Pleated Modernity: On Anthropologization of Modern Art in Iran, 1941–1979

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Bring new words!—for in newness is another sweetness told.

—Jalil Ziapour and his colleagues' motto, derived from a poem by the eleventh century poet Farrukhi Sistani

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.

—Karl Marx

High Art is for all people, but Low Art is only liked by laymen.

—Ziapour

All history is the preparation for 'man' to become the object of sensuous consciousness, and for the needs of 'man as man' to become [natural, sensuous] needs. History itself is a real part of natural history—of nature's coming to be man

—Marx

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Rooster Crows

1.1 General Introduction

When readers' gaze fell on the first issue of *Khorus Jangi* (The Fighting Rooster) in 1949, they would be immediately arrested by the cover image (fig.1.1) designed by

Iranian modernist artist Jalil Ziapour (1920–1999). A lone, majestic rooster stood within a frame, devoid of any accompanying title or context, leaving the viewer in eager anticipation of what lies ahead. The rooster's self-confident posture would strike the most—beak agape, chest thrust forward, one foot planted firmly behind, wings outstretched, while its angular lines and geometric composition convey that it belongs to an era of machines. Its posture, anchored by a sturdy triangular base, and its piercing gaze, locked on an invisible point beyond the frame, radiate a sense of unyielding alertness and resolve rather than impulsively charging forward. The rooster appears to be addressing an invisible audience beyond the frame as if heralding a pivotal moment in history. This visual rhetoric evokes the modernist imperative for collective action, urging the masses to seize agency in shaping their own destiny and, by extension, to inscribe themselves into the broader historical schema.

Upon turning the page, readers would encounter "From the City of Morning" (*Az shahr-e Sobh*) by modernist poet Nima Yushij (commonly known under his pen name Nima), confirming the initial impression conveyed by the cover image.[1] In its strategic positioning following the image, Nima's verse functions as a literary corollary to the pictorial proclamation, amplifying the periodical's avant-garde imperative to precipitate societal metamorphosis through aesthetic awakening. The poem emerges as a declaration of cultural renaissance, while its deliberate juxtaposition with Ziapour's gallinaceous figure intimates a calculated coalition between poets and visual artists in their concurrent pursuit of modernist ideals.[2] Ziapour explains:

[1]Please refer to the appendix for the English transcript of the poem.

[2]This alliance is unsurprising given the poet's long-standing role as the vanguard of cultural awakening and poetry's far stronger tradition of modernism compared to the fine arts. As Shiva Balaghi observes, "increasingly the role of artist was fused with that of the poet, the long-standing

> In our ancient literature, the rooster, as a messenger of the angel Bahman, would crow at dawn from atop the fences, awakening people and calling them to work and endeavor. For this reason, since it crowed and sounded the wake-up call, we chose the rooster as our symbol, both for what we were doing and for its beauty.[3]

Upon learning of this symbolically resonant choice, Nima responded by contributing both the aforementioned poem and a series of pedagogical essays entitled "Words from the Neighbor (harfhay-e hamsayeh)," demonstrating his sustained commitment to their modernist enterprise.[4]

In his composition, Ziapour synthesized ancient Persian iconography, specifically the mythological creatures adorning Persepolis' processional friezes, with contemporary modernist sensibilities.[5] This fusion extended to incorporate Picasso's rooster imagery, which emerged as a potent symbol of French resurgence during the Nazi occupation.[6] While Picasso's renditions featured fluid, playful contours, Ziapour's interpretation embraced geometric precision, embodying technological advancement through angular forms and linear elements.

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conscience of Iranian society" Balaghi, "Iranian Visual Arts in 'the Century of Machinery, Speed, and the Atom'," 31.

[3]Ziapour, *An Anthology of Jalil Ziapour's Artistic and Investigative Speeches (Majmu'e-ye Sokhanrani-haye Honar-e-Tahghighi-e Zendeyad Ostad Jalil Ziapour)*, 287.

[4]Ziapour, 287. In traditional Iranian literature, the rooster (*khorus*) was considered a symbol of wakefulness and was associated with Bahman, the divine being. At dawn, the rooster was believed to announce Bahman's arrival. In Zoroastrian texts written in Pahlavi and in broader Zoroastrian tradition, the rooster was associated with the spiritual being ('*yazata*') known as *Sraosha* in the Avesta. In Islamic belief, the rooster became a symbol of awakening for the morning prayer. Foroutan, "Why the Fighting Cock ? The Significance of the Imagery of the Khorus Jangi and Its Manifesto ' The Slaughterer of the Nightingale '," xxxiii.

[5]According to Foroutan, Ziapour's Khorus was inspired by the friezes at Persepolis. Foroutan, "Why the Fighting Cock ? The Significance of the Imagery of the Khorus Jangi and Its Manifesto ' The Slaughterer of the Nightingale '," xxxiii.

[6]Foroutan, xxxvii.

This mechanical interpretation of the rooster as a herald of modernization finds its literary parallel in Nima's poetry, but the symbol takes on political dimensions. Nima's "From the City of Morning" narrates an awakening led by a rooster, echoing Immanuel Kant's formulation of enlightenment as a gradual process of liberation from 'the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another." Kant recognized—and Nima seems to agree—the constraints on and necessity of freedom for enlightenment, as "a public can only slowly arrive at enlightenment."[7] In Nima's poem, the rooster's "Cock-a-doodle-doo" serves as a rallying cry for the enlightened few—the caravan—to navigate through the darkness towards a new dawn. But the process cannot be rushed Kant distinguishes between an "enlightened age" and an "age of enlightenment," asserting that while his era had not achieved full enlightenment, it was actively progressing towards it.[8] "From the City of Morning" echoes this view through its portrayal of a liminal temporality—a transitional period where night recedes, but dawn has not yet fully broken.

In Nima's poem, the caravan's journey symbolizes the gradual enlightenment process. As it advances, it allows the public to join, mirroring the way enlightenment spreads through society. The enlightened individuals—artists and literati among them—embody Kant's notion of those who have freed themselves from intellectual immaturity. "Who is it who has fallen behind? / Who is it, who is tired?" Nima challenges readers to join the caravan towards a new collective reality. By exercising their public reason, they contribute to society's gradual enlightenment, embodying

[7]Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, 8:36.
[8]Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History.*

the Kantian imperative to dare to know ("Sapere aude!").

The cover of *Khorus Jangi* proclaimed its cultural mission: "Increasing the culture of Iranians with the Fighting Rooster association."[9] The statement encapsulates the avant-garde's commitment to cultural enlightenment in mid-twentieth-century Iran while positioning these artists within a broader historical narrative of emancipation that traces back to the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911. Following in the footsteps of Nima, avant-garde artists like Jalil Ziapour saw themselves as the inheritors of this revolutionary spirit, envisioning their role as contributors to the public use of reason by liberating art from traditional constraints. Thus, he—like many of his like-minded artists—viewed his work as a continuation of the progressive ideals that had animated Iranian intellectuals since the Constitutional era, adapting the struggle for political and social reform to the realm of culture and aesthetics.

1.2 Historical Context

On August 15, 1941, the Allied forces swept into Iran. A month later, on September 15, they abdicated Reza Shah (1878-1944, reigned from 1925 to 1941), terminating his two decades of autocratic rule, and installed his twenty-one-year-old son Muhammad Reza (1919-1980, reigned from 1941 to 1979) as the new Shah.[10] While British forces controlled southern Iran and Soviet forces occupied the north, this period of foreign occupation paradoxically created an opening for new political and cultural

[9] Cited in Nahidi, *The Cultural Politics of Art in Iran*, 238. See the cover of Fighting Rooster Magazine, no. 1 (Tehran, 1948).

