

## “Peace and Paper”: Iran Contemporary Art Biennale 2016

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### Biennale in Iran invites cross-cultural connection through fragile medium.

The second edition of the Iran Contemporary Art Biennale brings together paintings, photographs, installations and video art highlighting peace, not war.



Soheila Sokhanvari, 'We Come in Peace', 2016, egg tempera on vintage passport (dated 1929).

Image courtesy the artist.

The **Iran Contemporary Art Biennale (ICA Biennale)** successfully concluded its second edition "Peace on Paper" on 31 July at the Niavaran Cultural Center (NCC) in Tehran, with the second leg of the Biennale opening on 20 September 2016 at the Abadan Museum of Contemporary art.

Originally, the Biennale was slated to open in Istanbul, with paper chosen as the primary medium due to the ease in which the material could be transported. After the terrorist bombing of the Istanbul Ataturk Airport in early July 2016, the Biennale was moved back to Tehran, with an even more urgent message towards cultivating peace.



Founded by Majid Abbas Farahani, the organisation originally known as the Culture of Peace Biennale (CP Biennale), the Iranian Contemporary Art Biennale aims to provide an international platform for exchange through the "language" of contemporary art, as noted in the event's press release:

*The Iran Contemporary Art Biennale is an independent and non-profit organization and has been dedicated to the advancement of discourse on peace in the field of contemporary art in Iran. It provides a context for the production and exhibition of Iranian as well as international contemporary art and related cultural practices.*

*The "ICA Biennale" began as a venture to showcase Iranian contemporary art by providing an international platform for innovative contemporary Iranian artists; alongside established international artists so as to create a space for cultural and social appreciation and exchange.*



Shadi Ghadirian, 'Nil' from the "Nil" series, 2008, 76 x 76 cm. Image courtesy the artist and ICA Biennale.

"Peace on Paper" continues where the first edition "The Culture of Peace" left off, with some 90 Iranian visual artists participating and 35 international artists hailing from around the world and 15 galleries present, including three from Germany, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. Artist Shadi Noyan is Curatorial Advisor for the second edition.

Exhibition highlights include prominent Iranian artists:

- **Fereydoun Ave**
- **Pariyoush Ganji**
- **Shadi Ghadirian**
- **Koorosh Shishegaran**
- **Soheila Sokhavari**
- **Charles Hossein Zenderoudi**

With international artists rounding out the exhibition:

- **Le Brothers** (Vietnam)
- **Cristiana de Marchi** (Italy)
- **Emine Gozde Sevim** (Turkey)

