

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

FEMALE VISUAL SIGNS IN THE MINIATURE PAINTINGS OF FARAH OSSOULI ADAPTED FROM REZA ABBASI'S MONOGRAPHS

Akram Pilechian¹, Laleh Kharazian², Fatemeh Zahmatkesh³

¹Department of Art, Ferdows Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Khorasan, Iran.

²Department of Art, Faculty of Alzahra, Technical & Vocational University (TVU), Mashhad
Branch, Khorasan, Iran.

³Department of Art, Ferdows Institute of Higher Education, Mashhad, Khorasan, Iran.

Corresponding Author Email: [1akrampilechian@ymail.com](mailto:akrampilechian@ymail.com)

[2kharazian@um.ac.ir](mailto:kharazian@um.ac.ir) [3Mahshid.70@gmail.com](mailto:Mahshid.70@gmail.com)

Akram Pilechian, Laleh Kharazian, Fatemeh Zahmatkesh. Female Visual Signs In The Miniature Paintings Of Farah Ossouli Adapted From Reza Abbasi's Monographs-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(10), 191-204. ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Miniature Painting, Reza Abbasi, Farah Ossouli, Adaptation, Visual Signs.

ABSTRACT

Among contemporary artists, Farah Ossouli has adapted the female monographs of Reza Abbasi's miniature painting to express her purpose and worldview, which is the status of women in today's society. This article analyzes the role of visual themes in the works of Farah Ossouli's adaptation of a work of Reza Abbasi *Two Lovers* and seeks to answer to this question: What changes Ossouli has made in the visual signs of Reza Abbasi's works for achieving her goal of presenting the intended concepts? The data were gathered through library, field-based and also interview-methods and the research method is on the basis of concept and structure analysis. The data demonstrate that Ossouli was influenced by the figure states of Reza Abbasi's paintings due to her special interest in miniatures and Safavid period. The man and woman's state are not changed, and only the elements are replaced, and the symbolic visual signs have entered the work.

INTRODUCTION

Farah Ossouli, a contemporary painter, has used various methods for creating her artworks, and based on her three working periods (iconic, modern and postmodern), she depicts some issues taken from themes of woman and men. In the transition from the modern period (using the concept of syntagmatic

relations) to the postmodern period (using the concept of succession), she has used the option of adaptation as a means of expressing her purpose and worldview. Farah Oussuli has adopted from the women's figure in Reza Abbasi's monographs and has replaced the symbolic visual signs with the decorative elements in the miniature. What is significant is the unparalleled similarity of her work with Reza Abbasi's monographs, so that audience at first glance notices the mere simulation of the miniatures, but by paying more attention, the changes might be observed. The expressed signs make one to peruse this issue: What concepts did Ossouli insert into her work by making changes to Reza Abbasi's paintings? This study aims to decipher the changes made by Farah Ossouli to Reza Abbasi's miniatures and compare and contrast the forms and elements of both artists with each other. Few researchers have been focused on Farah Ossouli's works. Fersive (2003) in his study has written about Ossouli's works and her pedagogy through interview. In this article, Ossouli has complained about Iranian artists who do not care about their history and do not respect their cultural heritage. In the following she has expressed that all third world countries are affected by this issue.

Keyghobadi (2014) has focused on the visual response of Farah Ossouli to a painting by a Renaissance Italian artist (Leonardo da Vinci) and discussing how and why Ossouli has re-presented an icon of the western art canon through her creative discourse. Also, she has investigated Ossouli's use of visual re-narration as a pedagogical tool for offering alternative social, cultural and political perspectives.

Khosravi Jelodar & Zandiravan (2019) in their paper stated that contemporary artists, including Farah, due to their artistic knowledge of historical sources and the selection of appropriate stylistic principles, elements and materials, have been able to introduce new values in relation to the visual tradition of Iranian painting and art media.

