

PRVANEH ETEMADI THE FOURTH REALM

By: Ali Eftehad

Parvaneh Etemadi is an artist who has been always searching for new expressions for representing her ideas. Born in Birjand (North East of Iran) in 1948 and schooled in Tehran. "I didn't like the school. I countervailed the agony of going to school with painting. This amazing game used to be done by pencils and ended up being the comrade of my childhood." She explains¹¹. During high school in her literature teacher Jalal Al-e Ahmad¹² found her painting on the book margin and thought of her being highly talented and introduced her to Bahman Mohasses¹³. During that summer Mohasses used to go to her home as her tutor and taught her drawings. This was the first serious experience in Art for Parvaneh. Mohasses also taught her about art in ancient times specifically ancient Greece and Etruscan civilization. She took interest in those ancient civilizations and that is how she created her first series.

Parvaneh Etemadi studied painting in Tehran Fine Art University beginning her career with a tendency towards constructivism and abstraction where she had her first exhibition in late 1960s. This exhibition was not convergent with Iranian art scene at the time rather had a reflection of European art. In the 1970s her attitude evolved changing distinctively through mixing her past decade experiences with figurative forms. This conjuncture formed the most famous series in her oeuvre: cement paintings. This series consists of cement-mounted canvases: the main impress was formed on each of the canvases before the cement became dry then colors were added to it. Simple linear figures and still life images made the series inconsistent and relevant at the same time while the still lives were purposely better rendered than the figures. The reason of its inconsistency is because the objects found a more genuine identity and relevant because all the images



Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars 11, 2010. Collage on cardboard. 50x70cm. Courtesy of the artist and JAMM Art



Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars 20, 2011. Collage on cardboard. 81.5x102cm. Courtesy of the artist and JAMM Art



Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars 9, 2011. Collage on cardboard, 70x100cm. Courtesy of the artist and JAMM Art



Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars 21, 2011. Collage on cardboard, 81.5x102cm. Courtesy of the artist and JAMM Art

had the same cement texture. The cement walls of famous art museums that were built in the 70s could be the best example of such architecture. In this context Etemadi made her works similar to those walls and thus opened a new way for interpreting her works. The next vicissitude in Parvaneh's oeuvre happened almost a decade later: In the 1980s her works were mostly painted by colored pencils. She often painted forgotten objects that used to be useful in any Iranian's home not so long ago. She talks about her grandmother's old and dusty basement that was full of old abandoned chests and boxes. This is how the old fabrics, dried pomegranates, hand woven textiles and old objects, etc. enter her body of works.

The last series of her works would be her collages. Although she had used this technic before, but her new collages were the result of her searching and experiencing the digital images. Etemadi doesn't make collages in the cyber atmosphere, but prints digital pictures and makes them a collage by glue and scissor. "we are making collages every day; whether it is mounted on the paper or not. Making the image is what is important; and the resulted image is a collage of all the images we have in mind; that is why the noetic painting ends up with formalism. It is because you can make a collage in the computer of your brain by a few words and a few images. When you are told to get inspiration from nature that is because those images make the mind limitless; while the aesthetic construction of your brain is so uniform. There is only one form of apple and one form of gillyflower in your mind and when you want to paint it just by imagination the result would be the same all the time; and that is why the abstract or noetic painting will always end in repetition"¹⁴. Etemadi's collages are a synthesis of her whole oeuvre. She mixes up the simplicity in her cement works, the abstraction of her first series and the past recycling of her colored pencil works to make something magical: the works that are from this world but at the same time seem unbelievably strange and unfamiliar. In Old Persian wisdom, this world

is the *Sensibilis mundus*. The world of things perceived by the human senses and thus everything in it is empty of verity. Versus this universe is another universe called *Mundus intelligibilis (Realm of Ideas)* which is sheer truth. As if the *Mundus intelligibilis* is one standing in front of the mirror, while the *Sensibilis mundus* is the image through the mirror; something like Plato's cave. These two universes have no border in common, what connects them is a third universe: the *mundus imaginalis*. In Persian wisdom the universe of *mundus imaginalis* is a place where unimaginable notions get translated into visual elements of *Sensibilis mundus*. Just like Hermes translating the incomprehensible language of Gods and Goddesses of Olympus into the understandable language of mortals. Here this is the *mundus imaginalis* that has this obligation of interpreting the abstract notions into earthly meanings. The familiar elements of each collage in combination with other elements make an unfamiliar phenomenon that makes the audience ponder: something like the world of Persian Old paintings (Negar garil) that the familiar components of this world make a totally different and unearthly image just by different perspectives and colors functioning like the *mundus imaginalis*. A dress made of the surfaces of clocks with English and Roman numbers and the elements of Iranian book lay outs, the transparent paper shrouds and dresses, a wrinkled fabric that seems like Iran's map. Old papers of Islamic art that shaped into containers and dishes from the ancient times and etc. seem to be forming the *mundus imaginalis* in the contemporary world of Iranians. But all these are neither created for Iranization, nor reviving the subjectivity of Persian wisdom. The artist intuitively created something that the spirit of the past and present of her homeland is fluid in it. "I painted for fifty years before realizing how Iranian my works was. It was unintentional. On the contrary, I resisted against letting my work take an indigenous taste. I didn't leave my compositions."¹⁵



1. Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars 8, 2011. Collage on cardboard, 70x100cm. Courtesy of the artist and JAMM Art
2. Dowry of a Fairy Princess to Mars 7, 2011. Collage on cardboard, 70x100cm. Courtesy of the artist and JAMM Art

End Notes

1. Selected Works of Parvaneh Etemadi, by Javad Mohabi and Jocelyn Damija, 1960-98, Honare Iran, 1998, Tehran, Iran.
2. Jalal Al-e Ahmad (1923 - 1969) was an Iranian writer, thinker, and social and political critic.
3. Bahman Mohasses (1932 - 2010) was a prominent Iranian Artist.
4. An interview with Parvaneh Etemadi, Etemad Melli newspaper, 1 January 2009.
5. Paper power, by Muhammad Yusuf, The Gulf Today, June 6, 2013.