and love of the participants.

Competitors of different countries and religions comforted those who lost and congratulated the victors. How could you not be touched by these moments and how could you not be frustrated. For two weeks we were so compassionate and so close. What is the secret formula to maintain these feelings forever.

Can the governments of the world remember this the next time they go into negotiations. The next time they seek to sanction the innocent for the action of a few. Will they remember the Olympic spirit?

Just maybe one day we the simple people who thrive on love and acceptance will commingle together to create a force greater than financial power and military strength. That power exists now and is within the heart of every non egotistical human being. Its elements are love, understanding and most important mutual respect.

I am sure that it is only a matter of time before we know the truth about TWA 800. We have all read the papers and have seen that the media is pushing towards and act of terrorism

somehow connected to Iran. I hope that the world will be able to decipher that whoever the culprit, it is an act by a few. No one nation, whoever that nation, should be condemned.

Minoo Ghafarian

### TERRORISM (IS IN THE EYES OF THE BEHOLDER)

Interestingly enough what one government describes as a terrorist camp another sees as a military or intelligence facility.

Terrorism... do you know what makes it most frightening? It is more deadly than all the viruses of the world and there will never ever be a cure. All the legislation and all the money in the world will never destroy it. The only sure way to destroy it and on that I am not too sure is international respect of one another.

Terrorism is a weapon much like a gun. It was created and now will only improve as time goes on. It thrives on hatred. Unfortunately for the world hatred is running rampant. Instead of finding the root of the

real problem we camouflage it with a superficial military victory and rhetoric. Please do not waste my money by developing super bomb detectors in buildings and airports. It is not going to work. Where a person is desperate, nothing will stop him/her.

To all of you, individuals and governments who have created and improved terrorist tactics (and I do believe not a government in the world is free of its use in some manner) my sarcastic thanks. Perhaps in the right situation this infantile form of strength did get its point across, but it has now gotten into the wrong hands and those hands are not limited to governments. I believe the government: of the world recognize the fact that they have created a monster. They used it without calculating all the potential risk factors. They did not perceive the individual human greed. Do you REMEMBER JURASSIC PARK? A fantasy but, a very important lesson.\*

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## Sandra Mackey The Writer of "The Iranians"

*As Iranians living outside of Iran, we often find ourselves defending Iran, its people and its culture. For that reason it is always interesting to speak to non Persians on these topics. The following is a portion of an interview with Sandra Mackey, author of the book "The Iranians", a non Persian, who has educated herself on the topic of Iran, its culture and its people.*

**Q.** Ms. Mackey, during our brief conversation before this

interview, you mentioned that you graduated college with a teaching degree and that you taught high school history. When did you become interested in international relations?

A. My husband was in his third year of medical school when we were married, and he received a fellowship from Smith, Kline & French to go to Borneo. There he worked with the Iban Tribes people. We were there for four months and it was during that period that I decided to take up International Relations. Since I

had already been a high school history teacher, I believed that this was the next logical step in my educational goal.

**Q.** Up to this point in your career, you did not have any journalistic training?

A. No. It is funny that you should address this because my husband calls me the Grandma Moses of Journalism, I started very late.

**Q.** What sparked your interest to become a writer?

A. Well, my interest in writing did not come first. My interest in the Middle East sparked my desire to write. After my husband completed his internship, he had the opportunity to work in Saudi Arabia as the Chief of Dermatology at the King Faisal Hospital. We were there for the first time from 1978 to 1980. We were forced to return to the United States due to a family illness. Eventually we returned in 1982. I wanted to write a book about this country, the business of oil and its effect on the county. I wanted the book to talk about the Saudi culture and what the infusion of the West meant. During our second trip there, I extensively researched for the book. The book entitled, "The Saudi's", was published in 1987. My second book was published in 1989, "Lebanon, Death of Nation". This book dealt with the Civil War in Lebanon. I wanted to educate the Americans on the fact that this was not a religious war but rather a war between the Lebanese on whether or not their identity lay with the West or with the Arab world. Professor Ramazani liked this book very much.

**Q. If I might interrupt, you mentioned Professor Ramazani, how was it that you came to know him?**

A. When we returned from Borneo, my husband needed to find an internship program. It was difficult because we were looking for a university that would have both the internship program and a graduate program for me on the same campus. The end result was the University of Virginia. At that time there were no women allowed to attend the undergraduate program so there were only about 12 females on the entire campus. Professor Ramazani was a young professor there and had already made a name for himself. His class was in demand, and I was lucky enough to get into the class.

We remained in contact over the years. When I first started writing my books, I sought his advice. In addition to the Iranians, I consulted him on "The Saudis" and "The Passion of Politics".