Reza Abbasi the Master Miniature painter in Safavid Era

Reza Abbasi (c. 1565 – 1635) without any exaggeration was an innovative, creative and the leading Persian miniaturist of the Isfahan School during the later Safavid period, spending most of his career working for Shah Abbas I. Reza probably received his training from his father Ali Asghar Kashani and joined the workshop of Shah Abbas I at a young age (Brend 1991, Azhand 2006).

He is considered to be the last great master of the Persian miniature, best known for his single miniatures and the presence of human figures for albums,



Figure 1. Young Portuguese Man. (1634) 14.6 x 19.2 cm. Detroit Institute of Arts

especially single figures of beautiful youths. He usually depicted one or two figures in a very beautiful garden and sometimes decorated his works with gilding style. Unlike most earlier Persian artists, he usually signed his work, often giving dates and other details as well, however there are many pieces with signatures that it is not clear who owns their signature (Canby 1996). Unfortunately, some of his contemporary painters and calligraphers had similar names and reputation to Reza (Pop 1996). The fluency and the thinness of the line is seen in all his works which most of the pieces are covered with a thin layer of light color. The boldly emphasis on the wrinkles of long scarves or dervish cloaks and belts of figures has been performed professionally which have acquired beauty and abstract properties (Grey 1991). (Figure1)

Rhythmic lines which continue with circular and curved movements in the background elements and create a dynamic effect. Also Using circular and geometric composition in which the figures and elements have been placed elegantly in the frame. His miniature paintings mostly include social themes such as: dervishes, young women and girls, peddlers, hunters and farmers which most of these are rare in the history of Iranian painting. they were made at a time when he was away from the court, and probably his populist and dervish spirit can be considered as an important reason for his resignation from the court. (Mohebi 2017)

Reza's ingenuity, initiative, and mastery influenced all the painters of his time. After him, none of his students could present works like him. from this period onwards, we are witness the weakness of painting in Iran (Fadavi 2007)

Artistic Developments in the Works of Farah Ossouli

Farah Ossouli was born in 1953 in an



Figure 2. Ahmad and I. (2012). by Farrah Ossouli British Museum. London. Gouache on cardboard. 76x56 cm



Figure 3. Fra Angelico and I. (2014). by Farrah Ossouli. From the Listen! Do you hear darkness blowing series. Gouache on cardboard. 75x75 cm

artistic family in Zanjan. Since childhood, she has been interested in drawing and creating cardboard doll characters, and in addition to painting, she has focused on literature and storytelling. In 1968, she moved to Tehran with her family, and in 1969 attended the entrance exam of Fine Arts Vocational School and was accepted in the art major. Under the supervision of professor "Mohammad Ebrahim Jafari", she started learning western painting and copying the works of past artists and also learned miniatures from Professor Mahmoud Farshchian¹. She graduated in 1971 from Fine Arts Vocational School. Ossouli graduated in 1977 with a B.A. degree in graphic design from University of Tehran. She learned graphic design, animation, photography, engraving, printing, children's book painting and posters under the supervision of professors. The period of modernist tendencies' period of Farah Ossouli was formed by the syntagmatic relations between the miniature painting and flat colored surfaces (structurally and without purpose) in *Neyshabur* collection. 30 created works represent attacks, earthquakes and natural disasters in Neyshabur. To create these painting, she has focused on the Safavid period, especially the works of Reza Abbasi and the frescoes remaining in Isfahan. In this collection, the background is simple and figures are highlighted (Fersiv 2003).

Two attitudes are evident in the works of Farah Ossouli from 2007 onwards. One has replaced the decorative elements without manipulating the character (by using gouache, she would create simple backgrounds and delicate motif, inspired by Safavid era) (Figure 2). And the other one has replaced the characters through using the themes and combinations of the works of Western painters (she would create a vibrant and colorful space by using airbrush and gouache). (Figure 3) In addition, in Ossouli's works, there are quotes from contemporary Iranian poets such as Ahmad Shamlou², Forugh Farrokhzad³ and also composite-ties adapted from the famous paintings of Frida Calvo, Francisco Goya, Peter Paul Rubens, Reza Abbasi, Leonardo da Vinci and others.

