

SHAHEEN MERALI

The Promise of Loss

A CONTEMPORARY INDEX OF IRAN



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ARTISTS

SAMIRA ABBASSY
IMAN AFSARIAN
ASGAR/GABRIEL
MASOUMEH BAKHTIYARI
SHAHRAM ENTEKHABI
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CURATOR

SHAHEEN MERALI

The Promise of Loss.

By Shaheen Merali

The Present Tension

The recent surveillance of Iran's state of turmoil, repeatedly looped and replayed on a myriad of flat screens has given an astonishing impression of a territory which had remained obscured in the last thirty years. The thundering reclamation of the streets that illustrated the disdain felt by the Iranian people about the results of their faulted and faulty election, has provoked a poignant response from almost everywhere and has garnered global media attention. Attention from within focused on the strict demand for accountability from the formerly entrusted regime; from without the attention has seemed to be filled with empathy for its young population's desire to be counted. But, in terms of the international community, the response remains affixed by the continual, open, partial disdain of all things Islamic.

The governance of Iran has remained a mixture of political expediency and polemic control that has helped drive its Platonic Islamic vision of an ironic Republic, which, since June 2009, seems to be under its greatest moment of duress, from within and also from

external forces. This uprising of youthful vigour demonstrates a yearning to implement aspirations, to renegotiate the limits imposed on their freedom, making this Islamic Republic's demographic bulge at loggerheads with its entrenched conservative establishment that disallows sway. What remains under control, under whose control and how it is controlled seems to be at stake here.

IR of I

Iran is the abbreviated name, commonly used for what is in current reality- the Islamic Republic of Iran. The quickly forgotten prefix is an important and telling "pre" that certifies a demand. A demand for the systematic redistribution of the political, economic and social within a theocratic sufficiency, a Republic officiated and guarded by an evolving religiosity that is bounded by a self-totalising logic. At its most powerful level it remains unaccountable to the masses and highly impermeable. It evidently employs similar contingencies and is not very different from western democracies, as recent con-

trolling mechanisms have highlighted in the USA and Russian elections, whereby an electoral system can optimise results by effective technological misdemeanours that assist the final results by subverting both the elective and the electoral.

A Cultural Palimpsest That Turns Into a Pretext

Curating any regional domain, including that of Iran is made difficult by the sophisticated, cultural palimpsest of the region, although it is necessary to evaluate its specific aesthetic and cultural developments. The study of Iran, as both a regional powerhouse and a place of immense articulation in cultural terms, makes it an obvious choice at a time when the whole world is trying to come to terms with its moral effectiveness as it crosses a fragile, politicised crossroads of governance and experience. Historically, the country is of ontological importance and has been a domain of highly discursive thinking within its expanses. In its present constellation, Iran has suffered and endured many different circumstances and faced specific challenges from a range of biased nations and religiosities; this, combined with its own reactive epithet provides for a very pertinent set of conditions which enable the production as well as set down the role and rules of aesthetics which have had to function until now within a curtailed freedom. An evolutionary aesthetics of adaptation and an approved cultural code has emerged. Within this cur-

tailment of immobilised consent and the threat of the eradication of dissenting voices, a new formula of the putative whole has emerged, an increasingly consciousness alphabet of poetic and political conjunctures. A postmodern parody within the Shia lore and imagery of myth and treatise has arisen and appears to be increasingly, if not prominently, urban. In a land of Iranian Islam¹ there is now an Art from Iran (as opposed to a Persian Art).

The Persian architectural, philosophical and crafts' heritage, a legacy found in the mainstay of most museums' collections and part of the carefully drawn roadmap of global civilisation, has started to act as a pre-existing zone alongside the vast amount of cultural work produced under the Shah, which was a mixture of international accessories (as found in the Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran in the collection of Queen Farah) in combination with an exclusive group of modernists who bridge both the reign of the Shah and the Islamic Revolution.