**Q. Did you feel compelled to visit the country prior to writing the book?**

A. Absolutely. I went to Iran prior to making my final decision to write the book. I needed to see if I could relate to the culture so I could really do the right job on this book. I wanted to write it with the feeling it deserves. I felt that if it was a recitation of facts, it would not be very good. So I began trying to get a visa. I went through the academic community rather than journalistic channels. A number of the people in the academic channels were willing to help me and I finally got one in 1992. I went for four weeks. The way I got it was to attend a conference on Nomads which lasted six

days. It was not the main thing I was interested in, but it got me into the country. There I met a number of Iranians, and after the conference I went through the countryside visiting them. I came back from Iran really excited about the project. I knew that I did not learn everything about Iran but emotionally I had made contacts with people and now had a sense on how the book should be written. I then started months and months of research and took two more trips to Iran. Now it is in print.

**Q. You were never in Iran before this?**

A. I had planned to go in the spring of 1979 while my husband and I were living in Saudi Arabia. We were going on leave and had made reservations. The situation in Iran was such that we decided not to go. We had a 10 year old son and thought it foolish to go to a country with such turmoil. Something could go wrong and we could get separated.

**Q. With so much written about Iran, What was your first impression about the country?**

A. Actually, when I go to a place for the first time, I try to go without a preconceived notion. I keep my antenna up and see just what unfolds. Iran was very interesting. The first thing I realized was how heterogeneous the country is. How differently the people see what happened and what was happening now. The people really love their country regardless of what they think about the revolution. I met people who were opposed to the revolution but all had this sense of love for their country and realized that they had been

through a very difficult time. I think that you cannot go to Iran today without picking up a feeling of disillusionment about the revolution and where the people want to go from here. Some people want to dismantle the Islamic Republic, some do not and some people want to leave it in place and revise it. Some people want to redo it in its entirety. I always left Iran feeling very sad. I thought that here you have a wonderful group of people who had a very difficult history and are in a very difficult period again.

The fact remains that whatever way it does turn out, the times reaching that point will be difficult for the people. These people have had such a fabulous culture. Their political history, however, has been tragic. I think that this is a paradox, a fabulous culture and history in which the political system has not lived up to the expectations established at the time of Cyrus. His ideal of justice has not been realized in either Kingship/Islam. The questions that remain are what is justice and what is the correct balance between the Iranians two cultured identities? Certainly, there was an attempt by the constitutional revolution as well as other ways to address that problem, but it still remains unresolved. I do think that it is moving and I believe that the Iranian people are so obviously intelligent that they will eventually work through this, but I am afraid that it will take a long time.

**Q. How did you find the physical aspects of Iran?**

A. I think that the economy is very bad. Each time I went back you could physically see the country was in worse shape and that the people were

discouraged. People are having a difficult time making ends meet.

**Q. While there; did you feel like you were in a hostile land?**

A. I gave a lecture to the World Affairs Council in Washington, DC. People always ask me that question as well as the question, "were you scared?" I always answer by saying the thing that I was most scared of was being in an automobile on the road. Really, the people were so gracious to me. People took me into their homes. They would close up their businesses to take me sight-seeing and any other place I needed to go. Sure you meet some people who remain hostile to America, but this was a small percentage. People were more curious than hostile. I would say that I met thousands of people and had about 12 negative reactions. They would often ask me the question, "What are you doing here?"

It was amazing how much I got to see by the kindness of the everyday people. They would call up a relative in another area and tell them that they had a new friend and ask if they would receive me. They would say yes and off I would go. I think that is what really amazed me the most. How total strangers would take in another total stranger and an American at that, based on the request of a relative.

It was a wonderful experience and was different in that I had to make my own arrangements. I had to be aware about the fact that you could get into a situation that you did not intend to and that you really had no backup from the United States or Iranian government. You were really dependant on the good will of ordinary people. That is who took care of me.

**Q. As a country, how did you find the scenery?**

A. It is a fabulous country and the nice part of not being under any control, I was able to go all over. I went to the Caspian, Kerman, Mashed, Qom, Hamedon and many small villages. I also got the government's permission to go to Abadan and Khoramshar. This was heart breaking. If you have not seen it in person then you just do not know the destruction from the war. It is slowly being repaired. The government, however, is skeptical as to how much money to put back into this area with Sadam Hussein still in power.

