

Master's Degree  
in Economics and Management of Arts and Cultural Activities

Final Thesis

*Contemporary Iranian Art: Emerging Interest in Iranian Art in the International Art Markets and the Reception, Production and Assessment of Iranian Contemporary Art in the International Sphere*

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## Introduction

In the last decade, the global fine arts market has grown with unprecedented speed, swiftly recovering from the 2008 financial crisis that enveloped the world's economy. The market for fine arts was widely contented amongst the most powerful Western countries, primarily between the United States and Europe, up until 2011, which saw the emergence of China as number one on the global fine arts marketplace<sup>1</sup>. However, recent years have seen emerging countries enter the market, with auction houses enacting development strategies aiming “to anticipate markets, educate local perception and attract potential investors”, especially in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, China, India, Turkey and so on<sup>2</sup>. One of the countries that has attracted interest, both for its artistic practices and its particular political situation, is Iran: 2006 marked the entrance of both Sotheby's and Christie's in the Middle East, establishing branches in Dubai, in order to cater to growing interest of both international and regional buyers. The image of Iran that is often seen in the West is highly discordant with the reality of artistic production in Iran, which is not typically or exclusively focused on criticism of the Islamic Republic of Iran and political dissent.

The scope of the research is to investigate and observe the changes in the reception of contemporary Iranian art, how this affects the production and reception of the art and artists themselves, mainly through the effect of the entrance of Iranian contemporary art in international art markets, ownership and exhibitions, either through personal collections or galleries, focusing on Iranian contemporary art. Specifically because of the peculiar political situation of the country itself, the problems of censorship and anti-Western sentiments, Iranian art arises as

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<sup>1</sup> ArtPrice (2011), p. 9

<sup>2</sup> ArtPrice, (2014), p. 28

an oddity in the Middle East, where artists and galleries are, as of recent times, trying to regain their own space and create art that can reflect a new national identity, signalling a reclaiming of Iran and negative aspects associated with the country.

The first chapter explains the historical and political events that have taken place during the last century and the implications that governmental policies have had on artistic and cultural practices in Iran. The progression of the chapter begins with Iran under Reza Shah and the creation of “modern” Iran, followed by Mohammad Shah Reza’s rule, characterised by the attempt of a Westernisation of Iran and concluding with the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the implications of the installation of the Islamic Republic of Iran up until the current situation.

The second chapter delineates the progression of Iranian art, from modern to contemporary, a topic which is still hard to define precisely, given the different approach to a study of art history in Iran, as well as its differing concepts of “modern” in contrast to Western categorisation of “modern” art. The evolution of Iranian art has had a different course from canonical Western art historical tradition, as it is a recent phenomenon and has been often the product of specific cultural policies under the different governments over time. What is considered “modern” Iranian art can be traced to 1851, with the institution of the academic painting with Dar ul-Funun and Mohammad Ghaffari, known as Kamal Ol-Molk, becoming the first court painter introducing “modern” portraiture and landscape paintings. The “academic style” is a byproduct of Western 20th century art in the taste of the Iranian court. Art was also instrumental in cultural policies under Reza Shah, particularly for the formation of “modern” Iran, where archaeology and traditional art forms became a tool for nation building and legitimisation of the Persian Empire. In 1941 Tehran University inaugurated its Fine Arts department in a bid

to modernise Iran and promote traditional Iranian arts in favour of Western styles. The initial seeds of Iranian contemporary art can be seen in the encouragement of traditional craft being taught at university, an element that will be re-enacted and re-contextualised by the majority of contemporary artists that have paved the way for Iranian art nowadays. Under Mohammad Reza Shah, Iran found itself in a moment of great prosperity for the arts, where the queen consort Farah Diba was at the forefront of artistic innovation and opened the first museum dedicated to contemporary art in Iran, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary and Modern Art, as well as promoting cultural exchanges and arts festivals in the country. The Iranian Revolution in 1979 however, stunted artistic progress and rather implemented propaganda as a visual aid for the Iran-Iraq war and religious purposes, whereby artistic production was mostly dedicated to state controlled and censored images. Although the country's closure to the external world truncated cultural exchange, Iranian contemporary art managed to persist in the works of the artists who both stayed in the country and those who fled. Contemporary Iran is today more than ever connected to the outside world, promoting its art and artists within its borders and outside, recognising the importance of Iranian contemporary art and its role in shaping the cultural identity of contemporary Iran, regardless of any political affiliation.

The third chapter offers an in-depth analysis of the fine arts market in regards to Iranian contemporary art contextualised within the global art market. In order to discern the appreciation and re-evaluation of contemporary Iranian art on an international perspective, an important factor is the performance of Iranian contemporary art both regionally and internationally. As auction houses legitimise Iranian art by presenting artworks on the global art market, growing appetite for Iranian artists pervades the market and seems to point in the direction of

increasing appreciation and valuation of art by Iranian artists. Given the country's unstable political situation and dire economic crisis, it is a positive sign that contemporary art manages to thrive and find modes of expression in the country and outside of it as well, as it indicates increasing legitimisation in the global art sector as well as in Iran, which is known for heavily restricting and censoring of images not in line with governmental rules. Moreover, on a global scale, the appreciation and re-evaluation of Iranian art demonstrates a shift in the ways the Western art world accepts and acknowledges art productions that differ from its own tradition, making way for a broader and more inclusive understanding of art and its history. In the span of a decade, Iranian art has kept a strong presence in Middle Eastern auctions, solidifying its position and appreciation in the MENA region. In order to analyse the performance of Iranian art on the global art market, the research examined three auction houses, Christie's, Sotheby's and newcomer Tehran Auction, that have established a presence in the Middle East and share the majority of market share in regards to the art that is sold in the region. Moreover, the entrance of Tehran Auction in the region serves to understand the shifting dynamics of power and acknowledgement of Iranian art on the fine arts market, as it indicates a positive change in the promotion and legitimisation of Iranian art by Iran itself and highlights the presence of interested buyers in the country. Iranian artists Parviz Tanavoli, Shirin Neshat, Hossein Zenderoudi, Mohammad Ehsahi and Monir Farmanfarmanian have become the most expensive artists in the Iranian market and have emerged over the span of a decade.

In order to explain Iran's complex history and political situation, the main literature used was Ervand Abrahamian's *A History of Modern Iran* and Farian Sabahi's *Storia dell'Iran*, both considered because of the way that Iranian history is

depicted and analysed, offering a comprehensive view of Iran's modern history, going in an in-depth analysis of sociological, cultural, economic and political events of Iran throughout the 20th and 21st centuries.

Concerning the delineation of Iranian art history, several sources were used, first and foremost Hamid Keshmirshekan's seminal works on Iranian contemporary art and post-revolutionary discourses, as well as Rose Issa's *Iranian Contemporary Art*, a book dedicated to various artistic currents in contemporary Iran, including critical essays by one of Iran's most important art historians, Ruyin Pakbaz.

The market analysis was conducted following a longitudinal study over the span of thirteen years, primarily taking information from the auction houses ([christies.com](http://christies.com), [sothebys.com](http://sothebys.com) and [tehranauction.com](http://tehranauction.com)) when available to the public, otherwise resorting to other websites storing auction data (such as [artvalue.com](http://artvalue.com)) in order to gain as much access as possible to auction results. The research examines the auction results of Christie's, Sotheby's and Tehran Auction over the span of thirteen years, from the beginning of sale operations in 2006 up until today. Given the specific classification of Iranian contemporary within Middle Eastern and Arab contemporary art, the auction sales analysed are the ones selling primarily Middle Eastern and Arab art, both in the Middle East and in Europe. What emerges from the analysis is a steady pattern in value for Iranian contemporary art, which hit peaks with record-breaking artists and kept a uniform value for others throughout the years. Moreover, the research indicates that Iranian contemporary art is readily available in sales, with many lots within the auctions being from artists of Iranian nationality, making Iran the country with the majority of lots sold, in comparison to others. This trend however also points at a steady increase in interest for Egyptian and Lebanese artists, which

have, in recent years, almost levelled up with Iran. Iranian contemporary art also seems to collect a higher sale total in comparison to other Middle Eastern or Arab artworks, possibly because of several Iranian contemporary artists gaining a “superstar” status amongst the international fine art market, such as Parviz Tanavoli, Shirin Neshat, Mohammad Ehsahi and Bahman Mohasses, to name a few. The results also shows a positive outlook on the presence of Iranian contemporary art in the art market, as the country’s political situation at the time of the sales (over thirteen years) almost never impacted sales; rather, the market followed the global fluctuations which uniformed results overall. The implications of studying the art market at large have ramifications in the sociology of art economics, represented chiefly by studies of Velthuis and Throsby. Sociology in relation to art economics is a branch that serves to analyse market behaviour in relation to a social context, where concepts such as globalisation and culture can explain consumer behaviour and the ways in which the market interacts on a social level.

In conclusion, the general outlook towards the re-evaluation of Iranian contemporary art seems to point in a positive direction, as Iran is becoming more open to the promotion of Iranian contemporary art, inaugurating events dedicated to exporting Iranian art to a wider and international public such as Tehran Auction in 2012 and Teer Art Fair in Tehran, as of 2018. Iran’s political climate is often detrimental to artistic practices in the country, both because of censorship and outside pressure, especially in recent years, where Iran is heavily suffering from sanctions imposed by the international community and frequent clashes with the United States. Optimistically, the coming years will provide opportunities to enhance cultural exchange and a



greater opening towards Iran and Iranian artists, devoid of any political implications.



1. Fereydoun Ave, *Rostam in Late Summer Revisited* (2010)

# Chapter One | *Historical and political background of Iran from the 20th Century to the 21st Century*

## *Introduction*

Iran entered the twentieth century in a climate of extreme political turmoil, with revolts and protests which had undermined the country's political stability under the *laissez faire* attitude of the Qajar rulers. Notably, the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 represents the first attempt at modernisation and a result of increased protests of the Persian population, highly dissatisfied by the increasing poverty and instability of its country. The destabilisation of Iran, a major presence in the Middle East, was grounds for its progressive weakening by foreign powers, which heightened their presence during World War I, intensifying their military occupation of the region. Iran was contended by two major players and their respective allies: in a geopolitical chess game, the strategic occupation of Iran was between the Ottoman Empire and its ally, Germany, versus Russia and Great Britain. The Ottoman Empire, with its sights set on the Caucasus and Baku, had occupied Iran and armed a group of guerrillas in order to gain power over Azerbaijan; the resulting issue conflicting with Russian interests, which, in turn, augmented their own and British troops in the region. Contributing to Iran's progressive weakening was also the coincidence of "(...) bad harvests, cholera and typhus epidemics, and, most deadly of all, the 1919 influenza pandemic. Altogether, between 1917 and 1921 as many as 2 million Iranians - including one quarter of the rural population - perished from war, disease, and starvation"<sup>1</sup>.

Although Iran had declared neutrality in the first world conflict, the end of the conflict did not coincide with peace in the country

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<sup>1</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 62

itself. The defeat of Germany and Russia, notes Abrahamian<sup>2</sup>, provided a further confirmation to Britain, and its foreign minister Curzon, of Iran's frailty, which resulted in the drafting of the Anglo-Persian Agreement in 1919, a way of incorporating Iran into the British Empire. The Agreement sought the majority of rights to "provide Iran with loans, arms, advisors, military instructors, customs administrators, and even teachers. (...) In return, Britain was to provide Iran with a loan of £2 million"<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, Britain retained the monopoly in the building of infrastructure throughout the country, "(...) combat famine, find entry into the League of Nations, and seek indemnity for damages suffered in World War I". The Agreement drafted was the result of an internal two-fold debate in London; on one side, "(...) given that direct control was too demanding on the financial point of view, the colonial government of India urged to obtain an agreement with Tehran's moderate nationalists"<sup>4</sup>; on the other side, Lord Curzon was certain that actions had to be taken in order to consolidate Britain's power in buffer zones surrounding the area as to defend both India and Iranian petroleum from Russian expansionism<sup>5</sup>. The ideal resolution for Curzon, would have been that of expanding the protectorate formula to Iran, however this outcome would have generated further diplomatic tensions and been against the concept of "auto-determination of peoples" en vogue during that period, asserts<sup>6</sup>. The implications of the covert agreement to effectively establish Iran as a British protectorate were "an unmitigated disaster — especially when the public grasped its full implications"<sup>7</sup>; the British had severely underestimated Iran's political mood at the time, believing it would "remain anti-Russian and pro-British"<sup>8</sup>, while in reality it was mostly anti-

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<sup>2</sup> *ib.*

<sup>3</sup> *ib.*

<sup>4</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 63

<sup>5</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p.62

<sup>6</sup> *ib.*

<sup>7</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 62

<sup>8</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 63

British. The secrecy of the agreement came to light once Ahmad Shah, reigning monarch of Iran at the time, was forced to resign in July 1920, following public indignation by the nationalists and other foreign powers<sup>9</sup>. Historian Ervand Abrahamian describes Iran in the 1920s as a “failed state”: the government was mostly decentralised and had minimal power outside of Tehran, the country was stalled between the upper land-owning class, new political parties and the Anglo-Persian Agreement, the countryside was at the mercy of tribesmen and armed rebels, the Red Army had occupied Gilan and was inching towards Tehran. The monarch, Ahmad Shah, was ready to flee Iran<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 63

<sup>10</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 64

## 1.1 | *The Reza Shah Era (1921-1941)*

The political background that set the pathway towards a ‘modernisation’ of Iran starts with the appearance of Reza Khan and his ascension towards political power, and then the throne, of Iran. February 21, 1921, known also as *3 Esfand liberation*<sup>11</sup>, General Reza Khan marched on Tehran and took control of the city with a *coup d'état* supported by Britain against the Bolsheviks, in order to reassure the Qajar monarch that everything was under control and military intervention necessary to stabilise the precarious situation of the monarchy. The *coup* went against the current political cabinet and aimed to remove from office premier Sepahdār, installing in his place, Anglophile and reformist, Sayyed Ziya Tabatabai. Unbeknownst to the Qajar monarch, colonel Reza Khan had promised Ironside, a British general in charge of the Cossacks, to “facilitate the withdrawal of the British troops; and not to overthrow Ahmad Shah”<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, Ironside gave Reza Khan control over the Qazvin troops and pressed for his promotion as general, contributing to Reza Khan’s ulterior political and military power. General Reza Khan however, proved he had ideals and goals of his own, as he switched sides against the British, abrogated the Anglo-Persian Agreement and in turn subscribed to the Russo-Persian Treaty of Friendship a couple of days later, on February 26, 1921<sup>13</sup>. The treaty maintained the right of Russia to intervene if foreign presence was to be detected in Iran and in turn cancelled all “Tsarist loans, claims and concessions”<sup>14</sup>. Following the *coup*, Ahmad Shah declared Reza Khan as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and consequently as war minister; the rapid ascension to military power gained further traction when, in 1923 the Qajar

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<sup>11</sup> Esfand: twelfth month of the Solar Hijri Calendar, adopted in 1911 by the Iranian Parliament. It corresponds to the month of February in the Gregorian. The date, according to the Iranian calendar, would be Esfand 3, 1299.

<sup>12</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 66

<sup>13</sup> Persia and the Russian Socialist Federal Soviet Republic - Treaty of Friendship, signed in Moscow, Russia on February 26, 1921 [1922] LNTSer 69; 9 LNTS 383

<sup>14</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 66

monarch nominated Reza Khan as premier, while contemporaneously holding the role of war minister<sup>15</sup>. Reza Khan quickly established himself as a military dictator and established himself as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, as well as being declared, in 1923 as premier. As the general's power kept growing, the Qajar monarch was swiftly losing power; finally on October 21, 1925, the Iranian parliament impeded Ahmad Shah's return in the country, deposing him and instead nominating Reza Khan as chief of the State: a final blow to the reigning Qajar dynasty was held on the 12 December 1925, where "the Constituent Assembly amended the Constitution, preparing the field for a change of regime"<sup>16</sup>. On April 25, 1925, Reza Khan crowns himself as reigning monarch Reza Shah Pahlavi.

The appearance of Reza Shah on the center-stage of Iran was characterised by an intense period of "state-building"<sup>17</sup>, where the main goal was to modernise a country which he deemed decaying and highly neglected by the previous Qajar rulers. Reza Shah had two main pillars on which he based his reign: the military and the bureaucracy<sup>18</sup>; these were two aspects that he deemed necessary to encourage and rapidly develop Iran as a modern and secularised country. The unprecedented growth under Reza Shah was mainly derived from the revenues of four sources: oil royalties, the application of a strong tax extraction, a higher customs duties and the introduction of new taxes on consumer goods<sup>19</sup>. The military as well grew under the monarch's supervision: Reza Shah had gained power through the military, therefore tightened his grip on the army, by introducing conscription in 1925, which in turn created the first official birth certificates and identity cards<sup>20</sup>. On the economic

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<sup>15</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 68

<sup>16</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 72

<sup>17</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 67; Chehabi, H.E. (1998), p.495; Sabahi, F. (2003), p.75

<sup>18</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 69

<sup>19</sup> *ib.*

<sup>20</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 70; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 78

point of view, Farian Sabahi observes how Reza Shah's era can be considered as "characterised by a strong statism"<sup>21</sup>: the bureaucracy had grown from four ministries, a remnant of the Qajar era, (foreign affairs, interior, finance and justice) to eleven by the end of Reza Shah's reign (public works and commerce, post and telegraph, education and endowments, industry, roads and agriculture)<sup>22</sup>.

In order to unify and "instil in the citizenry a feeling of uniformity and common allegiance to himself and his state"<sup>23</sup>, Reza Shah implemented a series of reforms that could amplify the identification of Iranians with Iran as a modern country without forgetting its glorious past<sup>24</sup>. The need to deplete any memory of the Qajar era and its impact on Iran was felt very strongly by Reza Shah, who in turn approved a series of actions in order to "modernise", "secularise" and "Westernise" Iran<sup>25</sup>. As put by Goldstein, "Reza Shah embarked upon a program of Western modernisation, which resulted in rapid change (...) [it was a] forced secularisation"<sup>26</sup> which had a hard impact on Iranian society and its economy<sup>27</sup>. Arasteh, in his essay *The Role of Intellectuals in Administrative Development and Social Change in Modern Iran* (1963), describes the situation of Iran before Reza Shah, under an administrative point of view: "Before the desire for change and modernization arose, Iran was a nation accustomed to the rule of a powerful king. Iranian society was organised into stratified social groups and the local community exercised a considerable d in managing its own affairs, particularly urban areas where merchants played an important role in civic affairs"<sup>28</sup>. A deep-rooted contrast to Reza Shah's vision of nationhood and the rise of Iran as a modern and

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<sup>21</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 81

<sup>22</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 73

<sup>23</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 80

<sup>24</sup> Kia, M. (1998), p. 19 ; Ghods, M.R. (1991), p. 37

<sup>25</sup> Goldstein, W.S. (2010), p. 53; Abdi, K. (1963), p. 57-58; Kia, M (1998), p. 19

<sup>26</sup> Goldstein, W.S. (2010), p. 53

<sup>27</sup> Goldstein, W.S. (2010), p.53; Grigor, T. (2004), p. 20; Chehabi, H.E. (1998), p. 496

<sup>28</sup> Arasteh, R. (1963), p. 326

Western country. The transition was difficult primarily because of societal and economic change, in addition to a fervent opposition by the clergy, who withdrew its support<sup>29</sup>, Chehabi (1998) asserts that “The creation of a modern state apparatus perforce had a deep impact on society; its tentacles began affecting people's everyday lives. (...) In many insidious ways, the creation of a modern bureaucracy also affected class structure, as those who had the benefit of a modern education came to form a privileged stratum based on their recruitment into the state apparatus”<sup>30</sup>. Reza Shah’s primary goal was to boost modernisation, an aim that was achieved by implementing “Western” ways of life, adapting schools to the French system and encouraging the Western dress for both men and women, also as an attempt to undermine the power of the clergy and the religious hold on society<sup>31</sup>. Khaki and Altaf-Bhat observe how “the interrelationship between education and national consciousness came out most strongly in the adult education project undertaken in 1936. Reza shah wants to make education an experimental and dynamic force in society. He viewed the educational system as a tool for mobilizing broad support for the regime and its policies”<sup>32</sup>. As a matter of fact, Reza Shah’s main action towards modernisation, other than imposing Western clothing, was that of implementing a cultural, therefore educational, system. Khaki and Bhat continue their assertion, by analysing that the main problem was illiteracy, which affected a high part of the population, calling for the standardisation of an academic curricula “for both private and public schools in order to create a strong centralised government”<sup>33</sup>. By converting the academic system to the Western pattern, Reza Shah had planned to “wrest control of the schools from the clergy and, more

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<sup>29</sup> Goldstein, W.S. (2010), p. 53

<sup>30</sup> p. 496

<sup>31</sup> Mir, O. and Mehr, A.D. (2014), p. 609-610; Grigor, T. (2004), p. 20; Khaki, G.N and Bhat, N.A. (2015), p. 49

<sup>32</sup> Khaki, G.N. and Bhat, M.A. (2015), p. 49

<sup>33</sup> *ib.*, p. 45



broadly, to curb their influence”<sup>34</sup> by which he could introduce new generations to a secularised and modern country: this process was dubbed by Afary as a “secularisation from above”<sup>35</sup>, wherein the Pahlavi regime actively promoted a process of modernisation against the wishes of the clergy, radically oppressing it and acting as a superior system of implementation. However, Goldstein remarks that “While the Shah attempted to modernise Iran economically and culturally, he repressed Iran from developing politically”<sup>36</sup>, hence augmenting the social inequality and disparity he wanted to overcome in the first place. This new policy implementation produced a growth in urbanisation and industrialisation, whereby new social classes came to be, in deep contrast from the existing ones. A new middle class was formed, which were a byproduct of Reza Shah’s policies, as Goldstein describes: “The expansion of secular education led to a growth in the new middle classes. (...) Reza Shah’s forced secularisation contributed to two cultures in Iran. There was the growth of an educated new middle class, which together with the upper classes became increasingly modernised, westernised, and secularised. The new middle classes are composed of two groups: salaries employees in both public and private sectors and the liberal professions. The peasants and the old middle class (which was composed of the bazaar and the Ulama) retained a traditional religious style of life. The new middle classes had higher levels of education and income than the old middle classes”<sup>37</sup>.

It is in this moment of extreme and radical change that Reza Shah implements an attitude of revivalism and nationalism<sup>38</sup>, which was characterised by the strong ties to ancient Iran and the re-discovery of archaeology as a way to aggrandise his monarchy and the nation of Iran as a whole. As a matter of fact,

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<sup>34</sup> Khaki, G.N. and Bhat, M.A. (2015), p. 47

<sup>35</sup> Afary (2009), p. 53, found in Goldstein, W.S. (2010), p. 284

<sup>36</sup> Goldstein, W.S. (2010), p. 54

<sup>37</sup> *ib.*, p. 53

<sup>38</sup> Grigor, T. (2004), p. 18; Abdi, K (2001), p. 57

Reza Shah, in the words of Abdi, “had two overriding and inseparable goals that he pursued relentlessly: to restore Iran to some of its former greatness and to establish himself as the absolute power on top of the reconstructed nation”<sup>39</sup>. Under the first years of his reign, the approach towards culture as an instrument for nation-building was mainly undertaken as archaeological excavations and the institution of official ministries and societies that could implement Reza Shah’s new policies and encourage studies for the benefit of the nation. An event that prompted Reza Shah to start implementing policies in favour of a nationalised archaeology is described by Kamyar Abdi in his essay *Nationalism, Politics, and the Development of Archaeology in Iran*:

While in Khuzestan, Reza Khan paid a visit to Susa and, to his great despair, learned about crude archeological activities at the site by the French and the Concessions of 1885 and 1900. Shortly afterwards, encouraged by nationalist figures, especially General Faraj-Allah Aq-evli and Mohammad Ali Forough, the Majles abolished both Concessions on 17 October 1927 and ratified the Antiquities Law three years later. (...) To fulfil the long-delayed goal of the Society of National Heritage the Iranian government was required to build an archaeological museum and library in Tehran. (...) André Godard began his job as the first director of the “Antiquities Service of Iran” in 1929. (...) The so-called Godard era in Iranian archaeology was marked by two accomplishments: inauguration of the first Iranian journal of archaeology (*Athar-e-Iran*) and the design and construction of a museum modelled after the great Sasanian palace at Ctesiphon<sup>40</sup>.

Soon after, in 1927, Reza Shah inaugurated the Iran Bastan Museum (Ancient Iran Museum) in Tehran. Mainly, two Western figures helped Reza Shah formally shape his approach to archaeology, French archaeologist and historian, André Godard and American art historian, Arthur Upham Pope. André Godard was appointed as first director of the “Antiquities

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<sup>39</sup> Abdi, K. (2001), p. 58

<sup>40</sup> Abdi, K. (2001), p. 58-59

Service of Iran” in 1929, as a way to make up for the abolition of the archaeological concessions to the French up until 1924. Godard praised Reza Shah’s attempts at giving Iranian art a new importance in the political context of the time, noting the extraordinary importance of his policies in contributing to art history globally:

However, until 1926, when H.M. Reza Shah Pahlawi acceded to the throne, the art of Iran was only represented in the eyes of the world by the minor arts, masterpieces of which occupy the showcases of the great national museums in the world, both public and private. Nothing or almost nothing was known , even in Iran, about Iranian architecture, because of the indifference of the country’s inhabitants to the vestiges of their ancient civilisation as well as a fanaticism which prohibited foreigners from entering religious buildings. (...) On the other hand, during the reign of H.M. Reza Shah Pahlawi, i.e. from 1926 to 1941, it was possible to enter and work in all the monuments in Iran, even in the particularly holy cities of Mashhad and Qum.<sup>41</sup>

On the other hand, Pope compiled the first survey of “Iranian art from the Achaemenid to Sasanian and Islamic times and stressed the cultural, artistic, and spiritual contribution of Iran to the world civilisation”<sup>42</sup>; not only: Reza Shah was encouraged to promote the patronage of arts and culture as a way of solidifying Iranian national identity, a goal shared by Pope, considered “most influential in promoting Iranian nationalism”<sup>43</sup>. Therefore, with Reza Shah Pahlavi, we see a new era of patronage for the arts and culture typical of Iran and its various regional derivatives: among the arts patronised, carpet weaving, restoration of buildings, traditional Iranian architectural structures were preferred. The need for the purification of the language was also enhanced by anti-British nationalist sentiment, which had already started in 1919 and had effectively

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<sup>41</sup> Godard, A. (2015), p. 9

<sup>42</sup> Abdi, K. (2001), p. 60

<sup>43</sup> *ib.*, p. 61

bloomed under Reza Shah Pahlavi<sup>44</sup>. The glorification of Iran's pre-Islamic past and the purification of the Persian language, was "motivated primarily by ideological expediency"<sup>45</sup>; one such example is the attempt at purification of Iranian language as a way of returning to its Achaemenid past: he chose for himself the surname "Pahlavi"<sup>46</sup>, "emphasising his cultural ties with pre-Islamic Iran"<sup>47</sup>, and for Iran chose the name "Persia" in 1934, as he believed that "Iran" was heavily associated with the Fars province and the decadence of the Qajar era, whilst "Persia" gave rise to a sentiment of belonging to the glorious past and pre-Islamic times<sup>48</sup>. This was mainly justified by the reformist intelligentsia as a parallel to what English speakers were accustomed to, using Greek and Latin roots to create words and enhance their own language, whilst purporting a historical validity to it <sup>49</sup>. To conclude, the reign of Reza Shah is considered to have had a deep impact and emphasis on the re-galvanisation of nationalism on its society, as an instrument of modernisation. However, it will be precisely this need to educated and secularise society that will inevitably backfire against the ageing monarch: the newly formed intelligentsia, discontented by his despotism, the constant military oppression and lack of tolerance, lead the way to an increasing opposition that would have eventually lead to his abdication in 1941, in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi <sup>50</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> Kia, M. (1998), p. 19

<sup>45</sup> *ib.*, p. 20

<sup>46</sup> Abdi, K. (2001), p. 63; Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 80; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 73

<sup>47</sup> Abdi, K. (2001), p. 63

<sup>48</sup> Abdi, K. (2001), p. 63; Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 80; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 84

<sup>49</sup> Kia, M. (1998), p. 22-23

<sup>50</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 99; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 95

## 1.2 | *The Mohammad Reza Shah Era (1941-1979)*

In 1941, Iran suffered the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran, and covertly, of the United States, as a way of guaranteeing control over oil and as a safe pathway to the Soviet Union for both Allies: this event further enhanced Reza Shah Pahlavi's failure and abdication. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, took the reigns of the country, albeit under the Allies' control and full cooperation: the Shah was to cooperate without questions asked, in return for the promise that the foreign powers "guarantee Iran's territorial integrity; promised to withdraw within six months of the war's end; supplied the government with grain to ward off famine; discouraged tribes to cause trouble; and, most crucial of all for the new Shah, agreed to retain his armed forces at the minimum strength of 80,000 soldiers and 24,000 gendarmes"<sup>51</sup>. The new king tried to emulate his father's iron fist, however lacked the authoritarian approach given the political situation at hand. However, the Shah could act within a limited scope of action, thus taking steps to maintain his public standing, therefore appeared dressed both in civilian clothing and military garbs, as a way of cultivating his presence in the military, one of the Pahlavi state's main pillars<sup>52</sup>. Nevertheless, global tensions were at a high point at the time, given the start of the Second World War: Iran had declared neutrality, but was under the occupation by the Soviet Union in the northern regions, whilst occupied by the British in the south. Abrahamian describes the period of occupation from 1941 to 1953 as the "*nationalist interregnum*", an era that was characterised by putting "(...) an end to the era when the monarch had ruled supreme through his undisputed control of the army, bureaucracy, and court patronage"<sup>53</sup>. Instead, Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi was merely a figure of reference of the monarchy

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<sup>51</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 101

<sup>52</sup> *ib.*, p. 102

<sup>53</sup> *ib.*, p. 102

for the thirteen year period of nationalist interregnum, whereby his control of the military was still guaranteed but not that over the bureaucracy or the patronage system.

