

Protest Visual Arts in Iran from the 1953 Coup to the 1979 Islamic Revolution

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Abstract: There have been conducted a few numbers of researches with protest-related subjects in visual arts in a span between the two major unrests, the 1953 Coup and the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This study tries to investigate how the works of Iranian visual artists demonstrate their reactions to the 1953 Coup and progresses towards modernization that occurred after the White Revolution of Shāh in 1963. The advent of the protest concept has coincided with the presence of Modern and Contemporary art in Iran when the country was occupied by allies during the Second World War. The 1953 Coup was a significant protest event that motivated some of the artists to react against the monarchy's intention. Although, poets, authors, journalists, and writers of plays were pioneer to combat dictatorship, the greatest modernist artists of that time, impressed by the events after the 1953 Coup, just used their art as rebellious manifest against the governors.

Keywords: Iranian Visual Artists, Pahlavi, Political Freedom, Persian Protest Literature, the Shāh.

INTRODUCTION

The authors decided to investigate the subject of protest artworks because it is almost novel and has addressed by the minority of other researchers so far. The beginning of the war between Iran and Iraq in 1980, very soon after the 1979 Revolution, and the resistance art flourishing which encouraged people to resist against Iraq drew the attention of many artists. As a result, the subject of protest art was obsoleted for about four decades from 1980 (Ganji 2002; Kaveh 2019). That's why the first author decided to study protest art as a main part of his doctoral dissertation in Visual Arts entitled "À la recherche de la figure de l'artiste contestataire contemporain, dans le cadre de la mondialisation. Le cas particulier des artistes contemporains Iraniens" (Ganji 2002; Kaveh 2019). The advisor of thesis was prof. Corine Pencenat, and the dissertation defense meeting was held at the European Doctoral School of the University of Strasbourg, in 5 June 2018. This paper is written based on a part of author's PHD thesis.

The Qajar dynasty ruling over Iran from 1789 to 1925 overthrown by the Pahlavi dynasty (1926-1979) that its evolutions and repercussions extend until today. The advent of the Pahlavi regime was the origin of modernization, westernization, and return to glory of ancient Iran at the same time (Dabashi 2001;

Abrahamian 2018). The Iranian visual arts affected unconstructively by Pahlavi I (1926-1942) contradictory approaches. By opening of Fine Arts School, which became after a while Fine Arts Faculty of the University of Tehran, students came into contact with contemporary art and the history of Western art for the first time. They did experiments that were unimaginable within the limited and well-institutionalized borders of traditional Iranian art. Thus the dominant currents of the Pahlavi I era can be divided into four categories, namely:

1. The Naturalist and Romantic painting, or the School of Kamāl-ol-Molk (1848-1940). It is a fact that despite the passage of time, and the presence of some new schools and new artistic trends, Iranian's taste remained under the influence of Kamāl-ol-Molk School. This passion stays alive until now as today, there are many art shops where you can find paintings of the School of Kamāl-ol-Molk, on sale which a majority of them made by unknown amateur painters.
2. The new Iranian schools of painting created by the traditionalists.
3. Modern painting introduced by the School of Fine Arts.
4. Finally, the painting called Qahvehxāne1 (see appendices), claimed by self-taught painters those who were from the mass of the people and not supported by the state.

In this paper, we studied the major influences of the transitional era from 1953 Coup, the event in which

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Britain and the United State accompanied Pahlavi II (1919-1980) or the Shāh² (see appendices) to overthrow the government of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh (1882-1967), to 1979 Islamic Revolution on artistic evolution. The authors also investigated how visual artworks of Iranian artists manifested their reactions against 1953 Coup and progresses towards modernization occurred after the White Revolution of Shāh in 1963 when the country was suffering from the lack of political freedom at the same time due to the way the Shāh governed the country (Bayat 1997; Dabashi 2017).

There are large numbers of protest contexts, in the form of poetry, history, novel, short story, and piece, against Pahlavi I in the literature of those years. But there are not any remained samples of protest visual arts, and the concept of rebellion was totally strange and unacceptable in the limited borders of traditional Iranian visual arts despite a long term resistance literature against hated rulers.

Indeed, the absence of protest visual artworks was because Modern art in Iran was quite unknown before 1958, the year in which the first painting and sculpture biennial was held in Tehran (Hatton 2013).

Research Objectives

This study tries to investigate how the works of Iranian visual artists demonstrate their reactions to 1953 Coup and progresses towards modernization occurred after the White Revolution of Shāh in 1963 when the country was suffering from the lack of political freedom at the same time because of the way it was governed by the Shāh.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present paper has been written based on the analytical-descriptive method to study the works of artists such as Sia Armajani, Mohasses brothers, Kaveh Golestan, Bijan Jazani, Kourosh Shishegaran, Nosratollah Moslemian and those whose works are among the best of the masterpiece of protest visual arts before the Islamic Revolution.

