Standardisation and the Question of Identity: On The Dominant Discourses on Contemporary Iranian Art

Hamid Keshmirshekan*

Abstract

This article deals with the discourse of cultural globalisation and related issues such as the global market and cultural industry, which emerged as recent seminal factors within the context of Iranian culture, art and artistic practice during the recent history of Iran. Moreover, it seeks to explore the inevitable issues drawn from the process of globalisation, namely the forces of standardisation, question of identity, i.e. local, historical, imaginative and collective identity, which were followed by artistic production and thereafter other consequences and critical discussions, located differently by generations in the contemporary Iranian art scene. Accordingly the treatment of the subject is thematic rather than historical or chronological. Examining visual culture in post-revolutionary Iran, with particular emphasis on the recent developments—from the late 1980s onwards—this article then attempts to deal with the works of artists who are likely to involve some account of the historical specificity of their context, as well as an exploration of the ways in which the artists' focal beliefs about national identity, social relations and cultural essentialism find expression in their work. It will then address how an intellectual and aesthetic change that is also intended to initiate a contribution to global culture becomes almost a desire for the new generation. It will examine the role of the new developments in the art market in the transformation of aesthetics and expectation. It seeks to show the sometimes contradictory relationship between international markets and local expectations and domestic forces opposed to globalisation. It will address questions such as how the locality of artists has been established, and how an effect of the globalisation process and globalising forces can directly influence the representation of such a locality in their art.

Key words: Contemporary Iranian art, globalisation, standardisation, identity, cultural essentialism, global art market

*. Associate Professor of History of Art at the Advanced Research Institute of Art, Iranian Academy of the Arts. Email: hkeshmir1@yahoo.com

For a long time it was often argued that modern and contemporary art production outside Euro-American domain could be viewed as derivative and clichéd. However, this cannot possibly be maintained at the present time when the contemporary imagery suggests fragmentation and hybridisation—a loss of unifying authenticity, and the recombining of diverse elements. This latter could also perhaps explain why the contemporary art scene today increasingly shows an interest in non-Euro-American art, including contemporary art from the Middle-East or the so-called Islamic societies.

This article deals with the discourse of cultural globalisation and related issues such as the global market and cultural industry, which emerged as recent seminal factors within the context of Iranian culture, art and artistic practice during the recent history of Iran, specifically from the late 1980s onwards. Moreover, it seeks to explore the inevitable issues drawn from the process of globalisation, namely the forces of standardisation, question of identity, i.e. local, historical, imaginative and collective identity, which were followed by by artistic production and thereafter other consequences and critical discussions, located differently by generations in the contemporary Iranian art scene. Accordingly the treatment of the subject is thematic rather than historical or chronological. In line with the theoretical nature of this article, it in fact tries to explore the concerns over globalisation over the past two decades on visual representations in Iran. The changing socio-political dynamics of the country present a number of unique and interesting cases for this new situation, specific to their cultural essentialism, but also related to other cultural norms and a much larger global movement and institutions. This article, however, does not aim at, and will not be able to fully look at, all the varieties of artistic ideologies but just aims to address key issues which would help to understand the current situation which is made up of a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory ideas in Iranian art.

This article examines the developments during the period mentioned in relation to movements of earlier decades and their emphasis on establishing a national visual identity; and the more recent, contemporary global identity, allowing them a place in the global art scene. This is, however, related to discussions of the younger generation of Iranians' demand for participation in the global processes of development. This article also discusses the developments that have empowered this eagerness.