In the thirteen years of nationalist interregnum, Iran observes the rise of different sources of political power, debated primarily between the Majles, the monarch, the cabinet and the population<sup>54</sup>. Most notably, the power had once again been shifted into the hands of aristocrats and notables, which consequently organised the bureaucracy around them in their favour. Political influence of the notables predominantly manifested itself in the cabinet and through the rise of four parliamentary parties, denominated *fraksiuns* (a word taken from the German Reichstag): the *Azadi* (Freedom) *fraksiun*, the *Demokrat fraksiun* (*Fraksiun-e 'Eshayer* [Tribal *fraksiun*], the *Ettehad-e Melli* (National Union) *fraksiun* and the *Mehan* (Fatherland) *fraksiun*<sup>55</sup>. The Majles and the *fraksiuns* would choose a premier or premier candidate, submit a government program and receive approve both program and ministries from the Majles (*id*). In 1941, the Tudeh party entered the political scene, a move that would heavily destabilise the notables' power in the Majles, a party made up of the intelligentsia and former political prisoners, whose leader was Iraj Iskandari<sup>56</sup>. The party ushered in a socialist movement that would last until 1949; the intellectuals behind the party believed in Marxist and communist ideology, influenced also by European socialist and communist parties of the time. The party's program was directed towards an ideology that encompassed "socialist, patriotic, democratic, and even constitutionalist sentiments"<sup>57</sup>, focusing on the lower classes and aiming at lessening the inequality gap between social classes, as well as denouncing the oligarchy of the Majles and the notables. This period was dubbed as the era of 'Revival of Constitutionalism' (*ehyd' mashrutiiyyat*) which

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<sup>54</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 103; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 97

<sup>55</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 107

<sup>56</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 110; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 97

<sup>57</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 111

was characterised as having “unprecedented freedom of the press, speech, and assembly in spite of the chaos, factionalism, personalism, clique-ism, and cliental-ism that characterised much of party politics and parliamentary practices alongside the rising 'demands for popular participation during the war and intermittently afterwards until the early 1960s”, however, as independence rose, “the primacy of the goal of national independence and subsequently modernization has had the effect of suspending the adoption of popular participation as the primary goal of the political system”<sup>58</sup>. The Tudeh party was showing increasing influence over the middle salaried working class, and was progressively amassing the following of both intelligentsia and white-collar workers<sup>59</sup>; however this came to an abrupt halt when two events undermined Tudeh’s political confidence in the Majles: the first disastrous happening was the demand for oil of the Soviet Union and its encouragement of independent movements for authority in Kurdistan and Azerbaijan, the second event came after the attempted assassination of the Shah in February 1949. The failed attempt gave space for a propitious moment for the Shah, who instructed the government to crack down on all the political parties possibly associated with the assassin. The government declared martial law, outlawed Tudeh, shut down the press, limited political and free speech, closed trade unions, tortured and imprisoned possible political leaders of the opposition, effectively eliminating any kind of opposition<sup>60</sup>. What emerged from the situation was an advantageous moment for the Shah, who wasted no time in positioning his own power in the Majles and the Constituent Assembly and gained greater political control. However, the rise and diminishing of the Tudeh party greatly influenced and encouraged political participation and

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<sup>58</sup> Ramzani, R.K. (1974), p. 134-135

<sup>59</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 113

<sup>60</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 115

understanding in Iran, as Abrahamian observes in his book *A History of Modern Iran* (2018):

“The party introduced into Iran the notion of mass politics, mass participation, and mass organisations with party cells and branches, party conferences and congresses, and party newspapers, politburos, and central committees. Tudeh published the first Persian-language political dictionary popularising such words as colonialism, imperialism, fascism, united front, bourgeoisie, aristocracy, oligarchy, reactionary, progress, masses, and toilers. It popularised the notion of class identity, class conflict, and class dynamics (...).”<sup>61</sup>

The political situation was nonetheless fragmented, with the looming presence of British influence in the background. A fundamental event during 1949, which led to the foundation of the National Front party by Mohammad Mossadeq, was the debacle concerning the nationalisation of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The AIOC, founded in 1908-9, had given considerable power and influence to the British in regards to oil, a contested situation by Iran, which frequently tried to negotiate the terms of the agreement. After a first failed re-negotiation in 1933, distrust and discontent were steadily rising in regards to foreign occupation and the oil debacle. The situation concerning AIOC, coupled with the dwindling of the Tudeh party, ushered in a new sentiment of nationalism in the figure of Mohammad Mossadeq, a political actor present since the Constitutional Revolution in 1906. The National Front party was instrumental in its opposition of both the Shah and Britain, gaining the consensus of several political fractions, (including the Iran Party, the Toilers Party, the National Party and the Tehran Association of Bazaar Trade and Craft Guilds) and rallying against the Prime Minister at the time, Razmara, accused in 1951 of protecting the

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<sup>61</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 116



interests of the monarchy and the British<sup>62</sup>. Following Razmara's assassination in 1951, the Majles approved to pass the decree by which the AIOC became nationalised, to the detriment of Britain's interests, and was finally signed by Mossadeq on 1 May 1951, the day after accepting the role of Prime Minister. This episode triggered a series of diplomatic incidents with Britain that eventually escalated and served as justification for the 1953 coup d'état against Mossadeq. Mossadeq himself amplified tensions by breaking diplomatic relations, closing official institutions and the embassy in Tehran; as a result, Britain responded by freezing assets, reinforced the embargo and its naval presence in the Persian Gulf<sup>63</sup>. Rising tensions exploded in the Iranian capital in July 1952, when crisis erupted internally between Mossadeq and the Shah: Mossadeq had tried to reform the electoral law to weaken the power of the monarchy and take control of the military by appointing himself as war minister. One of the Pahlavi state's main pillars of governance and control had thus been put in question by the premier: Mossadeq once again escalated the confrontation with the Shah by resigning as premier and fuelling a three day general strike of the discontented public, denoted by armed confrontation of the police with protestors, leading to a crisis also known as 30th Tir (July 21). The situation precipitated once Mossadeq tried to up-stage the monarchy once again by calling for a referendum in 1953 to substitute the monarchy with a democratic republic. Having cut ties and limited control of the British, therefore of the United States, Mossadeq was increasingly seen as an enemy for foreign control over Iran and to the monarch and monarchy itself. The Shah, in accordance with British and American intelligence agencies, retreated away from the Iranian capital, leaving the effective coup d'état in the

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<sup>62</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 118; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 111

<sup>63</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 120; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 114

CIA and MI6's hands, leading to operation AJAX. The interest of both countries were strictly tied to Iran's oil reserves, one the world's largest, the potential damage the autonomy of Iran and the consequent advent of communism could cause to the verdict of the Cold War, in favour of the Soviets. The publication, in 2013, of the CIA dossier on the 1953 coup briefly discusses the reasons for intervention in the summary:

By the end of 1952, it had become clear that the Mossadeq government in Iran was incapable of reaching an oil settlement with interested Western countries; was reaching a dangerous and advanced stage of illegal deficit financing; was disregarding the Iranian constitution in prolonging Premier Mohammad Mossadeq's tenure of office; was motivated mainly by Mossadeq's desire for personal power; was governed by irresponsible policies based on emotion; had weakened the Shah and the Iranian Army to a dangerous degree; and had cooperated closely with the Tudeh (Communist) Party of Iran. In view of these factors, it was estimated that Iran was in real danger of falling behind the Iron Curtain; (...) a victory for the Soviets in the Cold War and a major setback for the West in the Middle East.

(Donald N. Wilber, March 1954)<sup>64</sup>

The fruitful collaboration of CIA and MI6 came to conclusion on August 19, 1953, day of the coup d'état against Mossadeq: the intelligence agencies had pulled strings to stir up public chaos with mock protestors and agitators, whose role was that of agitating the crowds, helped by the military presence gaining pace in Tehran and nearing the former premier's house in Tehran, where military tanks were also positioned in front to protect him. After hours long conflict, Mossadeq was removed from his house, surrendered himself to the newly appointed and CIA-backed premier Zahedi and was later imprisoned, along with his collaborators.

It is said that after the removal of Mossadeq, a period of state expansion was inaugurated, blessed by the rising oil revenues, which grew from 34.4\$ million in 1954-55 to 359\$

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<sup>64</sup> CIA, Clandestine Services History, Overthrow of Premier Mossadeq of Iran: November 1952 - August 1953, p. iii

million at the beginning of the 1960s, a 943% increase in just five years (Abrahamian, 2018). Keddie argues that “the entrance of countries other than England and the United States into the Iranian oil market brought real competition for the first time in this field, and a constant improvement in terms available to the Iranian government, as well as considerable governmental control over production in the area outside the large international Consortium concession”<sup>65</sup>. This statement by Keddie is echoed in the economic boom that surrounds the 1960s in Iran and the accruing of power by the Shah right after the 1953 coup. The period was mainly characterised by the reprisal and expansion of two of the Pahlavi state pillars: military and bureaucracy; the Shah increased military spending and appointed family members to ensure the possibility of a military coup against the monarchy, whilst court patronage diverted funds into new enterprises for the royal family, amassing a \$3 billion fortune at its height<sup>66</sup>. Concerning bureaucracy, in those years the Shah expanded the number of ministries from twelve to twenty, including a ministry dedicated to art and culture and tourism: this process of forced and fast-paced modernisation was seen as of utmost importance for the Swiss-educated Shah. Ramazani debates that social change in Iran derived from its political history, asserting that “as an ‘old’ and technically sovereign nation, but in many ways a ‘new’ nation, Iran’s modern political history is largely that of a nation in search of its ‘true’ or ‘complete’ independence”<sup>67</sup>, therefore used as instruments to encourage a national modern identity for Iran, a process that had already been initiated by Reza Shah in the 1920s<sup>68</sup>. However, the political situation and context that allowed for new modernisation processes was also a byproduct of external circumstances; Ramazani lists three factors as main incentives: (1) Iraq’s political turmoil after the dismantling of an

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<sup>65</sup> Keddie, R. (1971), p. 14

<sup>66</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 130

<sup>67</sup> Ramazani, R.K. (1974), p. 125

<sup>68</sup> Keddie, R. (1971), p. 12

unpopular monarchical regime in 1958; (2) the improvement of Iran-Soviet Union relations and the consequent pledge of alliance to the Soviet Union by Iran in 1962; and finally, (3) the “adoption of socio-economic modernisation as the primary goal of Iran by the early 1960s”, a choice favoured by the Kennedy administration<sup>69</sup>. Following Reza Shah’s pathway in the modernisation of Iran, the Shah inaugurated the 1960s with the introduction, 1963, of the so-called ‘White Revolution’ (*enqelab-e sefid*), a socio-economic and welfare programme<sup>70</sup> that encompassed twelve main points:

- (1) Land reform
- (2) Nationalization of forests and pastures
- (3) Public sale of state-owned factories to finance land reform
- (4) Profit-sharing in industry
- (5) Reform of electoral law to include women
- (6) Literacy Corps
- (7) Health Corps
- (8) Reconstruction and Development Corps
- (9) Rural Courts of Justice
- (10) Nationalization of the waterways
- (11) National reconstruction
- (12) Educational and administrative revolution

The reform, that extended from 1963 to 1979, was dubbed “the revolution of the Shah and its people” (*enqelab-e shah va mardom*) and was regarded as a “humanitarian revolution” dedicated in particular to the less privileged and the safeguard of their rights<sup>71</sup>. The White Revolution sparked a new approach of the political elite which “began speaking a revolutionary language that stressed the need for change”<sup>72</sup>, however it also highlighted the deep-rooted inequalities between social classes, as it was felt as a “new attempt to introduce reform from above which (...) will preserve traditional power patterns”<sup>73</sup>. The most prominent points of the programme were the land reform, the

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<sup>69</sup> Ramazani, R.K. (1974), p. 130

<sup>70</sup> Ramazani, R.K. (1964), p. 129

<sup>71</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 132

<sup>72</sup> Bill, J.A. (1970), p. 32

<sup>73</sup> *ib.*, p. 33

Literacy Corps and women's rights, which immediately garnered attention by the people. A blow to the ulama and the clergy was seen in the form of the championing of women's rights and the declaration of Farah Diba, the Shah's third and last wife, as *Shahbanou* "Lady Shah", a title never before bestowed upon a woman which made her egalitarian to the Shah. The land reform sought to distribute existing land to the less privileged population in the countryside, creating "the emergence of millions of peasants as the new owners of land, the development of thousands of rural cooperatives, and increased agricultural productivity despite the migration of the labor force to cities and towns and the inability of the existing industry to absorb it"<sup>74</sup>. The government also tried to bolster illiteracy rates and to unify educational institutions throughout the country, introducing the Literacy Corps, 74,000 freshly graduated students whose mission was that of teaching in both rural and urban settings, diminishing the literacy rate from 46% to 26%<sup>75</sup>. The presence of the Literacy Corps in rural settings also helped enhance the presence of structures that were absent in the countryside, creating medical facilities and hospitals, consequently diminishing childhood epidemics and deaths, as well as creating vocational schools and helping further educational institutions. In a 1973 UNESCO report, Djamchid Behnam analyses the cultural policy enacted by Mohammad Reza Shah during those years, by stating that "Iran has now entered a new cultural, social and economic era and is once again bent on its historic mission of assimilating foreign cultures while preserving its national identity"<sup>76</sup>. Behnam succinctly summarises the goals of cultural policy in Iran during the years of the White Revolution:

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<sup>74</sup> Ramazani, R.K. (1974), p. 131

<sup>75</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 137; Ramazani, R.K. (1974), p. 132; Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 135-136

<sup>76</sup> Behnam, D. (1973), p. 14

“The text concerning cultural policy stresses the importance of disseminating a culture based on national continuity but meeting the needs of people who have to live in a changing society. The aim is neither to give a blind imitation of Western civilisation and culture nor to reject them. Iran must make a permanent evaluation of its cultural heritage in relation to the new elements and seek to adopt the best of these elements. [...] Such is the aim of Iranian cultural policy: to ensure that the country progresses economically and socially but yet does not lose its originality in the face of uniformity imposed by the values of modern technological civilisation. Another objective is the development of artistic and intellectual creation”.

(Behnam, 1973)<sup>77</sup>

The first attempt at developing cultural activities and creation comes in 1964 with the creation of the Ministry of Culture and Arts, a ministry dedicated to the progression of culture and art, safeguarding of cultural heritage, “improve the taste and the level of artistic appreciation of the people” and to prepare artists and encourage public interest in the arts<sup>78</sup>. Interestingly, sections of the ministry were dedicated to artistic creation (*General administration for artistic creation*), assisting artists with government funded subsidies and official artistic institutions, and artistic activities (*General administration of artistic activities*), dedicated to the dissemination of art in the population. In 1967, the Shah inaugurated the Higher Council for Arts and Culture, formed by the Minister of Culture and Arts, the Minister of National Education, the Minister of Information, the Minister of Science and Higher Education. This first step signalled a revival of the arts that expanded in different artistic branches, from archaeology to the aforementioned purification of the Farsi language, the protection and regulation of handicrafts (carpets in particular) and the different ways of propagating and disseminating culture for the people of Iran.

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<sup>77</sup> *ib.*, p. 16

<sup>78</sup> *ib.*, p. 19

Specifically, artistic endeavours such as film and cinemas, festivals, museums and cultural centres were favoured. Regarding festivals we see the creation of two art festivals that would shape the cultural and artistic environment: a festival of culture and art in October through Iran and the acclaimed Shiraz Arts Festival, a festival dedicated to the encounter of East and West, held four times until 1973, where international artists would perform. The festival would become a symbol of the artistic avant-garde. In this context, the rise of museums was split in three different 'genres': Archaeological Museums (i.e. the Archaeological Museum of Tehran), Religious Sanctuaries and Cultural Heritage/Fine Arts and Decor Museums (e.g. Golestan Palace Museum, The Tehran Museum of Contemporary and Modern Art and the Museum of National Arts). Most importantly in this cultural dissemination was the establishment of cultural centres where artists could develop artistic techniques and inspire cultural debate: the introduction of specific bachelor's or master's degrees for the Fine Arts and artistic disciplines greatly enhanced the artistic production of the time. By 1973, the publication date of Behnam's cultural policy analysis of Iran, 4% of all Iranian students had enrolled in specialised courses in arts, a 13% of which was enrolled in the first course of study, a 33% enrolled in bachelor courses and a 51% in a master's degree<sup>79</sup>.

These improvements led to exponential population growth, with 76% increase from 1956 (18,954,706) to 1976 (33,491,000): however, a direct consequence of such expansion was the inevitable widening of society, the creation of new social classes and the deepening of inequality gaps between classes. The Shah's intent to ally with the peasantry and the middle class backfired once the educational reforms bore their fruits: "by virtue of literacy and land reform, the offspring of villagers are beginning to acquire the tools that will enable them to penetrate

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<sup>79</sup> Behnam, D. (1973), p. 40

the middle class in larger and larger numbers. One of the most profound unintended consequences of the White Revolution is the accelerating growth of the professional middle class”<sup>80</sup>. Profound changes impacted the structure of society; the upper class was composed of the aristocracy, elite and intelligentsia, the middle class was layered in two different strata, the traditional bazaar bourgeoisie and the rise of a new white collar, salaried middle class, which was also composed of the ulama <sup>81</sup>.

Although the White Revolution sought to uniform society and improve societal conditions, three main consequences derived from it that will eventually lead to the dismantlement of the monarchy. First of all, the reform quadrupled the size of problematic classes for the Shah, such as the urban working class and the intelligentsia, characterised by Bill as being distinguished by five major characteristics: “(1) increasingly they refuse to accept the traditional socio-political patterns that have dominated Iranian society; (2) they possess, or are acquiring, a higher education (i.e., a modern or "new" education as opposed to the traditional religious-based education); (3) their power position derives primarily from the skills or talents they have acquired from their modern formal education; (4) they have been exposed in varying degrees to outside philosophies, thoughts, and ideas; and (5) they are free of rigid religious dogmatism and of blind worship of past history”<sup>82</sup>. A second consequence was the widening of the economic and social gap between classes, sharpening societal differences and building resentment against the reforms. Finally, the oil boom fuelled the Shah’s supposedly “Napoleonic vision of Iran as a new Japan”<sup>83</sup>, leading to a series of publicised criticisms of his flamboyant way of life in spite of the economic conditions of the Iranian people. A very criticised event that led to a vocal public indignation was the celebration of dynastic nationalism with an extravagant

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<sup>80</sup> Bill, J.A. (1970), p. 39

<sup>81</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 137-138

<sup>82</sup> Bill, J.A. (1970), p. 25

<sup>83</sup> Schayegh, C. (2010), p. 41



ceremony held in the archaeological site of Persepolis for the commemoration of the 2,500-year of Iranian monarchy in 1971, an event that flourished with elaborate fireworks, decor and international guests<sup>84</sup>. The event was one of many that further distanced the public's opinion of the Shah, impacting negatively his image and the way the government was supposedly spending its assets. Pesaran emphasises that, "when a general socio-economic crisis began to grow in Iran from 1973 onwards, and as inequalities between rich and poor across the country became heightened, the response of many was to build on this global atmosphere of protest. Revolutionaries soon thereafter focused their attention on the perceived injustices of the Shah's economic system, which was criticized both for its reliance on oil revenues and for its dependency on the West"<sup>85</sup>. In this unstable political context, two figures rose as major critics of the Shah's monarchy, which will be influential in the 1979 Islamic Revolution: Ali Shariati and the exiled Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Both figures were proponents of political and Islamic radicalism, stances exacerbated by growing social tensions and dissatisfactions. In 1965, Shariati, the intellectual behind the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, returned to Iran and started disseminating his ideology through pamphlets and public lectures, all with one main concept: "that the true essence of Shi'ism is revolution against all forms of oppression, especially against feudalism, capitalism, and imperialism"<sup>86</sup>. A return to Islam signalled a return to radical politics and as a form of protest against a Western imperialism that was emblematic with the Shah and his Western way of life. Shariati, similarly to Fanon, "advocated the need to stop imitating the West, but unlike Fanon, he did so by insisting that the correct path to achieving a truly independent development was a religious one"<sup>87</sup>. Khomeini's involvement, on the other hand, peaked in

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<sup>84</sup> *ib.*, p. 40

<sup>85</sup> Pesaran, E. (2008), p. 700

<sup>86</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 148

<sup>87</sup> Pesaran, E. (2008), p. 699

1970, when he discussed his ideas in lectures and the published a series of pamphlets denouncing the Shah and the Pahlavi government that were widely spread under the title of *Velayat-e Faqeh: Hokumat-e Islami* (The Jurist's Guardianship: Islamic Government)<sup>88</sup>. Green argues that “(...) an important but unanticipated aspect of Iranian social mobilisation was the spread of ideas. Pahlavi development, through its politicising character as well as the unpopularity of its chief proponent, the shah, not only served as the target of such ideas but also facilitated their transfer. Such ideas are not necessarily dangerous, but given the absence of communication between the crown and the Iranian people, and the denial of political participation, they ultimately proved to be fatal”<sup>89</sup>.

In 1975, the Shah sensed the impending political tensions and gave in to an authoritarian regime of oppression, quashing any political opposition with the dismantlement of party opposition (namely the *Mardom* and *Iran-e Novin* parties) and the creation of a one-state party: *Hezb-e Rastakhiz* (Resurgence party). Abrahamian summarises the fall of the regime as coinciding with the creation and employment of the Resurgence Party:

“[the Resurgence Party] had been created to stabilise the regime, strengthen the monarchy, and firmly anchor the Pahlavi state in the wider Iranian society. It had tried to achieve this by mobilising the public, establishing links between government and people, consolidating control over office employees, factory workers, and small farmers, and, most brazenly of all, extending state power into the bazaars and the religious establishment. (...) Instead of bringing stability, it weakened the regime, cut the monarchy further off from the country, and there added to public resentments. Mass mobilisation brought mass manipulation; this, in turn, brought mass dissatisfaction”

(Abrahamian, 2018)<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 150

<sup>89</sup> Green, J.D. (1980), p. 38-39

<sup>90</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 157

The rapidly declining political situation worsened in 1976, when an article published in Paris and penned by Khomeini, titled “Fifty Years of Treason”, denounced the Shah and his government of misrule and alliances with the West. The 1978 Qom incident, whereby religious students took to the streets to protest the smearing of Khomeini’s persona by government sponsored newspaper *Ettea’at*, triggered a series of events that will lead to the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Three major forty day crises erupted all over the country: the first, in February saw violent clashes in various cities, including Tabriz; a second clash in March, that shook Yazd and Isfahan; a third much intense and brutal protest took place in twenty-four towns. December 11, 1978, day of the Ashura, one of the most important Islamic religious days, the opposition negotiated on behalf of Khomeini with the government, with the Iranian people taking to the streets in protest and demanding the establishment of an Islamic Republic, the return of their exiled leader Khomeini, the demolition of the monarchy under the slogan “The Shah Must Go!”. Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi could do nothing but flee the country and accept his failure as monarch. Khomeini triumphantly returned on February 1, 1979, inaugurating the process that will lead to the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On April 1, 1979, a referendum was held to abrogate the Islamic Republic of Iran, with a staggering 99% yes votes<sup>91</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> *ib.*, p. 167

### 1.3 | *The Islamic Republic of Iran (1979 - now)*

Khomeini's ascension to power and his unprecedented victory over the Shah inaugurated a new era in Iranian history, however practical questions arose on the establishment of an effective Islamic government. Soon after the referendum, Khomeini commissioned a group of clerical experts to create an Islamic Constitution, a hybrid of both religious and civil rights. Importantly, the Constitution endowed Khomeini with the title of Supreme Leader, both spiritual and governmental. The Constitution advanced both the introduction of shari'a law and democratic concessions that concerned the general electorate, which included women, to vote for the president, the Majles, the local and regional councils; the presidential term was limited to four years with a possibility of a second term. The Islamic Constitution purported a political structure that saw the Supreme Leader as highest role in charge, which was elected by the Assembly of Experts, and superseded the Expediency Council and the Guardian Council. The president, considered the second highest office, superseded the executive branch and could appoint ministers, cabinet members, as well as directors of the nationalised enterprises such as the NIOC (National Iranian Oil Company) and the National Bank. An important clause was that all laws were supposed to conform to Islam, a fact that caused discontent among the secular groups that helped the revolution. The first Interim Government (*Dowlat-e Movaghat-e Iran*) established, also known as the Provisional Revolutionary and Islamic Government of Iran, was headed by Mehdi Bazargan, appointed by Khomeini. However, the continual inference of Khomeini led to frequent confrontations between Bazargan and the ayatollah, echoed also by secular movements and Shariatmadari, a high ranking ayatollah who believed cleric

presence in governmental affairs was detrimental, denouncing Khomeini's advance to power and the interpretation of Islam as not representative of the Iranian people as a whole<sup>92</sup>. Hostilities exacerbated on November 4, 1979, where students affiliated to a pro-Khomeini group took hostage for 444 days (until January 20, 1981) the U.S. embassy in Tehran, leading to an international diplomatic crisis between the United States and Iran, known as the Iran hostage crisis. The hostage crisis stemmed from the entrance of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in the United States for health issues, an action of dissidence against Iran that heavily impacted the fallen Shah's image in Iran<sup>93</sup>. In addition to this, Bazargan's resignation of the first Interim Government, a result of the frequent clashes with Khomeini and his followers, sent the situation spiralling into further political chaos. Seizing the moment of political instability, Khomeini, on December 2, 1979, proposed a second constitutional referendum, where an astonishing 99.5% voted yes. The Islamic Republic of Iran was effectively abrogated and could continue its path towards a solid consolidation of its power.

The consolidation of power of the Islamic Republic of Iran takes a decade, from 1979 to 1989, encompassing the Iran-Iraq war as a major factor of expansion. The Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) created the opportunity for state expansion: in the form of military growth in terms of numbers and power; of ideological appeal under the guise of patriotic rallies, the rise of images focused on martyrdom and Islamic sacrifice: a factor enhanced by the production of patriotic movies glorifying martyrdom. Cultural production during the Iran-Iraq war was characterised by "feeding the needs of war, with particular emphasis on populism and rigid puritanism. (...) The war required massive amounts of material and human resource mobilization, but it was the

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<sup>92</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 167

<sup>93</sup> *ib.*, 170

necessary ideological and cultural groundwork for mobilizing and sustaining the war that proved more long-lasting. The Iran-Iraq War became the basis of a new political and cultural milieu (...)”<sup>94</sup>. Economically it depressed food rations and introduced price controls. The government also imposed a stronger interpretation of shari’a law, diminishing women’s rights and re-introducing the hijab and full coverage of the body, enforcing an “Islamic code of public appearance”<sup>95</sup> for both men and women. More-so, to encourage nationalist sentiments, the Islamic Republic announced a “Cultural Revolution”, that was supposed to oppose “cultural imperialism”<sup>96</sup>: censoring was introduced as a regulatory tool, Western cultural productions were banned, as were references to the monarchy or the Shah. Balaghi reports the clause of Article 2 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran as stating that it is “a system based on belief in (...) cultural independence”<sup>97</sup>. Farhi debates that the attempted ideological fusion of culture and religion, the Islamic revolutionaries hoped, on the most manifest level, to make a statement about a new and unified set of values that was about to become important, explicitly rejecting what to them was also an integrated set of values revolving around the impact of Westernization on Iranian life and cultural practices”<sup>98</sup>. In May 1980, Khomeini appointed a High Council for Cultural Revolution (HCCR), in order to regulate cultural production in a fashion that conformed to “Islamic culture and principles”<sup>99</sup>. The overall aim, argues Abrahamian was to “Islamicize Iran”<sup>100</sup>, by detracting Iran of its past history (wanting to cancel the Zoroastrian New Year or disposing of the archaeological ruins of Persepolis). However,

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<sup>94</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 4

<sup>95</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 182

<sup>96</sup> *ib.*, p. 181

<sup>97</sup> Balaghi, S. (2009), p. 15

<sup>98</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 1

<sup>99</sup> *ib.*, p. 3

<sup>100</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 182

the Islamic Republic distributed wealth to the less rich, by expanding its presence in the rural countryside and rising agricultural prices. Statistics from the period show the positive benefits that did happen over the first years of the Islamic Republic taking charge: schooling rose from 60% to 90%, further eliminating illiteracy rates; infant mortality decreased; overall population growth hit a 3.2% annually, from 34 million in 1976 to 50 million in 1984<sup>101</sup>.

In order to further consolidate power, Khomeini arranged a system by which the transition of power could be regulated and provide a defence against any kind of opposition. The Supreme Leader designated a Constitutional Reform Council that was to nominate the successor, following strict guidelines and criteria by which the next Supreme Leader could be chosen, foremost, the need to be a seminary-trained cleric. After Khomeini's death, ayatollah Khamenei was elected in 1989, a formerly elected president since 1981. With Khamenei as Supreme Leader, Ali Rafsanjani won the presidential elections with a 97% landslide. The new president's main concern was that of "reconstruction" and of giving a positive outlook on the accruing of wealth, a position justified by the fact that the *bazaariis* had played a great role in the revolution itself<sup>102</sup>. This post-war reconstruction phase<sup>103</sup> saw a shift in the cultural policies employed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the aforementioned inauguration of the HCCR. "The Cultural Revolution was a major blow to Iran's cultural and intellectual life"<sup>104</sup>, observes Farhi, as the cultural opposition was quashed. The conflictual relationship between Khamenei and Rafsanjani started cracking in 1989, when the latter, inspired by a visit to China, suggested a similar economic model, incurring in the opposition of the Supreme

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<sup>101</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 185

<sup>102</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 192-193

<sup>103</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 5

<sup>104</sup> *ib.*, p. 3

Leader and the Majles<sup>105</sup>. In 1997, during the economic crisis derived from U.S. sanctions at the time, Rafsanjani concluded his second presidential mandate.

The next presidential term was debated between clerically backed Nateq-Nuri and reformist Khatami in 1997, which saw the unexpected triumph of Khatami, with a 69% of votes in favour<sup>106</sup>. A minister of culture under Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami was known for his liberal views, and in his first actions as president had tried to loosen censorship, open Iran to the West and viceversa<sup>107</sup>. Khatami's reformist presidential term was re-confirmed for a second time, inaugurating a period of cultural and artistic flourishing for the Iranian arts, signalled by the exhibitions held at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, the renewal for Iranian art in the international markets and the appreciation, and therefore government encouragement, of Iranian cinema internationally<sup>108</sup>. The reformist government provided funding for cultural organisations that could enhance cultural appreciation, such as local clubs, theatres, cinemas, cultural centres, newspapers and so on<sup>109</sup>. However, the breeze of reform and liberal attitudes soon encountered the opposition of conservatives who in turn vetoed bills that echoed sentiments of Western lifestyle or were against shari'a law. Internationally, the United States had publicly denounced Iran as an international threat, furthering the opposition felt against reformers: in this unstable diplomatic position, Khatami's second presidential term ended in 2005.

