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Fig.7. «Eve» 2015. Source: <http://www.imagomundiart.com>.

necessity for establishing harmony between these elements, the totality of the work and its content into consideration. Thus, these works in most cases are of a dramatic aspect.

## Conclusion

In recent years a relative development has taken place in the market of Iranian visual arts and art trade has strikingly grown due to the ever-increasing interest of contemporary Iranian artistic movements in globalization as well as the simultaneous success of Iranian artists in the auctions of Dubai and some European countries.

Globalization of the contemporary Iranian art put the Iranian artist in such conditions in which the insistence on national and religious identity proved to him to be a necessary condition for the continuation of presence in this area. nationality and religion are two significant factors in creation of distinctive

identity for an individual and build his identity versus the identity of the other Iranian artist insists on his national and religious identity in order to continue to be successful in global scene and recognized by western audience. On the other hand, western audience does also consider these elements to be the source of the distinction of him and the oriental other and via these identity-related features he recognizes Iranian artist and accepts him in the global scene.

Thus, Iranian artist represents these identity elements in his work in order to be seen in global market. In this way Iranian artists seek to keep their eyes on the form and content of successful works in auctions for their fast entering to sale and transaction cycle. In other words, these new artistic works struggle to reproduce the same familiar national and religious elements with which the previous successful works have earned their fame. Insofar as in many of these works the use of the aforementioned elements by artist is not based on the relationship of the formal and content structure rather for the sake of injection of the symbols which are reminding national or religious notions that catch the attention of the audience. These signs are supposed to earn an identity for the artist so that the buyer finds his works contemporary and valuable. Thus, art work is reduced to an on demand commodity which is supposed to represent our Iranian-Islamic identity.

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Fig.3. From the collection: "Qajar", 2001. Source: Ghadirian, 2010.

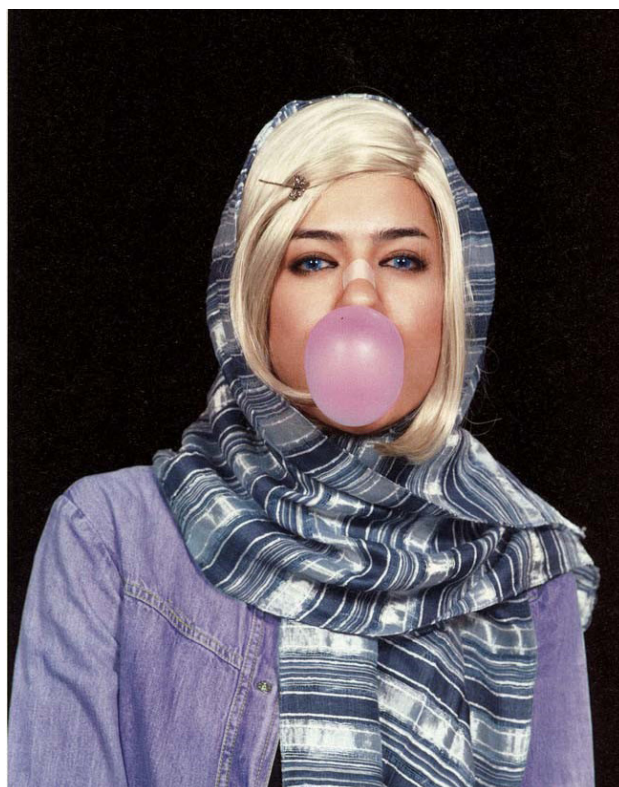


Fig.4. «Ms. compound 3» 2006. Source: Aliabadi, 2010.

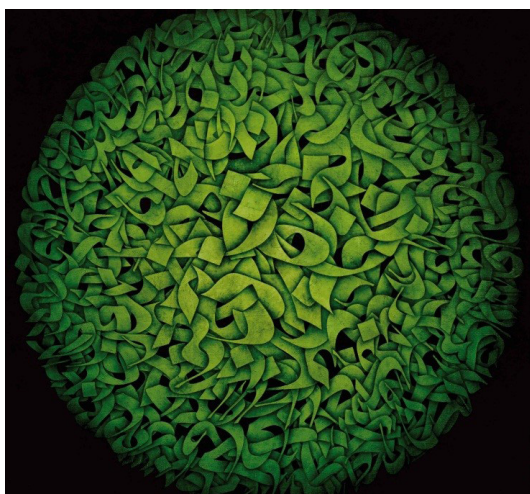


Fig.5. «green earth» 1991. Source: Ehsaei, 2011.