Library Research

For the study, the researchers collected information about political, sociological, culture-artistic, as well as economic situations, which resulted from the coup of 1953 against the democratic government of Mohammad Mossadegh, before the Islamic Revolution

of 1979. The information were collected from wide range of authenticated sources such as books, articles and interviews in specific journals, Encyclopedias and some academic works published in Iran and abroad. To do this, the researchers did an elaborated profound investigation on aforementioned sources, to extract the precious pieces of information about the progress of Iranian contemporary protest art, affected by the coup, from 1953 to 1979. Among the references, seemed of important for the study, is a book by E. Abrahamian. The book entitled: *A History of Modern Iran*, and published by Cambridge University Press in 2018. In this book, Abrahamian portrayed himself as an enthusiastic witness, whose mission is to observe, understand and record the political, sociological, culture-artistic and religious transformation of modern Iran, over the post-coup era. Another well-known book about the history of protest-artistic movements in Iran, whit in the years before the Islamic Revolution, entitled: *Street politics: poor people's movements in Iran*. It has been written by A. Bayat, and published by Columbia University Press (1997). The book focused on the circumstances in which some of the most famous protest-artistic movements emerged and supported by people from the lower classes of the Iranian society at that time. Another reference, entitled: *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of The Islamic Revolution in Iran*, is from H. Dabashi, and published by Routledge Publication in 2017. In the book, Dabashi carefully has scrutinized the religious theology and ideologies of revolutionaries, ending in the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The book entitled: *Defying the Iranian Revolution: From a Minister to the Shah to a Leader of the Resistance*, from M. Ganji, published by Greenwood Publishing Group (2002) is also of the outstanding study references. The book has analyzed the changes, took place in Iranian society from the Prime Minister, Mohammad Mossadegh (1951-1953) to Ayatollah Khoemeyni (1902-1989), a religious leader who became the leader of Islamic revolutionists as well as non-religious people. K. Abdolmaleki gave a presentation based on his thesis entitled: *A Robin Redbreast in an Iron Cage: Revisiting the Intellectual Movement of Dissent in Iran between the 1953 Coup And The 1979 Revolution*, at the University of Alberta (2018), which is used as one of remarkable study sources. Abdolmaleki presented some pieces of information were gathered from several governmental confidential documents along with, interviewing with some famous revolutionaries, who played influential role in political scene of Iran at that time.

Moreover, the researchers studied the two well-known online encyclopedias Iranica and Universalis,

journals, web sites and interviews, and the Iranian art-specific articles like the articles by Jean-Charles Blanc, French ethnographer, writer and painter about thoughts and sentimental moods of Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi, known as the Shāh, published in *Universalis*. Furthermore, some other sources were referred to write the paper including articles about works of Ardeshir Mohassess (1938-2008), the internationally famous Iranian protest artist, before the Islamic Revolution. In addition to, interviews with Akbar Behkalam (1944), a German-Iranian painter, sculptor, and creator of the *Perspolis* series 1975-77, someone who was forced to go to exile by the royal regime because of protest subjects of his artworks (Gasirowski 2014; Sohrabi 2018). The interviews are about art and artists in exile and were uploaded in a German site <https://kuenste-im-exil.de>. Interviews with Chiara PALAZZO, journalist of the *English Telegraph*, about the documentary photos of Kaveh Golestan (1950-2003). The photos depicted truly different faces of Iranian society which the royal regime was always trying to hide from the world. All above-mentioned sources were studied to write the present paper.

The Cultural-Artistic Atmosphere of Iran from the Coup in 1953 to the Islamic Revolution in 1979

Following the Coup in 1953, a government under General Fazlollāh Zahedi (1892-1963) was formed which raised the power of Mohammad-Reza Shāh to terminate the freedom and democracy has been established during the government of Mohammad Mossadegh, in Iran. The Shāh was convinced that the Britains and the Americans were at his side. Consequently, he began to suppress the Tudeh communist party, the most powerful and well-organized party in Iran at that time as well as the National Front party. The Tudeh party, which was founded in 1941 and was supported by the Soviet Union, had numerous members and supporters from different classes of the society including socialist, intellectuals, students, social and protest activists as well as artists.

In 1944 eight candidates from the Tudeh party were succeed to enter the parliament which gave them open hand to play a more significant role in Iran's politics. In 1949, the Tudeh planned a terrorist attack again the Shāh. The attack failed. As a result, the party became banned, and its leaders as well as active members were arrested, escaped abroad, or hide (Abdolmaleki 2018).

After selection of Mossadegh, the leader of the National Front, as the Prime Minister, thanks to his

good relationship with libertarians, social and protest activists, the Tudeh party took advantage from the free protest atmosphere and managed to get into political stage. But after the 1953 Coup, in reaction to the violent acts of Tudeh party, dictated from Moscow to overthrow the royal regime including the organization of the attack against the Shāh, the party became illegal (Gluck 2006).

Having survived from a severe typhoid fever he had when he was 6 years old, as doctors thought he would soon die, and also several terrorist attacks, notably in 1949, shāh was convinced that he is under "divine protection" and has a "mission" to accomplish for his country. He then banned the party (Tudeh) before his first journey to the United States to purchase new weapons and ask for financial and military supports for the modernization of Iranian armed forces, aviation in particular.

