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 MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI  
 Meeting Aydin Aghdashloo

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I had already developed a routine when I started to work on my next project. Ms. Mithra Etezadi, the chief conservator and expert of the Cultural Institutions of Bonyad, was very kind to organize everything and obtain the required papers for me. We had some telephone calls.

A couple of days later, I decided to fly to Tehran to start analyzing the inventory of historical arms and armor of the museums of Bonyad. I had the same feeling when I entered the board of Iran Air, the nice smile of my compatriots, and all nostalgia, a mixture of happiness and dazzling feeling of going back to my childhood and adolescence. It was in the evening when our plane approached Tehran. The marvelous lights of this wonderful city were everywhere, so numerous, so colorful. They looked like a feast of lights with different colors, as though people were celebrating something. I tried to make a futile attempt to find out the whereabouts of my parent's home where I used to grow up. I could still remember every corner of that house, every neighbor's house, and all those memories. It was impossible to tell the whereabouts of our former neighborhood from above, from that distance. So big, so huge, that was my beloved Tehran. Finally, our plane landed, and we got out. The weather was cold, and we approached the passport control. How nice it was to listen to people; everyone was speaking Farsi. After spending so many years in different countries, it was nice to hear my mother tongue as it always brought me back to the memories of my childhood.

I went through the passport control, and I searched my luggage and went through the customs. I could see many people waiting in the hall. Everyone was holding a bunch of flowers to welcome their loved ones returning from abroad. All those eyes were fixing on us, trying to find their loved ones.

My parents were also waiting for me as always. I could see their eyes and how happy they became when they saw me. We hugged and kissed each other, and my mother handed me the flowers. I thought how fragrant the flowers smelled, how tender and how fragile. Yes, fragile was the word, or even ephemeral, like our lives, a bridge between this world and the next, like a flash of a second. However, I thought that, in spite of their short existence, these tender flowers made people happy and share love.

Maybe that was the whole reason for their existence, for making people happy, to give them the feeling that someone cares. I looked at my mother again, at her eyes and all her dreams, waiting for us throughout all these years. It was the same routine as usual. We got into the car and headed home. I kept watching the streets and the people. The cars

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seemed to be everywhere--different lights, many shops, and many people. On the way home, in Vanak Square, I could see the big billboard advertising a brand of Japanese chef knives with folded steel. I smiled and thought how much I loved those knives and was surprised to see that they were marketed in Iran as well. After a long drive, we got home.

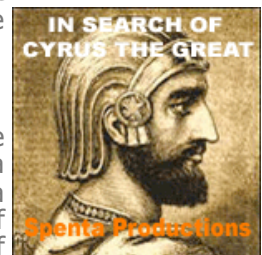
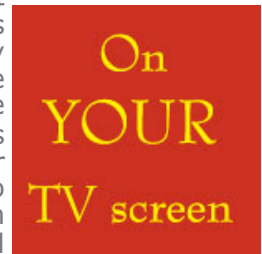
I looked around and could see so many objects that brought me back to my childhood. I wondered how strange it was that those inanimate objects could bring me back to my childhood. We had dinner, and I thought how delicious the 'ghorme sabzi' of my mother was. They kept asking me about the news, and I thought that I could report on artifacts and book projects but decided to talk about the family. Later in the evening, I started to check my laptop as I wanted to make sure that everything would be fine for the museum work the following day. I approached the window and looked at the mountain of Damavand and all the snow in the street. Then, I decided to go to bed, but I could hardly sleep.

It was early in the morning when I got up. My head was aching, so I figured it was due to the jet lag. The clock on the wall was ticking continuously, counting the time. It reminded me that time in Tehran seemed to go slower, at least, for me. Maybe it was due to the fact that I did not need to hurry so much. I went to the fridge and got some milk and tasted *noon-e lavash* (a type of thin bread).

This was always the same: it reminded me how I used to line up in the bakery to get our family bread when I was a teenager. That wonderful taste. Everything seemed like a dream. All those memories. Tehran was, indeed, a feast of memories for me. I remembered exactly the type of discussions on the bread we had in the family. I remembered that everyone argued in favor of a certain type of bread, be it *noon-e lavash*, *noon-e taftoon*, *noon-e sangag*, and *noon-e barbari*. Then, I heard the ring, and I knew that the cab was there. I packed my camera and equipment and headed downstairs. The taxi was waiting, and I got in, sitting next to the driver. He was a young man with dreamy eyes. He asked me the address, and I told him the name of the museum. I watched out of the car window. We were heading towards Mirdamad.

The traffic was really heavy, but somehow the taxidriver managed to pass through all those barriers. I watched the people, going to work, children going to school, mothers doing the shopping, and parents holding the hands of their children. Finally, we arrived, and after paying, I went into the museum. Ms. Etezadi was already waiting for me and gave me a very warm welcome. She introduced me to Mr. Javaheri and other colleagues there. We discussed the details of the project, and we entered the safe to inspect and analyze the wonderful artifacts of historical Iranian arms and armor. There, I met the team of keepers. They were really nice gentlemen who helped me in any respect, and I am truly thankful to them. We all worked on the artifacts, measured them, analyzed them, and photographed them. We shared tea, and they shared their food with me everyday.