Examining (briefly) visual culture in post-revolutionary Iran, with particular emphasis on the recent developments, this article then attempts to deal with the works

of artists who are likely to involve some account of the historical specificity of their context, as well as an exploration of the ways in which the artists' focal beliefs about national identity, social relations and cultural essentialism find expression in their work. It will then address how an intellectual and aesthetic change that is also intended to initiate a contribution to global culture becomes almost a desire for the new generation. Of particular relevance are the ever-present obsessions with cultural and social issues; the impact of 'after modernist' imagery which would refer to fragmentation and hybridisation. This will provide platform from which to further ponder the question of identity and the articulation of both identical national elements/concepts and those Western counterparts in the artists' works. This article also seeks to explain how artworks are created as representations of critical junctures of Iranian society in its recent history. It will examine the role of the new developments in the art market in the transformation of aesthetics and expectation. It seeks to show the sometimes contradictory relationship between international markets and local expectations and domestic forces opposed to globalisation. It will address questions such as how the locality of artists has been established, and how an effect of the globalisation process and globalising forces can directly influence the representation of such a locality in their art (with reference to tradition, expressing views of contemporary local problems or as having the nature of a localised culture). The question is whether traditional values, beliefs and patterns of loyalty and behaviour are accommodated within this new structure and serve to secure and reinforce it.

It is perfectly clear by now that the ideas and practices of globalising modernity are appropriated and re-embedded in practices that are local, giving rise to a plethora of modernities through the assemblage of diverse cultural elements. Anthony Giddens shares with Jürgen Habermas the view that modernity as an institutional design is in fact a 'Western project'.[1] He points out that the two unique institutions of modernity, the nation-state and capitalism, are Western in origin. However, he believes that the globalisation of modernity across the world introduces new forms of world interdependence, in which, once again, there are no 'others'.[2] In *The Consequence of Modernity*, Giddens says:

> Neither the radicalizing of modernity nor the globalizing of social life are processes which are in any sense complete. Many kinds of cultural response to such institutions are possible given the world cultural diversity as a whole.[3]

The definition of art historian John Clark, regarding the process of transformation of Euro-American modern art into other contexts, confirms a similar process. He states that during the process of transformation the old existing discourses themselves actively empowered the original source through their modern situation, and then through choices from modernism. Those choices were based on different art discourses, conceptions of taste, and fundamentally different life values. Clark continues by saying that 'the shift is into a space where the problematic is how to construct an art discourse that uses modern concepts as articulation of indigenous tastes or broader metaphysical positions considered as culturally "ours".'[4]

However, this process would involve the new contexts in the process of 'appropriation'. Art historian Robert Nelson maintains:

> [...] appropriation is more complicated. As Edward Said long understood, in every cultural appropriation there are those who act and those who are acted upon, and for those whose memories and cultural identities are manipulated by aesthetic, economic, or political appropriations, the consequences can be disturbing or painful.[5]

This perhaps refers to the complexities of cross-cultural dialogues, the issue of identities, histories and geographies which are involved as well as the subtle forms of imperialism that work to marginalise non-Eurocentric art in the west. As Hichem Djaït, in *Europe and Islam*, argues:

> […] superficial contact creates a feeling of strangeness; more profound encounters risk bringing on the dissolution of the self, the shattering of its coherence, the end of certitude, and a traumatic challenge to one's values.[6]

Here what proves to be essentially important is the subject of identity. Most commentators on global and local social change acknowledge that 'identity' is fundamental to their social analysis; however, most also find it a confusing and contradictory concept when trying to capture the force and experience of self-consciousness and collective awareness. Influenced by psychoanalysis and poststructuralist thought, identity is now generally acknowledged to be less fixed and more fluid in ways which still allow the individual some agency. Looking across and through the geographies, although differently located, there are axial sites where the artists meet. These are at the precise point where the personal, the social and the political of the past and present interact through history, place and memory. In Stuart Hall's terms they are 'not the rediscovery but the production of identity. Not an identity grounded in the

archaeology, but in the re-telling of the past.'[7]

As for globalisation; Mike Featherstone introduces a cultural condition, caused by the process of globalisation, by stating that:

> The process of globalization suggests simultaneously two images of culture. The first image entails the extension outwards of a particular culture to its limit, the globe. Heterogeneous cultures become incorporated and integrated into a dominant culture which eventually covers the whole world. The second image points to the compression of cultures. Things formerly held apart are now brought into contact and juxtaposition.