Trained as a soldier and faithful to his father's ideals and principles, he was always believed that equipping the army is his heavenly mission that could assure his governance over the country (Blanc 2017). We completely agreed with Blanc, because there are plenty of written pieces of evidence that prove the claim including the *Mission for My Country*, a book by Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi, published in 1960 by the audiovisual Institute of Fine Arts of Iran, in which he introduces himself and his government as religious and supported by Shiite imams (Varzi 2011; Rauh 2013).

DISCUSSION

During dominance, the dictator of Pahlavi II, Siah (Siavash) Armajani (1939), a famous Iranian-American sculptor and architect who had a close relationship with both Tudeh and National Front parties, immigrated to the United State when he was only 19 years old. Siah Armajani is best known for his installation titled *Sacco and Vanzetti Reading Room* (1988) displayed in his first solo exhibition in Europe at *Kunsthalle Basel* and *Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam*. The work was also exhibited in many museums of Modern and Contemporary art throughout the world. (See Figure 1).

These two personalities, Sacco (1891-1927) and Vanzetti (1888-1927) sentenced to death by the court for never-proven charges were the symbol of Anarchism during the 1920s in the United States. To understand the work, the socio-protest circumstances of the United States at the time Sacco and Vanzetti lived in, should be regarded. We know that during the

1920s, and after the October Revolution in Russia, Americans had an extreme phobia of reds which is known as the "Red Fear". The federal-state was violently suppressing all the socio-political critics and was classifying them under the term of Anarchism. However, the concept of the word Anarchism is quite different from that declared by the US state. Regarding Anarchism's doctrine, it is understood as a political and social conception based on the refusal of all sorts of surveillance of government and religion which violates the individual's privacy and freedom.

As audiences of the work, who know the story of Sacco and Vanzetti, we can say that the artist has dedicated his work to Sacco and Vanzetti as a tribute to his protest comrades who were victims of prejudice, due to their political ideas. People whose destiny was similar to that of the artist, those who escaped from Iran, or arrested and sentenced to prison or death. The choice of a reading room to stage the installation was very intellectual and conveyed the artist's message clearly that is the only way to reach absolute truth about thoughts and actions of characters like Sacco and Vanzetti is through wisdom. You probably wonder why Armajani has chosen two Italian Anarchists for his work instead of two Iranian protests? The answer is that these two characters are famous in contemporary political history. They are the symbols of people who are judged and prejudiced discriminately. If Armajani had cherished two lesser-known Iranian characters, those who were executed during post-coup years, in his work, he would not have been able to communicate with international audiences anywhere, anytime (Zabolinezhad 2018).



Figure 1: Sia Armajani, Sacco and Vanzetti Reading Room, installation, Kunsthalle Basel and Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, 1988.

Besides, the mentioned work also reminds us of a belief in the Zoroastrian religion where Ahurā-Mazdā, the god of pure goodness, sent light to the Iranians. Light is a symbol of insight, knowledge, and wisdom in many cultures. Therefore, by staging a reading room, indeed, Armajani referred to his Iranian roots, saying that the only way someone can get rid of the prejudice which threaten human life and dignity is to obtain wisdom through study.

In 1958, The First Tehran Biennial was organized by the agency of Armenian-Iranian artist Marcos Grigorian (1925–2007), a modernist painter, which introduced the lesser-known artistic style, Modern art, to the Iranian art community. The state strongly supported this artistic event. Consequently, the Iranian pioneers' works of Modern and Contemporary art were taken into consideration by the public during the following years in which more five biennials were organized until 1978. These biennials had a significant role in the evolution of Iranian Modern and Contemporary visual artworks and served the best Iranian artists as introductory letters to the upcoming international biennales at Venice and São Paulo. Furthermore, the fact that the last Empress of Iran, Farah Diba (1938), was a young graduated from the School of Fine Arts in Paris and her passion for Modern and Contemporary art also played a key role to promote the position of modern visual arts at the expense of gradual decline of traditional arts. All these encouraged the young artists to experience new styles like fine and visual ones. The authors truly believe that the flourishing of modern visual arts and continuity of traditional arts is beholden of Empress's efforts. The most valuable and outstanding activities of Farah Diba are including the founding of Cultural Heritage and Tourism and Handicraft Organization, which was responsible for gathering and reviving traditional artworks which were on the verge of disappearing due to the modernization of the country, to help the society to recover its cultural identity. The foundation of several museums, each dedicated to seek, buy, and exhibit a huge and varied collection of artworks from across the globe and from the Persian civilization in particular. Among the largest art museums in Tehran established by Empress is Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts, (Persian: *موزه هنرهای معاصر تهران*) which is considered to have the most valuable collections of modern Western masterpieces outside Europe and North America at that time like the work of Warhol (1928-1987) showing the face of Empress Farah. (See Figure 2).



