

Ghass

Time Out meets Ghass Rouzkhosh, a former Iranian soldier whose dark paintings, currently on show in Dubai, belie his enthusiastic and benevolent nature. Words Arsalan Mohammad

'In just about every one of my paintings,' says Ghass Rouzkhosh, 'there is at least a tiny bit of white – some purity and hope. I'm not only talking about war, in my work. Happiness and unhappiness is part of being human. We can't escape this.'

In the flesh, this tall, shaven-headed Iranian-born painter seems anything but unhappy. Bounding about the B21 Gallery like an over-excited puppy, half-eaten croissant in one giant paw frantically gesticulating at various paintings around the walls with the other, Rouzkhosh's excited and benevolent demeanor is firmly at odds with the impression left by his works. They're harsh, dark and raw – ranging from huge,

angry pieces, multi-layered and textured, to smaller, quirky pieces, illuminated with a simplicity and sense of humour that's a pleasure to see. They're all housed in purposefully customised frames, topped with Rouzkhosh's trademark signature – what appear to be a rather ragged pair of angel wings.

Ghass Rouzkhosh was born in Iran, to a liberal, artistic family. An early love of art was put on hold during the mid-80s when, at the age of 18, he reported for his mandatory national service and was sent to fight in the Iran-Iraq war. It was here that his world view fundamentally shifted, informing his artistic perspectives forever.

'I was part of the communications team, carrying heavy bags around,' he remembers. 'Out there in the battles, I questioned everything I had ever believed. It was like the end of the world. The sky was red, everywhere was desert, trees were burnt to the stump and everywhere was death. I could smell burnt flesh. You enter an alternative reality, one melts into time. I was only 18, a child – and I saw my friends dying, one after the other. You lose track of time and space. The eyes see, but the brain can't understand.'

Returning from the battlefield, Rouzkhosh found himself pursuing a new artistic direction. 'For 12 years after the war, I didn't set foot in a gallery. I cut myself off from the world, to develop a style. I felt I had no patience anymore, I couldn't just look at things and reproduce them. I needed to breathe.'

Rouzkhosh's approach to his work – a sort of plaintive honesty – has paid off handsomely. Today, this espresso-guzzling chap works industriously at his Paris studio, exploring the depths of human suffering and endurance. 'You must dig to find the truth!' he exclaims. 'The truth is inside.' Here's Rouzkhosh on just a few of his paintings currently being shown in Dubai...

B21 Gallery (04 340 3965), Al Quoz 3, near The Courtyard. Open Sat-Thu 11am-7pm.



Zig Zag 1 + 2

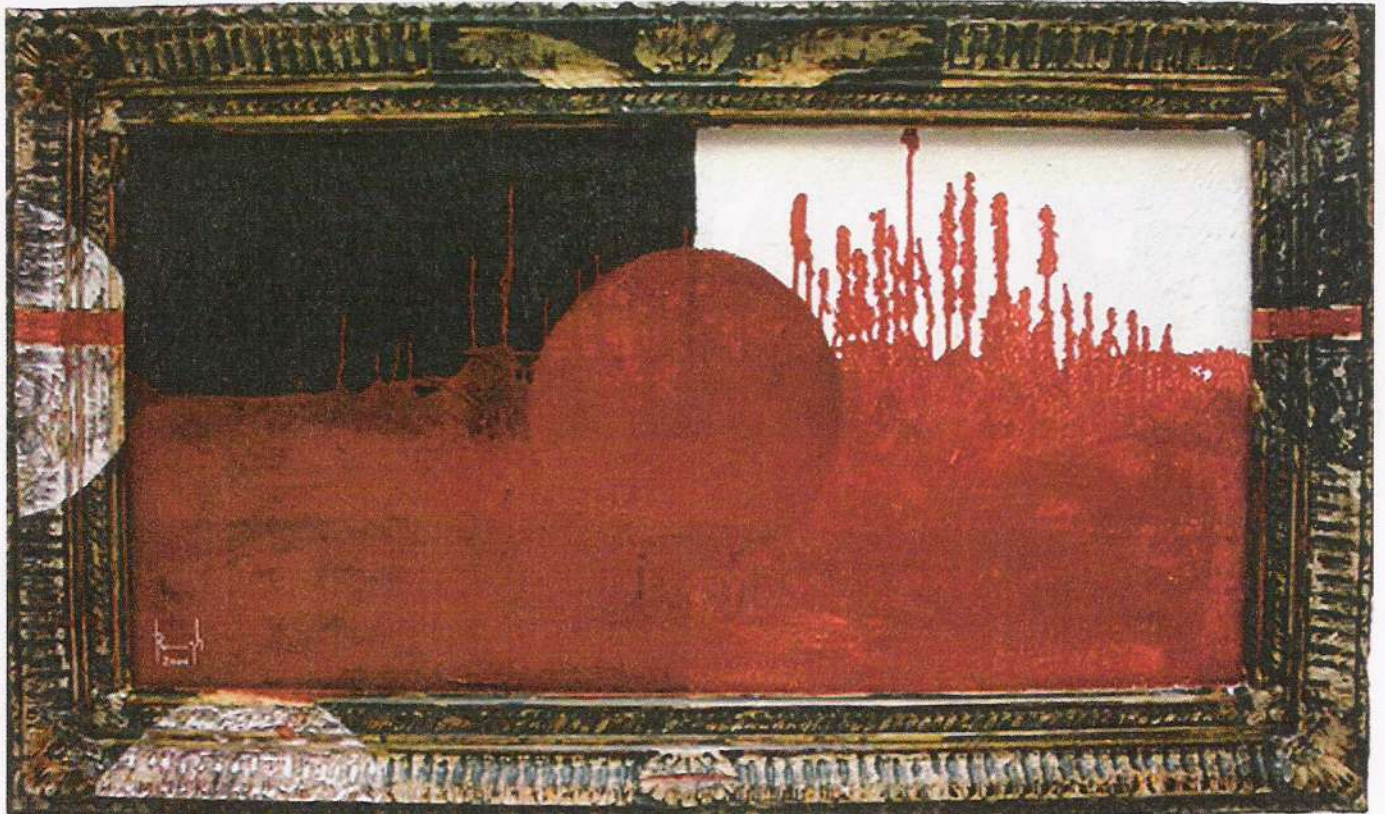
'I was in the mood to paint in all directions. The canvas here is upside down, inside out. I used oil paint and a technique where the paint actually spreads – like a flower – it's all related to the message. The message? People who aren't sincere – they're inside out. Me, I'm just upside down.'

