

Islamic Art from the Ulrich Museum of Art Permanent Collection



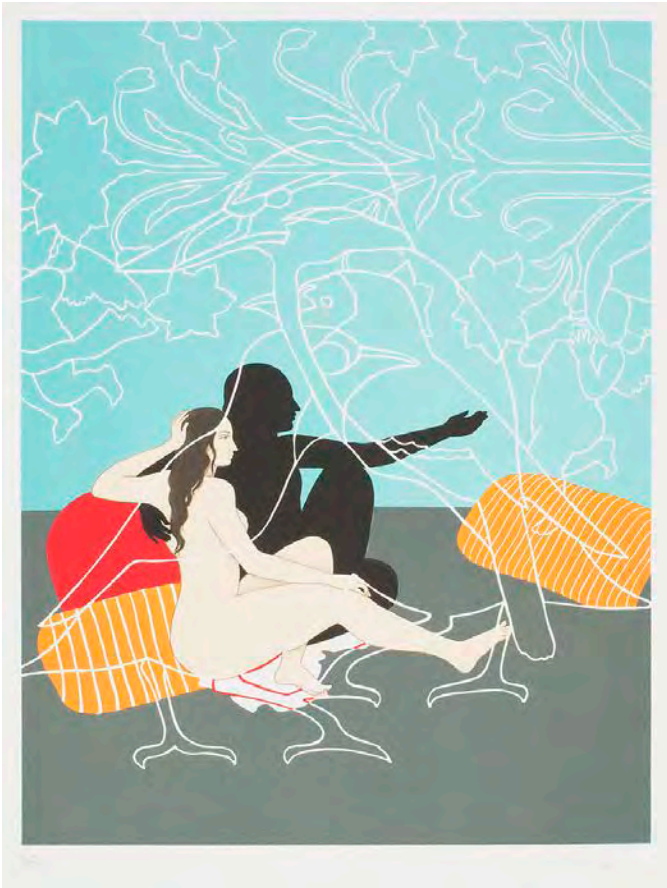
Shahzia Sikander
American, born Pakistan 1969

Afloat, 2001
Serigraph
Museum Purchase
2002.6

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Born and raised in Pakistan, Shahzia Sikander mixes traditional Islamic and Hindu motifs, Persian pattern designs, and a Western perspective to create artwork that reveals the superficiality of cultural borders and definitions, which she calls “surface identity.” Her art is based on traditional Islamic decorative miniature painting, a style in which the artist has extensive training and which is commonly considered “women’s work.”

Sikander is interested in creating and exploring contradiction. Speaking of her work, Sikander states that “the focus is always to create icons that are neither personal nor cultural, but somewhere between both.” The synthesis of Muslim and Hindu culture that exists in her work stems from the cultural diffusion and conflict that exists between Pakistan and India. What she creates is not just an allegory of Western and Eastern cultural differences. Rather, what is revealed is the “nearness of difference” that exists everywhere in the world. This is a direct statement about inconsistency and contradiction that challenges our view of history, gender roles, and cultural identity.



Nusra Qureshi
Pakistani, born 1973

***Three Songs of Devotion*, 2003**
Lithograph
Museum Purchase
2016.11

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Nusra Qureshi
Pakistani, born 1973

***Gardens of Desire*, 2003**
Lithograph
Museum Purchase
2016.10

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Primarily working in painting, Nusra Qureshi's work explores themes of gender, colonization and power. Her works reference and incorporate the aesthetic of various texts such as South Asian illuminated manuscripts and botanical manuals. However, rather than solely mimicking these forms in her work Qureshi makes slight alterations, which aim to challenge or subvert the rhetoric that is embedded within the original texts.

The work *Gardens of Desire* references the ways in which colonization has "overwritten" and replaced the indigenous names of birds, plants and lands, while *Three Songs of Devotion* subtly plays with gender role reversal.



Zarina
Indian, born 1937

Rohingyas: Floating on the Dark Sea, 2015
Woodcut
Museum Purchase
2016.57

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Rohingyas: Floating on the Dark Sea references the plight of the Rohingyas people, a Muslim minority group from Burma who are described as being among "...the world's most persecuted people." They have consistently faced persecution through being subjected to numerous human rights abuses and have been denied citizenship by the Burmese government. Their ongoing exodus has led to them being referred to as "Boat People" by the international media.

The stark print is meant to reference the condition of existing in what Michel Foucault refers to as a heterotopic space, which is a liminal, in-between space that does not exist in reality, which describes the condition of being stateless. The boat is "...heavy in symbolism," referencing "travel and transit...exploration and escape."