**Q. One of the perceptions the West has about Iran is that they still live back in medieval times. How did you find the families and did you feel that they were living in medieval times?**

A. I had never read or seen "Not Without My Daughter", and did not want to until I knew more about Iran and had a better ability to judge it. On my first trip I met a woman who was a friend of Betty Mahmoudi. On my second trip I contacted her and asked if she would get together with me and other people who knew her? She said sure. There were four American women and one Finish woman. They explained to me that much of what was said was distorted. It was a difficult marriage. I describe it like taking somebody from abroad into a battered woman's shelter in the United States and saying that this is how all women are treated in the United States. I finally finished the book and rented the movie. Actually, if you knew what happened in Iran and what the situation was, the movie was

much more understandable. I thought there was more truth in it. The husband's family was from a rural area and not very educated. Because of the revolution they moved to Teheran. The son who had been in the United States, married to an American woman, came back to his country and just did not fit. He received a lot of pressure from his family. If people really understood the dynamics of what went on, they would have understood the movie as something other than some horrible expose of what Iranian life is supposed to be. The book was about the family, an individual family at opposite ends of life experience. You have two factions, the family who came from a rural area without much education, and the son who had a totally different experience who came back to the middle of all of the emotion of the revolution. The family came up in the economic and social level because of the revolution. I am sure they were fearful that if they did not conform they might lose what they gained.

**Q. So you agree that they took one individual family and made it the entire country?**

A. Yes, and that was what was so bad about the film. People watching the film have no context in which to understand it. In addition Hollywood wanted to make a BIG film. In other words, if you knew what was really going on in Iran at that time, then it was a better movie than I expected. The problem was that people did not have the background to watch and understand the movie. They took one person's experience and applied it to all.

I saw several families where American women were married to Iranian men and are living in

Iran by choice. They have been there 15 years. They admit there were some difficulties. Likewise, Iranians here often discuss the difficulties of uprooting and coming to the United States. You are living in foreign culture and need to adapt.

**Q. So they had to make an adjustment to a new culture?**

A. Yes of course, but there will always be things that you miss about your culture.

**Q. Has your book been reviewed?**

A. There are publishing review services. All gave the book a positive review. Obviously, I was very pleased. Since publication the Los Angeles Times, the Seattle Times and the Atlantic Constitution have all given very good reviews, I understand more reviews are coming.

**Q. I also believe that every Iranian home should have a copy of this book.**

A. Thank you. As I told a group in Atlanta, when I started this book it was aimed at Westerners. I wanted to put Iran in context and try to help them understand the history and culture why the revolution appeared and what might happen in the future. As I got more into the writing I realized it was also a book for the younger generation of Iranians who never lived in Iran and do not know much about the country. I wanted to give them 400 pages on their culture and what happened politically in the 20th century. When I first started writing the book I thought that Iranians were not going to find it interesting. They would know this information and not respond

to the book at all. Fortunately, I am seeing the opposite reaction. I believe that it might be valuable to the Iranian community.

**Q. Overall what was your concept about the nation of Iran?**

A. I think that it is hard to say. Let me go back. One of the points I make in the 20th century section of the book was that you had centuries where Iranians the Persian tradition and Shia Islam and that these two identities stayed relatively balanced. The people generally know who they are. They know that they have an inheritance that comes from an ancient history rich in art and philosophy. Of course so much of that fed into the Islamic Empire. In fact Shia Islam really was the Iranians tailoring Islam to their own culture. These two identities then intertwined. There were things about them that were intentional.

When modernization hit Iran in the middle of the 19th century the country was shut off by the Ottoman Empire. The Iranians realized that they had missed out on the industrial revolution going on in the West. They knew that in order to become a powerful country in order to defend themselves they were going to have to modernize. It is at this time that you start having problems as to whether or not reach out and adopt the western ideas or guard the traditions.

The constitutional revolution brought up that problem. The constitution when written was probably too western biased. There were clerics who wanted a constitutional government and others who opposed it. Islam became frightened. So the constitution remained unfinished for a whole variety of reasons.

The Pahlavi's came with the good intentions of modernizing the country. They perceived Islam as holding them back. So over the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah there was a deliberate attempt to suppress Islam in Iranian identity, in the name of modernization. The Shah believed he had the power to modernize but he paid too little attention to other questions such as "what is just rule", "what is identity" and "what is nationalism?" By 1979 the Pahlavi's were out of power. By 1981 an Islamic government run by the clerics took Iran to the other extreme of total Islamic identity. Neither of these models were truly Iranian. Too often both the Shah and the clerics defended one side of this dual identity for personal gain rather than ideology.

What I see happening now is terribly confusing. The revolution has failed to meet its promises particularly as to the question of justice. People thought that the revolution was going to bring justice, democracy and economic benefits. It did not happen. What I see in Iran now is a situation where people are seeing that neither extreme has met their needs. They are still asking the question, "How do we define ourselves politically?"

The government as it exists now restricts political freedom. There is now a closed political system. People seem to put a fair amount of emphasis on who gets elected to the Majlis. They recognize that not anyone can run. Others get a restricted list of candidates. Within that group he or she can vote for who they want to. The Majlis seems to have more status and legitimacy than the Presidential election.