[10] Katouzian drew a parallel between Reza Shah's downfall and Napoleon III's defeat in 1870, noting that both rulers lost power as a result of foreign military occupation. Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran*, 141.

possibilities. With Soviet support, autonomous socialist governments emerged in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. However, these initiatives collapsed after Soviet forces withdrew from northern Iran under US and Iranian pressure.[11]

The occupation represented a stark departure from the previous era of state-directed modernization under Reza Shah. During the 1920s and 1930s, Tehran had undergone comprehensive urban renewal following nineteenth-century European planning principles.[12] The capital's neighborhoods were reorganized into orthogonal patterns with major thoroughfares running north-south and east-west.[13] According to municipal records, the establishment of the main boulevards and streets occurred between the late 1920s and mid-1930s, facilitated by the Street Widening Act of 1933.[14] These urban transformations profoundly influenced a new generation of Iranian artists, who absorbed the geometric rationality and ordered spatial relationships of the modernized cityscape into their artistic vocabulary.[15]

With the abrupt transition from Reza Shah to his son, the state's aggressive modernization campaign temporarily receded, creating space for cultural ferment and democratic aspirations to emerge from below. As the strict controls of previous decades loosened, artists, poets, and intellectuals who had operated in the shadows now sought to forge innovative forms of expression that responded to Iran's rapidly changing urban fabric. Their work increasingly reflected both the promise and tensions of modernization, as they grappled with questions of tradition and progress

[11]See Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*.

[12]Banani, *The Modernization of Iran, 1921-1941*, 145.

[13]See Kiyani, *The Architecture of Early Pahlavi (Me'mari Doreye Aval Pahalvi)*, 181.

[14]For example, major streets, including Cherahg-e Bargh St, Gomrok St, Youef Abad St, Estanbol St, Amiriy-e St and Ferdowsi Sq, were built during this period. See Kiyani, 37.

[15]For the impact of the new urban life on artists see Delzende, *Tahavolat-i Honar-i Iran*, 231–43.

in their artistic practice. The geometric abstractions and architectural motifs that emerged in Iranian modern art during this period bore witness to artists' lived experience of Tehran's transforming urban environment.

The artistic optimism of the late 1940s emerged during an interregnum when the newly installed Muhammad Reza Pahlavi wielded limited authority. This period of reduced state control fostered unprecedented opportunities for intellectual and artistic exploration. However, the creative energies unleashed during this time were soon curtailed. The 1953 coup d'état—orchestrated by British and American intelligence services—that overthrew Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh marked the end of this cultural opening. In its aftermath, a state-sponsored modern art movement arose that aligned with the Pahlavi regime's vision of positioning Iran on the global stage. The Shah's consolidation of power, supported by an extensive security apparatus, including the newly established SAVAK (National Intelligence and Security Organization), transformed the landscape of cultural production.

The First Tehran Biennial in 1958 presaged a seismic shift in Iran's artistic landscape, reflecting broader economic changes that would profoundly alter cultural production.[16] In the following two decades, Iran underwent a rapid and uneven modernization process, driven by several key factors: the country's increasing integration into global markets, the sweeping transformation of its agricultural sector, and an overwhelming dependence on booming oil exports. This economic metamorphosis, fueled by petrodollars and guided by the state's development policies, unleashed pow-

[16]Scholars has argued the significance of the biennials as a pivotal event. Combiz Moussavi-Aghdam, for example, identifies the origin of 'Iranian modernism' in the Tehran Biennials. Moussavi-Aghdam, "Art History, 'National Art' and Iranian Intellectuals in the 1960s," 137.

erful forces that reshaped not only Iran's socioeconomic structure but also its artistic expressions. As traditional modes of life and production gave way to new forms of labor and consumption, artists found themselves grappling with questions of identity, tradition, and modernity in an increasingly globalized context.

This dissertation examines the evolution of modern art in Iran from 1941 to 1979, a period marked by the nation's tumultuous transition from a predominantly agrarian society to one increasingly shaped by capitalist modes of production. This transformation unfolded against a backdrop of imperialist interventions, political upheaval, and cultural tensions, creating a complex milieu for artistic innovation. To illuminate the contradictions that shaped the relationship between cultural production and social life in this era, this study focuses on the works of three influential Iranian artists: Jalil Ziapour (1920–1999), Parviz Tanavoli (b. 1937), and Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian (1922–2019).

As Iran navigated its transition to capitalist modernity, artists faced the particular challenges of creating work from within what can be characterized as "uneven development"—a concept first introduced by Leon Trotsky and later elaborated by Ernst Mandel and David Harvey to describe how capitalism's expansion generates inherent spatial and temporal disparities.[17] From the 1950s to 1970s, this unevenness manifested starkly in Iran: while petroleum revenues drove rapid modernization in urban centers like Tehran, rural regions remained bound to pre-capitalist modes of production. The Green Revolution did not alleviate existing contradictions; instead, it intensified them. Implemented through the Shah's White Revolution and

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supported by Kennedy's Alliance for Progress, this program of agricultural mechanization achieved selective modernization while simultaneously uprooting peasants and artisans from traditional livelihoods. This displacement generated what Marx identified as a "reserve army of labor" that gravitated toward urban peripheries, fundamentally reshaping Iran's social fabric.

These conditions profoundly shaped artistic production in Iran. As new cultural institutions and patronage networks flourished in Tehran, traditional craft production and indigenous artistic practices faced displacement. Simultaneously, the response of Iranian artists to the contradictions of modernization evolved significantly. Earlier modernists like Ziapour had sought to penetrate the totality of fragmented social life through formal innovation.[18]

By the 1960s, artists increasingly turned their attention to Iran's internal "others" - tribal, rural, and traditional communities whose marginalization was produced by uneven capitalist development and the state's aggressive modernization policies. Their approach resembled Boasian participant observation in its surface emphasis on immersion in traditional cultures, though they never explicitly claimed this methodology. Tanavoli, for instance, worked with craftsmen in Tehran's southern quarters and incorporated their techniques into his modernist practice, yet the relationship remained one of patron-to-artisan rather than genuine cultural exchange. These artists maintained their elite (the professional-managerial class, so speaking) social status while selectively appropriating cultural forms from communities increasingly displaced

[18]Blake Stimson aptly summarizes this tendency of the classic modernism: "rtists are concerned with form, and the primary formal problem they face is representing the governing model of supersensible transcendence, or the social and epistemological infrastructure of understanding and experiencing the world." Stimson, *Citizen Warhol*, 38.

by market forces. Their engagement with "traditional" cultures, while perhaps motivated by a genuine interest in preservation, ultimately served to authenticate their work for both domestic ruling class and international markets while obscuring the economic forces driving cultural transformation. This turn from universalist aspirations to localized cultural exploration marked a significant reorientation in Iranian artistic practice—from attempting to construct a historical consciousness to preserving and re-enacting indigenous cultural forms within the perpetuity of the present.[19]

The period under study in this dissertation falls within what Michael Denning calls "the age of three worlds."[20] During this era, defined by the geopolitical division between the capitalist First World, the communist Second World, and the decolonizing Third World, culture assumed unprecedented significance as "a way of summarizing the ways in which groups distinguish themselves from other groups."[21] Culture expanded beyond its traditional association with elite literature and high arts and came to encompass all aspects of daily life and social practice. This shift marked a crucial change; culture now operated simultaneously as a field of political contestation, an instrument of national identity formation, and a mass-produced commodity. In this context, the process of cultural differentiation gained new urgency with the rise of nationalism and the spread of mass media. Denning captures this transformation in a striking passage: "Everyone discovered that culture had been mass-produced like Ford's cars; the masses had culture and culture had a mass."[22]

[19]For the anthropological conception of cultures, see Osborne, *Crisis as Form*.

