Art and Transition in Iran (online/Bonn, 16-17 Nov 23)

online / Institute of Art History, University of Bonn, Nov 16–17, 2023
Deadline: Jul 31, 2023

Birgit Mersmann

International Hybrid Workshop: Collective Traumas and Future Fantasies: The Power of (Visual) Art for Social and Political Transition in Iran.
Conception and organization: Raika Khorshidian, Birgit Mersmann.

Art and visual culture, artistic creativity and art activism have played a significant role in the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement, acting as tools to protest against the propaganda of the Islamic regime and echo the voices of millions of minoritized Iranians. Since the beginning of the movement, the practice of art-based disobedience – in the form of performances, happenings, graffiti and installations – has raised public awareness in Iran. Circulating these images, paintings, graphic designs, illustrations, photomontages and animations on social media has highlighted political issues, documented the victims and paid tribute to the activists (heroines and heroes). It has brought about an extended solidarity, created a diasporic re-collectivity and expanded global awareness. These artistic protest activities have led to the creation/imagination of future fantasies of a free Iran (an Iran without the Islamic Regime). At the same time, however, widespread repression and arrests, unbridled inflation, forced confessions, executions, new restrictions and the enrichment of uranium have all caused artists to envision nightmarish dystopian futures.
Understanding how these revolutionary moments, conditions and feelings are reflected in the visual and performing arts, along with how they are shared on social media, requires us to explore Tehran's pre-September 2022 art scene and Iranian diasporic art, factoring in the nostalgic legacy and unhomely aesthetics of modern and contemporary Iranian art. The workshop will look at how the visual and performing arts resisted the repression, divisive propaganda, severe censorship and mass surveillance at work in Iran, and invited Iranians to share their traumas, shift perspectives and broaden their viewpoints on rereading Iran's history. We encourage contributors to approach the themes below from different academic backgrounds and research perspectives, such as artivism and (visual) protest cultures, democracy studies, diasporic aesthetics, trauma research and memory studies.
If there is a future after the Islamic Regime, Iranians will inevitably have to confront the individual and (trans-)national trauma inflicted by the devastation of their homeland. Art may provide Iranians with a valuable mechanism for releasing collective trauma, encouraging mutual understanding and rebuilding the homeland. In this, there are valuable lessons to be drawn from the art history of Germany during reconstruction and reunification, the art history of post-communist Europe and the histories of other nations and regions that have experience with system change and the role of the visual arts in transitional politics. The future of Iran's democracy requires imagination

and creativity. We therefore invite contributions that offer thought-provoking perspectives and comparative and cross-cultural studies on the role of art, including individual artists and art collectives, focusing on advancing democracy in Iran and other countries worldwide.

The deadline for submissions is 31 July 2023. The selected presenters will be notified by 31 August 2023. The Institute of Art History at the University of Bonn offers to pay for the accommodation of the selected speakers (max. 3 nights). Unfortunately, travel expenses cannot be covered.

The workshop will be held in English. Please send the title and an abstract of your proposal (maximum 500 words) for a 20-minute presentation along with a short biography to: ArtandTransitioninIran@uni-bonn.de

Possible topics include but are not limited to:
- Why artists engage in the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement
- Visual languages/iconographies of civic protest during the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement
- Protest art/art activism and art-based disobedience in the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement
- The significance of performance art in the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement
- The role of social media as a medium for art-political activism
- Art against propaganda in Iran
- Precariousness, estrangement, and nonbelonging in contemporary Iranian art from 1979 onwards; transformation of the concept of home/homeland in contemporary Iranian art
- The visual history of Iranians’ collective traumas
- Nostalgia in contemporary Iranian art
- Diasporic dimensions within the Iranian art-protest movement
- Post-apocalyptic and post-catastrophic art in Iran
- Visualizations of future fantasies (dreams and/or nightmares) for Iran
- Post-dictatorship art
- Comparative/cross-cultural art-historical studies of social change and political transition with a focus on future fantasies

Reference:

CFP: Art and Transition in Iran (online/Bonn, 16-17 Nov 23). In: ArtHist.net, Jun 1, 2023 (accessed Nov 2, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/39408>.