

- In memory of -

# FARIDEH LASHAI

(1944-2013)

An Exhibition Honoring the Life  
and Work of Farideh Lashai

**THE  
FARJAM  
FOUNDATION**



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The Farjam Foundation

The Farjam Foundation fosters a universal dialogue between East and West through various cultural initiatives. Since 2008, with the city of Dubai as its base, the Foundation has partnered with local, regional and international organisations to realise this aim beyond chronological, traditional and geographic divisions.

At the core of the Foundation's work lies The Farjam Collection, one of the world's foremost privately-owned art collections encompassing Islamic, Middle Eastern and Western art. Its vast Islamic and pre-Islamic section spans the entire history of Islam, comprising of a multitude of art forms from manuscripts in science, poetry and mathematics to textiles, metal works, lacquers, textile and fine carpets. An extensive section is devoted to modern and contemporary art from the Middle East, celebrating leading artists from the region; collected in depth, key works by names like Farhad Moshiri, the Haerizadeh brothers, Mounir Fathmi, and Abdul Nasser Gharem feature prominently. At large, the modern and contemporary art collection includes the principal figures of modern art history, from Pablo Picasso and Willem de Kooning to Alexander Calder, Andy Warhol and Jean-Michel Basquiat, alongside the most promising talents of recent years such as Anselm Kiefer, Jeff Koons and Andreas Gursky.

Showcasing artwork drawn from the collection, The Farjam Foundation's flagship space at the DIFC in Dubai houses a series of rotating thematic exhibitions accompanied by a broad range of educational offerings. With a special focus on engaging young audiences, these programmes include lectures, panel discussions, university workshops and an annual "Art Camp" that provides a unique opportunity for children to interact directly with art and heritage.

In addition, The Farjam Foundation works with leading universities, colleges and cultural organisations, including Zayed University in the UAE, the British Museum and the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in the UK, as well as an international collaboration with UNESCO. These partnerships take forward the Foundation's vision by engaging broader audiences in the understanding and appreciation of Islamic art and heritage.

To further its core mission, The Farjam Foundation aims to expand its outreach projects in the developing world, harnessing the power of art and heritage to bring world civilizations together for a common future.

## Introduction

It was with a profound sadness that The Farjam Foundation learned of the passing of Farideh Lashai on February 24, 2013. As Iran's leading female artist, Lashai paved the way for a global appreciation of an Iranian cultural aesthetic and enabled the flourishing of female Middle Eastern art witnessed today. Lashai even continued to paint while battling cancer. Her spirit and passion will be deeply missed. Artists, collectors, academics and enthusiasts owe a huge debt to the body of work she leaves behind and her legacy will continue to touch the artistic community for generations to come.

With her remarkable explorations into her cultural identity and heritage, Lashai spoke not only to those who shared her social history but to all those who questioned their sense of self. Articulating her experiences through painting, sculpture, installation and audiovisual media allowed for a powerful freedom of expression that permeated traditional creative boundaries. Her work is held in the world's most prestigious art collections and has earned a place in the pantheon of modern masters.

The Farjam Foundation commemorates her memory and lifetime of artistic achievements during Art Dubai 2013 with *In Memory of Farideh Lashai (1944-2013): An Exhibition Honoring the Life and Work of Farideh Lashai*. The show will highlight her artistic genius through an array of early and late paintings. All the works on display are drawn from The Farjam Foundation's private collection.

## Preface by Farhad Farjam

Homage to my friend, Farideh Lashai 1944-2013

It is difficult to articulate the profound sense of loss I experienced on hearing of Farideh Lashai's passing last month. I was deeply honored to have known her as both an artist and a friend, and share an inexpressive degree of grief with all those who were fortunate enough to have had their lives touched by her spirit. Her character and art have left a deep and enduring imprint on all of us. The tragedy has encouraged us to reflect on the astounding impact that Farideh has had on the world; artistically, intellectually and spiritually. I therefore feel privileged to introduce this retrospective of her work, in order to commemorate her life and bear witness to the magnitude of her achievements.