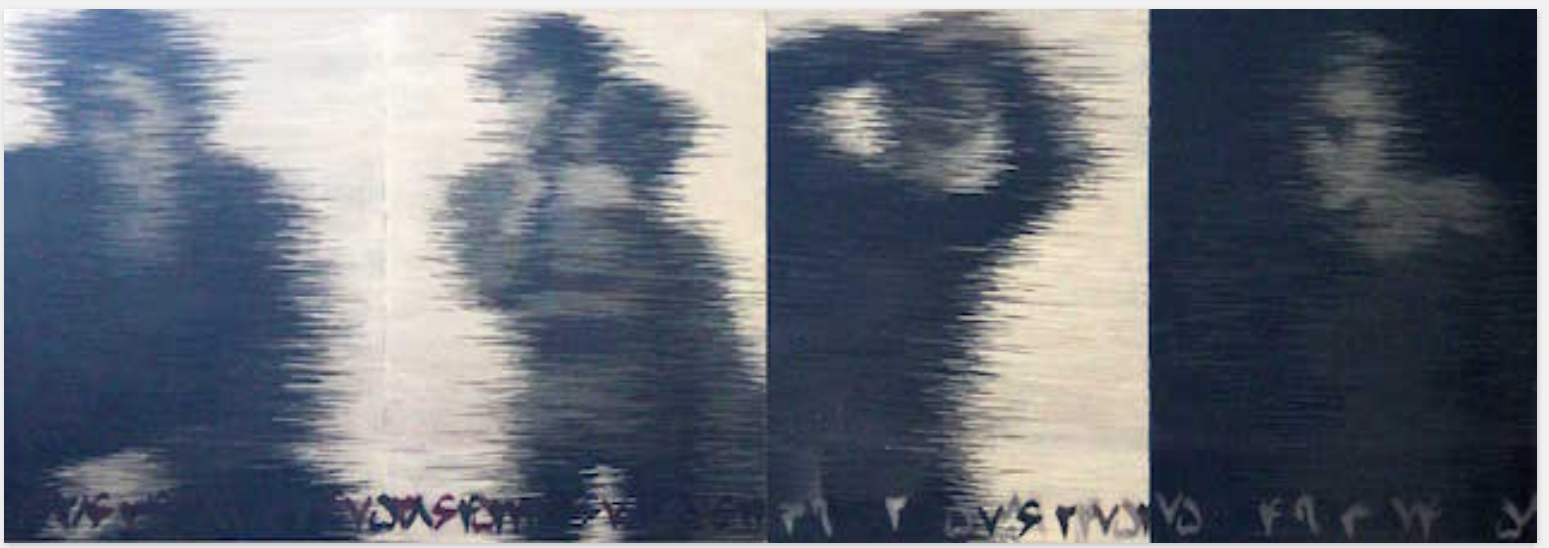
- **Laila Shawa** (Palestine)



Koorosh Shishegaran, "War on the ground – Peace on the Paper" installation shot, 2016, mixed media, 2 x 5 m. Image courtesy the artist and ICAB.

A global contingency of artists is necessary towards fulfilling the Biennale's *raison d'être*, with forums, performances, installations and other unique projects offering opportunities for discovery, as diaspora artist **Soheila Sokhanvari** told *Art Radar*:

*It is important for Iranian artists to be showing alongside international artists in the heartland of Tehran because it reveals a cross-cultural dialogue, allowing both artists and the local audience to discover similarities and differences — and most importantly, to be able to put their own culture within context to the world as a whole. In addition, it allows artists from outside Iran to be exposed to new audiences inside the country.*



Mehrdad Mohebali, *Untitled*, 2016, acrylic on cardboard, 33 x 95 cm. Image courtesy the artist and ICA Biennale.

These individual connections in turn provide an outlet for understanding each other at the most fundamental level and seek to open up a new narrative around war, conflict and injustice through cooperation and “understanding what creates a culture of human society”.



Shadi Noyani, *'Bed Peace'*, 2016, oil on cardboard, 150 x 220 cm. Image courtesy the artist and ICA Biennale.

One such artist whose work blurs the lines of separation is Italian artist Cristiana de Marchi. As de Marchi relayed to *Art Radar*, her work *White Flags* was extremely well suited to the Biennale's overarching theme and the medium:

*The works are a selection from "White Flags", a series of embroideries on paper that I realized in 2014. Over the past years, I have worked on reproducing on a monochrome palette the flags of all countries (both on paper and canvas, always using embroidery as a medium). This series is focusing on the Middle East and addresses areas of conflict and political disagreement, by neutralizing the meaning of colours and symbols displayed on the national flags, thus introducing the possibility of a connection beyond boundaries and national representations.*



Cristiana de Marchi, 'Algeria' from the "White Flags" series, 2014 (ongoing), embroidery on paper, 21 x 30 cm. Image courtesy the artist and 1x1 Gallery.

Despite the very real conflicts and increase of strife throughout today's troubled world, Farahani spoke of the Biennale's profundity in the *Tehran Times*, **with the idea that the event and message will continue on**, regardless:

*If we only focused on peace against war, it would turn to be a repetitious topic. In this collection we did not think of peace as a sweet world, but focused on the influence of different factors in the world on one another. Actually, the participation of various artists in a single event conveys the meaning of peace in itself.*

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