

hinterland

BIRD TALK #4

Rooster Booster - The Conference of the Birds and Its Impact on Modern Iranian Art

May 4, 2023, 7pm @hinterland

Julia Allerstorfer Hertel in conversation with Katrin Nahidi

Summary by Caroline Ahorner / Translation: hinterland and Meghla El Haque

During this bird talk, we explored transcultural global connections and intersecting lines. We examined artistic interpretations and interdisciplinary approaches, raising the question of "modern" Iranian art. Julia Allerstorfer-Hertel steered us through the evening's discussion, accompanied by Katrin Nahidi, whose work combines Postcolonial Studies with a focus on art history in the MENA region. Nahidi's upcoming book, *The Cultural Politics of Art in Iran - Modernism, Exhibitions, and Art Production*, will be published by Cambridge University Press this year. The subject of modern Iranian art is a multifaceted realm of cultural production that critically examines notions of modernity and modernization. How can we describe a localized modernism in Iran?

Katrin Nahidi shed light on the Fighting Rooster Association (Anjoman-e Korūs-e Jangī), which also inspired the conversation's title, "Rooster Booster." Nahidi expanded on the Iranian art scene in the late 1940s and its connections to 'Atṭār's 12th-century epic. The Fighting Rooster Association, established in Iran during the 1940s by painter Jalil Ziapour (1920-1999), writer Gholam Hossein Gharib (1923-2003), composer Morteza Hannaneh (1922-1989), and playwright Hassan Shirvani, aimed to promote modern Iranian art. To cultivate a distinct form of Iranian modernism, these artists sought to incorporate local elements into their art, including Sufism and calligraphy. However, given Reza Shah's efforts to secularize Iran and transform it into a Western-style nation-state, religion was marginalized. Therefore, the inclusion of Sufi elements was met with considerable controversy at the time. Regrettably, the Fighting Rooster Association has received limited international attention to date.

This raises the question: How do we date Iranian modernism? The association avoided institutionalization due to its overt communist affiliations. Ziapour eventually parted ways with the association when he found their artistic principles, as outlined in the Nightingale's Butcher Manifesto published in 1951, to be too radical. This manifesto is considered the earliest manifesto of Iranian art, advocating for an Iranian avant-garde that relied on new forms of abstraction to break free from the constraints of Iranian art traditions and figuration's social concerns.

hinterland

The final section of the discussion sought to explore the meaning of Iranian modernism and examine how problematic and limiting terms like "modern" can be when they hinder our engagement with the art being produced. Perhaps it is better not to label them as "modern" and instead ponder as to why such labels can be unnecessary.