Throughout her life, Farideh's powerful imagination and innate artistic genius combined to create artworks that inspire us to contemplate the very nature of the human condition: our beliefs, our sense of self, our sense of belonging. Farideh's desire to create was intrinsic to her character, and in spite of the devastating battle with cancer that she endured for over a decade, she worked tirelessly until her final days. With her beautiful smile and vivacious personality, she painted, travelled, exhibited, and shared her inspirations and creative experiences with people across the globe, defying her physical suffering through an inexorable love of art. The depth of power and emotion conveyed by her late works testify to the immense strength of her extraordinary spirit.

Farideh's paintings convey a deeply ingrained attachment to her homeland that resonated with audiences regardless of culture or nationality. The eloquence of her reflections on the history, landscape and social fabric of the Middle East inspired an intellectual engagement with her heritage, which achieved critical acclaim on an international scale. Consequently, Farideh has established a permanent platform for female artists, and the current blossoming of contemporary female art from the region owes a huge debt of gratitude to her precedent.

Farideh was driven by an unsurpassable passion for art and she never ceased to challenge herself creatively. Her move into the audiovisual domain demonstrated her desire to push the boundaries of her artistic expression, adding a further dimension to her creative oeuvre and engaging a new realm

of audiences with her brilliant mind. She inspired us all to challenge convention, question our limitations, and combat inequality. This legacy will live on in her absence.

I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to Farideh's daughter, Maneli, her family, her friends, and to all art lovers who are mourning the loss of this incredible artist. I hope that this exhibition will serve, to a small degree and in a humble manner, to honour Farideh's life and work, and give thanks for her remarkable accomplishments.

Farhad Farjam, March 2013  
Founder of The Farjam Foundation

#### Commemoration and celebration

Farideh Lashai has been fighting cancer for over a decade but never lost her commendable passion for art. During her last years, she has been more than ever overwhelmed with the art that greatly helped her combat the disease. She devoted much of her life to her human aspirations and despite her long battle with cancer, all the pain and agony, she managed to create some her best works including her video installations with increasingly radical content.

I share the grief with the art community and appreciate The Farjam Foundation for organizing the event to commemorate the life of the celebrated Iranian artist, Farideh Lashai.

Dr. Alireza Sami Azar, March 2013  
Art Historian and Architect

Farideh Lashai (1944-2013)

Throughout a distinguished career spanning over five decades, Farideh Lashai has always juggled with varying means of expression, without recognizing any frontiers that might confine her to a rigidly defined identity. A graduate of Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna she worked as a crystal designer at Riedel Studios in southern Austria, and then Studio Rosenthal in Selb, Germany. Crystal design became her basis for practicing sculpting later in her career alongside her main discipline of painting. Ever since she has held over 25 solo shows in Iran, Europe and the USA and has been involved in numerous international biennales and collective exhibitions such as the *18th Biennale of Sydney: all our relations* (2012), *Identity Crisis: Authenticity, Attribution and Appropriation*, The Heckscher Museum of Art (2011), *Hope!* At Palais des Arts, Dinard (2010), *Iran Inside Out*, Chelsea Art Museum, NY (2009), Ludwig Museum, Koblenz (2005), and *Persian Gardens* Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (2004).

Prior to going to Academy of Fine Arts, she studied German literature in Frankfurt. While painting and visual arts are her main practices, lyricism is the reigning characteristic in her works, whether it is painting, sculpture, writing, installation or a combination of animation, video and painting. On her video paintings, the artist states: "It is a blow of magic with which invisible creatures that had no shape or form appear from the depth of a mysterious abstract scenery, full of life and charged with untold narratives, expanding the painting as an elastic structure in time, material and space, then disappear, leaving behind a silent still painting, yet now charged with the mythical, the imagined, and creating colossal spaces for fantasies."

Prior to studying Fine Arts, she studied German literature in Frankfurt, and had subsequently worked extensively on the works of the German playwright Bertoldt Brecht. In her literary career, she has translated seven of Brecht's works from German to Farsi, works by Natalia Ginzburg from Italian to Farsi and Edita Morris's *Flowers of Hiroshima*. In 2003 her *auto-fiction* "The Jackal Came" was published in Iran, narrating the lives of three generation of women against the socio-political background of the Iranian society. Critics have described as a genre between painting and essay.