[20]Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 2.

[21]Immanuel Wallerstein, quoted in Denning, 140. Arif Dirlik describes the Third World as "a residual category, a dumping ground for all who did not qualify as capitalist or socialist," became a crucial battleground for cultural politics." Dirlik, "Spectres of the Third World," 136.

[22]Dirlik, "Spectres of the Third World," 136.

Third Worldism emerged in the aftermath of World War II initially as a series of nationalist independence movements across formerly colonized and underdeveloped nations. The 1950s witnessed pivotal manifestations of national projects led by charismatic leaders: Gamal Abdel Nasser's articulation of Arab nationalism in Egypt, Jawaharlal Nehru's vision for an independent India, Sukarno in fighting against Dutch re-colonization efforts, and Mohammad Mosaddegh's steadfast commitment to economic sovereignty and the nationalization of oil. While these movements shared a fundamental commitment to national self-determination and opposition to colonial control, their trajectories diverged significantly by the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, the radical potential of early Third Worldism was increasingly contained by neo-colonization.[23] As Vijay Prashad argues, many post-colonial states adopted culturalist frameworks that celebrated tradition while implementing economic policies that deepened dependency on Western capital.[24] This shift from anti-colonial resistance to state-managed cultural difference aligned with American Cold War strategies, as emerging national elites were incorporated into US-led networks of cultural and economic exchange.

Within this shifting global configuration, the United States developed a distinctive approach to cultural diplomacy that strategically emphasized the recognition of cultural differences, distinguishing itself from European colonial powers' civilizing missions.[25] As Penny Von Eschen demonstrates, this "jazz ambassadorship" and celebration of cultural diversity served to deflect criticism of racial inequality within the

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[24]Prashad, *The Darker Nations*.

[25]

US while advancing American interests abroad.[26] Christina Klein argues that the emphasis on cross-cultural understanding and "people-to-people" diplomacy helped legitimize American power through apparently more benign forms than European colonialism.[27] In Chapter 3, I will analyze the implications of United States cultural diplomacy in Iran during the Cold War by investigating the patronage of American collector Abby Weed Grey and her collaboration with Iranian artists, particularly Tanavoli.

In Iran, in the aftermath of the 1953 coup that reinstated Mohammad Reza Shah, the pervasive influence of the United States on Iran during the era manifested at multiple levels, from the Pahlavi state's close political and military ties to Washington to the influx of American consumer goods, cultural products, and lifestyle ideals that transformed everyday life for many urban Iranians, creating a complex landscape of modernization and cultural hybridization that both fascinated and unsettled Iranian society.

In navigating Cold War geopolitics, the Shah crafted an ambivalent position within Third World politics. While maintaining close military and economic ties with the United States, viewing these relationships as crucial for Iran's security and economic development, the Shah drew intellectual inspiration from figures of decolonization like Léopold Sédar Senghor, who articulated theories of cultural synthesis between tradition and modernity. Like Senghor's concept of *négritude*, which proposed African cultural specificity while embracing aspects of modernization, the Shah promoted a

[26]Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows up the World*, 8–12.
[27]Klein, *Cold War Orientalism*, 49.

vision of Iran as a unique civilization bridging East and West. This selective appropriation of Non-Aligned Movement ideals allowed the Pahlavi state to present its modernization program not as Westernization but as a distinctly Iranian path to development, compatible with the legacy of the Persian Empire.

As I show in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, Tanavoli and Farmanfarmaian, in particular, reflect the foreclosure of revolutionary possibilities of the future after the coup and the search for coming to terms with Iran's uneven development As Chapter 3 established, Tanavoli's artistic stance was distinctive in its conscious rejection of Western canons and embrace of what he termed "*heech* ('nothingness' or 'nothing' in Farsi)." Unlike other Third World artists who struggled to either adopt or reject Western traditions, Tanavoli positioned himself at what he claimed was a "zero point" of sculpture. By embracing "*heech*," he transformed the very absence of a sculptural tradition in Islamic Iran from a limitation into a creative opportunity. This self-conscious positioning in a historical void allowed him to construct a new artistic vocabulary drawn from Iran's craft traditions and cultural forms. However, this turn to the archaic past was not simple revivalism—rather, it manifested what Fredric Jameson identifies as a crisis of historicity in postcolonial culture, where the relationship to history becomes spectral rather than organic. That is, the past in Tanavoli's work functions not as lived tradition but as a repository of forms and symbols to be reanimated in the present in perpetuity. Chapter 3 explores how Tanavoli navigated the contradictions of Americanization in the Iranian cultural landscape of the 1960s, all within the broader context of Iran's changing relationship with the West, particularly the United States, during the peak of decolonization in the Global South.

The incorporation of certain Iranian modernist artists, notably Tanavoli and Farmanfarmaian, into a new emerging professional-managerial class (PMC) during the late Pahlavi had its roots in developments traced in Chapter 2 through Jalil Ziapour's career. Ziapour's trajectory from avant-garde to state ethnographer exemplifies the broader shift that occurred as artists were integrated into the Pahlavi state's administrative and cultural apparatus. His ethnographic work, undertaken while receiving state commissions in the post-coup era, marks a pivotal moment when artists who had once functioned as organic intellectuals were transformed into traditional intellectuals serving state institutions. This transition established a pattern that would shape the roles of subsequent artists like Tanavoli and Farmanfarmaian within Iranian society.

Chapter 4 examines Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian's artistic practice through the lens of her distinctive social position. Born into a merchant family and later married into the aristocratic Farmanfarmaian dynasty, she operated from within Iran's ruling class while forging her path as a female artist. Her work developed an aesthetic that reflected the technocratic incorporation of folk art and handicraft into modern Iranian art. This approach stemmed from her dual position: her privileged access to traditional artistic practices and indigenous communities on one hand, and her role in the state-sponsored preservation of these traditions on the other. Through Farmanfarmaian's career, the chapter illuminates how class status and gender shaped artistic innovation in late Pahlavi Iran, particularly in mediating between traditional crafts and modernist aesthetics.

1.3 The Genesis of New Art in Iran

The interregnum period (between Reza Shah's abdication in 1941 and the MI6/CIA-orchestrated coup in 1953) should be considered crucial in the formation of modernism, with its first public manifestation in 1946. Yet, this is in no way to say that modernist expressions were unprecedented before 1941; rather, it is to emphasize concerted efforts made during this period against the backdrop of the power and structural shifts.[28] In this respect, for example, Iranian critic and writer Javad Mojabi argues that Abolhassan Seddighi might be considered among the early modernist painters in Iran.[29]

During his European sojourn, Seddighi's works began to show clear Post-Impressionist influences, particularly evident in his 1930 paintings of Venice's Saint Mark's Square and A Village near Florence (1930, fig.1.2). His break from academic conventions had begun even earlier, as demonstrated by his graduation project at the Sanaye Mostazrefe School in 1927, where he subtly but decisively departed from the institution's rigid academic standards. The painting juxtaposes three different modes of representation (fig.1.3): a portrait of Mary drawing on the long-established tradition of icon painting prevalent among Armenian communities in Iran, a profile of Ali Mohammad Heydarian (Seddighi's cohort and friend) likely drawn from a photograph, and Seddighi's self-portrait presumably drawn from life using a mirror.

