

Shahrazad Ghaffari



Shahrazad Ghaffari, Born in 1972, Shahrazad became serious about painting at the age of 12. As a direct descendant of the renowned Iranian painters Sani-ol- Molk Ghaffari and Kamal-ol-Molk Ghaffari, Shahrazad continues a family tradition that spans more than 150 years. After training under Mostafa Dashti in Tehran, she studied graphic design at Azad University for three years until 1994. During that period she began displaying her work at many group exhibitions. Shahrazad continued to paint, taking part in exhibitions in Kuching, Malaysia (1995) as well as two exhibitions in Vancouver, Canada (1997). Her recent works have been acquired privately by collectors in the U.S., Europe and the Middle East. In 2010 she has taken part in group exhibitions at the Golestan, Hanna, Haft Negah and Shirin Galleries while 2011 promises to be an equally busy year for Shahrazad.

The Art of Shahrazad Ghaffari

by Zahra Faridany-Akhavan

Imbued with a spirituality that belies her youth, the “Naghashi-e Khat” or ‘painted word’ of Shahrazad Ghaffari is the mystical synthesis of her deepest instincts, the soul of Rumi and the spirit of her ancestors Kamal ol Molk and Sani ol Molk Ghaffari, Iran’s most illustrious artists.

Standing with folded arms, her steady gaze bids you enter and look beyond the canvas “*Az Dive Va Dad Maloulam*” Behind her, like foam on the “ocean,” Rumi’s own metaphor of the Masnavi, words surge and drift aboard the currents of abstraction. Inspired by the Maulana’s fundamental teaching of a unified mind and heart, her work challenges viewers to infuse their own emotions, as does she herself, to the experience. Stepping out of the shadow of calligraphy where the visual representation of words themselves shape the feelings they evoke, Shahrazad uses the word as a launchpad for visual and transcendental exploration rather than as an aesthetic end in itself. Following the thread of consciousness thrown up by the layers of literary meaning, she delves deep into whispered form and alchemical colour, molding a visual landscape from the palattes of emotion hinted at by the underlying words and teases meaning onto an altogether different plane

“Each painting has its own secret, that is why I sometimes play with words... I wish people to be drawn in not only visually but with their mind and soul” she explains.

The bold graphic colors jostle against each other in a rhythmic joust of night and day and the Manichean dance of yin and yang, witnessing the soul’s tormented journey from darkness into enlightenment. In “*Dar Seteezam*” (I am in torment) the letters in the undercurrent of red rise and cut into the etched darkness contrasting its raw starkness with flowing vitality.



Drawing upon Rumi’s intoxicated adoration of freedom, her work personifies his cry:

“Love cannot be carried or contained in words
Love’s an ocean of unfathomed depth
Infinite, the ocean’s drops of water
Yet the seven seas, tiny, next to love”

-Masnavi 5:2731-2

Entranced in the whirling “Sama”, Shahrazad’s work captures the illusive moments of the dance. Each painting tells its own story of its struggle to relinquish reality and attain Rumi’s spiritual ecstasy. In “*Heecheem*” letters writhe and slither across the canvas in confused search of themselves until, through the labyrinth of black and white relief and graffiti, the revelation rises hesitatingly in disappearing blue... “we are nothing.”





The painting "*Rahae*" (Freedom) captures the very moment before the soul's liberation. Emerging from the black abyss, the letters in turquoise, the traditional color of hope, are caught within the whirlwind of the tunnel of bondage. The narrowness of the canvas pushes against the letters evoking the suffocating confinement of the soul. Yet the sheer force of the letters as they overwhelm the darkness and rise powerfully and unravel gracefully into the gold of enlightenment signal Rumi's ultimate belief that the soul will always prevail.



In "*Rahā Sho*" bold white textured strokes whirl into one another and lift off the black canvas with lyrical lightness. The sacred ritual of revolving on earthly axis while orbiting the sun is disarmingly captured in the two words. The letter "R" propels the circular orbit of the "hā". Floating, one simple stroke transforms into uplifted arms of the open embrace forming the central "sho" of the tilted head as it looks up to the welcome of its higher self. Freed from the recognition that chains them to the material world, the letters ascend towards spiritual union with the beloved.

A mystical dance of words suspended between the material and cosmic worlds, Shahrzad's work is the pictorial transmission of Rumi's thoughts onto the field of vision. The timeless message of the kindred souls of both artist and poet, it is best summed up in the simple command of her painting :

"*Raha sho*", free yourself.

Zahra Faridany-Akhavan holds a PhD and Masters in the Arts and Culture of the Islamic World from Harvard University, and a BA in Fine Arts from Wellesley College.