works



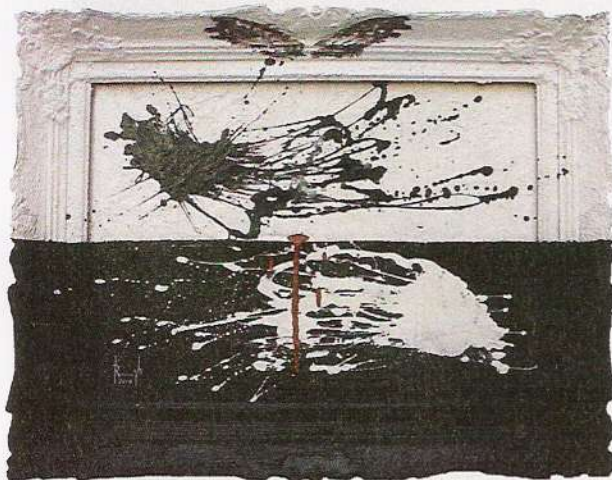
Consciousness Underwears.

'With abstract painting, you have to completely convince yourself first of what you're doing. Abstract art is never really abstract. A good painter can totally go over the subject that he is representing, just expressing it with paint. It's no longer figurative, but he's trying to express an idea and trying to represent something. Mark Rothko, at the beginning, was not trying to represent something with his colour strips, he was really trying to express feelings, like music. I didn't want to be like Pollock. It is not the same style of action painting. If I had laid the painting on the floor, it would have dried and been much more beautiful. But I lifted it up, and so everything has dripped down.'



Midnight in Bam.

'When I am in Paris, I don't watch TV. I read newspapers. I read in the paper the earthquake in Bam, in 2005, happened during the night, and I got really sad thinking about it. I started to think of the kids who were sleeping quietly, in the night. Then at midnight, the earthquake started, the floor shakes, and the earth ruptures – it's the role of an artist to pay tribute to events such as this. There is the peace and innocence of the kids – the white. And split down the middle, is the moment at midnight the earthquake happened.'



Children of The Republic

'In Paris, there are many different ethnic groups, many nationalities. Lots of people, all mixed up. Paris is a state of mind, I don't see it as a town. There is black and white, mixing together. They are the same. We are all the same. And the scar is life. I use this special recipe here for the texture – paint, varnish, paint, varnish, all mixed up. And I use soil. This is dust from Tunisian stones.'



Ideology

'The background is a natural one. I lie it on the floor and put my hands on the paint and smear that across the canvas. That is the first layer. The second layer sees a lot of movement, representing the state of the world today. I then put on a gel and that turns everything white, like a mirror. We need to accept both sides of the world. In today's world a good artist is a communicator, everything is about communication. In today's world, people look at each other and then they turn their backs on, they don't communicate. The one who communicates is an artist. It's not about painting and the act of painting, it's the communicating. A world without culture is not a world.'



Ring 2

'One of my friends is a boxing champion, Mahyar Monshipour. He's from Bam. Following the earthquake, he set up a charity called France Bam, and I did the logo. This guy built schools in Bam, he's put a lot back into that place. This here is like being in a boxing ring. It's just the energy – a fight between two people, here is a fight between two colours. This was the first one I sold.'

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