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[29]Mojabi, *Navad Sāl Noāvāri Dar Honar-i Tajassomi-yi Iran (Ninety Years of Innovation in Fine Arts)*, 2016, 2:257–58. Also see Mojabi, *Navad Sāl Noāvāri Dar Honar-i Tajassomi-yi Iran (Ninety Years of Innovation in Fine Arts)*, 2016, 1:13–14. Mojabi considers Sadeghi's A Portrait of the Sister (1925), an impressionist painting, the first example. He also suggested the Estensakh by Mahmoud Khan Saba, "Iran's first modern painting"

By juxtaposing these three modes of representation side by side, Seddighi not only showcases his technical versatility but also creates a visual dialogue about the nature of the painting itself and its correlation with reality. This early work hints at the emerging modernist sensibility in Iranian art, where artists began to question and experiment with established modes of representation and painting as a medium.

Iranian artists and critics of this era employed various terms to describe these new artistic approaches, which were largely inspired by European Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. They frequently used "New Art" (*honar-e* no or *honar-e jadid*) and "modern art" interchangeably, highlighting the novelty of these artistic approaches against the entrenched brand of academic painting institutionalized by Kamal-ol-Molk.[30] Additionally, terms such as "progressive art" (honar-e nogara) and "contemporary art" (honar-e mo'aser) were utilized.[31]

Among many explorations of the notion of New Art in the late 1940s and the early 1950s, the essay "Grasping Novelty (*shenakht-e no-vi*)" (1949) by avant-garde poet, playwright, and critic Hasan Shirvani is particularly insightful. Shirvani elucidates how the modern world's material conditions due to the industrialization of agriculture call for fresh artistic and cultural forms in the midst of the 20th century for Iranian artists. He points out that peasants who perform manual labor to cultivate the land would readily appreciate the advantages of shifting from traditional

[30]This usage parallels how modernists in the European context during the 1910s and 1920s simply employed "the new art" ("*el arte nuevo*" or "*die neue Kunst*") in other contexts. Mercer, *Cosmopolitan Modernisms*, 21.

[31]Today, honar-e nogara is often used to mean modern art. Mojabi draws a distinction between For him, nowgarayi transpired with the Constituition Revolutuon in art and literature and it was an urge to challenge and change "established traditions." Mojabi, *Navad Sāl Noāvāri Dar Honar-i Tajassomi-yi Iran (Ninety Years of Innovation in Fine Arts)*, 2016, 1:13.

to industrial agriculture, while intellectuals, accustomed to traditional practices, may be slower to recognize or even resist the benefits of a new era (since they don't face immediate material consequences).[32] Indeed, the stunning urban population growth within three decades or more split the population evenly into urban and non-urban.[33] Shervani anticipates that ultimately, material and economic factors will drive cultural acceptance of the new.[34]

Art historian Alice Bombardier argues that the first generation of Iranian modernists, whom she refers to as "pioneers" following Mojabi, confronted what she terms a 'double transition (une double transition)'.[35] The first transition was institutional: the shift from Kamal-ol-Molk's School of Fine Arts (*Madreseh-ye sanaye-e Mostazrafeh*, est. 1911) to the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Tehran. The second was aesthetic: artists developed what she—following the artists—terms "New Painting" (naqqashi-e jadid or naqqashi-e now), characterized by increasingly abstract figuration that marked a decisive break from academic pictorial traditions.[36]

Institutionally, New Art gathered steam in the Faculty of Fine Art at the University of Tehran.[37] The teaching cadre at the Faculty of Fine Arts was composed of academicists who received their education at Kamal-ol-Molk's School of Fine Arts. Hasan Ali Vaziri, Esmail Ashtiani, and Abolhassan Sadighi were among the important instructors trained in academic painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts. Conceiv-

[32] In a sense, culture follows the material changes although with certain delays.

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[34] shervaniGraspingNoveltyShenakhte2021[70]

[35] Bombardier, *Les pionniers de la Nouvelle peinture en Iran*, 27.

[36] Bombardier, "The Pioneers of Iranian New Painting," 99.

[37] Mojabi claims the Faculty of Fine Arts was the birthplace of modern Iranian art. Mojabi, *Navad Sāl Noāvāri Dar Honar-i Tajassomi-yi Iran (Ninety Years of Innovation in Fine Arts)*, 2016, 1:35.

ably, the majority of them resisted modernism.[38] heir students, however, assiduously experimented with various technical and visual lexicons developed by European modernism—drew inspiration from Impressionism, Expressionism, Cubism, and Surrealism—in their own way as part of the New Art movement.

In her analysis of modern art during this period, Bombardier makes an astute observation about the overlooked intersections between New Poetry (*she'r-e no*) and New Painting (*naqqāshi-ye no*), a connection that has received little attention in existing scholarship.[39] "The two [New Painting and New Poem] currents converge and tend to develop together," with literature having an edge over other arts, notes Bombardier.[40] Bombardier points out that the profound pictorial innovations of this period were contingent upon constructing a public through the demarcation of exhibition spaces, organization of debates, and publication of journals.[41] This crucial observation warrants further exploration, which I undertake in discussing the 1946 Exhibition of Fine Arts. As I demonstrate in Chapter 2, these artists operated without established patronage systems–a limitation they transformed into an opportunity to define modern art on their own terms. Through close analysis of archival materials and artworks from the exhibition, I trace how the first generation of modernist artists in Iran strategically engaged audiences and institutions to gain recognition for their innovations.

[38]Perhaps with the exception of Seddighi.

[39]Bombardier, "The Pioneers of Iranian New Painting." It is worth noting that while Bombardier's focus on New Painting provides valuable insights, it ultimately constrains her analysis. By concentrating primarily on painting—admittedly the most contested medium of the time—she overlooks the broader context of negotiations surrounding the institution of art and artistic production as a whole.

[40]Bombardier, *Les pionniers de la Nouvelle peinture en Iran*, 47.

[41]Bombardier, "The Pioneers of Iranian New Painting," 99.

To fully appreciate the significance of these artists' break from traditional patronage systems, it is essential to understand the historical context from which they emerged. The Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911 anticipated the coming shift in Iranian cultural history by beginning to challenge aristocratic control over cultural production. Prior to this period, as Terry Eagleton notes of traditional societies, culture primarily "served as an instrument of political and religious sovereignty," with artists working as "court poets, genealogists, licensed fools, painters and architects patronised by the landed gentry."[42] The Iranian royal court maintained this system through the patronage of manuscript illustration, poetry, and architecture. The royal atelier—and sometimes the local ateliers established by the regional governors—funded and supervised the production of a majority of illustrations, through which the aristocracy expressed their taste and splendor.[43] In these studios, illustrated manuscripts, more often the heroic Shahnameh (The Book of Kings) or the courtly Khamseh, were the result of collaboration between painters, bookbinders, gilders, and calligraphers.

The epochal shift in Persian visual culture reached its zenith under Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh's sovereignty (1848-1896), whom scholars dubbed "the photographer king."[44] This shift stemmed from burgeoning European trade relations and cross-cultural exchange. The monarch's fervent embrace of photography, coupled with the aristocracy's mounting preference for true-to-life depictions, hastened the demise of long-enstablished manuscript illustration. This paradigm shift forced artists, bereft of

[42]Eagleton, "Terry Eagleton · Where Does Culture Come From?"
[43]#todo
[44]Ṭahmāsbpūr, *Nāṣir-ad-Dīn, šāh-i ᶜakkās*.

royal patronage, to seek sustenance from merchant classes flourishing in the bazaars of Tehran and Isfahan.[45] The last manuscript illustration supported by the Qajar royal atelier was One Thousand and One Nights (Hezār-o-yek Shab), which was executed between 1885 and 1892 by Abul Hasan Khan Ghaffari Kashani (1814–66).[46] Ghaffari's nephew Mohammad Ghaffari (1848-1940), later known as Kamal-ol-Molk, not only decisively moved away from Persian courtly painting toward European oil painting with the Shah's enthusiastic support, but more significantly, his establishment of the School of Fine Arts in 1911, first of its kind, marked an unprecedented milestone in Iranian art education—creating the very institutional paradigm that would paradoxically become the target of the 1940s avant-garde movement's rebellion.

