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Eye-catching show from a group of emerging artists Discuss

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Dubai has become a hotspot for viewing Iranian art, not in the least because travel to the country is tricky for some, but also because our city [offers](#) Iranian artists a platform to embrace their creative freedom. Through this channel, many of the artists are quick to demonstrate that behind Iran's often intimidating façade lies a thriving contemporary art scene that is surprisingly edgy and unique. 'Mise-en-scene', currently on show at Gallery Etemad until Saturday July 28, brings these artworks to our doorstep with a captivating exhibition featuring a number of Iran's emerging artists who are showing across the pond for the first time.

Themes [offer](#) a revealing insight into the struggle for cultural identity and the effect of Western society on tradition. Here, we chat to some of the artists and find out more about the standout pieces.

Elnaz Farajollahi, 28, based in Tehran

Title: Untitled

What does this piece represent?

It represents my views on contemporary Iranian women.

Explain the symbolism.

It's inspired by a traditional society on the brink of [physical] outburst. Symbolism is evident in the animal-like qualities that represent my thoughts on the similarities between humans and animals, hence the rabbit ears which represent primitive relations.

What does this piece say about modern culture in Iran?

Modern culture is clearly inspired by the media and TV. Yet people only seem to succeed by adopting superficial trends rather than the concepts behind them.

What are the challenges you face as an emerging Iranian artist?

The biggest challenge for me working as an emerging artist in Tehran is expressing myself in a way that won't be depicted strictly as plain expression of circumstances and that allows me the flexibility to be judged on an international scale.

Name your three biggest influences?

Salvador Dali, Andy Warhol and Lucian Freud.

Ghazaleh Avarzamani, 32, based in London

Title: Flirtation

What does this piece represent?

This is a piece from a series called 'Utopia', a body of work based on a collection of images that depict contemporary Iranian women in a European Rococo context. I want to challenge the viewer by suggesting that picking Western culture as a role model doesn't fit us.

What materials did you use?

This is an actual embroidery piece, stitched with colour wool threads. Needle-point seemed to be the perfect media to contextualise the concept because it used to be popular in Iran.

Explain the symbolism evident in this piece?

About two decades ago, needle-points were hung on the most apparent walls of Iranian houses. Women spontaneously chose to do handicraft as a natural way to picture their fascination of modernism. Today, there are no more needle-points on the walls and the young generation is totally different from the previous one. At least that is what appears on the surface, but if you go deep within the new society, you will be surprised by the fact that ironically, everything is the same.

What does this piece say about modern culture in Iran?

Western culture can't be superimposed upon a place in such a short period of time. Western influence is surface only, it's not a reality, and why should our culture reach for it anyway?

Name your three biggest influences.

Yinka Shonibare, Jeff Koons, Ghada Amer and Grayson Perry – it's hard to only choose three.

Farniyaz Zaker, 29, based in Tehran

Title: Puppet Behind the Curtain, Puppet Behind the window**What does this video represent?**

The video is a new reading of Sadegh Hedayat's short story: 'Puppet behind the curtain'. In the story, a young student in France falls in love with a mannequin in a shop window. He takes her home to Iran where his fiancée finds out.

Why did this story speak to you?

I read this story during my time as a student in Iran. A couple of years later when I was in England I came across the story again and decided to make a piece on it. At the time I had just seen Nostalgia by Hollis Frampton, to whose video I am highly indebted.

Explain the symbolism evident in this piece?

The women in Hedayat's story and those in my video represent a form of female perfection. The mannequin is perfect and not tangible, like an object of desire remote from real life. The fiancée, on the other hand, is ideal in the sense of being pure, innocent and faithful. None of them is real.

What does this piece say about modern culture in Iran?

Representations of perfection impose themselves upon women, and, eventually, consume them like cancer. Women encounter such ideals in various societies, whether they be in the East or the West.

The Lowdown

Exhibition: 'Mise-en-scene' until July 28 at Gallery Etemad, Alserkal Avenue, Al Quoz (04 346 8649).

Artists include: Elnaz Farajollahi, Ghazaleh Avarzamani, Farniyaz Zaker.

Price range of works: Dhs8,000 to Dhs15,000.

By Jenny Hewett

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