Figure 2: Photo of Empress Farah and Andy Warhol, standing in front of Warhol's work, which was torn apart by the revolutionaries during in 1979, Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts, 1977.

Another cultural annual ceremony held by the initiative of Empress from 1967 to 1977 in Perspolis, was the International Festival of Arts (Persian: جشن هنر شیراز). Persepolis, the capital of the Persian Empire of Achaemenid is near Shiraz, and the ruins of the great royal city called Takht-e-Jamshid (in Persian: تخت جمشید) or the Throne of Jamshid was an ideal location to perform the festival's programs included dance, drama, showing film and music. Musicians,



Figure 3: Ghobad Shiva, Poster of the 12th Shiraz Festival of Arts, from 3 to 12 September 1978, canceled because of the great strikes of the revolutionaries.

singers, comedians, dancers, and some other visual artists participated in the Festival from around the world to perform alongside Iranian artists. The festival was publicised and documented very well not by the beautiful posters designed over the years, but also by the photographs taken by the great names of the culture of the 1960s-1970. Some Art celebrities who appeared at the festival are John Cage and David Tudor, Merce Cunningham, Maurice Bejart, Hariprasad Chaurasia... The art festival, of course, was an opportunity for promoting the artistic atmosphere of Iran in the favour of unknown Iranian contemporary artists in particular between the years following the 1953 Coup and the 1979 Revolution. It was canceled due to the serious political turmoil that Iran experienced after the Revolution.

In 1971, the Shāh organized an elaborate propaganda event to celebrate 2500 years of the Iranian monarchy in the ruins of Takht-e-Jamshid located in Persepolis, the ancient capital of Persian civilization. The aim of this was to gain respect for his regime among the international community by referring back to the ancient Persian traditions. A few years later, Akbar Behkalam, painter and sculptor who exiled to Germany in 1976 because of criticism of the regime, introduced himself as a protest artist with a series of paintings titled Persepolis (1976-1979). In Behkalam's paintings, the contradiction between the attempt of Shāh to present Iranian as "a cultural people" and the murder of those who opposed his regime becomes blatantly apparent.



Figure 4: Akbar Behkalam, Persepolis I, Perspolis series, oil painting on canvas, 1977.

The Persepolis series is a mixture of Realism, Expressionism as well as Persian miniatures, with the presence of motifs inspired from engraved on the walls of Takht-e-Jamshid which was internationally well-known thanks to the Shiraz Festival of Arts. Behkalam placed these motifs together with contemporary images from the Shah's era, for example, figures of torturing and murdering among parades of ancient Persian soldiers. The title and these motifs were selected very cleverly to depict the paradox of the glory of the great Persian people, the image that Shāh tried to show to the world by celebrating 2500th year of the foundation of imperial of Iran, and human rights violations that had been taking place by the shah's government.



Figure 5: Akbar Behkalam, They expected a different life when the Revolution began, Persepolis series, oil painting on canvas, 1979.

The second major political event took place after the 1953 Coup was the White Revolution (1963) of the King and the People (Enqelāb-e Shāh o Mardom) which was the origin of a series of fundamental socio-political, socio-economic as well as cultural-artistic reforms in Iran. Although these fast-pacing changes that contributed towards modernization of the country affected Iranian society by providing social signs of progress and freedoms, the lack of political openness and democracy at the same time, eventually led to downfall of the Shāh's regime.

During that particular period, a large number of visual artists have related to politics and the

predominant topic of their works was usually the posters. Their works also were strongly under the influence of the Socialist Realism School, an official style in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). It depicts the communist ideologies such as encouraging people to fight against Capitalism, corrupted government of the Shāh who was the symbol of depravity. Some visual artists portrayed the USSR as a Utopia where the citizens' demands are perfectly satisfied.



Figure 6: Famous propagandist photo of the Shāh, published in newspapers at the time of the White Revolution, 1963.

The following photos were taken by the first authors during her visit from the exhibition of Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Paris, July 2014, titled UNITED HISTORY Séquences du moderne en Iran de 1960 à nos jours, where the organizers displayed some practices of modernists and contemporaries Iranian artists of different generations.



Figure 7: Posters created by the protest artists, from 1953 Coup to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the exhibition UNITED HISTORY Séquences du moderne en Iran de 1960 à nos jours, the Socialist Realism School, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of the city of Paris, July 2014.

They also dedicated a hall to propaganda practices with political subjects, made by protest artists against the Pahlavi regime (See Figure 7-9).



Figure 8: Posters created by the protest artists, from 1953 Coup to the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the exhibition UNITED HISTORY Séquences du moderne en Iran de 1960 à nos jours, the Socialist Realism School, Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art of the city of Paris, July 2014.



Figure 9: Kourosh Shishegaran, a poster displayed in Figure 7, in the upper right, there is a picture of Mossadegh wearing a forehead of a flag of Iran without the acronym of the Pahlavi. There is also a text next to the picture, a part of a famous poem, saying "I am a servant of wisdom man (the elderly man of the Moghs) who made me free from ignorance."