In 2005, ready to run for the presidential race was Mahmud Ahmadinejad, a fervent conservative and populist, whose denunciations against Rafsanjani and capitalism greatly

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<sup>105</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 189

<sup>106</sup> Sabahi, F. (2003), p. 207

<sup>107</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 190; Balaghi, S. (2009), p. 15

<sup>108</sup> Balaghi, S. (2009), p. 15

<sup>109</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 196



improved his chances to triumph at the elections, nonetheless by a smaller voter turnout than previous years. Ahmadinejad turned to be everything but shy of voicing controversial statements, gaining the discontent of most of the international community (statements such as: the Holocaust had never happened, Israel had no right to exist and Iran would not recognise it as a state, and most importantly, that Iran would continue its uranium enrichment program regardless of sanctions from the outside)<sup>110</sup>. Unsurprisingly, Iran was isolated by the international community and received harsher sanctions from the United States. In 2009, the re-election of Ahmadinejad suffered from a major electoral vote scandal, as Mir-Hussein Mousavi, a well liked reformist, after the election results denounced rigged elections in favour of Ahmadinejad<sup>111</sup>. Protests exploded in Tehran the night of the election, 12 June, 2009, with violent protests bursting on the streets, in one of the most violent manifestations of political activism of the past decade in Iran. Dubbed as the Green Revolution, the protest ran for 7 months, before being extinguished, rallying people in Tehran and other major cities spread across Iran. The violent outburst saw the fight between the Islamic Revolutionary Guards and the protestors: a popularised incident revolved around the murder of a young woman, Neda Agha-Soltan, who became the symbol of the protest and the demand for justice. Nonetheless, protests proved to be ineffective in resolving the issue at hand, as the government still accepted Ahmadinejad's victory and instead clamped down on the protestors, jailing and torturing protestors, a number which still has not been confirmed but has been reported as being around 200-500 people in total<sup>112</sup>.

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<sup>110</sup> Abrahamian, E. (2018), p. 199

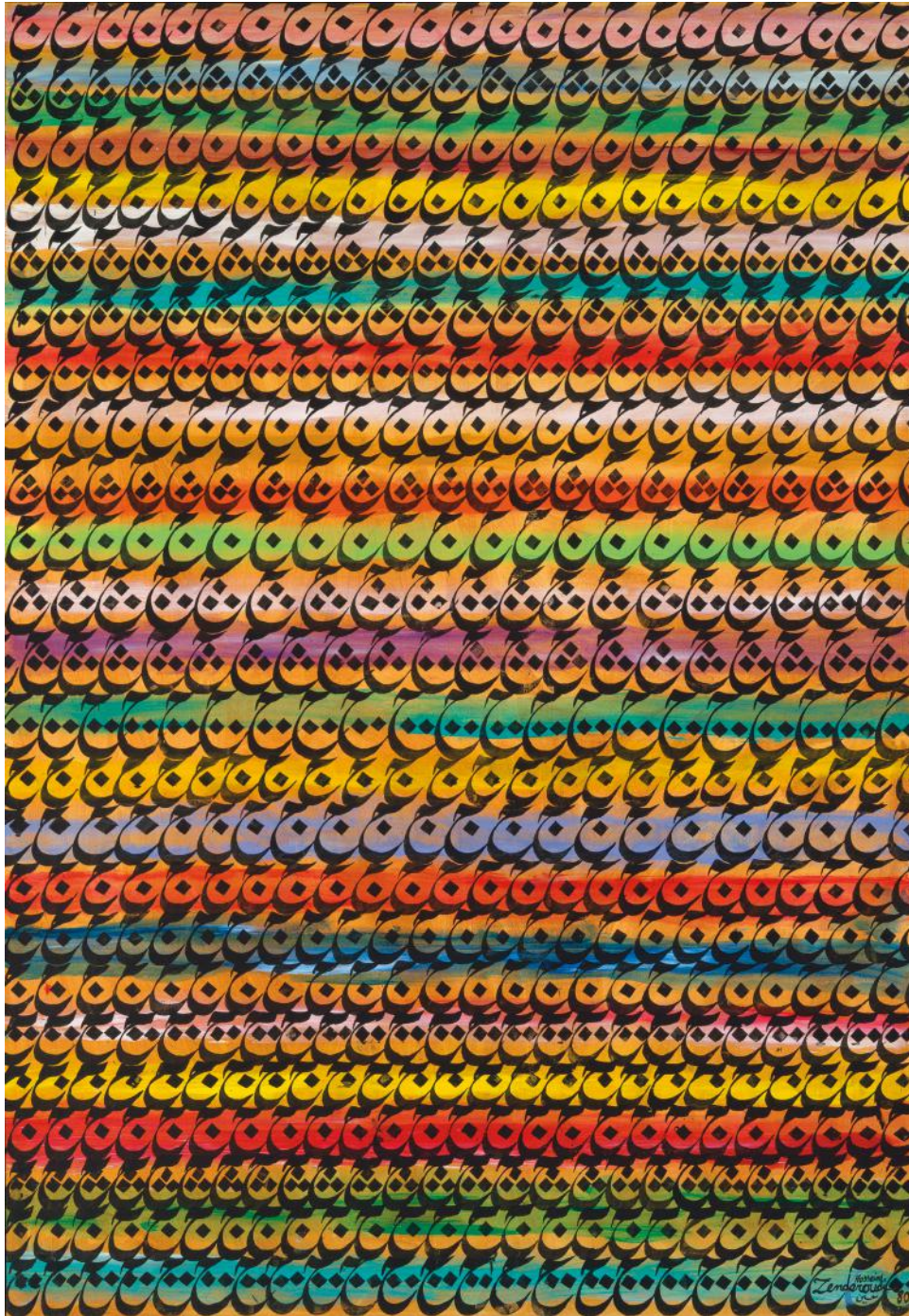
<sup>111</sup> Worth, R.F and Fathi, N. (2009); CNN (2009); Tisdall, S. (2009);

<sup>112</sup> Human Rights Watch (2009); Hafezi, P (2009)

In 2009, newcomer Hassan Rouhani, a cleric, won the elections in a landslide, a complete turnaround from the persona of Ahmadinejad. Rouhani, interested in salvaging Iran's diplomatic situation, tried to re-establish ties with the diplomatic community, symbolised by the successful negotiation with the United Nations in regards to the nuclear agreement, ratified in 2015. Overall, Rouhani's presidential mandate still suffered major setbacks from Iran's own political instability and growing economic depression, that, as of today, is one of the gravest economic moments for the country. Under the pressure of United States sanctions and the embargo, Iranian economy has faltered: "In a year, the national currency, the rial, as lost 70 percent of its value compared to the dollar. Inflation is over 35 percent"<sup>113</sup>.

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<sup>113</sup> Erdbrink, T. (2019)



2. Hossein Zenderoudi, *Tchah Tchah Jime* (1980)

## **Chapter Two** | *Tracing the evolution of Iranian art through the 20th and 21st Centuries*

### **2.1** | *From Kamal ol-Molk to Reza Shah Pahlavi (1880-1940): The beginning of Modern Iranian Art*

Artistic practices of modern Iran can be traced to the transitional period of the late Qajar era in the 20th century; a period were political instability and the need for reform spaced into cultural and artistic reforms and led to a re-discovery of art for the artists themselves. The Qajar period primarily favoured court and academic painting, rather than miniature and manuscript illustration, given by the influence of Russian art. Artistic practices in Iran in the nineteenth century were mostly dedicated to religious painting, “in both hybrid and popular forms at all levels of society for religious ceremonies. Portable canvases known as *pardeh* were used by local storytellers in teahouses, coffeehouses, and other public spaces, and mural paintings and tile work decorated mausoleums, shrines, and bathhouses. Popular decorative arts, such as metal locks, votive objects, religious standards, tribal rugs, and reverse glass paintings are also associated with this period”<sup>114</sup>. The late Qajar period was primarily distinguished by the flourishing of traditional art in the style of miniatures and *ghave-khane* paintings, and is considered as a “transitional period from tradition to modernity”<sup>115</sup>.

An important event in the modernisation of artistic practices in Iran was the establishment, in 1851 of Dar ul-Funun, the first polytechnic institute and university in Iran, under the orders of the newly-appointed grand vizier, Amir

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<sup>114</sup> Diba, L. (2014), p. 46

<sup>115</sup> Pedram, B., Hosseini, M. and Rahmani, G.R. (2017), p. 986

Kabir<sup>116</sup>. This moment is generally thought of as the stepping stone towards a path of modernisation in Iran. Dar ul-Funun posed as a great accomplishment as no such establishment had been created before in Iran: it set out to employ Austrian, Italian, French and other European teachers to come instruct its students. The first decade of the Dar ul-Funun was dedicated military sciences and was considered a military school, something Iran lacked during the Qajar era. Around 1885-6 the Dar ul-Funun had widened both its student body and curricula, with around 250 students, 15 teachers and assistants and had increased its facilities to host “along with the offices of the Ministry of science, the printing house, a chemical laboratory, a *tūp-kāna* (arsenal), a photographic atelier, an art studio, a music room, and the library. The Dar ul-Funun was the first establishment that made space for a more academic approach towards painting, much like the European institutions, and is considered to have become “an incubator for political and cultural reform in the era that followed”<sup>117</sup>. Dar ul-Funun was essential in the establishment of a hierarchy of academic painters which could spearhead the need for Iranian painting and a more academic approach that could encapsulate Iranian and Western art in a modernised way.

Graduating from Dar ul-Funun, Mohammad Ghaffari, later known as Kamal Ol-Molk (or Al-Molk), would become one of the greatest Iranian painters of the 20th century under the late Qajar dynasty. Discovered by Nasser Al-din Shah, Ghaffari was chosen as court painter for the monarch, where his European style distinguished him from other painters and artists. The name of “Kamal ol-Molk” was bestowed upon him by the Shah, meaning “Perfection on Land”, because of his extraordinary talent for realism, exemplified by one of his most famous

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<sup>116</sup> Dezhmkooy, M., & Massoudi, A. (2014), p. 5

<sup>117</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 45

paintings, *Mirror Hall* (1876)<sup>118</sup>. However, Kamal ol-Molk felt the importance of experiencing artistic practices in the West before establishing himself as court painter, and under Nasser Al-din Shah's orders, went to Europe to acquire new techniques he could diffuse in the academic cultural sphere. Whilst Europe was experiencing Impressionism, Kamal ol-Molk focused on portraits and realism, marking a change in his attitude towards the subjects painted: a trip to Iraq under the pretence of a pilgrimage led to Kamal ol-Molk's portraits of countrymen and the less fortunate, as well as of political characters, especially liberal leaders of Mashrote<sup>119</sup>. Kamal ol-Molk's career turn occurred in a period of social and political transformation, by which the Qajar dynasty was losing power to a then relatively unknown Reza Khan. The need for the foundation of a dedicated academic institution occurred in 1911 with the founding of the Madreseh Mostazrafeh Sanaye in Tehran, under the direction of Kamal ol-Molk and welcomed by the Ministry of Information<sup>120</sup>. The Madreseh Mostazrafeh Sanaye proposed a curricula that drew from Kamal ol-Molk's own experiences and influences gained from the West, proposing both low and high art and even creating a new art form resulting from these influences: "tapestry painting"<sup>121</sup>. As a matter of fact, Iranian art in the West was particularly appreciated in the style that evoked sentiments of 'Orientalism' such as miniature painting, with several exhibitions in Europe in 1910 on the subject, as well as books classifying the style<sup>122</sup>.

The peculiar nature of the institution itself gathered momentum amongst both registers of the cultural spectrum, high and low, possibly as a pathway to the creation of more specialised

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<sup>118</sup> Dezhmkooy, M., & Massoudi, A. (2014), p. 6-7

<sup>119</sup> *ib.*, p. 9

<sup>120</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 47

<sup>121</sup> *ib.*

<sup>122</sup> Bombardier, A. (2017), p. 153

institutions concerning artistic practices. Moreover, Iranian modern art styles of the period lacked a certain unity and personal identity, which can be attributed to neocolonial trends that sought a general appreciation, both abroad and locally, of the paintings portrayed<sup>123</sup>. Diba, in her essay *The Formation of Modern Iranian Art*, observes how the lack of a national artistic identity led to a less uniform style in Iranian modern art:

“The subject matter of academic painting shifted from the depiction of court culture to themes of modern middle-class urban life. Painting of this era began to reflect nationalist ideals without attaining a truly national modern style. The continued dominance of this mode during a period that was parallel to the radical modernist movements in Europe may be attributed to Kamal-al-Molk’s influence, to local aesthetic standards that privileged realism above all else, and to Iran’s cultural isolation. Although Iran was not politically isolated, chronologically it was out of sync with international cultural shifts.

(Diba, 2013)<sup>124</sup>

Tehran, however, was just one of the many cities in which artistic practices and cultural debates flourished at the time: in 1918, painter Mir Hossein Mosavvar Arzhangi established a school of academic painting, with strong ties to his own artistic training in Russia; Isfahan distinguished itself by becoming a stronghold for traditional crafts and a preference for revivalism, spearheaded by artist Mirza Agha Emami<sup>125</sup>.

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<sup>123</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 47

<sup>124</sup> *ib.*

<sup>125</sup> *ib.*, p. 48



3. Kamal-ol-Molk, *Mirror Hall* (1876)



## 2.2 | *Art under Reza Shah Pahlavi (1921-1941)*

During those years, political turmoil led to the dismantling of the two-thousand year old Qajar dynasty, with a key player taking control of the country: Reza Khan, later to be known as Reza Shah Pahlavi, first monarch of the Pahlavi dynasty. Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign ushered in a period of social and cultural turmoil, where one of the main aims was that of restoring the country's identity and history, in regards to its glorious past. Therefore, Reza Shah Pahlavi's rule was distinguished by the implementation and research for archaeological sites and the establishment of a National Heritage Committee, who could, with the help of several European scholars, restore and trace a definite historiography of Ancient Persia. This research was "closely entangled with the nationalism of the Pahlavi dynasty, as it helped to manifest modern Iranian identity through its attachment to its prestigious pre-Islamic past"<sup>126</sup>. However, although many scholars were European, this sentiment of 'antiquarianism' was felt by many Iranian scholars, which believed "the conception of identity as a self-evaluative process hinged on the matrices of Persian language and Aryan ethnicity"<sup>127</sup>. Alongside the many archaeological interventions supported by the Iranian government under direct orders of the Shah, the academic institutions progressed into the French model, an aspect that art historian Layla Diba comments "would have profound implications for the formation of Iranian modernism"<sup>128</sup>. In 1937, Esmail Merat, Iran's minister of education, called for the establishment of an art school that could follow the French beaux-art academy model, whom he had observed on his travels abroad. In 1941, the University of Tehran welcomed the new department of College of Fine Arts,

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<sup>126</sup> Moussavi-Aghdam, C. (2014), p. 4

<sup>127</sup> *ib.*

<sup>128</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 50

based on the Parisian model and was the first institute dedicated to artistic education during the Pahlavi period<sup>129</sup>. Another key character in the modernisation process of Iranian art that began with the establishment of academic institutions, is artist Hossein Behzad, who became director of the Madreseh in 1930, and favoured a curricula combining both traditional crafts, such as silk weaving, and newer techniques, leading to the establishment of a center for crafts within the Madreseh: the new center had a section for New Arts and for Old Arts<sup>130</sup>. However, the state of political turmoil was followed by a period of settling for the new monarch, who sought out to rebuild Iran as a way of demolishing any trace of decadent Qajar buildings, a symbol of an era that the Shah felt kept the country back on an international level. The focus on architecture would have an impact on the artistic practices that enveloped the period, by promoting art in harmony with Persia's mythological and glorious past, therefore preferring depiction of mythological episodes. This "new heroic national style" was supposedly championed and invented by Behzad, as a collaborative effort with architects and artisans to decorate the new royal palaces of the Shah<sup>131</sup>. Behzad's contribution to Iranian art in the 1930s was exemplified by the capacity of combining a peaking interest in Persian antique art in Europe and the creation of a miniature style that could evoke Safavid dynasty manuscript art. Coinciding with Reza Shah's efforts to nationalise Iranian archaeology and expand knowledge of Iranian mythology, Behzad's work occurred at a time where the renewed interest in manuscript illustration and miniature gained a significant traction in the Western markets<sup>132</sup>. Coined as "new miniature painting", and spearheaded by Hossein Behzad, the movement

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<sup>129</sup> Rezaei, H., Etessam, I., & MokhtabadAmre'ei, S. (2013), p. 59

<sup>130</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 50

<sup>131</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 51

<sup>132</sup> Bombardier, A. (2017), p. 156

grew particularly under his appointment as teacher of miniature painting at the School of Ancient Arts in 1939 and the Specialised Art School of the Country in 1955<sup>133</sup>. A key player in the transformation of Iranian art during the 1930s and 1940s, Hossein Behzad's influence was crucial in the identification of Iranian art and the re-appropriation of art as such, generating a space for the creation of new cultural meanings and artistic practices: a symbol of this shift can be found in the appropriation of the term "*miniature*", an expression alien to Iranian language but integral to Western art history, which was adopted to indicate "*Iranian ancient painting*" (the term preferred in Iranian for miniature painting) in order to internationalise the market of Iranian art for a Western audience<sup>134</sup>. During Reza Shah Pahlavi's reign, the term "New miniature painting" indicated a shift in the approach towards miniature painting, which was "marginalised and removed from the artistic curriculum of the Faculty of Fine Arts in Tehran University in the 1940s"<sup>135</sup>. As can be observed, the years leading up to World War II were characterised by two main directions in the arts: the academic portrait painting imported from the West by Kamal ol-Molk and Persian miniature painting, were the two most popular styles in the decades from 1920 to 1930<sup>136</sup>.

Similarly, artists and craftsmen augmented their production of so-called *coffee-house* or *tea house* paintings, a style that was dubbed "revivalist"; the style introduced was largely an interpretation of what a Western clientele expected of the arts, in particular evoking styles of Orientalism and art nouveau<sup>137</sup>. Coffee house painting is an umbrella term that refers

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<sup>133</sup> *ib.*, p. 158

<sup>134</sup> *ib.*, p. 159

<sup>135</sup> *ib.*, p. 162

<sup>136</sup> Eigner, S. (2015), p. 26

<sup>137</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 52

to an “oil color narrative painting with epic, lyrical and religious themes, (...) based on the traditions of the folk and religious arts and the influence of conventional naturalistic paintings (...)”<sup>138</sup>. The main themes depicted were taken from stories of the *Shahnamh*, the Iranian national epic, with popular characters such as Rostam, as main centrepieces. However, coffee-house art was also “informed by issues of nationalism, modernization, and cultural identity”<sup>139</sup>, and retained their popular identity by distinguishing themselves as devoid of academic training, but rather as dream works (*khiarpardazi*), heavily influenced by the environment of the bazaar and coffeehouses<sup>140</sup>. Moreover, *ghaveh-khane* paintings have been tied to the constitutionalist movement of the beginning of the twentieth-century, an art that carried political meaning and flourished during the Pahlavi dynasty, distinguished by a search for tradition and folklore<sup>141</sup>.

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<sup>138</sup> Rahmani, N., & Khatib, S. A. (2016), p. 26

<sup>139</sup> Diba, L. (2013), p. 52

<sup>140</sup> Rahmani, N., & Khatib, S. A. (2016), p. 26; Diba, L. (2013), p. 52

<sup>141</sup> Pedram, B., Hosseini, M., & Rahmani, G. R. (2017), p. 988-989

### **2.3 | *Modernisation and Westernisation under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941 - 1979)***

The period following Reza Shah's abdication in favour of his son, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, in 1941, is generally considered to be the advent of modernist art in Iran<sup>142</sup>: the first years of the new Shah's reign were distinguished as the *nationalist interregnum*, where foreign covert occupation lasted until 1953. Tehran was a lively city and the establishment of the Academy of Fine Arts in 1940 contributed to a breath of fresh air: in the late 1940s group exhibitions of contemporary art started emerging, notably *Voks* and the *Mehragan Club* in 1950s. In 1946, during the Anglo-Soviet occupation, the Iranian-Soviet cultural centre opened the first art exhibition, in which, however, the style was changing from academic portraiture to Impressionism, a subtle but strong change in contemporary Iranian arts<sup>143</sup>. Other cultural organisations and centres started gaining momentum in those years, such as the art magazine *Khorus Ganji* (Fighting Rooster), which was briefly published from 1949 to 1950, when it was shut down by the increased censorship promoted by the Shah in those years. A change in the perception and production of art was also noticed in the growing number of artist-owned galleries in Tehran, whereby artists would support and educate other emerging artists, giving space to Iranian art. The most important galleries established during those years were, in 1949 Apadana Art Gallery, owned by the artist Mahmoud Javadipour; from 1950 until 1954, Marcos Grigorian's Galerie Esthétique exhibited works of young Iranian artists. Politics were heavily influencing the arts and the 1953 Mossadeq coup brought up tensions in the intelligentsia, prompting discussions on Iran and the meaning of its art, where

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<sup>142</sup> Ekhtiar, M., & Sardar, M. (2004); Issa, R. (2001), p. 15

<sup>143</sup> Issa, R. (2001), p. 15

“national identity became more than a political issue: it animated heated discussions in various art circles”, exacerbating the debate between the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ arts<sup>144</sup>. The problem with discourses on identity in Iran was inevitable, as during the 1940s and the 1950s, was actively encouraged in order to establish concepts such as ‘national art’ or ‘school of national art’; a moment of change, whereby modernism became a common issue in Iranian art: “(...) since the 1940s when modernism began to be adapted by Iranian artists-although modernism and its acceptance by artists and Iranian society was the main issue-many of those pioneers had tried to look at modern western art from an Iranian point of view. Here, the relationship between some intellectual and governmental debates respecting the problem of national identity was the effective agent in influencing the artistic atmosphere of that era”<sup>145</sup>. Under the Shah’s need for Westernisation and promotion of culture, Tehran hosted, in 1958 the first Tehran Biennial, a project highly sponsored by Armenian-Iranian artist Marcos Grigorian, who had studied in Italy and wanted to import the Venice Biennial model in Iran. The project was welcomed by the General Administration of Fine Arts and hosted primarily forty-nine Iranian artists, with a panel of foreign experts and hosted within the Golestan Palace complex<sup>146</sup>. In total, a number of five biennials were hosted in Tehran, up until 1966, which saw the last Tehran Biennial, its demise a possible mixture of different factors, such as the expansion of gallery and exhibition spaces, and the internationalisation of Iranian art in the rest of the world<sup>147</sup>. Tehran and Iran in the 1960s presented itself as a fertile ground for cultural activities and arts, enhanced by the newly minted reforms of the White Revolution supported by the

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<sup>144</sup> *ib.*

<sup>145</sup> Keshmirshakan, H. (2005), p. 627-628

<sup>146</sup> Diba, L. (2014), p. 4

<sup>147</sup> Diba, L. (2014), p. 6; Ekhtiar, M., & Rooney, J. (2014)

Shah. The decade between the 1950s and the 1960s is regarded as the stepping stone towards what is now considered contemporary Iranian art, a moment defined by changes in the traditional structure of society, increasing wealth derived by the oil exchange and cultural development given by the expansion of the middle social class<sup>148</sup>. However, as Iran's presence in the global sphere widened, the intelligentsia started questioning themselves on the identity of Iran as a country, promoting discourses and debates concerning national identity and heritage, national roots and tradition, a stark contrast with the prevalent Western narrative they had become accustomed to <sup>149</sup>. The discourse exacerbated when the book *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* was clandestinely published in 1962 by Jamal Al-i Ahmad, an intellectual who negatively criticised Western influences on the production of culture and the consequent Western narrative that the Shah was trying to implement in Iran at the time<sup>150</sup>. Ahmad termed the coin *gharbzadegi*, a literal translation of which can be *Westoxification*, a term used to critique the heavy influences on the West and the de-personalisation of Iranian culture in favour of a Western attitude towards the arts. This anti-West, anti-orientalist and traditionalist period created a fertile ground for the Saqqa-khaneh movement, which arose from debates concerning the clash between traditionalism and modernism <sup>151</sup>. The Saqqa-khaneh movement is considered to be one of the most important art movements in Iran, gaining considerable attention especially in auction houses and is the centre of many exhibitions on the theme of Iranian contemporary art.

The Saqqa-khaneh movement has no clear beginning, however, the term was identified around the early 1960s by art

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<sup>148</sup> Moussavi-Aghdam, C. (2014), p. 6

<sup>149</sup> Keshmirshekan, H. (2005), p. 628

<sup>150</sup> Diba, L. (2014), p. 7; Moussavi-Aghdam, C. (2014), p. 9; Keshmirshekan, H. (2005), p. 628

<sup>151</sup> Keshmirshekan, H. (2005), p. 608

critic and scholar Karim Emami, in reference to the artworks exhibited in the 1962 Tehran biennial, which he believed were characterised by a common aesthetic research of ‘neo-traditionalism’<sup>152</sup>. *Saqqa-khaneh* in Iranian religious tradition are votive foundations with fountains erected for public drinking, usually a charitable action in remembrance of the martyrdom of Imam Hossein in Karbala around 680 AD<sup>153</sup>. Emami’s usage of the term was particularly directed at artists who formed a cohesive visual imagery that made references to local, religious art, votive Shi’ite art, elements of sculpture and traditional-decorative elements, objects that related to Iranian religious folklore, as well as referencing art from the Qajar era, Sasanian and Achaemenid eras<sup>154</sup>. The Saqqa-khaneh movement’s artists all hailed from the Tehran College of Decorative Art, were the department of arts proposed an approach that could valorise Iranian art and offer a way to reclaim an Iranian identity through the use of Iranian folklore and aesthetics pertaining to Iran; this reclamation however, was meant to generate a hybridisation of the traditional elements of Iranian art in combination with a more refined and prevalent modernist Western aesthetic<sup>155</sup>. The style those artists were trying to achieve was a ‘modern-traditional’ synthesis<sup>156</sup>, which could establish a defined national school of painting for Iran, whose elements were supposed to be “conformed to the ‘universal’ principles of modernist aesthetics as well as incorporating Irano-Islamic art forms and native cultural elements”<sup>157</sup>. Some of the painters who were influential in the Saqqa-khaneh movement are nowadays some of the most sought

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<sup>152</sup> Khorshidian, R and Zahedi, H. (2016), p. 46; Issa, R. (2001) p. 17

<sup>153</sup> Keshmirshekan, H. (2005), p. 609; Issa, R. (2001), p. 18; Ekhtiar, M., & Rooney, J. (2014)

<sup>154</sup> Khorshidian, R. and Zahedi, H. (2016), p. 46; Keshmirshekan, H. (2005), p. 609; Moussavi-Aghdam, C. (2014), p. 15; Ekhtiar, M. and Rooney, J. (2014)

<sup>155</sup> Moussavi-Aghdam, C. (2014), p. 15

<sup>156</sup> Keshmirshekan, H. (2005), p. 613

<sup>157</sup> Moussavi-Aghdam, C. (2014), p. 15



after painters in international art markets, as well as being considered the most important artists of the century in Iran: Hossein Zenderoudi, Faramarz Pilaram, Parviz Tavanoli, Massoud Arabshahi, Mohammad Ehsai, Sadegh Tabrizi and Sohrab Sepehri are a few of the many members of the Saqqa-khaneh movement. These artists were all part of the same cultural circle and are often regarded as the founding members of the Saqqa-khaneh movement, this exchange of ideas expanded the influence of these artists, which collaborated to exhibit and promote debates at the Atelier Kaboud, founded by Tanavoli<sup>158</sup>. The influential Saqqa-khaneh school brought about a new breath of artistic innovation and by the 1970s had already begun to place Iran on the map of international art, exemplified by the last Tehran Biennial in 1966, which included artists from neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Turkey<sup>159</sup>. Moreover, the Pahlavi Foundation and court patronage was taking over the arts, establishing festivals dedicated to showcasing Iranian art and welcoming Western-oriented art, such as the Shiraz Arts Festival in 1967<sup>160</sup>. An important aspect to the dissemination of Iranian art in West was the presence of foreign collectors, such as Abby Weed Gray, whose collection of Iranian contemporary art is one of the most important ones of those years, fuelling an international interest in Iranian art<sup>161</sup>. The neo-traditionalist movement of the Saqqa-khaneh eventually defined itself in two main currents: on one hand, several artists - including Zenderoudi, Pilaram and Arabshahi - had espoused the stylised aspect of local Iranian art and had hybridised it with Abstract art; on the other hand, other artists - such as Ehsaei, Tabatabai and Tabrizi - re-evaluated figurative forms of Iranian traditional painting, including Qajar painting

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<sup>158</sup> Ekhtiar, M. and Rooney, J. (2014)

<sup>159</sup> Diba, L. (2014), p. 6

<sup>160</sup> Gluck, R. (2007), p. 21

<sup>161</sup> Ekhtiar, M. and Rooney, J. (2014)

and manuscripts, to incorporate in a modern way through decorative elements and calligraphic motives<sup>162</sup>.

However, the 1970s was a decade that projected the growing political instability of the Pahlavi monarchy, where the reforms of the White Revolution had shaped an educated middle class that realised the growing inequality in wealth that permeated the country at the time, as well as the increasing Western regime at the disservice of the Iranian people<sup>163</sup>. Moreover, political instability increased once the Shah introduced censoring and heavy restrictions to freedom of speech, closing down several magazines and cultural hubs that were felt as anti-Pahlavi, an aspect which exacerbated the feelings of resentment of artists in Iran at the time<sup>164</sup>. Increasing censorship and control resulted in a ‘brain drain’<sup>165</sup> that saw many artists emigrate from Iran for political reasons. Regardless, the Pahlavi Foundation continued court patronage and in 1977 inaugurated the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (TMoCA) in Laleh Park, a project supervised by the Empress to showcase the vast collection of contemporary artworks the court had acquired and to encourage further acquisitions, as to put the Museum on par with other Western institutions. The Museum was assembled and staffed with both Iranian and foreign advisors, such as Toni Shaffarzi and David Galloway, who assisted in the creation of a cohesive collection that could reflect both Iran’s wealth and its openness to the world<sup>166</sup>. Many of the paintings acquired at the time were of both Iranian and foreign artists, making the collection one of the most sought after treasures of contemporary art, where works of Rothko, Warhol, Bacon, Twombly and Lichtenstein can be found among the many Iranian artists.

