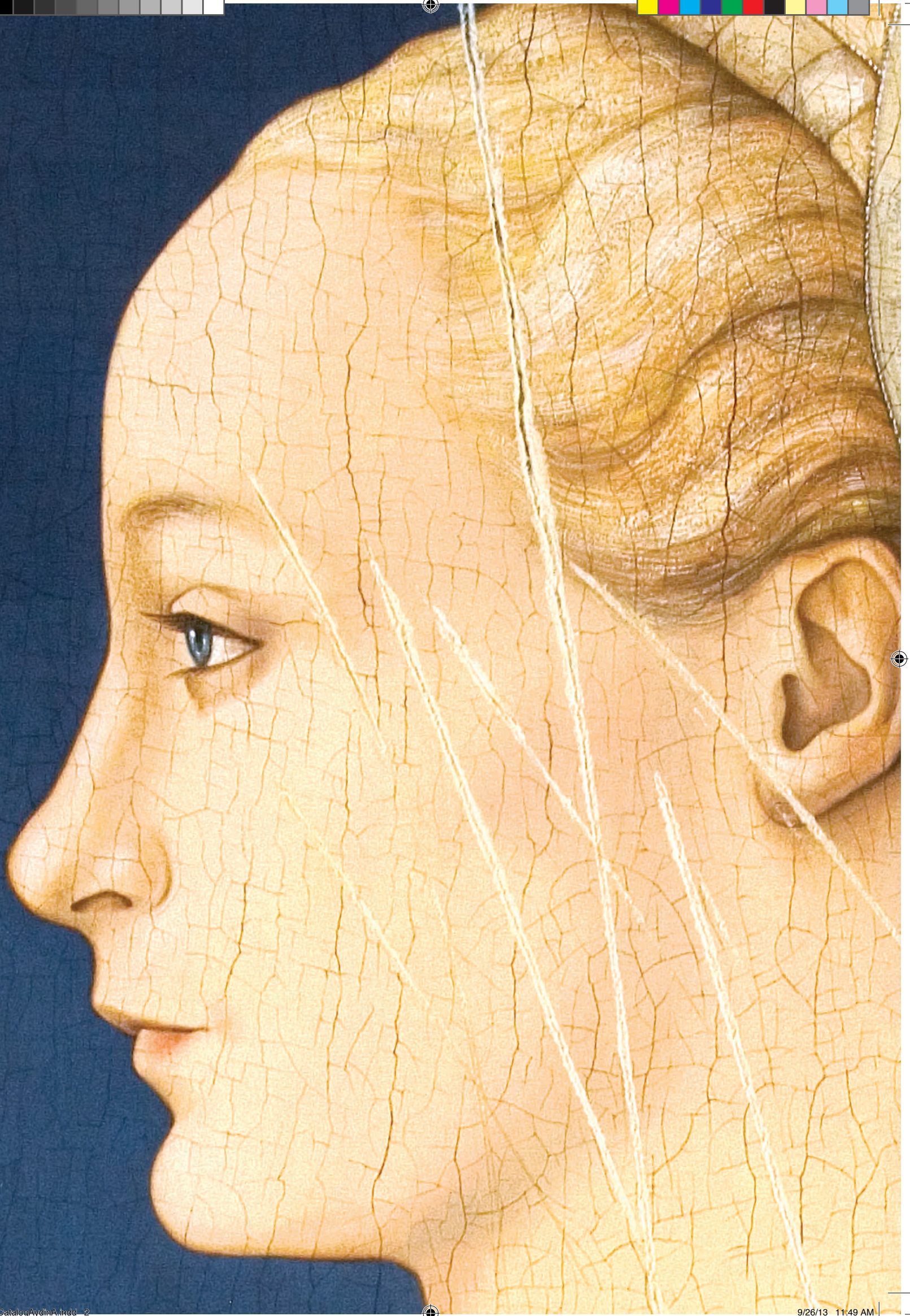


A SELECTION OF WORKS BY
AYDIN AGHDASHLOO
 FROM THE FARJAM FOUNDATION

THE
 FARJAM
 FOUNDATION







“MEMORIES^{OF} DESTRUCTION”





PREFACE

FARHAD FARJAM

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ALI REZA SAMI AZAR

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The Farjam Foundation fosters a 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 vision.

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 section spans the entire history of Islam, comprising a multitude of art forms from manuscripts on science, poetry and mathematics to textiles, metal works, paintings, sculptures, lacquers and fine carpets.