There seems to be a lot more suspicion. I am just speaking from what I observed. I have

nothing to back this up. It is simply my impression from talking with the people. I believe that regardless of what the people think about the Islamic Republic the Majlis is giving them a genuine feeling of participation in the government, though limited. People do feel like they have some voice, not as much as they want but they do see some. This is interesting, because Westerners have the impression that Iran is a totalitarian state. It is not, simply because the regime is so split on what it wants and where it wants to go. I think that comes from the very nature of Shia Islam. Because different people follow different clerics they have been able to mobilize their followers on one position or the other. This has been one of the Islamic Republics. The regime is so split over fundamental economic philosophy, whether or not they will have the free market, or Islamic socialism. Economic policy since the revolution will run one way for a while and then go a different way depending on what group is presently in power. Obviously, the Iran Iraq war devastated the economy as well.

**Q. What advice do you give to the United States and Iran on how to better understand one another and change the negative press each side gives to the other?**

A. The epilogue in the book is about American policy and the importance of Iran. Iran is now struggling for a direction. There is no organized opposition to the present regime and probably is not going to be one as long as there is no leader. Maybe some charismatic leader will come forward and be able to get attention. Presently, there is so much debate going on at all

levels of Iranian society as to what is the "Islamic Government" or what it should be. I do not believe anyone really believes that it will survive as it is. There is a tremendous debate going on within the regime and within society about all aspects of government. They are even debating a return to some form of monarchy.

The US being antagonistic against Iran and keeping it so isolated economically, that contributes to the power of the hard-line element of the government. Obviously, the United States is not going to run over and embrace Rafsanjani. But what the United States needs to do is to step back and give the Iranians chance to see where they want to go. The United States does not have to say it really loves the Islamic Republic. Obviously, we do have a difference of opinion with Iran as well as other countries. No one here, however, is giving them a chance to see if they can work things out.

The situation in Iran is such that it has to change and that if it does not change for the better they will change for the worse. If the United States does not put so much pressure on Iran, we may see things move to the better rather than the worse. The Iranian government also has to cut back on its rhetoric. They have beaten up on the United States for almost 17 years. It is a easy scapegoat for the regime to say, all its problems are the United States' fault.

In conclusion I would say quit the rhetoric and back off. Americans really have a lot of feelings for the Iranian people and they likewise have a great deal of feelings for the United States. I would hope that we can build some sort of bridge to restore the respect each country

used to share. I think these feelings are still there but have gotten distorted by what has happened. Both sides are very bitter and angry over the last 17 years, you must talk to the enemy.

**Q. There are two governments against one another, not individual people. Is it fair to display such prejudice against individuals who have immigrated to the United States before or after the revolution? Is it fair to classify the masses as terrorists? How do we as people and individuals and not representatives of either governments change this?**

A. One thing your readers might be interested in is the favorable reaction of Americans to my lecture and my book. I am encouraged by this. Many Americans believe that we need to rethink our position on Iran. This whole issue of Islamic Fundamentalism is something that people just do not understand. It has to do with the politics of various countries. It does not have a lot to do with religion. It is more about identity and people demanding respect.

**Q. If you go back to Iran what would you like to do?**

A. I want to contact the friends I made. I would like to again visit Mashad, because I thought it was so beautiful. I would also like to go to Yazd. Kerman impressed me. It was interesting to see that the county has drug problems and that they are getting a dirty deal when they are called "drug runners". Basically the tribes are bringing them in. There are check points every where and the government is making exhausting efforts to intercept them at the border.

Like I said, I believe Iran is getting a bad wrap because they also are suffering as the first step on the drug routes.

**Q. You have a 27 year old son, how do you compare the young adults of Iran to the young adults here?**

A. It is hard to generalize, but let me say two things. Some people who have come up in the public school system and from families who perceive themselves as having benefited from the revolution have one set of ideas. The school system has pushed this extremist ideology to the limit. I do believe that this is changing a little. At the same time the students who have been exposed to other educational systems have a different ideology and also have a lot of questions and frustrations. All the young people have genuine concern about their future. They are frustrated because they do not believe they have a future. Young people are delaying marriage because they cannot afford it, because they would have to live with their families. Social structures are very hard for the young people to abide by. It seems that this fits into a paradox. The government could really get a lot more support if they let down some of the social restrictions. However, if they do, they deny the legitimacy of

Islamic Era. I think that the pragmatists realize this more than the hard liners.

One thing I must say that has impressed me the most about Iran and Iranians that despite the war and the revolution intellectual life is incredible. The movie industry is very impressive etc.

