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Western curator explores works by Iranian artist in the heart of Tehran

Exhibition co-organised by Germano Celant signals Iran's soft power offensive

by GARETH HARRIS | 23 November 2015



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Farideh Lashai's *Le Dejeuner au Park-e-Mellat* (2007-2012) © Farideh Lashai Courtesy of Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art, New York

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An exhibition of works by the late Iranian abstract artist Farideh Lashai, which opened last week at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (until 26 February 2016), has been co-organised by the Italian scholar Germano Celant. The show marks the first time that a prominent non-Iranian curator has presented an exhibition at the museum since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, reflecting a growing rapprochement with the West.

The survey, which was also overseen by the Iranian curator Faryar Javaherian, includes loans from the Centre Pompidou in Paris and the Central Bank of Iran.

Lashai's works hang alongside key pieces from the museum collection by artists such as Alberto Giacometti, Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, Francis Bacon, Cy Twombly, Sohrab Sepehri, and Nasser Assar.

The late Shah's wife, Farah Pahlavi, who lives in Paris and the US, played an important role in opening TMOCA in 1977 and in building the collection of 20th-century US and European art, which is considered to be the finest outside of the West.

The New York-based Modern and contemporary art dealer Edward Tyler Nahem was instrumental in launching the Lashai exhibition. "Having seen



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Farideh's work with my gallery, [Celant] was already familiar with it, as well as its place in the world of contemporary art. The three of us [Celant, and Lashai's daughter, Maneli Keykavoussi] met in Basel last June and discussed his coming on board, and how unprecedented it would be to have a Western curator explore the work of an Iranian artist at an Iranian museum," says Nahem.

Celant has focused on Lashai's paintings and sculptures from the 1960s onwards, adding that he has "also sought to include all manifestations of her creative activity, from her glass designs for the Reidel Studio to her translations into Farsi... from her collaborations with magazines to the writing of stories and novellas". Later works, such as projections of moving images and complex animations, are also included.

"Farideh represents the richness and complexity of an intellectual and an artist, a woman, who has passed through and suffered troubled times in Iran, reflecting them in her works, from paintings to poetry," writes Celant in the exhibition catalogue. "Her path is mixed with tribulations and obstacles, emigrations and disasters, including the social and the personal, which are reflected in her activity."

In October, officials at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art announced that works by international and Iranian artists would go on show next year in Berlin.