

Atmospher of War in Paintings: Iraj Eskandari's Report on his Experiences

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Revolution related art, the holy defense and related concepts have dedicated an important part of the Iranian contemporary art to themselves during the past three decades. Iraj Eskandari, painter and academic member of The Tehran university of Arts, is one of the prolific contemporary artists in Iran; his works are blended with the experience of life during wartime and reflects a set of realistic, semiotic and semantic approaches.

Iraj Eskandari reviewed his works and achievements of 3 decades in the art of revolution and the holy defense in a one-day conference of war and landscape on the 16th of May 2016.

The following is a brief part of his speech and in fact is a monograph of this artistic life and his 30 year activities.



Revolution and the Start of the Movement

With the start of the revolution and its victory Iraj Eskandari left his studies in Beaux-Arts faculty in Paris and came back to Iran. At that time like other artists of his time under the influence of the classic artwork of French, Spanish, Mexican revolutions he created classic artwork by copying from western artists with the Islamic revolution of Iran theme (Pics 1 & 2).

War and the Creation of Conceptual Works

During years 1983-85 at the time of Iran and Iraq war, Eskandari created artworks in the field of the revolution and war which was his first independent and empiricist efforts in this area. Most of the works in this collection are painted using charcoal and niello technique. Set of works on display in this section is part of the painter's personal collection which has never been displayed until now. In this collection, symbols related to the location of the war such as the great



Pic 1: A painting titled "Karughloo", a symbol of people's movement leading into the revolution.

Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.



Pic 2: A painting titled "Hefdahe Shahrivar".

Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.

sun and the set of palms, play an important role; and also the soldiers appear ghostly (silhouette) and without details. Iraj Eskandari defines the powerful presence of the sun in this collection as a symbol and sign of a bright future in the mind and thought of people which somehow indicates their hope (Pic. 3).

In this collection in some parts the artworks have moved towards a conceptual and metaphorical expression of the events. In this group of drawings meanings and symbols are presented which either originate from the painter's artistic mind or existed in the minds and sights of that era that have been transformed into symbols; for example the picture of two militants that carry the body of a martyr who move towards a specific direction. As seen in the picture, the background is a circle. This symbolic form of the full sun is repeatedly found in all works of this collection (Pic. 4).

Looking for Particular Compositions

In the following years, in a series of artwork with the subject of war and its surrounding events in 1989 the artist tries to compound the works and to use broken lines in completing the classic compositions.

In this collection which is partly accompanied by symbols and signs, the artist has used composition and the background of the artwork in expressing the concepts of war. In this collection narrations of destruction, homelessness and the loss of loved ones is illustrated such as picture No.5 that shows the migration of people from war zones. In this painting the artist tries to use his personal language in transferring the concepts of war to the audience by using pen movements, composition and background. For example, in this painting the composition and movements reflect the happenings of the war. Two explosions are displayed in the background and



Pic 3: A constructivist design, two militants talking together.
Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.



Pic 4: A symbolic and semantic design; showing two militants carrying a martyr's body.
Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.

the movements and figures are emphasized (Pic. 5).

In the following the painter shows the importance of "composition" in the paintings of this period of his work; including paintings with the subject of "resistance" and scenes from war in a work titled "Resistance" which its sturdy structure represents the war atmosphere. In the background the attacking missiles, displayed as arrows, show the war emotions. In addition, in the background a woman is embracing a bird that has given a symbolic status to the painting (Pic. 6).

In this era, by utilizing classic compositions, the artist has created semi-realistic artworks of war scenes with an emphasis on opinionative aspects. Iraj Eskandari showcased two of his works in this collection including the artwork that shows two militants praying. Praying refers to militants thoughts. The weapon which can be seen behind them

represents a war that is underway and eventually in the background, the landscape of the war and the type of the trees defines the region (Pic. 7).

Paying Attention to Concepts and Symbolism

In the following, the artist displayed a set of his works which mostly contained expressing his feelings of the war and all its related concepts using a symbolic and metaphorical expression; events that have influenced the artist in various timeframes and Iraj Eskandari states his feelings about that special event by using diverse tools. For example an artwork related to chemical bombings; in this painting two masked men are drinking wine which refers to the chemical attack of Iraq against Iran. Also the picture of a dead child on the top of their heads which is illustrated in the center of the child's pacifier specifically points to the chemical attack on Halabche



Pic 5: Usage of lines and composition to introduce the war and its related concepts. A symbolic painting showing migration and displacement. Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.



Pic 6: An art work named "Resistance"; usage of composition to introduce the concept of war's cruelty and the presence of hope for peace. Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.

(Pic. 8). In another painting, professor Eskandari created a picture affected by the destructions of Khoramshahr by the title of »Khoramshahr« which indicates the tragic feeling of war. In this painting, the artist looks at a sad city from beyond a half-broken window; in the background the picture of the broken bridge of Khoramshahr and the demolished buildings is glaring (Pic. 9). In some of the works from this collection Iraj Eskandari has also addressed Palestine and

Qods events (Pic. 10).

In another set of artworks, the role of symbols and signs is strong. Symbols such as white bird, red fish, Damavand Mountain are seen in this collection. For example a painting that illustrates a militant wearing a green snood in the foreground that is staring at the Damavand's mountaintop, a mosque and a village on the hillside in the background. In another painting, by copying from Picasso's artworks the



Pic 7: A scene of two militants showing their environment and beliefs. Source : Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.



Pic 9: An artwork with the subject of Khoramshahr's war ruins. Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.



Pic 8: An art work with the subject of "Halabcheh chemical attack". Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.

painter illustrates two birds in the form of the good and evil forces and thus expresses war and victory of the oppressed over the oppressor (Pic. 11).

