

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Highlights the Mohammed Afkhami Collection of Contemporary Iranian Art in July

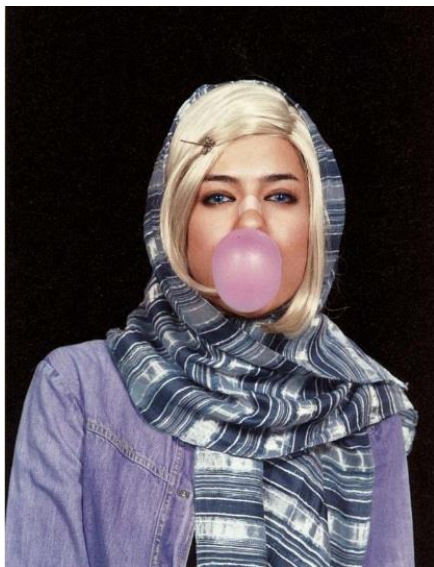
Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians—The Mohammed Afkhami Collection illuminates the multifaceted histories of Iranians today

U.S. premiere of acclaimed collection, following its debut at Toronto's Aga Khan Museum

HOUSTON—June 5, 2017—In July, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, presents *Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians—The Mohammed Afkhami Collection*, profiling the distinguished collection of financier and philanthropist Mohammed Afkhami. Featuring 23 Iranian-born artists across three generations, the exhibition reveals the complex histories and identities of Iranians today. These works range across a variety of media, including painting, sculpture, photography, and video. Curated by Fereshteh Daftari for the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, with the partnership of Mohammed Afkhami and the Afkhami Foundation, the exhibition is on view in Houston from **July 1 to September 24, 2017**.



Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet highlights the unique evolution of contemporary art both in Iran and by Iranian artists who have left their native country. Independent curator and scholar Fereshteh Daftari selected 27 signature works to express four interwoven themes, charting a nuanced and complex overview that transcends standard chronologies.



The mystic current, which is perhaps the most familiar aspect of contemporary Iranian art, is introduced by two calligraphic works: Parviz Tanavoli's sculpture *Blue Heech (Blue Nothingness)* (2005) and Mohammad Ehsai's painting *Mohabbat (Kindness)* (2006), the title of which can be also translated as an expression of love and generosity. Opposing currents of satire and rebellion are encapsulated by Shirin Aliabadi's *Miss Hybrid 3* (2008), a staged photograph that explores the global self-consciousness which characterizes the generation of Iranians who came of age in the Internet era and the relative liberalism of the Khatami presidency (1997–2005). Ali Banisadr's epic *We Haven't Landed on Earth Yet* (2012) expresses the terror and chaos of war through painterly abstraction, while Farhad Moshiri's *Flying Carpet* (2007) displays silhouettes of fighter planes cut into traditional carpets, reflecting on the ever-more-

urgent threat of global conflict. Ultimately, an elegiac mood is established through the poetic vistas photographed by Shirin Neshat and Abbas Kiarostami. Additional featured artists include such established figures as Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian and Shirazeh Houshiary, as well as more emerging talents, including Morteza Ahmadvand, Nazgol Ansarinia, and Alireza Dayani, among others.



“We are delighted by this collaboration with the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, and the Afkhami Foundation, two outstanding resources committed to promoting a more profound understanding of the art of our times,” stated MFAH director Gary Tinterow. “We are deeply grateful to Mohammed Afkhami for his generous loans, making it possible to shed light on the rich heritage, as well as the trials and triumphs, of the Iranian people during a period of social and political unrest.”

“Both the city of Houston and the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, are exceptional in their global outlook,” commented Mohammed Afkhami. “It is a great honor to bring *Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet* to this truly multicultural institution for the inaugural U.S. presentation. I am proud to introduce the work of contemporary artists from Iran into fresh dialogues with new audiences and the Museum’s wide-ranging collections.”

“Mohammed Afkhami’s collection offers an entry point into the contemporary art of a nation known to foreigners, since the ancient Greeks, as Persia, but whose indigenous name has always been Iran,” added Fereshteh Daftari, exhibition curator. “Out of the more than 300 works held by the Afkhami Foundation, *Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet* focuses on works which exemplify the main discursive ingredients of Iranian contemporary art—gender, politics, religion, and spirituality—and the dialogue they can stimulate across pluralist positions, diverse aesthetics, and a multiplicity of mediums.”

The Houston presentation of this exhibition has been coordinated by Alison de Lima Greene, the MFAH Isabel Brown Wilson Curator of Modern & Contemporary Art.

About the Collector

Iranian-born collector and financier Mohammed Afkhami is internationally celebrated for his contributions to the preservation and promotion of modern art from the Middle East. His distinguished collection of more than 300 objects focuses primarily on Iranian-born artists, featuring works created from 1961 to the present day. In addition, Afkhami is a founding member of the British Museum’s Middle East and North Africa Art Acquisition Committee, a member of the Guggenheim Museum’s Middle East and North Africa Art Acquisition Committee, and serves on the advisory board of Art Dubai.

Publication

Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians—The Mohammed Afkhami Collection is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue with essays by Fereshteh Daftari and Ahmad

Karimi-Hakkak, and with a preface by Mohammed Afkhami. The catalogue was published by the Aga Khan Museum, Toronto, and by Black Dog Publishing, London.

Honar: The Afkhami Collection of Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art was published in May 2017 by Phaidon Press Limited, London and New York.

Organization and Funding

Rebel, Jester, Mystic, Poet: Contemporary Persians—The Mohammed Afkhami Collection has been organized by The Aga Khan Museum, Toronto.

About the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

Established in 1900, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is among the 10 largest art museums in the United States, with an encyclopedic collection of more than 65,000 works dating from antiquity to the present. The main campus comprises the Audrey Jones Beck Building, designed by Rafael Moneo and opened in 2000; the Caroline Wiess Law Building, originally designed by William Ward Watkin, with extensions by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe completed in 1958 and 1974; and the Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, designed by Isamu Noguchi and opened in 1986. Additional spaces include a repertory cinema, two libraries, public archives, and facilities for conservation and storage. Nearby, two house museums—Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens, and Rienzi—present American and European decorative arts. The MFAH is also home to the Glassell School of Art and its acclaimed Core Residency Program and Junior and Studio Schools; and the International Center for the Arts of the Americas (ICAA), a leading research institute for 20th-century Latin American and Latino art.

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Illustrations

1. Mohammad Ehsai, *Mohabbat (Kindness)*, 2006, oil and silver leaf on canvas. © Mohammad Ehsai. Courtesy: Mohammed Afkhami Foundation.
2. Shirin Aliabadi, *Miss Hybrid 3*, 2008, chromogenic print. © Shirin Aliabadi. Courtesy: Mohammed Afkhami Foundation.
3. Ali Banisadr, *We Haven't Landed on Earth Yet*, 2012, oil on linen. © Ali Banisadr. Photo: Jeffrey Sturges. Courtesy: Mohammed Afkhami Foundation.