Her works can be found in major private and public collections such as the collections of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Los Angeles County

Museum of Art (IACMA), The Farjam Collection, Dubai, Demenga Public Collection in Basel, Deutsche Bank, Commerz Bank in Germany, Christie's collection, NY, National Museum of Fine Arts, La Valetta, Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH), and Dia Art Foundation, Delhi.

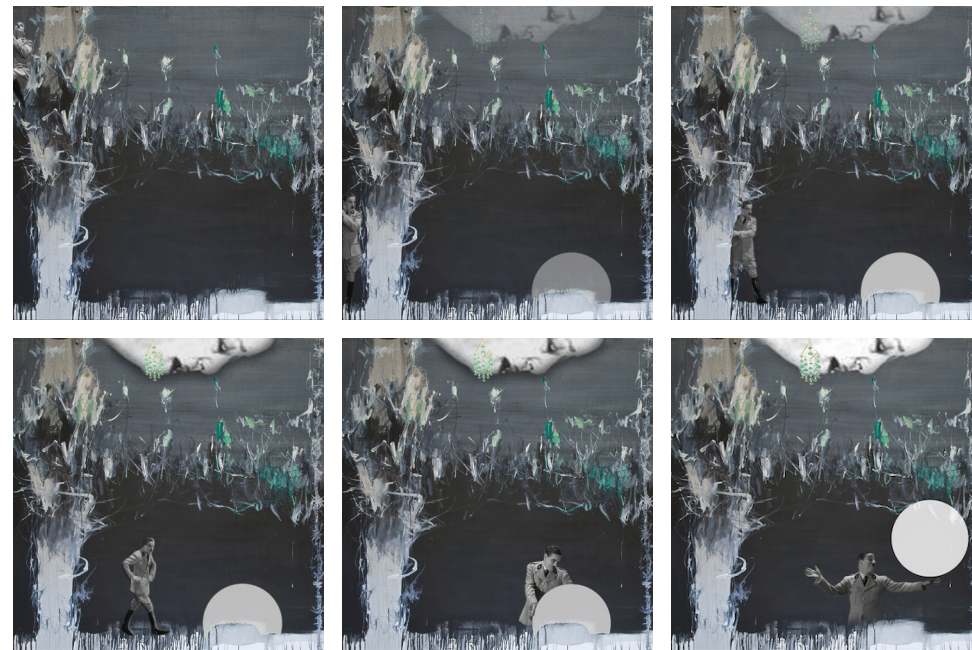
A LIFETIME  
OF  
CREATIVITY

VIDEO ART

In her more recent works from the past ten years, Farideh Lashai employed video projection on her canvas paintings as her new medium. The artist explained that the video helps expand the painting as an elastic structure in time, material and space. It creates a space for articulating the hidden narratives in her painting. It is also a bridge for her between painting and theater as one of the mediums that the artist practiced under the auspices of Bertoldt Brecht in East Germany.

In this current work that was created in the heat of the Arab spring and the Egyptian revolt, Chaplin appears in a scene of *The Great Dictator*. The face of Um Kalthoum, the Grande Dame of Arab music rises on top of the painting, majestic as a moon with her renowned emerald earrings hanging. The eyes of the singer are closed, as if she is ignoring the minuscule dictator under her watch dancing in excitement to the tune of her song "El Amal", meaning "hope, desire." The desire of Chaplin playing Hitler is different to what the singer is preaching. He has the desire to devour the world, to make it his own, to possess it, as he plays with the globe bouncing it with his bum, touching the moon and Um Kalthoum's earring. In a final act as the music comes to an end; *The Great Dictator's* sweet dream, the globe bursts in his hands, leaving him empty handed. The majestic face of Um Kalthoum calmly fades away, leaving a still painting behind, an abstract painting that is now charged with meaning.

The work is not a reflection on political affiliations as such, but a greater statement about art, and how it supersedes and overwhelms power. It is a commentary on power of art, its grandiose and eternal character, and how it influences identity of nations. The work was made by using 2500 still images that were cut from *The Great Dictator* and animating a photograph of Um Kalthoum taken from the internet to sync her lip movement to her song "El Amal".