The Movement of Syntagmatic Concept to Paradigmatic Concept in Postmodern Art

In fact, by passing through the modern art and entering the postmodern art it can be expressed that postmodern art challenges the values, compared to the modern art, replacing them with history, time, space and more transient and subjective concepts. it is noticeable that modern art has paid attention to the form and structure (structuralism: the concept of syntagmatic relations, placing the elements together and new structure), and postmodern art to the content expression (deconstructionism: the use of paradigmatic elements as tools, displacement of elements, changing the concept, creating ambiguity, metaphor, adaptation and meaning). Glenn Ward quotes Jenks in his book, "Postmodernism is seen as an art of adaptation, combining references merely in a hollow and mystical landscape. Adaptation with its nostalgic state enjoys a lot of past styles, but doesn't understand anything of history and has no interest in the future (Ward 2003). In confirming these, Archer expresses, "Postmodern culture is an adaptation culture and sees the world as a simulated collection".

Adaptation culture has various forms, but without any claim of innovation, it seeks for efficacy (Arher 2014). The postmodern period with its fundamental changes has utilized the process of semiotics and created works with many implicit and unlimited implications. (Cabely & Jansz 2004).

Syntagmatic (how elements are put together) and Paradigmatic (how elements are replaced).

Syntagmatic and Paradigmatic are two axes; the former is the horizontal axis and the latter is the vertical axis. The syntagmatic performance is in a way that two certain elements are combined, but the paradigmatic performance is in a way that one element is selected out of others. In paradigmatic relations, elements are compared and differentiated (Mahdiyeh 2014). Therefore, it can be said that the value of a sign is determined by both of these relationships. The axis of syntagmatic defines the juxtaposition of the components of language in time, and the axis of paradigmatic defines the possibility of replacing these components with each other. (Chandler 2003)

Farah Ossouli's Works Adapted from Reza Abbasi's Monographs

Among the exemplary works of adaption, there are two work by Farah Ossouli *Seven Thousand Years Old, Reza-Ahmad and I* which are adapted from the monograph of Reza Abbasi *Two Lovers* and will be considered in this study. These two works have been created since 2010 until 2014. The current study analyzes the works of Ossouli adapted from Reza Abbasi's miniature painting. Then after comparing the mentioned works, tables are presented to show the similarities and differences in how the two artists expressed themselves and how they performed.

Table 1. Farah Ossouli Art Courses

Art Courses	Subject of Work	Technique
1957 - 1968	Childish Painting Creating puppet characters	Paper- Colored pencil
1969 -1971 (Iconography course)	Entering the Fine Arts Conservatory teaching and copying artists' works	Oil paint - charcoal and...
1971 – 1977 (modernism- syntagmatic)	Entrance to Tehran Art University Graphic design - Painting- Printing...	Mixed media painting using (printing-colored pencil-crayons) & (colored pencil- crayon)
1977 – 1984 (modernism- syntagmatic)	Cover design of Iranian music inspired by film	the style of Safavid miniature (<i>Ghalamgiri</i>) -

		Simple backgrounde-Featured figures
1984 – 2006 (modernism-syntagmatic)	Following Neyshabur documentary filmmaking and creating 30 themes (attacks and disasters)	Timurid Period - Gabbeh and Kilim Motifs - Large frame, flat monochrome surfaces - Air brush - Figures in corner of frame.
2006 up to now (postmodernism – paradigmatic)	Adapted from the works of the great Iranian and world artists - using military tools to express their purpose.	Two methods First: Safavid <i>Ghalamgiri</i> , simple background, motif Two: Crowded Space Works, Various Colors, Air Brushes

The Analysis of Female Visual Signs in Two Miniatures of Farrah Ossouli
Farah Ossouli miniature *seven thousand years old*