Inevitably, here we will face with the question of cultural standardisation. As Ian Clark argues:

> The pressure for cultural standardization could generate resistance, disorder and violence. In such instances, standardization seems to stimulate phenomena of rejection, secession and alienation on the part of subjects such as nation states, ethnic and religious groups, which seek to defend their identities and claim the authority of their local space in the face of global contamination and standardization.[8]

It is therefore said that the two sets of processes of globalisation and localisation are linked dialectically and work with and against each other at the same time. Cesare Poppi also rightly argues that:

> [G]lobalization must be understood as the condition whereby localizing strategies become systematically connected to global concerns…Thus, globalization appears as a dialectical (and therefore contradictory) process: what is being globalized is the tendency to stress 'locality' and 'difference', yet 'locality' and 'difference' presuppose the very development of worldwide dynamics of institutional communication and legitimation.[9]

In the meantime it has become commonplace to see economic globalisation as a homogenising, universalising model which absorbs cultural differences and therefore ultimately rejects them.[10] However, as both Anthony McGrew and David Harvey have noted, globalisation, as a universal phenomenon, gives rise to opposite forces of particularism and localisation. While promoting universal values, standards and processes, globalisation provokes particularistic reactions along the lines of nationality, ethnicity and religious faith, particularity against Western cultural influences.[11]

It seems that psychologically this process on the one hand encourages local artists to familiarise themselves with the latest idioms practised dominantly in the Euro-American art scene and on the other hand causes a kind of reaction against it by seeking refuge in cultural or artistic specificities. It seems, however, that on many occasions for them there is no other choice than just to think of a global-local (or so-called glocal) approach. Here, in the words of John Clark:

> […] an important feature of avant-garde practice found elsewhere in Asia is that artists who adopt avant-garde positions feel free to explore indigenous art forms alongside—rather than in opposition to—the discourse they operate on.[12]

So any successful attempt, for example, to deal clearly with the nationalist dimensions of a given work is likely to involve some account of the historical specificity of a given context, as well as an exploration of the ways in which the artist's focal beliefs about national identity, and self-deceptions linked to the psychologies of nationalism, find expression in the work at hand. Hence the question of to what or for what the artists belong becomes an existential challenge for them. Here in the context of Iran, according to the Iranian philosopher and social scientist Ramin Jahanbegloo:

> The complex sentiment of inferiority mixed with that of the loss of the Iranian self through the global domination of the West has been the foundation for theoretical elaborations on the two concepts of tradition and modernity among four generations of Iranian intellectuals.[13]

The question of identity has, moreover, led individuals to react to it in various ways: on the one hand, from a nostalgic psychological return to the past or an imagined historical identity—ethnic, native, local or even national or societal collective identity—to, on the other hand, a self-identity and embodiment of cultural memory, this latter mainly being practised by the new generations. This first identity, one can argue, is still the compelling concern of the artists who belong to the earlier generations, while the latter has mainly preoccupied the minds of the new generations who are partly concerned with the outcome of the global forces affecting Iranian society and culture. These approaches and the outcomes, on the one hand (as indicated), have long been concerns of intellectuals—in art, predominantly inspired by the nativist movements in the 1960s[14]—and, on the other hand, by cultural officials of the country for different reasons, both in the period before and after the Revolution; but they have also been targeted for criticism

Figure 1: Iraj Eskandari, *The Story of Love*, 1994, oil on canvas, 200 x 100 cm.

Figure 2: Jamshid Haghighatshenas, *Untitled*, 1991, oil on canvas, 70 × 50 cm.

by cultural opponents of these ideologies.

In the first phase of the post-revolution period, a 'unique' form of art based on the ideology of the Islamic Revolution containing traditional Islamic or the so-called Irano-Islamic values[15] was suggested. Due to the lack of theoretical and practical principles, the main output, however—namely, the revolutionary art—was not unique, particularly in terms of formal approach and had close familiarity with those of revolutionary art worldwide.

