



Etemadi's signature motifs — pomegranates, flowers and Persian vases — are symbols of a rich culture and the spirit of the people, while the fish represent the artist, who is a Piscean

Scenes of destruction hide hope for future

Parvaneh Etemadi's works allude to the cycle of apocalypse and renewal

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Well-known Iranian artist Parvaneh Etemadi's latest exhibition in Dubai, titled *Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars*, features a series of thought-provoking collages filled with a variety of elements such as fish, insects, serpents, flowers, pomegranates, knives, traditional Persian textiles, and references to Iranian myths, fables, literature, art and history.

The interesting thing about these colourful collages is that the artist has cut out all these elements from photocopies and prints of her earlier pencil drawings. Etemadi's collages speak about the violence and destruction in Iran and the region as well as around the world. But through the process of destroying her old drawings and bringing them back to life in another form, the artist expresses her hope that something better will emerge from the turmoil.

In a career spanning over five decades, Etemadi has experimented with various media and genres. She began by doing abstract paintings, and later moved on to do still life and figurative oil paintings on a cement surface. In the 1980s, while her country was being ravaged by the Iran-Iraq war, she immersed herself in making drawings with colour pencils. Her subjects ranged from household utensils and furniture, flowers, fish and pomegranates to exquisite hand-woven textiles.

Using her pencil strokes like a weaver uses thread, Etemadi reproduced rich brocades, feminine clothing with delicate lace and the traditional Iranian "termeh".

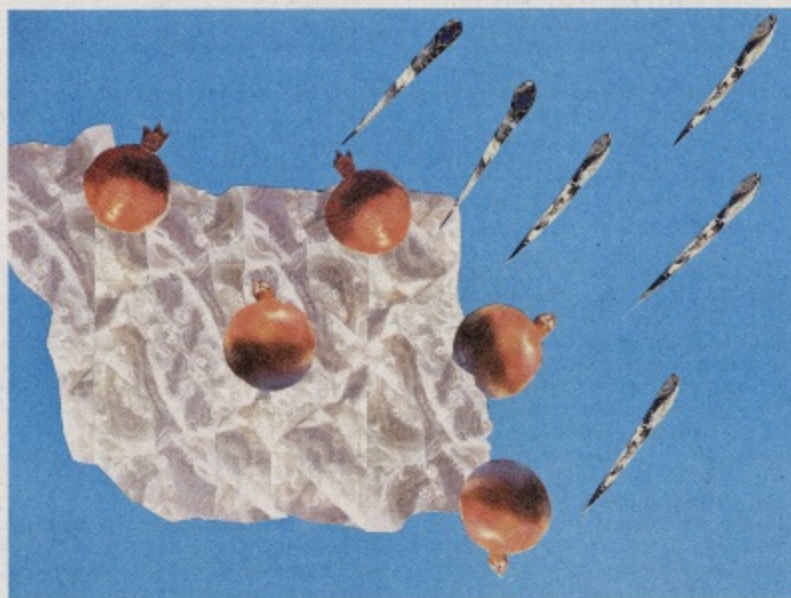
Although there were no people in the drawings, their presence could be felt in the weaving and embroidery and in the folds and flowing movement of the textiles and garments. At the same time, the textiles also connected her work to a bygone era and her rich cultural heritage. During this period Etemadi also collaborated with various other artists to create interesting artworks. For example, she worked with Indian artist Manjit Bawa to create paintings where his signature cows were draped with her pencilled textiles.

Having explored pencil drawing to its limit, in the 1990s she moved to another medium. Scissors became her new tool and she used them to cut up reproductions of her pencil drawings to make collages. She has been working with this medium for over two decades, creating various figures and shapes, and folding and twisting them to infuse them with life and movement.

Etemadi's latest exhibition, which is curated by Ali Bakhtiari, features her collages from 2010 and 2011. The apocalyptic world in these collages reflects the conflicts that erupted in the region at that time. You can see colourful fish floating on the canvases, but hovering just above them are sharp daggers, scissors and golden hooks. The map of Iran appears draped in rich textiles and decorated with pretty flowers; but also surrounded by malevolent knives, serpents



Powerful metaphor The use of British two-penny coins (above) speak about how cheap life has become. In another work, the map of Iran (below) appears draped in textiles and decorated with flowers but also surrounded by malevolent knives



and insects. Shiny British two-penny coins speak about how cheap life has become and about old values that have been lost. Etemadi's signature motifs such as pomegranates, narcissus flowers, lace and brocade, Persian vases, and old manuscripts appear in the compositions as symbols of a rich culture and the undying spirit of the people.

In another set of collages, that artist has used ancient wedding contracts to create traditional wedding garments. A clock with Roman numbers hidden among the folds of the garments and numbers written in English lining the front are a reminder of the timelessness of good values and the need to adhere to them.

"My work is essentially about the in-

herent duality in our lives and within every person. I have tried to find a balance in my collages by juxtaposing good with evil, feminine with masculine, a poisonous snake with one that represents good health, and the past with the present. My collages reflect the fact that this is the time of Mars, the planet of war and destruction. And the dark blue background in these artworks represents femininity as well as an element of lunacy. I want to say that the dark side of the moon brings out lunacy out of sanity, and my region is now facing towards that side. My zodiac sign is Pisces, so the fish in my work represent me.

"But they also represent everyone who is dealing with the violence and destruction that is all around us. However, just as my old drawings have been deconstructed and reconstructed to form new artworks, I believe that from the destruction that exists in the world today will be reborn a new and better world," the artist says.

Etemadi is also displaying a video titled *Once Upon a Time*, which tells the story of apocalypse and rebirth of the Earth through various animated elements, ranging from her favourite motifs of fish, pomegranates and textiles to a Roman bust and characters from Persian poet Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*.

■ *Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars* will run at JAMM art gallery, Al Quoz, until June 13.