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<sup>162</sup> Keshmirshakan, H. (2005), p. 615

<sup>163</sup> Ekhtiar, M. and Rooney, J. (2016)

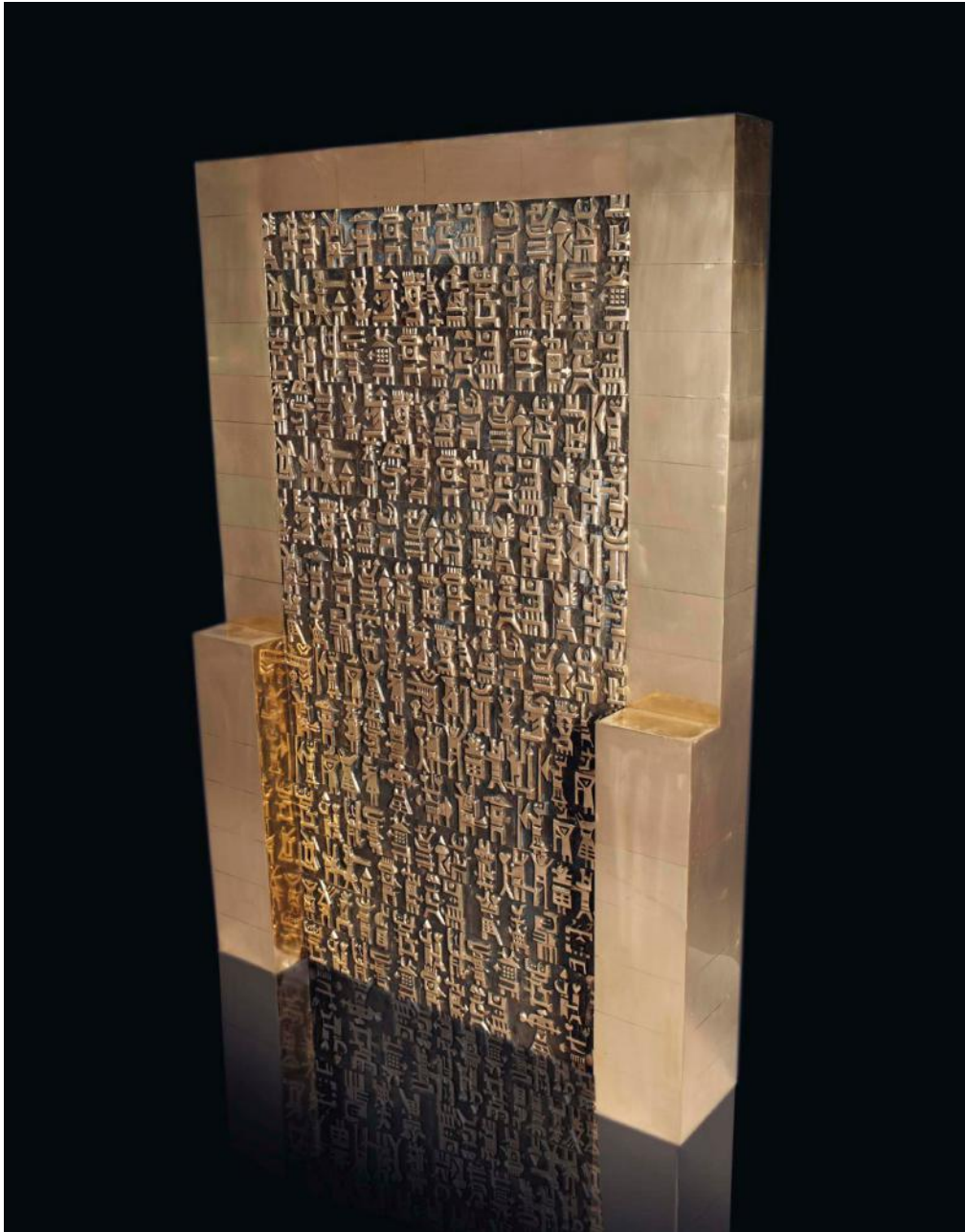
<sup>164</sup> Issa, R. (2001), p. 22

<sup>165</sup> *ib.*

<sup>166</sup> *ib.*



4. Sohrab Sepehri, *Untitled* (1960 c.a.)



5. Parviz Tanavoli, *Oh Persepolis II* (1975-2008)

## 2.4 | *Art under The Islamic Revolution and the New Millennium (1979 - now)*

The Islamic Revolution halted any innovation that had been brewing in Iran at the time. Political instability and a rigid return to Islamic values had brought many artists to fled Iran in favour of other countries. As dress codes and moral codes became stricter, so did laws concerning the production of culture and art, with many artistic activities, movies, books and magazines closing down and being censored. What had felt like an opening into the international sphere soon reverted to the alienation of Iranian artists from the outside world: the impossibility of interacting with the international art world prevented artists from participating into the global discourse of modern art<sup>167</sup>. Moreover, Ayatollah Khomeini, now in power, introduced the High Council for Cultural Revolution in 1980, with the intention of defining guidelines for universities and cultural activities alike in following Islamic values: the Cultural Revolution resulted in a heavy setback to Iran's cultural and artistic life, where many intellectuals were "cleansed" (*paksazi*) from the institutions, urging emigration for others<sup>168</sup>. Artistic activity came to a brusque halt in 1980 with the start of the eight year Iran-Iraq war, an event that would paralyze Iran under every aspect of everyday life, with many fleeing the country and institutions closing down and unable to function<sup>169</sup>. The Iran-Iraq war lasted until 1988, and proved to be a severe change of path for the production art in Iran, as the first decade after the Islamic revolution was primarily dedicated to the creation of posters that could re-invigorate the sentiment of martyrdom, heroism, religious devotions and anti-imperialist slogans <sup>170</sup>. By

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<sup>167</sup> Keshmirshakan, H. (2006), p. 161

<sup>168</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 3

<sup>169</sup> Issa, R. (2001), p. 23

<sup>170</sup> *ib.*, p. 24

encompassing these sentiments, the state encouraged volunteers for the war by visually and culturally feeding elements that could justify war and bellicose intentions<sup>171</sup>. Moreover, the symbols used by Iranian artists referred to a shared language of the revolution, were concepts such as the Iran-Iraq war, gnosticism, martyrdom and social commitment were translated through the use of a religious or political substrata that increased the popularity of this kind of artwork to the masses, as the composition was effective and understandable in its simplicity<sup>172</sup>. The crude images resulting from this production were comprised of “faces and images from photography combined with a surrealist background representing heaven or sacred places”<sup>173</sup>. Many of these “artworks” were displayed publicly as posters, billboards or murals around cities and towns, playing a significant role in fostering sentiments of glorification of war and the defence of nationhood. This kind of art, is also known as *hunar-i mardumi* (demotic art), “in revolutionary terminology referred to realist (...) art that dealt mainly with political and revolutionary subjects in which lower-class and ordinary people played the main role”<sup>174</sup>, where art could function as a tool for war propaganda. The production of demotic art was highly encouraged and was actively pursued by the newly established government, and had almost over-saturated the artistic production of the first decade of the Islamic Revolution, at the detriment of the art of the Saqqa-khaneh school.

The end Iran-Iraq war in 1988, signals the restart of artistic production in Iran, with the first artistic activities unfolding at the start of the 1990s, with a new input of art in Iran. The political attitude in regards to the policing of cultural activities

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<sup>171</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 4

<sup>172</sup> Keshmirshekan, H. (2006), p. 135

<sup>173</sup> Issa, R. (2001), p. 24

<sup>174</sup> Keshmirshekan, H. (2006), p. 132

shifted to an era of re-building (*doran-e sazanegi*) under president Rafsanjani's first term, whereby he attempted to soften the *basijis'* hardcore censorship towards cultural and moral norms<sup>175</sup>. In 1991, the First Biennial of Iranian Painters was held in Tehran, with 264 artists participating and a total of 400 paintings exhibited. The Biennial was hosted in the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Arts, which regained its status as a non-political center for the arts. These post-revolutionary neo-traditionalists were dedicated to the discovery and implementation of the traditional forms of the pictorial heritage, where common characteristics were the use of structures from historical architecture, calligraphy and classical Persian painting<sup>176</sup>. Keshmirshekan notes that the post-revolutionary neo-traditionalism trend can be distinguished in three different currents: figurative, abstract and a conservative category. Whilst neo-traditionalist artists delved in figurative art mainly, the group of abstract painters dedicated themselves to an artistic style whereby the characteristics favoured were Irani-Islamic elements, mysticism and gnosticism over political issues<sup>177</sup>. The Biennial of Iranian Painters in Tehran was held for several editions, respectively from 1991 until 2012, with its 8th edition being the most recent one.

However, in 1992, Ali Larijani was selected as Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance under Rafsanjani, and proved to be in stark contrast with the president's own openness towards the arts. As a matter of fact, Larijani called for an opposition against the West, as he believed that the 'Western cultural onslaught' (*tahajom-e farhangi*) had invaded Iranian society and had started a process of moral decadence that needed to be addressed<sup>178</sup>. The *basijis* gained power once again and started

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<sup>175</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 5

<sup>176</sup> Keshmirshekan, H. (2006), p. 146

<sup>177</sup> *ib.*, p. 150

<sup>178</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 7

harassing people in the street, reverting the political and social climate back to one of severe censorship. An important moment is marked by the 1997 presidential election of the Islamic Republic of Iran, where social change was sparked by President Khatami's election. Khatami, previously the Minister of Culture, loosened up the atmosphere concerning artistic production and cultural centres<sup>179</sup>. This period of openness was also welcomed by the Minister of Culture Mohajerani under Khatami, who promoted laws that made the exhibitions in public spaces no longer bound to the possession of special permits, thus relaxing the environment for galleries and artists alike<sup>180</sup>. The easing of the political interference with art also brought renewed interest in Iranian art of the previous decades, highlighting the importance of the Saqqa-khaneh movement as on par with European and American movements of the time. Those artists who had fled the country at the beginning of the Revolution were now being hailed as the masters of contemporary art, prompting a swift interest in the art of that period, welcoming discussions and exhibitions of neo-traditionalists such as Zenderoudi, Moghaddam and Tanavoli, who became the protagonists of a series of exhibitions titled "Pioneers of Modern Iranian Art"<sup>181</sup>. Interest in Iranian art therefore spurred increasing exhibitions and publications, were "the result was a period of artistic flourishing in which the presence of neotraditionalism was central"<sup>182</sup>. In 2005, president Ahmadinejad won the general election, inaugurating a new phase in Iran, whereby efforts were made to block any kind of opening that the Rafsanjani presidency had welcomed,

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<sup>179</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 7; Article 19 (2006), p. 17

<sup>180</sup> Issa, R. (2001), p. 24; Article 19 (2006), p. 17

<sup>181</sup> Keshmirshakan, H. (2006), p. 144

<sup>182</sup> *ib.*



censoring newspapers and leading to mass arrests of people considered to be against the regime<sup>183</sup>.

In 2013 Hassan Rouhani became president and seemed to usher in a breath of liberalism to Iran: by promoting ideas on gender equality and the need for artistic freedom in his presidential discourses. However, these policies still have to be implemented on a factual level. Art in Iran has begun a phase of re-vitalisation whereby several events have been inaugurated in a bidding to generate interest in Iranian art, a fact that many gallerists in Iran perceive to be also of great interest for Iranian collectors in Iran, which have recently begun to acquire paintings of both established and emerging Iranian artists<sup>184</sup>. In 2018, the first edition of Tehran Art week (Teer Art) was inaugurated, gaining considerable interest and around 6,000 visitors in its entire duration, with the second edition of 2019 in the works for June. In regards to this interest, activities previously absent in the country were established, such as the Tehran Auction which was launched in 2012 in a bid to fill the gap for

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<sup>183</sup> Farhi, F. (2004), p. 9

<sup>184</sup> Tarmy, J. (2018)



6. Shadi Ghadirian, *Untitled (from the Qajar series)*, (2000)

the buying of Iranian contemporary art. Results for the auction house were astounding, considering the high rate of inflation in the country given by the international political situation it is in, arriving at a total of \$8.1m in January of 2019<sup>185</sup>. Important

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<sup>185</sup> Tehran Auction (2019); Najib, M.A. (2019)

signs of a rejuvenation and interest in Iranian contemporary art concern international auction houses like Sotheby's, Christie's and Bonham's, creating specialised departments for Middle Eastern and Iranian contemporary art in the specific. Sotheby's and Christie's both established, respectively, the department for Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish art and the department of Modern and Contemporary Middle Eastern Art (Middle Eastern, Iranian and Turkish), in 2007, while Bonham's joined in 2008 with the department of Modern and Contemporary Middle Eastern Art. The recognition of Middle Eastern, therefore Iranian, art in the international sphere has gained considerable interest in the last years.



7. Afsoon, *The Shah and his Three Queens* (from the *Fairytales Icons series*), (2009)



8. Shirin Neshat, *Untitled* (from the *Women of Allah* series), (1996)

## **Chapter Three** | *The Art Market for Contemporary Art and the Role of Iran in the Middle East*

### **3.1** | *Definition of the market for fine arts*

The market for fine art is defined by Tschacher and Martin as a complex “social art system” which is demarcated by the presence of a “global market system comprised of millions of traded artworks, hundreds of thousands of artists, hundreds of auctioning companies and approximately 50 art fairs”<sup>186</sup>. Fine art is considered to be a special category of consumer good, often tied to a high cultural status and can be described as a *Veblen good*, where its “high price functions as an indicator of high elite value”<sup>187</sup>.

### **3.2** | *1980s-1990s: Emerging countries in the art market and the value of art*

The exponential growth of the art market in the last decades has posed the question of the definition of the art market as “globalised”, both because of its presence internationally and the emergence of new key players in the international market which have expanded the horizon of choice in regards to the art market’s prevalently Western content. Tschacher and Tröndle describe the advent of a “new art market” in stark contrast to the institutionalised art market that dominated until the 1980s, which is defined as “dominated by strict economic rules; its players were a clearly defined group of art connoisseurs who based their decisions on long-term strategies of establishing private and public collections”<sup>188</sup>. The

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<sup>186</sup> Tschacher, W. and Tröndle, M. (2011), p. 70

<sup>187</sup> Plattner, S. (1998), p. 482-483

<sup>188</sup> Tschacher, W. and Tröndle, M. (2011), p. 70-71

art market that dominated until the 1990s was widely comprised of Western countries, such as Europe and the United States, that maintained global hegemony in the market, leaving little to no space for other countries<sup>189</sup>. The engagement with countries which did not belong to the Western hemisphere grew in coincidence with the economic impact of globalisation and the concept of “ ‘internationalism’ — the notion that art might reflect or impact the complex relations between distinct, politically sovereign nations (...)”<sup>190</sup>. Griffin argues that globalisation in regards to artistic circles can be used to “describe an exponentially increased audience for (and financing of) contemporary art, attended by a radical proliferation of public and private museums and exhibitions throughout the world and, further, an expanded and ever-more rapid travel network and exchange of information among constituents of art on all points of the compass”<sup>191</sup>. This globalised and global art market absorbs and engages the concept of contemporaneity itself, which develops new phenomena, in the context of international relations. Wang Zineng argues that the events taking place are “processes of decentralisation changing the geographies of art”, where “New York, London, Paris and other traditional nodal points in the global modern and contemporary art ecology are now being mapped alongside Hong Kong, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Beijing, Seoul, Singapore and a clutch of other newly emergent cities, most notably in Asia and the Middle East, where ambitious, far-reaching cultural development projects initiated by governments are matched and sustained by corporate and private capital”<sup>192</sup>. Therefore, the emergence of new economies globally has also spurred interest

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<sup>189</sup> Komarova, N. and Velthuis, O. (2017), p. 1; Villepontoux, M. (2018).

<sup>190</sup> Dumbaze, A. and Hudson, S. (2013), p. 5.

<sup>191</sup> Griffin, T. (2013), p. 7.

<sup>192</sup> Zineng, W. (2011), p. 460.

in the new market, given by the influx of buyers coming from the so-called emerging countries, such as China, India, Russia and the UAE<sup>193</sup>. As a market which is not devoid of the implications of the financial environment it belongs to, the art market is also affected by the ramifications of its newly globalised status, whereby many economic and geopolitical elements can bear consequences in the market<sup>194</sup>. The ArtPrice Contemporary Art Market Annual Report of 2014 also signals the specialisation of emerging markets arising in the beginning of the 2000s, as “ a crucial development in these embryonic and highly promising regions of vital importance in supplying an art market always in search of new blood”<sup>195</sup>.

Increasing globalisation in the contemporary art market has produced an environment of participants which are geographically diversified and belong to countries which previously had a minimal access to the market, such as China, the Middle East and Russia<sup>196</sup>. With the rise of a global economy and emerging economies, new members of the upper-classes have access to the global art market and are thus giving their input in the shaping and distribution of the art market itself<sup>197</sup>. The entrance of these participants leads to the question regarding the consumer behaviour motivation behind the acquisition of art for these emerging countries: Velthuis<sup>198</sup> argues that there are primarily three motives that can be distinguished in regards to buyers in the art market: (1) motives concerning the intrinsic value of art itself; (2) motives derived from financial speculation; (3) motives regarding social reasons. The third category offers an interesting insight into consumer

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<sup>193</sup> Codignola, F. (2015), p. 88.

Tschacher, W. and Tröndle, M. (2011), p. 70-71.

<sup>194</sup> Codignola, F. (2006), p. 73.

<sup>195</sup> ArtPrice (2014), p. 27

<sup>196</sup> Crane, D. (2009), p. 339

<sup>197</sup> Crane, D. (2009), p. 338

<sup>198</sup> Velthuis, O. (2011), p. 33-34.

behaviour, as it asserts the role of art in the creation and maintenance of social status. Thorstein Veblen (1899) coined the term ‘conspicuous consumption’<sup>199</sup> in regards to the consumption of buyers that aims at maintaining social status in virtue of its value. Goffman<sup>200</sup> (1951), DiMaggio and Useem (1978)<sup>201</sup>, have analysed the discourse of art appreciation and consumption as closely tied to the identification and belonging to a determinate social class, by which “the adoption of artistic interests, tastes, standards, and activities associated with a social class helps establish an individual's membership in that class”<sup>202</sup>. The act of belonging to a class is explicated by the use of status symbols, which not only identifies the social status of the individual but, most importantly, replicates “the style of life, and the cultural values of the person who makes it”<sup>203</sup>. Moreover, ArtPrice’s 2014 report on the art market in 2013 noted that “Trophy-names, which garner extremely high prices, notably boost the credit of nations currently constructing their cultural identity, in China, the Middle East and South America”<sup>204</sup>. Velthuis argues that this can be seen in the contemporary and global world specifically in “emerging countries such as India and China, [where] buying art may be a means of expressing membership of a rising middle class”<sup>205</sup>. Sabella<sup>206</sup> argues, using the case study of the United Arab Emirates, that emerging countries who aim to construct and stabilise the value of their own art, go through nine steps: (1) **Political Stability** - where the correlation between political stability and the increased quality of living standards has ramification for the ways in

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<sup>199</sup> Veblen, T. (1899), p. 30.

<sup>200</sup> Goffman, E. (1951)

<sup>201</sup> Dimaggio, P. and Useem, M (1978).

<sup>202</sup> Dimaggio, P. and Useem, M. (1978), p. 143.

<sup>203</sup> Goffman, E. (1951), p. 295.

<sup>204</sup> ArtPrice, (2014), p. 20-21.

<sup>205</sup> Velthuis, O. (2011), p. 34.

<sup>206</sup> Sabella, S. (2009), p. 126-130.



which art is perceived and valued; (2) **Education** - whereby the correlation between education and appreciation enhances artistic participation, therefore artistic value; (3) **Government policies**; (4) **Museums** - given that institutions validate art and add to its value; (5) **Biennials** - “curatorial shows bring influential people to the region: artists, dealers, critics and collectors”, providing a growing platform for its art; (6) **Galleries** - which act as sponsors and curators of the art, by enabling commercial transactions to the prospering art market in question; (7) **Collectors** - required to sustain the market; (8) **Auction Houses** - auction houses branch into regional offices in order to establish their presence in the emerging market, at the same time confirming the region as commercially viable and prosperous; (9) **Art fairs** - whereby art is showcased in order to promote debate and its presence in the international sphere.

Some of the categories explicated by Sabella (2009) are effectively found in the context of Iranian contemporary art and its market. In regards to government policies, Iran ushered in a moment of cultural prosperity and relative freedom during the early 2000s, under Khatami, which in turn granted more freedom towards the arts and the participation in cultural activities increased, including activities held at the Tehran Museum of Modern Art. The Tehran Museum of Modern Art proposed activities and exhibitions that could showcase Iranian contemporary art, introducing biennials and triennials in 1991<sup>207</sup>. Moreover, as of 2018, Tehran has opened the Tehran Art Fair, in order to give more space to Iranian contemporary art. Sabella argues that the phenomenon of galleries establishing themselves in a determinate local artistic context is vital to the evolution of art in said context; Tehran has seen a growth of galleries in the last decade, although the current economic

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<sup>207</sup> Keshmirshakan, H. (2006), p. 137.

situation has stalled the overall growth, such as Ab/Anbar, Dastan's Basement, Seyhoun Gallery and so on. The presence of such galleries confirms the interest in Iranian contemporary art, as asserted also by Dastan's Basement founder Hormoz Hematian, in conversation with James Tarmy for the 2018 article published by Bloomberg, "the majority of our market is definitely inside Iran, it's not even a question"<sup>208</sup>. The interest is signalled also by the growing presence of collectors interested in Iranian art, who not only invest in more established artists but also have an interest in discovering and financing younger generations of artists<sup>209</sup>.

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<sup>208</sup> Tarmy, J. (2018).

<sup>209</sup> Tarmy, J. (2018).

### 3.3 | *Methodology*

In order to analyse the art market, in particular the Middle Eastern art market and the performance of Iranian artists on the global market, the research was primarily focused on three auction houses: Christie's, Sotheby's and Tehran Auction. Christie's and Sotheby's were an obvious choice considering they represent two leading auction houses globally, a duopoly that dominate 80% "of the market for works over \$1m"<sup>210</sup>. Tehran Auction, a newly minted auction house, was launched in 2012 in Tehran, in response to growing interest, both an interesting case study, as well as an exclusive representation of how Iranian contemporary art is received in its own country. Tehran Auction poses as a peculiar auction house as it deals exclusively Iranian artists and seems to attract the wealthiest part of Iranian society, which pays, if not similar, even higher prices than those in the Western art market for prized artists such as Sepehri, Tanavoli or Farmanfarmaian. In a dire economic situation, characterised by extreme recession and U.S. sanctions threatening economic growth, it is interesting that the contemporary art market in the region continues growing at rates upwards of 137% in 2019 in comparison to 2018<sup>211</sup>. Therefore, the aforementioned auction houses analysed have presented the most complete data in regards to the Middle Eastern art market. Bonham's is also present in the region, however data is not readily available, therefore it was excluded from the present case study.

The research started with the analysis of Christie's and Sotheby's entrance in the Middle East in 2006-2007 and concluded with 2019 auctions results. In order to paint a

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<sup>210</sup> Gammon, M. (2018).

<sup>211</sup> Tehran Auction press release (2019), p. 1

cohesive picture of trends on the Iranian art market, the examination of auction results looks at:

- (1) the composition of the auctions in regards to nationalities represented;
- (2) percentage of lots of Iranian artists sold in regards to total lots offered at the auction;
- (3) total sale collected by the sale of exclusively Iranian contemporary art in comparison with the total sale revenue;
- (4) number of auctions held per year by auction house, and in which region;
- (5) when available, number of times Iranian artists were highest-grossing lots of the sale.

Given the interest in contemporary art in the region, the research analysed the lots presented and detracted lots by modern artists (19th century), as they skewed results that pertained to the research's primary interest, which is focused contemporary art by Iranian artists. Moreover, auctions held in Dubai or Doha frequently presented contemporary art from artists that were not exclusively from the Middle East, but offered internationally renowned artists, such as Hirst, Emin, Kapoor and so on, augmenting the price of the sale in relation to the presence of artists of the calibre of the aforementioned artists.

To produce results as homogenous as possible, the currency chosen depends on the region in which the sale took place. Because both Christie's and Sotheby's are established internationally, the research needed a currency that could offer a consistent outlook in order to compare results further on. Given that the majority of auctions dedicated to Middle Eastern artists are held in London and Doha or Dubai, the two currencies chosen are pound sterling (£) and the United States Dollar (\$), respectively. Taking in consideration the ever-changing rate of inflation between the two currencies, the sale results were converted based on the historical rate of inflation of that day and

year, in an effort to render the results as equivalent as possible. The choice was based on the dramatic variability of the rate of inflation, by which converting a 2008 sale result in USD to GBP in 2019 would offer a drastically different and incorrect result. Tehran Auction on the other hand posited a completely different situation, as the rate of inflation in Iranian rials (IRR) is very high and the auction house opts for a market rate that may differ from the official inflation rate. The International Monetary Fund estimated that inflation could reach 40% by the end of 2019, a consequence of the U.S. sanctions imposed on the country, with the Iranian rial losing more than 60% in 2018, shrinking the economy by 3,9%<sup>212</sup>. The official rate of inflation for the Iranian rial is technically set at 42,000 IRR to one U.S. dollar, however the market rate is set at 133,500 IRR to one U.S. dollar, as of today (4 June 2019), according to [bonbast.com](http://bonbast.com). The difficulty in establishing the correct conversion for Tehran Auction derives from the presence of these two rates, however in order to achieve precise results, the research primarily used the market rate conversion, as it was the conversion preferred on the Tehran Auction website. For example, Tehran Auction's January 2019 auction settled on a market rate of \$1 = IRR 100,000, converting the total results of the auction at \$3,440,300: if converted to the official rate (where 1\$ equates IRR 42,000), the results would be \$8,191,190.

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<sup>212</sup> Barbuscia, D., (2019). *Iran inflation could reach 40 percent this year as economy shrinks further - IMF*. Reuters. (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-economy-imf/iran-inflation-could-reach-40-percent-this-year-as-economy-shrinks-further-imf-idUSKCN1S509Q>)

### **3.4 | *Analysis of the art market: a comparison of Christie's, Sotheby's and Tehran Auction***

#### *3.4.1 | The art market in 2007 and 2008*

One of the first signs of interest towards Middle Eastern art came in 2006 with the 2006 Christie's auction *International Modern & Contemporary Art* at the Jumeirah Emirates Towers Hotel, Dubai which earned a sale total (including buyer's premium) of \$8,489,400 (£4,700,758), with a total of 128 lots sold out of which 15 were Iranian artists, most notably Shirin Neshat, Shadi Ghadirian, Hossein Zenderoudi and Faramarz Pilaram, totalling \$336,240 (£186,183), accounting for 37% of lots sold.

On the trail of the 2006 success, in 2007 Christie's opened an official branch in Dubai, establishing its presence in the Middle East and acknowledging growing interest and the potential of Middle Eastern contemporary art. ArtPrice describes the peak of the speculative bubble in the art market as having reached its peak in 2007, marked by an 18% increase in prices in comparison to the previous year. However, the art market managed to gain outstanding results, a result that ArtPrice ascribes to the globalised market and the influx of wealth from "nouveaux riches collectors from countries posting very strong economic growth rates (essentially Russia, China and India)"<sup>213</sup>, an early sign of emerging countries' entrance in the art market. Overall the art market in 2007 found itself "in a context of substantial economic slowdown in developed economies, [where] the Contemporary Art market is continuing to post excellent auction results against a backdrop of the rapid emergence of the Asian and Middle-Eastern art markets which are today generating artists and players with centre stage

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<sup>213</sup> ArtPrice (2007), p. 6-7.

positions on the international art scene<sup>214</sup>. Dubai managed to position itself as a successful art investment hub, where the total revenue for the auction houses collectively grew around 70% from 2007 in 2008, with a total of \$34.9m (Artprice, 2008, p. 11). The beginning of 2008 saw both Christie's and Sotheby's auction Middle Eastern art, in Dubai and London respectively, amassing a total of \$26,411,076 (£13,303,356) \*[\$20,062,850 (£10,105,731) and \$6,348,226 (£3,197,625) respectively]\*. Moreover, the 2008 Christie's Dubai sale garnered attention for Iranian art as Parviz Tanavoli set the record as highest-selling Middle Eastern artist at the auction and as highest selling record for the artist itself, with *The Wall (Oh, Persepolis)*, which realised \$2.8m (£1.4m). The growing interest in regards to Iranian contemporary art is traced as a growing trend starting in 2007-2008, where ArtPrice listed Iran as one of the top new 50 entrants in the art market, with 3 Iranian artists appearing (Parviz Tanavoli, Sedaghat Jabbari, Gholamhossein Nami) in an overwhelmingly Chinese list of artists<sup>215</sup>.

### Contemporary Art - The 50 best first appearances at auction in 2007

	Artist	Hammer price	Lots Sold		Artist	Hammer price	Lots Sold
1	CHUBAROV Evgeny (1934)	€ 892 560	4	26	BARTON del Kathryn (1972)	€ 82 269	2
2	SUN Lixin (1955)	€ 536 030	1	27	YONG HWA CHO (1961)	€ 81 924	1
3	SHAO Yachuan (1958)	€ 445 418	1	28	LIU Yun (1957)	€ 75 071	1
4	FAIBISOVICH Simon (1949)	€ 372 398	5	29	COOKE Nigel (1973)	€ 74 140	4
5	OH Chigyun (1956)	€ 364 098	4	30	KIM Chonghak (1937)	€ 73 600	8
6	MA Baozhong (1965)	€ 352 450	4	31	NAMI Gholamhossein (1936)	€ 69 400	2
7	KANG HYUNG KOO (1954)	€ 329 422	2	32	SUWA Atsushi (1967)	€ 69 352	1
8	DO HO SUH (1962)	€ 308 655	1	33	XIAO Feng (1932)	€ 67 683	1
9	JABBARI Sedaghat (1961)	€ 249 840	1	34	SATO Yoshihiko (1968)	€ 65 018	2
10	HE Datian (1950)	€ 238 446	2	35	CHEN HSIENTUNG (1930)	€ 61 277	1
11	YAMAMOTO Ryuki (1976)	€ 228 120	2	36	LEE JAE SAM (1960)	€ 60 683	1
12	TANAVOLI Parviz (1937)	€ 194 320	5	37	HUANG Maoqiang (1956)	€ 60 288	1
13	AL-RAES Abdul Kadir (1951)	€ 169 686	3	38	HE Dan (1960)	€ 60 034	1
14	LI Tanke (1951)	€ 166 311	1	39	WANG Shugang (1960)	€ 58 452	2
15	LING Huitao (1954)	€ 155 936	1	40	AL-SAAI Khaled (1970)	€ 57 848	4
16	BALINCOURT de Jules (1972)	€ 150 084	2	41	ATTIA Kader (1970)	€ 56 985	1
17	ZHOU Xianglin (1955)	€ 139 125	1	42	SEO (1977)	€ 55 624	2
18	CHEN JINFANG (1938)	€ 137 325	2	43	CHU Earthstone (1950)	€ 53 693	1
19	HOU Junming (1963)	€ 136 680	7	44	LIN Sen (1958)	€ 53 256	1
20	JUNGEN Brian (1970)	€ 98 168	1	45	CHEN Ming (1962)	€ 53 064	2
21	XU Jianbai (1925)	€ 97 830	4	46	LEE Soukja (1942)	€ 52 800	2
22	FAUNCE Justin (1980)	€ 96 200	1	47	NAVARRO Ivan (1972)	€ 51 800	2
23	ZHANG Huaqing (1932)	€ 87 777	1	48	NAHAS Nabil (1949)	€ 50 135	4
24	HUANG Ming (1963)	€ 85 210	1	49	SHI Jinsong (1969)	€ 50 116	1
25	CHAMOUN Chaouki (1942)	€ 83 280	2	50	ZHOU Ling (1941)	€ 49 440	1

### 3.4.2 | *The art market in 2009 and 2010*

The results for the first half of 2008 were greatly obscured by the negative Dubai sales of October and November 2008, influenced by the economic recession already witnessed in Hong Kong, London and New York sales, where “the results proved very mediocre for the modern and contemporary Iranian artists who are usually very sought-after in the Dubai market”<sup>216</sup>. The inevitable effects of the economic recession contributed to the rapid fall of Contemporary art prices, where “by the middle of 2008, the Contemporary art market reached its peak and the subsequent melt-down was unprecedented in the Middle East . In the second half of 2008, half of the works offered for sale were bought in; then the price index fell 42% in 2009 alone”<sup>217</sup>. However, 2009 also saw the lessening of the North-American and European art market domination in favour of emerging countries, such as China, Russia and India, with an interest returning for Iranian art<sup>218</sup>.