On the third day of my work in the museum, Ms. Etezadi asked me whether I wanted to give a short lecture to the



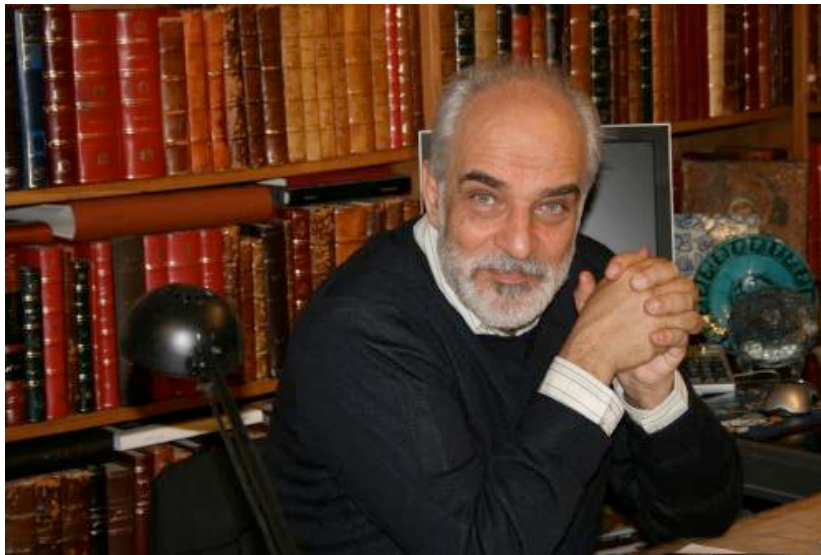
students of conservation and art history of the University of Cultural Heritage of Iran. The students were already in the museum doing some conservation work. I was very happy and accepted the kind offer.

There were some young female and male students waiting for me. I saw that each one was restoring an artifact, many of them bronze items. Some of them were restoring bronze and iron daggers. They were so young, so friendly, and so welcoming. I started to give a short lecture. That is what I actually planned to do. But I ended up giving a lecture for an hour and a half about how crucible steel and composite bows were made. I could see how interested these young students were, their eyes searching for knowledge and listening attentively to every word.

They asked many questions, and I was truly happy to see how interested they were. I was also pleased to hear their level of knowledge in metalworking. Then, they invited me to have lunch with them. It is truly amazing to see the hospitality in Iran. People always share with you. That was really nice, and I accepted their kind offer. We continued our discussion during lunch, and after that, I went back to the safe to continue my work.

It was in the evening when I was sitting in the cab, heading to the place of my parents. This time, the cabdriver seemed to be very interested in sports and asked me about my preferences for soccer teams. People here can easily talk to each other about everything, and that was truly a nice experience. I came home and was very exhausted. My hand still smelled of protective oil and renaissance wax that we used for protecting metal artifacts. I thought that it was truly strange as no amount of washing seemed to wipe that smell off, at least not for a while. I took a shower and sat back to start typing all the dimensions of the artifacts in my laptop computer.

I was pressed for time and did not want to lose any. During my stay in Tehran, I was also honored to meet the husband of Ms. Etezadi, Mr. Faramarz Mostaelizadeh, who is a renowned artist in Iran. He showed me some pieces of horn he had made. They were true pieces of art, and he invited me to visit his exhibition in Reza



First

Next

Abbasi Museum. Unfortunately, I could only stay in Tehran for one week and could not attend his exhibition. During my stay in Iran, Ms. Etezadi and her kind husband gave me a ride one evening to meet Mr. Aydin Agdashloo, who started painting in his youth and is truly a genius artist and a celebrity. I was truly happy and honored to meet Mr. Aydin Aghdashloo, who is not only an accomplished painter but also an art historian and graphic designer. Next to his professional work, he teaches in different Iranian universities. Mr. Agdashloo was very kind and welcomed us. I was truly honored and impressed by his personality. There were books all around the place. Mr. Agdashloo knew a lot about Iranian history in general and art history in particular. I was really impressed by the amount of books in his place and, when I later read his biography, I understood more about the nature and the philosophy of him.

In his own words:

*'Gradually I became acquainted with the works of the great masters, and realizing that would not be enough, I began to read and read, to read any loose page that came my way; and, still not satisfied, I learned English to read more. But knowledge was a vast sea, obscured by the thick dark of the night, and I was an anxious enthusiast, abandoned in a corner, lost.'*

At the age of nineteen, Mr. Agdashloo joined the prestigious College of Fine Arts. However, as he describes the years in that college were wasted years in his life, and, as he puts it in his biography, *'The years in that college were wasted years in my life, and I am indebted to none of the instructors there. The only image left now is one of a herd fighting loudly and furiously for the better seats on a train which has stood still for years and rusted, the engine having departed with a loud roar long ago, leaving everyone behind. Realizing this, I threw myself off the train. I quit the college in 1964.'* Mr. Agdashloo started *'The period of Memoirs of Annihilation'* in 1974 and continued with *'The Years of Fire and Snow'* in 1977.