At the end of the Qajar dynasty (1796–1925), the increased number of foreigners who came to visit Iran, those who brought new thoughts about freedom and human rights with themselves, as well as an increased number of published newspapers, led to the advent of intellectualism and a new type of socio-protest art in Iran that was Caricatures. The caricature was the only form of protest arts produced by activists and social movements until the mid of Pahlavi regime. Although posters with politics and revolution related subjects, which have designed between the 1953 Coup and the 1979 Islamic Revolution are an important part of the

history of graphic art in Iran, the predominance of politically oriented restrictions, during the Pahlavi, has remarkably limited the number of studies conducted in this area and a new generation of visual artists are very less familiar to these sort of works. The first posters with protest-related subjects were produced under the influences of after-Coup political and social changes. During the years 1974-75 Kourosh Shishegaran (1945) was the best known Iranian visual artist for portraying the global issues, the political in particular, such as the civil war in Lebanon in his posters, named Peace in Lebanon. He then, created another poster, joint work with his brothers Behzad and Ismail about the lack of freedom of expression in Iran. A work that they were arrested by SAVAK for it. His successors were a group of students from the Faculty of Fine Arts of the University of Tehran, artists like Amir Esbati, Akbar Aharipour, Mohammad Farzin, Abdolreza Nikou, and the others those who began to create a set of posters with different strong political topics, they all together put their signature on the posters. Even Morteza Momayez (1935-2005), an internationally known graphic designer, contributed to this set of works.

There are also several posters produced by anonymous activist artists those who prefer to stay unknown because of socio-political limitation had been set by the government. Thus, in many cases, it is difficult to determine the exact identity of the creator of the posters. Furthermore, there are a great number of posters produced by revolutionaries against the regime from 1977 to 1979 that should not be neglected.

The Islamic Revolution was another movement to install a democratic government in Iran. The posters produced during this era were often simple and the subjects were cliches. They often were publicizing the ideology of revolutionaries that was battle against the western world, the USA in particular. The artistes commonly used black and red colors and graphics components like a tulip, pigeon, pistol, and bodies wrapped in a white shroud. The point is that language of these posters was sharp and polite, but not insulting like some other political posters seen in other countries. The years in the 1970s was the stunning breakthrough for revolutionary posters in Iran. Visual arts in the simple form of the poster was an important tool for the dissemination of revolutionary ideologies among the public. The posters are a collective memory that reminds us of those turbulent years.

In 1980 the war between Iran and Iraq, known as Holly Defense in Iran (1980-1988), put an end to the brilliant season of protest posters in Iran. The

government began to produce immense visual artworks, often posters, to encourage Iranians from different generations and social classes to support the war. Thus, the posters with the subjects that were publicizing the war against the enemy were prioritized.

The works of Kaveh Golestan, documentarist, photographer and journalist, were influenced by his famous father: Ebrahim Golestan (1922) had social topics that displayed the deplorable lives of underprivileged people those who ignored by urban societies in Iran at that time.

Kaveh launched his career in 1972 with his first freelance assignment about the conflict in Northern Ireland for the daily newspaper Kayhan, Golestan began working for the newspaper Ayandegan, for whom he produced reports on the lives of his compatriot. He showed these works in an exhibition at Tehran University entitled *Roospy, Kargaar va Majnoun* (Prostitutes, Laborers, and Mental handicap) which was closed down by the authorities after only a week. He reacted by displaying the same photographs at an art gallery in full view of Iran's Empress Farah a few weeks later, which led her to remark that he had a very dark view of life. Chiara Palazzo. Sincerely, the first impression of his photos taken from the life of the wretched people, especially innocent women and children, as well as a documentary made from a famous house of prostitution in Tehran called *Shahr-e -no³* (in Persian: شهر نو) (see appendices), was a real shock. Perhaps they distorted the image of a developing country and people who live in joy and welfare that affected by the propagandas of the Shāh's regime about the onset of a golden era in Iran that we still have in mind. Now, thanks to the documentary photos of Golestan, we can discover a latent face of Iranian society that the Pahlavi regime tried to hide from the world. The authors believe that Golestan intended to say although there were several state-run organizations whit the mission of poverty alleviation, the dominant bureaucracy and the denial of poverty either have complicated the assistance to destitute people (See Figures 10-12).

Take a look, for example, at Figure 11, we see a jealous looking of a worker looking at the published image of the Shāh and Empress Farah stood next to President Jimmy Carter (1924) and his wife during their visit from Iran; all dressed in prestigious colorful clothes. The photo depicted an obvious paradox between the pretty world in which the royal family lived and that of the poor workman and his comrades.



Figure 10: Kaveh Golestan, nameless, from the series of the Prostitutes, photo, 1975-77.



Figure 11: Kaveh Golestan, nameless, from the Labor series, photo, 1975-77.



Figure 12: Kaveh Golestan, nameless, from the Mental handicap series, photo, 1975-77.