Sotheby’s first auction in Doha, titled *Contemporary Art* in March of 2009 earned a profit of \$4,290,000 (£3,068,953), although it did not exclusively deal Iranian art but also presented a plethora of Western artists such as Damien Hirst, Anish Kapoor, Andy Warhol and so on. Iranian artists were present in the sale with 11 lots (out of 50 total lots sold), of which only 5 were sold, totalling around \$921,000 (£658,513). In October, Sotheby’s London held the *Contemporary Art Including Arab & Iranian Art auction*, which garnered a sale total of £12,757,125 (\$20,804,572), presenting around 245 lots which included again some of the key players of contemporary art like the previous auction in Doha (Anish Kapoor, Damien Hirst, etc.), a fact that

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<sup>216</sup> ArtPrice (2009)

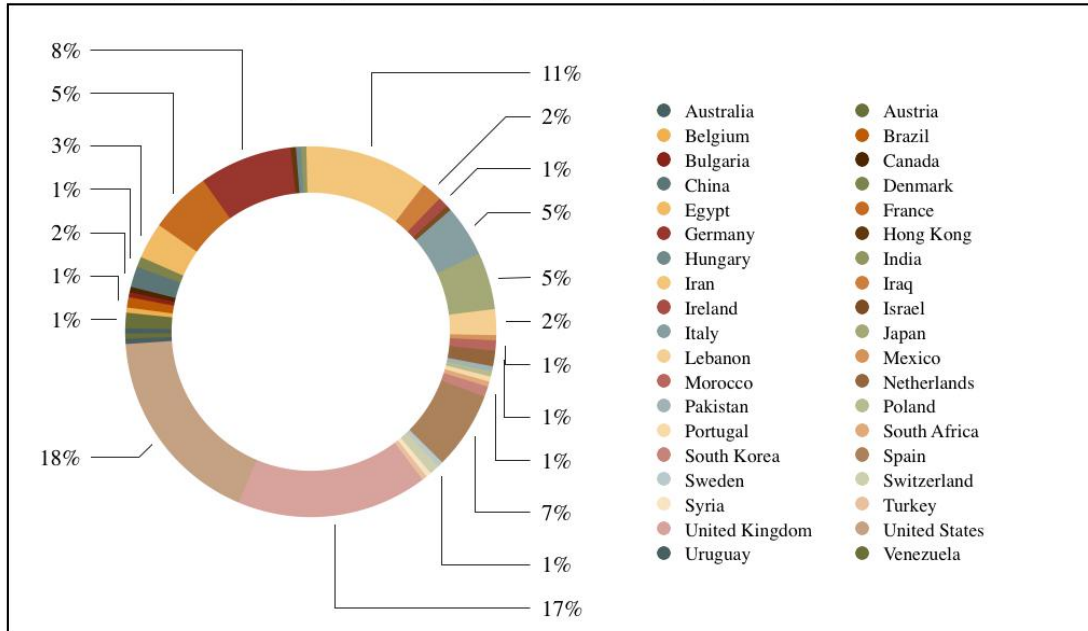
<sup>217</sup> ArtPrice (2011), p. 41-42

<sup>218</sup> ArtPrice (2009), p. 93



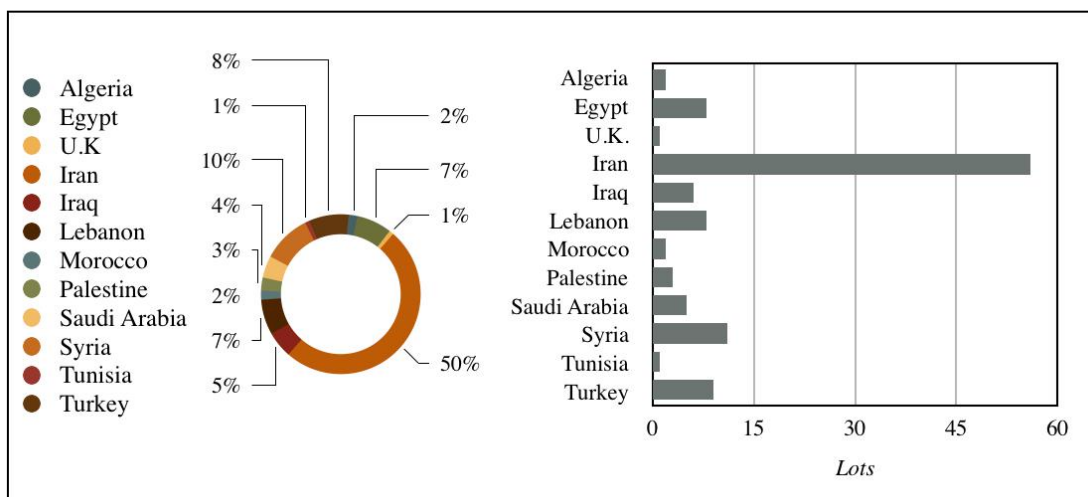
needs to be taken into consideration when reviewing the gross profits of the sale. The auction also included Iranian art and hosted 24 lots, of which only 5 went unsold, for a total of 19 lots sold, collecting £861,810 (\$1,405,456).

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Art Including Arab & Iranian Art*, (Sale L09624), London, 2009



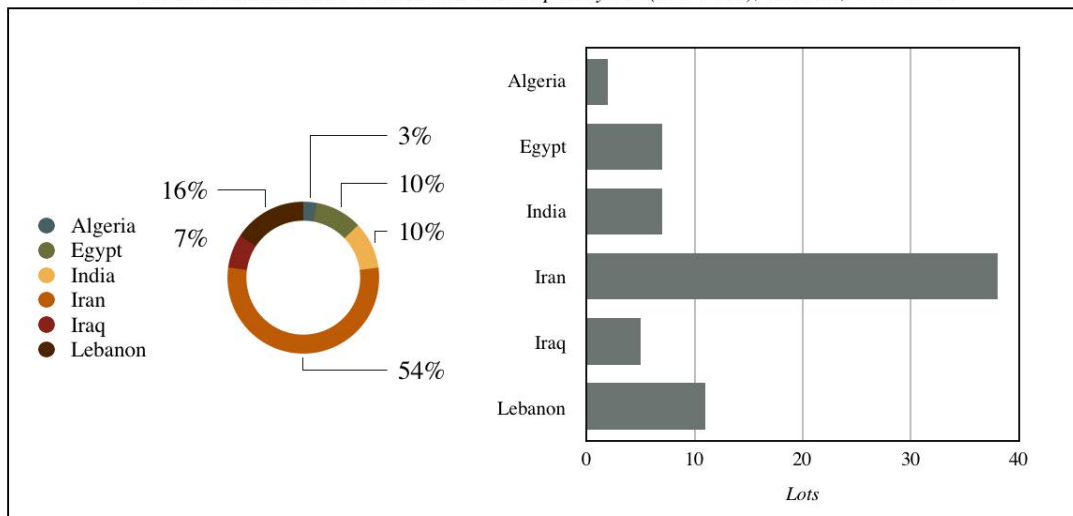
In comparison, Christie's held two auctions in Dubai in 2009, one in April and another one in October, focusing mainly on Middle Eastern artists. *International Modern and Contemporary Art*, in April, grossed \$4,766,175 (£3,229,006) of which 38 lots were Iranian artists out of 114 lots sold, garnering a total of \$2,000,750 (£1,355,475).

Christie's *International Modern and Contemporary Art* (Sale 7802), April, Dubai 2009



The second sale in October, *International Modern & Contemporary Art*, earned a total profit of \$6,736,475 (£4,220,316), where the Iranian lots sold were 38 out of 114, bringing in a total of \$1,866,175 (£1,138,913). Christie's gained a total of \$11,502,650 (£7,449,322) from the combined sales in Dubai, of which \$3,866,925 (£2,494,388) were profits derived from the sale of Iranian artists.

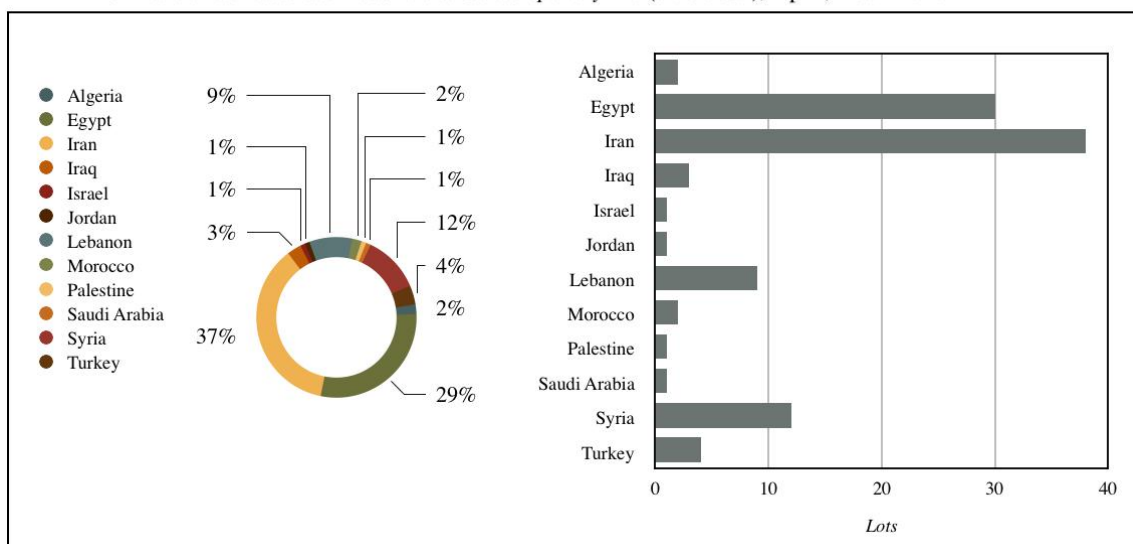
Christie's *International Modern and Contemporary Art* (Sale 7804), October, Dubai 2009



Dubai managed to keep its stronghold in the Middle Eastern region and was the backdrop of two auctions for Christie's, with one auction held in Paris, whilst Sotheby's held its auction in London. Christie's opened 2010 with three auctions, two major auctions in Dubai and a modern art auction in Paris which featured contemporary Iranian artists. The auctions in Dubai, showcased in two auctions, concerned the private collection of Mohammed Said Farsi. The first sale held in April, *International Modern & Contemporary Art, Including Masterpieces from The Collection of Dr. Mohammed Said Farsi*, held at the Jumeirah Emirates Tower Hotel, showcased artists primarily from the Middle East grossing a sale total (including buyer's premium) of \$15,172,125 (£9,898,413) with 106 lots sold. Iran was present with around 37 lots sold represented by

31 artists, earning a profit of \$3,892,875 (£2,453,613), featuring artists such as Parviz Tanavoli, Hossein Zenderoudi, Mohammed Ehsai and so on.

Christie's *International Modern and Contemporary Art* (Sale 7893), April, Dubai 2010

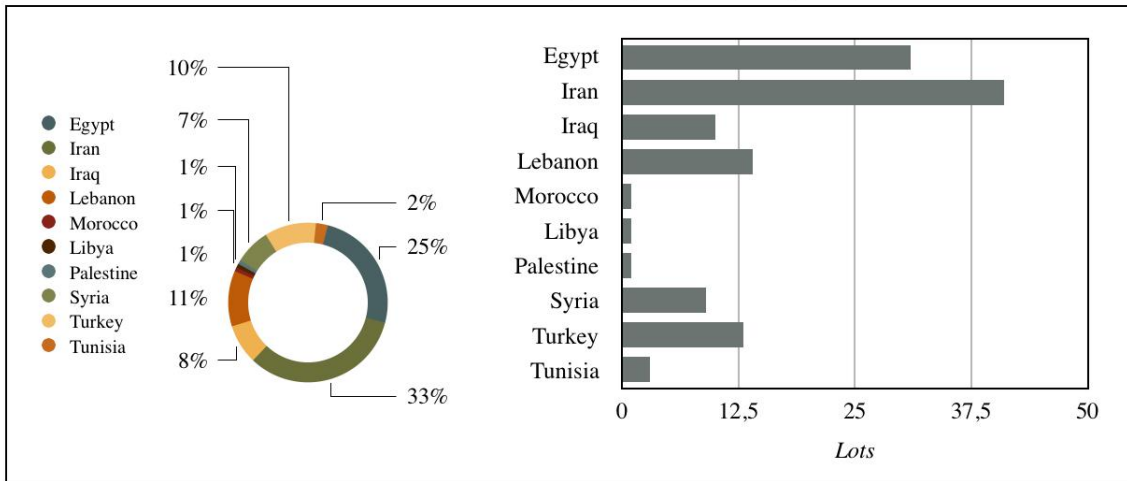


The second part of the auction, *International Modern and Contemporary Art*, was held in Dubai in October and offered a wealthy plethora of Middle Eastern artists, concluding the profits for the Farsi collection at \$14,050,000 (£8,855,479), from the sale of a total of 131 lots. Iranian artists managed to gain a total of \$3,892,875 (£2,453,613) based on the sale of 41 lots, on the overall sale results. Combined, the private collection garnered a total of \$29,222,125 (£18,753,892), making it the “the highest selling private collection offered at auction in the Middle East”<sup>219</sup>.

The auction held in Paris, *Tableaux Orientalistes et Art Moderne Arabe et Iranien*, showcase both modern and contemporary Middle Eastern art, including several Iranian contemporary artists, such as Mohammed Ehsahi and Shadi Ghadirian, with a total of 9 lots sold represented by 7 artists. The sale total of the auction obtained a gross of €3,313,600 (\$4,620,815; £2,857,482), with Iranian artists’ sale total earning €150,150 (\$209,384; £129,481).

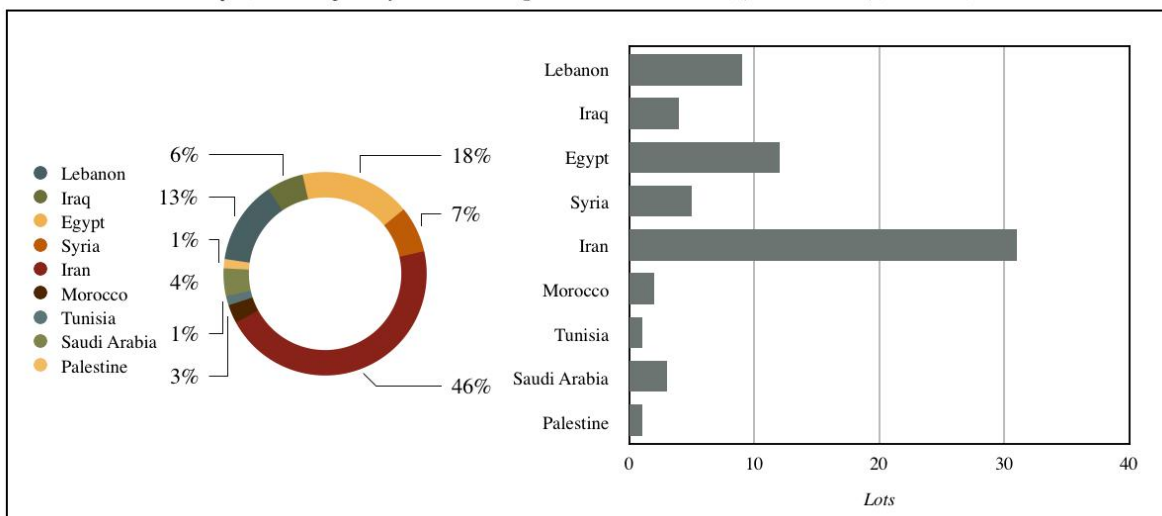
<sup>219</sup> Christie's (2016), *10 Years of Christie's Dubai*, <https://www.christies.com/features/10-years-of-Christies-Dubai-7149-3.aspx>

Christie's *International Modern and Contemporary Art* (Sale 7895), October, Dubai 2010

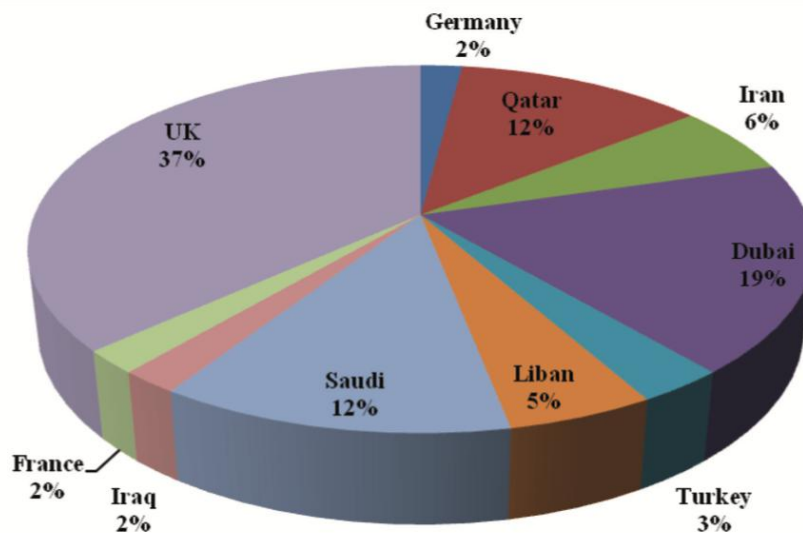


Sotheby's *Contemporary Art / Arab & Iranian* auction in London presented around 82 lots, of which 68 were sold, totalling the sale at £3,194,250(\$5,019,897). Out of the 82 lots, 31 were from Iranian contemporary artists, of which 5 went unsold. The resulting profit of Iranian artists lots sold collected £1,654,525 (\$2,600,155). The combined profits for Christie's and Sotheby's in Dubai for 2010 was £24,805,624 (\$38,863,337), of which Iranian artists garnered a total of £6,954,571 (\$10,657,530).

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Art Including Arab & Iranian Art*, (Sale L10224), London, 2010



Statistics pertaining to buyers' nationalities pointed at a 60% of local buyers, 28% European, 10% American and 2% Asian; however, according to Quemin and Jahanbaksh, the analysis does not specify the percentage of Middle-Eastern immigrants in the West, which account, for example, for the 36% of buyers in the United Kingdom, particularly Lebanese, Egyptian and Iraqi emigrates <sup>220</sup>. In the diagram for Art Tomorrow Magazine's analysis and comparison of Iranian and Egyptian art markets, Iranian buyers make up 6% of buyers, however the chart does not take into account the amount of Iranian expatriates that live elsewhere: "From this point of view, one might say that the sheer numbers of European buyers of Iranian art is greater than the buyers of Arab art. However, since the majority of the purchases at Christie's Dubai are by local buyers, one can say without a doubt that buyers of Arab art easily outnumber the buyers of Iranian art"<sup>221</sup>.



*The Statistics of Islamic Art Works' Buyers* <sup>222</sup>

<sup>220</sup> Quemin, A. and Jahanbaksh, Z. (2012), p. 17

<sup>221</sup> *ib.*

<sup>222</sup> Quemin, A. and Jahanbaksh, Z. (2012), p. 17

### 3.4.3 | *The art market in 2011 and 2012*

Following a successful year in Dubai, ArtPrice introduced the term “Arab Contemporary Art” to categorise contemporary art of the Middle East at large, Iran included, a geographical categorisation that pertained to the need of specifying artworks in a greatly emerging market. The global situation concerning the art market at large saw the beginning of 2011 as re-stabilising with “prices returning to approximately the levels recorded at end-2004 (i.e. before the market started its frenetic acceleration)”<sup>223</sup>. Foroutani believes that “the boom in the Middle Eastern sales [...] was the ideal time for Western auction houses to invest in the country where wealthiest people in the world live and get them involved in the art world. [...] Even though high prices decreased after the booming period, demand for this market rapidly increased and locals also started collecting artworks more than ever”<sup>224</sup>.

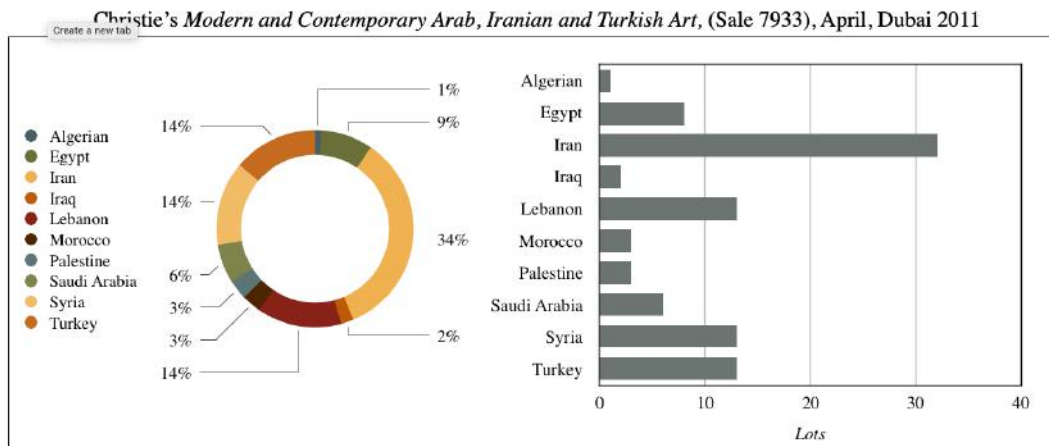
Christie’s inaugurated 2011 with its April auction in Dubai, *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art*, putting under the hammer 96 lots for a total profit of \$7,980,975 (£4,899,460), including buyer’s premium. Among the artworks offered, 32 were of Iranian artists and were sold grossing a total of \$1,841,000 (£1,130,190) on the overall result. The highest result in the auction was achieved by Abdalnasser Gharem, a Saudi artist; Iranian artists still managed to appear in the first ten highest results, with Farhad Moshiri realising \$230,500 (£141,503) with *Choc Line*, followed closely by two paintings by Nasrollah Afjehei, *Wave* (\$218,500; £134,137) and *Globe* (\$122,500; £75,202). However, Iranian art amounted to a 34% of lots presented, over all other nationalities, with Syria, Turkey

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<sup>223</sup> ArtPrice (2011), p. 44

<sup>224</sup> Foroutani, S. (2015), p. 3-4

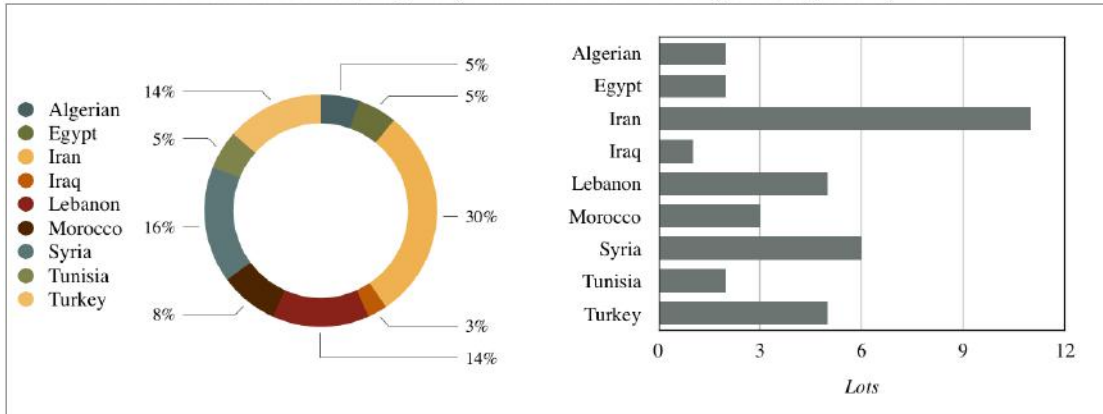
and Lebanon disputing the second percentage, with 14% and 13



lots each.

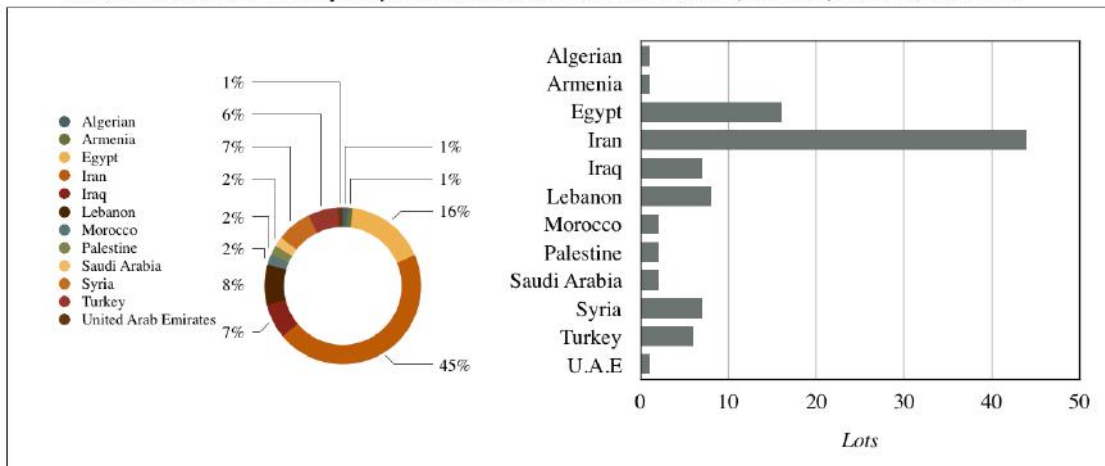
After the success of the April sale, two sales were held in Dubai in October, part I and part II of *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art*. The first part of the sale, held the 25th of October, showcased around 37 lots, of which 11 were of Iranian artists. The first part of the sale earned a profit of \$5,145,350 (£3,216,675), with \$1,357,000 (£848,344) only from the 11 Iranian lots, which featured Hossein Zenderoudi, Farhad Moshiri, Shirin Neshat and Parviz Tanavoli among others. Moreover, analysis of the lots presented for auction shows that 30% was comprised of Iranian artists, the highest percentage of one nationality over all others. Sohrab Sepehri's *Untitled (from the Abstract series)* came in as second highest-grossing lot, earning \$266,500 (£166,605); other Iranian artists appearing in the first ten highest-paid lots were Parviz Tanavoli with *Lovers* (\$182,500; £114,092), Afshin Pirhashemi, *Heading towards New York* (\$158,500; £99,088), Farhad Moshiri, *Untitled (Jar)* (\$146,500; £91,586) and Reza Derakshani's *Prelude in Pink* (\$146,500; £91,586).

Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part I*, (Sale 7935), October, Dubai 2011



The second part of the auction held the day after the first part, was slightly less successful in regards to lots presented and profits earned, with a \$2,382,750 (£1,491,720) derived from the sale of 117 lots total. The highest price realised was contented by two lots, one by Iranian artist Aydin Aghdashloo's *Untitled* and the other one a sculpture by Egyptian artist Ahmed Askalany, both knocked down at \$68,500 (£42,884). Out of the 117, 44 were of Iranian artists, and composed 45% of overall lots sold in comparison to other nationalities. The deriving profits of the sale of exclusively Iranian artists equal \$868,625 (£543,892). The aggregate of both sales in October was \$7,528,100 (£4,708,395), with Iranian art grossing \$2,225,625 (£1,392,146) represented by 55 lots. The growing interest in Iranian art is reflected in the total results of sales held between

Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part II*, (Sale 7936), October, Dubai 2011

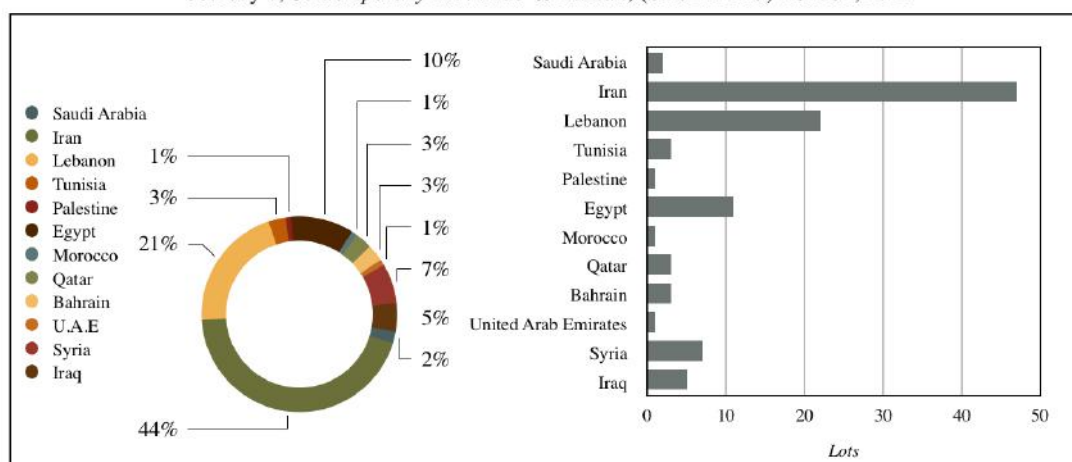




2006 and 2011, where the 11 auctions held at Christie’s Dubai (...) were US\$118,139,785 and of this, Iran’s share was \$41,322,115 which is 35% of all the sales”<sup>225</sup>.

Sotheby’s on the other hand, held its *Contemporary Art / Arab & Iranian* auction in London, proposed 106 lots, grossing £2,335,200 (\$3,593,726). Amongst the lots offered, around 47 were of Iranian artists, of which only 17 were acquired and the others bought-in. Overall, Iranian art generated a revenue of £1,040,752 (\$1,609,005), representing 44% of the overall Middle Eastern nationalities present at the auction, with Lebanon following at around 21%. Sohrab Sepehri’s *Untitled* was acquired for £385,250 (\$595,597), making it the most paid lot in the auction for Sotheby’s.