The second phase appeared gradually during the late 1980s. During the late 1980s and early 1990s new trends, attitudes and methods gradually unfolded. The majority of the exhibitions, however, consisted of works in which one can see a tendency towards traditional Islamic motifs and folklore arts as references to the so-called Irano-Islamic culture (**Figures 1, 2**).

In the early 1990s, the question of identity was in fact influenced by the ontological and political underpinnings of *gharb-zadigi* ('Westoxication') which had been addressed through a critical interpretation of the works of

Iranian intellectuals during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The discourse of 'authentic culture' is reminiscent of the same discourse in those decades. The distinguishing features of this intellectual climate were anti-colonialism, anti-Westernism, and a desire to find one's authentic culture. More specifically, there was continued preoccupation during those decades with 'the West' as a universal model dominating a troubled Iranian 'self' and a resistance to a basically imperialist West.[16] This view notably reminds one of the discourse of Orientalism in reverse[17] which is used by 'oriental' intellectuals and political elites to lay claim to a self-appropriation which is almost invariably presented as a counter-knowledge to Europe's central narrative.

During the 1990s the works of artists employed motifs taken from 'vernacular materials' such as traditional textiles and decorative forms and even Persian classical arts. The question of how a contemporary work of art could adopt a so-called Irano-Islamic form on many occasions—as in similar cases elsewhere in the Middle East and Islamic world—led to the solutions of abstraction and calligraphic patterns (this had already been practised extensively by the pioneering artists some decades ago) (**Figure 3**).

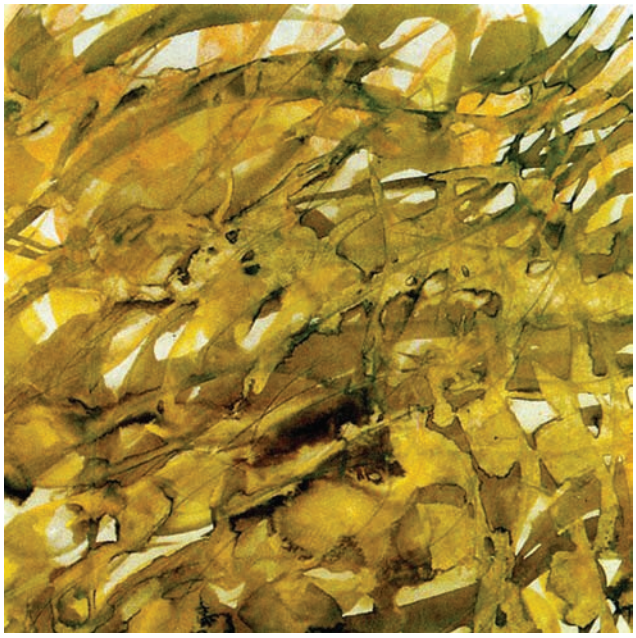

Figure 3: Mohammad Reza Moghaddam, *Autumn,* 1993, acrylic on cardboard, 40 × 40 cm.

The formulated interest of officials within the country clearly promoted particular values as resistance against the cultural aggression (and norms) of cultural globalisation or so-called Westernism. This general cultural attitude explains why in official cultural and artistic events it was perfectly clear that encouragement had been given to taking refuge in the cultural authenticity, historical specificities and artistic identity and traditional values, as integral parts of that authentic culture. Under the direction of the post-revolutionary official policy it has been justified that it is essential to find a place in the global culture and also an answer to confront western aggression.[18]

Much of what was, for example, considered local—with reference to

Figure 4: Simin Keramati, *Dust*, 2006-2007, still from video.

tradition or as having the nature of a localised culture—was proposed against cultural aggression as being worthy of preservation and said (by officials) to be based on cultural essentialism.[19] However, it is argued by Jahanbegloo in the introduction to his book *Iran: between Tradition and Modernity*, 'Iran has never been more a country of paradoxes and contradictions than it is today.'[20] It may then explain why the implications for the maintenance of the idea of those cultural ideals, presented in the ideology and works of those previous generations, have now become problematic. It was perhaps because these cultural ideals and their presentation carry little weight with those who do not identify with those ideals.