Uniquely, an extensive section of The Farjam Collection is devoted to modern and contemporary art from the Middle East, celebrating leading artists such as Abbas Kiarostami, Shirin Neshat and Farhad Moshiri, Monir Fatmi, Abdul Nasser Gahrem, among many others. As broad as it excels in depth, the international art collection includes principal figures of modern art history, from Pablo Picasso and Willem de Kooning to Alexander Calder and Andy Warhol, alongside masters of Contemporary art such as Anselm Kiefer, Jeff Koons and Andreas Gursky.

Showcasing artwork drawn from the Collection, The Farjam Foundation's flagship DIFC space houses a series of alternating thematic exhibitions accompanied by a broad range of educational offerings, including lectures, panel discussions, workshops and an annual "Art Camp" that provide a unique opportunity for children to interact directly with art and heritage.

In addition, The Farjam Foundation works with leading universities, colleges and cultural organizations including Zayed University in the UAE, the British Museum and the Prince's School of Traditional Arts in the UK, and UNESCO worldwide. These partnerships take the Foundation's vision forward by engaging a broader audience in the understanding and appreciation of Islamic art and culture.

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.

For regular updates on our exhibitions, events and programmes, please explore our website or follow us on Facebook.

All exhibitions and programmes are free and open to the public.





The Farjam Foundation





It is with great pleasure and honour that we present “Memories of Destruction,” the inspirational series of works by Aydin Aghdashloo. Known as “Maestro” in Iran, Aydin is one of the foremost international experts in Islamic arts. He has played a fundamentally important role in conserving the Middle Eastern ancient artistic civilization, while successfully connecting its rich heritage to modern times. Throughout his multifaceted career as an artist, art historian, critic, curator and teacher, Aydin has been a great source of inspiration for contemporary artists who have enjoyed his popular classes over several decades. It is rare to witness a prominent artist connect the technical expertise of an ancient art history with a contemporary vision. This is what makes Aydin’s work truly exceptional.

My relationship with Aydin spans 25 years. It springs from a shared passion for Persian miniatures and Islamic art. Aydin’s vast knowledge and expertise have enhanced my journey as an art collector on both a personal and professional level. Our interest in the cultural history of the Middle East forged a strong friendship and common goal - to conserve and commemorate the past. We strive to encourage and achieve the successful fusion of ancient and modern through artistic and cultural practices. We both believe that art can be used to identify and express the intricacies of a remarkable past and an ever-changing present, as well as linking the Eastern and Western diasporas.

