

Writing Pictures: Contemporary Middle Eastern Art (Part III)



Tradition or a Postcolonial Choice?

LONDON -- The staging of the two shows is coincidental, but Issa and Porter have collaborated over the years, as when Porter contributed to Signs of Our Times.

Issa and Porter's exhibitions, along with Dia Al Azzawi's retrospective of his artists' books, or *dafatir*, at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, have opened a debate over artists' use of lettering as a post-colonial move. Al Azzawi, for example, who is also included in Porter's show, has suggested that *dafatir* connects him to the Arab tradition of manuscripts and performed poetry — unlike imported media such as painting or sculpture from the West.

Similarly, for Issa, artists' use of text speaks of an authenticity to Middle Eastern traditions.

"I wanted references to my culture rather than imitating or having derivative works of the West," says the Iranian-Lebanese curator of her interest in the form. "I see students from Sharjah who come to London — and they teach them how to put garbage in a plastic bin to be conceptual, while what they did before was much more interesting. To me, I prefer when they refer to their own culture than to be a bad derivative work of the West."

Both Issa and the curator of Al Azzawi's show, Francesca Leoni, underline this continuity by juxtaposing contemporary text work with pre-modern Islamic artefacts. Issa, for example, sets a blue-glazed Seljuk ewer from SOAS's permanent collection next to a ceramic work by Manal Al Dowayan, in which she casts scrolls in porcelain (ironically titled *Just Paper*, from 2019), and various artists' books with richly illustrated manuscripts.

But the emphasis on Arabic and Persian writing has, over the years, come across like typecasting: a recognizably "Arabic" subject that artists from the Arab region feel pigeonholes them in their identity.

While neither of these shows address these concerns, the variety of work — and the works themselves — complicate any easy readings, whether of artists' books as an authentically "Middle Eastern" form, or as one of stereotyping.

When it comes to modern art, the interchange between West and Middle East has been ongoing for decades, without any sharp or binary divide between the two regions. Indeed, the Lebanese artist Shafic Abboud, who was the first modern artist in the Middle East to make an artists' book, became acquainted with the form when he was living in Paris, where the tradition of *livres d'artistes* flourished in the early 20th century.

Likewise, Moroccan artist Farid Belkahlia, who explicitly turned his back on the French traditions of the School of Fine Arts of Casablanca in the 1960s, used source material from that country for his own explorations. In his *Atours* (1980, on view at the British Museum), he used a French text, written by the Czech poet Natacha Pavel, which he had translated into Moroccan Arabic for his handwritten version of the text.

While the source material speaks of layers of cultural exchange, Belkahlia cites his version of the book in the color palette of Moroccan folk art, in tawny browns and dark reds.

"These books are many things," says Porter. "Artists will find different ways to tell their stories." End

Courtesy: The National

'Roya' to Participate in Spanish Festival

TEHRAN -- Iranian short film 'Roya' has made its way into the PERSONA - Molins de Rei International Film and Human Rights Festival in Spain.

The Iranian Youth Cinema Society reported that 'Roya' will take part in the 16th edition of PERSONA - Molins de Rei, iFilm reported.

'Roya', directed by Muhammad-Reza Muhammedi, is about a young Afghan couple who tries to illegally enter Europe but faces vari-

ous challenges.

'Roya' was awarded at several festivals, including the Five Continents International Film Festival in Venezuela.

The 16th edition of PERSONA - Molins de Rei International Film and Human Rights Festival will take place on March 24-31.

'Roya' will also take part in the Achill Island Film Festival in Ireland, and the Ca' Foscari Short Film Festival in Italy this spring.

The Dust of Colonialism: Eurocentrism in Art Music (Part III)

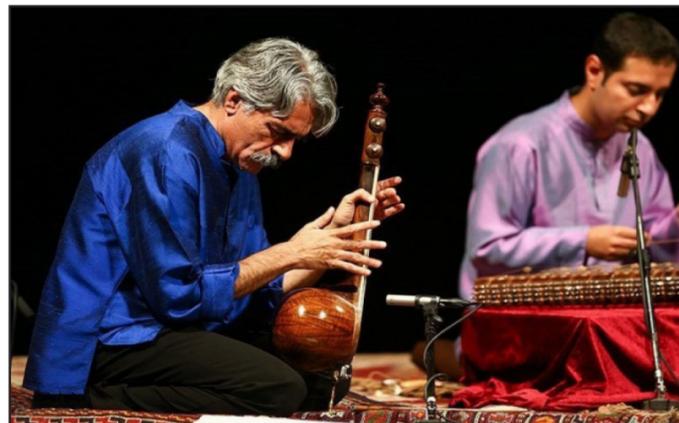
By: Reza Vali*

Division of Music Into European and Non-European Music

European art music is often referred to as "classical" music, and non-European music is called "indigenous" or "ethnic" music. Recently, the name of "Ethnic Music" has been changed to "World Music." In other words, if a performer plays music of Bach, Mozart or Beethoven, they are performing "classical music," but if a performer plays the music of Ravi Shankar or Hossein Alizadeh, they're performing ethnic music or "world music." Aren't European countries part of the world? Why is only the music of Asia, Africa, and Latin America called "world music?"

In pluralist thinking, music is not divided into European music and non-European music. "Classical" music refers not to a specific historical period or culture's music, but to the art music of a country. The music of all countries could be divided into classical (art) music, folk music, religious music, popular music, and so on. For each country, we would have classical music — Iranian classical music, Indian classical music, Chinese classical music, Japanese classical music — and this division of music that separates European and non-European music would be eliminated.