Fig.6. «untitled» 2008. Source: Alikhanzadeh, 2011.

is generally classified as Orient without taking its specific historical and geographic features into considerations” in order to solidify his position in the process of globalization (Mustafavi, 2010: 39). Today the artists of countries which are described in the west in an arbitrary way as “Islamic” or “Oriental” (like Iran) serve the same oriental clichés (Ibid), which had been depicted in the end of nineteenth century. Such an approach is undoubtedly focused on the economic success and global appreciation that these works earn in the west. These pictorial clichés in the works of contemporary Iranian artists covers a vast spectrum of ideological symbols like veil, scarf, and veiled picture of Muslim Iranian woman, use of calligraphy, religious signs and symbols, Islamic miniature, ornamental forms of Qajar Era, old pictures of family albums and other visual effects which in most cases are put into the work without any creativity.

Thus, today most of Iranian artists understand the notion of “Iranian-Islamic identity” in terms of an ideological totality in their confrontation with the contemporary art works. As if enjoying a religious and national identity for an artist depends on using the predetermined and ready-to-hand content packages which should be used in a deterministic fashion in his works so as to be seen in the global scene of the visual arts. These specific packages generally include familiar visual constituents that refer us directly to Iranian or Islamic history and culture and are supposed to represent its totality within a particular form (Figs. 3 to 7).

Of course, one needs to take it into consideration that the reference or allusion to these elements as such is not objected. What makes the use of these elements superficial and banal is their uncreative and undue application in an immediate fashion without being preceded by a formal justification in the middle of the work which in most cases builds a weak and ambiguous form. Such an approach turns all historical richness and meaning of the

aforementioned elements trivial and changes them to mere ornaments of the work.

Such works are interpreted and introduced by the audience, buyers and critics based on such notions as Islamic art or Iranian art. Having such an identity in most cases is the major factor in turning the eyes of the western audience and collectors towards these works. Because Iranian art and artist are usually recognized based on the constituents, which were already familiar to the audience. In fact, Iranian artists represent the same identity that has been depicted for him in advance. This exotic approach often causes the artist not to take any



Fig.1. An anecdote of «martyrdom» From the collection: “Women of God”, 1995. Source: <http://www.artnet.com>.



Fig.2. A steady picture of “Bigharar”, video 1998. Source: Archer, 2008: 238.

### **Contemporary Iranian Art in Global Scene**

Contemporary Iranian art has been oriented towards globalization in the past years like other areas such as economy, politics and culture. Of course, this orientation is more rooted in the orientation of the global society towards globalization of various national and cultural identities in 90s. After the establishment of new global order and following the cultural and political developments of the late 90s the ground was set for the fundamental transformations. The international events of 1989 and the coming years – reunification of two Germanys, fall of USSR, increase of international commercial contracts, solidification of commercial blocs, and China's turning towards capitalist economy – changed the conditions of art world in a dramatic fashion (Stallabrass, 2010: 31).

In these years the collapse of reductive meta-narratives whose inability in realization of the promised liberating ideals was proven in practice led to the substitution of decentralized pluralist politics that suggested that it is possible to tackle the social problems of various identity groups (focused on race, ethnicity, gender and the like) (Sahafzadah, 2009: 179-180). In line with this very procedure from 1960s a revolutionary change took place in the expression of contemporary art through which the art works are increasingly classified no based on their styles rather based on their subjects (Ibid: 181). Arrangement of multicultural exhibitions, attention to the works of African and South American artists, presence of female artists in international exhibitions, establishments of huge museums across the world and the increase of the transaction of art works in 1990s were all in line with the expansion of the globalization. Meanwhile cultural changes of in mid 1990s in Iran provided the opportunity for the artists to establish more effective relations with the world art. The new managing body of Tehran Contemporary Art Museum in early 2000s and the concentration of the magnificent auctions throughout

the world on Middle East Art in recent years have brought about fundamental transformations in the country.

For the first time the works of Shirin Nishat the Iranian-American artist with her pictures collection "Women of Allah" (Fig.1) and the collection of videos of "Uneasy", "Ecstasy" (Fig.2) and "Passion" which had earned a unprecedented success for her the Forty Eighth Biennale Exhibition turned the eyes of world critics to Iranian Art (Mustafavi, 2010). Two basic motifs of Nishat in these works were Iranian Muslim Women and the calligraphic aesthetic tradition which caught the attention of the Iranian artists after her global success.