Burnt Generation: Contemporary Iranian Photography

In September of 2018, the Ulrich Museum of Art opened the exhibition *Burnt Generation: Contemporary Iranian Photography*. The following is an overview of the exhibition, the Gallery Brochure, and images with wall labels representing the nine Iranian artists in the exhibition.

Burnt Generation, an exhibition of contemporary Iranian photography, surveyed the profound impact of decades of political unrest and social upheaval on the people of Iran. The name Burnt Generation has been applied to Iranians born between 1963 and 1980. Their generation was overwhelmingly marked by the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which brought down the ruling monarchy with major social, political and economic consequences, as well as the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War in which many of them served. Featuring an array of approaches to photographic storytelling, Burnt Generation had three central themes: the isolation, loneliness and desolation of youth; the common threads that unite the country in spite of decades of tumult; and the personal, political and social consequences of war.

The exhibition offered a rare opportunity to move beyond cliché—an invitation to forget the stereotypical images of Iran and enter the worlds of eight highly original, intellectually engaged artists. Burnt Generation was an exhibition curated by Fariba Farshad and organized by Photo London.

The Ulrich Museum of Art exhibition was made possible by generous support from the Gridley Family Foundation, Dr. Sam and Jacque Kouri, J. Eric Engstrom and Robert Bell, Bud and Toni Gates, Sangeeta Khicha, Ron and Lee Starkel, Mickey Armstrong, the City of Wichita and Wichita State University.

Additional funding for this exhibition was provided by Humanities Kansas, a nonprofit cultural organization that connects communities with history, traditions, and ideas to strengthen civic life.

Additional Resources:

[Burnt Generation Panel Discussion: Azadeh Akhlaghi and Gohar Dashti at the Ulrich Museum of Art](#)

Gohar Dashti

(Iranian, b. 1980)

From the series *Iran, Untitled*, 2013

Courtesy of Azita Bina and Robert Klein Gallery, Boston

Gohar Dashti explores fraught social and political issues through the carefully staged photographs of her series *Iran, Untitled*. By tightly clustering groups of people in the middle of a desert landscape, Dashti creates mysterious tableaux that suggest the isolation of specific populations within Iranian society. At the same time, she underscores the insularity of her select groups by providing one element that compositionally binds the people together, such as a couch or orange traffic cones. Dashti describes these images as haikus exploring the relationship between form and content. “It’s like objectifying a feeling; that is how an image reveals itself,” she explains. In this way, her work suggests the universal human need to bond with others, as well as the common urge to seek distance from the unfamiliar.



Gohar Dashti
Iranian, born 1980

From the series *Iran Untitled*, 2013
Inkjet print
Courtesy of Azita Bina and Robert Klein
Gallery, Boston



Gohar Dashti
Iranian, born 1980

From the series *Iran Untitled*, 2013
Inkjet print
Courtesy of Azita Bina and Robert Klein Gallery,
Boston

Ali & Ramyar

(Iranian, b. 1976, b. 1980)

We Live in a Paradoxical Society, 2010

Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran

Ali Nadjian and Ramyar Manouchehrzadeh have worked collaboratively in the field of photography for many years. Their practice explores the cultural impact of the Iranian Revolution over nearly four decades and documents the rigid dualities of public and private life imposed on Iranians under the Islamic Republic. Their series, *We Live in a Paradoxical Society*, represents the strict divide between domestic and public spheres, the former marked by individual expression and the latter by necessary self-censorship. As the artists explain: “Home is considered a safe space to live in which we are free to think, dress and behave the way we want. On the contrary, there’s a life outside our homes full of fundamental and basic differences in which we are attacked for deviations, and pretensions are required in order to survive.”



Ali and Ramyar
Iranian, born 1976/1980

From the series *We Live in a Paradoxical Society*, 2010
Inkjet print
Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran



Ali and Ramyar
Iranian, born 1976/1980

From the series, *We Live in a Paradoxical Society*, 2010
Inkjet print
Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran

Newsha Tavakolian

(Iranian, b. 1981)

