



Farideh Lashai.
Photography by
Sueraya Shaheen

Therefore, I think this is a very timely retrospective.

HBA: *What are the main themes of the exhibition?*

FJ: The integration of life and art. I am very grateful that Germano Celant has accepted to work with us on this exhibition and we are following his methodology by presenting a chronological account of the artist's life and works. We will be showing the different periods of her work alongside material that brings to life the artist's personal journey. The exhibition will certainly shed light on the circumstances

in which Farideh created specific works. But Germano takes this personal context and extends it to a socio-historical level so that we also attempt to show the larger context encompassing the history of our country and her times as the background of Farideh's artistic or literary practice. What happens is that we see a parallel of the artist's life and her works. I hope the exhibition will achieve this integration.

I think the real spirit of contemporary art in Iran has been mostly determined by the traumatic events of the Islamic Revolution, like the killings on Black Friday, and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-88). Art has been a way to exorcise all the evils witnessed during the war and the Revolution. After World War II, there was a similar outburst of art, literature and philosophy in Europe. Ironically, if we look at our art history, it has mostly flourished after periods of great upheavals, and after the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War we also witness a similar period of revival, especially in the visual arts, and most prominently in cinema. The last 37 years have been a period of intense isolation for us Iranians; we have been left to our own resources. This condition in my view has yielded an artistic practice that is unique and at times a reflection on personal attempts to deal with the anguish and void we face around us. Farideh never tried to prove anything to anyone; therefore I would say that her works are "politically pure." She has no hidden agenda, and this is why it is a privilege to have worked on this exhibition where drafting an objective personal story and creating an objective historical background are our main concerns. Fortunately, the permanent collection of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art is enabling us to juxtapose it within an international historical artistic context, through works by Rothko, Bacon, Giacometti, Twombly and many others that are part of the museum's permanent collection.

HBA: *What is the relevance of Iranian art today in the international art scene?*

FJ: Thirty-seven years of isolation have not helped to improve our relevance, but definite efforts have been made and they have culminated in the last couple of years in several exhibitions in major museums, namely *Les Modernités Plurielles* at the Centre Pompidou that attempted to show that there is other modern art besides European and American modern art. I think that curator Shiva Balaghi is apt in saying that Middle Eastern art was kept in the closet at major museums and is only now slowly coming out. And here, in Tehran, we are finally seeing this take place. Farideh Lashai's retrospective is glorious case in point. ■

Towards the Ineffable: Farideh Lashai runs from November 20, 2015 to February 26, 2016 at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art tmoca.com



Farideh Lashai. *Untitled*, 1967. Oil on canvas. 133 x 95 cm. Courtesy of the Centre Pompidou, Paris

TOWARDS *the* INEFFABLE

The first monographic exhibition of late Iranian artist Farideh Lashai opens at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art this month. Co-curator Faryar Javaherian explains why this show is so important to the Iranian art scene

Harper's Bazaar Art: *Why did you decide to stage this exhibition on Farideh Lashai?*
Faryar Javaherian: I worked with Farideh during the last twenty years of her life. It was easy to work with her. We had many things in common and we quickly became close friends. When she passed away in February 2013, I was

in the US and could not go to her funeral, but as I attended the first anniversary of her death and looked at the delicate stone on her grave that her daughter Maneli had commissioned, designed in the same fashion as one of Farideh's vases, I immediately decided that I would do a retrospective for her. It was at once an emotional and professional decision: she is a very important figure in our contemporary art history.

For me there are two broad movements in Iranian modern and contemporary art that can be subdivided into smaller groups and tendencies: the artists who visually refer to formal elements of Iranian heritage and the modern artists who don't. I believe that the works of the second group is also deeply informed by Iranian heritage, but the references are subtler and not as visual, sometimes literary, sometimes political, but always rooted in an Iranian context. In the second group we have very few artists — so much so that we can even count them on our fingers! Farideh is one of them.

Beyond this prominent place she has in contemporary Iranian art, Farideh is also unique in terms of her life: she was an intellectual, she was politically engaged and also a "serious feminist" as opposed to an "angry feminist" — a distinction made by Anne Lonsdale. She was also a writer and a poet, an artist who has worked with a large array of various media, from crystal works to painting and video art.