The Constitutional Revolution accelerated what Eagleton identifies as a key historical transition—the movement of cultural production from court patronage into the marketplace.[47] This shift had contradictory effects, especially for the coming generation of modernist artists in the 1940s: while it deprived artists of guaranteed patronage, it also granted them new forms of autonomy. As cultural works became commodities rather than instruments of sovereignty, artists could begin to operate independently of court tastes and controls, opening possibilities for critique and in-

[45] #todo

[46] Muhammad Shah (1834-1848) noticed Ghaffari's talent and sent him to Italy to study classical art and Renaissance masters. Upon his return, Nāṣer al-Dīn Shāh appointed him to be the chief painter of the royal court (naqqashbashi) and gave him the title Sani-ol-Molk. In 1861, Sani-ol-Molk played a significant part in opening a department of painting (*Naghashikhaneh*) at the school of Dar-ol-Fonoun where he trained many artists including his nephew Mohammad Ghaffari (Kamal-ol-Molk).

[47] Important to consider the movement from the royal ateilar to the market was under way from the Safavid period. The popularity of single page painting played a key role in the transition. A significant change in Persian art occurred during the Qajar dynasty (1786–1925) with the growing contacts with Europe and the rise of photography.

novation.[48]

In the immediate post-war era, the year 1946 holds a significant place as it marks the beginning of New Art and the emergence of modern art criticism in Iran. This was the first time modernist artists showcased their works publicly, garnering considerable media attention. Additionally, that same year, the Congress of Writers and Poets officially recognized New Poetry. I am not suggesting that there was no writing about art prior to this date, but I want to emphasize that the wide circulation of reviews regarding this exhibition in publications was unprecedented.

Drawing a compelling parallel with French art history, one might consider how the 1946 Fine Arts exhibition thrust Iranian modernist artists into the national consciousness, much as the 1863 *Salon des Refusés* had revolutionized the Parisian art world by showcasing non-conventional artists and inspiring critical discourse from luminaries such as Charles Baudelaire and Emile Zola. Furthermore, just as the Impressionists established their autonomous exhibition spaces in the wake of the 1863 salon, the proponents of New Art in Iran carved out their independent venue shortly after the watershed moment of 1946.

The Soviet Union played a pivotal role in nurturing early modernist movements in Iran following World War II, offering vital support to a generation of artists who lacked both state sponsorship and public recognition.[49]Through the Soviet All-Union Society

[48]The revolutionary period introduced new imperatives to address everyday experience and common life in literature, particularly through the Literary Revolution (*Enghelab-e Adabi*) that championed simplified language and quotidian themes. This democratizing impulse in literature, which sought to make cultural expression accessible beyond aristocratic circles, established important precedents for the modernist movements that would emerge in both poetry and painting by the 1940s. See Bombardier, *Les pionniers de la Nouvelle peinture en Iran.*

[49]Bombardier, 29.

for Cultural Ties Abroad (VOKS), the USSR implemented sophisticated cultural diplomacy campaigns promoting socialist modernity. These efforts found particular resonance among Iranian intellectuals who saw in Soviet republics like Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan compelling models for developing a distinctly Persianate form of socialist modernity.[50]

The genesis of New Art in Iran can be traced to 1946, when the Iranian Society for Cultural Relations with the USSR (ISCR, *Anjoman-e Ravabet-e Farhangi-ye Iran va Shoravi*) organized the Exhibition of Fine Arts of Iran[51] . The ISCR, established through Sa'ed Nafisi's request to the Academy of Iran (*Farhangestān-e Iran*) in collaboration with VOKS, experienced meteoric growth—opened branches in Mashhad, Tabriz, Rasht, and Kermanshah—but ultimately proved unsustainable.[52] The society's dissolution in 1955 stemmed from multiple factors: the implausibility of implementing Soviet-style socialism in Iran, the Azerbaijan crisis, and insufficient backing from both Soviet and Iranian authorities. Nevertheless, despite its brief existence, the ISCR stands as a "an early case study of Soviet soft power in the Third World."[53]

In concert with the Iranian communist Tudeh Party, the ISCR emerged as a

[50]Pickett, "Soviet Civilization Through a Persian Lens."

[51]Art historian Mohammad goes so far to claim that the 1946 exhibition opened "a new gate to the life of Iranian society."Hamedi, Mohammad Hassan, *Iranian Art through Time (Honar-e Iran dar gozar-e zaman)*, 433. Cited in Aryanpour, "The Record of the Iranian Society for Cultural relations with the USSR, Part 1 (Karnameh-ye Anjoman-e ravabete farhangi iran ba ettehad-e jamahir-e shoravi)," 41.

[52]Other notable intellectuals who contributed to the establishment of the society includes Malek-ol-Shoaraye Bahar and Fatemeh Sayyah. #todo In Pickett's assessment, Nafisi embodied the intersection of two distinct modernizing forces: the Soviet Union's wartime campaign to propagate its particular vision of progress, and Iranian intellectuals' earnest pursuit of a modernization pathway that would harmonize with their cultural heritage. This confluence exemplified how disparate modernizing impulses could align in unexpected ways through the agency of key historical figures. Pickett, "Soviet Civilization Through a Persian Lens," 805–6.

[53]Pickett, 806.

magnetic force for the nation's preeminent intelligentsia, drawing into its orbit distinguished literati, poets, and academicians—eminent writers like Sadeq Hedayat, Bozorg Alavi, Sadeq Chubak, and Gholam-Hossein Saedi; poets Ahmad Shamlu and Nima Youshij; theater directors like Abdolhossein Noshin; film directors like Ebrahim Golestan; and art critics like Jalal Al-e Ahmad. Notably, this intellectual ferment transcended artistic boundaries, encompassing professionals from jurisprudence, medicine, and technical fields, creating a truly interdisciplinary movement that would shape Iran's political and cultural landscape.[54] As The Times observed, Tudeh drew "the most talented and the best educated of the young generation."[55]

The Exhibition of Fine Arts of Iran was held at the Palace of Shahpour Gholamreza Pahlavi from February 5 to March 30, 1946, and it included sections on painting, decorative arts, and architecture, with a total of 730 works by 125 individual artists.[56] Among the organizers of the event were Maryam Firouz (1914-2008), the leader of the Tudeh-affiliated Women's Democratic Organization (*Tashkilāt-e Demokrātik-e Zanān*, est. 1943), Hamid Sayyah (1885-1968), a diplomat, G.M. Kalish'ian, the VOKS commissioner (*upolnomochennyi*) in Iran, and a Russian painter.[57] Reportedly, the exhibition attracted overwhelming numbers of visitors from all backgrounds, "intellectuals, college students, students, blue-collar and white-collar workers, businessmen … [as well as] veiled women."[58] The extraordinary public response caught

[54]Other honorable mentions: Said Nafisi, Mehdi Bamdad, Muhammad Tamaddon, Moerteza Ravandi, Yahyi Aryanpour, Hussein Lhair-khaw Parviz Khanlari, Nader Naderpour, Muhammad Tafazolli, Muhammad Mo'in, Siavash Kasrai. Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*.

