

Form, Concept and Stories of Majid Biglari

By Nazila Noebashari



Jack, King, Queen, Joker. 2009, mixed media - Courtesy of Aaran Gallery.

At first glance, Majid Biglari's sculptures are immediately likeable, quite simply because they remind us of our childhood. However, the initial attraction and sense of enchantment is soon replaced with wonder and even gloom. Looking closer, the familiar shapes and colors transform into characters that we meet every day. In later works these personages are found in circumstances and in the midst of events that are recognizable to us; in fact aren't we looking into a mirror? Is this not an amazing examination of our lives? In Iran, life is often thrust upon us at high speed. From the innocence of childhood we move into adolescence and almost immediately into premature adulthood.

Majid Biglari recognizes that his life has been a series of incidents that were powered with his deep sense of idealism. He grew up in a traditional family, surrounded by books, and was given his first set of coloring pencils by his uncle who is a writer and journalist. But, he refused to even attempt painting as he was sure that he

could not draw the unfamiliar. There were no pictorial references in his home or in the books in the house; only the rigidity and seriousness of a traditional yet educated family. In an unconscious act of rebellion he found himself attending a caricature course at the age of 16, and strangely enough he was supported by his family in this radical choice. For the next three years he was tormented in these classes as he could not think or work in two dimensions. At the same time he was fascinated with the world of theatre and consumed by reading plays. Graduating from high school he applied to study art at university and was immediately accepted, again with the support of his family. Astonishingly, he did not attend the university in the first year as he considered his skills and knowledge of art well beneath his classmates, instead he used that year to read and learn as much as he could. By 2005, he was settled at the university dormitory and formed part of a circle of like-minded peers. It appeared that he had



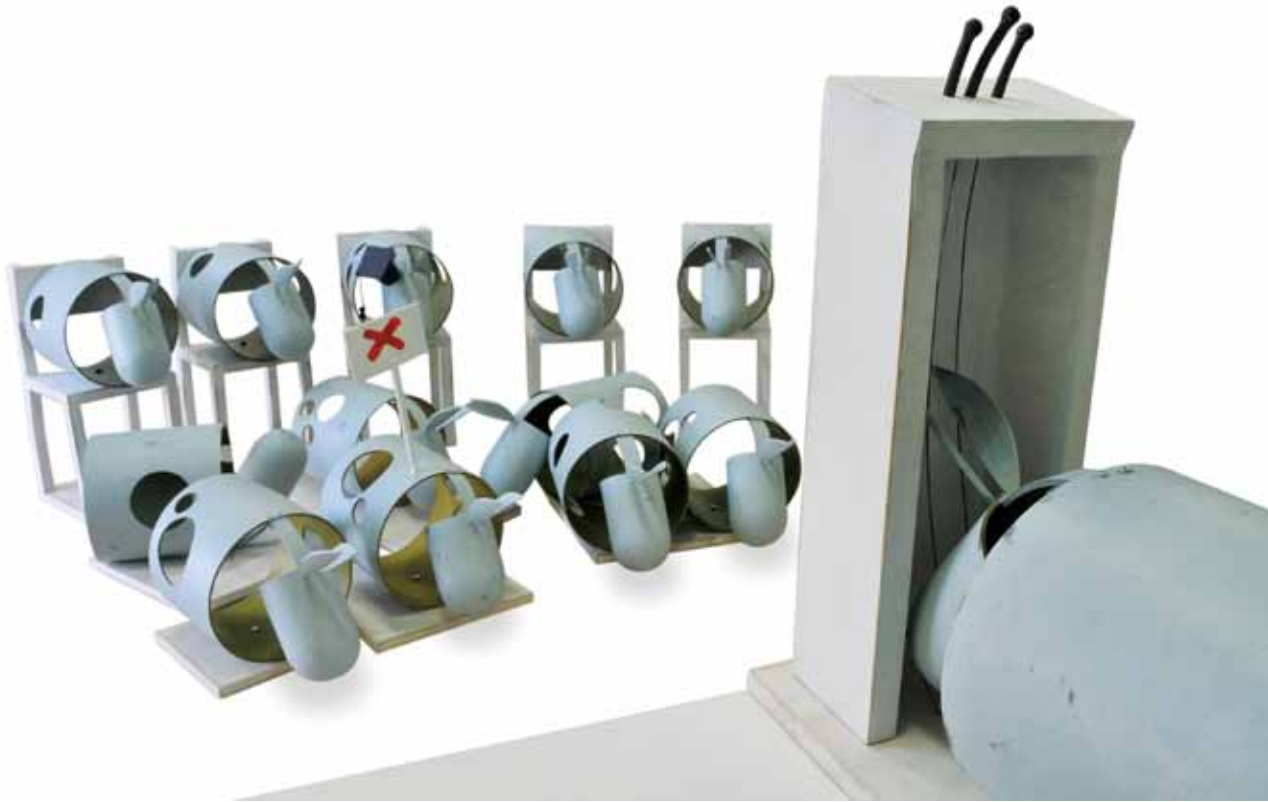
Us, From series “The Sky is Partly or Completely Cloudy”, 2010, mixed media, 160x50x40cm. - Courtesy of Aaran Gallery.

finally come into his own and could engage in his real passion for sculpting.