#### El Amal

Projected animated images on painting,  
acrylic on canvas and sound  
(distance of the projector is variable)  
(AP2/2, animated projection is  
an edition of 7, Painting is unique)  
200x200 cm.  
2011

Her present installation is inspired by Pamuk's tale of a tree destined to enter the pages of a great manuscript in late 16th Century, which is consequently lost and left as a solitary image. Lashai is fascinated by the multiplicity of potential meanings the tree could have been given had it arrived at its destination instead of being purloined en route. Following Pamuk's text, through three simultaneous video projections on three sets of paintings, the viewer becomes aware of various hypothetical scenarios in which the tree could have featured and its role therein. The video is made of animated photographic images that move and morph into one another. The technique is meant to preserve painting as the dominating form, and for the photography and animation to merge into Lashai's paintings.

In the first scenario, the Master Storyteller is lying under a tree pointing at another panel where writings appear on the wall: "Coffee is a sin, coffee is a vice". In the coffee house the tree tells the tale of the Cross-Eyed Nedret Hoja of Sivas and The Giant who were both taking shelter beneath it. Nedret Hoja is captivated by the trees tensile branches, while the Giant compassionately kisses Nedret's ears and whispers into it: "Coffee is a sin, coffee is a vice". In Lashai's installation we observe the two characters hiding behind her painting of the Tree, their bare legs visible, while the Devil's instructions to ban coffee appear on the wall.

On another wall Qays, the future "Majnun" when he first sees his Lady Beloved Leyli is projected on a painting of the "Tree of Life" from illuminated pages, while in the other panel his Lady's countenance offers a pomegranate that bursts in her hand, its seeds falling on the ground connecting the two lovers symbolically. When night falls they fall asleep together enwrapped in Leili's veil and in their dream an image of femininity borrowed from Manet's *le déjeuner sur l'herbe* appears in Majnun's embrace. The dog in colossal dimensions passes through their dream, recounting the story of their divine love.

Our raconteur then roams the fields of text, and hides behind the meaning of the Tree: a thin golden silhouette of its edifice adorning the mantra of "I don't want to be a tree, I want to be it's meaning". In the panel next to it Western and Eastern imagery are juxtaposed against one another. Edouard Manet's, *le déjeuner sur l'herbe*, a painting that sparked massive controversy after its completion in 1863 due to its depiction of a naked woman casually lunching with two male figures, slowly morphs into an image of



I Don't Want to be a Tree:  
I Want to be its Meaning  
 Oil on Canvas, 6 pieces with projector  
 (number 1 from an edition of 3)  
 200x160cm  
 2008



three identically placed figures, with the exception that they are Eastern and that the woman who was once naked is now clothed. Amidst this metamorphosis, we notice several keenly observed insights. The figures are contemporary people posing in eternal positions. The Master Story Teller we notice is laying in the same pose as the poet posed in Manet's painting to which it morphs. The contemporary man in the middle becomes Majnun in another panel. In his dreams, Majnun embraces the image of femininity borrowed from Manet's painting, which then slowly transforms to the contemporary Iranian woman in this panel. And the lady bravely looking at us is Leyli in another scenario.

Recalling the conceptual format of ancient illuminated manuscripts, Lashai places her trees amidst a scrolling textual background. In all the panels the projected images in combination with the text and the paintings refer to imagery and narratives in Pamuk's *My Name is Red*. Nezami's poetry on Leyli and Majnun are written in Farsi in illegible electrified lines on one panel. Other references such as the name of the art piece "I don't want to be a tree, I want to be it's meaning" and "coffee is a sin, coffee is a vice" are repeated, and serve as the structure and a form of surface treatment on other panels.

The work as a whole acts as a confluence of various meditations on the nature of artistic depiction, the contrast between appearance and essence, and the relationship between objects and their environment, all done within a visual makeup rich in cultural imagery and literary ornaments. Ultimately, in the present work, Lashai goes beyond the realm of mere depiction, and instead provides us with a tangible sensual experience that guides the viewer through a reflective yet playful journey exploring the essence of the artistic spirit and one whose humor and buoyancy provides a satirical edge to an otherwise profound subject matter.



