



Q&A Faryar Javaherian

Blurred lines: the curator and architect considers the overlap of brutalism and postmodernism in 1960s Iran

How would you define brutalism?

Exposed concrete buildings that are massive in scale and look a little bunker-like. Brutalism is a little bit rough and aggressive. It's not my favourite style of architecture but even in my own designs there are some parts that are brutalist.

What's the movement's historical context?

Brutalism developed mostly because of the devastation after World War II in Europe. Governments were in a hurry and wanted to build quickly and cheaply.

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Did brutalism influence the architects of Tehran at the time?

I think the architect who used it most is Kamran Diba. I wouldn't say his designs are 100 percent brutalist architecture though – he incorporates other elements. A lot of architects have said his buildings are brutalist because he used exposed concrete on the inside and very rough stone cladding on the outside.

What elements in Diba's designs would you say deviate from brutalism?

He uses the vernacular of Persian architecture, as seen in his buildings like the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art and the Jondi Shapour University in Ahvaz. Most of Kamran Diba's works could be considered postmodern

replicas of Persian architecture. At that time there was a sort of hybrid architecture which included many different styles.

Which other buildings in Tehran would you consider brutalist?

We can't really label them as strictly brutalist, but some of the buildings that can be considered as such are the Behshahr Industrial Group offices, designed by Nader Ardalan. It's an exposed concrete building made of precast concrete parts, which were assembled on site. You can also say the Azadi Stadium designed by Ardalan and Abdolaziz Farmanfarmaian is brutalist with its exposed concrete, but again it's also a bit postmodern because it has a lot of Iranian elements in it.

Was it a widespread trend?

These are all very isolated cases. I wouldn't say that brutalism was a major style in Iranian architecture. The use of exposed concrete is definitely there, but this is only one parameter of brutalism. We had exposed concrete before, from Le Corbusier's architecture, which our architects were very influenced by.

What were some of the other styles developing in Tehran in the same era?

Austrian architect Victor Gruen, who along with Richard Neutra designed a lot of architecture in California, also had an influence. He was working with Farmanfarmaian on the master plan of Tehran. That's how a California style of architecture was introduced in Iran. Because of Farah Pahlavi's intervention in architecture there was a revival of traditional Persian architecture too. This was the beginning of a very Persian form of postmodernism – the combination of an international style of modern architecture with Persian architecture. In Iran it was a very different modernism and postmodernism from what was happening in architecture around the world.