

KOOROSH  
SHISHEGARAN

OPERA GALLERY  
LONDON

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Opera Gallery is pleased and very proud to present the works of Iranian abstract painter Koorosh Shishegaran in a solo exhibition in London for the first time.

Shishegaran's ability to humanize abstraction and bring three dimensions onto his canvases and through the brush strokes and colours, make him one of the most expressive and emotive artists of the contemporary Iranian art movement.

It is an honour for us to show this selected assortment of his greatest and latest paintings in our London gallery and consequently present the deserving artist to the UK art lovers and collectors.

Gilles Dyan  
Founder and Chairman  
Opera Gallery Group

Jean-David Malat  
Director  
Opera Gallery London

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*"We live in complex times: of breathlessness and excitement, of ties and confusions, of contradictions and mysteries, of disturbances and breakneck speed; of colour, exploding wonders and novelties; in short, a complicated world for today's man. I have been trying to find a style or language expressive of the modern era. One that can be seen as pure painting yet rooted in my own country's art and culture."*

Shishegaran's world is a vivid matrix of fluid dynamics and channelled complexity, where word, pattern, geometry and colour synthesise into a torrid visual language. Harnessing the myriad cultural legacies of his native Iran, he shoots fragments of the Orient through the contemporary prism of pop art and modernism with a freestyle nod to graffiti woven into the ride. Exploring the essence of line, pattern and subjective meaning within a set of personal "rules" about the courtship of calligraphy, his bold tapestries of form distil into profoundly human moments as hints of portraiture peek out from behind the oscillating folds.

Characterized by freeform calligraphic stylization on solid fields of colour, bold lines twist, turn and whirl ecstatically through precision spirals of connected chaos. Electrifying the ancient, the slow, deliberate movements of traditional calligraphy mutate into a charged poetry of lyrical elegance that dances the visual rapture of conflicted emotions. Exuberant loops and bolts of iridescence spring over the muted backgrounds with an intoxicating energy and sweep the viewer deep into the swirls of pure movement.

Traces of his past work and a fascination with the graphic arts reveal themselves in the sharp incisive lines, the industrial colours and the interplay with the paintings own negatives. At once playfully irreverent and spiritually searching, dramatic compositions rush and race across the canvas as a frenzied spontaneity teetering on the edge of rampaging abandon is fed back into a graceful order.

*"There are many untold mysteries within a portrait. Once told, they project a different world far more interesting than the one apparent to us. The artist who can detach himself from the appearance will find a unique way of projecting his apprehensions."*

Echoing the philosophy of Persian calligraphy and painting where each portrait, line, gesture and nuance is a mystery unto itself, the elusive caricatures of the whimsical and often humorous subjects seduce the viewer into a visual game while giving the artist the liberty to delve beyond appearances and deep into the symbolic. Through abstract form, Shishegaran resists emotional and psychological clues to avoid influencing external experiences of the work, thus allowing the viewer to forge their own narrative within the entangled coils.

In the primal dialectic of being and nothingness, solid and void, mind and body, the movement and momentum of his eternal spirals flow along the vortices of invisible objects as they whirl free in liquid space. Light and shadow pour through the slipstream ravelling and unravelling into snatched flashes of three-dimensional form. A perpetual tension, a taut dualism, an alchemical turn of reality's wheel that crystallizes again and again into a mesmerizing, shape shifting whole.

*" I am a painter and communicate with line, point, colour, and image."*

Zahra Faridany Akhavan PhD  
Specialist in Iranian and Islamic Art



Untitled, 2011  
Acrylic on canvas - 120 x 120 cm - 47.2 x 47.2 in.



Untitled, 2011  
Acrylic on canvas - 130 x 130 cm - 51.2 x 51.2 in.



Untitled, 2011  
Acrylic on canvas - 160 x 130 cm - 63 x 51.2 in.

Figure, 2011  
Acrylic on canvas - 160 x 130 cm - 63 x 51.2 in.