**Q. What is the reason for this in your opinion?**

A. A lot of people I talked to really believe the cultural surge is a repetition of history. When the Iranians feel that their history and culture are threatened you have a great cultural revival. If you recall when the Mongols came in there was a tremendous cultural activity.

**Q. How did you find the family structure?**

A. Westerners have to be somewhat envious of the Iranian family because of the strength and security it gives. There is also the other side, that the families are very controlling. My observation is that the family is under a lot of stress at this time, because of the economic situation and because we are in a technical age. Families are splitting up and moving away from one another because of the job market.

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I talked to a man in a small village with 9 sons who had all moved away to the city. He and his wife were sitting in the living room very sad. The movement started back with the land reform. The revolution and the war also had an adverse effect on the nucleus of the family. Many of the youth died, this has exasperated the situation. So I believe Iran to be a paradox. The women of the middle class are in the work place, because the family needs their incomes.

As for education and employment opportunities, many women particularly those from the lower classes are far better off today than at the time of the Shah. There are a lot of educated women in Iran, and I think it is confusing to outsiders. They cannot understand that segregation of women does not mean that they are less educated than the men.

**Q. Was there anything else you wanted to put in the book and did not?**

A. Oh yes, there were many short personal stories I wanted to add, but my Editor felt that the book had to be kept to 400 pages. Hopefully I will be able to write those articles and have them printed in magazines.

**Q. Can you give a brief summary of your emotions regarding the writing of this book?**

A. You know when you are an outsider writing about someone else's culture and country, you constantly ask yourself if you have the right to do this. In this case I have been approached by many individuals who stated that they were glad that I, as a non Iranian, wrote the book. Their feeling was that because of the revolution there was too much division amongst the Iranian community. When groups would get together, individual viewpoints would often get in the way. Therefore, they believed an outsider was precisely the person who should write this type of book. I only hope that the book will have a positive effect on all the players.

I see Iran as follows, it was a pyramid prior to the revolution, with the hierarchy being on top. The hierarchy was leveled by the revolution. Now I see it as an hourglass turned over where the people on top are now on the bottom and the people who were on the bottom are now on the top and now taken up where the other elite left off.

**Q. Their uniform changed!?**

A. Yes. I think that it reflects survival rather than distrust. But hierarchy in Iran has been a problem

throughout its history and continues to remain so. Everyone or at least the majority thought the hierarchy was more important than the common good. There were no resources to promote the common good. So the way of survival for your family was to go in the direction of the wind. I don't know if you agree with that or not.

**Q. Do you believe the Iranians in this country have assimilated themselves?**

A. I think they have except for what is perhaps a paradox. I think that the Iranians here have done very well in making the best of their situation. They have made adjustments. Certainly their children have. But that is the nature of Iranians, to assimilate. But I also think at the same time there is a real sense of who they are and a yearning to go back. I think a few people are very unrealistic that there will be a restoration with the Pahlavi's young Reza. Iran will never be the same. In some ways it may be better and in some ways it may be worse.\*



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## Reza Karimi - Artist - "He views simplicity and creates the sublime."



*By: Dr. M. Hakami*

*Reza Karimi, born in Isfahan, Iran in 1946 has received significant recognition in the Art World. His technical training began at the school of Fine Arts in Isfahan, in lieu of high school. During the first three years at the school, he studied drawing and from 10th grade through the 12th grade, he studied color, oils and pastels. The following interview only begins to enter into the great mind of this wonderful painter. Mr. Karimi came to the United States and received his BA degree from Queens College in the City of New York, 1974. In 1975 he enrolled in a graduate program at Brooklyn College and received an MFA (Master in Fine Arts) in 1977.*

**Q. If you could give only one piece of advice to a young aspiring artist, what would that be?**

**A.** Remain financially independent. Financial independence allows the artist to be able to paint or sculpt the way he/she feels rather than what the public dictates. I was able to attain financial independence through my career in art restoration and conservation.

**Q. What is art restoration?**

**A.** It is an art in itself and is very scientific. It deals with physics, chemistry and art history. The important part of conservation is that you must preserve the life of the art work and extend its life without changing the essence of the work.

**Q. Is it important for an artist to study all forms of art history?**

**A.** Yes. For instance while in Isfahan, in the fine arts school, I

learned to copy nature, it was very mechanical. In New York, I was exposed to all kinds of art theory and history. All these aspects helped me choose my future direction.

**Q. With regard to yourself when did you realize you had an interest and talent for art and who influenced you?**

**A.** I guess when I was in elementary school, I seemed to excel in art more than the other children. Once I realized my talent, I knew that I had to be the best that I could be in the field.

While in Isfahan I was influenced by Mr. Bahadori. I was 13 years old and was doing a drawing from the shape of an egg which in art represents the contour of a head. I was doing the drawing using only my hand and fingers to control the pencil, being very precise. Mr.

