

Sweet Illusion of Ebrahim Eskandari

By Behrang Samadzadeghan.

Ebrahim Eskandari comes from a family of artists. Since childhood, his world has revolved around the arts. His father, a post-revolution era painter, has been credited with reviving the educational curriculum and reopening the Faculty of Fine Arts in various Iranian universities. His mother and older brother are also well known in Tehran's artistic circles. Therefore, it was with the full support of his family that at age of 12 he began to seriously engage in the arts. Like all children born in the 1980s in Iran, he grew up with the tension and fear of war, along with its aftermath. It is no wonder that at the age of 4 he was painting scenes of war. Three years later he was drawing cartoon characters and caricatures. Since the age of 6 his favorite toys were Lego and puzzles. He used to accompany his father to Tehran's Friday antique bazaar, where most of the items on sale were knickknacks from the 1970s. His father would shop for antiques and he would look for Nintendo and Atari TV games. He was fascinated with the mechanical world. He would break down mechanical toys, TVs and radios, wanting to build stronger and more interesting toys. He was given free reign at home; his family never interfered with his creativity, even when he painted the walls with markers. He fondly remembers taking the double decker bus on his own to his grandmother's house in downtown Tehran, the colorful phone booths and postboxes were accessories of a city that he came to care for. At school he continued painting and was also fascinated with handicrafts. Being a good student meant that he could have a certain amount of freedom to indulge in his hobbies and interests. For example, at the age of 12 he took off on his own and visited the city of Esfahan. He asked his family for permission and was granted the freedom to travel alone, almost unheard of in Iran. Since then he has been constantly travelling and enjoying the freedom and independence that only traveling offers him. The young artist's character was shaping up exactly in the manner he wanted it. In high school he continued taking drawing lessons as well as sculpting. He visited as many exhibitions

as he could. The vigorous technique of copying old masters at school had a positive effect on him, but he yearned to sculpt. He was fascinated with sculpture as it was more accessible to him. He preferred to create three-dimensional objects rather than draw them. Upon admittance to the University of Art in 2005, photography and sculpting were added to this potent regime of training.

He would first draw a piece and then stylize the form based on key poses of the figure. During his third year, he made his first series of sculptures entitled "The Wrestlers". In 2008, two sculptures entitled "Div & Delbar" (Beauty & the Beast) were accepted for a group exhibition in Tehran's Barg Gallery. Soon after, he was drawn to realism and applied it to his new works. At this time he became interested in the relationship between sculptures and the city. It was a consuming topic, which he has been exploring ever since. In the same year he made his first life size piece as a semester project. It was a depiction of a sweeper waving his broom. The movement of the hand is intended to engage the viewer, aiming to merge the cityscape, the sculpture and the citizens. During the last year of his studies he became interested in set design, which led to experiments with applied materials such as plaster, ceramic, soil, and bronze. Elaborate sculptures did not interest him anymore. Instead, ordinary poses and mundane events inspired him. The mechanical world intrigued him and the bits and pieces that he had collected found their way into jars that he labeled and, by doing so, redefined the objects inside, as is observed in the piece "A Good TV". The details and elements of modern life had become a fundamental part of his thought process, the overall totality of life and the objects that make it up were not that important. It took him two years to prepare the project for his final degree presentation. Made entirely of fiberglass, accompanied by a buzzing sound of an out of program TV, "Room 22" is an installation about a set moment. The room shows a graffiti artist who, after an extraordinary day, has come back home and is resting



Room 22. 2010, fiber glass, life size - Courtesy of Aaran Gallery.

in front of the TV. The use of objects and appliances, all dating back to the 1980s, are intended to invoke common memories amongst viewers. This is part of a hope that mutual feeling will rise from the depths and be brought to the surface; a tedious voice used as a language to depict the vague story that is roaming behind the walls of the houses. The artist anticipates the response of the visitor, allowing for a direct reaction to the subject, components and colors. It is the conscious memories of the artist and his prevailing political affiliation at the time that are at play here.

The frozen time in this installation is a memory aide of Proustian notions as an emblem of the life many teenagers lead in Iran. The failure of the system to give

the youth of the country proper education and allow them to enjoy their free time as they wish has, in so many ways, backfired. The hollow propaganda has pushed kids into an abyss where the western symbols and values, and TV life, have become the towering factors in their lives. Taking part in the Tehran City Sculpture Biennale in 2010 revived his admiration for the forgotten and vanishing city elements, such as double Decker buses and orange taxis with bright colors that once created part of the city's identity.

The process of replacement astonishes him, everything breaks in Iran; there is hardly any continuity. There is a disconnection with the past. The city refuses to embrace its colors and forms. The artist feels a blissful nostalgia.

He presented the “Post Box” in the biennale, cleverly reminding the citizens of the not so distant future. It is clever because it reminds people of how the past is erased and a neoteric spirit is introduced. The same process has been used to erase many other parts of our lives. For instance, the city murals that once depicted martyrs and leaders are now replaced with commercial advertisements or simplistic paintings of common life. The textbooks have been changed to emphasize contemporary history and very little attention is paid to the past. The image of one dictator is replaced by images of another. Perhaps it is best to rename the sculpture “Flash Back – Post Box”!

In his latest work, the concept of disconnection with the past is carried through. The “Phone booth”, a not-so-distant element of Tehran’s past, is alluded to in his work. To accentuate the concept, there is a constant buzzing sound of a phone that is not in use. This, again, is the Iranian life, cut short and discontinued.

He considers himself an urban artist and enjoys putting his signature on the walls of the city. His graffiti art, while partly political, is another flashback, reminding us of the past. The importance of the tower of “Shahyad”, later renamed “Liberty”, as the icon of Tehran is now undermined and the image of a new tower, the “Milad telecommunication Center”, is constantly reproduced in governmental documents or mass media. Peykan, the British Hunter manufactured in Iran back in 1960s, which remained until a few years ago, was dubbed the national car but it is now replaced with a hybrid named “Samand”. The artist attempts to revitalize these elements and give them a more lasting shelf-life.

At age of 25, this young artist seems to be well on his way. His recognizable pieces invoke the blissful nostalgia shared by many of Tehran’s citizens and even Iranians in diaspora. While he is conscious of the long-standing artistic practice of fine arts, he is completely capable of bringing punk anarchism into his oeuvre. He draws our attention to details that are often neglected, bringing abandoned objects and feelings into the limelight, the little things and little people that matter, and proving that the ordinary is beautiful.



Post Bo. 2011, Fiber Glass, 130x60x60cm - Courtesy of Aaran gallery.

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