The third phase, one can argue, began in 1997 with the so-called reformism when the new movements paved the way

for developing new discourses in Iranian art. One of the direct outcomes caused by the opening of cultural boundaries was the development of artistic and cultural dialogue with the outside world.[21] A keen desire to establish a relationship with the international art scene was also a response to the need of many young artists who were eager to have transnational cultural and social links. One of the outcomes of the presence of Iranian artists in these events during the past recent decade has been that Iranian artists are now determinedly trying as fast as possible to go along with current artistic approaches and with what is dominant in contemporary art among their counterparts all around the world. Through these events and also electronic media, books and journals, the post-revolutionary generation of artists are continually being introduced to other cultural values. They may become stimulated by the great variety of other cultural artefacts and documents now made available to them. For them it was a success to have a chance to experiment combining new expressions with innovative languages, which were coincidentally backed by the official art establishments of that period. The third phase also saw the introduction of new means of visual expression like videos, installations, performances and the emergence of a new generation whose concern is less with the affirmation of communitarian identity than with their own biography within a society undergoing fast and radical changes. Now the main obsession for the new generations predominantly explained as participating in the contemporary international art scene. This was also justified as the cross-cultural nature of contemporary art partly pertinent in the context of a globalising era.

The so-called Third Generation[22] after the Revolution has more or less just begun the second decade of its artistic activity. This generation has come of age in the Islamic Republic and is already a majority in Iranian society and indeed one might say that it is concerned with a need for self-presentation. Here, the importance of questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'How can my identity be defined?' and of cultural intellectual self-criticism is revitalised (**Figure 4**). However, this new generation is not concerned with the task of re-experiencing what had already been experienced by the previous generations in the course of development of Iranian art, but instead felt an urgent need for individualism and self-expression in various possible ways. Also to them, there is a frequent obsession with the sense of being up to date, 'of today'; meaning living in, and with, perpetual flux. Whatever we see, from two-dimensional works to installations, from personal individual experimentations to conceptual works, are all signs in the new generation of freedom and liberation from rules and obligations.

The change in cultural and artistic ideas was not only a product of an influence from the outside, but had its roots in Iranian reality itself for various reasons: One is certainly intellectual. The post-revolutionary intellectual discourse which was inclined to conform to the West was also a phenomenon of the 1990s.[23] Unlike their intellectual predecessors and their contemporaries in many parts of the world, thinkers in the 1990s generally tended not to have similar simplifications, i.e. ideological views that emphasised one factor as central to solving Iran's problems.[24] With the end of the 1990s, the search for identity through art and the need to produce 'authentic' works have been predominantly expelled from the art scene.

The second factor was that domestic interest in the visual arts grew mainly from the reform period (1997-2005) and by the effective activities of official cultural and artistic institutions, in particular the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (*Muzeh-i hunar-hay-i mu'asir-i Tihran*) (TMoCA)[25]during this period with organisation of both domestic and foreign exhibitions, but more recently by non-official sectors such as commercial galleries, private institutions, and societies of artists. The results have thus been the creation of two distinct levels of production and market in the visual arts.

The fourth phase began with the end of the reform period and the beginning of the new radicalism in official politics and cultural enterprises in 2005. Since then, although the level of support and artistic choice of the official body has shifted onto a quite different path, individual artists and institutions have been able to continue and even empower the path that they had already started in the previous phase. Private sectors such as galleries, too, gained more influence from their

Figure 5: Seyyed Hamid Sharifi, *Life*, 2003, mixed media installation.