Le Déjeuner au "Park Mellat"

Projected Video on Oil and  
Acrylic on Canvas  
210x260 cm.  
2008

# PAINTINGS



Untitled  
Oil on Canvas  
150x100 cm.  
1997



Untitled  
Oil on Canvas  
100x79 cm.  
2005



Untitled (Landscape)  
Acrylic on Canvas in 2 parts  
100x200 cm.  
2006



Untitled  
Acrylic and Oil on Canvas  
200×100 cm.  
2007



Untitled  
Acrylic on Canvas  
90×149 cm.  
2007



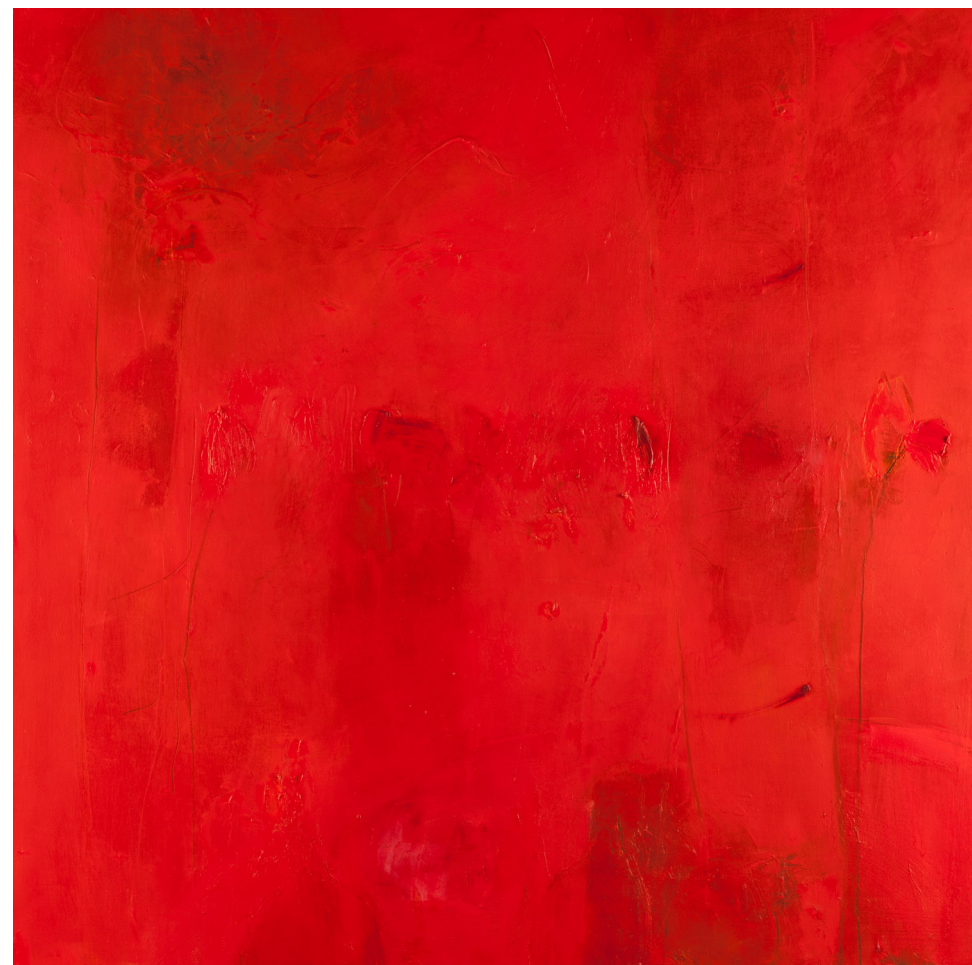
Untitled  
Acrylic on Canvas  
200×100 cm.  
2007



Abstract  
Oil on canvas  
148×90 cm.  
2007



Untitled  
Mixed Media  
130×180 cm.  
2007



Untitled  
Oil on canvas  
90×90 cm.  
2007



Mossadegh  
Oil on Canvas  
190×90 cm.  
2009



Mossadegh  
Oil on Canvas  
270×200 cm.  
2009

Farideh Lashai | 1944 | Rasht, Iran  
A graduate of Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna

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Institutional Collections (selected)

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Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran  
Los Angeles County Museum (LACMA)  
Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH)  
Farjam Collection, Dubai  
Devi Art Foundation in New Delhi  
Deutsche Bank, Berlin, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Germany  
Credit Suisse, Geneva, Dubai offices  
National Museum of Fine Arts, Valetta, Malta  
Demenga Galleries Public Collection, Basel, Switzerland

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Solo Exhibitions (selected)