Bahadori took the pencil from my hand and demonstrated, through the use of his shoulder, arm, hand and fingers how to attain total control over the entire page. From that time forward I learned that when I painted I must consider controlling the entire page. Also influencing me while I was in Iran were the Armenian water colorists Sum-bat and Napetian.

A Famous Russian seascape artist, Alvazovsky also impacted on my painting. I used to copy from his book to learn about color and other things. Interestingly enough, I am restoring the same paintings I used to paint one time as a student. That is how life is, sometimes.

In the United States I was influenced by the watercolors of John Singer Sargent. His use of light in his scenes often reminded me of Isfahan. Also Maurice Prendergast 1859-1924. I was fascinated by how he put his paints on the surface of the canvas without spreading the colors around, giving each color its own individual identity.

The modern abstract painter Helen Franken Thaler and Willem De Kooning also contributed to me as an artist. De Kooning was capable of taking a walk through the woods seeing all of nature and developed a feeling of that day in colors. He would then take this feeling back to his studio and paint that feeling. You can actually feel that day without real images, since he painted in the abstract.

**Q. All artists have a piece of work they believe to be their best work, do you have such a piece?**

A. I have several paintings that I like very much. The first painting was in my catalogue from an exhibition in New York. The name of the painting was

"Entrance to the Bath House". It was a combination of blue colors, and the color of the towels that are hung out to dry; also symbolizes that the bathhouse is open for business. Another of my favorites was one I painted of Fin-garden.

**Q. You mentioned Fin-garden, what is it and where is it located?**

A. Fin-garden is located in Kashan. When you enter the garden, there is a building that used to be an old governor's mansion where there is a pool of water. The water comes through the pool via gravity. It is so well calculated and divides into 4 equal directions. The water runs for miles and miles with a waterfall between each of them. Each waterfall is turquoise in color. The contrast of the waterfall against the orange and yellow stone walk and the cypress trees direct your eyes outward. This whole concept and the romantic mood that the garden creates fascinated me.

**Q. As a painting conservator what is the most important painting you have worked on?**

A. I work with the old masters so all are important.

**Q. How can we promote and introduce Persian art to the outside world? Also how do we make it more interesting to Westerners.**

A. First of all "Persian art" has always played an important roll in the art community. Secondly, art for an artist is the same as for the viewer. Both the artist and the viewer have their own individual taste and will like or dislike what he/she paints or sees. Persian artists must be aware of what is happening today in art. They have to know 20th century art and artists. They must also realize that the

competition is great in the United States. Therefore, in order to stand out, you must be unique, unique in a positive way. If you are not unique, you will not stand out. I remember years ago my teacher told me that there were over 30,000 artists in the New York area. Uniqueness, however, is often lost if the artist is depending on his/her commissions in order to live. That is the time that you lose your creativity and you become commercialized. The minute you go to commercialism and do what the public demands then you have become a laborer and an artist cannot become a laborer. You cannot be a craftsman, craftsmen are mechanical and lack creativity. They must be patient and not be afraid to show their work. The more exposure the better off he/she will be. They also must realize that you must think beyond your own people, your own community. You must remember that you are now living abroad. You go to school and breathe the air here, you have to think internationally.

The aspiring artist has to see the world as being very close today, not like it was years ago. Recently I was in Iran. I met an artist, he said that we must mix the art of the east and west together. Even if you are born in Iran and live in New York, I do believe my work, your work should still reflect something about your heritage. It could be represented through color, symbol, light or shade. For example Picasso worked while living in France continuously exhibiting his work. Through color and design, his Spanish heritage came through.

**Q. You mentioned the importance of uniqueness, what do you believe is your unique style?**

A. Being a product of New York schools, I adopted a theme of painting that no one else ever painted. My theme is to try to paint the simplest possible subject. That a million people pass by the scene and do not see any beauty in it. I see the beauty and bring it to the surface of the painting. I probably would exaggerate some forms and colors in order to express what I see.

I also exaggerate light and shade. For example if you walk on the street in Isfahan on a bright sunny day in the summer the sun is really hot, but if you walk in the shade of an alley you can almost feel a cool breeze.

I try to paint that warmth and coolness in my paintings. I eliminate as much as possible any modern signs because Iran is ancient. I see Iran closer to the romantic 19th century than to the modern 20th century.

**Q. Is there any way that Iranians who live abroad can exhibit their heritage?**

A. There is a possibility to show our heritage even though we live abroad. One should not be afraid to paint as he/she feels. I believe that you feel better if you do this. You become more honest with yourself. Honesty is what an artist must be, be not only to themselves but also to their public.