Figure 6: Barbad Golshiri, Cura, *The Rise and Fall of Aplasticism*, 2011, performance, The 4th Moscow Biennial.

international connections, sharing their artists with international art scene.

This period also witnessed the development in the market of all sorts of non-Euro-American art, including contemporary Iranian art, with more exhibitions of this art in western and non-western cultural venues. The wealthy Persian Gulf states started to play an increasing role as a market for artists from other regional countries, including Iranian art; their museum infrastructure has been developed and international events created—like the Sharjah Biennial,[26]Art Dubai, Abu Dhabi Art and Christie's auctions.[27] It is perhaps difficult to say if it is by choice or coincidence; however, it seems that the majority of the artists are involved in producing their art for the so-called global market or to international criteria. Although what used to be called a

Figure 7: Hamed Rashtian, from the *Lion and Sun* series, 2011, bronze, steel, fiberglass, 90 × 70 × 45 cm.

'local taste' in accordance to its established 'international standard' is now changing to the idea of pluralism, nevertheless, the emergence of a global art scene and its pronounced difference is in its new negotiations of the politics of identity between local and global. In increasingly wide market-oriented production there has, however, been a constant concern which, unless understood, will yield the artists to a compulsive production of art for international art festivals and exhibitions. It would also lead this art to a global audience with no significance in the art itself. So the issue of 'expectation' here is the main question for criticism.

At the same time, the critical base

Figure 8: Nazgol Ansarinia, *Rhyme and Reason*, 2009, (detail) handwoven carpet, wool, silk and cotton.

of a part of the new generation is that a work of art should be used, effective and meaningful in the first place at this particular time in their context or based on the artist's lived experience. It could eventually be meaningful elsewhere, although that would not be a priority.[28] The demonstration of aesthetically identified works—being the aesthetic potentials of formal traditions or social implications, cultural codes, political or social particularities (see **Figure 5**)—and the strong sense of exoticism[29] has been what these artists and critics strongly oppose. Instead, identity in the new generation is mostly transferred to various forms of self-expression or self-representation. This art could perhaps enable these artists to forefront alternative visions of Iranian identity in an increasingly globalised world.

Some artworks are particularly criticised when the artists are not expressing their own concerns, but rather creating to meet market demand. This concerns a part of these generations, practising in different media including painting, photography, sculpture and other media who believe that artistic specificity means just being different and unique. So they aim at being both contemporary and different from other contemporaries. These particularly attract curators and audiences in the exhibitions outside Iran. The reason is that these works are better matched with the image that others have of Iran and therefore this approach is an answer to their expectation. Exoticism is criticised from the point of view that such works may not originate in cultural and artistic real need; but the themes and forms are, rather, seemingly injected into the artist's works. Even in the recent works of Iranian artists created in various media and presented in the dramatically more numerous auctions or overseas exhibitions, cultural confrontations and contemporary social issues could be based on formulae and even coded into typical indigenous elements. These issues and objects have been based on a subjective exotic view of what is expected to be shown as 'Iranian' and as 'contemporary'. They may, however, be based on a part of the realities that can be found in contemporary Iran such as themes of gender relations and the situation of women, Third World and feminist elements, but they have become stereotypes.

The criticisms partly coincide with the belief that, as Stuart Hall writes, '[e]very identity is placed, positioned, in a culture, a language, a history … But it is not tied to fixed, permanent, unalterable conditions. It is not wholly defined by exclusions.'[30] Hall writes that 'identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.'[31] In other words, the critics reject a fixed, unified identity and instead propose a hybrid, unfixed and negotiable identity. They are against the idea of particularism in the sense of imposing a fixed mode of identity or 'monolithic' or 'one-view' formula, either imposed by officials or by 'others' and presented both domestically or internationally. These artists variously demonstrate these criticisms mainly in their works. Addressing critically the actual problems and issues in culture and society, for instance, is the only commitment for an artist, and not the depiction of local characteristics which they rather avoid (**Figure 6**).[32] They respond to the changing cultural climate of their country by creating works that incorporate, yet depart from, a personal or collective past. Now the works of artists share a critical interest in the social and political realities and aesthetic history of Iran (**Figure 7**). In this way, their reference to traditions and cultural values are formed in different types of parody or critical, satirical and ironic language such as the demonstration of a fashionable way of life, especially youth culture, from the wider sphere of popular culture to critical confrontations. This ironic, sometimes humorous, language has also become a common method to criticise exoticism and a metaphorical reaction against united values (**Figure 8**).

