

Contemporary Artists Investigate the Plurality of Identity in 21st Century Iran at the Aga Khan Museum

Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians opens February 4, 2017



Photo credit: *Miss Hybrid 3*, Shirin Aliabadi, 2008. Image courtesy of the artist.

Toronto, December 21, 2016 — Beginning February 4, 2017, a pioneering and insightful collection of post-revolution Iranian art will be presented for the first time at the Aga Khan Museum. Featuring works by 23 contemporary artists, the world-premiere exhibition *Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians* showcases the many identities of today's Iranians through 27 works selected from the private collection of Iranian-British financier and art collector Mohammed Afkhami.

The works of art featured in the exhibition confront such issues of today as gender, politics, and religion — topics familiar to those in the Western world — through quiet rebellion, humour, mysticism, and poetry. These paintings, videos, sculptures, and photographs created since 1998 present a different side of Iran, previously unseen by Western audiences, and yet very familiar in its medium and meaning.

“Despite the sanctions, isolation, and political unrest characterizing Iran in this millennium, the creative forces of Iranian artists have not been dampened,” says Dr. Fereshteh Daftari, curator of *Contemporary Persians*. “The narratives presented in the exhibition are woven out of genuine obsession and eloquent resilience. This is not the first exhibition on the subject, but it is the first to cast these artists and their works in light of their fortitude.”

Exhibition highlights include:

- A digital portrait from the *Miss Hybrid* series by Tehran-based artist Shirin Aliabadi;
- A fighter jet made from 32 stacked Persian carpets by Shiraz-born artist Farhad Moshiri;
- A painted fiberglass sculpture standing nearly two metres tall by renowned Iranian-Canadian artist and sculptor Parviz Tanavoli; and
- A triptych from the *Snow White* series, which began just after the outbreak of the Iranian Revolution, by late photographer and filmmaker Abbas Kiarostami.

In addition to being renowned for his contributions towards preserving and promoting modern art from the Middle East as a collector, Afkhami is also well known for his art philanthropy – as he is a Founding Member of the British Museum’s ‘Middle East and North Africa Art Acquisition Committee,’ a member of the Guggenheim Museum’s ‘Middle East and North Africa Art Acquisition Committee,’ and a member of the Board of Patrons for Art Dubai.

“A passion for the arts of Iran, tinged with patriotic undertones, is part of Mohammed Afkhami’s family history,” notes Dr. Daftari. “In a little over a decade, Afkhami has acquired some 300 works, many of them now iconic, from 1961 to today.”

Exhibition-related programming includes an Artists’ Symposium, featuring scholars from both Iran and Canada, and performances by renowned Iranian artists, such as singer-songwriter Mohsen Namjoo and Tehran-born singer Soley Vaseghi. The Museum’s restaurant, Diwan, will be offering special menu items that celebrate the textures and flavours of Iranian cuisine.

Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians is curated by Dr. Fereshteh Daftari in cooperation with the Mohammed Afkhami Foundation, and runs through June 4, 2017 at the Aga Khan Museum.

The Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, Canada, has been established and developed by the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), which is an agency of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). The Museum’s mission is to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of the contribution that Muslim civilizations have made to world heritage while often reflecting, through both its permanent and temporary exhibitions, how cultures connect with one another. Designed by architect Fumihiko Maki, the Museum shares a 6.8-hectare site with Toronto’s Ismaili Centre, which was designed by architect Charles Correa. The surrounding landscaped park was designed by architect Vladimir Djurovic.

– 30 –

FOR PRESS INQUIRIES PLEASE CONTACT:

Jackie Koffman, Holmes PR
jkoffman@holmespr.com, 1.416.628.5608

Arlene Madell, Aga Khan Museum
press@agakhanmuseum.org, 1.416.858.8735
agakhanmuseum.org, 1.416.646.4677