Look, 2013

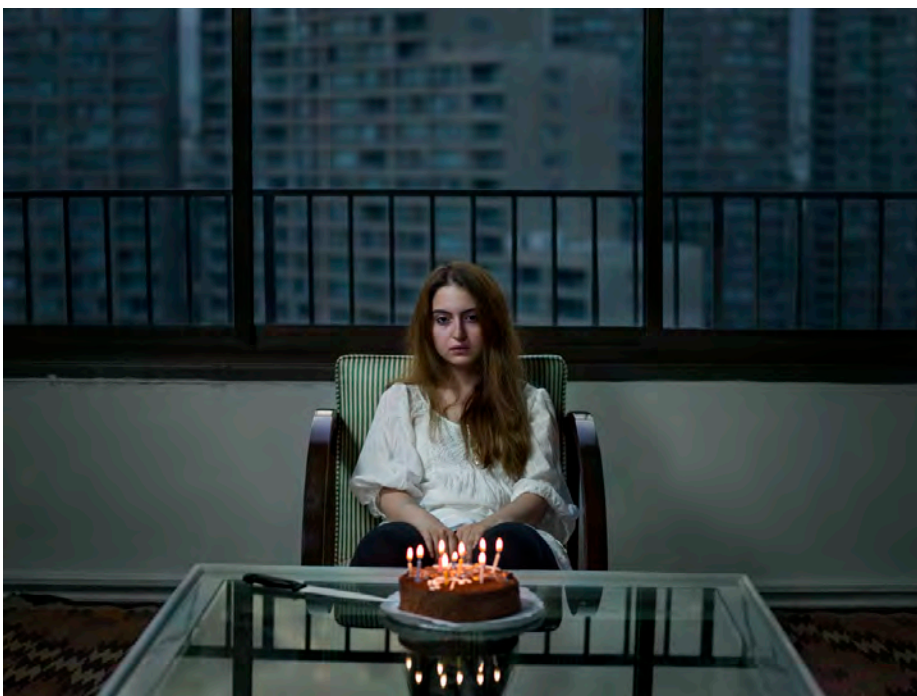
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

In her series, *Look*, Newsha Tavakolian delves into the unseen, private lives of Iranians. Peering into apartments in her building, she presents tenants who have lived within them for more than 10 years. These photographs tell the story of middle class youths attempting to cope with their isolation from a conformist society and battling with their lack of hope for the future. Over a period of six months, always at 8 p.m., Tavakolian fixed her camera on a tripod in front of a window and tried to capture the moments that best illustrated her subjects' anxieties and concerns. Her neighbors are caught within the frame of that window, their images echoing the cold, nondescript buildings seen in the distance.



Newsha Tavakolian
Iranian, born 1980

From the series *Look*, 2013
Inkjet print
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York



Newsha Tavakolian
Iranian, born 1980

From the series *Look*, 2013
Inkjet print
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery, New York

Shadi Ghadirian

(Iranian, b. 1974)

Nil Nil, 2008 and *White Square*, 2009

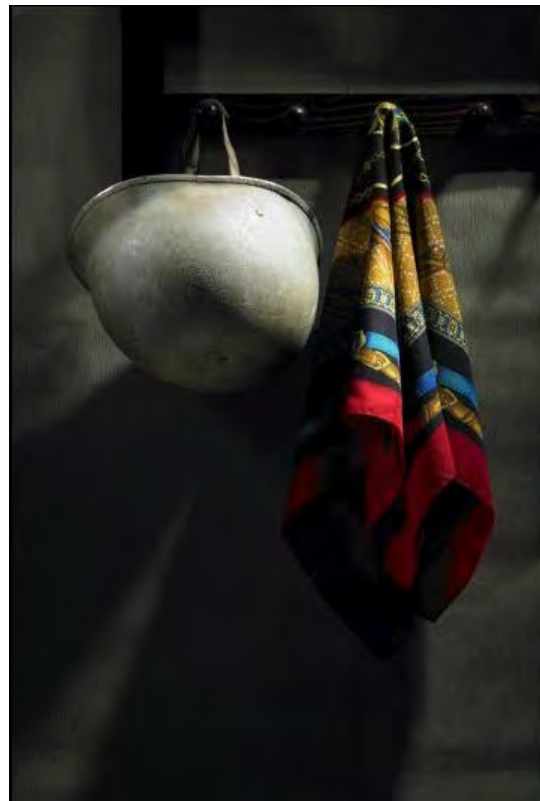
Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran

Shadi Ghadirian's *Nil Nil* series addresses the symbolic presence of political ideology and war within the home. Transforming the domestic space with the addition of military objects, she reminds us that war has a silent but powerful presence in people's minds and innermost private lives. In *White Square*, Ghadirian has photographed objects of military use—a helmet, canteen, ammunition belt or grenade—that she decorates with a red silk ribbon. Recontextualized, these accessories of war become unfamiliar and appear at once menacing and delicate, their aggressiveness tempered by an element of the feminine.