Sculpting, which had been eradicated from Iranian University curriculums from 1980 to 1999, was once again included but the prevailing teaching methods focused on form and the syllabus concentrated on Modernism. There were hardly any references to Contemporary art. It was no wonder that this small group of students became rebellious, confronting and questioning the administration at each step of the way. The election of a reformist president in 1997, overwhelmingly supported by the youth of the country, allowed for more freedom of expression and the advent of the internet completely changed the lives of this inquisitive generation. The well-endowed library of the university was an unexpected treasure trove which they now used to their advantage.

One of Majid’s first attempts to escape from the established Modernist program of the university was

to use the discarded materials found on the campus, which by his second year of studies he had turned into assemblages. At the same time, he was intent on improving his technique and constantly experimented with different practices and materials. His first serious group of sculptures was an adaptation of native traditions in which he simplified the majestic domes of Persian architecture. The half sphere – the half sun or moon – continues to be one of his preferred forms. At this time he demonstrates an ability to conceive his designs on a large scale where he breaks the parts down and produces them in a style reminiscent of an assembly line. By 2009 he was invited to show two of his pieces in a group exhibition at Aaran Gallery. The sale of both sculptures proved extremely encouraging for him. His world now included people outside the university who appreciated his work, reducing the weight of the judgmental attitudes that he had thus far experienced from his professors. The two pieces offered at the gallery



The series “Endangered Species“, 2011 - Courtesy of Aaran Gallery.

were a set of four characters from a deck of cards: a King, a Queen, a Jack and a Joker. A symbolic group immediately recognizable in their flat two dimensional forms are re-invented in his favorite spherical world; a challenging process which proved highly attractive to him. Familiar forms are broken and re-assembled to allow the concept to prevail.

Once over this hurdle he was then able to add literature and the age old practice of using metaphors into his work in a most Persian way.

His next series, “The Sky is Partly or Completely Cloudy“, was exhibited in 2010, by which time he had become a narrator. Concept had conquered form and titles now became indicators designed to give every piece a separate individuality, so that even if they were seen apart from their group, they still could tell their own tale. At only 23, he had matured into an artist, refusing to remain just a sculptor and demonstrating a very well defined social and political outlook.

The application of mature distorted sarcasm and wit in this series was beyond his years. Many of the pieces were mobile; motionless sculptures were no longer adequate for the artist. The series placed a mirror in front of us; we were invited to look at ourselves as a society and to contemplate change. While some pieces were highly political, the overall ambition of the series was to accentuate the social shortcomings of a nation, away from the usual slogans.

The series “Endangered Species“, exhibited in September 2011, reveals the preoccupations of a young artist brought up in an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty. From his soul searching pieces such as “Me – the Graduate “ where he addresses the changing circumstances of a young student after graduation, to pieces such as “ Dead Donkey “, where he points to sudden unexpected change, we are encountering an inquisitive mind. The choice of donkeys is rooted in Persian fables and jokes. In our popular culture donkeys



The Winding Soldier, 2011, mixed media, 177x75cm - Courtesy of Aaran Gallery.

are stubborn creatures with very little intelligence, often abused and used as a symbol of idiocy. Here the artist unashamedly questions his own intelligence as well as that of his society and demands answers. Nothing is sacred, and narcissism and particularly hypocrisy are ridiculed. The application of assembly line rules are once again noticeable, and while the artist uses the method to his advantage, at the same time he resists conformity and ridicules uniformity. His choice of a singular character and the use of monotone grey are an escape from usual preconceptions. While the “unit” sculpture is beautiful, there is no variation on color or character. The “unit” is chosen to represent “us”. By deforming society and taking away individualism, the artist attempts to reveal the true “us”. He advocates the acceptance of the “other”, in its lowest form of all: the donkey, as one of us.

Majid Biglari defines his characters in this series by installing them as a group; representing a society that

is supposedly mesmerized by the orator. This particular choice of presentation emphasizes the concept and, at the same time, shows the artist’s contempt of tyranny; the shadow of the orator that he has had to live with all of his life.

In yet another move forward, he made his first life-size piece, “The Winding Soldier”, in September of 2011 when the artist was forced to begin his mandatory Military service. This self-portrait appears to be a resistance against forced conformity. He is questioning the age-old struggle between choice and force. He is crying out: “Bring out your best, I shall not be defeated.” The “Winding Soldier” might be restrained but the artist shall prevail.

This latest successful piece has opened new horizons for our young artist. He admits that now he is in command of his forms, concepts and stories and that he likes to master the complication of molding them together, relying on hard earned skills. All seems to be coming together for him to achieve his personal narration. There is a missing link to be found in his work. Much like in any story, he introduces a prelude, heightens the tension during the course of the narration and completes the fantasy with a finale, but refrains from sharing his answers and leaves the viewer to draw their own conclusions.

Majid Biglari’s ability in overcoming the obstacles of a life lived in a tyrannical system, and his success in establishing a dialogue with a society that is constantly changing and overtly instable, is shared by many artists from our region. It has fallen on them to raise the questions, expand the horizons and teach us all how to aim higher and achieve results.

The Spring is upon us all.

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