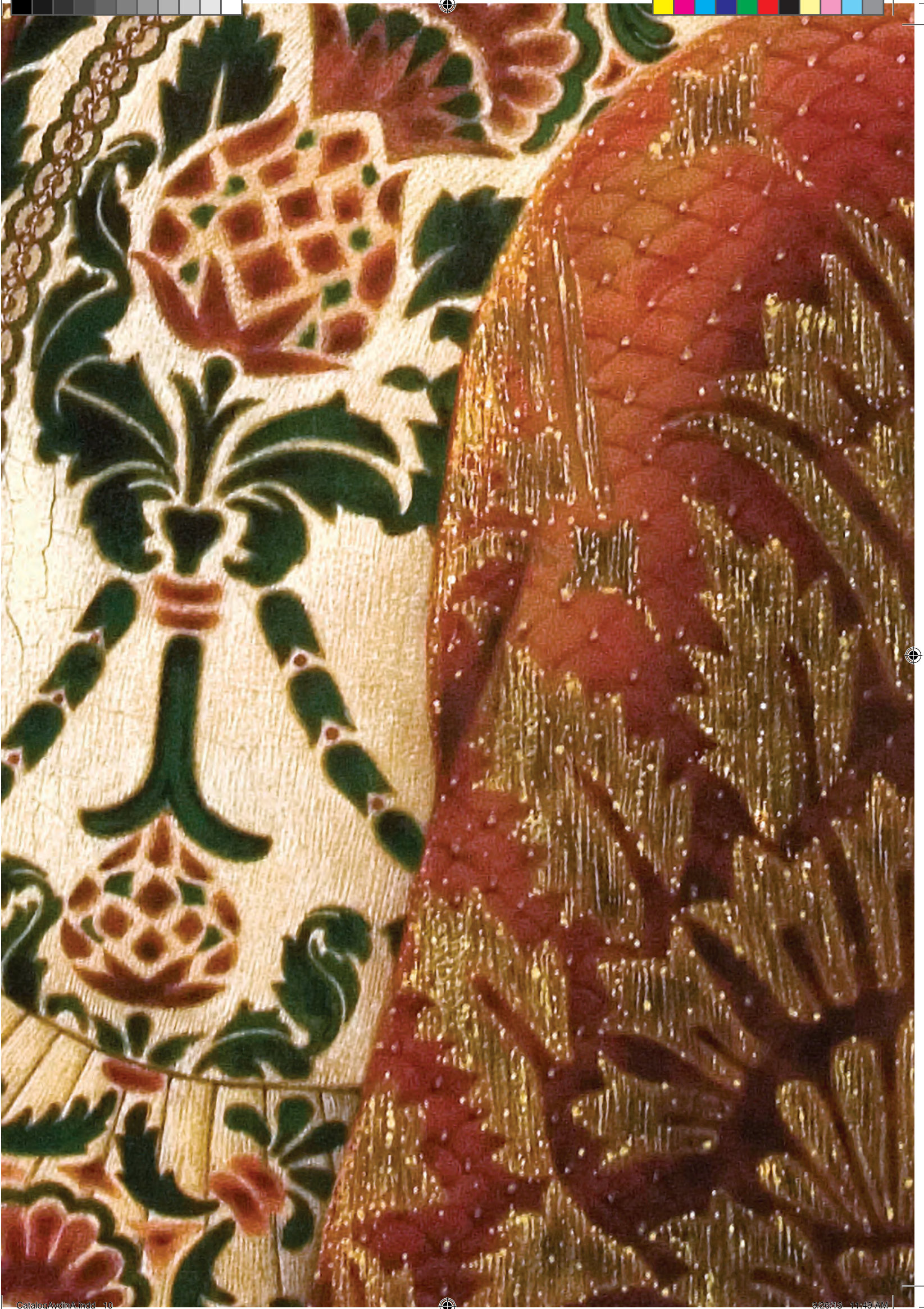
“Memories of Destruction” is an immensely important body of work, which exposes the inevitable destruction resulting from the transformation of the human condition. Combining classic Persian rhetoric with Western overture, the stark juxtaposition evokes a philosophical commentary on the inalienable truth of our existence in this world. Influenced by the mysticism of poetry and philosophies of the Middle East, Aydin’s work references the superficiality of our tangible state and alludes to concepts of eternity and higher states of consciousness.

I wish you an enjoyable journey through Aydin’s world.

Farhad Farjam









Aghdasloo's ironic subversion of a revered western original finds parallels in contemporary Chinese art, for example in work by the sculptor Sui Jianguo (b. 1956), who teaches at the Central Academy in Beijing. Sui's series "Creases in Clothes" features iconic Greek and Renaissance classical statues, such as the "Discobolus of Myron", clad in flapping Mao suits. In both cases the artists concerned adopt a critical, distancing, deliberately ironic attitude when confronted with revered western traditions. Or, at least, when confronted with the idea that non-western cultures must inevitably follow in the footsteps of the West.

Edward Lucie-Smith

Author of "Art Today" (1995)







EMBODYING LOST GLORY

Shading into the debate on lost heritage has been a growing interest in Iran ever since the country embarked on modernization. It always leads to the question of identity, which is widely reflected on the contemporary artistic practices. The hybrid works of Aghdashloo passionately replicate the artistic achievement of the past and thus maintain an explicit political edge. They evidently have an element of polemic, which points to an increasing skepticism about the rhetoric of modernism, as opposed to the age of classicism and its fundamental values. Irritated by the dogmatism of the alleged traditionalism, adherent by the Islamic government, he also began to doubt altogether the sense of any artistic practice oriented purely towards the old style of painting.

Art could hardly have been more charged with political purposes than it was during the years before and after the Islamic Revolution in Iran. Aghdashloo's most famous works of this period, which present of his images through tearing, crumpling, burning and sometimes scratching. Looking at his series of so-called Memories of Destruction, in which a copied work of an old master is taken as the subject for a contemporary painting, one sees his response to the discontents brewing in the campaign of Iranian artists and intellectuals suspicion of socio-political situation of the country. In the latter works of this period, he further intensifies his sarcastic language by

supplying his images with silhouetted faceless body which evidently lacks any sense of identity and orientation.