[55]Quoted in Abrahamian #todo

[56]#todo

[57]#todo

[58]Reported by Payam-e No magazine cited in Arianrad, "Karname-i Anjoman-i Ravabet-i Farhang-i Iran Ba Etehad Jamahir-i Shoravi [A Report on the All-Union Society for Cultural Rela-

the attention of governmental authorities, and this success catalyzed the organization of subsequent exhibitions in 1950, 1952, and 1953.[59]

In the exhibition's spatial configuration, the artworks were categorized into two distinct temporal spheres: the first encompassing creations from the Qajar era through the twentieth century, while the second showcased contemporary artistic expressions, including New Miniature illustrations (a revival of the Safavid miniature style began under Reza Shah), academic works by disciples of Kamal-ol-Molk, and Modernist paintings. The inaugural chambers featured works by Kamāl-ol-Molk, among them his *The Jewish Fortune Teller* (1899), *Dead Partridge* (1925), and *The Hall of Mirrors* (1876). The exhibition dedicated a section to Kamal-ol-Molk followers, artists such as Esmail Ashtiani and Vaziri Moghaddam, though Moghaddam's provocative nude study *A Woman and a Man* was discretely positioned in an unobtrusive corner. In the modernist section, while male practitioners such as Hossein Kazemi, Mehdi Vishkayi, Javad Hamidi and Jalil Ziapour garnered attention, women artists equally shaped the movement's trajectory.[60]Among these accomplished women, Leili Taghipour distinguished herself through her evocative illustrations of Nima's poetic works and children's literature. The artistic landscape was further enriched by the presence of Shokuh Riazi, whose pedagogical influence would prove instrumental in

tions with Foreign Countries." R.R. Makaroff, a Soviet musician who probably received an invitation from ISCR, published his observation in Dowlat-e Iran's press on March 7, 1946 (corresponding to the 46th of Esfand, 1324 in the Iranian calendar), suggested that the exhibition drew between 2,500 and 3,500 daily visitors.

[59]In the last exhibition, 130 paintings—by the artists such as Hossein Behzad, Mohsen Soheili, Abbas Katouzian, and Esfandiar Ahmadiye—were on display.

[60]Of particular significance was Banu magazine's coverage of the exhibition, which drew special attention due to the inclusion of women artists among the exhibitors. The magazine's reportage highlighted this progressive element of female artistic participation, marking it as a noteworthy cultural development.

molding an entire cohort of modernist artists during her tenure at Tehran University. The exhibition's modernist collection encompassed several noteworthy pieces: Ziapour's rendition of the ancient Persian legend *The Uprising of Kaveh*(*Qiyam-e Kaveh*, fig.2.1)—discussed in Chapter 2—and his interpretation of the classic tale *Shirin and Farhad* Kazemi's compelling portrayal of the literary figure Sadeq Hedayat (fig.1.4), alongside his now-lost depiction of revolution; Hamidi's provocative works *Slave Trader* and *Shahpour and Valery*; and Vishlayi's portrait of an elegant lady.[61]

Despite this early critical excitement for New Art and new possibilities in the nation's art, it would take nearly two decades for the first comprehensive scholarly examinations of Iranian modernism to emerge—ironically, not in Persian but in European languages: *L'art modern en Iran* (1967) by Akbar Tadjvidi, commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and Art, appeared in French, while artist-critic Ruin Pakbaz's *Contemporary Iranian Painting and Sculpture* (1974), commissioned by the High Council of Culture and Art, was written in English. This linguistic choice reflected both the state"'s international aspirations and the complex positioning of modern Iranian art between domestic development and global presentation. Tadjvidi's volume, widely recognized as the first scholarly examination of Iranian modernism, was published alongside the 1967 imperial coronation (coinciding with the "25 Years of Iranian Art" exhibition at the Museum of Iran Bastan dedicated to ancient Persia). As both a painter and critic instrumental in establishing the Tehran Biennials from

[61]See Jorjāni, "The Exhibition of Iranian Fine Art (Namāyeshgāh-e Honarhā-ye Zibā-ye Iran)," 41–42.

1958, Tadjvidi featured artists who attended the coronation ceremonies and had been invited to the five previous art biennials. Never translated into Farsi and remaining limited in its reach in Iran, the monograph explicitly oriented the work toward an international audience, particularly tourists visiting Iran.[62] Tajvidi concludes that while Iran's modern art movement had begun two decades earlier, it was only now bearing fruit.

The critical discourse surrounding New Art exhibited a remarkable symbiotic relationship with the exhibition itself. These reviews, disseminated primarily through the Tudeh Party's networks and its affiliated periodicals, were instrumental in establishing New Art's cultural significance. One reviewer heralded it as "one of the most significant cultural and artistic events in Iran in the mid-twentieth century"[63] Among this critical constellation, the scholarly analyses of Reza Jorjani and Fatemeh Sayyah emerge as particularly illuminating.

Sayyah, in her capacity as a Comparative Literature scholar at the University of Tehran, posited that the exhibition transcended mere artistic display, suggesting instead that it functioned as a collaborative forum where progressive intellectuals and artists could engage in critical discourse and cultivate their artistic acumen through public and peer interaction.[64] Jorjani, with subtle irony, exhorts artists to demonstrate audacity and liberate themselves from slavish devotion to conventions, metaphorically encouraging them to "transition from *Khanghah* (Sufi lodge) to aca-

[62]Tajvidi, *L' Art Moderne En Iran*, 1.

[63]*Payam-e No*, series 2, no. 10, July 1946 (*mordad 1325*), 2. Cited in Aryanpour, "The Record of the Iranian Society for Cultural relations with the USSR, Part 1 (Karnameh-ye Anjoman-e ravabete farhangi iran ba ettehad-e jamahir-e shoravi)," 41.

[64]Sayyah, "About the Iranian Fine Art Exhibition (Nazari Be Namayeshgah-e Honarhay-e Zibay-e Iran)," 44.

demic institutions" (41). He proclaims:

> The era of the rose and nightingale, of the beloved (shahed) and cupbearers, has long passed for us, and it has been a long time that we have been immersed in the quagmire of an ill-fated existence. Yet the sweet taste of art from periods of peace and tranquility, due to its distance from the attraction-repulsion and tumult of the new world, still lingers in our mouth.[65]

Jorjani contends, nevertheless, that the Iranian bourgeoisie lacks sufficient cultural sophistication to comprehend these artists' works adequately. He maintains that, given the absence of a viable market, the state bears responsibility for establishing requisite economic infrastructure and institutions to enable these artists' flourishing.[66]

The first book by the artist and ciritic Akbar Tadjvidi L'art modern en Iran (1967), commisioned by the Ministry of Culture and Art, the and Contemporary Iranian Painting and Sculpture (1974) by Ruin Pakbaz and commissioned by the High Council of Culture and Art were in French and English respectively and they were never translated into Farsi.[67] The first one was published at the occasion of imperial coronation in 1967 (at the exhibition 25 years of Iranian art at the Museum of Iran Bastan). Tadjvidi's book is generally considered the first scholarly publication on Iranian modernism. A painter and art critic, Tadjvidi was involved in the planning of the Tehran Biennials, which began in 1958. A photo of coronation was inserted at the

[65]Jorjāni, "The Exhibition of Iranian Fine Art (Namāyeshgāh-e Honarhā-ye Zibā-ye Iran)," 42.
[66]Jorjāni, 43.
[67]Bombardier recognizes that not until the 2000s, that the histographical sources commonly dismisses the early developments of Iranian modern art that she attributes to the ideological and political reasons. Bombardier, *Les pionniers de la Nouvelle peinture en Iran*, 38.