Shadi Ghadirian
Iranian, born 1974

White Square #4, 2009
C-Print
Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran



Shadi Ghadirian
Iranian, born 1974

Nil, Nil #4, 2008
C-Print
Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran

Babak Kazemi

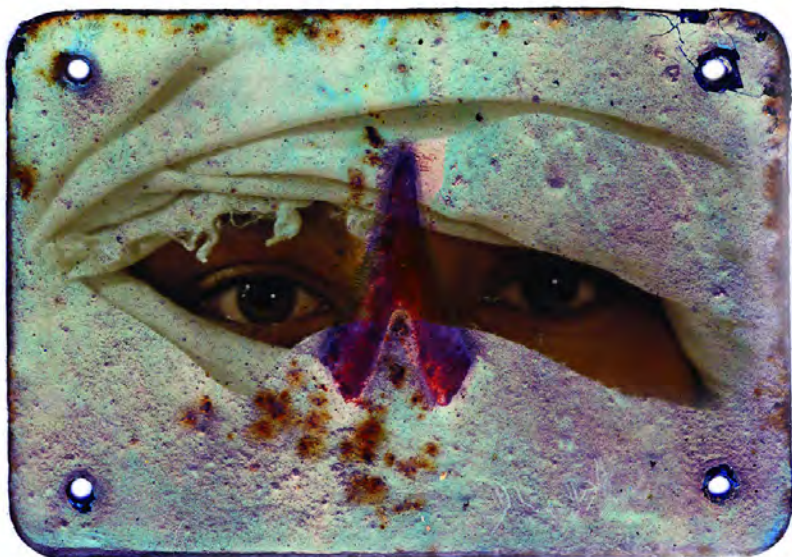
(Iranian, b. 1983)

Khorramshahr Number by Number, 2006–2010

Souvenir of a Friend and Neighbor Country, 2006

Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran

Combining markers of conflict and domesticity, Babak Kazemi offers a commentary on the Iran/Iraq War, the longest battle of the 20th century, and the second longest violent conflict after the Vietnam War. In *Khorramshahr Number by Number*, Kazemi superimposes photographs of local people and scenes onto house number plates from destroyed homes in the war-torn city of Khorramshahr, located on Iran's border with Iraq. Openly blaming the nearby oil fields for the political upheaval he witnessed, Kazemi prints his photographs in petroleum products. The works symbolize the 75,000 displaced residents of the city, bringing into view the human and financial costs of war. Kazemi's *Souvenir of a Friend and Neighbor Country* presents bullets from the conflict, which, photographed individually, take on a strange, chilling beauty as a memorial to Khorramshahr.



Babak Kazemi
Iranian, born 1983

Khorramshahr Number by Number, 2006-2010
Mixed media, collage, inkjet print
Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran



Babak Kazemi
Iranian, born 1983

Souvenir of a Friend and Neighbor Country, 2006
Mixed media, collage, inkjet print
Courtesy of Silk Road Gallery, Tehran

Abbas Kowsari

(Iranian, b. 1970)

Shade of Earth and Light

Courtesy of the artist

Concerned with the legacy of the Iran/Iraq War, Abbas Kowsari's *Shade of Earth* series documents the pilgrimage that hundreds of thousands of Iranians make to the border between the two countries during the New Year holidays. This journey, known as Rahian-e Noor, commemorates the millions of soldiers who died during eight years of trench warfare from 1980 to 1988. It is paired here with Kowsari's hopeful series *Light*. Inspired by the centrality of light in all major world religions, which serves as a universal metaphor for truth, knowledge and enlightenment, Kowsari photographs the green-hued illuminations of Islamic rituals. His radiant pictures reveal that a respect for religious traditions is very much alive in Iran, particularly in its old neighborhoods, towns and villages. He has taken many photographs over the years on two particular nights of Shiite celebrations, the night of Ashura and the birth of the Twelfth Imam, documenting the decorations, lamps, colored papers and festive installations made by the people in their communities.