Sotheby’s, *Contemporary Art / Arab & Iranian*, (Sale L11225) London, 2011



In 2012, the first ever auction house in Iran was launched as “an independent and private initiative to introduce the best of Iranian art ranging from established and emerging Iranian artists to Iranian art collectors and global audience”<sup>226</sup>. Tehran Auction marked a break-through for the Middle Eastern art market, as it positioned itself among key players in the art market, such as

<sup>225</sup> Quemin, A. and Jahanbakhsh, Z. (2012), p. 20

<sup>226</sup> TehranAuction, <http://tehranauction.com/en/about-us/>

Christie's, Sotheby's and Bonhams. The man behind Tehran Auction is Alireza Samiazar, a prominent figure in Iranian contemporary art, having been the former head of the Tehran Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art. Funded by Samiazar himself and other colleagues, its opening came in response to Christie's and Sotheby's interest in Iranian art, as well as regional fairs in neighbouring Dubai<sup>227</sup>. Tehran Auction presents a peculiarity in the market, as it caters exclusively to the buying and selling of Iranian contemporary and modern art. Its first auction, held in Tehran in May, titled *Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art*, showcased 72 lots, gathering IRR 21,5bn (\$934,782; £575,095), a satisfying result considering both the novelty of Tehran Auction on the art market and Iran's economic uncertain situation. The highest bid lot was Sohrab Sepehri's *Untitled*, which realised a price of IRR 1,9bn (around \$82,609).

Sotheby's provided no information of sales in 2012 concerning Middle Eastern contemporary art, seemingly focusing more on antiquities from Asia and the Middle East.

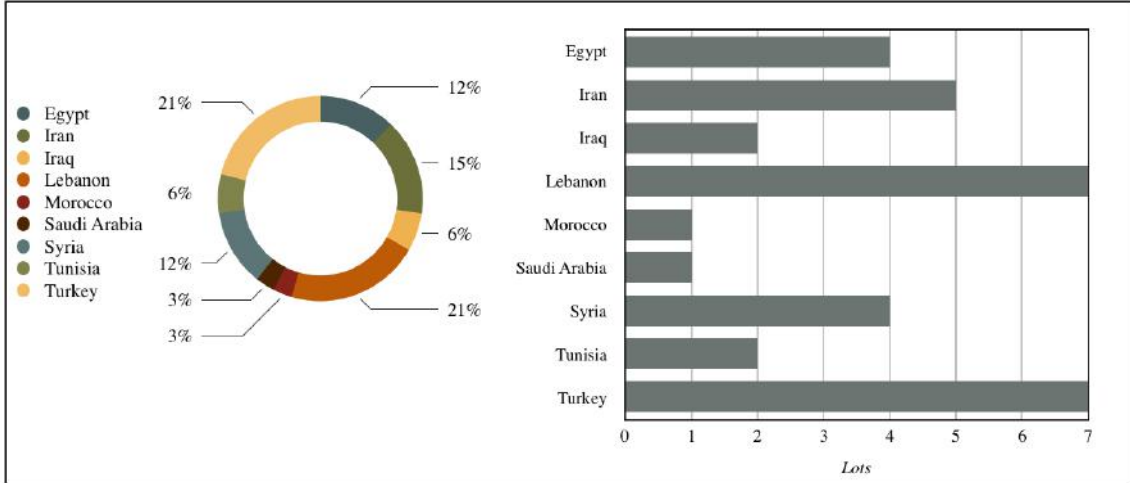
Christie's, on the other hand, held four auctions in its Dubai branch, repeating the previous year's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art* auction theme, with the first two auctions in April and the remaining two in October. The first part of the April auction, held on the 17th of April, featured 33 lots, raising \$4,016,300 (£2,518,292). Out of the 33 lots, 5 were of Iranian artists, collecting a total of \$377,500 (£236,699) and representing 15% of lots sold, surpassed by Lebanese and Turkish artists, which tied in first place for 7 lots sold respectively and a share of 21% of representation each on the lots presented. The most paid lots

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<sup>227</sup> Bozorgmehr, N. (2012). <https://www.ft.com/content/0fbd798a-bec4-11e1-8ccd-00144feabdc0>

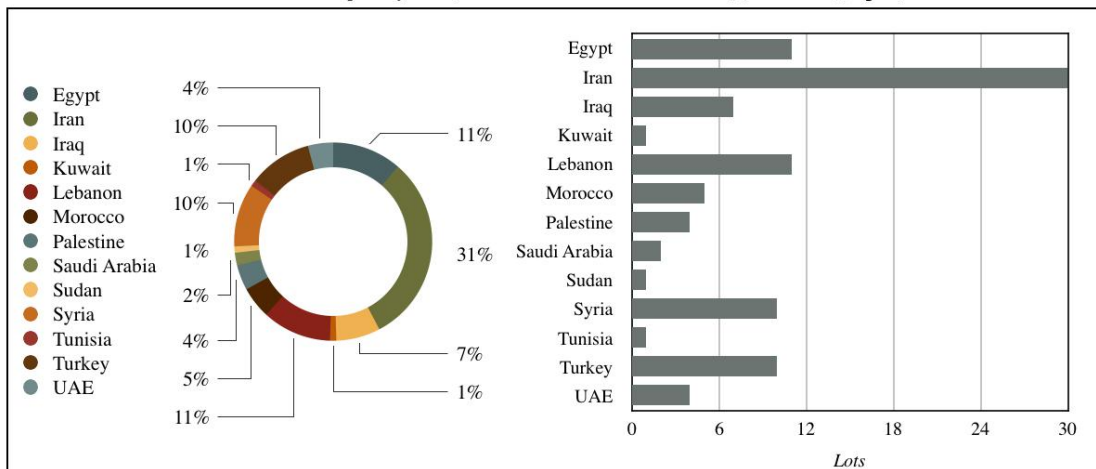
featured in this auction see Iranian Reza Derakshani's *Anaré dooneh dooneh* placing as 8th highest acquired lot, getting knocked down at \$116,500 (£73,047).

Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part I*, (Sale 8057), April, Dubai 2012



The second part of the April auction obtained \$2,386,525 (£1,493,104), displaying 97 lots. Iranian artists corresponded to 31% of lots sold in comparison to other nationalities, with 30 lots sold gathering \$741,375 (£463,833) in total. Concerning the top ten lots acquired, Iran appears at number five, with Farhad Moshiri's *Tiny Stencil Blue Jar* realising \$74,500 (£46,610). Christie's April sales grossed \$6,402,825, "against a pre-sale

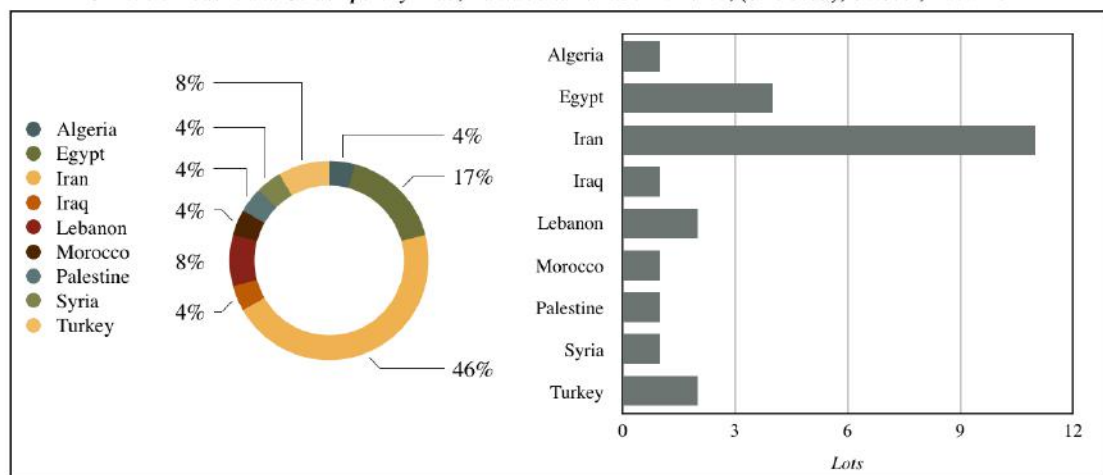
Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part II*, (Sale 8058), April, Dubai 2012



high estimate of \$6.1 million” and “the sales were 92% sold by value”<sup>228</sup>.

The third auction in October, the first part out of two, exhibited 29 lots of which 24 were sold and 5 bought-in, realising \$3,640,100 (£2,277,406) with 96% of lots sold in total<sup>229</sup>. Moreover, Christie’s registered the presence of bidders from 13 countries, with “20% of new registrants from the region were engaging with Christie’s over the last 3 days from viewing to bidding, reflecting the constant growth of interest in the arts”<sup>230</sup>. Although not achieving the highest price realised, Sohrab Sepehri is positioned in second place, with *Untitled* getting knocked down at \$266,500 (£166,734). The auction however saw “modern and contemporary works by Iranian artists Sohrab Sepehri, Farhad Moshiri and Nasrollah Afjehei achieved high prices well above their pre-sale low estimates”<sup>231</sup>.

Christie’s *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part I*, (Sale 8059), October, Dubai 2012



Christie’s concluded 2012 with the second and final part of the October auction, which presented 81 lots, realising \$2,260,250 (£1,411,652), selling 88% by value<sup>232</sup>. Iranian artists were

<sup>228</sup> Christie’s (2012), press release, <https://www.christies.com/about-us/press-archive/details?PressReleaseID=5507&lid=1&mob-is-app=false>

<sup>229</sup> Christie’s (2012), press release, <https://www.christies.com/about-us/press-archive/details?PressReleaseID=5889&lid=1&mob-is-app=false>

<sup>230</sup> Christie’s (2012), press release, <https://www.christies.com/about-us/press-archive/details?PressReleaseID=5890&lid=1&mob-is-app=false>

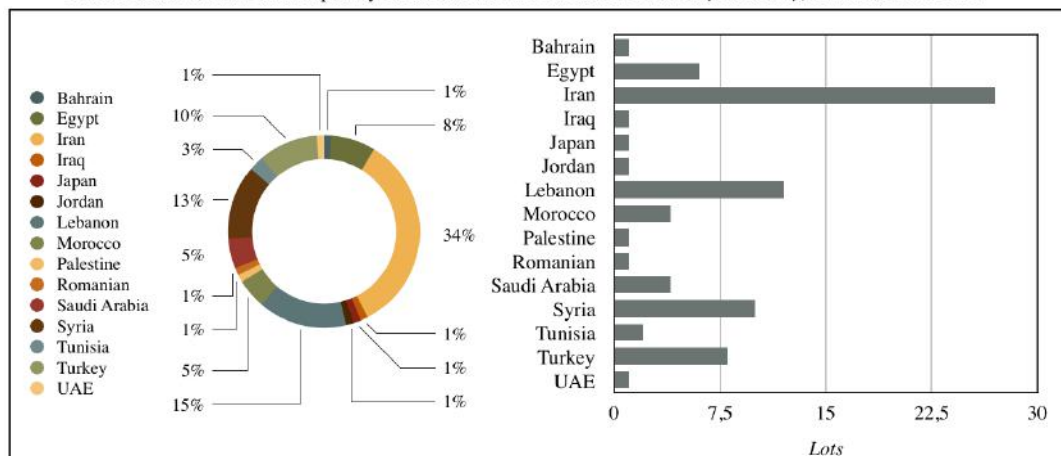
<sup>231</sup> *ib.*

<sup>232</sup> Christie’s (2012), press release, <https://www.christies.com/about-us/press-archive/details?PressReleaseID=5896&lid=1&mob-is-app=false>

present with 27 lots, representing 34% of lots sold, collecting \$661,625 (£413,221). The top ten highest grossing lots saw Iranian artists positioned at number three with Ali Banisadr with *Divine Wind* at \$92,500 (£57,771), Reza Derakshani following closely at number five with *Day and Night Blue* (\$68,500, £42782) and once again at number eight with *Untitled* (\$60,000, £37,473), and finally, Gholamhossein Nami's *The Milky Way 2* at number six (\$62,500, £39,034).

Collectively, the October *Part I* and *Part II* auctions gathered \$5,900,350 (£3,685,097), “establishing 29 new world auction records for Middle Eastern artists (...) and 41 young artists represented for the first time at auction in 2012”<sup>233</sup>. Overall, Christie's wrapped up 2012 with a total profit of \$12,303,175 (£7,700,454), out of which, \$3,524,000 (£2,204,563) was earned exclusively from the sale of Iranian contemporary art, an overall 29% of total earnings.

Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part II*, (Sale 8060), October, Dubai 2012



<sup>233</sup> Christie's (2012), press release, <https://www.christies.com/about-us/press-archive/details?PressReleaseID=5897&lid=1&mob-is-app=false>

### 3.4.4 | *The art market in 2013 and 2014*

ArtPrice defined 2013 as the “best year ever recorded in auction history” with over \$12bn in revenue and Christie’s establishing the absolute record in hammer price (\$127mln) for Francis Bacon<sup>234</sup>. Despite the repercussions of the economic crisis which still undermined the global market, 2013 was characterised by a “globalised demand, particularly with buyers from Asia, the Middle East and Russia, who played a crucial role in the market’s fine performance, and displayed a voracious appetite for flagship artists of the 20th century, landing them in a spate of records”<sup>235</sup>. ArtTactic reported that 52% of international buyers believed the global art market would rise, showing a positive outlook towards the art market in 2013<sup>236</sup>. Moreover, 2013 marked China’s fourth year as leading country surpassing of the United States in terms of sale volumes, positioning at number 1 with \$4,1bn, just above the United State’s \$4bn: both market places controlled around 70% of the art market in total<sup>237</sup>.

After a year of hiatus in the region, Sotheby’s hosted the 2013 *Contemporary Art / Doha* auction in Doha, Qatar. Offering 45 lots in total, the auction achieved a total of \$15,199,750 (£9,983,543), which was 89.1% sold by lot<sup>238</sup>. The sale showcased artists from the Middle East, Europe and the United States: Iranian artists made up 24% of lots sold overall, with 9 lots sold and one bought in, generating a total of \$1,404,250 (£922,343).

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<sup>234</sup> ArtPrice (2014), p. 9

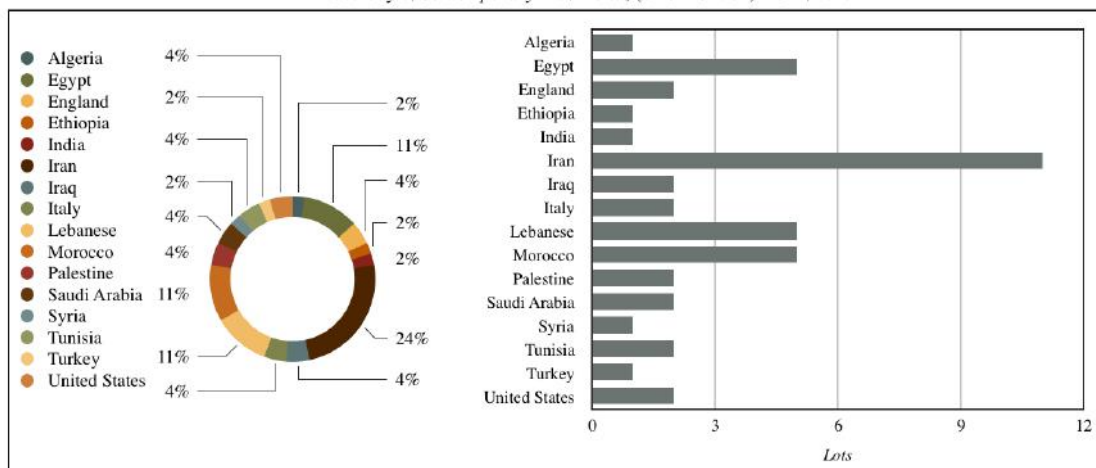
<sup>235</sup> *ib.*

<sup>236</sup> ArtTactic, (2013).

<sup>237</sup> ArtPrice, (2014), p. 11; p. 31

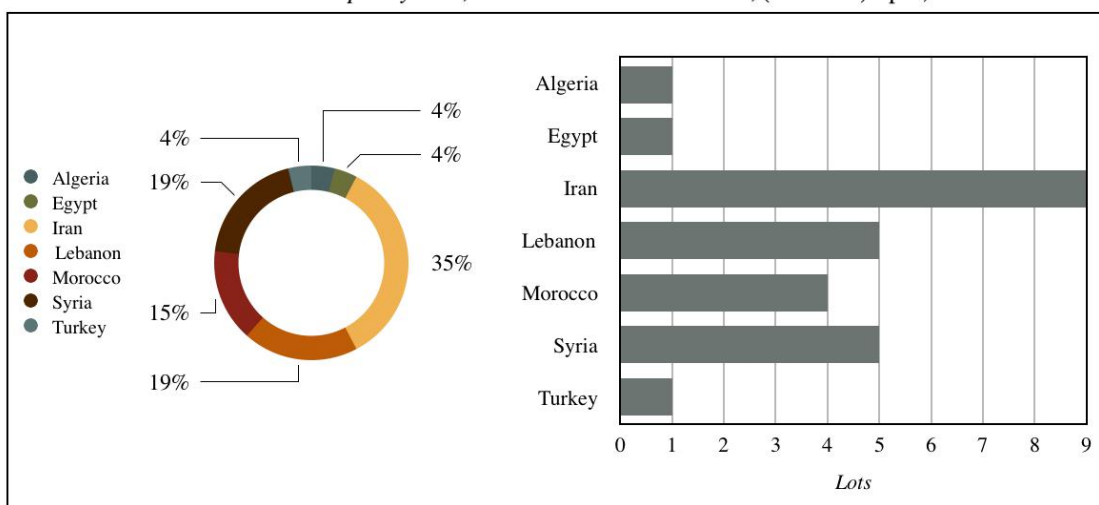
<sup>238</sup> Sotheby’s, (2013). <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2013/contemporary-art-doha-do1301.html>

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Art / Doha*, (Sale DO1301) Doha, 2013



Christie's once again repeated its successful formula of the previous year, presenting two sales, one in April and the other in October, both divided in two parts, held in Christie's Dubai branch. April's first auction the 16th, *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part I*, totalled \$4,128,750 (£2,649,741) from the sale of 26 lots, the auction was 95% sold, with 2 lots bought-in <sup>239</sup>. Iranian artists prevailed in regards to percentage of lots presented overall, with 35% of lots being from Iranian artists, grossing \$2,036,250 (£1,329,014) from 9 lots sold. Farhad Moshiri's *Secret Garden* was knocked

Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part I*, (Sale 8061) April, Dubai 2013

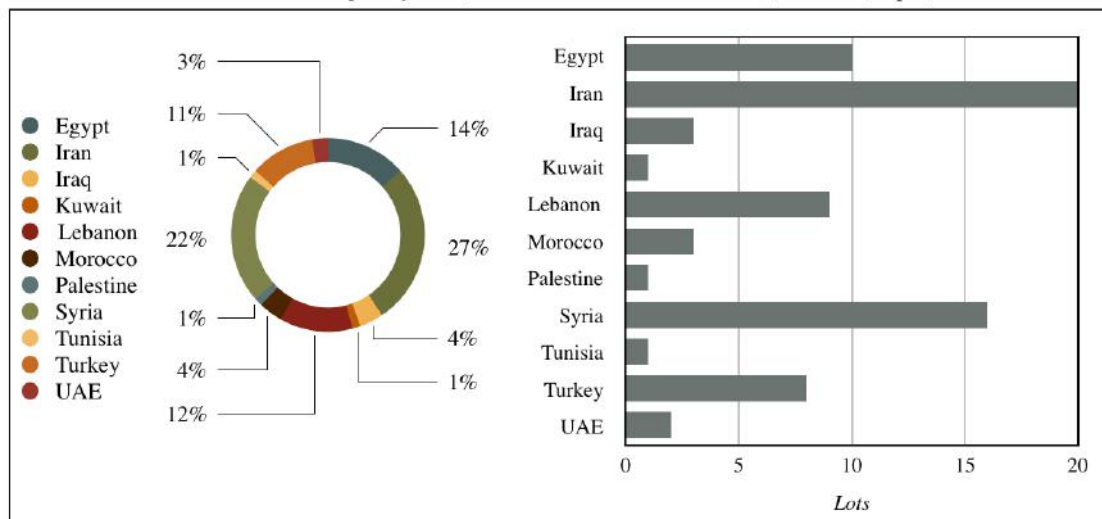


<sup>239</sup> Christie's (2013), [https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=24258&sc\\_lang=en&sid=4a284954-7f10-4668-8ae0-f874b23ed8fc&action=sort&sortby=high](https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=24258&sc_lang=en&sid=4a284954-7f10-4668-8ae0-f874b23ed8fc&action=sort&sortby=high)

down at \$987,750 (£644,681), almost repeating Moshiri’s record price set in 2008.

The second part of the April auction was held the following day collected \$2,256,000 (£1,414,552) from the sale of 74 lots presented to the public. Lots exclusively concerning Iranian art made up about 27% of lots sold, with 20 lots showcased, surpassing Syria for a small percentage more (5%): overall, Iranian artists collectively gained a profit of \$473,875 (£319,875). The April sale exhibited 103 works, from 13 different countries and amassed a total of \$6,384,750, “103 works of art representing 13 different countries made a total of \$6,384,750 across two evening sales held on April 16 and 17, 2013. This was against a pre-sale high estimate for the sales of \$5.5 million, and the auctions averaged 93% sold by lot, a clear indication of the success of Christie’s commitment to bring art from the Middle East to a global audience”<sup>240</sup>.

Christie’s *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part II*, (Sale 8063) April, Dubai 2013



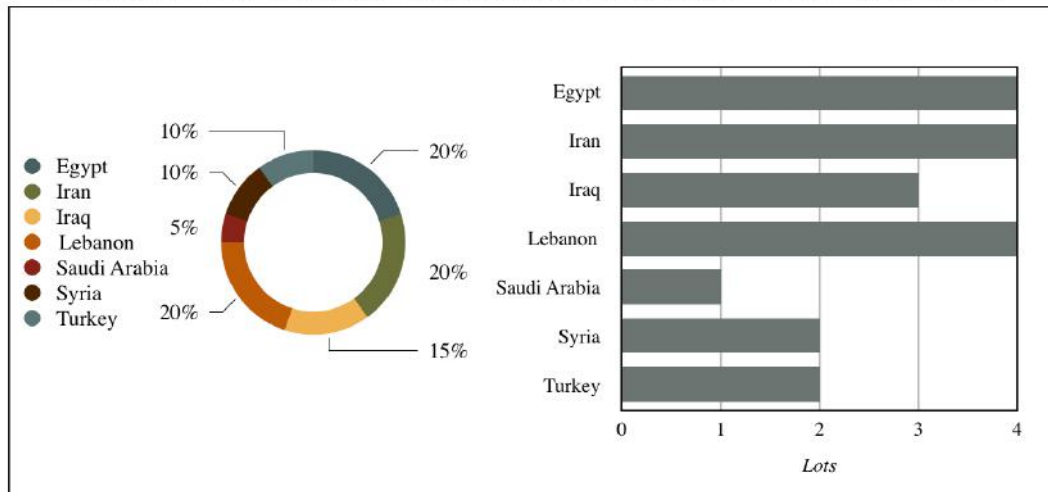
The October sales season opened in Dubai on the 29th, with the first part of the auction grossing \$6,910,750 (£4,300,144), with 20 lots sold and 10 bought-in. Iran represented 20% of the

<sup>240</sup> Christie’s (2013), [https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intSaleid=24259&sc\\_lang=en&sid=dd69edafe383-4ea0-8a6b-1d0face8a491&action=sort&sortby=ehigh](https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intSaleid=24259&sc_lang=en&sid=dd69edafe383-4ea0-8a6b-1d0face8a491&action=sort&sortby=ehigh)



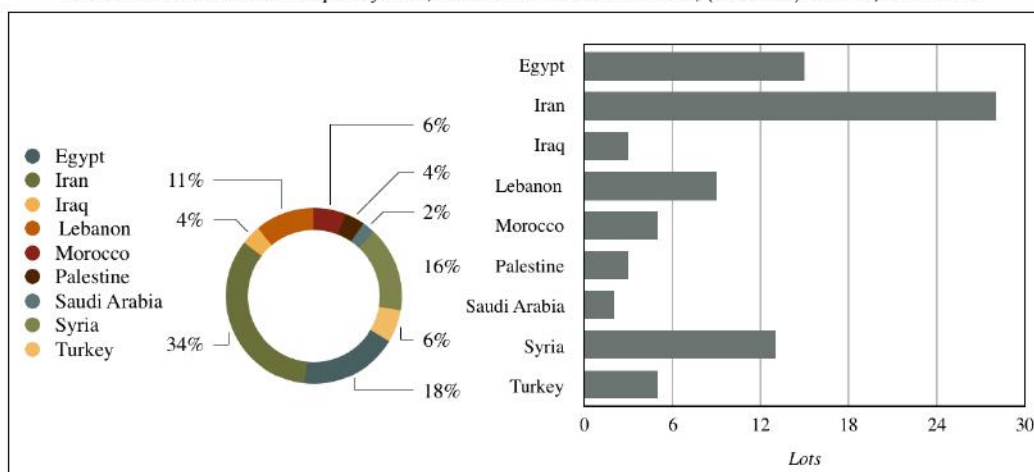
geographical make-up of the nationalities of artists present in the sale, alongside Egypt, with 4 lots sold each. Iranian artists collectively gained \$1,543,000 (£960,116), with Parviz Tanavoli's sculpture, *Oh Persepolis II*, being acquired for \$941,000 (£585,527) who was also the auction's second highest-paid lot.

Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Part I*, (Sale 8064) October, Dubai 2013



The second part of the sale totalled \$3,498,975 (£2,177,162) from the sale of 83 lots. In regards to Iran's presence in the sale, 28 lots were bought for a total estimate of \$1,239,000 (£770,963), 34% of the overall sale dominated by Iranian artists in comparison to artists of other nationalities. Farhad Moshiri came in first with *842L1* getting knocked down at \$173,000, the highest bid of the evening, followed closely by Afshin Pirhashemi's *Recrudescence* bought for \$161,000. Collectively, all four auctions in Dubai earned a profit of \$16,794,375 (£10,586,599), with "sell through rates of 83% by lot"<sup>241</sup> and buyers participating from 20 different countries. Profits deriving from the sale of exclusively Iranian artists garnered a total of \$5,292,125 (£3,370,968), around 1/3 of the total sales.

<sup>241</sup> Christie's (2013), <https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=24261&saletitle=&sid=6c3ad0ff-8f46-4cb0-935c-394039d157d0&action=sort&sortby=ehigh>



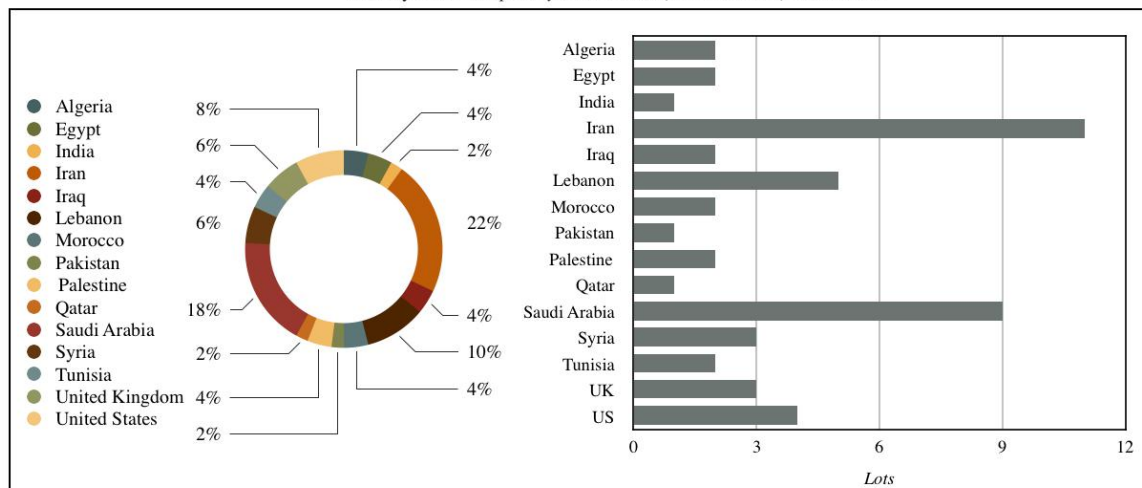
Tehran Auction held its annual *Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art* auction in May, offering 82 lots for sale realising IRR 65.5bn (\$1,872,857, £1,209,648). Sohrab Sepehri's *Untitled* was the highest lot acquired, getting knocked down at \$200,000 (IRR 7bn), followed by a sculpture by Parviz Tanavoli (*Heech*) that was acquired for \$160,000 (IRR 5.6bn)

The stabilisation of foreign auction houses in the Middle East exposed artists from the region to a more global platform, giving space to vibrant regional art markets. ArtPrice delineates the Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Iran as the “most dynamic regions for the sale of contemporary art in the broadest sense in (...) the Middle East”, occupying the top 50 market places in the world (ArtPrice, 2014, p. 30).

Sotheby's *Contemporary Art / Doha* auction in October was held in Doha, Qatar, featured 51 lots, grossing a total sale revenue of \$8,006,625 (£4,976,118). The auction however, did not exclusively deal with Middle Eastern artists, but offered also Western artists and key players of the art market globally, such as Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst and Anish Kapoor. Nonetheless, Iran was the most visible nationality, with Iranian artists

representing around 22% of lots presented, with 11 lots sold for a total of \$1,631,625 (£1,014,055). The lots that attracted more interest were Anish Kapoor's *Untitled*, acquired for \$1,595,000 (£990,560), followed by Damien Hirst's *Tranquility*, sold for \$845,000 (£524,780) and *Affliction* (\$574,000, £357,098). The first Middle Eastern artist that follows is Iranian Ali Banisadr, with *The Chase*, knocked down for \$557,000 (£345,920). Overall, Iranian artists realised \$1,631,625 (£1,014,055) out of the total sale, from the sale of 11 lots.