*I always thought to myself why we should not paint a portrait in an abstract form. An abstract portrait gives the artist liberty to look beyond the appearance into subject in a symbolic way. There are many unspoken secrets within a portrait that once revealed, present a very different world. It is a world of appearance. Every artist has his unique way of depicting his subjects if he tries to detach himself from the appearance.*

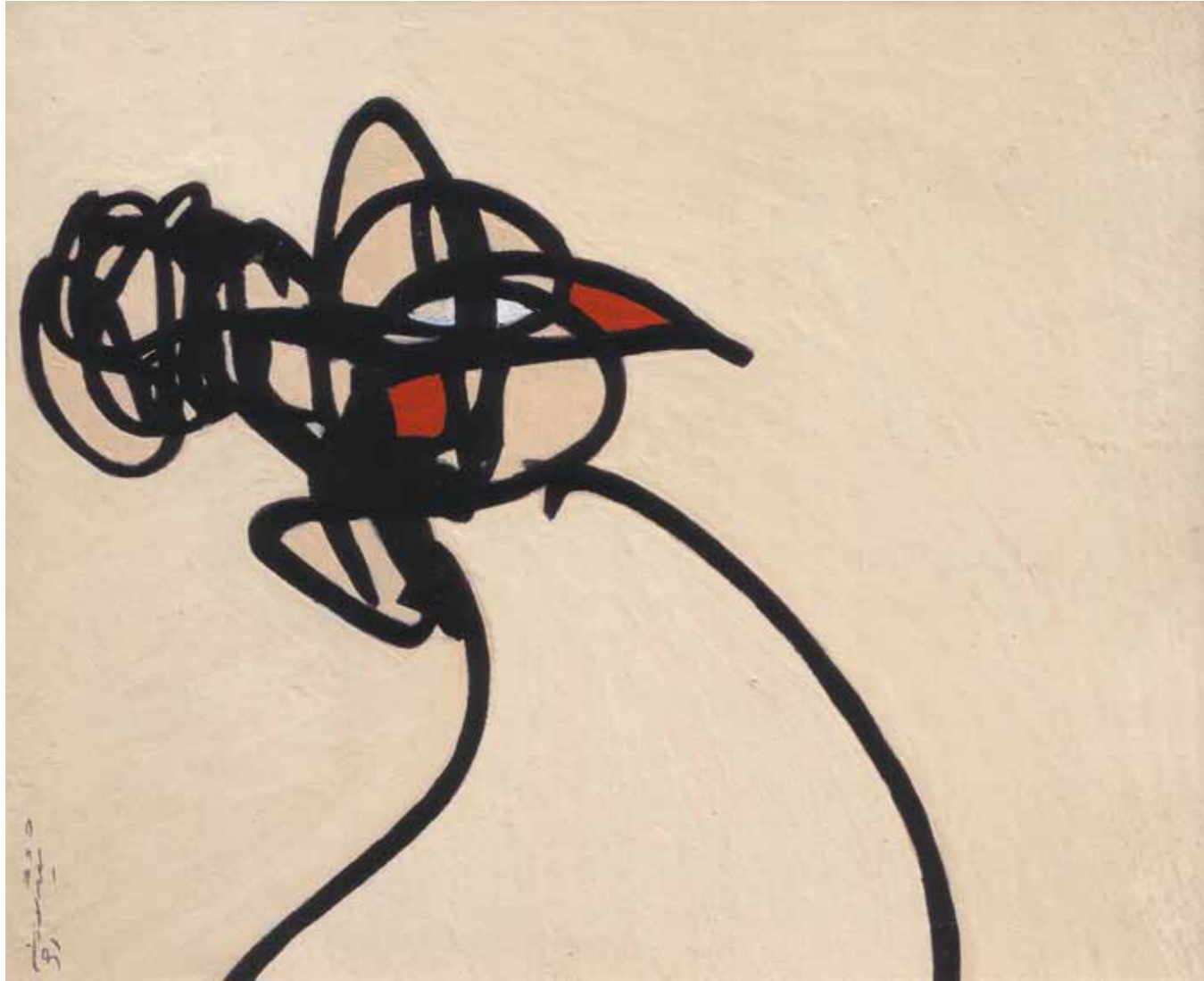
My portraits, 2008

Plot-Painting: inkjet print on canvas, unique piece - each piece is signed with acrylic colour - Triptych: 140 x 300 cm - 55.1 x 118.1 in.



Untitled, 2011  
Acrylic on canvas - Diptych: 134 x 134 cm - 52.8 x 52.8 in.





The bird, 1982  
Gouache on cardboard - 12 x 15 cm - 4.7 x 5.9 in.



The bird, 2012  
Acrylic on canvas - 100 x 160 cm - 39.4 x 63 in.

Green head, 2009  
Acrylic on canvas - 170 x 120 cm - 66.9 x 47.2 in.