In the same time, the success of the works of Iranian artists in Christine's and Sotheby's auction houses which were almost all based on the aesthetics of Persian writing system like the works of Mohammad Ehsaei, Faramarz Pilram, Parviz Tanavoli and Hussein Zendehtroodi or related to the Iranian Muslim woman like the works of Afshin Pirhashemi, Shadi Qadiryani and Shirin Aliabadi, caught the attention of art experts across the world. These successes were simultaneous with the world curiosity after September 11, 2001 of Middle East and the cultural, national and religious attitudes of the residents of this region which had been influential in the success of Middle East artists.

### **Iranian-Islamic Identity in the Contemporary Art Works**

With the outstanding presence of Iranian artists in global scenes and the achievements earned in international transactions contemporary Iranian art became more interesting for the western audience. Globalization of the contemporary Iranian art put the Iranian artist in such conditions in which the insistence on national and religious identity proved to him to be a necessary condition for the continuation of presence in this area. As if Iranian artist had to experience the fact "that his life world



early 1990 is totally revealing (Akhgar, 2010: 10-11). It was indeed in these years that “this term made its way to sociology in order to provide the path for the emergence of independent sociological theories on the process of globalization and its social aspects” (Giddens, 1998: 28).

Different aspects of the concept of “globalization” have caused its correct understanding to be associated with certain difficulties. For this reason, one cannot easily provide a clear and unique definition of it. Nevertheless, based on the suggested definitions and perspectives in this regard, one can say that “globalization consists of the process of ever-increasing condensation of time and space due to which people across the world become part of a global society in a relatively conscious way” (Golmohammadi, 2007: 20).

In the theoretical discourse of globalization this concept is always associated with the complementary and seemingly contradicted notion of “localization”. Each one of these two concepts cannot reach its full meaning without the other and their intertwined-ness is to the extent that some theoreticians have suggested the combined term of “Glocalization” in order to refer to the dialectic between the globalized and localized movements (Akhgar, 2010: 11). Glocalization is in the first place concerned with the possibility of cultural coexistence and communication that is provided through the process of globalization. This term coined by Japanese marketers for the first time has been discussed in more details by Roland Robertson the sociologist and theoretician. “Glocalization” denotes that we are now faced with the globalization of the local affairs and conversely the localization of global affairs. In the cultural studies concerning globalization, this term can cast light on the point that against the current ideas, globalization is not merely an assimilating cultural movement and tantamount to westernization (westoxification) rather it moves in two parallel directions and increasingly brings about further differences (Stallabrass, 2010: 12). It is these

differences that highlight the issue of identity in the process of globalization.

### **National Identity and Religious Identity**

Identity is one’s interpretation of oneself that specifies his cultural place. In fact, besides its temporality and spatiality, it represents the context to which the individual belongs. Identities merely exist in the societies because it is these societies that define and organize them. Since the individual needs to belong to a society s/he is always in search of identity. “Nation” is also a representative of one of these societies and the national identity is its product (Giberna, 1999: 120).

Continuation in time and distinctiveness from others are two significant criteria of identity. In fact, identity is always associated with otherness: “our identity” versus “the identity of others”. Moreover, historical continuity is one of the requirements of the construction of identity. Individuals understand this continuity via a set of experiences that have come to existence in the past and been unified under the banner of a shared unique meaning. Distinction from others has its origin in consciousness of the formation of a society with a common culture that leads to the distinction between the insider and the outsider (Ibid: 121). When one speaks of the identities he does indeed imply that social groups think of the world in different ways; they evaluate it based on various criteria; they have different wishes and aspirations and in general they prefer to adopt a different lifestyle (Abdi & Gudarzi, 1999: 1).

Meanwhile nationality and religion are two important factors in creation of a distinct identity for the individual which constitute his identity versus the identity of the other. These two elements cause the individual in a society to distinguish and present himself from/ to the other based on the differences that are revealed via belonging to a special nation or religion.

has been frequently discussed by many sociologists and theoreticians in the past decades. Meanwhile art as one of the distinguished cultural manifestations has become more intertwined with the problem of identity. In fact, a country's art is a manifestation of the culture and identity of the people who live in that country; particularly when it is seen from the outside and in transnational areas. Contemporary Iranian art in recent years has caught the attention of the western audiences due to the increasing presence in the global market and expansion of the activities of Iranian artists beyond the borders of Iran and this very issue highlights the necessity of the representation of national and religious identity in contemporary Iranian art works.