The Mohassess brothers, Bahman and Ardeshir, are among visual artists whose works' subjects can be considered as socio-protest ones. Bahman Mohassess (1931-2010) was a painter, sculptor, poet, play writer, and also a translator. He was one of the members of the avant-garde group founded by the father of modern Iranian art, Jalil Ziapour⁴ (see appendices) someone who had always been known as an avant-garde leader, promoting Modern art and initiating criticism in Iran. During the same period, he joined (Anjoman-e Khorous Jangi), established by Jalil Ziapour. After the Coup, Bahman Mohassess, like many of his contemporary artists, left his homeland to Rome where he attended the School of Fine Arts, and he was close to Ferruccio Ferrazzi (1891-1978) a famous Italian painter. He then returned to Iran in 1964 and participated in Venice, Sao Paolo, and Tehran Biennales, and in 1968 he left Iran again to Paris and later to Rome, where he remained until the end of his life. His works often depict dark characters, without faces in distress, as a hybrid of monsters and humans of mythological origin (see Figures 13, 14). He used these unknown creatures to express overriding anguish and despair for being misunderstood and unappreciated as an artist by the rulers who forced him to leave his homeland to exile and to express profound pessimism about humanity's ability to control its fate. And also the motive of a fish out of the water which is repeatedly seen in Mohassess's works, and as he says in Fifi Howls from Happiness documentary by Mitra Farahani, fish might be the artist himself representing dislocation and struggle. Of course, I am a historical artist! The day will come when the handicapped people will become aware of his clumsiness", he had dared in an interview at the time of his glory, in 1967. Provocateur, willingly cynical, perpetual indignant, Bahman Mohassess (1931-2010) was, in addition to a prolific artist with a sure gesture, a colorful man, resolved "to put his nose in the shit". Seeing his works today, even if it can only happen at the turn of a film or an old photo, does not leave indifferent as the subjects of his paintings and sculptures are strong, screaming if not overwhelming with their shapes hybrids with fish, deity, and monster at the same time.

Unfortunately, revolutionaries destroyed a great number of his works. He also destroyed even more of his works in rage at man's inhumanity to man.

The works of Ardeshir Mohassess, Bahman's brother, are also labeled as Iranian protest arts, and despite Bahman's works the footprint of politics is more obvious in them. Ardeshir was an illustrator, graphic



Figure 13: Bahman Mohassess, nameless, oil painting on canvas, Museum of Contemporary Arts in Tehran? 1974.



Figure 14: Bahman Mohassess, nameless, oil painting on canvas and collage of fish motifs, Rome, 2010.

satirist, cartoonist, and painter, who played a major role in the development of satirical cartoons in Iran, resided in New York after the Revolution. He believed that despite rapid changes in the appearance of Iranian society, taken place after Pahlavi's modernization reforms, it has eventually remained radical and bonded to its well-institutionalized traditions and stated his attitudes by his works. He created satirical drawings of Iran's historical characters such as the shāhs of Qajar, the shāh and famous people, in addition to the daily life of the Iranians in Qajar dynasty trying to say that, a few

essential socio-political changes have occurred and main characteristics of the Pahlavi regime are identical to that of Qajars. Drawing upon Persian folk art, miniatures, and 19th-century lithographic illustrations, which were practiced after the introduction of lithography print to Iran in the 1850s, Ardeshir produced an extraordinary volume of work portraying current events and everyday life of people. He often combined lithographic illustrations of *Šāh-nāma*, as well as religious lore and literary books, and complemented them by his unique sense of humor. His illustrations, arguably the best in the style, were often created for editorial pages of newspapers and periodicals. Influenced by multiple sources they were minutely detailed, heavily hatched, and crosshatched. In 1976 Mohassess traveled to New York City again where he developed a special technique for articulating subjects like human rights and socio-political freedom in the different countries as well as Iran by a few strokes of lines in ink or by pencil in a satirical manner. One can never change anything by art, Mohassess said in 1973. The only thing one can say is that artists in each period of history leave a record so that people in the future will know about their time. Just like his older brother, Ardeshir preferred to leave Iran because of the extreme censorship imposed by the secret police of the regime, SAVAK, to live in New York for his remaining years.



Figure 15: Ardeshir Mohassess, *The King and I*, from the Series of life in Iran, drawing on paper, Library of Congress, United States, 1978.



Figure 16: Ardeshir Mohassess, *The men bent in prayer to God and the government airplanes arrived*, drawing on paper, Library of Congress, United States, 1978.

Bijan Jazani was a major figure among modern Iranian social and political activist before being an artist. He was the co-founder and theoretician of the paramilitary communist organization called Iranian People's Fadaian (in Persian: *ایران فدائیان خلق*) which was a branch of the Tudeh party, of which his parents were active members. After the Tudeh party became illegal in 1949, Jazani continued participation in the secret meetings of the party. Then, he was arrested, accused of trying to arrange an attack against the Shāh, and was eventually executed with eight of his comrades after being tortured during several years in captivity. There are many paintings left by him that depict his prison memories. The influence of Cubism, Surrealism, German 1920s Expressionism schools, and Fauvism in the many paintings left by him. He did not access to art education and was amateur and a self-taught artist. However, we found his paintings very interesting and remarkable to be introduced as political works before the Revolution. Figure 17 titled *Siyahkal* (1971), inspired by the *Siyahkal* event refers to a guerrilla operation against the Pahlavi regime organized by Iranian People's Fadaee guerrillas that happened near *Siyahkal* town at the north of Iran in 1971. The painting is a tribute to brave involved guerrilla those who were killed during the *Siyahkal* skirmish or arrested and then executed by the regime.