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2013 Between the act/ And the motion/ Falls the Shadow, Art Dubai Projects, Art Dubai Catching The Moon, Book Launch and Exhibition, JAMM, Dubai

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2012 Between the act/ And the motion/ Falls the Shadow, curated by Ali Bakhtiari presented by Magic of Persia, Saatchi Gallery, London

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2010 Rabbit in Wonderland, Isabelle van Den Eynde, Dubai, UAE

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2009 Rafia Galery, Damascus, Syria  
i dont want to be a tree, i want to be its meaning, Art Dubai, Dubai, UAE

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2008 i dont want to be a tree, i want to be its meaning, Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair, Istanbul, Turkey

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2001 Farideh Lashai, Cultural Center, Barcelona, Spain

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1998 Espace Galant, Avignon, France  
Goletsan Gallery, Tehran, Iran

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1997 Château de Lascours, Laudun, France

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1996 Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran

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1990 Hill Gallery, London, UK  
University of Berkeley, Berkeley, USA  
Libertas Gallery, Dusseldorf, Germany

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1987 National Museum of Fine Arts, La Valletta, Malta  
Demenga Gallery, Basel, Switzerland  
Golestan Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
Classic Gallery, Tehran, Iran

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1984 Clark Gallery, Bakersfield, USA

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1977 Cultural Center of the National Iranian Oil Company, Khoozestan, Iran

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1975 Iran America Society, Tehran, Iran

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1973 Sayhoon Gallery, Tehran, Iran

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1968 Studio Rosenthal, Selb, Germany  
Gallerie Duomo, Milan, Italy

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Group Exhibitions (selected)

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2012 18th Biennale of Sydney: all our relations, curated by Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster  
The Elephant in the Dark, Devi Art Foundation, Delhi, India  
Curated by Amirali Ghasemi  
Art Abu Dhabi  
ARCO, Madrid, Edward Nahem Gallery  
Zona MACO, Mexico City, Edward Nahem Gallery

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2011 Identity Crisis: Authenticity, Attribution and Appropriation, The Heckscher Museum of Art

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2010 Hope, Palais des Arts, Dinard, France  
Curated by Ashok Adiceam  
Art Dubai, Isabelle van Den Eynde Gallery

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2009 Iran Inside Out, Chelsea Art Museum, NY, NY  
curated by Sam Bardouil  
Across the Persian Gulf, Hong Kong  
International Art Fair, curated by Charles Merewether  
Movers and Shakers in Iranian Contemporary Art, Leila Taghinia Milani Heller Gallery, NY, NY, curated by Laila Diba  
Contemporary Istanbul Art Fair, Istanbul, Turkey  
Abu Dhabi Art Fair

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2008	Art Paris Abu Dhabi, Abu Dhabi, UAE Conference of the Birds Exhibition, Berardi & Sagharchi Projects, London, UK Creek Art Fair, Dubai, UAE
2007	Dar Al Fonoun, Kuwait City, Kuwait Warsaw Museum, Warsaw, Poland
2006	Cultural Foundation, Abu Dhabi, UAE
2005	Ludwig Museum, Koblenz, Germany
2004	“Persian Gardens” Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran
2003	Liu-Haisu Museum, Shanghai Yan-Huang Museum, Beijing, China Kokkola Museum, Kokkola, Finland Festival Femmes en Iran, Evry City Hall, Evry, France Caisa CulturalCenter, Helsinki, Finland Sala Uno Gallery, Rome, Italy
2002	Iranian Contemporary, Christie’s King Street, London, UK Villa del Cardinale, Naples, Italy Fabien Fryns Fine Arts, Marbella, Spain Palazo Reale di Napoli, Naples, Italy Cultural Center, Berlin, Germany
2001-2003	Traveling exhibition “A Breeze from the Gardens of Persia, New Art from Iran”, Meridian International Center, Washington DC, New York, Belleville Illinois, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Texas, Florida USA
2000	Museum of Fine Arts, Caracas, Venezuela, Rome Expo, Rome, Italy International Drawing, Biennial, Tehran
1997	Shilpakala Academy, Biennial, Dacca, Bangladesh
1978	Art Basel, Switzerland
1977	Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran
1971	International Exhibition of Tehran (as a member of the Austrian Pavilion), Tehran, Iran