

life

Life, War & Art

The Paintings of

Khosrow Hassan Zadeh





Art

Born in 1963 in Tehran, from an Azerbaidjani family, Khosrow Hassan Zadeh belongs to a generation that has witnessed two tumultuous social upheavals: the 1979 revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, events which were accompanied by great changes and devastation in Iran.

Hassan Zadeh spent most of his childhood sneaking into museums and cinemas, a refuge from the busy streets of Tehran where he sold bananas to tourists near the National Museum. As a teenager he volunteered to fight on the Iran-Iraq front, not knowing that for several years he would be kept as a conscript, his height and bravery making him an exemplary soldier. When he returned from war, having 'miraculously' escaped death, 'a constant companion', he chose a discipline that he had always dreamed about: painting & poetry.

Like the children of martyrs and other war veterans, he was allowed to further his studies. He registered with an art academy, but disliked the restrictions of its formal approach. He left art school and continued to write poetry and paint on his own, earning a living by working as a fruit seller. Here, on his fruit stalls, he met his mentor and art teacher - Ayden Agdashlou, a former advisor to Queen Farah, a patroness of the arts. Under his guidance, Hassan Zadeh's love of painting was transformed into an obsession and a vector of life.

His colourful paintings, on paper used to wrap fruit, are mostly figurative depictions of saintlike figures, musicians, his mother, wife, children, or self-portraits, with war diaries or poetry covering the images. Mysterious numbers, subliminal codes, symbols, 'street signs that bemoan decay', and collages of wall paper are added to the composition of the patch-worked paintings. There are signs that reflect human emotions and unravel secrets, joy and tragedy. Secret codes that stand for flattery, unrequited love, sacrifice, and the emotional status of beings and society reduce a complex existence to a manageable abstract formula and complement the visual aspects of the paintings.

Recent works, mostly in black and white, visualise dead figures, covered with white linen, piled on top of each other. This new series, made in a darker mood, capture the essence of ephemeral existence - a subject he is developing for his forthcoming exhibition.

Khosrow Hassan Zadeh's ephemeral works were captured on film by his friend, the young documentarist Maziar Bahari, in *Art of Demolition* (1997), later followed by another portrait of the artist *Paint! No Matter What* (1998). His attractive personality also made him the focus of BBC2's recent television programme *Correspondent* (20 March 99).

War has taught Khosrow Hassan Zadeh the fragility of life, how precious it is, and how - in a split second - one may disappear without ever realising one's dream. In the shadow of death, only love for other human beings gave him the strength to continue with life. His paintings reflect this realisation.

R. Issa

This exhibition coincides with a major season of Iranian cinema, *Life & Art: The New Iranian Cinema*, at the NFT during June-July, followed by a seminar at SOAS, University of London.

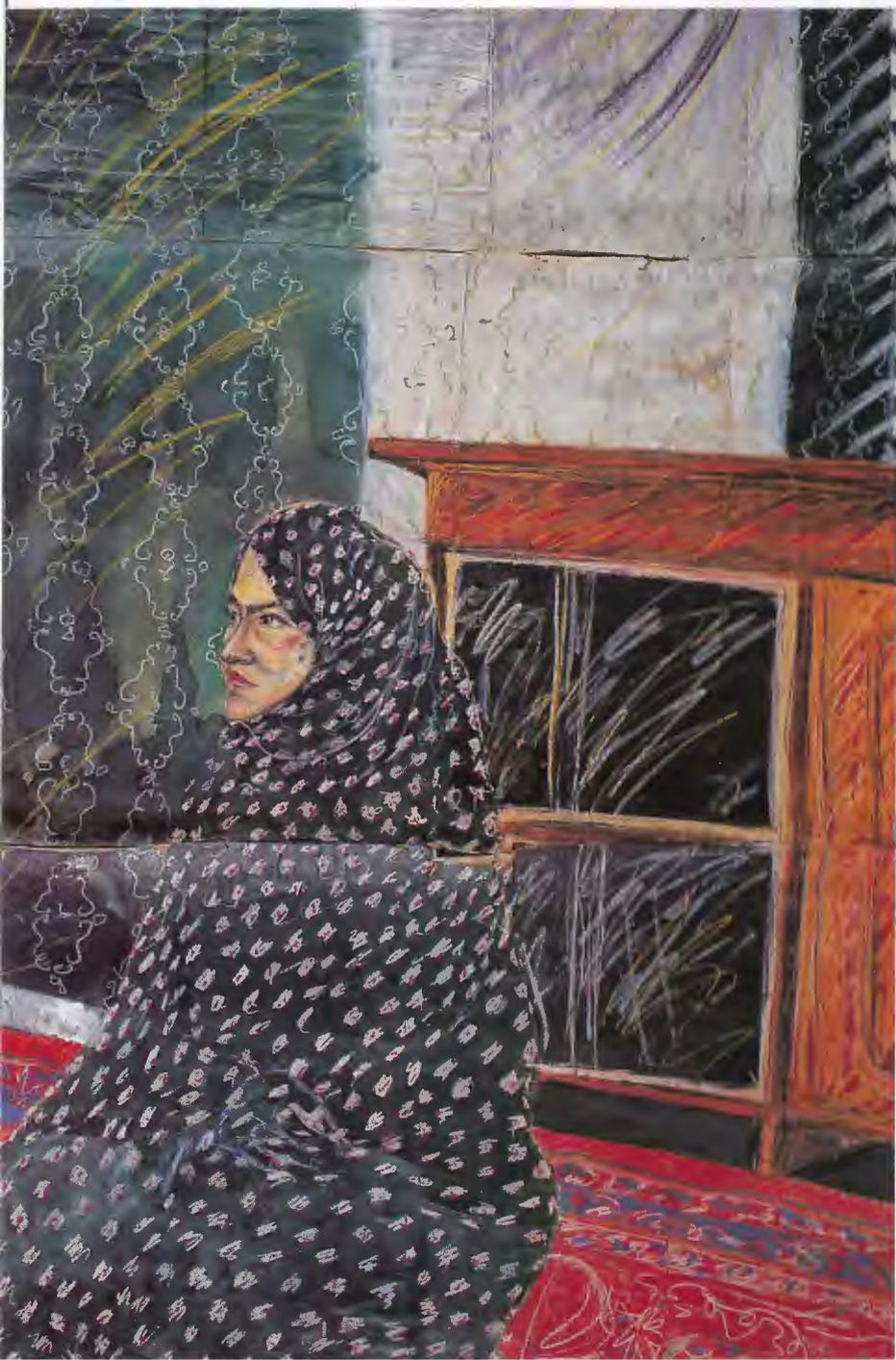
Diorama Arts Centre

34 Osnaburgh Street, London NW1, Telephone 0171 916 5467
16 June - 2 July, Tuesday - Saturday 12 noon - 5pm

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