In Iranian and Indo-European cultures, deer is the symbol of courage, power, speed, and dignity. The eye symbolizes wisdom and vigilance. Seeing the painting for the first time, remind the audience of the painting by Frida Kahlo (1907-1954), *The Wounded Deer* (1946). Jazani had not perhaps seen Kahlo's painting before. Although the two works resemble each other

stunningly, there are a few nuances. For example, the gazelle in Frida Kahlo's painting has gestures that differ from the aggressive deer in the Siyahkal painting.



Figure 17: Bijan Jazani, Siyahkal, painting, 1971.

cell as a womb that surrounds him. He shows himself as a fetus, squatted but sensible at the same time, waiting for an upcoming destiny that is becoming free from this dense uterus. A hope that unfortunately never came true for him.



Figure 19: Bijan Jazani, Prisoner, painting, 1971.



Figure 18: Frida Kahlo, The wounded deer, painting, 1946.

The calm gestures of gazelles and the use of living colors in the painting titled Life, confirms the fact that the world of Jazani was not black and depressing. He was waiting for a new time to come in the hope that the Pahlavi regime would fall soon (See Figure 20).

The last painting of Jazani, the Prisoner, is undoubtedly a testimony of the artist's difficult last years in captivity, before being executed by SAVAK, despite he was sentenced to 15 years prison by Court of First Instance. As you can see, the artist depicted his



Figure 20: Bijan Jazani, Life, painting, date?

At that time, there was also a new generation of artists who were ideologically close to Islamic groups

that were obeying Imam Khomeini, their religious and political leader, were fighting against the regime. This intellectual dependence was displayed, by a Combination of the Realism and Expressionism styles, in their artworks that emphasized on the concept of revolution of Muslim people in Iran. This new strong artistic movement promotes in-depth the ideology of Political Islam and succeeded to unite all separate groups under the command of Imam Khomeini to combat the regime (See Figures 21-25).

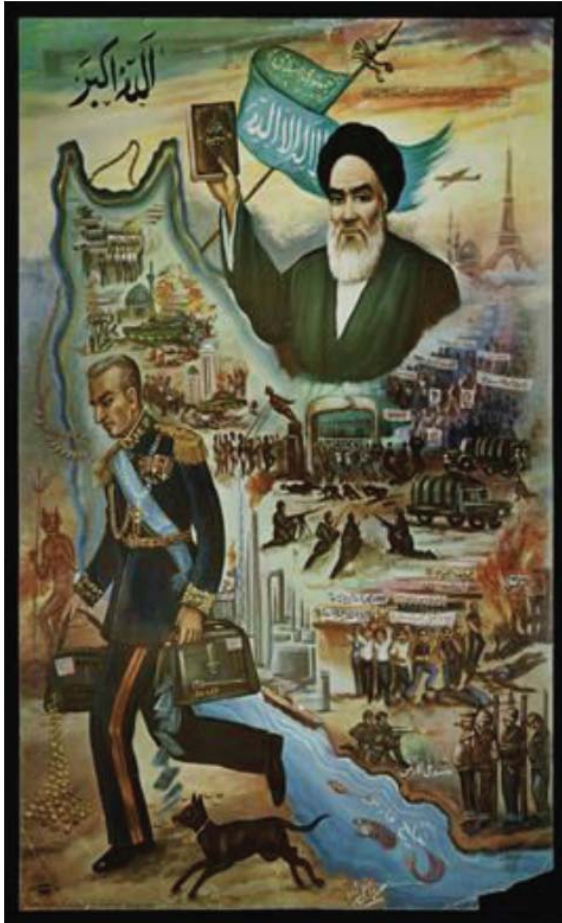


Figure 21: Hasan ISMA'ILZADAH, The Shah's Exile and Imam Khomeini's Return, Oil painting on canvas, 1979.



Figure 22: Bahram Dabiri, An Illustration of the Islamic Revolution, Oil painting on canvas, 140 X 700 cm, 1980.



Figure 23: Kazem Chalipa, Black Friday, Oil painting on canvas, 1979.



Figure 24: Ayoub Emdadiyan, Sapling of Freedom Oil painting on canvas, 1976.



Figure 25: Hossein Khosrowjerdi, Hay Ali Al-Falah, Oil painting on canvas, 1978.

Like Nosratollah Moslemian (1953), a revolutionary painter, has created several works with Revolution and protest related subjects, by applying a mixture of Expressionism and Fauvism styles. Compared to the other Moslemian's contemporary artists, whom practiced revolutionary-related subjects in their works, his unique style has made his works prominent. Moslemian used strict paint stains along with thick

layers of pale colors to show the miserable populace who stuck in deplorable conditions and will never survive (See Figures 26-28).



