

Paths of the Glory

An article based on an interview with Shahpour Pouyan

Violence was only curbed by

Belief in a rumor that the tribes to the east had joined forces and forged weapons deadlier than the world has seen and that even then the hooves of their scouts had been heard in the southern hills. The year ended fraught with the fear of war. Next year began with baleful auguries. [1]



From the Gallery

“Is there any way to be cleansed or baptized to clear the human being of any predefined code? Specific codes, which describe me and that I was born with are, respectively; Middle Eastern, Muslim, a Persian from Iran, a country with a complex nuclear program. The paradox within my character is the dual approach of the world towards me. In the media Iran is a country with stunning history that had an immensely beneficial effect on humanity, with a hospitable population, which is educated and cultivated; but at the same time it is a part of an “Axis of Evil” that threatens the free world with

its complex nuclear program, it is a sleeping ogre full of people trying to resurrect the Persian empire. This is only a part of Iranian identity, but in more general terms, I come from the Middle East, the cradle of civilization, which invented the alphabets and money as the very first step towards the evolution of industry and economy, as well as the place of origin of several of the largest world religions. At the same time, today it is also seen as the birthplace of terrorism and barbaric violence. This duality is a question without answer for me.” says Shahpour.



From the Gallery

He was born in the early days of Islamic Revolution in Iran and at the end of the period of the Persian monarchy. He grew up during the longest war of the 20th century, and even today his people are still living with international sanctions. His whole life has been spent watching our neighboring countries involved in a war. “The shadow of the war is something that not even the sun could fade. When I was a child I used to ask who would be the winner in a war. The adults always replied ‘the stronger one’.”

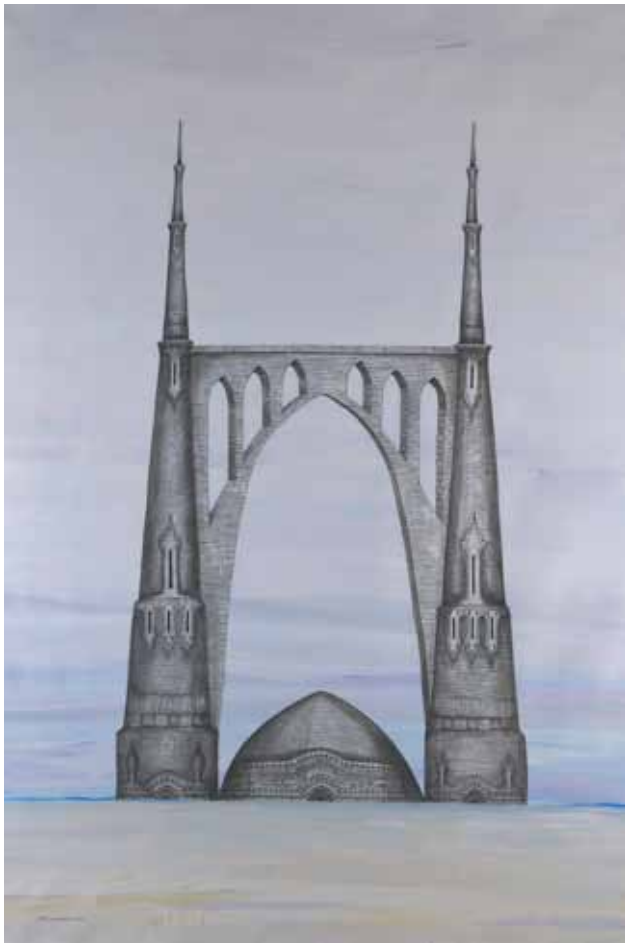
The concept of power is a permanent concern for him and in his different works he depicts its relation with other things like politics and wealth, and eroticism and aesthetics. Having been brought up in Isfahan, as a child Pouyan was enchanted by the ornaments and decoration of classical Iranian art and architecture. Before the Towers for example, Pouyan studied the



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miniature, which led to his black and white series, based on the depictions of Iranian gardens and architecture in miniature painting. It is the epic fashion in which this architecture transforms this symbolic eroticism through abstract means that inspired Pouyan to paint his Towers series. “In my early works I had an ironic and critical vision of the relationship between power and monuments- how humans try to immortalize themselves when they have the power and wealth to build such monuments. Historically, monumental architecture has been seen as a way to overcome death. It is an obvious display of glory, power and wealth.”