Division of Music Research Into 'Musicology' and Ethnomusicology



If a researcher studies European art music, such as the music of Bach or Beethoven or Brahms, they are called a "musicologist." But if a scholar researches Indian or Iranian music, they are called an "ethnomusicologist." Aren't Germans, French, and Italians ethnic groups? Of course they are, so a scholar who is researching the music of Bach is studying the music of ethnic Germans in the 18th century. Therefore, all musicologists are in fact ethnomusicologists because they study the music of different ethnic groups in different historical periods. Thus, separating "ethnomusicology" from "musicology" literally makes no sense.

I think it likely that, in the future, the word "ethno" will be excised from musicology as a field of study, whether a researcher is exploring European or non-European music.

Almost a century after the end of colonialism, the dust of Eurocentric thinking still weighs heavily on the musical minds of the peoples of the world.

I'd like to add a few final thoughts on the progression of music from a Eurocentric field to a more pluralist perspective:

In the 21st century, the instruments of non-European cultures should be equally valued alongside European instruments.

International orchestras and ensembles that use European and non-European instruments alike should be established. This is already occurring with ensembles like the Silk Road Ensemble.

Composers should create new works for such orchestras and ensembles.

Through dialogue and cooperation, some of the basic elements of non-European musical cultures, such as intervals, rhythms and forms, should be taught to Europeans, Americans, Australians, and all musicians who are trained in the European conservatory system.

Almost a century after the end of colonialism, the dust of Eurocentric thinking still weighs heavily on the musical minds of the peoples of the world. Removing this dust requires directly and deliberately challenging Eurocentrism when it appears, without being hostile or anti-European. Rather, it should be done through friendly discussion and sincere dialogue. In this way, the European musical culture will find its true place among the other musical cultures of the world — not above them, but alongside them.

*This article is derived from Chapter 2 of Reza Vali's *Return to the Origins*, published in Nov. 2022 by The Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies at Princeton University, and has been edited for content and length. End

Courtesy: I Care If You Listen

Lift-Off Festival to Screen Two Iranian Movies



TEHRAN -- Two movies directed by Iranian filmmaker Muhammad-Reza Rahmani will compete at the Lift-Off Film Festival 2023 in Britain.

"Pari-Sa" (Like a Mermaid) and "The Last Dance With Iranian Cheeta" will view for awards in the completion which will be held on March 27.

The festival is held online with the aim of identifying in-

dependent films throughout the world and discover pure talents in the filmmaking industry.

The movies will be judged at the Pinewood Studios that is a British film and television studio located in the village of Iver Heath, England.

The international screening of the Iranian movies is going to be carried out by the Cinema 4way company managed by Sahar Nasouti.

7500-Year-Old 'Cursed City' in Southwest Iran

TEHRAN -- Sialk Hills, located in the southwestern part of Kashan city in Iran, was known among the locals as a 'cursed city' where people were afraid to approach. Before a severe flood led to the discovery of Sialk Hills, no one dared to approach this terrifying location.

Thanks to the flood of 1930, the story of the Sialk Hills, dating back 7500 years to the Achaemenid Period, was also revealed. "Teppe Sialk" (in Persian, Tappe means "hill" or "mound")

In reality, this structure is a ziggurat, a rectangular stepped tower that occasionally has a temple on top and is made primarily of clay; it is possible that calling it "hills" would not be accurate.

It is claimed to be the world's oldest ziggurat, dating to the 3rd millennium BC, tucked away in the suburbs of the city of Kashan, in central Iran, close to Fin Garden.

After flood, a colossal number of ancient artifacts and tools like potteries were found at the surface.

After a while, a group of European archaeologists led by Dr. Ghoshman of the Louvre Museum traveled to Iran for the first time to excavate this site. All of the excavations took time, and their findings were eventually published in two books. Unfortunately, despite all of that team's hard work and the amazing results of their findings, the government ignored the significance of this site until 2001.

The artifacts unearthed here eventually found their way to museums like The Louvre, The British Museum, The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and private collectors, much like the tens of thousands of other Iranian historical sites.

Fortunately, in 2001, Dr. Malek Shahmirzadi began new excavations on this site; they took some serious measures to ensure the site and its artifacts' survival.

Dr. Ghoshman estimated this civilization dated more than 10,000 years old. He proposes that it has six distinguishing levels in two northern and southern parts.

What remains of this ziggurat is not in a favorable condition like many other ancient ruins in Iran. At the site, there are actually

two structures (necropolis) at Sialk situated several hundred feet from each other.

The three platforms of the larger ziggurat however still remain in place. Not much remains of the smaller structure.

The Elamite civilization built four ziggurats, including Sialk. The other three are: Choqa Zanbil (1250 BC), Susa Ziggurat (1800 BC), and Haft Tepeh (1375 BC), all in Khuzestan.

The Ziggurat at Ur was rebuilt by Saddam Hussein with bricks stamped with his name. Sialk is the 32nd and most recent ziggurat to be discovered.

The Sialk ziggurat has three platforms, and despite being built in 2900 BC, it pre-



dates Urnamu's Ziggurat at Ur, which was built in 2100 BC. The earliest archeological remains of the north mound, however, date back to the middle of the sixth millennium BC, or approximately 7500 years ago. A study conducted in collaboration with Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization, The Louvre, and the Institute Francais de Re-

cherche en Iran confirms the oldest settlements in Sialk date back to 5500 BC.

It is said that the reason for building this ziggurat was to store a colossal amount of water running nearby. The "Solomon's Spring" called "Cheshme-ye Soleyman" is the source of bringing water from nearby mountains to the area.

Picture of the Day



A ceremony was held in Valiasr Square of Tehran on Friday evening, March 27, 1401 to mark the beginning of the Nowruz festival.

Photo by IRNA