Sotheby's, *Contemporary Art / Doha*, (Sale DO1401) Doha, 2014



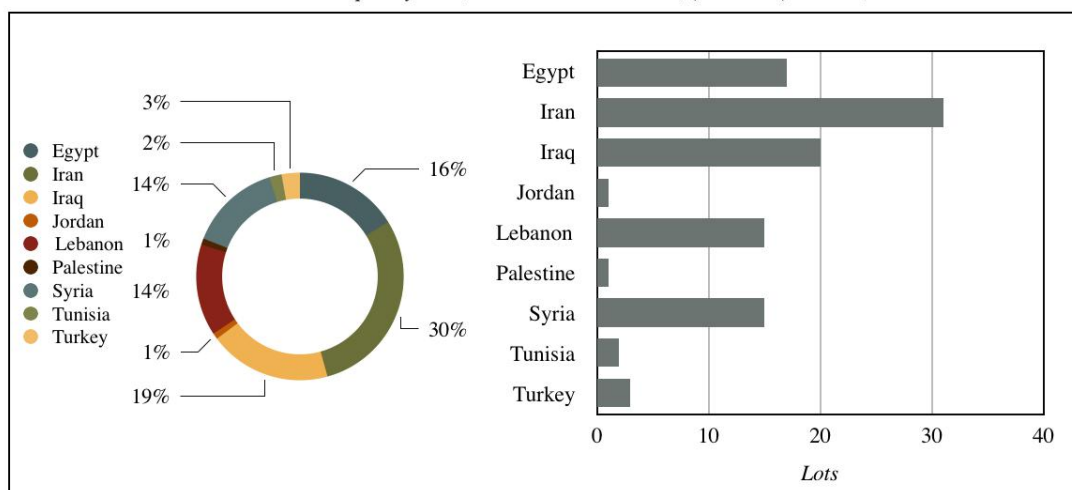
Christie's decreased the sales in Dubai for 2014, hosting only two auctions, one in March and the other in October. The first sale in March included artworks from the Pharos collection of modern Egyptian art and from the Maath Alousi collection. The *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art Including Masterpieces from the Pharos Art Collection & From the Maath Alousi Collection*, realised a total of \$10,648,250 (£6,404,409) from the sale of 138 lots. The auction was primarily focused on Egyptian modern art, with 52 lots total, however other Middle Eastern countries were not disregarded. Iranian artists made up 19% of sales in the overall result, with 26 lots sold realising \$2,034,500 (£1,223,653). Ali Banisadr

positions himself as third highest-paid lot with \$339,750 for *Black 3*, the top lot acquired being Abdul Hadi El-Gazzar's *Construction of the Suez Canal*, knocked down at \$1,023,750.

The second auction in October, titled *Modern & Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art*, offered 105 lots grossing around \$12,510,875 (£7,744,547). Christie's noted that the sale was the "highest sale total for the category since 2010", with the sale being sold by value at 95%<sup>242</sup>. On a total of 105 lots, 31 artworks for sale were of Iranian artists and comprised 30% of lots sold. In total, both auctions raked in \$23,159,125 (£14,148,956) as a whole, with lots by Iranian artists totalling \$5,788,500 (£3,547,473).

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<sup>242</sup> Christie's (2014), [https://www.christies.comsalelandingindex.aspx?intsaleid=24745&sc\\_lang=en&saletitle=&pg=all&action=paging&sid=e0299ed6-807a-46de-81df-547cab478a4e](https://www.christies.comsalelandingindex.aspx?intsaleid=24745&sc_lang=en&saletitle=&pg=all&action=paging&sid=e0299ed6-807a-46de-81df-547cab478a4e)



Tehran Auction also participated in May with its *Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art*, realising IRR 134,9bn (\$4,325,937, £2,505,210) from the sale of 90 lots. Sohrab Sepehri was the most coveted artist, positioning both number one and two, with *Untitled* as the highest-paid lot, achieving IRR 18bn (\$562,500), and another *Untitled* fetching IRR 16bn (\$500,000).

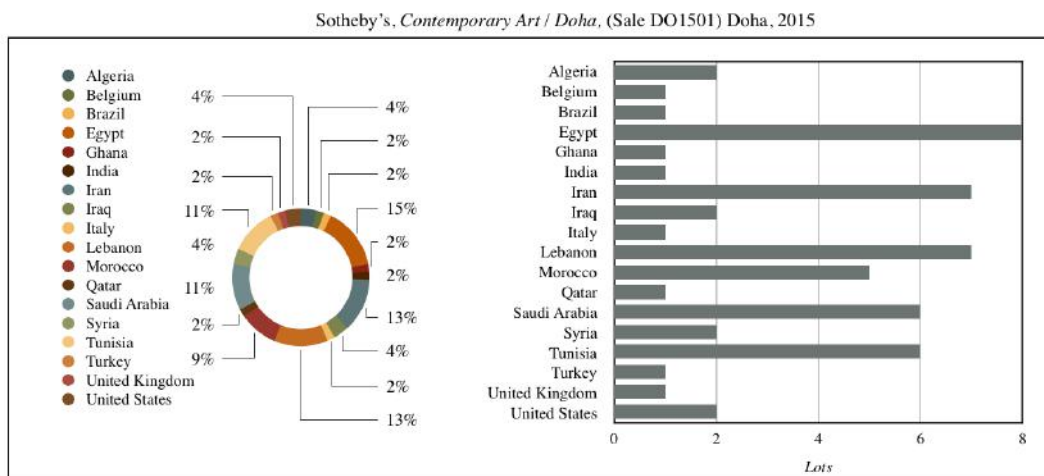
### 3.4.5 | *The art market in 2015 and 2016*

The art market in 2015 was characterised by the contraction of the Chinese art market, losing its prime position to the United States. Moreover, auction house strategy introduced Internet platforms for bidding, in order to cater to a more global audience: 95% of auction houses in the world have an Internet platform, in comparison to the 3% in 2005<sup>243</sup> (ArtPrice, 2016, p. 2). The art market establishes a growth of +212% over the last decade, “largely driven by globalisation of the market, with strong economic growth and an intensification of demand at the high-end of the Western market”<sup>244</sup>.

<sup>243</sup> ArtPrice, (2016), p. 2

<sup>244</sup> ArtPrice (2016), p. 1

Sotheby's annual Doha auction, *Contemporary Art / Doha*, held the 21st of April, showcased 55 lots, racking in a sale total of \$7,511,125 (£5,045,089), with both Western and Middle Eastern artists, also focusing “on artists who are redefining contemporary art through a global dialogue, many of whom are being introduced in the region for the first time”<sup>245</sup>. Iranian artists were present in the auction with 7 lots, of which 5 were sold and 4 bought-in, for a total sale of \$792,250 (£532,140).



Christie's hosted only one auction in the Middle Eastern region, *Modern and Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art* in March. Christie's counted more than 500 participants from 25 different countries, as well as telephone bidders and 25 bidders participating online bidding<sup>246</sup>. The lots unveiled at the auction were around 158, including several pieces from the Mokbel Art Collection of Lebanese Art<sup>247</sup>. The sale gathered a total of \$11,397,750 (£7,779,997) deriving from 122 lots sold. In total, 38% of lots (47) were sold above their estimate and the remaining 57% (71 lots) were sold within estimate<sup>248</sup>. Iranian art

<sup>245</sup> Sotheby's (2015), <https://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2015/contemporary-art-doha-do1501.html#&page=1&sort=salePrice-desc&viewMode=list>

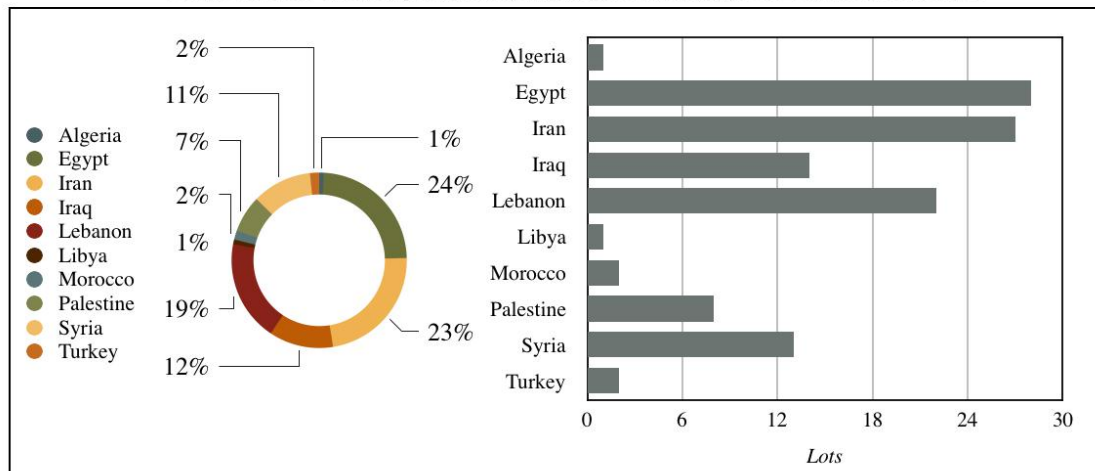
<sup>246</sup> Christie's (2015), [https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=25684&sc\\_lang=en&saletitle=](https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=25684&sc_lang=en&saletitle=)

<sup>247</sup> Christie's (2015), [https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=25684&sc\\_lang=en&saletitle=](https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=25684&sc_lang=en&saletitle=)

<sup>248</sup> Christie's (2015), [https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=25684&sc\\_lang=en&saletitle=](https://www.christies.com/salelanding/index.aspx?intsaleid=25684&sc_lang=en&saletitle=)

was present at the auction with 27 lots sold, constituting \$2,3mln of the sale, sold at 90,9% (by lot). Iran comprised 23% of overall nationalities present, surpassed by Egypt (24%) with 28 lots, and followed by Lebanon (19%), 22 lots. Although not the highest paid lot of the evening, Monir Farmanfarmaian's *Zahra's Image* came in fourth, knocked down at \$395,000.

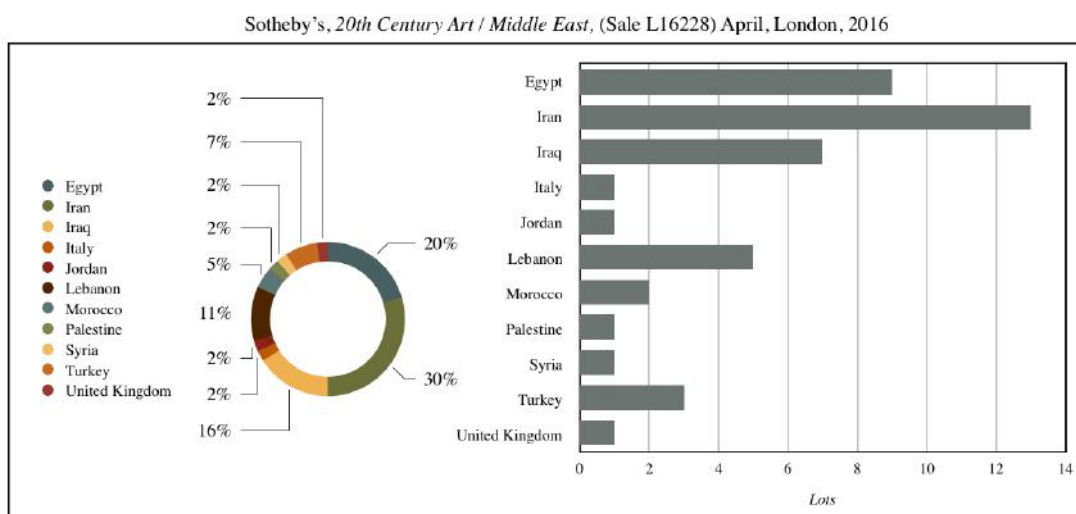
Christie's *Modern & Contemporary Arab, Iranian and Turkish Art*, (Sale 1237) March, Dubai 2015



Tehran Auction repeated its May auction *Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art*, displaying 126 lots for sale and achieving a result of IRR 205,9bn (\$6,055,882, £3,924,038). Sohrab Sepehri places number one for the third consecutive year as well as situating in second place with another *Untitled* (\$500,000), confirming the strong preference for the artist during the years. Sepehri's *Untitled* was acquired for IRR 28bn (\$823,530), making it the highest-paid lot of the sale.

On the trail of the success of its 2015 auction, in 2016 Sotheby's relaunched two auctions dedicated to the Middle East, one in April and the other in October. However, in a shift from the previous year, the auctions were held in London, rather than in Doha. *20th Century Art / Middle East* in April achieved £2,048,875 from the sale of 44 lots, primarily focusing on

Middle Eastern with only two lots by European artists. Iranian artists represented 30% of lots sold, with 13 lots up for auction, which collectively gathered £413,125 (\$593,456).

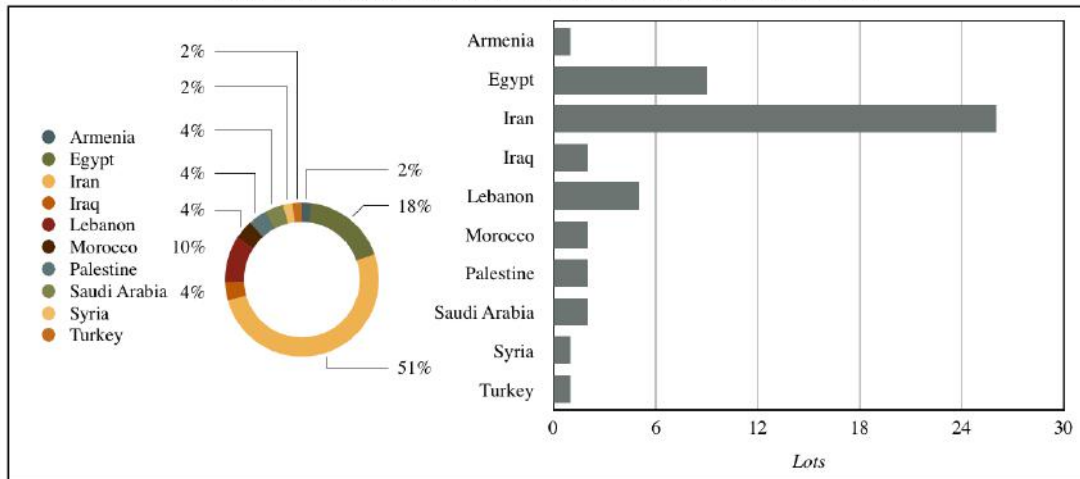


The second *20th Century Art / Middle East* auction of October, was sold above its pre-sale estimate, achieving a £3,014,125, with a sell-through rate of 87,5%<sup>249</sup>, from the sale of 51 lots total. Among the artworks up for auction, several were Iranian, around 51% of lots presented (26 lots overall), collecting £1,320,325 (\$1,618,565) in total. Monir Farmanfarmaian's *Variations of Hexagon and Octagon Mirror* came in second, grossing, £245,000 (\$300,787), followed by Ali Banisadr with *Creation*, knocked down at £197,000 (\$241,857). *Learning to Read* by Hossein Valamanesh set a new auction record for the artist, sold at £56,250 (\$69,058).

<sup>249</sup> Sotheby's (2015), <https://www.sothebys.com/it/auctions/2016/twentieth-century-art-middle-east-l16226.html>

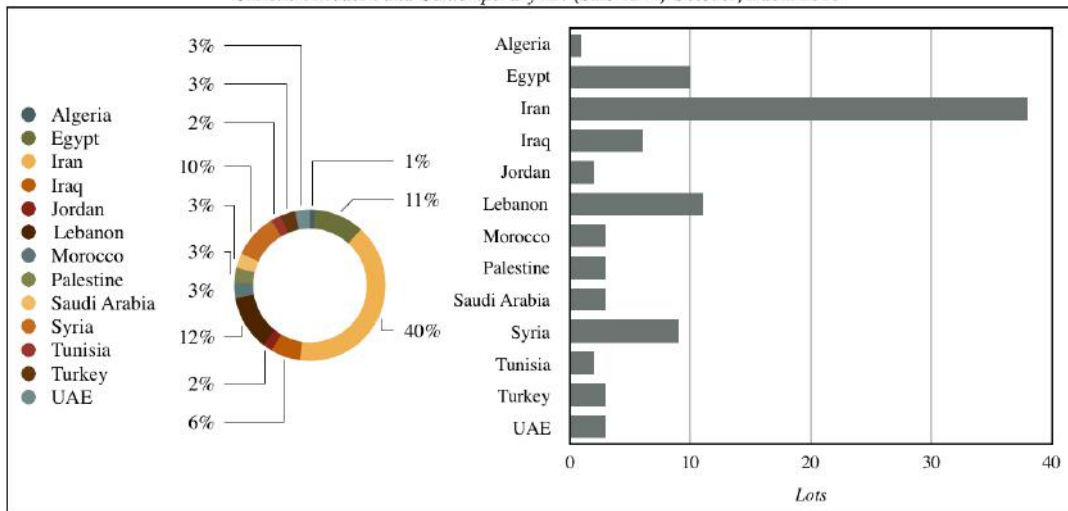


Sotheby's, *20th Century Art / Middle East* (Sale L16226) October, London 2016



Christie's inaugurated its sale season in Dubai with the auction *Modern and Contemporary Art* in October, which offered 94 lots for sale, earning a total of \$6,473,250 (£5,274,052). The auction showcased predominantly Middle Eastern artists, including Iranian artists, which accounted for 40% of total lots sold (38 artworks) raising \$2,859,625 (£2,329,867). Hossein Zenderoudi's was the auctions' second most sought-after painting, knocked down at \$307,500, surpassed by Lebanese Shafic Abboud's *Les années de l'oiseau*, which fetched \$391,500.

Christie's *Modern and Contemporary Art* (Sale 1244) October, Dubai 2016

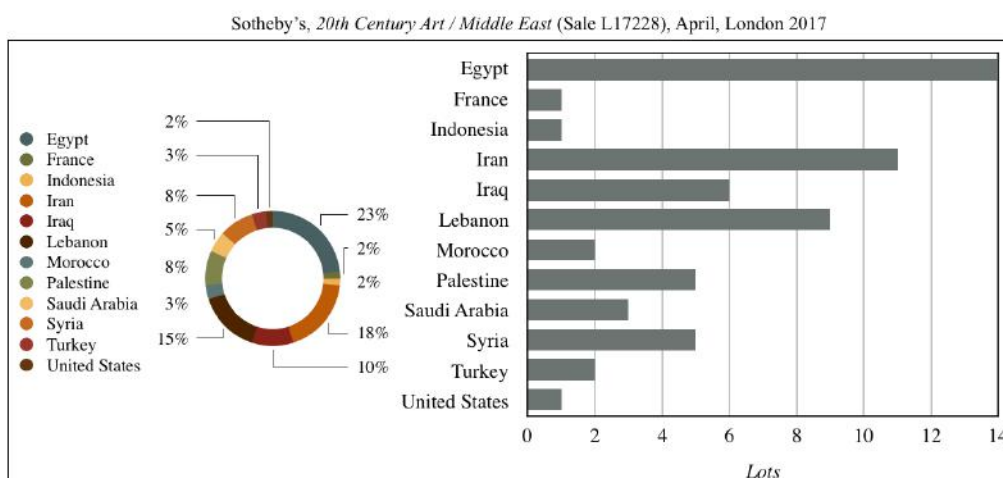


Tehran Auction introduced held two auctions in 2016, introducing the “Classic Iranian Art” category alongside their contemporary Iranian art selection. The term used by the auction house does not hold the same significance it has in Western art history, as it refers to the art produced in the second half of the 19th century up until the 1930’s. Classic Iranian art is therefore used to sum up the category of classical painting that pertained to the beginning of modern Iran, principally in the school of Kamal Ol-Molk and Academic Iranian paintings. However, the *Classic and Modern Iranian Art* auction held in May presented only 11 “classic” artworks, the rest being contemporary. The May sale garnered a total of IRR 253bn (\$6,854,594) from the sale of 80 lots, although the result comprising only of Contemporary Iranian art achieved IRR 241bn (\$6,534,594), given that classical paintings collectively earned a profit of IRR 11,8bn (\$320,005). Sohrab Sepehri’s *Untitled* fetched 30bn (\$810,811), earning number one spot for highest-paid artwork for the fifth consecutive year, cementing the growing interest and preference for the artist by the Iranian art market over the years. In December, Tehran Auction hosted *Contemporary Iranian Art*, repeating the previous year’s success, however earning IRR 100bn less than 2015, for a total sale of IRR 119bn (\$2,052,307) from 120 lots put up for auction. In total, Tehran Auction earned IRR 360,8bn (\$9,586,901) from the sale of solely Iranian contemporary art. Farhad Moshiri’s *Black Numbers on White* was knocked down at IRR 8,5bn (\$217,949), the highest selling lot of the sale, mirroring general art market trends in the Middle East of the previous years and solidifying Moshiri’s status as one of the most sought-after Iranian contemporary artists.

### 3.4.6 | The art market in 2017 and 2018

ArtTactic’s *Global Art Market Outlook 2018* noted a 25% growth in global auction sales from major auction houses, Christie’s, Sotheby’s and Philips from 2016, “particularly notable in the final quarter of 2017, which raised \$4,91 billion in total sales (...) up 35% from the fourth quarter of 2016”<sup>250</sup>. The overall growth of the art market two after years of market contraction in 2015 and 2016, with -10% and -23% respectively, grew +20% in 2017<sup>251</sup>. The MENA region was also affected positively by the global growth of the art market, with total sales growing slightly in 2017<sup>252</sup>.

Sotheby’s held its annual *20th Century Art / Middle East* auction in London in the first semester of 2017, on April 25, showcasing 60 lots and earning a sale total of £3,494,500 (\$4,4801,278). The most represented nationality was Egypt, with 14 lots of Egyptian artists, while Iran was the second most present with 18% of lots sold by an Iranian artist. Out of the 11 lots presented, only one was bought-in, collectively earning £1,057,875 (\$1,356,598). The sale saw a new world record for Bahman Mohasses, which was knocked down at £584,750.



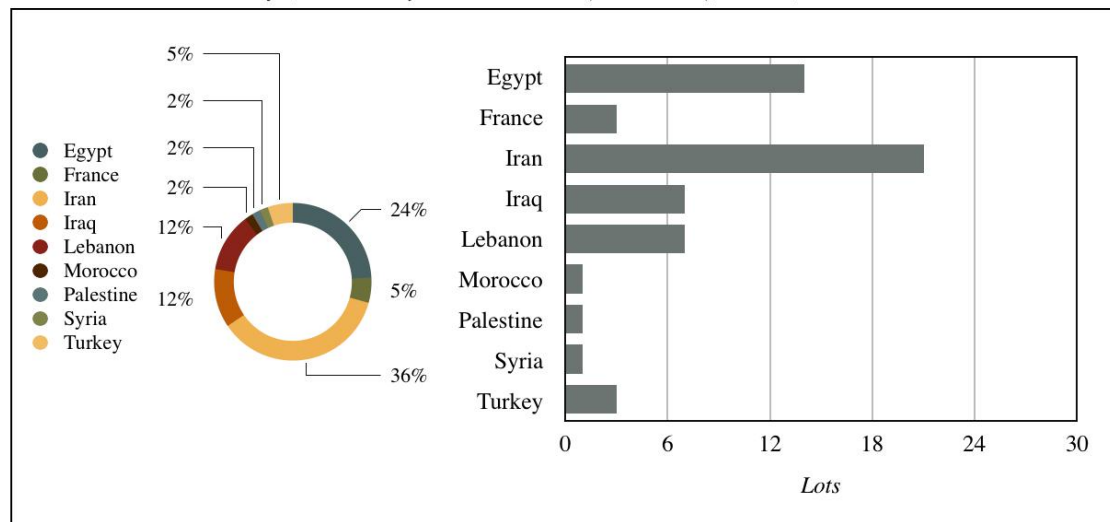
<sup>250</sup> ArtTactic (2018), p. 5

<sup>251</sup> ArtPrice (2017), <https://www.artprice.com/artprice-reports/the-art-market-in-2017/2017-summary-the-art-market-enters-a-new-phase>

<sup>252</sup> ArtTactic (2018), p. 14

The second auction held in London in October presented 58 lots to the public, earning £2,082,250 (\$2,743,923) from the sale of 57 lots, with one bought-in. Iranian contemporary art comprised 36% of lots sold, with 21 up for auction of which only one went unsold, for a total gain of £1,197,127). Sohrab Sepehri's *Untitled (From the Tree Trunk Series)* was the highest paid lot of the evening, getting knocked down at £272,750, confirming interest in the artist throughout the years.

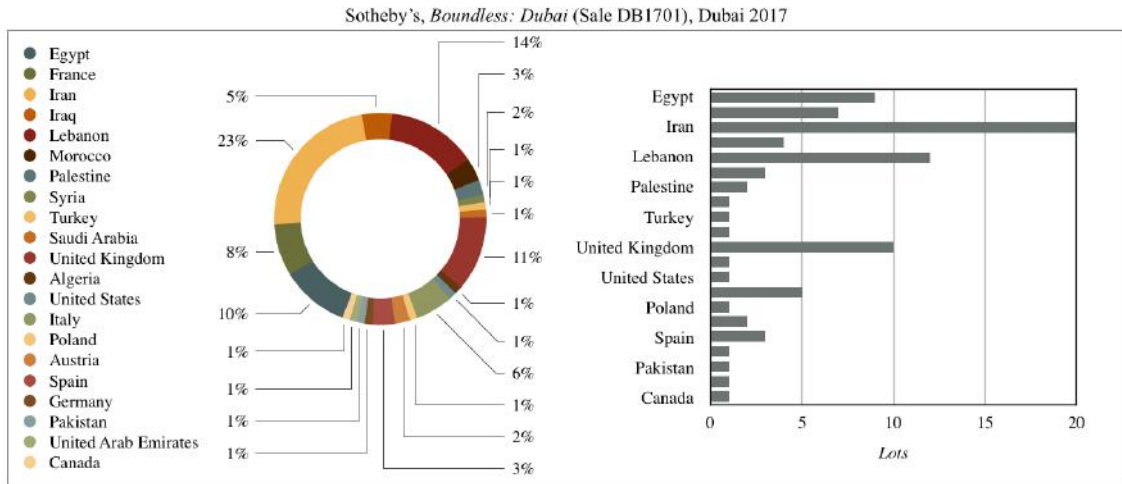
Sotheby's, *20th Century Art / Middle East* (Sale L17226), October, London 2017



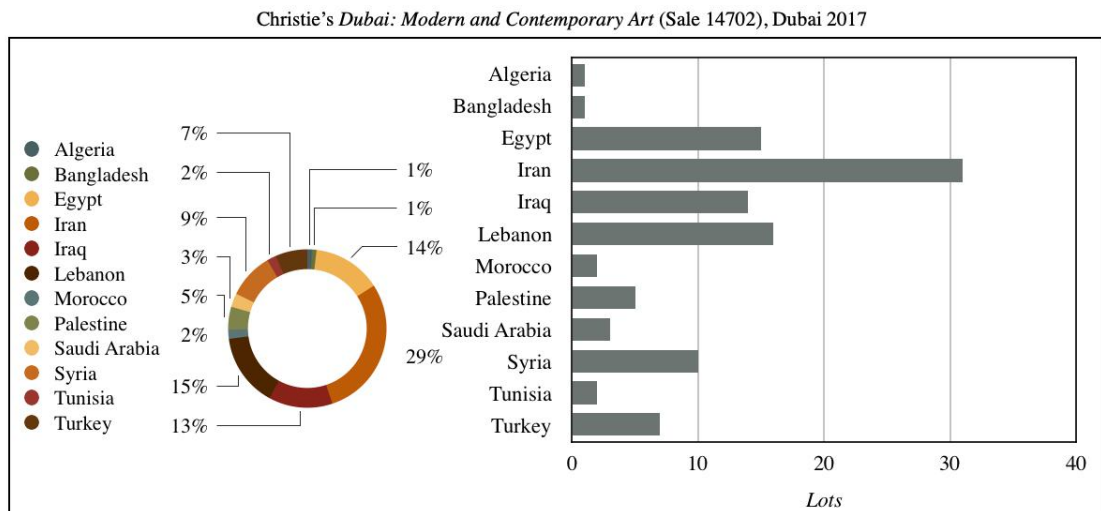
In a turn of events, Sotheby's held its annual Middle Eastern sale in Dubai instead of Doha, a change that Askhan Baghestani, Sotheby's Head of Sale and Director for Middle Eastern and Contemporary Art, justifies as timely in consideration with internationally growing interest in Middle Eastern art in the region<sup>253</sup>. *Boundless: Dubai* put up for auction 102 lots, which earned a total of \$3,622,975 (£2,766,824). The auction presented chiefly Middle Eastern contemporary artists but also offered a selection of internationally renowned artists and antiquities from the region. Iranian art represented 23% of lots offered, comprising \$1,524,337 of the total sale, with 20 lots of which

<sup>253</sup> Sotheby's (2017), <https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/why-dubai-now>

two were bought in. Iranian artists Ali Banisadr and Bahman Mohasses were the top two highest-grossing lots of the sale, respectively achieving \$459,000 and \$375,000.



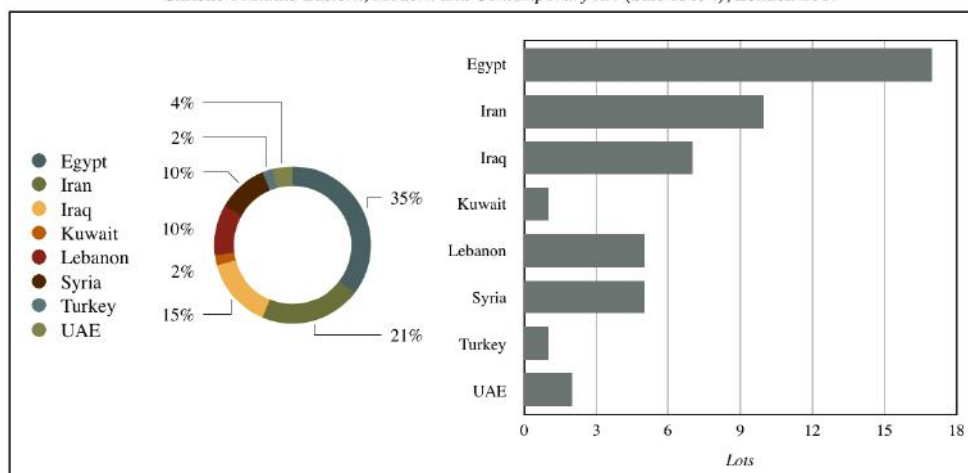
Christie's held its first annual sale in Dubai, *Dubai: Modern and Contemporary Art*, garnering a total sale revenue of \$8,079,375 (£6,536,641) from the sale of 108 lots overall. Iranian artists made up 29% of lots offered for sale, with 31 lots total sold, amassing a total of \$2,964,000 (£2,398,032).



The second sale dedicated to Middle Eastern art was held in October in Christie's London offices. Titled *Middle Eastern*,

*Modern and Contemporary Art*, the auction sold 48 lots in total, collecting £5,234,125 (\$6,939,928) out of which 10 were of Iranian artists, comprising around 21% of lots sold, surpassed only by Egyptian artists that made up 35% of lots sold. In total, Iranian contemporary art garnered £1,011,250 (\$1,340,816), with Parviz Tanavoli’s sculpture *Standing Lovers Heech* fetching £200,000, although it was not the highest paid lot of the evening.