Within these two fields of the cultural and the political, a new space has emerged, a prefecture of individuals cruising (around but still within) state determined values with a political valency and an astute sense of potential foreboding – here a denatured balance of within and without has developed. A highly sensitive artistic relation to cultural production and the means for a continual production has contested the policed culture.

A cultural agency, that is tantamount to a precarious undertaking in the refusal to stand within as recipients of state principles and a sense of accountability, has emerged by placing and articulating knowledge and conditions based on perception. This articulation is not a compulsive, ironic criticism or even nihilistic sarcasm but an imbibed discourse of cultural tropes that simultaneously work within the given franchise of state liberty, as well as being understood by mediators of the International realm. This poetic enclosure and disclosure are image/text/filmic constructs framed by lived limits and blossoming with occluded meaning; an insider's discourse of Iran's passionate oral culture transgressively rooted in national annotations that deploy and employ scurrilous plays.

A Doppelganger Realm

The pseudonym "Persia" is the biblical casing of an erstwhile era, a multi-farious cache within the imaginary; a whisper of forlorn imperial journeys in the midst of hostile tribes and demure Bedouins (as in the rest of the homogenised orient) and it remains an impudent space within the historical archive of imperial oriental cultures. Iran and Persia act out the parallel predispositions that remain the root of the current crisis and propensities of its identification schizophrenia. These duelling tendencies, (the Islamic Republic of Iran and the idea of Persia) are not so much parallel layers of cultural epochs but

volcanic forces that enforce change from within and externally, often unsettling the values of its citizens who evaluate their contemporary through a lens that volleys between the last embers of the Shah's enforced westernisation and the proselytising guiding counsel. Here residues of the past as evident in old Persian beliefs are policed and unwelcomed within the public domain - the contemporary state controls Iran's streets and bazaars with a dedicated moral police force. The private and the public become two quickly changing masks for the urban population as they daringly criss-cross the opposing realms in a continuous face-off; a paradigm that has become the norm in the last thirty years.

This bipolarisation of reason, role, and act is constantly in play. The "I and We" of the state and an "I and We" of old Persia in the dynamics of a contested reality have lead to not only a diminishing "Us and Them", but a vicious constant re-invention of the self, policed within the public or bounded by the private. To a certain extent this dynamic has come to a head more recently, where the "I and Us" and the "We and Them" have become but a grand charade that has been vehemently attacked. In retaliation, the state has reinforced its illogical tendencies.

This complicated history of revolution, monarchies and a mixture of high-octane political oligarchs have made the twentieth century and the new millennium's history of this nation into a testing ground of hybrid net-

works and confined it to its contemporary, solitary status – most of it within one generation's experience. This schizophrenia has come to effectively define the contemporary state of comprehensive arrest for its young generation, feeling even further distanced and nuanced by their virtual connectivity to 'western' standards, but nevertheless contained and maintained by the deployment of a moralising regime.

Their fight for the right to exist is a deeply complex one in this exuberant nation. Beyond the schisms of generational differences and technological saviness, this generation, more so than any other, feels bounded and contained by the manner in which the state unilaterally exerts its Islamic Republic ideals. This thirty year old experiment that is finding its principles, splits its alliances between the urban and the rural, between the young and those seeking salvation in their old age, between the international borderless business community and those seeking a brotherhood within Sharia² communities. All this, is further complicated by highly vociferous demands for women's rights and a vast artistic community with its inescapable call to realise its poetic vision.

The East of the Tryst

This Islamic Republic of Iran remains qualitatively harboured in the Middle East region, where the region's politics remain bounded by state experiments which constantly appear, but, in reality, never address their

compounded interests. This measure of political efficacy, drawn from its traditional historiography, is effectively a series of alliances drawn primarily from the mainstay of differences, including the Sunni and Shiite³ dichotomies, Islamic, Persian, Kurdish and Arabic identities, which are further deepened by historic drifts that encompass state, lingual and border structures. All these aspects have further affected the modernising and modernity of the region and, as a whole, the Middle East remains a rich, but caustic, region, lame in an accelerating globalised ground.

