

# Culture Today

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## Ghass searches for purity



■ Ghass Rouzkhosh poses beside one of his works at B21 Gallery in Dubai. Rouzkhosh, who had an idyllic childhood in Shiraz, Iran, says his life changed dramatically after the Iraq-Iran war

PICTURES BY XAVIER WILSON

For the past 16 years, Ghass Rouzkhosh has only painted in black, red and white to signify his time as a soldier during the Iran-Iraq war. The white represents purity but there is little of it in his paintings.

"Black is the dark side of man and ignorance, white is the purity of man but unfortunately I have not experienced that mentally or physically. Through my paintings, I am looking for this purity in society," he said in French, which was translated for us.

During his visit to Dubai this month for his first exhibition in a commercial gallery, at B21 Gallery, *Emirates Today* asked Rouzkhosh if he would ever paint in other colours.

"I will remember what you said and I will bring some oxygen to my painting," he said.

B21 Gallery director and curator Isabelle van den Eynde said the limited use of colours was a plus for Rouzkhosh's work.

"I think he has constrained himself to these three colours and in my opinion as a curator, I think that restriction and constraint pushes the artist further in his career."

The paintings are on canvas, using oil paint and

Rouzkhosh makes the wooden frames himself. Part of his unique style is painting on the frames, to show that art has no limit.

He describes himself as a "totally abstract" artist.

Rouzkhosh, 43, had an idyllic childhood, born in Mammassani in Iran and moving to Shiraz at the age of 12. But life changed dramatically during the Iran-Iraq war of 1980-1988.

Rouzkhosh's mother was desperate to get him out of Iran and sold her rings to pay for his trip.

On April 6, 1989, he was given his visa for France and he left Iran and has not gone back since then.

Although he would love to return to Iran, he believes it is dangerous for him, especially considering that one of his patrons is Farah Pahlavi, former empress of Iran and the wife of the late, deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

"I would love to see my family but on top of it being dangerous to go back to my country, I am not attracted by the country. I have no freedom of expression over there and that is not the way I want to live," he says sadly.

Rouzkhosh did not escape

As an artistic subject, war is both inspirational and saleable. **Maha Obeid** talks to soldier-turned-artist Ghass Rouzkhosh, whose work is inspired by the Iran-Iraq war

Iran unscathed - he was forced to do two years compulsory military service as a soldier and this has given his paintings a dark element.

Looking back at his time as a soldier, the wounds have

healed and he says it has given him humanity. "It's true that my paintings are hard and tough and violent but hope is always there."

For the past 10 years, Rouzkhosh has made his liv-

ing solely from his art, working out of his studio in Paris.

His younger brother Golan, who also lives in Paris, supports him by handling the gallery's communication and development.

Rouzkhosh, who spends most of his time painting, is adamant that a topic as shocking as war can be expressed in art. He says art is a form of communication.

"Men have a tendency to turn their back on other people and the purpose of my painting is to make visible what is invisible."

He says his art gives a voice to the victims who cannot speak. "I am lucky to be able to give an identity and volume to the sensations, the sensations that are immediately related to my own experience," said Rouzkhosh.

While his paintings sell for thousands of dollars today and are sought after by collectors, Rouzkhosh remembers a time when he had to make a living by creating window displays.

"It was only five degrees Celsius outside and I was making the Santas in the Christmas window displays of the shops.

"Unfortunately my Santa Claus was often a sad one and

sometimes I did not get paid." But he never went hungry, thanks to his family and friends. "I have always been supported by friends and family. Then suddenly people discovered my work and started to support me."

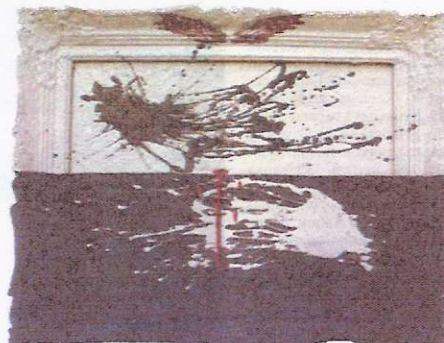
Despite the recent interest, Rouzkhosh holds on to his independence and integrity.

"I have been flattered by many people but when I started working with them I felt like I was in the desert, there was nothing, no connection between us. So, I can only exhibit and work with people who have believed in me, who I connect with."

■ Ghass Rouzkhosh runs at B21 Progressive Art Gallery in Al Quoz Three until October 14. For more details, call 04 340 3965 or log on to [www.b21gallery.com](http://www.b21gallery.com)

### THE PRICE OF FAME

At a Christie's Dubai auction in February 2007, Rouzkhosh' art topped the estimated price. *Enfant du Desert* (2006) sold for \$9600 (Dh35,232). *London I* (2006) sold for \$16,800 (Dh61,656). The works in his exhibition are priced between Dh40,800 and Dh306,000.



■ Rouzkhosh's work *Children of the Republic* on display in Dubai

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— BUT THEY MADE IT  
TO THE SUMMIT

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ARTIST GHASS  
DRAWS INSPIRATION  
FROM WAR

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**PLUS**

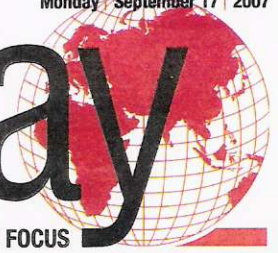
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Emirati engineers get to work on DubaiSat-1 SUPPLIED

## IT'S ALL SYSTEMS GO FOR DUBAI SATELLITE

Eight Emirati engineers begin work to design and build an orbiter in the UAE ahead of launch from Russia next year

**ANJANA SANKAR**  
NEWS REPORTER

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Dubai is designing and building its own satellite which will blast into space next year — propelling the UAE into the vanguard of advanced technological nations.

Eight Emirati engineers are currently developing and assembling *DubaiSat-1*, the country's first remote sens-

ing satellite. Its cameras and instruments will scan the Earth to gather vital information for use in urban and rural planning, mapping, transport and utility development, and a host of other purposes.

The trailblazing project is the brainchild of the Emirates Institution for Advanced Science and Technology, a Dubai Government initiative to foster innovation in

the UAE and the region. Technological support is being provided by South Korean company Satrec Initiative and the satellite will be launched from Russia.

"As the UAE continues to develop, there is a definite need for an accurate multipurpose information system," said the institution's Director-General Ahmed Obaid Al Mansoori. "*DubaiSat-1* will support

infrastructure development by providing information that is central to the decision-making process affecting urban and rural planning as well as transport, utilities and mapping, in addition to environmental applications such as monitoring pollution and detecting oil spills.

"*DubaiSat-1* will also help officials to manage natural disasters and promote

research and development, space science and other scientific disciplines.

"We will launch the satellite with Moscow's International Space Company Kosmotras, since Dubai does not have a launch facility."

Al Mansoori said phase one of the project — developing strategies, setting up budget and administrative structures — had already been completed.

Phase two involves developing prototype equipment and tools and mounting them on the satellite.

The final phase will include the testing of the satellite and its equipment and checks of its performance. This will be followed by a launch next year.

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