Christie’s *Middle Eastern, Modern and Contemporary Art* (Sale 15694), London 2017



In 2017, Tehran Auction only held one auction in July dedicated to Classic and Modern Iranian art, offering 72 lots for sale with only one bought-in, out of which 8 were in the “classical” style and the rest contemporary. In total, the auction earned a profit of IRR 260bn (\$6,858,684) from the total sale of the lots. Contemporary artists accounted for a total of IRR 238bn (\$6,270,495) on the total revenue, with Sohrab Sepehri once again established as top-selling artist for the sixth year in a row, fetching IRR 31bn (\$815,790) for *Untitled*, setting a new record for the artist both in the Iranian contemporary art market and internationally<sup>254</sup>. Parviz Tanavoli’s sculpture *Poet and Cage* was knocked down at IRR 25bn (\$657,895) establishing a new

<sup>254</sup> Tehran Auction (2017), press release, p. 1

national record for Tanavoli<sup>255</sup>. Tehran Auction estimated more than 800 people at the auction, out of which 150 registered bidders, the majority of which were first time bidders, driving total sales up by almost 24% above the estimates<sup>256</sup>.

ArtTactic's final analysis of the 2017 art market outlook of the MENA region highlighted Iranian art's stronghold in the regional market, "accounting for nearly half of all auction sales by value (...) Overall sales of Iranian art were however down 24,9% from 2016, with total sales coming in at \$15,9 million, giving it a 48,1% market share", followed by Egyptian art<sup>257</sup>.

ArtTactic estimated a -19% decrement in global auctions in the MENA region for 2018, were lots sold went down -2,5% and total sale value (\$) went down \$26,56m, around -19,4% in total<sup>258</sup>. However, on a more positive note, contemporary Middle Eastern artists accounted for 15% of overall sales, with Iranian artists comprising 60,7% of auction sales value<sup>259</sup>.

In 2018, Sotheby's held both auctions in London, one in April and the other in October. The April *20th Century Art / Middle East* auction made a sale total of £2,140,250 (\$2,988,392) from the sale of 60 lots. Iranian artists represented a share of 30% of lots sold with 18 being put up for auction but only 9 acquired, totalling £906,000 (\$1,265,031) derived mainly from the sale of Bahman Mohasses' *Il Minotauro Fa Paura alla Gente Per Bene*, which fetched £549,000 and Monir Farmanfarman's *Recollections I*, knocked down at £237,000.

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<sup>255</sup> *ib.*

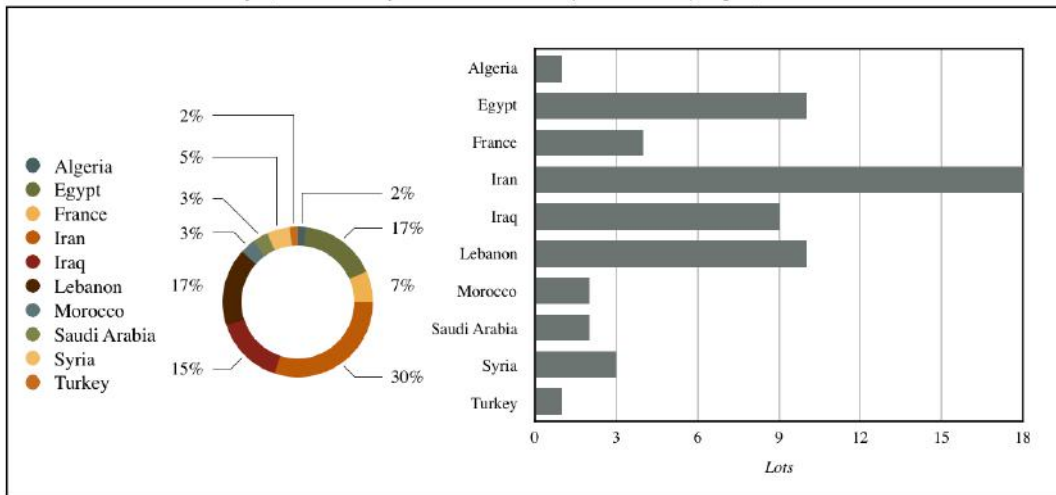
<sup>256</sup> *ib.*, p. 2

<sup>257</sup> ArtTactic (2018), p. 14

<sup>258</sup> ArtTactic (2018), p. 3

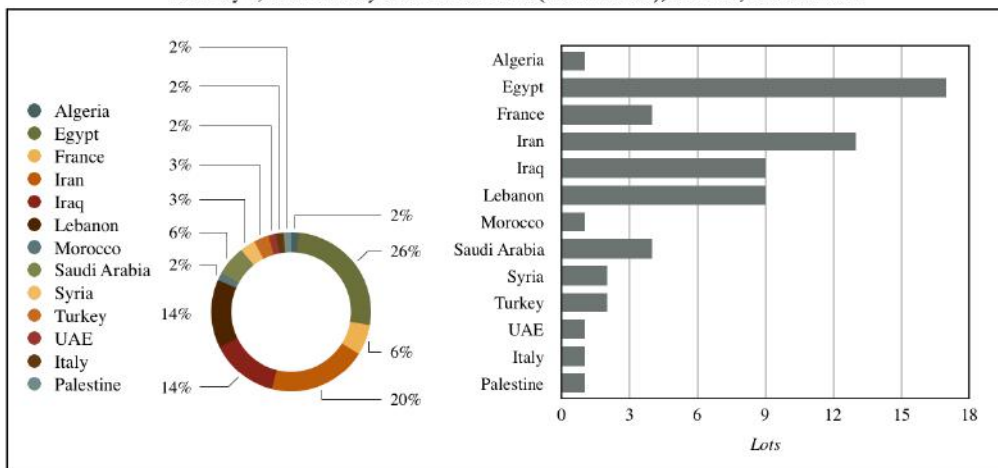
<sup>259</sup> ArtTactic (2018), p. 3

Sotheby's, *20th Century Art / Middle East* (Sale L18228), April, London 2018



The second *20th Century Art / Middle East* auction in October, presented 65 lots raking in a sale total of £2,488,000 (\$3,241,349). Out of the 65 lots up for sale, 13 were of Iranian artists, 3 which went unsold, representing 20% of lots sold and collecting a total profit of £698,250 (\$909,675). Monir Farmanfarmaian's *Three Graces* was knocked down at £187,500 and *Untitled (From the Jet Society Lady Series)* by Bahman Mohasses was acquired for £162,500, slightly underperforming in comparison to previous sales by Sotheby's in 2017.

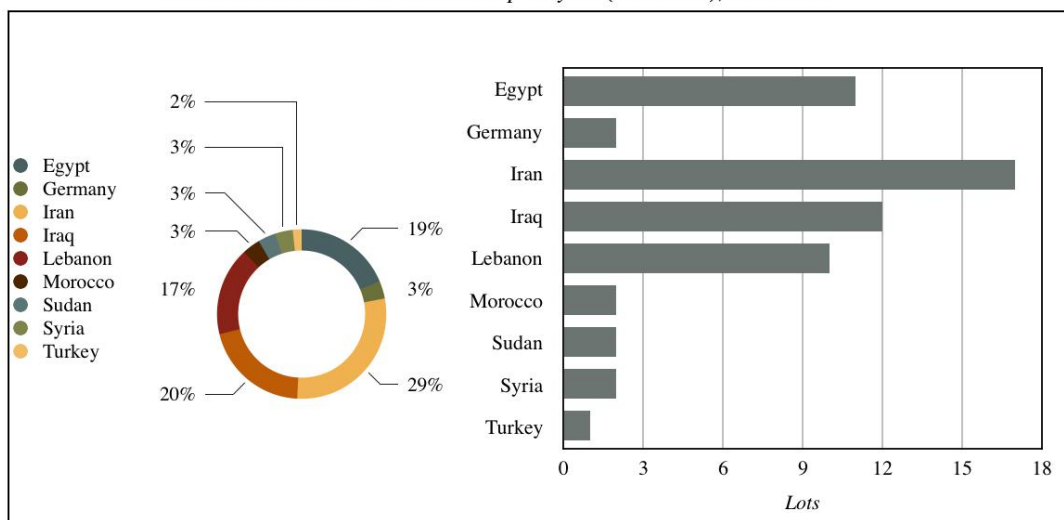
Sotheby's, *20th Century Art / Middle East* (Sale L18226), October, London 2018





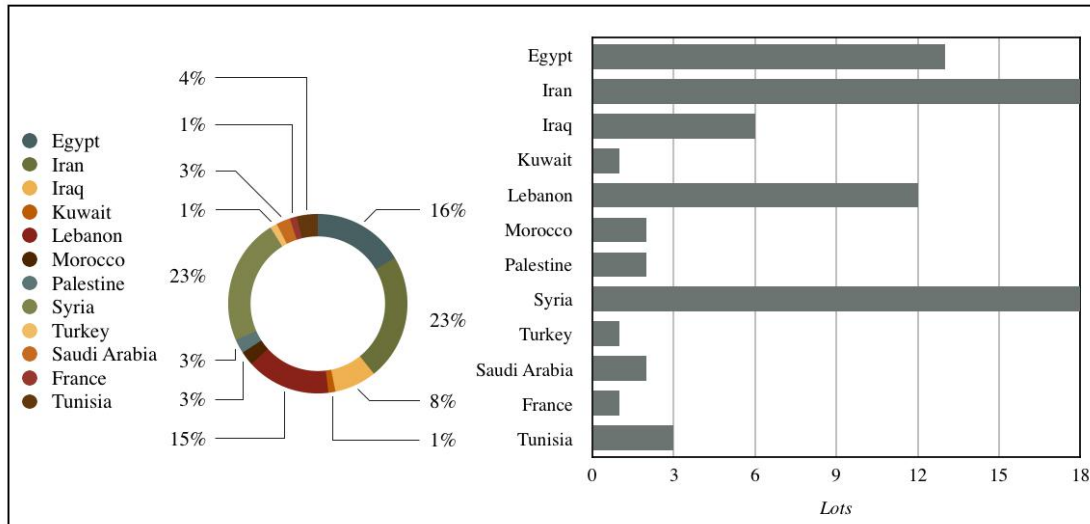
Christie's *Dubai: Post War and Contemporary Art* sale held in March realised a sale total of \$2,981,125 (£2,110,702) from 65 lots put up for auction. Out of the 65, 17 were from Iranian artists, comprising 29% of the total sale and generating a revenue of \$1,226,250 (£868,212). The highest-grossing lot was Sohrab Sepehri's *Untitled*, which was knocked down at \$287,500, confirming strong preference in Sepehri's work internationally.

Christie's *Dubai: Post War and Contemporary Art* (Sale 15739), Dubai 2018



Christie's London office hosted the *Middle Eastern, Modern and Contemporary Art* auction in October of the same year, achieving a sale total of £3,921,000 (\$5,061,175) from the sale of 79 lots in total. Out of the lots acquired, 18 were of Iranian artists, accounting for 23% of lots sold and collecting a total of £1,022,500 (\$1,319,829). ArtTactic however, noted that Christie's market share in the region showed signs of decline since inaugurating in 2006, falling to a 24,6% market share in 2018, dominated by Tehran Auction in overall sales and slightly ahead of Sotheby's<sup>260</sup>.

<sup>260</sup> *ib.*



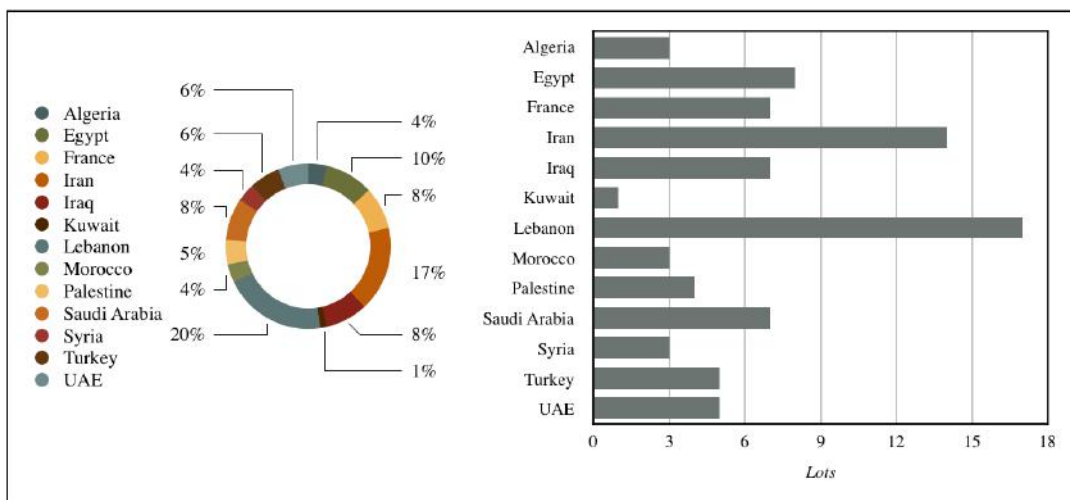
In 2018, Tehran Auction held two auctions, *Contemporary Iranian Art* in January and *Classic and Modern Iranian Art* in June. The January auction presented 120 lots to the public, realising a sale total of IRR 144,9bn (\$3,813,685). The highest bid lot of the sale was Monir Farmanfarman's *Untitled*, knocked down at IRR 13bn (\$342,106), the first artist to surpass Sepehri's results after being at number one six years in a row. The *Classic and Modern Iranian Art* in June put up 80 lots for auction, out of which 12 were in the "classical" style, and garnered a total sale profit of IRR 313bn (\$7,385,411). Contemporary artists collectively achieved a total of IRR 293bn (\$6,915,286) and saw Sohrab Sepehri rise once again as preferred artist in the Iranian art market, knocked down at IRR 51bn (\$1,200,000) setting a new national record for the artist. Overall, Tehran Auction estimated 140 bidders, 25% of which were first time bidders, driving sales up of almost 30% more than estimated (Tehran Auction press release, 2018, p.1). The success of the auction is even more astounding considering the economic situation of Iran, where inflation was set at around 1\$ = 42,500 IRR at the time of the auction, a fact that the auction house notes in its press release for the auction.

### 3.4.7 | *The art market in 2019*

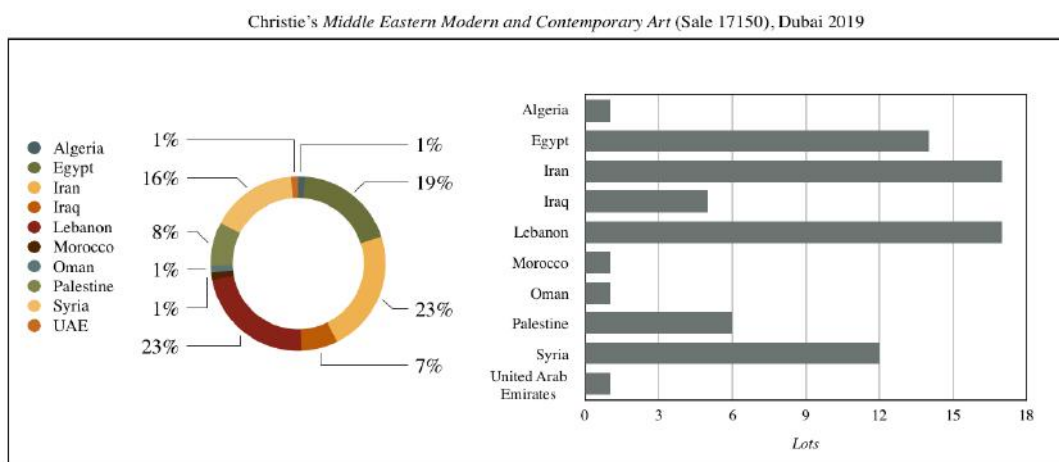
Entering 2019 the art market showed signs of uncertainty, with ArtTactic’s polled experts judging the year negatively (61% of polled responders), lessening confidence in investment in the global auction market, however, may create openings for smaller regional markets such as the Middle East; a factor enhanced by emerging countries’ wealth accumulation (ArtTactic, Global Art Market Outlook, 2019, p. 2).

Sotheby’s presented its April *20th Century Art / Middle East* auction during the Orientalist and Middle Eastern Art Week, an event dedicated to the region featuring also auctions focused on antiquities. The contemporary art sale grossed £3,458,000 (\$4,497,709) total, from 85 lots of artists from the MENA region. Out of the 85 lots, 14 were of Iranian artists, with only one bought-in, comprising 17% of the sale, gathering a total of £674,375 (\$877,137), with Manoucher Yektai’s *Untitled* and Bahman Mohasses’ *Elmo Antico* both positioning fourth and getting knocked down at £150,000 (\$194,055).

Sotheby’s *20th Century Art / Middle East* (Sale L19228), London 2019



Christie's inaugurated its regional Middle Eastern sale season with the *Middle Eastern Modern and Contemporary Art* auction in Dubai, held on March 23rd. Grossing a sale total of \$3,719,600 (£2,826,684) from the sale 75 lots, Iran was the most represented country with 17 lots total, making up around 23% of overall sale, alongside Lebanon, collectively making a sale profit of \$1,154,375 (£901,854). Hossein Zenderoudi and Parviz Tanavoli appear as third and fourth highest-paid lot of the auction, respectively knocked down at \$212,500 and \$200,000.



The 10th sale season of Tehran Auction was held in January, with the auction *Contemporary Iranian Art*, which grossed a total of IRR 344bn (\$3,440,300, with the market rate at 1\$ = IRR 100,000) from the sale of 114 lots. Tehran Auction estimated a growth of 137% in comparison to the previous year's auction, with 30% of the 200 registered bidders being first timers and the auction earned a profit that was above the original estimate of \$2,500,000<sup>261</sup>. Monir Farmanfarmaian's *Untitled* fetched IRR 40bn (\$400,000), surpassing once again Sohrab Sepehri as highest-paid artist, also setting a new national record for the artist.

<sup>261</sup> Tehran Auction (2019), p. 1

Although this year's sale season has not yet concluded, with other auctions coming probably in October, the outlook for MENA regions may be positive. The general outlook for 2019 for the Middle Eastern art market may benefit from the creation of a more solid infrastructure in the region, especially the establishment of cultural institutions which would enhance the region's support and growth of the regional art market<sup>262</sup>.

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<sup>262</sup> ArtTactic (2019), p. 12



9. Bahman Mohasses, *Il Minotauro fa paura alla gente per bene*  
(1966)

## Conclusions

Regardless of the political situation that often sheds a less than positive outlook on Iran and the highly unstable economic situation, the country's cultural scene is steadily persevering. Starting from the analysis of auction results, the research tries to examine the ramifications and consequent implications of the re-evaluation of Iranian contemporary art on a global and national spectrum. Market analysis allows the creation of a framework within which a more comprehensive response to Iranian contemporary art in a global market can be generated, given the fact that buyers are both international and Iranian. The possibility of mapping the trend of Iranian contemporary art in the market generates a broader spectrum of the modalities in which Iranian art is consumed and evaluated by the institutionalised framework of auction houses themselves. The presence of contemporary Iranian artworks put up for auction by auction houses of the calibre of Christie's and Sotheby's, prompt a system of validation and prestige that contributes to the growth in interest for Iranian art in the art sector at large. Increasing interest in Iranian contemporary art has often been termed as an "explosive", a sudden "boom" of interest that Iranian contemporary art had never experienced before<sup>263</sup>. However positive it may seem for the diffusion and appreciation of Iran's contemporary and vibrant art scene, it must not be forgotten that short-term boosts in the economy also carry their own implications. Once "market sentiment" pushes prices above the initial estimates, there is a consequent increase in market sentiment, a positive signal that causes "speculators [to] enter the market, pushing prices and volume up"<sup>264</sup>. In the case of the

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<sup>263</sup> Deghan, S.K. (2018); McCool, A. (2018); Levine (2018).

<sup>264</sup> Penasse, J. and Renneboog, L. (2014), p. 3.

art market for Iranian artists we can confirm a statement made by Penasse and Renneboog (2014), by which “when trading volume is high, we find that buyers tend to overpay, in that a high volume strongly predicts negative returns in the subsequent years”<sup>265</sup>. Based on the analysis of the sales, we can notice that indeed, Iranian contemporary art is always very present at high volumes in sales, as the median range of lots per sale is about 37,8 lots of Iranian contemporary artists per sale, with other countries represented by far less lots per auction. In some cases, a “boom” can be characterised as a “trading frenzy”, a phenomenon whereby “rising prices tend to be accompanied by more short-term transactions”<sup>266</sup>. However it is complicated to dub the contemporary Iranian art situation in the art market to such a “boom”, as it would necessitate further longitudinal studies examining the correlation between buyers and market trends in regards to works by Iranian contemporary artists. What can be observed from the data analysed is that there is indeed a growth of interest and value for contemporary Iranian art with a 71% increase over the span of one year for Tehran Auction, demonstrating increasing interest on an internal standpoint. On an international point of view, sales went down 24,9% since 2016 for Iranian art, which however still manage to keep the majority of the market share, at a total of 48,1%<sup>267</sup>. The overall research analysed 51 sales over the span of 13 years, in three different countries and cities: the United Kingdom, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, respectively in London, Doha and Dubai, where the majority of the auctions concerning Middle Eastern artists were held. From 2006 to 2019 the exponential growth of the region has garnered increased interest in investment, specifically in the art market and has brought major

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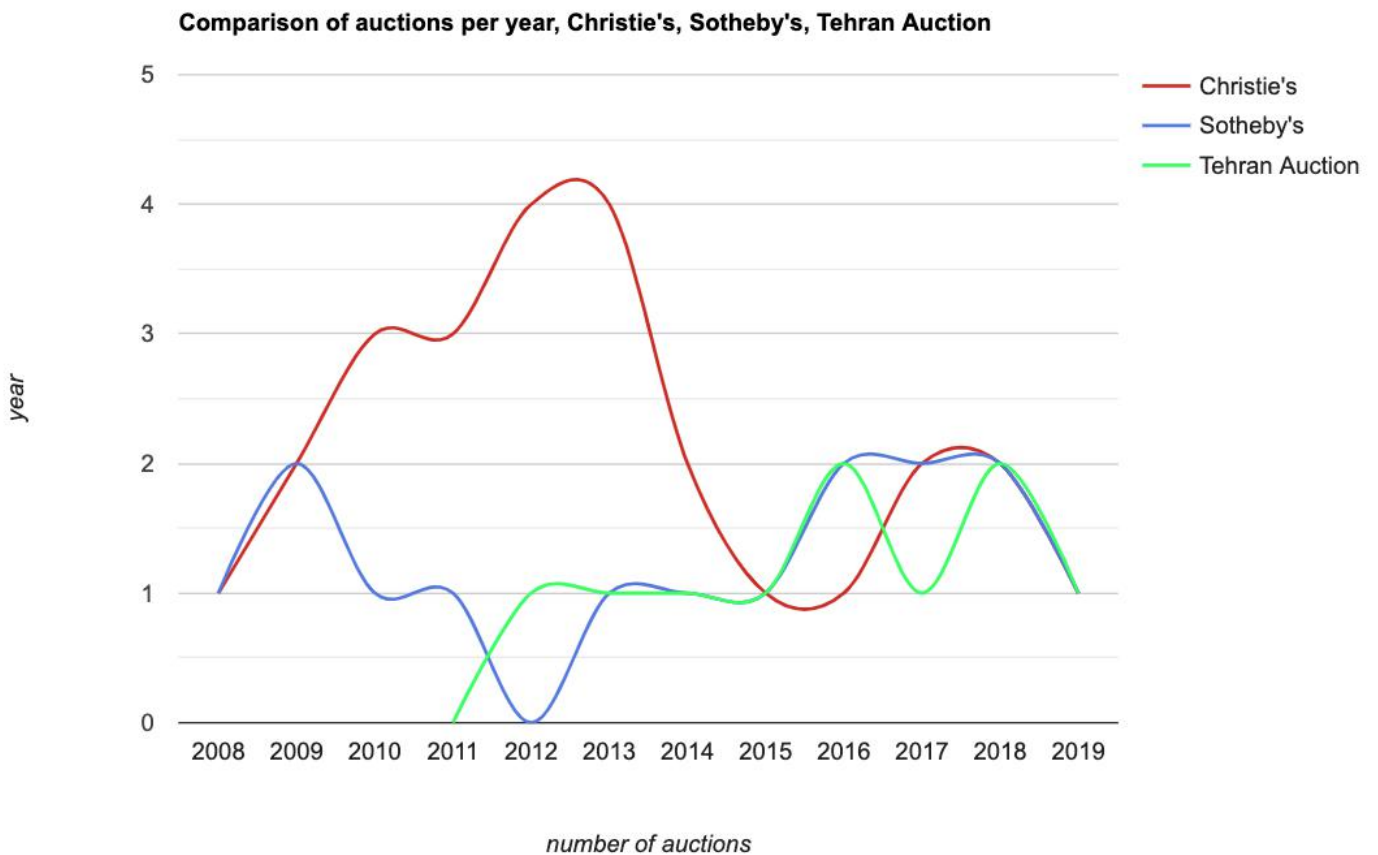
<sup>265</sup> page 38

<sup>266</sup> Penasse, J. and Renneboog, L. (2014), p. 38

<sup>267</sup> ArtTactic, *Global Art Market Outlook 2018*, (2019). p. 14



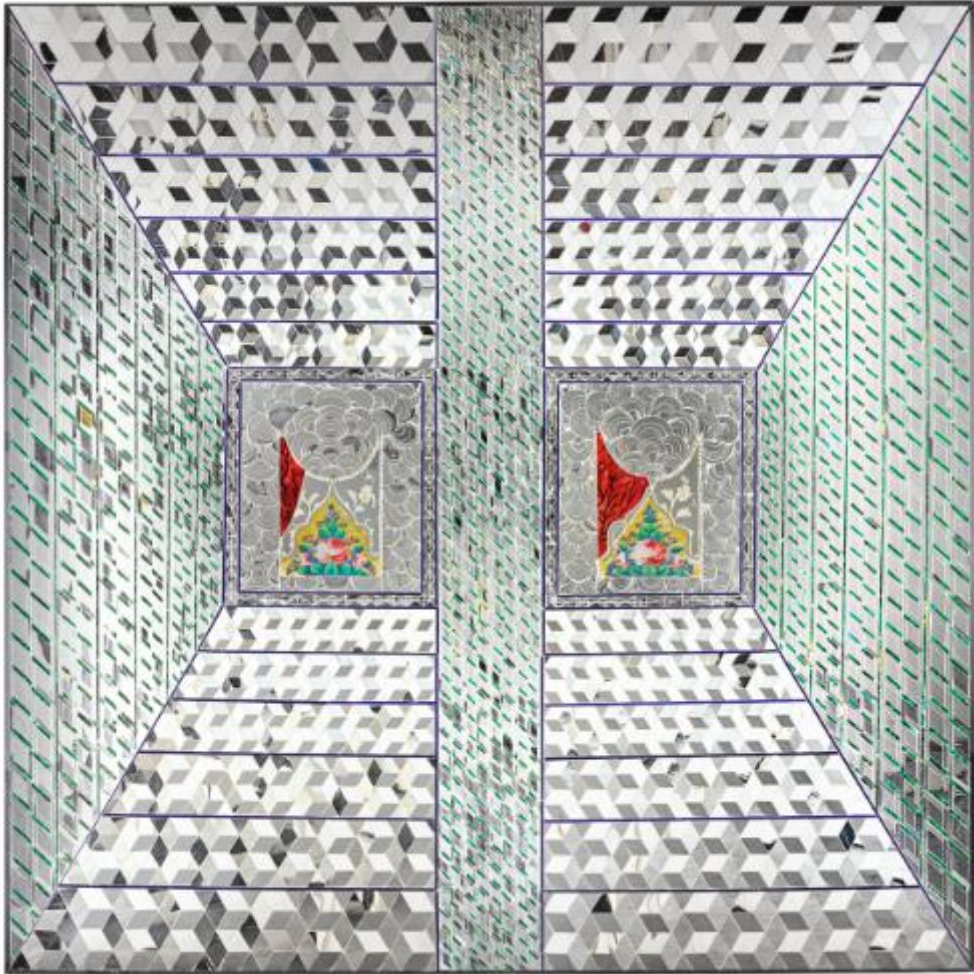
players, such as Christie's and Sotheby's, in the area. On average, 1,2 auctions were held per year per auction house including Middle Eastern artists and collected an average total sale of \$3,676,298 from the sale of exclusively Iranian artists. Out of all the auction houses, Christie's held the majority of auctions in the region with 25 auctions in total in 13 years in the region, followed by Sotheby's with 16 sales from 2007 and last Tehran Auction with 10 auctions in the span of 8 years. Moreover, Christie's held more sales overall in a year in comparison to other auction houses, with the peak being 4 sales respectively in 2012 and 2013. Sotheby's held a maximum of 3 auctions in a year (2017) and Tehran Auction holding 2 in 2016 and 2018.



Over the decade, Christie's maintained a steady domination of market share concerning the sale of Iranian artists starting with a 62% of market share in comparison to Sotheby's 38% in 2008. Steadily increasing over the years, Christie's peaked market share in 2012 with 79% of overall Iranian artists on the auction market presented at its auctions, the same year that Tehran Auction debuted with a 21% market share offered for the first time. Christie's domination of the Iranian art market share slowly decreased after 2014 with 50% of market share after the entrance of Tehran Auction which increased its market share to 36%, and Sotheby's maintaining a steady 14%. Pertaining to the peculiar context of the country, the data extrapolated from the research shows a positive interest in contemporary Iranian art, regardless of its political instability, which also demonstrates the re-evaluation of Middle Eastern art in a primarily Western environment: a favourable step in the direction of more visibility and acknowledgement of the value of art from the MENA region and Iran.

Iran has strict regulations in regards to the cultural, symbolic and visual content that can be produced by its artists, which often have to refer to the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. However, younger generations in Iran seem to be trying to push the boundaries of art in the country, a sign which can be observed through the increase of galleries in Tehran, the inauguration of the country's first auction house in 2012, Tehran Auction, and the first edition of Teer Art Fair in 2018, Tehran's art fair dedicated to promoting galleries in Tehran. The development of such an infrastructure in current Iran is an optimistic sign of change for the country, hopefully a way of representing Iran internationally as a valid cultural scene despite its unpopular political standpoints in the international

geopolitical chessboard. In order to paint a cohesive and comprehensive picture of the art market trends in Iran, a longitudinal studies over the span of twenty years, would perhaps enhance the possibility of establishing how contemporary Iranian art fares in fluctuating markets once its value has been solidified in market trends over the years. Another interesting point of view for future research and the improvement of the study could be the analysis of the distribution of regional and international buyers, in correlation with nationality and objectives when investing, or acquiring, Iranian contemporary art. Moreover, an observation of Tehran Auction's results over the years could yield interesting perspectives on how Iranian buyers and collectors engage with increasing prices and the economic situation in Iran, which is not expected to improve in the near future.



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