Within the contemporary fold, the Islamic Republic of Iran remains at another crossroad. Thirty years after the Islamic Revolution of 1979, it seems to be at the tethered end of an imploding belonging, of a precariousness encased and battered by a moral police and seemingly in flight, as words and images of its recent violations and volatility haunt the internet and satellite communities.

A shaken, hybrid demagogy, where repressive measures have been enacted on its own youthful kin, the highly organised state brutality has condemned millions as dissidents in a place where reality and rumour cohabit in a political struggle. Counter-revolutions seem to be a generational chant and the fight for reform clasps in the vestiges of something bitter. Living as we all do in an imperfect world, where the remainders of the past fall away or return to haunt our creative contemporaries, the exhibition *The Promise of Loss* is organised

to mine the huge ground of Iran. The connection of expertise to experience, the rhythm of its measures and the constancy of the artistic gazing into its shadows has made listening to the artists' renditions more urgent.

The exhibition is a consolidation of many dashed hopes, a desire to build a shrine as well as to plant trees in the campus condemned to destruction. The artists enable both a reading of the situation and encouragement to cross the distance where the bitterness of loss reigns within the national moral. These notations of incensed inspiration within this short century and a need for the aesthetic may be considered by asking these two key questions about its development:

- 1) What might art achieve? (A seemingly perennial question)
- 2) Can we assess these intense culpabilities which are re-written as artistic considerations and, in the process, resolve the aesthetic values of a modified times - in an evolving matrix, of abstractions, of manifestations and of sensitivities that inform the heart of its forms?

The exhibition *The Promise of Loss* will not define Iran or even start the process of defining Iran, but the intention is to curate an exhibition that adds to the symbolic archive of the future, that can supplement and deepen the aesthetic consideration of Iran's vast heritage from an individual artist's perspective.

The exhibition will be curated in five sections:

a) Beyond Iran and Near Tehran:

Peyman Hooshmandzadeh and Mandana Moghaddam

This section looks more closely at Tehran as a subject matter for artists, as the hubris for urban density, where youth filled motor cascades fill its streets at phantom peak hours. From Felestin Square to Jordan, districts and squares hold both class and age as its identity beyond commerce and settlement. No place in Tehran has remained untouched by the last thirty years' demographic shift in a population of whom the majority are under thirty and the largest component of its studentship is in hejab.

Peyman Hooshmandzadeh is a writer and photographer based in Tehran. Hooshmandzadeh takes the religious popular iconic images of the Holy Family and digitally composes them onto the carpet-like prayer mats' embedded clock (therefore *Time*) as found in many households. The mix of the popular in this kitsch rendition remains a fractious, even contentious, issue for the governing Islamic seminaries. These handsome portrayals of holy martyrs, namely Hazrat Ali, Imam Hassan and Imam Hussein, within the Shia iconography perform a similar task to that of the former Shah who was impressively profiled in all official places including banknotes (which were superimposed with an Islamic pattern at the time of the revolution). The current 10,000

tomam banknote has a portrait of Imam Khomeini, whilst the wall hangings in high-rise apartments of Tehran are resplendently dressed by these warriors of the desert.

Mandana Moghaddam lives between Iran and Sweden, where she exhibits regularly. Moghaddam's installation *Sara's Paradise* (2009) is an ode to the time-honoured place in the cemetery of Behesht e Zahra, Tehran, where the fate of the martyrs, from the Iraq-Iran war that claimed over 800,000 young lives, is commemorated. The place, as seen in the installation, is a gory fountain of red water continuously bleeding into the world. The source of the blood is the martyrs and their families who encouraged holy participation to the bitter end lured by a promise of a place in paradise. A gap in the generation remains, as Iran is missing a large percentage of males, due to the grotesque result of this brutal two-year encounter with Iraq.