In conclusion, for the majority of the talented young artists the concept of contemporaneity is not just restricted to the time. It is rather an ontological question allowing artists not to limit themselves in choosing the technique or theme through the diversity of their experience. They commit themselves to talk critically about the actual issues in their society by representing their own world—even if these issues have already been discussed and resolved elsewhere, they feel they still need to adapt them. They have created negotiable identities and ideologies which rise into the foreground while hegemonic standards, forced by globalisation, and identities of resistance recede into the background. In particular, through their artistic discourses, many young artists seek to disengage themselves from the nationalist agenda which has long dominated aesthetic discussions of Iranian art, instead invoking universalising and cosmopolitan discourses in order to position their art firmly within a global art scene; something which is often justified in terms of 'becoming international or

global'. These are the formations which actively shape and locate the work in the present and the conditions within which, through which, and against which, artists negotiate and re-create or re-vision themselves. For many artists of the new generation, the 1960s and 1990s debates about authentic unified identity are not an interesting subject any more. However, it is worth noting that the issue of cultural historical identity and art that is informed by national or collective identity is still an underlying principle among a group of artists mainly from the previous generations. All these processes, however, have posed options and challenges for Iranian society and will continue to affect art and artistic activities.

Endnotes

1. For further elaboration of the subject, see Ali Mirsepassi, Introduction: modernity and "culture", in *Intellectual Discourse and the Politics of Modernization* (Cambridge, 2000): 4.

2. Ibid.

3. Anthony Giddens, *The Consequence of Modernity* (Stanford, 1990): 174, 175.

4. John Clark, *Modern Asian Art* (North Ryde, 1989): 18.

5. Robert S. Nelson, "Appropriation", in *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago and London, 2003): 172.

6. Hichem Djaït, *Europe and Islam*, trans. Peter Heinegg (Berkeley, 1985): 1.

7. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonialism*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Cambridge, 1993): 393.

8. See Ian Clark, *Globalisation and Fragmentation* (Oxford, 1997).

9. Cesare Poppi, "Wider Horizons with Larger Details: Subjectivity, Ethnicity and Globalization", in Alan Scott (ed.), *The Limits of Globalization: Cases and Arguments* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 285.

10. See Oliver Ressler (ed.), *The global 500* (Vienna, Edition Selene, 1999).

11. Anthony McGrew's elaboration of this concept illustrates this point: 'globalization [is] a process which generates flows and connections, not simply across nation-states and national territorial boundaries, but between global regions, continents and civilizations. This invites a definition of globalization as: 'an historical process which engenders a significant shift in the spatial reach of networks and systems of social relations to transcontinental or interregional patterns of human organization, activity and the exercise of power.'" Anthony G. McGrew, "Global Legal Interaction and Present-Day Patterns of Globalization", in V. Gessner and A. C. Budak (eds.), *Emerging Legal Certainty: Empirical Studies on the Globalization of Law* (Ashgate: Dartmouth Publishing Company, 1998): 327.See also David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

12. John Clark, *Modern Asian art*: 219.

13. Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Introduction",

Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity, ed. Ramin Jahanbegloo (Lanham, Md., 2004): xii.

