

Memories of the battlefield form a strong backdrop for Ghass Rouzkhosh's works. The artist limits himself to using black, white and red — the combination signifying opinions and blood

Canvases in trinity

Artist Ghass Rouzkhosh says his work is a constant comment on the state of society

By VINITA BHARADWAJ
Special to Weekend Review

Not every Iranian artist's catalogue can boast a foreword written by Farah Pahlavi — the wife of the late Shah of Iran. And Ghass Rouzkhosh is only too aware of it. "Her Majesty has always been a kind supporter of Iranian artists," he says, always referring to her as the Empress of Iran.

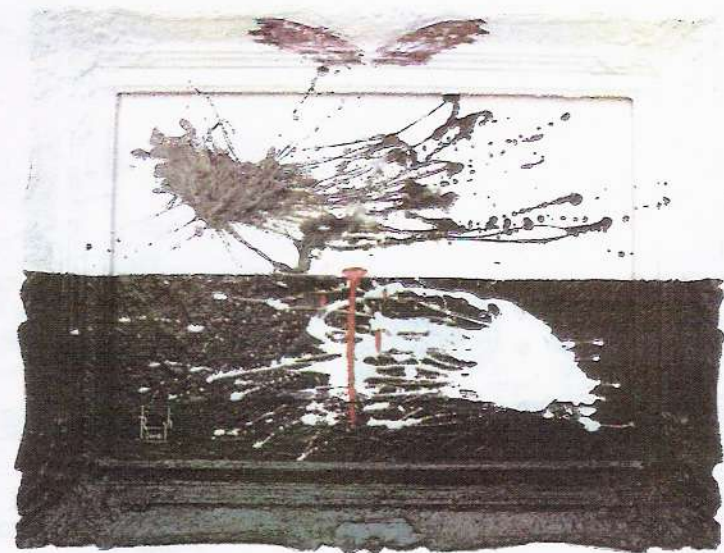
Rouzkhosh's tale has all the elements of intrigue, pathos, drama and tension that is reflected in his art. However, the person reveals none of the elements as he speaks freely, openly, happily and calmly answering any and every question.

Sitting amid canvases of all sizes that are obviously marked by his trinity of colours — red, black and white — the 43-year-old artist recalls an early proclivity for painting. "I used to draw on the walls in school. Of course, it would get me into trouble, but for sure there was the attraction from a very early age," he says.

Tempered by war

Like many exiled Iranians, Rouzkhosh has bitter memories of the Islamic revolution, more so of his experiences as a soldier in the war against Iraq. Stationed in the southern part of the country for two years, he says the only benefit of fighting was his acquisition of a passport.

"I was 18 when I was drafted. I saw friends that I went to school with die. Every day, there were 200 people dying. They were important to their families but to the rest of the world they remain just a number. Is that what humanity is about?" he asks.



Rouzkhosh says there is no significant incident that defined the war for him, nor is there a moment of truth as such, but he does admit to the memories of the battlefield forming an important backdrop for his art and painting. "There was black and white, in terms of opinions — and then there was the red of blood," he says.

Upon completing his military service, Rouzkhosh studied at the Fine Arts School.

"It was important in the sense it gave me a good foundation and introduction to Iranian art styles. But, I wanted to study figura-

tive art. The human body, nudes. That was unspeakable at the time. So I left for Paris and studied the art forms I wanted, for three years," he says.

His exhibits on show at present are anything but figurative. Abstract and sometimes wild, they seem violent at first glance, prompting the question of commercial viability. He bluntly admits that for years, galleries in France refused to display his works.

"Perhaps they found them disturbing. I don't know. It is their problem not mine,"

he says. However, with patrons such as Farah Pahlavi and a number of wealthy collectors, Rouzkhosh's works did find more than one place where they were appreciated and in growing demand. Today, he says, it is the galleries that are doggedly pursuing him. "But I am not interested."

Friends in deed

Clarifying that his stance is not vindictive but more on principle, Rouzkhosh says it is of greatest importance to him as an artist to have a relationship based on trust with his gallery.

"Yesterday I was rejected. Today, I am pursued. Tomorrow, who knows? But I have friends who have stood by me throughout and supported me when life was very difficult. These are the people I am confident will not let me down."

Rouzkhosh describes his works as a constant comment on the state of society.

Not restricting himself to 21st-century concerns of terror and fundamentalism, the artist's repertoire examines society's failings — regardless of their origin — and using his signature colours, makes a statement that is always accompanied by text explaining his reasons.

There was one exception at the start of the second millennium, when he painted a work titled *The Birth*, in which he used a fourth colour for the first time. He did not continue with the added colour but does not rule out the possibility of a future deviation. "Perhaps there will be a special reason to use a fifth colour at some point. It will have to be a progressive evolution though," he says.

Ghass Rouzkhosh's works can be viewed at B-21 Progressive Art Gallery in Al Quoz, Dubai. The gallery is open from Saturday to Thursday from 11am-7pm.

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Silhouettes of hope

The Lebanese presidential election promises to be colourful. The lead-up has seen new alliances forged and promises made. Laws seem flexible but the factions stay as rigid as ever.

Fears abound that the current political deadlock may not let a clear mandate surface. Lebanon may be leading, not towards a fresh start, but an impasse. **Full story on Page 6**

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