Much of Aghdashloo's works embody his profound fascination in the glamorous tradition of Persian art crystallized in miniature paintings, and sometimes calligraphy too. In this sense, he always appears as an admirer, rather than a follower, of the old masters, whom he loved so much, though in his fine details and subtle brushes he has proved to deserve the credit of a real master. Quite apart from inheriting Persian traditional painting, his vast knowledge of modern culture and traditional art forms has served him well.

In his important period of Memories of Destruction, Aghdashloo showed interest in making reference to Renaissance masters, which was mostly singled out by the great Italian painter Sandro Botticelli. Here, charm and sophistication of classical works are distracted by his annoying attempt to partially ruin them. With injuring and disfiguring these masterpieces, he discloses his discontent with the annihilation of the values in our era. To achieve this, he somehow emulates all the subtle touches, fine hues and nuance of the form, down to the last details, and leaves us with a deep feeling of frustration and bitterness arisen out of witnessing our heritage being damaged. The images are usually set against an





ambiguous background, mostly a bitterly cold winter which seems dreadfully endless, in order to make a strong and touching statement that can be interpreted both culturally and politically. In this way, Aghdashloo somehow becomes the narrator of our historical injuries, as he enthusiastically devotes his life to enhancing our cultural awareness.

In the following period, Botticelli and other European old masters are replaced by Reza Abbasi, the prominent court painter of early Safavid dynasty back in early sixteenth century, as well as other Persian artists of the same caliber. Half-burnt or crumpled miniatures, copied from the original works by the masters and suspended in the air, are now ironically set against a smoky backdrop which is basically abstract, but resembles the realm of dream and the province of surrealism. Embellished with fine illuminations and calligraphy, the stunning works of this period are considerably more explicit in their political connotations and social readings. The artist's preoccupation with the lost glory of the past is not merely intended to pay homage to his mentors, but to express a sense of devastation derived from the cultural decline and dissolution of values.