**Q. Do artists remain with one style their entire painting career and if not how are you changing, if in fact you are changing?**

A. I believe that all artists change during the course of their career. I am now working to simplify my style. As one matures you automatically feels the need to simplify your life. I think that we have learned from the great Matisse to take a subject, digest it and then

simplify it.

I am eliminating more details so that I can get to the main subject. I am now seeking to intensify my colors to express more of the Middle Eastern colors. A lot of non Persians as well as Persians comment that when they see the colors in my work, my paintings jump off the wall. To me this is a great compliment.

Today I am working in water colors. It is a medium in which you can not make a mistake. You have to 'paint' it ahead of time in your mind and when you really feel it, then you must put it on paper. So many times I will paint water colors and have only one come out as I planned. But with each day and each attempt you get better and better.

**Q. In your opinion what are some of the most impressive paintings produced in Iran?**

A. The School of Harat and Joseph and Zulaykha, by Behzad. In that painting he broke all the rules in painting in terms of perspective and composition. In this painting you have the wall in front of you but you can see behind the wall to the stairway, and then to the first floor into the next room and so on and then suddenly the figures appear.

**Q. There are many schools of painting. What movement do**

**you believe to have the most significant importance?**

A. The most important movement and certainly the one worth mentioning was Impressionism, Impressionists were anti realists. They would place bunches of colors on a canvas. In essence they would paint an image that when close up was an undetectable image. When you stepped back, however, the figures and images appeared.

Seurat was the one who made it more scientific. He would take a number of paints and place them side by side. When you step back, your eyes experience an optical illusion. The air mixes with your vision and all these paints come together. It then allows you to see the true impression of a sunny afternoon in a park with several figures. We also have the post impressionist paintings. Cezanne's work is a true representation of this period. He is truly the father of modern painting because he proves that tone and color are pretty much the same thing.

**Q. Are you presently having any exhibitions?**

A. At this moment after my show at the Hammer Gallery in New York they asked me to do 40 New York scenes. I have spent more than half of my life here so I do not see that as being a burden. \*



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# Abyaneh

by: Reza Karimi

by: Sohrab Hakimzadeh

Abyaneh is a village on the western border of the central desert of Iran, situated along the foot of "Karkas" mountain range about 70 km to the south of "Kashan". On the east, at 21 km an asphalt road joins the village to the main road connecting Kashan to Natanz.

The village consists of three rather detached regions separating the houses, orchards and the plain. Due to strategic factors limiting the extension of the village. Abyaneh is characterized by its condensed texture contrasting the reddish clay of the mountain slopes. The limitation of space is such that some lanes and alleys do not have a regular

form; alleys stretched from east to west, however, are much wider and easier to pass. The village is composed of four major districts known as Harden meaning the lower village, Paiah meaning the border, Yossmoon and Pakhunegah, and smaller regions such as Porzaleh, Ziarega, Pabaqucha and Poliza. The orchards are located behind the village houses with the plane in the background.

In the native language, the village is called "Viona" meaning the willow-land. The village boasts a modern culture. According to the census released in 1976, more than one hundred inhabitants have been studying at the

universities both in Iran and abroad. That was about ten per cent of the population at that time. Considering the particular culture and the spirit of cooperation in Abyaneh, facilities such as oven, stove, mortar, toilet and water taps are used in common.

Handicrafts had once enjoyed a time of flourish in the village, to the extent that the cloth required by the Safavid court had been woven there. The inlaid work in Abyaneh testifies to the existence of skilled carpenters once living there. The pulpit of Jaumy mosque (748 AD), the wooden altar of Husseinieh, wood carvings of Porzaleh mosque and the entrance of Hajatgah mosque are

dated more than 700 years ago.

Nearly thirty people in Abyaneh had been occupied with "giveh" production (a type of light cotton shoe) before the arrival of machine made shoes. Feasts and religious ceremonies transform the look of the village all together. Most of the local people who now live in cities and even abroad, return to the village for these occasions and wear their traditional costumes and spend a few days living together.

Abyaneh is an important architectural heritage of the country registered by the institute for the Protection of Historical Monuments.\*



# Mehr'gaun

F. Sadeghpour  
Boston, MA  
1996

Centuries ago our Iranian forebears created and established a brilliant Culture and mores, which after so many centuries have not been forgotten, and their brilliance still holds a fascination for any observer. Among these Customs are the festivities of Noe-rouz, Mehr'gaun, Saddeh, and the night of the winter solstice, (Chelleh-Bozorg).

The ancient Iranians had two seasons. One was winter, "Zayana", and the other was summer, "Hama". The festivity of Mehr'gaun indicated the beginning of nature's dormancy, and the imparting of wisdom, teaching, lore, and knowledge. It is the antithesis of the festival of Noe-rouz which announces the summer season.