Abbas Kowsari
Iranian, born 1970

From the series *Light*, 2012
C-print
Courtesy of the artist



Abbas Kowsari
Iranian, born 1970

From the series *Light*, 2012
C-print
Courtesy of the artist

Azadeh Akhlaghi

(Iranian, b. 1978)

By an Eye Witness, 2012

Courtesy of the artist

In this project, Azadeh Akhlaghi creates images of past events for which photographs do not exist. Her process specifically comments on the many dramatic, tragic deaths that mark Iran's modern history. Pairing images with explanatory texts in both English and Farsi, each work is a thoughtful reconstruction of historical events based on a combination of archived information, news reports and conflicting accounts from witnesses. Assassinations, torture, accidents, suspicious and natural deaths are all represented in the series; each death—whether of a political activist, intellectual or journalist—marks a turning point in Iran's turbulent modern history, crossing political and factional lines, to which all Iranians can relate.



Azadeh Akhlaghi
Iranian, born 1978

Hamid Ashraf, 29 June 1976, from
the series *By an Eye Witness*, 2012
Digital print
Courtesy of the artist



Azadeh Akhlaghi
Iranian, born 1978

Mirzadeh Eshghi, 03 July 1924, from
the series *By an Eye Witness*, 2012
Digital print
Courtesy of the artist

Sadegh Tirafkan

(Iranian, 1965–2013)

Body Signs, 2001 and *Body Curves*, 2003

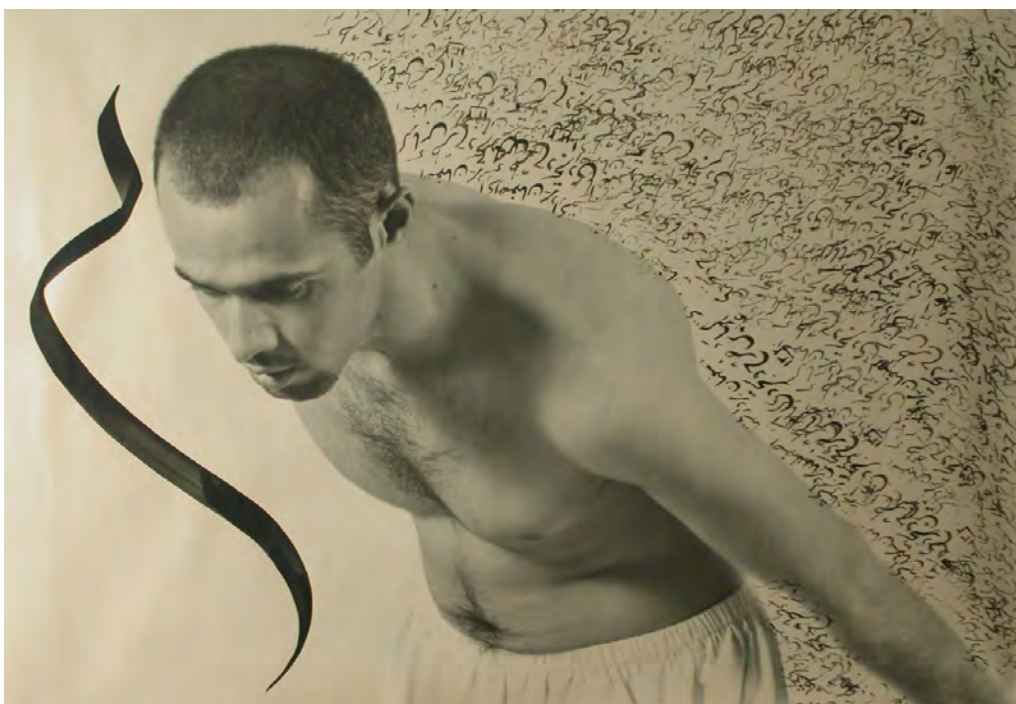
Courtesy of The Tirafkan Foundation

Figurative images are a mainstay of Persian art, but rarely are they presented nude. Sadegh Tirafkan has long been inspired by the human form. In researching his projects, Tirafkan encountered ancient Iranian art depicting the naked bodies of the Secaha tribe and noble pre-Achaemenian kings, who painted their torsos and limbs with abstract and figurative forms. Observing the male role in traditional Iranian society from this historical standpoint, Tirafkan continues this rare practice, embellishing his body with decorative wood blocks using the Mohr technique, which stamps traditional patterns onto prints and fabrics. His two series presented here are an effort to unite the curvatures of the human body with Persian calligraphy and figurative images from ancient Persian art, which more freely depicts the nude.



Sadegh Tirafkan
Iraqi, 1965-2013

From the series *Body Curves*, 2003
Calligraphy on black and white print
Courtesy of the Tirafkan Foundation



Sadegh Tirafkan
Iraqi, 1965-2013

From the series *Body Curves*, 2003
Calligraphy on black and white print
Courtesy of the Tirafkan Foundation