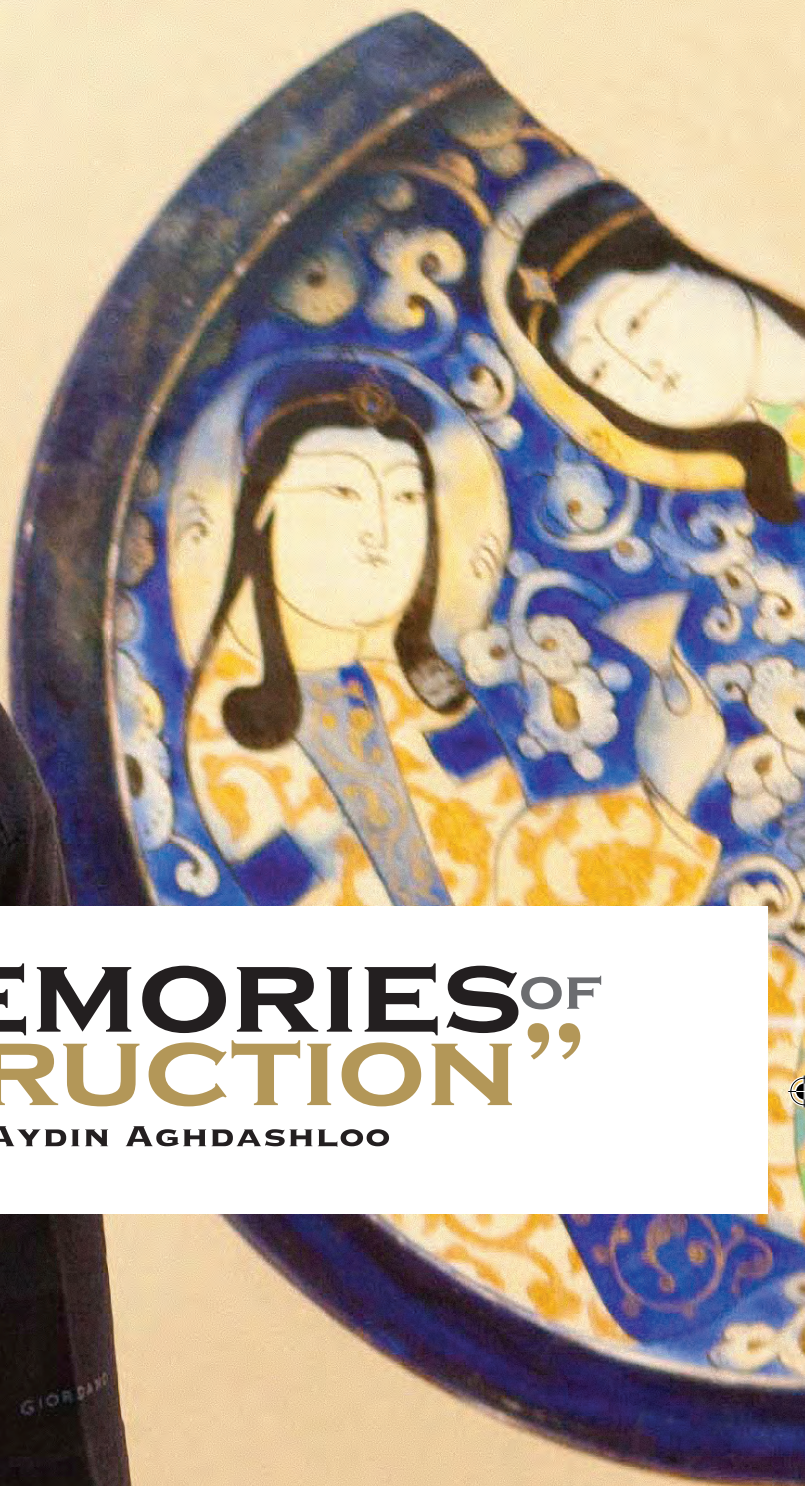
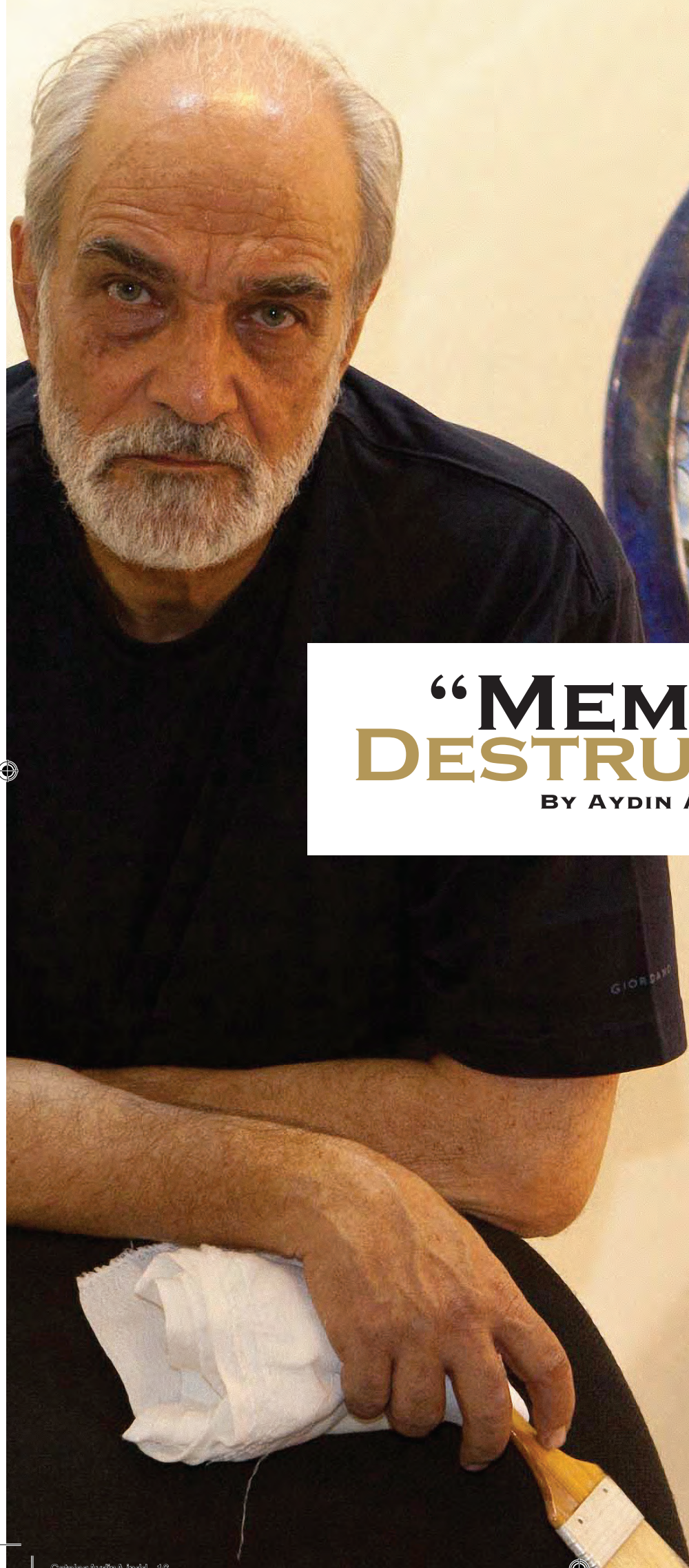
Aghdashloo has rarely presented his works in a solo exhibition and in Iran just Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art once had a chance to display his illustrations in 2003. Of course several paintings by him, mostly from the Museum's permanent collection, were repeatedly exhibited in different group shows. As director of the Tehran MoCA, it was one of my ambitions to present Aghdashloo's retrospective in order to provide a chance for all Iranian art lovers to view his brilliant works of different periods and various series. However, having had a strong market, his works have broadly been distributed all over the world, so that collecting them for such a big show seemed difficult. Hence, the current exhibition is indeed one of the rare opportunities to see some remarkable works by one of the Iran's most prominent contemporary artists. He is indeed a luminary in various fields and is deeply respected by the Iranian nation, not only as a celebrated artist but also as a great writer and distinguished art teacher.