first page. It contained most of the artists who attended the ceremony. The intention of the publication as stated by the author was for the general public particularly tourists travelling to Iran.[68] In conclusion, he recalls that the movement of modern art in Iran being started twenty years earlier but giving its fruit just now. Ru'in Pakbaz Contemporary Iranian Painting and Sculpture, he provided an extensive overview of artistic movement in Western and Iranian art. In his analysis, Pakbaz views the tendency toward subjectivism and Iranization pertinent to the contemporary Iranian art. as her argues:

> Since the advent of New Art in Iran, there has been a continual pressure in the direction of IRANIZING. This tendency has translated itself, in practice, either into outward portraits of typical Iranian people and objects, or into the modernized use of traditional elements of the indigenous art of the past. It should be noted however, that unfortunately only a handful of contemporary Iranian artists have really understood their culture, and have succeeded in creating works which truly reflect their Iranian heritage.[69]

The manifestation of this *Iranization*, as Pakbaz terms it, paralleled—I contend—a broader anthropological turn in modern Iranian art from the late 1950s onward. This phenomenon, exemplified in the work of artists like Tanavoli and Farmanfarmaian and their engagement with traditional craft practices, emerged alongside global shifts in how cultural difference was understood and represented in art institutions.

[68]Tajvidi, *L' Art Moderne En Iran*, 1.
[69]Pakbaz, *Contemporary Iranian Painting and Sculpture*, 40.

This transformation, which gained momentum through the 1970s, merits deeper investigation.

1.4 On Methodology and Anthropologization

In 2013, under the co-curation of Iranian-American curator Fereshteh Daftari and Jill Baird, the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia (MOA) presented The Safar/Voyage — an ambitious exhibition that brought together eighteen contemporary artists from Arab nations, Iran, and Turkey, with Vancouver's distinguished sculptor Parviz Tanavoli among the featured artists. Tanavoli's artistic trajectory, once commanding acclaim both within Iran's borders and on the global stage, encountered a profound rupture with the advent of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. The imposition of a creative embargo in 1980 forced his departure from his homeland, culminating in his relocation to Vancouver in 1989. There, he dwelt in relative artistic seclusion until the contemporary period witnessed his re-emergence.[70] His contribution to The Safar/Voyage, *Oh Persepolis II* (1975-2008, fig.3.1), a six-foot monolithic bronze sculpture from his significant "Walls of Iran" series, carries particular resonance given his status as an artist in exile.[71] The series, developed in the late 1970s on the eve of revolution, marks a pivotal moment in both his artistic practice and Iran's cultural history.

By 1980, Tanavoli had nearly created a dozen of these semi-architectural struc-

[70]Tanavoli's prominence in the North American art sphere was marked by two significant retrospectives — his inaugural North American survey exhibition in 2015, followed by a comprehensive retrospective at the Vancouver Art Centre in 2023, which further cemented his presence in the region's cultural landscape.

[71]The series gained international recognition when *Oh Persepolis I* (1975) sold for over $1 million at a Dubai auction in 2008.

tures characterized by grid-like arrangements of typeface elements.[72] These works exemplify his innovative methodology regarding textural manipulation and modular arrangement—serving both practical assembly purposes and recreating the fundamental act of wall construction through brick layering. The compositions incorporate anthropomorphic forms that evoke ancient cuneiform characters, making deliberate allusions to the processional friezes adorning the Apadana hall at Persepolis, where diverse peoples from across the empire's expanse are portrayed during their yearly Nowruz celebrations.[73]

In explaining the cultural and artistic significance of the series, Tanavoli employs metaphoric language. "I subsequently arrived at the idea," Tanavoli observes, "Iran was a wall from beginning to end. Every time an Iranian builds a house or garden, he surrounds it with a wall; every rug she weaves carries a wall-like border around its periphery."[74] Tanavoli deliberately connects this spatial metaphor of the wall— as a demarcation of Iranian cultural identity—to artisanal practices, positioning craft in opposition to fine art's elite pretensions:

> I withdrew into myself. Each day, the idea grew stronger in me that in making walls, I should work in the same way that masons did. Like them, I wanted to build my walls by laying bricks. … I considered it false to call myself a 'sculptor' and my works 'sculptures.' Neither did I feel a bond with Western sculpture, nor could I find anything to substitute for it. Instead, I preferred appellations such as "heech-maker" or "wall-

[72]Fock, *Die iranische Moderne in der bildenden Kunst*, 256–64.
[73]Fock, 259.
[74]Tanavoli, "Tanavoli by Tanavoli," 94.

> maker," for it was in these fields that I had attained a higher level of skill. Most importantly, my life was closer to the lives of artisans, who spent every waking hour at work, than to the lives of artists, who often consider themselves the elite of society.[75]

Tanavoli's conscious associations with craftsmen, rather than positioning himself within fine art circles, needs to be contextualized within Iran's uneven, top-down modernization of the 1960s and 1970s, as examined in Chapters 3 and 4. In his artistic practice, walls transcend their structural purpose, becoming repositories of cultural memory through their systematic patterns and algorithmic repetition—simultaneously functioning as metaphors for cultural demarcation, difference, and boundary-making in Iranian society. This methodological approach reverberates across the oeuvres of artists examined in this dissertation: Ziapour's late-period tile compositions meticulously transpose ethnic vestimentary motifs through systematic processes, while Farmanfarmaian's tessellated mirror works reconfigure sacred Islamic geometric principles into contemporary sculptural reliefs. These practitioners share a distinctive methodology—one that transmutes cultural patterns into discrete modular elements, enabling systematic permutation and recombination. Their artistic production unveils a compelling and unexpected confluence between traditional Iranian craft practices and serial logic, simultaneously offering a critique and creative reappropriation of the algorithmic rationality underpinning bureaucratic administration—considering unprecedented expansion of managerial under the late pahlavi—and industrial mass production.

[75]Tanavoli, 94.

Unlike their predecessors—the first-wave Iranian modernists who aligned closely with Western artistic autonomy—the subsequent generation emerging in the 1960s and 1970s gravitated toward an anthropological approach, privileging cultural patterns over artistic independence through their process-oriented creative methodologies. In this paradigm, the boundaries between material culture and fine art dissolved, as artists pursued dual objectives: safeguarding disappearing indigenous traditions while simultaneously absorbing these cultural elements into their contemporary artistic vocabulary.

Unlike modernist primitivism's surface-level appropriation, these Iranian artists engaged in a form of *compulsive repetition* that ultimately dissolved the artistic subject itself.[76] Their repeated engagement with cultural forms transcended mere aesthetic borrowing, manifesting instead as a psychologically charged process where the artist's individual subjectivity gradually merged with—and sometimes disappeared into—the cultural patterns they sought to preserve. This dissolution of artistic autonomy through repetitive practice stands in stark contrast to modernist primitivism's reinforcement of artistic individuality. While modernists maintained their distinct artistic subjectivity even as they borrowed from non-Western sources, these artists underwent a form of self-effacement through their obsessive reengagement with cultural forms—a process where the boundary between preservationist and preserved began to blur. Paradoxically, the repetitive nature of their practice functioned not merely as a preservation technique but as a transformative process that reconstructed the relationship between artist, culture, and artistic production.

[76]See Chapter 3 on the return of the repressed.