This essay is focused on the question of the way in which the representation of Iranian-Islamic identity becomes represented in contemporary Iranian art. To answer this question, we first explain such concepts as globalization and localization which play a major role in the formation and constitution of national and religious identities. Then we turn to the situation of contemporary Iranian art in global scene and discuss the national religious symbols used in Iranian works which are supposed to be the constitutive of Iranian and Islamic identity of contemporary Iranian art. The methodology of the current research is descriptive-analytic and the data have been gathered by means of library studies.

### Research Background

Various approaches and attitudes have been so far proposed by theoreticians and sociologists as to the phenomena of "globalization" and "identity". By these approaches they have sought to make these concepts understandable within a general theoretical framework. However, they have failed to provide a logical and decisive analysis. The novelty of globalization and lack of required background in scientific circles and its relation with various levels of analysis like politics, economy and culture have

made its definition even harder. Among these works one can refer to the literature produced by Anthony Giddens and Manuel Castells. Moreover, Julian Stallabrass in his works has criticized the issue of identity and globalization within this context with a critical approach to contemporary art.

As to Iranian and Islamic identity of contemporary Iranian art works we can refer to the article by Majid Akhgari entitled "Globalization of Iranian Identity: Reflections of the Recent Developments in Iran" and also to the essay published by Shulah Mustafavi under the title of "World of Iranian Pictures from the Point of View of an Outsider" both of which have been published in 2010 in the number 33 of Journal of Professional Artist. The authors of these two essays have approached and analyzed the situation of contemporary Iranian art and the issue of globalization and Iranian and Islamic identity from their personal perspectives.

### Globalization and Localization

Today the newly emerged phenomenon of "globalization" is one of the most significant concepts that have caught the attention of many of economic, political and cultural thinkers and theoreticians. This term was included in Webster Dictionary for the first time in 1961 which reflected the clear recognition of the importance of the process of global relations and communications (Kilminster, 1998: 93). Most of the theoreticians are unanimous that almost in the second half of 1970s some developments took place in the areas of economy, communications and world politics which were both qualitatively and quantitatively different from all similar past processes. The effects of these developments showed themselves in 80s and 90s and changed the face of world and global relations. Globalization as a term in its specific sense refers to these developments and the fact that "globalization" in the sense which we are familiar with today has entered the academic and intellectual discourse of human sciences since the

Persian translation of this paper entitled:

بازنمایی هویت معاصر ایرانی - اسلامی در هنر معاصر ایران

is also published in this issue of journal.

## Representation of Islamic-Iranian Identity in Contemporary Iranian Art

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### Abstract

In recent years contemporary Iranian art has caught the attention of the people across the world more than before. Undoubtedly, successful presence of Iranian artists in recent auctions and their numerous exhibitions throughout the Europe and USA have been influential in the process of globalization of contemporary Iranian art. Meanwhile since nationality and religion are two significant factors in creation of distinctive identity for an individual and build his identity versus the identity of the other Iranian artist insists on his national and religious identity in order to continue to be successful in global scene and recognized by western audience.


On the other hand, western audience does also consider these elements to be the source of the distinction of him and the oriental other and via these identity-related features he recognizes Iranian artist and accepts him in the global scene. Thus, Iranian artist represents these identity elements in his work in order to be seen in global market. In this way Iranian artists seek to keep their eyes on the form and content of successful works in auctions for their fast entering to sale and transaction cycle. In other words, these new artistic works struggle to reproduce the same familiar national and religious elements with which the previous successful works have earned their fame. Insofar as in many of these works the use of the aforementioned elements by artist is not based on the relationship of the formal and content structure rather for the sake of injection of the symbols which are reminding national or religious notions that catch the attention of the audience. The methodology of the current research is descriptive-analytic and the data have been gathered by means of library studies.

**Keywords:** *Globalization, Iranian-Islamic Identity, Contemporary Iranian Art.*

### Introduction

In the early years of the Twentieth First Century following the expansion of the challenging debates concerning globalization the issue of identity and

particularly that of national, religious and cultural identity have caught the attention of scholars more than any other time. Thus, the influence of globalization process on cultural and identity-related challenges

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