Moghaddam stunningly recreates a fountain lit by a neon green colour emitted by tube lights as found in many public spaces in Tehran, and further surrounded by empty plastic canisters in anticipation of being filled by more blood or by those other resources so often lacking during this period including water, oil, petrol and paraffin.

b) Graphic, Unfolding Tributaries:

Parastou Forouhar, Sara Rahbar, and Neda Razavipour

Can Iranian culture be curiously understood as a form of Shia Modernity, with all its permutations; what could this mean within the contemporary? The current visual culture has its roots in a specific political reality that has been constantly informed by socio-political strategies affecting allowances and cultural production. The level of pervasive Shia graphic tradition that is 'found' and used in the slow release of artists works forms a trail of both tradition and postmodern accord as they invent and recall cultural and religious heritage.

Parastou Forouhar lives and works in Frankfurt, Germany. Forouhar's series of projected animated drawings for the floor, *Spielmannszüge* (2005) is a tricky, Eischeresque commentary on Iran's long and troubled relationship with human rights. Forouhar has been at the forefront of commenting on this issue in most of her work, both in the form of digital drawings and in her large-scale photography. She remains steadfast in her concern for the fabric of the contemporary twisted reading of Islamic laws and ideals and their abusive usage in state controlling mechanisms.

Her monochromatic compositions are normally repetitions of acts of atrocious torture in medieval garb. Here, the simple anonymous human forms are twisted, deformed and altered by controlling anonyms. Her basic premise remains in questioning the wider ideology as

it penetrates the psyche of its citizens resulting in a bellicose cosmos that makes the tortured into a potential torturer in a systematic use of violence, coercion and distrust that makes us all culprit to acts of evil.

Sara Rahbar spends her working life between New York and Tehran. Her large fabric tent, *You Burned My House Down, Then Offered Me Shelter From The Rain* (2009), made from numerous flags of the United States of America, remains a facile and enigmatic, but empty, shrine to country and spirit. The flag, both of the USA and of Iran has been a mainstay for Rahbar, as she mines its symbolic potential for emotional meaning. Each time, as it is raised to commemorate another victory, another death, another conquest or another day, the flag, like the tent, becomes a symbolic shroud. It supposedly provides an identity of belonging and simultaneously guards the inside from the outsiders – it is both a nullifying graphic symbol and a blanket from under which to rape the world. Emotionally it pertains to justice and territorial claims but in its abuse it also acts as a symbol of imperial lust and lustre. Incisively, she draws on these many parallel journeys of the phallocentric raising of the flag yet it is in its half-mast-post-coital state that its true solace is obvious and we understand how quickly it can be used as a shelter for maiming and killing.

Neda Razavipour is a painter who lives and works in Tehran, who also trained as a theatre designer. In this exhibition she is represented by two types of work, a con-

ceptual video work entitled *Find the Lost One* (2009) which is a play on the title, allowing the audience to either 'play' alongside her split-screen totalising image or to wonder about its meaning in a more conceptual take. The second work is a series of drawings on a diary page with script and images drawn from the daily media as it trawls the earth for sordid or sensational or even mundane stories of human interaction with the universe. Some of these drawings are about hazards that make such effective news and others are lost fictional works of super heroes, still in search of home and belonging. In both works Razavipour asks similar questions about our ability to perceive and to make sense of our world and how we account for change, so swift, so skewed and odd all at once.

c) Responses to Legacies:

Samira Abbassy, Babak Golkar, Amin Nourani, Behrang Samadzadegan and Jinoos Taghizadeh

This section collates works which, in one fashion or another, respond to notions of legacies. The notion of legacy brings up all sorts of images from the vaults or websites. It is the process of unearthing stories and figures, of power and inheritance from all around the country on a variety of topics. Legacy indicates a diverse search on a variety of topics.