Figure 26: Nosratollah Moslemian, Farmer, Oil painting on canvas, 1978.



Figure 27: Nosratollah Moslemian, The strike of the workers of the Petroleum Company, Oil painting on canvas, 1979.



Figure 28: Nosratollah Moslemian, Immigration, Oil painting on canvas, 1977.

CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the reaction of some noted Iranian visual artists, illustrated in their artworks, to the major political changes from the 1953 Coup, which overthrew the democratically elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh in favour of strengthening the monarchical of Mohammad- Reza Pahlavi, to the victory of Islamic Revolution and establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Despite the long history of critical literature in Iran, the noted presence of visual artworks with a critical and political subject is relatively novel and back to the end of Qajar dynasty in the form of cartoons were published in newspapers. The paper additionally perused the advent of new artistic current impressed by the lack of socio-political freedoms despite agricultural and industrial movements toward modernization after the White Revolution of the Shāh. According to the present study, it can be claimed that the political visual arts owed its breakthrough to the presence of Modern and Contemporary art because of the international artistic events like biennials and the annual Festival of Arts held in Tehran and Shiraz respectively, after the Second World War.

It seems to the authors that becoming liberated from the imposed restricts of Persian traditional arts, political and critical concepts were conveyed properly in the new-introduced style of Visual Arts. In other words, these all attracted the young generation of modernist artists, inspired by the new protest movements against the royal regime and the new artistic styles used to display the great political events triggered after the 1953 Coup. During the Pahlavi dynasty, although the regime was fostering all forms of modernist, in the field of culture and art, in particular, severe censorship was imposing on the subjects by the SAVAK at the same time.

Apart from the activist those who were imprisoned because of the context of their artworks, the study of interviews done by some modernist artists in exile like the Mohassess brothers, Akbar Behkalam, Kaveh Golestan and the others, they stated self-censorship as the main reason of self-imposed immigration.

Furthermore, critics should not underestimate the artistic reception phase. Hence, when we talk about the receptive phase of an artwork, we think subconsciously about the aesthetics aspects displayed by the artist simultaneously. We often consider the artistic reception of an artwork as something, which is separate from aesthetics elements used by the artist. However, these

elements play a crucial role in manufacturing the meaning and interpretation of the work in viewer's mind. Thus, it is naive if one ignores the key role of shared experience of viewers, in the process of determining the meaning of an artwork and considers it much less important than the mental and spiritual secretions of the work creator.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While there were certainly more protest artists whose works laid under the category of protest arts, this paper focused on the most important ones who had a considerable influence on the protest climate of Iran. Future works can investigate other works of art and also literature of the time and their effects on the politics.

APPENDIXES

1. A dominant art painting school at the end of the Qajar dynasty and the early years of Pahlavi I as the subject of works created based on the School are often Islamic religious stories about life and death of Shiite imams and famous Shiite characters as well as epic stories from Shāhnāme. The artists inspired by QahvehXāne School were usually self-taught and the best-known painters of this School are Mohammad Modabber and Hossein Ghoular Aghassi. In recent decades some contemporary painters like Mansour Vafayi, Seyyed Hossein Hosseini, Mohammad Farahani, and ... began to use QahvehXāne School in their works.
2. Shāh in Persian means King in English, we name Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi simply The Shāh in texts and media. We commonly refer to the other kings of Iran with their first names next to the word shāh in historical text.
3. « Shahr-e Now was initiated by state officials, and preserved during the Pahlavi period, mainly for the sake of the military population in Tehran. Using the vast literature on the rise of the modern army in Iran as part of the Pahlavi Dynasty's establishment, the increasing number of soldiers in Tehran was the main reason why the Pahlavi regime allowed the creation of Shahr-e Now; the state-regulated prostitution in Shahr-e Now served to provide the military with "clean women." RASHIDPOUR Samin (2015), SHAHR-E NOW, TEHRAN'S RED-LIGHT

DISTRICT (1909–1979): THE STATE, "THE PROSTITUTE," THE SOLDIER, AND THE FEMINIST.

4. Iran was occupied by the Allies in 1945; The armies of Soviet, Britain, and America were settled in the North, center, and south of the country respectively. Although this inauspicious presence was catastrophic for the majority of people, the Modern Arts took advantage of the circumstances. Communicating with foreigners, who brought novel thoughts with themselves, opened new perspectives to the artists and liberated them from limit borders of traditional art styles. Therefore, a new generation of modernist artists was appeared in the Iranian art community besides several galleries dedicated to modern artworks that made the first connection with western galleries.

It was the time that Jalil Ziapour (1920-1999) (in Persian: جلیل ضیائی پور), painter and father of modern Iranian art, founded the Fighting Cock Art Society (1942) and published a journal with the same name, there was a slogan on the cover of the journals that stated: "In the Fighting Cock Art society, our goal is to raise the level of public knowledge."

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