Figure 4. Seven Thousand Years Old from the Khayyam series. (2016). by Farrah Ossouli Gouache on cardboard. 76x55 cm

(2013) which is part of "Khayyam" collection is adapted from *Two Lovers* by Reza Abbasi is about the works of three generations of Iranian contemporary artists named "Secrets of eternal, Khayyam⁴ and art today" and refers to Khayyam poem. (Figure 4). She has expressed about Khayyam that there is magic in his poems which made them universal and have a profound philosophy in a Do-bayti (a two-verse poem) Khayyam has a special look to the world. On the one hand, many things are considered absurd, and on the other hand, the human must understand that moment which is significant. Anything is remained neither from yesterday nor tomorrow¹.

The *Two Lovers* has been created in 1661 by Reza Abbasi that displays the presence of lovers and the intertwined state of two statues (Figure 5), where the protruding bump of the limbs, the twisted and lifted arms, and the clear erotic elements - fruit, wine, naked navel, bare foot, prominent chest - all express eroticism. The figures apparently are thinking about other things as if they are reminding of a delightful event of the past (Canby 1996) The man and the woman have a realistic state, spirit and movement. Ossouli by employing paradigmatic elements (from postmodernism component), has replaced the symbolic visual geometric signs highly elegant with Reza Abbasi's visual signs (such as murder instruments including knives, bullets, bombs). Alongside these murder instruments (a symbol of violence and war), she put the flower as a sign of freshness and gentleness which displays a contrast.



Figure 5. *Two Lovers*. (1039 AH).by Reza Abbasi. 18.1 x 11.9 cm. Metropolitan Museum of Art

In fact, this space is the same as Khayyam's space (despair and hope, anxiety and euphoria), showing a mirror of a world in which human beings are surrounded by wars, killings and destructions and at the same time seeking for the love, which is gained by humans at a high cost and lost by them in an easy manner. And the human is a victim of those events that he himself has no role in them. The blood stream refers to the story of war and killing. Due to the large size of her works, Ossouli has employed small amount of color in all parts of the frame and by using motifs has covered the figures.

Her figures like dead figures are disfigurement with ghostly faces in which two concepts are merged to create a new concept out of it. Probably she is trying to combine two meanings. One is that the world is absurd, meaningless and mortal and whatever joy and love exist, ultimately will be nothing left but death. And the other is that in a world of violence, murder and bloodshed, "O man, take advantages of the smallest moment and time for love and enjoyment, like lovers".

Another adaptation of *Two Lovers* miniature painting is named *Reza, Ahmad and I* in which Farah Ossouli employed the poems of Ahmad Shamlou to create this work (**Figure 6**).

This is a painting of "Wounded Virtues" collection performed in the United State for three years (2010-2013), which is inspired by quotes from Iranian contemporary poets such as Ahmad Shamlou and Forugh Farrokhzad and also of the famous images of art history. The general theme of "Wounded Virtues" collection is based on the notion that appearances can be deceptive and conceal the truth in another way.

Works of this collection reflect the conflict and struggle which Ossouli felt them in today's society and created the work according to her own conception of this issue. She has employed the paradigmatic element to decorate the margin and illuminate the painting, and has used such visual signs as knives, pigeon, wheat spikes and water container. Concerning the use of Shamlou's poem, she expressed that she has always been interested in creating a work based on this poem, which is reminiscent of her childhood memories. In her memory of killing a hen, she would see some water is given to it by hands, which had been a terrible moment for her. Over time, she believed that this water is the last pleasure and sign of life and also the last of its connection to the life.

Farah Ossouli believed that Shamlou analogized the "lover" to the "water" and in fact the last drop of life is the last moment of pleasureⁱⁱ.