Samira Abbassy is a New York based artist whose works are built up from, and are informed by, minute detail. In the process of making she manages to unearth

that which is left behind and hypothetically makes new, surprising narratives, often from partial fragments which in themselves are but fleeting memories and mementoes of peripheral histories. In the *The Eternal War: Third Circle: The Taliban* series, disemboweled bodies and beheaded soldiers lay slain in barren lands reminiscent of the Middle Ages or even present-day Afghanistan. These drawings of a deep brown hue force the viewer to consider the late twentieth century 'need' to conquer this terrain and the blood that has been spilt to guard it from the USSR, the USA and the British. Even this reeks of the trials and tribulations experienced during the attempts to conquer Persia by Alexander (the Great and Genghis Khan).

Babak Golkar, is an artist living and working in Vancouver, Canada from where his work has discussed the way architecture and design have influenced the way we live, work and yet remain retained by the state. His sculptures are often enclosures which, in design, incline to a panoptican 'look' - ambiguous structures that seem to concern themselves with mass surveillance. The history of architecture is similar to the invention of machines with a seemingly historical legacy of male inventors, Golkar makes his work as a meditation on model and scale which holds the possibility of power as its fetishistic promise.

In the work *Negotiating the Space for Possible Coexistences #2* (2009) he employs the traditional forms of

carpet design embedded in regional formats across Iran and re-assembles these into communal geometry a series of futuristic architectural forms. The carpet acts as a ground plan which provides a basis for these rising forms. The work is as much about discovery as wonder in perception of knowledge and ambition locked within the everyday - it provides a subtle and ingenious way that an artist responds to heritage as a set of invaluable signs.

Amin Nourani is a painter and tutor working in Tehran. His recent sojourn in Afghanistan has left an indelible memory that he reworks into these large scale paintings. Often painted in triptychs or diptychs - his world is a combination of the restlessness of the living and the perceived calm of the dead. Graveyards and sandstorms feature as blustery scapes within which the living (and the seemingly dead) wander in search of the continued loss of their country and their countrymen.

Hyper-realistic and solemn, these canvases create a chilling melancholic composition of veiled faceless women, no longer belonging or safe in their community or communes. Disturbing details of shoes hanging on branches symbolically paint a desperate picture of the loss of hope.

Behrang Samadzadegan is a lecturer, writer and painter who lives and works in Tehran and is recognised as an important voice within the city, for his forthright commentaries on artistic agency. His drawings in the

series *Sportswomen* are part of an ongoing attempt to map the role of women in search of their rightful destination as equal partners. These drawings act as a form of reassurance within an anxious play by the state on its population wherein the gender divide is more often one sided and humiliating for women. In strengthening their place in profound activities and set in unusual places of sport and profession, Samadzadegan creates unease around these instituted boundaries. These fictional compositions objectify the place of contrition. Influenced by Iran's little Schumacher, Laleh Seddigh, who is known for her stunning looks and legendary driving skills, Samadzadegan has created a myriad of women winners in allied fields of sports as a tribute to their inane capabilities which remain uncharted and yet proffer a great legacy for the future to be born.

Jinoos Taghizadeh is a valiant artist living in Tehran, paving a route through the constant arbitration between the real, the factual and the spinning yarns of the system. She has the soul of an animator tied to the plight for justice, a truth seeker and researcher with a specific athletic tendency that allows facts to happen where they exist. Her engrossing works allow the feared and the smeared to be re-instated within a national realism which consistently remains at stake. She single handedly allows an intimacy, and a level of care that replenishes values as part of her desire to hold the national culture and nature accountable as they vie for rational resourcing, a motto

in her fine *Stamp* series would be 'to say more rather than live within the less'.

The *Stamp* series are a poignant reminder that monuments are not about scale but an efficacy that is informed by necessity not material or egoistic memoirs.

d) The Main-Melancholia:

Iman Afsarian, Shahram Entekhabi, Abbas Kowsari and Rozita Sharafjahan

Iran has had a long tradition of poetry with key figures that have honoured its publishing and oral heritage with a great and surprising use of the symbolic and the metaphoric within its narrative. A definite language and style with spiritual and moral overtones has captivated its population. The role of melancholic ploys and mourning⁴ is a fusion of both Shia traits and Sufi philosophy.