Untitled, 2000  
Acrylic on canvas - 130 x 130 cm - 51.2 x 51.2 in.



Koorosh Shishegaran was born in Qazvin in 1944, but then moved to Tehran with his family. He finished elementary school in Tehran and then was admitted to the School of Fine Arts and continued his academic studies at the Faculty of Decorative Arts - Art University - receiving a BFA in Interior Design. His experiment in art is not confined to the style he uses in creating paintings today. What follows is a cursory look at Koorosh Shishegaran's artistic career.

### Mass-Produced Works

Koorosh Shishegaran held his first solo exhibition in 1973 at Mess Gallery. He began a process in his work that he called "Mass Production", continuing his practice in other solo exhibitions both at the Iranian National University and Mess Gallery in 1974. He mass-produced his works during this period and believed that in order for people to learn about his art, his paintings should be available to the public. Hence, he exhibited his work in public places and donated them to people and those places (see Alireza Sami Azar's article, Art Tomorrow, No. 28+3, winter 2011).

### A Reproduction of Works of Masters

Shishegaran undertook to reproduce works of old and modern masters when he finished mass production of his paintings. He appropriated some known elements of such works and combined them with concepts and elements of his own. The combination of mass-produced works and appropriated elements of works of masters resulted in four simultaneous exhibitions in four venues in Tehran back in 1976. The venues included Iran Gallery, Mess Gallery, and Palace of the Youth both in the south and north of Tehran (see Alireza Sami Azar's article, Art Tomorrow, No. 28+3, winter 2010).

### Postal Art

In a reaction to domestic and international social as well as political circumstances, Shishegaran designed a poster in 1976, illustrating the fragile peace process in Lebanon that followed the 1976 civil war in this country. In an attempt to exclude the commissioner from the graphic design, Shishegaran tried, similar to what is a usual practice in film industry, to find a producer, and in order to spread the message that the poster was trying to convey, he used the same design in producing postcards which he sent out to political, social, cultural and media centers, ranging from the United Nations to newspapers and publishers. He coined the term "Postal Art" to refer to this period of his artistic experiences, a term he used on the postcards. During this period, the name of Bahman Jahangiri would appear, both as a producer and an investor, on a majority of posters designed by Koorosh Shishegaran (see Alireza Sami Azar's article, Art Tomorrow, 28+3, winter 2011). [Illustration 1]



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### Art + Art

The concept that art did not belong only to galleries, museums and wealthy families led Shishegaran to widely exhibit and donate his mass-produced works in public places, thus taking a major step toward popularizing art, a trend which later continued in Postal Art. This time, however, the significance of the public aspect of art revealed itself in a different form. This everyday life of people even could be Art itself; These daily sweet and bitter events or visiting a patient or helping the elderly cross the street. In effect, whatever exists in the nature and life itself is a living, dynamic art, made up of diverse art forms. Taking this into consideration, Shishegaran designed a poster in 1976 under which he wrote "K. Shishegaran's Works: Shahreza Ave. Itself". He found Shahreza Street (now known as Enqelab Street), a collection of whatever can be called "art". This was the specific perspective he wished people to have when passing the street and in fact he invited people to see Shahreza Street from this point of view. This truly conceptual experiment was repeated during a visit to Washington in spring 1977 along with a group of avant-garde artists. This time Shishegaran made six similar posters and declared Wash Art Expo itself as his artwork in them. A new title was seen on the posters, though. It read "False Art". He called this period of his experiments "Art + Art" (see Alireza Sami Azar's article, Art Tomorrow, No. 28+3, winter 2011 - Nasrin Tabatabaie, No. 6, October 2007). [Illustration 2]

### Art for Production

Shishegaran began a new period in 1977 and half of 1978. During this period he collaborated with his brothers, Behzad and Ismail, and others in designing and producing furniture such as chandelier, wardrobe, armchair, table, chair, etc. The notion of public art revealed itself in a different form this time. Art greatly contributed to the production of what was available to people in their everyday life. He called this period "Art for Production". Shishegaran and his brothers put their products on display in 1978. The exhibition poster bore the name of Bahman Jahangiri, as the producer, and other contributors.

