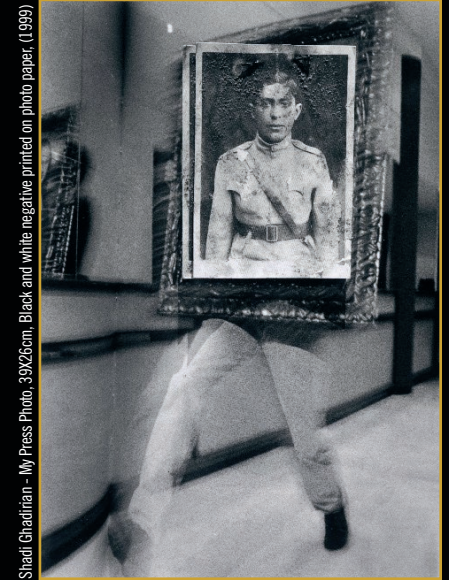


All that glitters is not gold

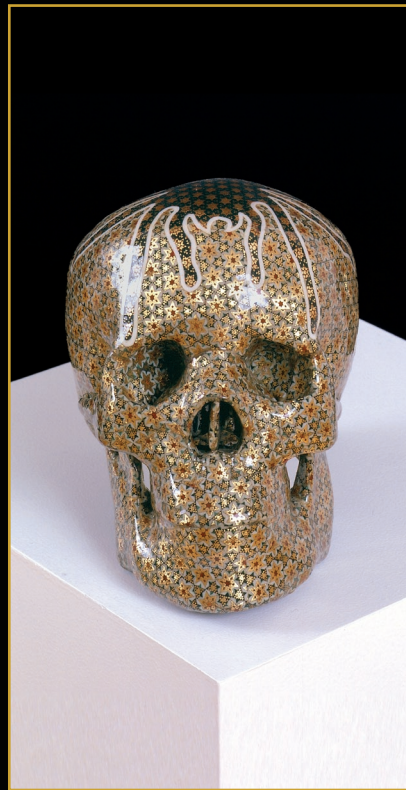
Glitter and doom they said so glitter and doom it is. Iranians are comfortable with these extremes. Have been for ages. Long before the current difficulties drove glitter from their streets – though not from their apartments and their parties. Iranian artists had to think carefully about just how much glitter they might sprinkle on their doom and doom on their glitter. Get it wrong and the chances were that they would have to run fast and far. Their great poet Khayyam had to stay his pen and flee for his life when the verses that now sparkle at us down the centuries were denounced as ‘fugitive verses’ that were ‘a tissue of error like poisonous snakes’ in the eyes of Canon Law. Even the work of the strong and powerful wasn’t immune to this kind of thing. One minute Shah Abbas was fashioning splendid architectural jewels like Isfahan’s Meydan-I Shah and Ghelel Sotan and the next, he was gone; his frescoes sealed in concrete. Or in our own blighted times, first the Shah endorses the avant garde and experimental Shiraz art festival and then in a twinkling of history’s eye all hell breaks loose. For every Persepolis there’s an Alexander waiting with a flame torch and a can of kerosene.

It’s the same story in each of the thirty one works that the charity Magic of Persia has gathered together for its remarkable auction at the end of November. Set in amid the glass and steel that rises each day higher and wider from the sand and sea that circle Dubai, Magic of Persia have brought together one of the most impressive groups of contemporary Iranian artists ever assembled. But they have done more than this. Each of the artists has donated a piece and every penny raised by the auctioneers, Christie’s, will go to support the Magic of Persia’s charitable work. Some of the artists they have assembled are international stars – Shirin Neshat, Abbas Kiarostami, Parviz Tanavoli and Farhad Moshiri to name but four – all of them are acknowledged masters whose works command high prices at auction. Most of the work has been made especially for the auction. And what work. From Shirin Aliabadi’s bubblegum girl (Miss Hybrid) to Shirin Neshat’s humanity dwarfing dark and louring branches and from the Swarovski crystals and oil of Farhad Moshiri’s Only Love to the intricate Marquetry (Khaatam) of Andisheh Avini’s unnamed skull. In each and every one the double bluff lives on. The sweet innocence of bubble gum girl is no such thing – the bubble, the hair and even the sticking plaster spell defiance. And the skull speaks not of death and decay but of beauty and skill. Here is glitter and doom turned to art and artists neatly turning the tables on the market... MB

Magic of Persia Auction and Gala, Jumeriah Emirates Towers, Dubai, 24 November 2007



Shadi Ghadirian - My Press Photo, 39x26cm, black and white negative printed on photo paper, (1999)



Andisheh Avini - Untitled, 14.6x12.7x20.3cm, Marquetry (Khaatam) and plastic human skull, (2007)



Shirin Aliabadi - Miss Hybrid, 3' (bubble gum)



Farhad Moshiri - Only love "faghat eshgh", 230x170x7cm, Swarovski crystal (diamonds) oil on canvas mounted on board, (2007)



Shirin Neshat - Toba Series, 69.9x81.9cm, C-print, (2002)



Peyman Houshmandzadeh - A Rough Estimate, 62x86cm, (2004)