At the last moment of life, a violent soldier















Figure 6. Reza, Ahmad and I From the Wounded Virtue Series. (2012).by Farrah Ossouli.. British Museum. London. United Kingdom. Gouache on cardboard. 76x56 cm







wearing a dress marked by the infinite and fascist signs (a combination of old soldier and new police) cuts the neck of the lover and kills him. The man in love embraces his love and the last point of his connection to the life is this love and mistress. It means no matter how hard death is difficult for the man, love has been able to connect it to the world and keep them alive. In other words, the woman is like that water for the man before his death. In Reza Abbasi's miniature painting, there is not any birds, but Farah Ossouli by drawing a pigeon has emphasized the poem⁷.

Farah Ossouli painted similar to the composition of Reza Abbasi's miniature to make the audience realize that it was adapted of his work, because Reza Abbasi's work expresses the peace and beauty of love and this calmness has been evoked in the mind of the audience. In her imaginary world, even the violence has been drawn with subtlety and beauty, and she has portrayed violence with a beauty that expresses contradiction.

The murderer (the one who used violence and disregarded the human dimension of a person and deprived the victim of his/her view and saw him as an object and then killed him) and the victim (those against whom violence is committed and have a transcended human state) are both lacking state.

Table 2. Analysis of Farah Ossouli miniature *Seven Thousand Years Old* & Reza-Ahmad and I with Reza Abbasi miniature *Two Lovers*

Miniature Paintings Features	 Two Lovers	 Seven Thousand Years Old	 Reza-Ahmad & I
Year	1039 AH	2013	2012
Size	11.9x18.1	76x55	76x56
place	The Metropolitan Museum of Art	Farah Ossouli Private Collection	Farah Ossouli Private Collection
Technique	Watercolor on paper	Gouache on cardboard	Gouache on cardboard
Subject	Romantic	The mortal & transient world	Violence, murder & bloodshed
Composition	The figures are centered in the frame	Figures at the top and bottom of the Frame, loxodromic	The figures are centered in the frame
Color	Variety of Warm, Cold & Vivid Colors	Neutral Color A bit of linear Color on the Surface	Neutral Color A bit of linear Color on the Surface
Illumination	 Golden flowers and leaves Motifs	 Murder Instruments (bombs) & Poem	 Murder Instrument (knives), Flowers & Poems
Dress Code	 Colored Color Flower & Golden Plants	 Motif	 Motif (fascist sign, cross)
Figure States	 Smiling Faces, Immersed in a Fantasy World	 A Man with a Beard & Mustache (emphasis on	 A Man with a Beard & Mustache

	Having State & Alive	being a man), Without State & Transcended	(emphasis on being a man), Without State & Transcended
Space & Background	 Gold Expressive Cloud	 Without background color Thin Colored Lines	 Without background color Thin Colored Lines
	 Drawing Free & Expressive Clusters without rules	 Obsession & sensitivity of the brush on paper with rules	 Obsession & sensitivity of the brush on paper with rules
Paradigmatic & syntagmatic	Bowl Wine container Fruit	Bowl Wine container Fruit Murder Instruments (bombs, bullet, knives)	Bowl Wine container Fruit Murder Instruments (knives) Pigeon Motif (fascist sign, cross)

CONCLUSION

Paradigmatic relations between the visual signs, which is an expressive tool, created a different worldview in postmodern era, by replacing the elements through changing the concept, creating ambiguity, metaphor, adaption and the meaning of the artistic works. By attributing an unfamiliar concept to a familiar one, this tool manifests the new aspects of the unfamiliar concept for the audience or highlights some of its certain characteristics. By the expressive tool of paradigmatic relations, the artist goes beyond the limitations of a particular artistic style, and by changing the concept through adaptation, created a context for expressing a new idea and concept in a different language. This context might be observed in the re-expression of the concerns of contemporary artistic women's like Farah Ossouli. Using the new expressive tool of visual signs, she has been trying to better convey the concepts to the audience. After passing the technical artistic courses, with the entrance of the concepts, the postmodern view gradually might be seen in her works. The use of structural visual elements was replaced by the approach of replacing meaningful visual signs. So, her modern views are transformed into postmodern views. Farah Ossouli created a work including certain features of an adaptation, and had a special perception of this adaptive work. Farah Ossouli has tried to own what she has perceived from another work and also the decorative elements of Reza Abbasi's monographs which she used in her work by using the paradigmatic and