### Socio-Political Posters

When socio-political turbulences in Iran grew in 1978, Koorosh Shishegaran felt a duty to design two posters in September and October of the same year (a few months prior to the victory of the 1979 revolution) titled "For A Free Press" and "For Today", respectively. These posters opened a window of opportunity to Koorosh and his brothers Behzad and Ismail Shishegaran who continued the practice until the late 1981. During this period, they responded to the events of the time by designing posters with individual signatures but in collaboration with each other. These posters originally appeared in silkscreen, followed by offset versions in high print runs. They also organized an exhibition of their posters at the central library of the University of Tehran in March 1980 (see Arash Tanhayi's article, Kheradnameh Hamshahri, No. 68, special edition for story, February 2011 - Arash Tanhayi, Tandis Magazine, No. 168 - Saeed Meshki, Neshan Magazine, No. 18, autumn & winter 2008 - Ali Asqar Qarebaqi, Golestaneh Magazine, No. 9, October 1999). [Illustration 3]



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### The First Exhibition of His More Famous Lines

During the late 1981, Koorosh Shishegaran switched the course of his artistic and social activities and starting from 1983, he tended to accept both private and government commissions mostly in the field of graphic design, drawing and painting throughout the war. He held the first exhibition of his more familiar undulating lines in 1989 at Classic Gallery.

### War Drawings

During the eight-year Iran and Iraq war (1980-1988), Shishegaran appeared as an artist who was greatly influenced by the social circumstances of the time, creating drawings that reflected the spirit of those years. A small portion of his drawings of the war period was exhibited at Golestan Gallery in 1990. The invitation card read "An Exhibition of Small Drawings by Koorosh Shishegaran", explaining that the drawings were made between 1981 and 1985, with a majority of works reminding the audience of the Iran-Iraq war (see Ali Asqar Qarebaqi's article, Adineh Magazine, No. 52, December 1980). [Illustration 4]



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### Plot-Paintings in the Fourth Exhibition of Abstract Lines

He held his next solo exhibition at Khak Gallery in 2006 as a continuum to his artistic practice. Shishegaran produced a number of works of digital art on canvas during these years, some of which were displayed in this exhibition (see Behnam Kamrani's article, Tandis Magazine, No. 76, June 2006). [Illustration 5]

### Self-Portraits

In spring 2007, Shishegaran presented one of his works as a self-portrait. He exhibited this painting along with 30 digital reproductions of the same work at Khak Gallery. He chose "Self-Portraits" as the exhibition title. In a return to the period he mass-produced works, Shishegaran replaced silkscreen with digital prints after nearly a quarter of a century and presented the original painting with different hues of colour to depict dissimilar yet common aspects of human beings. **The triptych Plot-Painting, presented in the current exhibition, belongs to this period of the artist's experiences.**

### The Second Exhibition of More Familiar Lines

The second solo exhibition of Koorosh Shishegaran that showed his undulating lines was held in 1992 at Golestan Gallery (see Javad Mojabi's article, Adineh Magazine, No. 76, December 1992 - Behzad Hatam's article, Kelk Magazine, No. 34, December 1992).

### Works of Photography

Shishegaran tried his hand at photography in 1995 and 1996, in the hope that he would combine his lines with landscapes, natural textures or plaster of walls. He painted over the photographs, using his individual abstract lines style, and called them "Photoworks". Shishegaran put these works on display at Arya Gallery in 1996.

### The Third Exhibition of Lines

Shishegaran held the third solo exhibition of his abstract lines at Golestan Gallery back in 1997 (see Javad Mojabi's article, Adineh Magazine, No. 125-126, March 1998).



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### Ten Gallery Exhibitions

Shishegaran participated in three thematic exhibitions at Ten Gallery in the Autumn 2008, spring 2010 and autumn 2010 along with a number of renowned artists such as Parviz Tanavoli, Abbas Kiarostami, Gholamhossein Nami, Farideh Lashai, Reza Derakshani, Afshin Pirhashemi, etc. The exhibitions were entitled "Van Gogh's Ear", "Mona Lisa" and "Van Gogh's Ear, Second Cut" (see Behzad Hatam's articles in the catalogs of these exhibitions).

Koorosh Shishegaran has taken part in numerous group exhibitions and biennials in Iran and abroad. International group exhibitions that stand out include Wash Art in Washington (1977), Basel, Switzerland (1978), Millennium Painting Exhibition in London (1999), Exhibition of Iranian Art in Rome (2000), Meridian International Center, USA (2001-2003), Barbican Art Center, London (2001), and Beijing International Biennial (2003). With international auction houses opening up to Iranian art in recent years, numerous works by the artist have sold at auctions.