14. According to Mehrzad Borujerdi, 'This period also represented the heyday of nativism and anti-orientalism in Iran. During this time, the question of self and other came to the forefront of intellectual deliberations and stayed there for good.' (see Mehrzad Boroujerdi, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West, the Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, New York, 1996): 132) Also for further details on the situation of artistic trends and parallels in the socio-cultural arenas in Iran in the 1960s, see the author's article, "Neo-traditionalism and Modern Iranian Painting: The Saqqa-khaneh School in the 1960s", *Iranian Studies*, vol. 38, no. IV (December 2005): 607–630; or the "Saqqa-khana School of Art" in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, London & New York, Routledge & Kegan Paul, http://www.iranica.com/articles/saqqa-kana-ii-school-of-art

15. For further study about this term and the 1990s post-revolutionary Iranian art see the author's article, "Discourses on Postrevolutionary Iranian Art: Neotraditionalism during the 1990s", *Muqarnas*, vol. 23, 2006:131-157.

16. Ibid.

17. See Mehrzad Boroujerdi, "Other-ness, Orientalism, Orientalism in Reverse and Nationalism", in *Iranian Intellectuals and the West, the Tormented Triumph of Nativism* (Syracuse, New York, 1996): 11-12.

18. See "Discourses on Post-revolutionary Iranian Art", *Muqarnas*, vol. 23, 2006: 131-157.

19. Explanation in terms of cultural specificities, sliding into cultural essentialism, are well illustrated in the work of Bertrand Badie, *Les deux états: pouvoir et société en Occident et en terre d' Islam*, (Paris, 1987; reprinted 1997) which presents a detailed argument for the historical and ideational distinction and contrast between the 'two states', the Western and the Islamic.

20. Ramin Jahanbegloo, "Introduction", Op. cit. xvii.

21. In my interview with the former director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Alireza Sami Azar, in 2006, he told me that 'this need really existed and the Museum provided the opportunity for it to happen and for this generation of artists to be seen!'

22. Here the use of this term is mainly to refer to the youth who were born in the period after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This term was also used in the press and political debate during the 1997 general election and as a reformist motto to emphasise the importance of this generation who came to be the main supporters of the reform movement during the late 1990s and early 2000s.

23. See Afshin Matin-Asgari, "The Intellectual Bestsellers of Post-Revolutionary Iran: On Backwardness, Elite-killing, and Western Rationality", *Iranian Studies*, vol. 37, no. 1 (March 2004): 87.

24. See Nikki R. Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Heaven & London, 2003): 304.

25. Established in 1977, TMoCA has

played a distinctive role as the main centre for the exposure of contemporary Iranian art. The Museum has also been at the heart of the promotion of contemporary Iranian art since 1991. Highly effective, the Museum, as the Centre of Plastic Arts (Markaz-i hunar-hay-i tajassumi-i kishvar) of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, played a pivotal role in promoting various forms of contemporary Iranian art, in particular during the reform period.

26. The Sharjah Biennial is one of the most celebrated cultural events in the Arab world. Since its inception in 1993, it has formed a cultural bridge between artists, art institutions and organizations locally, regionally and internationally. Produced by the Department of Culture and Information in the Emirate of Sharjah, the Biennial now occupies a key regional position in the production and presentation of art and in fostering experimentation.

27. In May 2006, Christie's held its first auction of International Modern and Contemporary Art in the Middle East. Since then, Christie's has gone on to sell over $200 million worth of art in Dubai and firmly established itself as the leading auction house in the region. Christie's currently hold sales in International Modern and Contemporary Art, and jewelry and watches. Christie's sales in Dubai typically take place in April and October.

28. This statement is based on my interview with artist and writer Farshid Azarang in 2006.

29. Exoticism in a strong or radical sense could direct works of art towards an unrealistic and non-creative product which has been shaped purely for the interests of the 'others'. These artworks are particularly criticised when the artists are not expressing their own concerns, but rather creating to meet foreign demand.

30. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonialism,* eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Cambridge, 1993): 393.

31. Ibid: 394.

32. Barbad Golshiri, Interview with the author, 2006.