



IN TRIBUTE TO FARIDEH LASHAI

By Reza Nader-Sepahi

On 24 February, Farideh Lashai, one of the most celebrated Contemporary Iranian female artists died after a long battle with cancer at the age of 68.



Throughout her life, Farideh Lashai's creative vision transcended traditional concepts of East and West as well as bridged numerous artistic disciplines. Her half a century of creative practice involved numerous artistic mediums including painting, sculpture and installation, all of which drew on her own personal experience, the natural world, socio-political conflicts as well as the broader history of contemporary Iran.

More recently, Lashai has used extensively the medium of video, at times on its own and at times projected on her abstract paintings which portrayed real and imaginary characters. On her video paintings: "It is a blow of magic with which invisible creatures that had no shape or form appear from the depth of a mysterious abstract scenery, full of life and charged with untold narratives, expanding the painting as an elastic structure in time, material and space, then disappear, leaving behind a silent still painting, yet now charged with the mythical, the imagined, and creating colossal spaces for fantasies."

Born in Rasht, Iran in 1944, Lashai received a Bachelor's degree in German Literature from the University of Frankfurt as well as a Bachelor's degree from the Academy of Decorative Arts in Vienna. She began her artistic career as a crystal designer in Studio Rosenthal in Germany and Riedel Factories in Austria before moving to painting and mixed media. Throughout her life she held around 25 solo exhibitions and participated in more than 80 group shows internationally. In addition to involvement in numerous biennales and exhibitions including the 18th Biennale of Sydney; *Iran: RPM and Window Café* at the Saatchi Gallery, London; *The Elephant in the Dark* at The Devi Art Foundation, Delhi; *Identity Crisis: Authenticity, Attribution and Appropriation* at The Heckscher Museum of Art, Huntington, New York; *Hope!* at Palais des Arts in Dinard; *Iran Inside Out* at the Chelsea Art Museum, New York and *Persian Gardens* at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, among many others. Her works can be found in major private and public collections including the Tehran

Museum of Contemporary Art; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Demenga Public Collection, Basel; Deutsche Bank and Commerz Bank, Frankfurt; the National Museum of Fine Arts, La Valetta; Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage (ADACH), Abu Dhabi; the Devi Art Foundation, Delhi and the Farjam Collection, Dubai.

Steadfast and determined throughout her life, even up until the last days of her illness Lashai continued creating her art. A woman of remarkable vision, determination and creative energy, Farideh Lashai remains in the hearts and minds of all who knew her. Her work will continue to be an unwavering example of artistic accomplishment and one which struck a common cord between the East and the West.

Farideh Lashai's latest works will form part of a joint exhibition this month in New York at Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art (3 April to 7 May) and Leila Heller Gallery (4 April to 2 May).



The following extract, translated from Farsi, was read at Lashai's funeral by her friend and notable contemporary artist Rana Farnood. In this poignant piece, she describes Lashai in a way that only an artist can – lovingly, gently and movingly.

"How can I present a quick vision of the Farideh whom I knew? I need to draw her in terms of nature, her favorite perspective, and the lenses through which she looked at the world. This will be a symbolic picture, envisioning her using the four elements of nature - fire, water, wind, and earth.

When I look at the life and works of Farideh, without a doubt she was made of fire, raging on a war path - more with death than with life. She fought a tireless and relentless battle against the fire (cancer) that threatened her life. It was a fire that had attacked the very flame that was her life.

"Farideh was humble and sincere, a humanitarian concerned with injustice."

Rana Farnood

This fight had turned Farideh into a complete and tireless warrior. She waged 20 years of war. Most modern world wars were shorter than this and I know of no other fighter to have lasted this many years on the frontline. A fire blazed in her very essence that could instantaneously incinerate her friendships, love and art into ashes. Nature, in Farideh's work is ablaze. Nature became like a pregnant volcano ready to destroy all living creatures in its path.

However, those who knew her also saw how Farideh was created from the element of water - flowing, fluid and flexible. In friendship, when she was enamored, she was like the sound of water. In art, she was easygoing, light and smooth. She flowed like running water - unstoppable.

Wherever she was obstructed, she would find another opening - painting, sculpture, stained glass, video, writing and translation. Her soul was crystal clear like water. She filled and fitted in everywhere like water. She could sleep, work and live anywhere - restless, homeless, constantly on the move, as if blowing relentlessly like the Wind. Sometimes stormy and sometimes like a gentle breeze - her life was nomadic. In her work you could feel the mysterious movement of the wind through intertwined branches, foliage and curved plants. Her soul was restless and moving, like the wind.

In some places, abstract painting is associated with the concept of death. Here, it may be seen to make the world devoid of the signs of reality reducing it to the basic elements of abstraction.

Abstraction gets so close to its seminal moments that it almost brushes with death. Hence, perhaps one can imagine that Farideh's unconscious tendency to see the world in abstraction was her way of gradually coming to terms with the manifest destiny that was always inevitable. Her life and work is symbolic of the era in which she lived, expecting death around every corner and attempting to subtly mitigate the real suffering through abstraction.

Farideh was humble and sincere, a humanitarian concerned with injustice. Despite being very sociable, her work was almost always solely devoted to a portrayal of the natural world.

She preferred the concept of space to that of time. To resolve this contradiction, she turned to writing in order to picture time. Farideh preferred to be a writer rather than a painter. Indeed, the conceptual approach in her recent body of work provided a way for her

to reconcile 'Farideh the artist' with 'Farideh the author'.

Farideh was foremost a humanist and this attribute connected her to the element of earth. A unique and special artist who was at once a multi-layered and complex being, the five elements of Farideh's life were constantly at war inside her. But the element of earth finally conquered the others so that her turbulent existence finally found peace within its arms where she now lies."

This work was created during the 2011 Egyptian uprising. It was made through the synchronization of 2500 still images cut from the 1940 movie *The Great Dictator* and the animation of a photograph of Umm Kalthum taken from the Internet. The face of the Grande Dame of Arab music rises on top of the painting, majestic as a moon, with her renowned emerald earrings hanging. The eyes of the singer are closed, as if she were ignoring the minuscule dictator under her watch, dancing in excitement to the tune of her song *El Amal*, which means hope in Arabic.

The Great Dictator has the desire to make the world his own, seen as he plays with the globe that bounces to touch the moon and Umm Kalthum's earring. In the end he is left with nothing. The majestic face of Umm Kalthum slowly fades away, leaving an abstract painting behind now charged with meaning. The work will be shown during Farideh Lashai's upcoming shows in New York at Edward Tyler Nahem Fine Art from 3 April - 8 May and at Leila Heller Gallery from 4 April - 3 May.



This Page & Facing Page:
 El-Amal. 2011. Stills from a projected animation on painting with sound. 200 x 200 cm.
 Edition of seven plus two artist's proofs. Images courtesy Edward Tyler Nahem, New York.