

Daryoush Gharahzad's 'Stop' (2008)



Farideh Lashai's 'Mossadegh' (2009)

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**T**wenty-nine Iranian artists come together in an exhibition, *Iran Inside Out*, and showcase paintings, sculptures, photography and works in mixed media to express their feelings about their homeland and experiences of the diaspora. There are 40 artworks on display, all inspired by Iran. These artists also attempt to challenge the conventional perception about Iranian art.

While some of the artists, such as Farhad Moshiri, Khosrow Hassanzadeh, Farideh Lashai and Vahid Sharifian, reside in Iran, there are others who have lived outside the country, such as Shiva Ahmadi, Sara Rahbar, Rokni and Ramin Haerizadeh.

The exhibition poses many questions but does not offer answers. For instance, there is an artwork called *Why Do I Paint?* which depicts the tireless search for an answer by Iman Maleki, who says this question remains always with her. "Well, even after years of being a professional artist, I still feel I never had a choice."

#### Creating connections

"I feel that art is a means to communicate but without the constraints of time and geography," Maleki says. "My work can be classified as a juxtaposition of reality that creates a distinct 'new reality' — a world that is emotive, thought-provoking and most importantly, creating a connection between the artist and viewer."

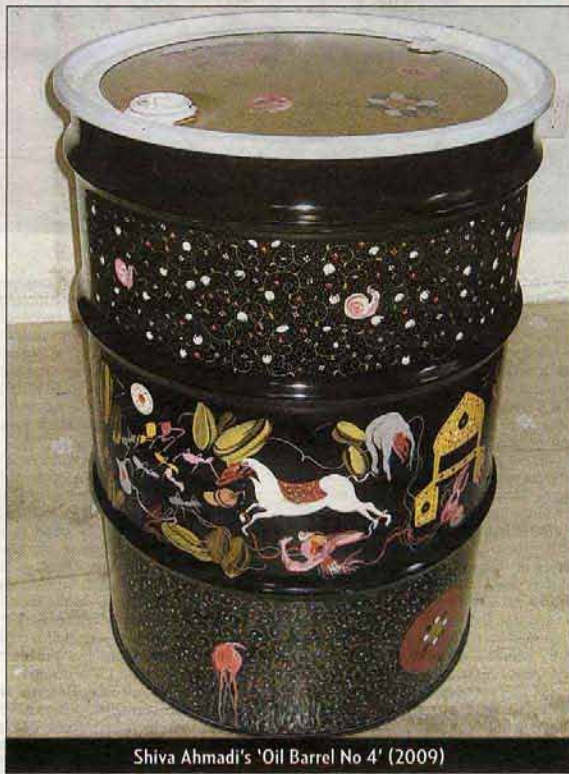
She is showcasing four oil-on-canvas paintings — *Dizziness*, *Composing Music Secretly*, *Today 2009* and *Children in the Streets*.

If this quest for answers is a theme also found in the work of Afshin Pirhanshemi (in paintings such as *Woman*), a reflection of time, society and culture are elements seen in the works of Arash Sedaghatkish. "I choose to paint Iranian students in their everyday life to show how they express themselves by dressing like young adults anywhere else in the world and how in the case of Iran the fashion is almost on the verge of opposing the legal dress codes," Sedaghatkish says.

The same perspective is also adopted by Daryoush Gharahzad, who captures the youth street culture of his hometown, Tehran. His work is inspired by graffiti on the walls all over the city. He also concentrates

## Collage of Iran

One show captures the country's many facets



Shiva Ahmadi's 'Oil Barrel No 4' (2009)

on women and the contrast between the headscarves they wear and their exaggerated make-up.

"There is a younger generation that is searching for something more interesting than whatever is within the parameters of their traditional culture," Gharahzad says. "If you only have your face to reveal, then what do you do? You make yourself up."

Photography is also the medium through which Newsha Tavakolian expresses herself. She is exhibiting six black-and-white photographs, five of them of herself. "Photography has opened so many doors for me and my lens has ... enabled me to touch other people's lives and to document their stories, which otherwise would have gone unnoticed," she says.

#### Focus on culture

Sadeqh Tirafkhan is showing three coloured photographs from the *Temptation* series. He uses photography, video and installation for his artworks and mainly focuses on his culture. "Since I am Iranian, my projects reflect my identity, heritage and the town I've lived in," Tirafkhan says.

*Operation Supermarket*, a joint artistic effort between Shirin Aliabadi and Farhad Moshiri, revolves around the media traits of the Middle East and is also a wry parody of the hopes pinned on commodity as a capitalist agent for change. With titles such as *Shoot First Make Friends Later* and *We Are All American*, the artists create double entendres of trite phrases from popular culture to take jabs at nationalism and contemporary politics.

The philosophy of life is seen upside down in the art of Jinoos Taghizadeh. She says: "When we were children, geography lesson was not emphasised as much as mathematics, for example. However, when we grew up it turned out to be that geography is the topic of the hour. All of a sudden it became important and defined everything else, including identity, emotions and our share of the world. Not only that but we also had to learn another language to approach the rest of the world." Jinoos is showcasing *Rock Scissors Paper* series.

The artists hope to receive a persuasive reply on what is going on in their country of origin and their imaginations still envision and produce more artistic dialogues that also seek answers.

*Iran Inside Out* will be on at The Farjam Collection at the Dubai International Financial Centre until June 15.