Iman Afsarian is on the editorial board of *Herfeh: Honarmand Magazine* and a renowned painter living in Tehran. His quiet enigmatic paintings are like whispers in a solemn evening where the slightest movement or breath can disturb its equilibrium. These rare elucidating moments of soliloquy inhabit unspoken reflections and virtues of malady and the unknown loss of focus. The lack of human presence is palpable and becomes a quality within the paintings that, in turn, heightens the importance of the quotidian objects represented in the still life and the interior, abandoned oddities that

feature in his work such as curtains, vases and lanterns – all are sensual reminders that speak foremost of intense loneliness. The dark hues and the evening light that accompany these slight interrogations of non-places are spellbindingly clear and their dank softness creates a sad revelation.

Shahram Entekhabi is a performance artist based in Berlin, who was trained as an architect – a training that is echoed in some of his larger works. Entekhabi uses the performative as a way to interrogate the world around him and the relationships that pre-occupy his wandering mind. Often the mundane activities of dancing, eating and selling are used as ways to communicate difference and the place of difference in contemporary Europe. In examining the everyday with such intensity, Entekhabi, allows a multiple of contexts to be revealed, just below the surface of these interactions – inequality, suffering, mistreatment and ambition float up in these sad encounters.

The three video works are poignant statements about the role of the artists and the male figure as they conflate within the frame, often unstructured in their 'feel'. Somewhat ordinary, these evaluations are fine notations of encounters and roles in a sad world of unmitigated love and broken dreams.

Abbas Kowsari is a photojournalist and artist based in Tehran whose work is characterised by the intensity of hues that accompany pathos or humour that enfold

these hallucinatory scenarios. The images are instantly recognisable as Kowsari, regardless of the subject matter – large swathes of colours of religious banners or garments or even plastic sheeting provide the subjects' counter-points in his framing.

Kowsari captured a blossoming reality with his meandering lens under the reformist agenda of Mousavi. His enigmatic photographs became frontpage material for the Iranian people. In the *Women Police Academy* series he astutely mocks those women in black chador as they climb the sides of buildings and march like soldiers to bring further dread to the streets of the nation whilst the *Shade of Earth* are a sorrow-filled set of landscape images of decaying places, where rusted carcasses of war machines jut out of the deserted borders between Iraq and Iran; marked death zones, where families gather to commemorate the memories of their sons, brothers and fathers who died in this immense fraction.

Rozita Sharafjahan is a video artist and the founder of an artist-run gallery, *Azad*, in Tehran. Her pedagogic role, both as a gallerist and as a tutor, provides an important conduit in highlighting the younger generation's desire to be located in culture's public passage. Her work as a video artist has recently started to be screened in international circuits, albeit in the context of large-scale group exhibitions.

Sharafjahan's work deals with the emotive crossroads faced by Iranian women in urban settings. Often using

nica and the first part of the diptych measurements are those of *Liberty Leading The People* by Delacroix. *Utopia*, as such, is a homage to two great painters and their historical and remorseful treatise on the notion of revolution. The artists stated "The term 'Utopia' does not exist in the Persian language; while it has been integrated into so many languages from Arabic to Turkish, no transcription of 'Utopia' is found in Persian dictionaries; we wanted 'Utopia' to appear in Persian letters - you find the writing in the upper border of our painting." An artistic re-instatement for the need to separate the notion of the paradisaical, that haunts Iranian language and religious culture, from the necessity to site utopia as a proposal for mother earth.

Shadi Ghadirian is a photographer based in Tehran who has had an enormous amount of exposure in exhibitions and publications around the world. In suggesting a flattened notion of history - where multiple historical time and places co-exist - she has been able to bring together that which has been removed and placed on the periphery. In her previous works, bicycles and Pepsi-cola seemed to be prevalent in the Gajjaar period. These mysterious juxtapositions are mindgames in which Ghadirian is well versed and she allows these to promote a unification of the removed, the submerged and the dislodged. In de-paralysing our minds and de-categorising our vision, Ghadirian allows things to escape into each other and a new, wonderful, even haunting meaning is created.