A marked distinction emerges between these artists from developing nations and their contemporaries in industrialized societies. For example, though Tanavoli's Walls series bears formal resonance with Oldenburg's anti-monumental works of the 1960s, their critical orientations diverge fundamentally. While Oldenburg's satirical lens focused on consumer excess, Tanavoli's ironic sensibility probed Iran's craft heritage and cultural traditions. Yet Tanavoli's parody operated on dual registers—simultaneously subverting traditional forms while mounting a critique of artistic labor's devaluation and artisanal industry's erosion under Iran's precipitous modernization and the influx of mass-produced American commodities. This ambiguous positioning should be read against the backdrop of Iran's asymmetrical development, where pre-industrial production modes became reified as acts of resistance against mounting petroleum dependency and imported consumer culture.

This complex interplay between spatial and cultural dynamics finds theoretical resonance in Fredric Jameson's framing of postmodernity, wherein cultural organization shifts from temporal to spatial relations.[77] Through this lens, "The Wall of Iran" series assumes heightened significance in Tanavoli's metaphorical treatment of spatial demarcation and geographic .[78] This spatial emphasis manifests prominently in the exhibition *Safar/Voyage*, where geographical context emerges as a defining element—the curators emphatically declared that "Place matters."[79] The exhibition's strategic placement within an anthropological museum, rather than a conventional art gallery, exemplified broader institutional transformations in contemporary art engagement.

[77]Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.*
[78]#todo
[79]Daftari and Baird, *Safar Voyage*, 2.

As one curator observes, ethnographic museums increasingly acquire and commission contemporary works "to cover their cultural geography with living art."[80]

Since the 1980s, scholars like Clifford and Hal Foster have examined the increasing convergence between ethnographic methods and artistic practice. The 1989 exhibition "Magiciens de la Terre" at the Centre Pompidou marked a watershed moment in this convergence, attempting to place Western and non-Western artists on equal footing while raising questions about cultural authenticity and representation. By the 1990s, ethnographic approaches had become increasingly central to contemporary art practice and curation. This shift was exemplified by major international exhibitions like Documenta 11 (2002) in Kassel, curated by Okwui Enwezor, which deliberately decentered Western perspectives through its emphasis on postcolonial discourse and global artistic practices. Similarly, the 2003 Fieldworks conference at Tate Modern reflected on how anthropological methodologies had become embedded in contemporary artistic production. These developments signaled that what began as an alternative approach had evolved into a dominant paradigm for engaging with cultural difference in the global art world.

The paradigm shift in Western anthropology's authority over knowledge production about the "Other" has, as scholar James Clifford articulates, necessitated "a world of generalized ethnography" and its subsequent replacement by an "expanded cultural-critical sense."[81] This epistemological transformation has consequently broadened the artist's role as a cultural intermediary. In The Predicament of Culture

[80]Belting cites the curator Claude Ardouin. Belting, "Contemporary Art as Global Art," 13.
[81]Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 22. Also see Clifford, "An Ethnographer in the Field."

(1988), Clifford further elaborates on this transformation by examining the parallel evolution of ethnography and art amid shifting cross-cultural relationships within emerging global modernity. His analysis reveals how traditional boundaries between ethnographic methodology and artistic subversion began dissolving in response to the declining Western colonial authority in the post-1950 period.

==According to Clifford, the division which "has restricted the former's analytic power and the latter's subversive vocation," comes to an end driven by the global shifts in the world order, leading to two key shifts:[Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, 12.] the replacement of transcendental notions of authenticity with cross-cultural multiplicity; and the displacement of ethnographic authority from direct observation to textual interpretation and aesthetic encounters with marginalized cultures.[Clifford, 22. He summarizes this tendency as "looking at culture as an assemblage of texts to be interpreted." Clifford, 38.] This transformation fundamentally altered artistic practice. While modernist artists had previously seen themselves as creators of "art" or contributors to a unified universal "culture," the new ethnographic disposition approached the world as a repository of discoveries waiting to be unearthed, with artists taking on what Clifford describes as the role of "miners of the museum."[Interview 55 in Site-Specific Turn. The renewed interest in artists like Marcel Broodthaers during this period was symptomatic of this broader shift. Broodthaers' Musée d'Art Moderne, Département des Aigles (1968-72), with its fictional museum departments and pseudo-ethnographic displays, prefigured many later artistic engagements with institutional critique and cultural classification. His work, which questioned museum authority and systems of cultural value through satirical

appropriation of ethnographic display techniques, gained new relevance as artists increasingly adopted similar strategies of collection and classification.] Thus, artists increasingly positioned themselves as collectors and interpreters of cultural artifacts and practices rather than autonomous creators.

In "The artist as ethnographer?," (1995) Foster traces this convergence, calling it the "ethnographic turn," in art to developments beginning in the 1960s. This shift, he argues, emerged through a succession of artistic movements: from Minimalism in the early 1960s through Conceptual art, Performance, Body art, and Site-specific works in the early 1970s.[Foster, "The Artist as Ethnographer," 184.] Foster identifies how these movements, coupled with broader social and theoretical developments, precipitated a breakdown of traditional definitions of art, artist, identity, and community. This dissolution resulted in a fundamental repositioning of art's locus—moving away from medium-specific concerns toward institutional critique, from the confined space of the traditional art object to the expanded field of the museum, and ultimately from institutional frameworks to broader discursive networks.[Foster 184] Foster grounds his analysis of the ethnographic turn in Walter Benjamin's influential essay "The Author as Producer," which examines the tension between productivism and proletkult in the early Soviet Union. While both movements aimed to align with workers and challenge bourgeois cultural hegemony, their strategies diverged sharply. Productivism sought to intervene directly in the means of production through formal experimentation with industrial processes, whereas proletkult focused on creating a distinctly working-class art suited to the industrial age. Benjamin criticized proletkult for its ideological paternalism and failure to recognize workers' agency.[Foster 172]

Foster sees the re-emergence of similar oppositions (aesthetic qualities versus political relevance) in contemporary art in "the artist as ethnographer."[Foster 172] He writes: In this new paradigm the object of contestation remains in large part the bourgeois-capitalist institution of art (the museum, the academy, the market, and the media), its exclusionary definition of art and artist, identity and community. But the subject of association has changed: it is the cultural and/or ethnic other in whose name the committed artist most often struggles.[Foster 173] The shift from class relations to cultural identity, Foester claims, is significant in the reproduction of the problem in the new ethnographic paradigm, which is grounded on three assumptions: the site of artistic transformations corresponds to the site of political transformations; this site of transformation "is always elsewhere, in the field of the other"—for the modern artist in the proletariat, for the contemporary artist in the post-colonial, the subaltern, the subcultural; for the artist to access this transformative alterity, they have to be perceived as other.[Foster 173] Foster then shows this disposition is prone to self-absorption, ethnographic self-fashioning, and narcissistic self-refurbishing. Foster views two precedents of ethnographic paradigm in the dissident surrealism led by George Bataille and Michel Leiris and the Négritude movement associated with Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire.

==As anthropologist and historian James Clifford points out, with the fall of the Western anthropology as purviwer of the knowledge of the other in the West, it necessitating "a world of generalized ethnography," or to be replaced by "expanded cultural-critical sense." Thus the role of artist as this cultural agent expnaded. Since the 1980s, scholars like Clifford and Hal Foster have examined the increasing conver-

gence between ethnographic methods and artistic practice.

==This shift aligns with ethnographer James Clifford's observation that anthropological knowledge could no longer remain the exclusive domain of the West, [Clifford, The Predicament of Culture, 22. And See Clifford interview with Alex Cole] In this context, artists from the Third World like Tanavoli and Farmanfarmaian emerged as cultural agents, bridging ethnographic and artistic practices in late Pahlavi Iran.

1.5 Global Modernity Is Not a Methodology

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Ziapour at Cubism's Edge

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