A. R. Sami-Azar

Former Director of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art (1998-2005)







“MEMORIES^{OF} DESTRUCTION”

BY AYDIN AGHDASHLOO







wildly in their descent towards a ground of sharp pieces of wood awaiting their arrival. Exquisite bowls with embossed Kufic inscriptions and glazed turquoise hues are depicted falling against desert storms and deep skies, their shattered fragments hovering across the ground.

In some instances, the greatest achievements of Persian culture are treated with negligence and contempt. Pieces of a fine miniature lay beside a worthless piece of rock, or another is pasted onto the hearty stalk of a pruned hedge, its illuminations shredded with the passage of time. These depressed images come from the times I've witnessed historical injustice, and sadly there are many more cases to report.

In *Orientalis*, the artworks symbolize the cycle of life itself— birth, beauty, youth and joyfulness, turning to maturity, aging, and the harrowing moment of death. This vision commenced with paintings by the masters of the Renaissance. The first work in the series was a recreation of a portrait by Sandro Botticelli, in which I removed the face and in its place, portrayed the landscape. After that painting, conversion and destruction ensued and I reconstructed masterpieces from art history with every detail, decay and varnish crack, and then destroyed them violently. This style developed into a metaphor of what the natural life cycle does to the youthful beauty of growing beings. In some works the destructions happen by changing and transforming the painting itself, and in others by actually tearing it, scratching it with a knife, or even burning parts of the piece. The extent of damage depends on my inner emotions at the time. In moments of dark and bitter crises, the paintings were almost completely annihilated.

My visual world is typically sad and envious. And so the statements are not simply flat. And so it is judgmental, and looks at death and destruction bitterly and with sorrow. It is not easy to demolish a perfect, skillful, precise artwork, yet I do it only to participate in the moment of destruction and to reach that finality. Burying a knife in a beautiful painting and twisting it on behalf of death, it is as if I stab myself. A painter, much like a journalist, does not merely report; he visualizes the future with hopes of a world in which justice, truth, equity, and compassion are absolute and vital. If I don't have the chance to witness this in my own lifetime, perhaps my children will.

Aydin Aghdashloo

September, 2013





«Memories of Destruction» began in the 1970s, when I learned to view the world in its full historicity. Whatever I created in this genre referred to a beautiful past laced with sadness, since I realized that the past is endlessly linked with our future and all beings will inevitably cease to exist. Quoting «destruction» and its «historical memories» has formed the bedrock of my works over last forty years.

«Memories of Destruction» covers universal themes, from magnificent objects and excellent paintings, to young and proud faces that believe glorious times will continue for eternity, and those wrinkled, crumpled, broken and ruined visages that are signs of our unavoidable future. While many pretend to be oblivious to this truth, like the oracle at the Temple of Delphi, the painter's brush bitterly reminds them.

