

# LEILA HELLER GALLERY.

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## Sotheby's

### CULTURAL CROSSROADS

## A Meeting of Minds

BY [ROXANE ZAND](#) | 22 APR 2015

**WELLESLEY, MA** - Tucked amidst the green and secluded setting of the Wellesley College campus, the Davis Museum has hosted a retrospective exhibition on **Parviz Tanavoli** that has transcended its intimate parameters and exploded on the global media scene. Tanavoli is, after all, the father of modern art and sculpture in Iran.



Ali Banisadr and Aaron Cezar. Photo by Sarah Xu.

In tandem with this landmark exhibition and several other important shows of Iranian art in the northeast United States – Monir Farman Farmaian retrospective at the **Guggenheim**, a soon-to-arrive Shirin Neshat exhibition at the **Hirschhorn Museum** and the Haerizadeh brothers at New York's **Callicoon Gallery** – the organizers of **Art + Reality: A Symposium on Contemporary Middle Eastern Art in Context** at The Davis Museum had little trouble convincing participants and the audience of the timeliness of such a conference. Dr Shiva Balaghi and Museum Director Lisa Fischman, propelled by the extraordinary cultural impresario that is Maryam Eisler, aimed to explore current issues in contemporary Middle Eastern art, given the newly heightened interest amongst institutions, collectors, curators, scholars and patrons.



Empress Farah Pahlavi at Art + Reality: Symposium on Contemporary Middle Eastern Art in Context at the Davis Museum.

The Empress Farah Pahlavi attended a screening of *Poetry in Bronze*, Terrence Turner's new documentary film on Tanavoli, on the night before the conference, which brought together artists, experts, gallerists, institutional figures and collectors for a comprehensive programme of discussions. Topics ranged from the visibility of Iranian art, to the artist's process and production, from academies and museums to market infrastructures. The list of participants was as impressive as the topics: curator **Vali Mahlouji** had flown in from his Whitechapel project in London, artists **Ali Banisadr**, **Hasan Hajaj**, **Pouran Jinch**, and **Manal Al Dowayan** (straight from Dubai!) had come to discuss their work; academics Nada Shabout (by phone!), Sara Raza (of Yarat and Guggenheim), Vasilis Oikonomopoulos of the Tate Modern, Ladan Akbarnia of the British Museum had all arrived from abroad to present their specific points of view. In the afternoon panels, **Bidoun's** Negar Azimi moderated NGOs represented by the Delfina Foundation and MOPCAP, that complemented the final session on Soft Power with Ambassador Frank Ricciardone of the **Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East**, Moukhtar Kocache formerly of the Ford Foundation, and Professor Karim Sadjadpour of Georgetown University.



Shiva Balaghi, Maryam Eisler, Leila Heller. Photo by Sarah Xu.

A meeting of minds would be an understatement -many fascinating dialogues sparked discussion that could only be halted by the requisite refreshment breaks taken under a glorious Wellesley sunshine.



Lisa Fischman. Photo by Sarah Xu.

As participants exchanged thoughts about what future initiatives are needed to enhance an already fast growing and vibrant art scene, it was clear to all that more forums like this are top of the list.