



PAPER POWER

MUHAMMAD YUSUF
PROFILES AN IRANIAN
ARTIST WHOSE
COLLAGES ON
CARDBOARD AT A
DUBAI EXHIBITION
EVOKE FEELINGS OF
WONDER AND
REVULSION

JAMM, the independent art advisory based in Kuwait and the UAE, with an office in London, is currently hosting an exhibition of works on paper by renowned Iranian artist Parvaneh Etemadi (May 14 - Jun 13) at the JAMM Art Gallery in Al Quoz, Dubai.

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1948, Etemadi is regarded as one of the most successful and popular contemporary Iranian artists. Her paintings are exhibited internationally and auctioned by leading art houses, including Christie's.

She spent her early childhood in the city of Birjand (in south of Khorasan, close to the vast barren eastern Iranian plateau). After primary and secondary education, she studied painting at the Fine Art College, Tehran University, where she became associated with a group of progressive, innovative painters of Talar Ghandriz.

Originally known as "Talar-e-Iran" or Hall of Iran, the name was later changed to Talar Ghandriz by the artists. Talar Ghandriz attracted emerging artists, including Etemadi, who were eager for new experiments and fresh ideas. She not only participated in more than ten of their group exhibitions (1967-77), but also held her first solo exhibition at the same hall (Ghandriz) in 1969.

Her first serious teacher was Bahman Mohases, already

known in the sixties as an innovative painter. During the first period of her artistic activity, probably due to her collaboration and sympathies with the Talar-e-Iran artists and also under the influence of academic life, she "came out" as an abstract painter. Her abstract works were noted for their free compositions of forms. Pleasing proportions, extensive touches of cold opaque colours, candid and resolute designs, were other features.

In the second period of her artistic practice in the 1970s, she began synthesising the constructivism of her first period with a determined assay into figurative art. Minimalism is the word here; the works of this period are predominantly still life and figures, carried out with rough sketchy textures of oil colour, on a cement base rooted in a modern minimal structure.

In the 1980s, she turned to colour pencils, which made her eye "the imaginary basement of her grandmother, with trunks of old forgotten outfits and textiles". During this period, by virtue of techniques she had mastered, out came a cornucopia of warm, harmonious and balanced colours. She reproduced fine garments and textiles of silk and termeh (cashmere) designed with flowers, fruit, home utensils and appliances.

She then cast her art eye on collage, which marks the fourth period of her work. Now were created compositions made of cut photocopied pieces of her previous colour pencil drawings. They were glued on the surface of wide canvases and the palette began to be even more colourful and varied. It is said to be a kind of artistic improvisation of fantastic free dancing outfits which often broke through the surface and the frame of the canvas.

In her current series of collages, she brings alive inanimate objects (fish, pomegranates, knives and delicate hand-woven textiles) and combines them with ancient Iranian myths, fables and literature. It reveals her attention to and criticism of the social environment of contemporary Iran.

She strongly denies that she deliberately set out to be an "Iranian" artist. "I painted fifty years", she has said, "before realising how Iranian my work was. It was unintentional. On the contrary, I resisted against letting my work take an indigenous taste. I did not leaf through miniature books to find my compositions".

This could be because throughout her career spanning over four decades, she has constantly reinvented herself and her practice. There is no one forte or genre that she calls her own.



IN HER CURRENT SERIES OF COLLAGES, SHE BRINGS ALIVE INANIMATE OBJECTS (FISH, POMEGRANATES, KNIVES AND DELICATE HAND-WOVEN TEXTILES) AND COMBINES THEM WITH ANCIENT IRANIAN MYTHS, FABLES AND LITERATURE

She defies categorisation! She is lost in a universe of her own, brought to being by repetitive patterns, which are no means accidental, but are a product of intense concentration. She brings to her art her own unique set of experiences, won by hard work in various styles over decades.

Her mania for utilising art ideas wherever they spring from, her zest for finding rhythm and beauty, her passion for re-inventing herself and her pursuit of

new ways to express herself make her works uniquely intense, filled with vitality and dynamism, and saturate them with humour, joy and mystery, not to speak of impish mischief.

The JAMM show is vintage Etemadi. Who else but she can combine reptilian forms and pomegranates, dresses and daggers, fish like the coelacanth and coffee pots, fish hooks and coins, silks and sharks? Even the title would have been outlandish (Dowry of a Fairy Princess to

Mars, series), if not for the contents, which seamlessly fit each other. A video titled *Once Upon a Time* is also on. It loops every six minutes and floating in it are monsters, classical statues and fruits, among other things. It evokes a feeling of dread, like memory being assaulted by fear.

Darius Zandi, owner of Total Arts Gallery, Dubai, noted that Etemadi was "one of the artists who has been continuously moving with time, introducing new types of art making, but without

forgetting who she was". "We are thrilled and honoured to present an exhibition of Parvaneh Etemadi's recent works on paper in our Dubai gallery", said Sheikhha Lulu MAI Sabah, JAMM founder and director. "She is a remarkable contemporary Iranian artist and it's been a very long time since she had her last solo show in Dubai. This exhibition opens a couple of months after we launched our gallery with a show by another grande dame of Iranian art, Farideh Lashai."

JAMM was established in 2009 and its stated mission is to create cultural projects without geographical boundaries, from large-scale exhibitions to small-scale events and activities, which advance Arab and Iranian artists in the West and Western artists in the East, thus furthering collaboration between the two.

It was after sixty five years of artistic exploration, experimentation, heart breaks and breakthroughs that Iranian art and culture attained contemporary life. Today, based on traditional and national elements, it consists of a number of approaches, styles and schools, and shows a turbulent, dynamic, diverse and rich face.

Modernisation began in the 1950s and lasted till the 70s, when the Shah of Iran actively promoted westernisation. During this period, young artists sought ways to enter the international mainstream. A few made art that was modern looking by western standards. But they were Iranian in context. H Zendouroudi and P Tanavoli were two noted artists of that era.

In 1979, the year of the Iranian revolution, the art scene changed dramatically and the 1980s were probably the darkest years, when the war with Iraq dominated every aspect of Iranian life. Even then, Iranian cinema, with all its limitations, flourished and many notable films were made and were shown in major film festivals around the world.

1990 was a year of change. Artists began showing their works again and new galleries opened. Works by a new generation of young artists also began to be shown. In the 90s and beyond, European cities and festivals, with the support of governmental institutions like the Iranian Museum of Modern Art, began hosting art shows.

Photography has perhaps seen one of the biggest booms in post-revolution Iran, and the West has become intrigued by Iran's photographic output and talent. Along with photographers, a number of artists are now represented by galleries in Europe, America and Middle Eastern countries.