I spent my youth collecting antique artworks - as far as my energy and money would allow. I purchased half-destroyed calligraphic pieces, miniatures, and hand written manuscripts, and would restore and revive their beauty. I found great joy in doing so, more than I would have in the standard investing and collecting. Collecting connected me with the magnificent soul of Persian culture, bruised and hurt as it had been throughout history, though ever so glorious and regal. Through these artworks, I was deeply connected to this rich cultural soul.

My collections were distributed and went from hand-to-hand over the years— but my connection with each object grew more unbreakably strong. Their presence became so powerfully engrained in my life that it determined the context of my own works. I restored many miniatures in this period, and witnessing their rebirth invoked a reverse process in my own paintings. Masterpieces that I restored and resurrected became once again crumpled and torn in my paintings.

The highest quality depictions of flowers and birds from three centuries ago, which decorated lacquered pen-boxes and mirror cases, succumbed to a deadly fall as the leaves and branches upon which they roosted had vanished. Elegant and expertly illuminated calligraphies, once the prized possession of an important library are torn apart and burnt, or tossed into a dark sky, twisting





ORIENTALS







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Crumpled Miniature

74 x 53.5 cm

Watercolour, Crayons And Ink On Paper

Executed In 1999









In some instances, the greatest achievements of Persian culture are treated with negligence and contempt. Pieces of a fine miniature lay beside a worthless piece of rock, or another is pasted onto the hearty stalk of a pruned hedge, its illuminations shredded with the passage of time.

Memories of Destruction

72 x 53 cm

Watercolour and gouache on paper

Executed in 2000





'Memories of Destruction' covers universal themes, from magnificent objects and excellent paintings, to young and proud faces that believe glorious times will continue for eternity, and those wrinkled, crumpled, broken and ruined visages that are signs of our unavoidable future.

Memories of Destruction

80 x 60 cm

Gouache, watercolour, brush and
India ink and gold leaf on thick paper

Executed in 1988









Elegant and expertly illuminated calligraphies, once the prized possession of an important library are torn apart and burnt, or tossed into a dark sky, twisting wildly in their descent towards a ground of sharp pieces of wood awaiting their arrival.

Falling Calligraphy

75 x 55 cm

Gouache, watercolour and gold paint
on paper and gold leaf on thick paper

Executed in 2001





In Orientals, the artworks symbolize the cycle of life itself— birth, beauty, youth and joyfulness, turning to maturity, aging, and the harrowing moment of death.

Falling Calligraphy II

74 x 53 cm

Gouache on board

Executed in 2004









My collections were distributed and went from hand-to-hand over the years- but my connection with each object grew more unbreakably strong. Their presence became so powerfully engrained in my life that it determined the context of my own works.

Broken Tile

74 x 54 cm

Gouache on board

Executed in 2003





Exquisite bowls with embossed Kufic inscriptions and glazed turquoise hues are depicted falling against desert storms and deep skies, their shattered fragments hovering across the ground.

Memories of Destruction

77 x 57 cm

Gouache on paper

Executed in 1980









The highest quality depictions of flowers and birds from three centuries ago, which decorated lacquered pen-boxes and mirror cases, succumbed to a deadly fall as the leaves and branches upon which they roosted had vanished.

Untitled

90.6 x 67.5 cm
Gouache On Cardboard
Executed In 1993





*A painter, much like a journalist,
does not merely report; he visualizes
the future with hopes of a world
in which justice, truth, equity, and
compassion are absolute and vital.*

Lilies

75 x 55 cm

Gouache and watercolour on paper

Executed In 1995







Darvish Khan (Dyptich)

69 x 51 cm each

Contemporary middle east paintings

Gouache on paper

Executed in 1978







OCCIDENTALS







*This style developed into a metaphor
of what the natural life cycle does to
the youthful beauty of growing beings.*

Triumph of Death

75 x 55 cm

Gouache, pastel and bandage
collage on cardboard

Executed in 1972









*Burying a knife in a beautiful
painting and twisting it on behalf
of death, it is as if I stab myself.*

Memories of Destruction

79 x 59 cm
Gouache on board
Executed in 1978





In some works the destructions happen by changing and transforming the painting itself, and in others by actually tearing it, scratching it with a knife, or even burning parts of the piece. The extent of damage depends on my inner emotions at the time. In moments of dark and bitter crises, the paintings were almost completely annihilated.