Each of these festivities is an indication of the sensitive and poetic soul and spirit of the Iranians. Therefore, since we are in the autumn season, why not partake in the festivity of Mehr'gaun? To begin with, it must be pointed out that Mehr'gaun falls between the 8th and the 10th of October in the Christian calendar.

According to the belief of ancient Iranians (Persians), Mehr or Mithra, the great sun god, had great love and affection for man, and bestowed upon man, his comforting warm rays, his brilliant light, and the power of growing vegetation on earth. In Avesta, the holy book of the Zoroastrians, Mehr'gaun is the birthday of Mashya and Mashyaneh, Adam and Eve of the Aryans. According to historical indications, this must have been right after the fourth ice age. The kindness, love, and affection of Mehr was to be adopted into the Persian language. The name of sun god, Mehr/Mithra was used for devotion, attachment, fondness, and endearment.

In the Old Persian language, when an "A" was

used as a prefix for certain nouns, the nouns would connote immortality. For example, Mortaut or Mordaud which means temporary, ephemeral. If the letter "A" is used as a prefix before it, it will read, Amortaut/Amordaud, which signifies immortal, lasting, and permanent. Therefore, when the prefix "A" is applied to Mehr, it will read, "Amehr", which denotes eternal, heavenly, and undying; hence, a deep affection, an eternal love, or heavenly love. This very word with the same significance is used as "Amor" in the Latin language. As "amor vincit omnia". Love conquers all, or "amor patriae", love of country, patriotism. According to the linguists, Old Persian and Sanskrit languages were sisters, Latin being the great grand-daughter of Sanskrit, and present Persian language is the great grand-daughter of Old Persian. Both languages are of Indo-European lineage. If there are any similarities between some words and phrases, it should not give any cause for surprise.

Before the advent of Islam, the Iranians still retained many of the mores and traditions of Mithraism. One of these traditions being the seventh day of the Sabbath which is called "Mehrsheed", the day of the sun god, which literally means "Sunday".

So far this preliminary description of Mehr'gaun has been inherently necessary so that we may understand why the festivity of Mehr'gaun is one of the dearest for the Iranians, and how its pinion, through the Roman Empire, was spread across Western Civilization.

Every sixteenth day in the Persian calendar is named Mehr, and when this day falls in the month of Mehr, it is called the day of Mehr'gaun. The celebration of Mehr'gaun starts on the 16th day of the month and ends on the 21st. The 21st day of the

celebration is called Raum-Rouz. The day to celebrate harvesting; the day of vows and pacts of friendship. Also, according to Iranian mythology, it is the day an ironsmith, Kauveh, a folklore hero, conjoined a nobleman, Feraydoun, to overthrow the vicious and criminal King Zahauk, a usurper of the people's trust, who was said to have sprouted a snake from each shoulder which had to be fed a human sacrifice daily. The ironsmith, Kauveh, had taken his leather apron, (Darafsh-e-Kauviani), as a standard for mobilizing the people in a revolt against King Zahauk. Darafsh-e-Kauviani is still the symbolic name for Iranian unity and standard of independence.

It is for these manifold reasons that Mehr'gaun is so near and dear to the heart of every Iranian. However, in the Avesta, Mehr or Mithra, declined from a major deity to an angel. It is still an important angel, since it is the angel, Mehr, which bestows light, the symbol of Ahur Mazda.

The Persian Kings of the Achaemenian Dynasty were not supposed to get inebriated, yet on Mehr'gaun Day, they would don a royal purple cape which would allow them to partake in the festivities of drinking and dancing in public. The holy men or Magi would carry a large wooden tray laden with seven branches of myrtle, bunches of white grapes, lemons, quince, apples, and sugar on a bed of blue nenuphar. This tray would be presented to the king while singing praises of the sun god.

The Belgian scholar, Cumont, in his book about Mithraism has indicated without a doubt that Mehr'gaun fest spread from Iran to the Roman Empire and was called "Sol Natalis in Victi" which means the birth date of the victorious sun. It is my belief that this learned scholar has mistaken the night of the solstice festivity with Mehr'gaun. In the Christian calendar, it is believed that the birth of the sun god falls on the 21st to the 23rd of December.

To date, the oldest document in which the name of the sun god, Mehr, appears, is in a manuscript found in the Kapatuka region in Asia Minor which is dated 1400 B.C. Masoud Sa'd Salmaun, the Iranian poet, has written the following poem about Mehr-gauns:

The day of Mehr  
The month of Mehr  
Brought along this  
Lovely Mehr'gaun fest.  
Increase your kindness  
My beloved moon face  
Be kindly on Mehr day  
This month, this day  
Is Mehr'gaun fest.

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