syntagmatic relations between such visual signs as using knife, bullet, bomb, pigeon and soldier. The figures are depicted with neutral faces, without state, simple linear images, flat, without-feeling and -excitement colors, but very delicately and beautifully, and show a violent, bitter and contradicted situation. Her works are very similar to Reza Abbasi's, so the audience might see a mere simulation at the first glance. However, with more attention, one might understand the visual signs which have taken the place of Reza Abbasi's decorative elements. Decorative elements are specific to Reza Abbasi, but the conceptual visual signs are specific to Farah Ossouli. With her special interest in the miniature painting and Safavid artistic period, she has used the figure state of the women and men in Reza Abbasi's works. The men and woman's state are not changed, and only the elements are replaced, and the symbolic visual signs have entered the work.

POSTSCRIPT

1. Mahmoud Farshcian (b.1930) is a contemporary Iranian master miniature painter.
2. Ahmad Shamlou (b.1925) was an Iranian poet, writer, and journalist.
3. Forough Farrokhzad (b. 1934) was an influential Iranian poet and film director. She was a controversial modernist poet and an iconoclast, writing from a female point of view.
4. O friend, let's not be worried about tomorrow
Let's take advantage of this moment of life
Tomorrow when we leave this mortal world
We are equal to the 7000-year old ones (poem by Khayyam)
5. Interview with Farah Ossouli (2016)
6. Interview with Farah Ossouli (2016)
7. You are that water which the servants give to the pigeons
Before cutting their neck by the knife (poem by Ahmad Shamlou)

REFERENCES

- Azhand, Yaghub. (2006). *Isfahan Painting School*. Iranian Academy of arts. Tehran
- Archer, Michael. (2014). *Art since 1960*. Thames & Hudson. United Kingdom
- Brend, Barbara. (1991). *Islamic art*, Harvard University Press. United Kingdom
- Canby, Sheila. (1996). *The Rebellious Reformer: The Drawing and Paintings of Riza-yi Abbasi*. Azimuth. London
- Chandler, Daniel. (2003). *Semiotics: The Basics*. Taylor & Francis. United Kingdom.
- Cobely, Paul. Jansz, Litza. (2004). *Intruducing Semiotics: A Graphic Guide*. Icon book. United Kingdom
- Fadavi, Mohammad. (2007). *Illustration in the Safavid and Qajar eras*. Tehran university
- Fersive, Sohrab. (2003). *Farah Ossouli Painter of Sublime Custom*. Social Science: People's Culture. No. 6&7. pp.12-32
- Keyghobadi, R. (2014). *Mona Lisa speaks Persian: An Iranian artist's visual response to an iconic painting*. Visual Inquiry: Learning & Teaching Art 3: 1, pp. 9–19
- Khosravi Jelodar, Khosrow; Zandiravan, Nasrin. (2019). *Historical Attribution of Modern Creativity with the Art Works of Iranian Contemporary Artists (A*

Case Study of Farah Ossouli, Kouros Shishegaran, Mohsen Vaziri-Moghddam). Rahpooyeh Honar. No.3. pages 47-58

Mahdiyeh, Raziye. (2014). *Studying the Role of Metaphor in Industrial Products: Postmodern Period*. Journal of Fine Art, Visual Art. Volume 20.No. 2, pp. 85-92

Mohebi, B; Khani, F; Ranjbar, m. (2017). *The role of women in the Safavid period Emphasizing on Reza Abbasi's works*. Women's studies, Vol 8, pp. 97-121

Pope, Arthur Upham, (1996). *Survey of Persian Art*. Oxford University Press, London

Ward, Glenn. (2003). *Postmodernism*. Teach Yourself. United Kingdom