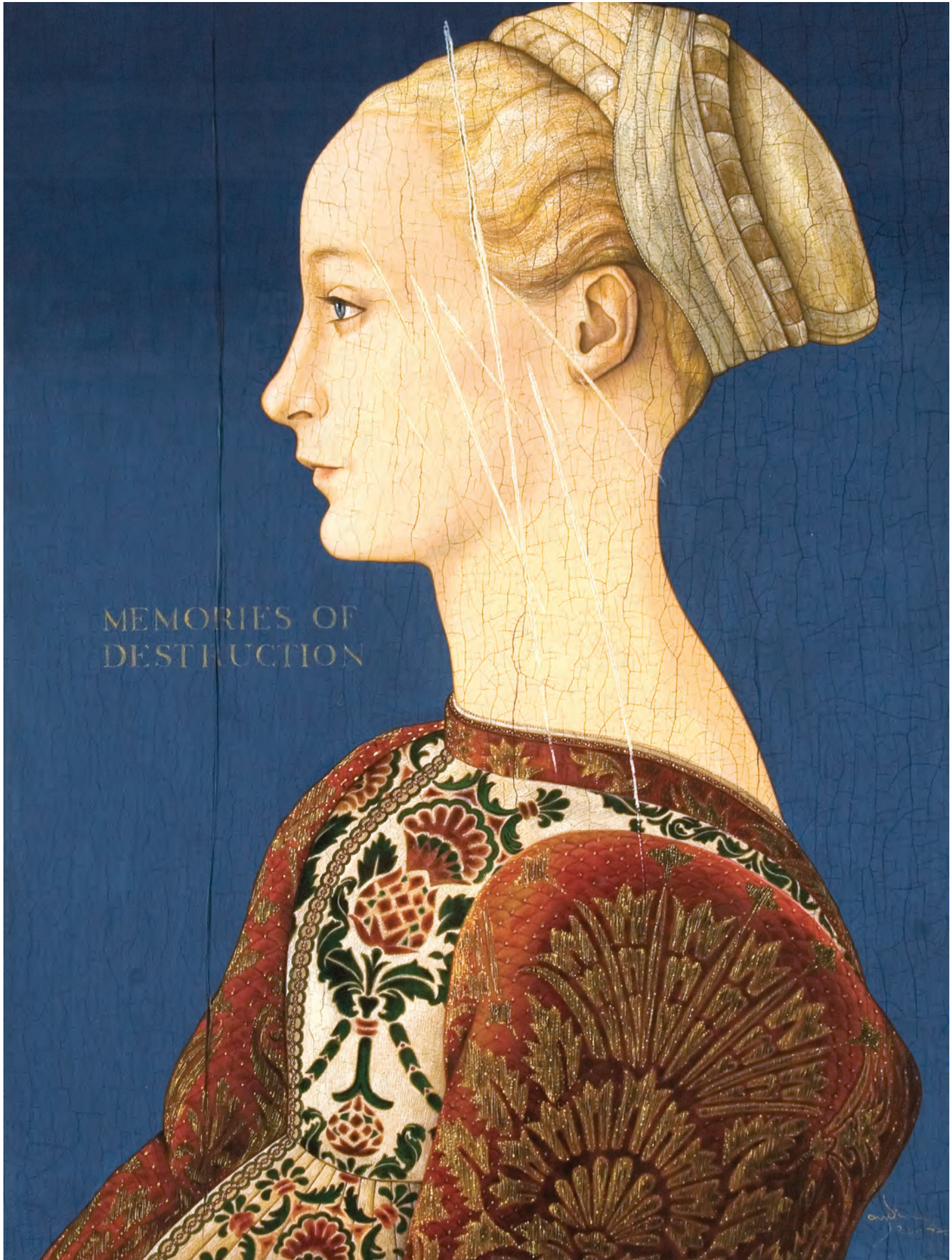
Memories of Destruction

76 x 57 cm

Gouache on cardboard

Executed in 2004









It is not easy to demolish a perfect, skillful, precise artwork, yet I do it only to participate in the moment of destruction and to reach that finality.

1984

75 x 55.5 cm
Acrylic on paper
Executed in 2005





*My visual world is typically sad and envious.
And so the statements are not simply flat.
And so it is judgmental, and looks at death
and destruction bitterly and with sorrow.*

Untitled

(From The Memories Of Destruction Series)

76 x 58 cm

Acrylic on paper

Executed in 2010











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