Revolution, War and Murals

In the second section Iraj Eskandari specially explained about his work in the area of urban and mural art with revolution and holy defense contents.

Among the artworks displayed in the wall-painting field that has started in the early years of the revolution, the artist created paintings in the area of diverse compositions according to the war and revolution atmosphere by utilizing his experiences. Among others is a work that was painted in 1982 that consists of 12 pieces with the dimensions of 3 in 12 meters. In this painting which was actually retrieved from pictures of a war related book, a narrative of the formation



Pic 11: Two Symbolic birds express the confrontation of the evil and the good.

Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.



Pic 10: An artwork with the subject of "Palestine".

Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.

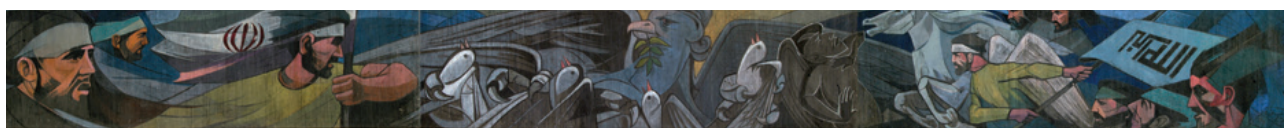
and victory of the revolution and also the happenings of its early years was illustrated (people's movement, the return of Imam Khomeini, people's vote, the capture of American embassy, Tabas, American hostages, the flag of America, Friday prayers, Revolutionary Guards, Jihad, the 7th of Tir events, Rajai martyrdom). Thereafter, an artwork retrieved from this picture got ready for implementing on a wall which later on was executed as a cameo in the center of Enghelab (revolution) square (Pic. 12). Another work of this period

was a mural in Enghelab Street on the beginning of Saba Street. In this work militants raid towards the center of the picture with the slogan "the god is great". In the center, a few birds are placed in the shadow of an eagle which is an example of the Islamic militants endeavor in freeing the oppressed from the oppressor (Pic. 13). Amongst other artwork which has been executed in other parts of the city we can mention the one in the Palestine square which uses religious and opinionative Symbols such as the image



Pic 12: An artwork painted as a mural is implemented in Enghelab square as a model.

Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.



Pic 13: A wall painting in Enghelab Street: A symbolic contradiction between oppressor and the oppressed.

Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.

of the Quran or the Kaaba in the eagle's claws to state the opinionative roots of the Islamic fighters.

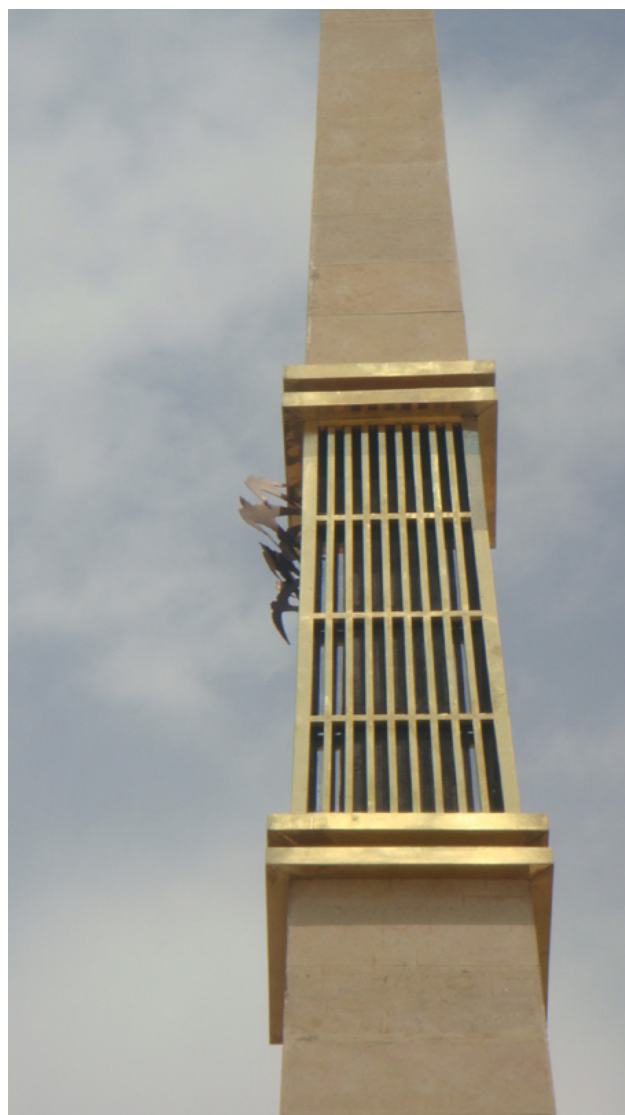
Experiences in volumetric artworks

By displaying a collection of his artwork with the subject of war and the holy defense Eskandari ended his speech including the works which were executed in the Ostandari square In Sanandaj during the early years of the revolution. By using concrete with the dimensions of 6 in 7 meters, symbolically a figure of a man is shown which is pointing upwards and on the other side is the face of a woman (Pic. 14).



Pic 14: Statue of a man and a woman battling against the enemy; Ostandari square in Sanandaj.
Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.

Of the latest works of professor Eskandari in this area is a symbolic artwork created for the martyrs of the oil industry which was implemented in an altitude of 21 meters. For this work that was added to an existing artwork, Eskandari polished a part of the work with bronze coating and executed a bronze cage with eight birds coming out of it. On this concrete work with bronze decorations versus from the Quran, Gol-o-Morgh (flower and bird) and Mawlana's poetry is molded (Pic. 15).



Pic 15: Adding artistic and conceptual elements to the memorial symbol of the petroleum martyrs.
Source: Iraj Eskandari's personal archive.