Maybe it is interesting to state the words of Mr. Abbas

Kiarostami, the renowned Iranian director, who was a school friend of Mr. Agdashloo and who wrote in the foreword for the catalog of *Aydin Unlimited: An Exhibition of Paintings*. These words, stated by one of the geniuses of Iranian movies, express the high intellectual level of Mr. Agdashloo:

*"He was a thirteen-year-old boy who was drawing. In those days, I too used to draw. I tried to peek at his drawing from behind when he gave me an angry look, one that stayed with me the entire academic year [. . .] At the age of fifteen, it was indeed none other than Aydin who aroused my desire for acquiring knowledge - a memory that I cannot attribute to any of my teachers. School years ended and we were both accepted to the faculty of Fine Arts at Tehran University. Aydin left college halfway through and became a painter. Meanwhile I endured the difficulties of Art school, completed the curriculum with hardship, and did not become an artist! [. . .] My oldest friend Aydin Agdashloo is in one word unique. He is both an intellectual who is an artist and an artist who is an intellectual. A critique of his work is indeed beyond my capacity. However, what is clearly visible in his work is the effort to portray an accurate and clear depiction of the present time and place by a committed artist; with a world-inclusive vision, he is an artist who has deep roots in his own Iranian culture. [. . .]. Today Aydin Agdashloo, this multifaceted personality, has turned into a cultural heritage himself. On his own, he is a unique heritage, whom unfortunately no one has the strength and power to effectively safeguard and protect. He is a mortal Heritage."* (Mr. Abbas Kiarostami in *Aydin Unlimited: An Exhibition of Paintings*)

Mr. Agdashloo's sensitive eyes and nature and his true love for his native country Iran are revealed in his descriptions of the [Iran-Iraq] war:

*'And when the war began, I paid my humble due, with a half-burnt miniature by Reza Abbasi suspended in the air as pillars of the conflagration's black smoke extended the darkness in the background. And the world itself told the tale of my memoirs of annihilation. One had to be blind, or would have had to shut one's door to the world and crawl into a hole, not to notice death's incursion, and the young men who took it for nothing, who welcomed it without fear. Just like that miniature, flying in thick smoke, which is not dead even if it is crumpled. And I discovered many killed ones around me who were not dead, who do not die, who, for me, do not die. And from this point on, all that was left was the tale of the disfigurement of youth and freshness, and there it was, the victorious Death, roaming; and I, unable to paint the faces of all the dead, was forced to fall back on metaphor, replacing the dead with miniatures and calligraphies and gildings, so that in acts of lamentation, seeking justice. I could become the narrator of the injuries conquering the land.'*

Another series of paintings by Mr. Agdashloo are 'Occidentals,' 'Orientals,' 'Meeting the past,' 'Water colours,' 'Falling angels,' 'Illustrations,' and 'Aydin Unlimited.' I still remember how mesmerized I was by the beauty of the paintings by Mr. Agdashloo there. Then, he got up, picked up a copy of the brochure of 'Aydin Unlimited,' signed it with 'Dedicated to dear Mr. Moshtagh with kindness and deep

congratulations,' and gave it to me. That was a truly emotional moment for me. One of those moments when one feels overwhelmed by friendship and generosity. One of those moments when words fail to express the feelings you truly have. One of those moments when you, indeed, realize that you have met an intangible cultural asset in person.

**Picture 1:** Mr. Aydin Agdashloo in his library.

**Picture 2:** Ms. Mithra Etezadi and her students.

**Picture 3:** Another picture of Ms. Etezadi and her students.

**Picture 4:** A casual discussion on crucible steel between the students of conservation and art history of the University of Cultural Heritage of Iran and me.

**Picture 5:** The same discussion.

**Picture 6:** A casual discussion on composite bow between the students of conservation and art history of the University of Cultural Heritage of Iran and me.

**Picture 7:** Mr. Aydin Agdashloo and me.

**Picture 8:** From left to right, Siyavash (the son of Ms. Etezadi and Mr. Faramarz Mostaelizadeh), Mr. Aydin Agdashloo, me, and Mr. Faramarz Mostaelizadeh.

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#### **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani writes for PersianMirror from Germany. He is the author of the book "[Arms and Armor from Iran - The Bronze Age to the End of the Qajar Period](#)".

More information is at [www.legat-verlag.de/e/programm\\_e.html](http://www.legat-verlag.de/e/programm_e.html).

Manouchehr is also the moderator of the American organization of Swordforum International, where he answers questions on Middle Eastern Swords. He is considered the specialist on Middle Eastern Arms and Armor and responsible for the forum Edged Weapon from the Middle East, Asia and Africa. For more visit: [forums.swordforum.com/index.php?s=](http://forums.swordforum.com/index.php?s=)

This article was contributed by **MANOUCHEHR MOSHTAGH KHORASANI**, Senior Contributor for PersianMirror.



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