In the *Nil Nil* series she unites the weapons of destruction with the space of a family home; a clash of ideals which no longer seem so far fetched, as army boots snuggle up to fancy knitwear, and gun knives, wrapped with pink ribbons, all cosily occupy the domestic as a place to co-exist in a war against each other.

Leila Pazooki currently works in Berlin where she is pre-occupied with the concept of "borders" which can be seen as both a recurring backdrop and a common thread which goes through her projects. *Aesthetics of Censorship* started as a research project but now more or less forms a diachronic root in her investigation of reinterpretations, which permit the discovery of beauty in unexpected ways and where 'borders' or 'cover-versions' may acquire aesthetic values. She has used the notion of 'remaking' as a process in the course of the censorship, specifically in her series of photographs taken from censored books, where personal choices and preferences and the attitudes of the people in charge of censorship, have added another layer of creativity to iconic images of history of art including Man Ray's photographs or Manet's paintings.

The green neon sign in Farsi *This is Not Green!* is an apt signifier for this exhibition, firmly oriental in script, unreadable as all good conceptual works should attempt to be and available for twenty fours a day for further contemplation. It starts the process of arrival at a place in Vienna where much has to be deciphered and under-

stood, of complexities and evocations that may allow or renege on access, depending on one's own place of acceptance. *This is Not Green!* in green, neon is a fascinating starting place.

The second series, *Backgrounds*, is a study in the employment of swathes of curtains resembling those used on platforms and in backdrops for the leadership of the Islamic Revolution. The breathless swathes, like waves and waves of immobilised signals in heavy sullen fabrics, stand for a maturity and tradition that has become *de-rigueur* in Iran's staging of the Islamic revolution.

Conclusion

In contemplating change and in addressing the necessities of our times, the role of the artist as well as that of the audience within any cultural context alters, slowly acclimatising to its persuasive voice.

The sense of engagement, so prevalent and yet premeditated in contemporary exhibitions including *The Promise of Loss*, has come to be known as a discursive practice. In its intention it is estranged and its agency it differs from previous exhibition-making practices; remaining at odds with the passive gaze and suggesting a more inclusive understanding. This change shows a desire to evolve from the given of art history to an engaged frame of multivalency.

This emergence has led to innovative forms, such as those so prevalent in *The Promise of Loss*, inviting analy-

sis and, where site as well image render meaning, evolving into a discourse which bathes in intense criticality as its intention is to provide further meaning of its place and context within the wider historical frame.

- 1 Henry Corbin, *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, "Le Shi'isme duodénaire", (Paris: Gallimard), 1991.
- 2 "Sharia refers to the laws contained in or derived from the Quran and the Sunnah (practice and traditions of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH))", in <http://www.newhorizonislamicbanking.com/index.cfm?section=glossary&letter=s>
- 3 HNN Staff, "What is the Difference Between Sunni and Shiite Muslims - and Why Does it Matter?", "The groups first diverged after the Prophet Muhammad died in 632, and his followers could not agree on whether to choose bloodline successors or leaders most likely to follow the tenets of the faith. The group now known as Sunnis chose Abu Bakr, the prophet's adviser, to become the first successor, or caliph, to lead the Muslim state. Shiites favored Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law. Ali and his successors are called imams, who not only lead the Shiites but are considered to be descendants of Muhammad.", in <http://hnn.us/articles/934.html>
- 4 Sigmund Freud, *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, (1917), in "Mourning and Melancholia" defined the distinguishing features of melancholy as "profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.", (London: Penguin Freud Library), 1991, 248.



Iman Afsarian
Untitled, 2009
Oil on canvas
140 x 100 cm
Image courtesy of
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