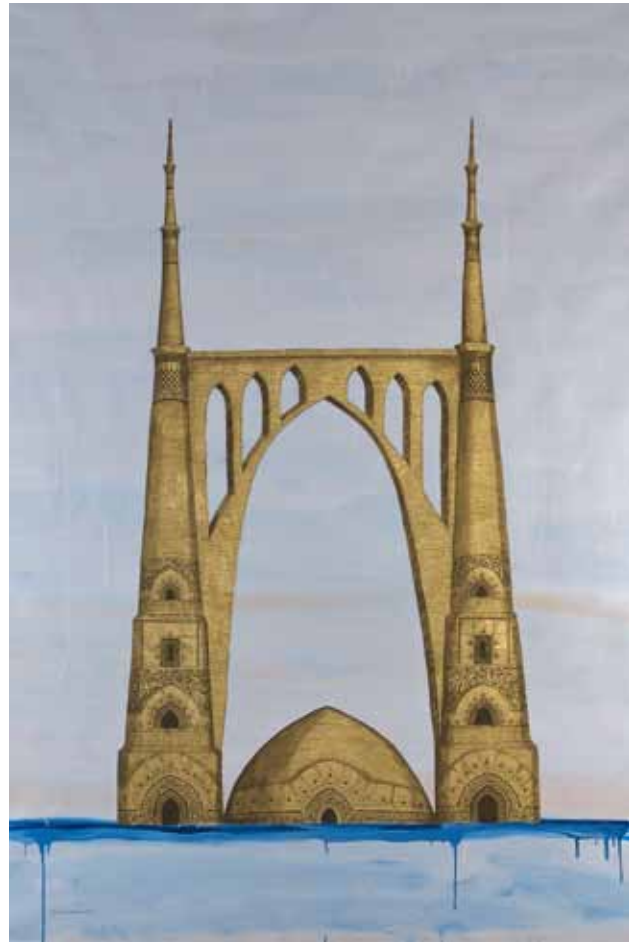
He uses many historical references in his works to demonstrate his mental engagements. “One such example is my series depicting the memorial cross of Pope Urban IV². The Christian Pope Urban IV died in AD 1389, and here I have taken his memorial cross



The Towers, 2011, Acrylic and silver leaf on canvas, 200x135cm - Courtesy of Ali Ebtikari & Lawri & Shabibi Gallery

and combined it with a bludgeon, thus linking this year to the Iranian year 1389 to highlight the continuity of repression under dictatorships throughout history, and how the expression of power through a religious structure can bring the same reaction throughout time. Symbols such as the cross, the bludgeon and gold are metaphors of dogmatism, power and wealth.”

In his next series he had a more humorous look at this power/wealth relation. “I painted a series of bull hooves capped with decorative helmets.” In these paintings, power as the thesis was confronted by wealth as an antithesis, and the final synthesis was a phallic product of both. Phallic forms for him are a reference to the patriarchal society in which his people have lived throughout history. “We have lived and will live in a world where men are ultimately dominant. My work



The Tower, 2011, Acrylic and gold leaf on canvas, 200x135cm - Courtesy of Ali Ebtikar & Lawri & Shabibi Gallery

explores the effects that this masculine notion of power has on human civilization.” The interaction of power and wealth has an interesting effect on art, aesthetics, culture and even sexuality. It should come as no surprise that the apogee of artistic creation has always coincided with the summit of each kingdom or dynasty.

Human history itself can be viewed as a string composed of the peaks of various societies against time. On the one hand, these consist of military conquests, and, on the other, the production and consumption of high quality artistic output. He is not looking for an answer regarding the effects of power on human history: “Instead I am asking more questions.”

Meanwhile, Pouyan’s sculptures – the Projectiles - are a fusion of traditional weaponry, armory and helmets, with the modern form of missiles and warheads. Through this juxtaposition he seeks to find a new definition for



From the Gallery

the projectile, his material being a combination of both classical war-ware and the modern costume of “passion play”. The wings of Pouyan’s Projectiles are etched with flowers and birds, their bodies made of strings of chainmail, and the helmets of solid metal, carved and inlaid with gold. Indeed, calligraphy and ornamentation are the basic elements of eastern decoration, having long been used to decorate all types of objects, including weapons and armor. They stand as metaphors for the narrow boundary that lies between sophisticated poeticism and extreme barbarism. Looking at these works, phallic symbols of power, we can find the trait unaire that links all of Pouyan’s works.

Tehran based curator Ali Bakhtiari meets shahpour pouyan after their collaboration ,”full metal jacket” in “lawrieshabibi” .born in Tehran,1985, Focused on Iranian



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contemporary art, Ali was the curator of Tehran 66 gallery from 2010 to 2011. His “Under Radar” show travelled from Tehran to Paris,”JTM Gallery” and from there to Beirut, “The Running Horse Art Space”. He was one of the nominators of MOPCAP 2011 and also the curator of 2012 MOP and consultant of BIDOUN library for the section of “Iran’s institute for intellectual development of children and young adults”. His published works include catalogue essays, critics and short stories. He is now working as an independent curator.his next project will be “how I learned to stop fearing and love the exotic art” in collaboration with JAAM foundation in Kuwait.

1.Part of the poem (Ancient history) from the book Sky Nails: Poems 1979-1997 by Jamie Mckendrick , English poet (born in Liverpool in 1955)

2. Pope Urban VI (c. 1318 – October 15, 1389), born Bartolomeo Prignano, was Pope from 1378 to 1389.