

SHABNAM SHAHKARAMI

NOTHING: Parviz Tanavoli and Iranian Modernism



Figure 1. Parviz Tanavoli . *Heech Lovers*, 2007. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.

When a word becomes a sculpture, outside of any conventional manner or preceding sculptural practices, the result is a hybrid and collaborative form of artistic expression. Parviz Tanavoli's 2007 sculpture *Heech Lovers* (fig. 1), one of the many pieces from his *Heech* series, does exactly that. *Heech Lovers* is highly conceptual, but at the same time stylistic and proportionate—a novel appropriation of modern calligraphy manifested in three dimensions. Tanavoli's first artistic expression of the Persian word *heech*, meaning “nothingness”, occurred in a painting in the middle of a medallion in 1964.¹ Since then, the artist has created hundreds of sculptural heeches in a variety of mediums, using a wide range of materials from bronze and fibreglass to ceramics.² In Tanavoli's work, the word



**NOTHING:
Parviz Tanavoli and
Iranian Modernism**
SHABNAM SHAHKARAMI

“Modern calligraphy saturated the market to satisfy the thirst of new bourgeois clients, who were looking for modern art to decorate the walls of their offices and homes. In response to such a commercialization of art and calligraphy, Tanavoli decided to make nothing.”



heech acquires a variety of shapes and forms, transforming the simple concept of *nothingness* into a visual expression. The *Heech* series introduces a new artistic language into sculptural practice that fuses tradition with modernity by employing principles of calligraphy and literature in the most transformative manner. The employment of a single word as an independent visual form for artistic expression provides the artist with the opportunity to take advantage of the abstract and figurative qualities of Persian alphabets. As a result, endless visual compositions are created by rendering calligraphy in a modern context.

Heech Lovers comprises two iterations of the word *heech*. The word is composed of three letters: the *h* (هـ) makes up the head of the sculpture; the *e* (ی) serves as the neck connecting the first and third letters; the curvilinear shape of the *ch* (چ) serves as the body. The

anthropomorphic quality of the two-eyed letter (هـ) symbolizes the weeping eyes of a lover in Persian poetry.³ The middle letter is static and fixed in shape. The last letter contains the most pliability and elasticity, twisting and curving, taking different shapes and forms. Together, these two groups of three letters in Nasta'liq⁴ script swirl and turn into two lovers embracing each other in the most intimate way, as calligraphy turns into a monumental sculpture.

In this exploratory paper, I will discuss Tanavoli's oeuvre, specifically his *Heech* series as a hybrid approach towards sculptural practices, which was innovative and at the same time nourished by the cultural heritage of his homeland. I will first explore the social context that shaped Tanavoli's *Heech* series, and the subsequent mystical and Sufi interpretations that were drawn from his work. Second, I will delve into the importance of calligraphy in Islamic art and architecture and its transformation from traditional practices to a novel artistic expression. After discussing the aesthetic aspects of *Heech Lovers* and its relation to the principles of Islamic art and architecture, I will situate the *Heech* series in its historical context by bringing Hossein Zenderoudi, another Iranian modernist, into the picture. Some of the works introduced here investigate how Iranian artists



Figure 1. Parviz Tanavoli, *Heech Lovers*, 2007. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.

“The emergence of nationalism, and the urge for constructing an Iranian identity in the global art scene played a significant role in elevating the status of traditional artistic practices.”

of the early twentieth century proposed a local visual language for artistic expression that could fit into modern conventions, while satisfying the national artistic trajectory.

By introducing modernity to many aspects of Iranian life in the early twentieth century, artists were faced with the dilemma of figuring out how to maintain their Iranian identity while being a part of the global artistic scene.⁵ There were contradictory reactions to modernity and the quest for change and progress in Iranian society in the twentieth century; while some believed in accepting the unconditional hegemony of European civilization, others were opposed to the West altogether. Between 1941 and 1979, the government’s investment in establishing cultural and educational institutions such as the Faculty of Fine Arts in Tehran University in 1940 and the Ministry of Arts and Crafts in 1950 was instrumental in developing a novel approach in art.⁶ In addition, private art workshops and galleries as well

as art journals and publications introduced innovative and avant-garde art movements from the West. At the same time, the emergence of nationalism, and the desire among many to construct an Iranian identity in the global art scene, played a significant role in elevating the status of traditional artistic practices. These nationalist sentiments prompted artists to recognize the potential of local cultural sources as raw materials for Iranian modern art. In order to shape an artistic language to distinguish them from their Western counterparts, Iranian artists drew on their cultural roots on the one hand, while using the forms and techniques that modern concepts provided on the other.⁷ Modern artistic conventions prompted new modes of representation and Iranian artists delved into literature, folk culture, and religious votives as sources of inspiration.⁸

As a graduate of the Tehran Academy of Fine Art, Parviz Tanavoli travelled to Italy in 1960 and worked with famous sculptors such as Marino Marini and Emilio Greco.⁹ As Fereshteh Daftari explains, “He acquired the techniques, but the style and the mannered figuration did not resonate with him.”¹⁰ Alongside other artists of the 1960s and 1970s, Tanavoli’s continuous exploration and innovation resulted in an emergence of

Figure 2a. Parviz Tanavoli, *Poet Turning into Heech*, 2007. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.



new movements which formed an artistic language that could satisfy the quest for a national artistic identity.¹¹ Parviz Tanavoli's sixty years of artistic creation manifested in different series such as *Heech*, *Walls of Iran*, *Bird and Cage*, *Locks*, and *Poets and Lovers*.¹² They demonstrate a wide range of the intertwined presences of Islamic and pre-Islamic material culture, as well as the negotiation between tradition and modernity. The building blocks of his artistic creation were poetry, architecture, calligraphy, folk culture, and religious motives—and in some cases the combination of one or two can be traced in some of his works. The *Walls of Iran* series captures the artist's interpretation of ancient monuments in a modern context,¹³ and the *Bird and Cage* series reflects the significant presence of birds in Persian poetry and the metaphoric struggle of the poet's or artist's spirit for freedom from the bodily cage.¹⁴

Among the most recognized and iconic works of Parviz Tanavoli, the *Heech* series has received controversial and contradictory interpretations. While many scholars and art historians have charged the artist with nihilism, others relate the work to mystic and philosophical interpretations around the creation of the world.¹⁵ The initial employment of a single word meaning *nothing* was Tanavoli's response to the extensive use of calligraphy by many artists during 1960s and 1970s, which he saw as problematic—especially after his return from Italy, when he witnessed the commercialization of calligraphy and its dominance over the Iranian art scene.¹⁶ The late twentieth century saw artists copying scripts onto canvas in order to secure their share in the art market. Emerging in the early twentieth century in many Muslim countries, including Iran, calligraphic modernism had a great impact on the development



Figure 2b. Parviz Tanavoli, *Heech and Table*, 1998. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.

of a new artistic trajectory which moved beyond tradition and extended the function of calligraphy as a tool for expression in a sociopolitical context.¹⁷ After Tanavoli's return to Iran, the neo-traditional movement, pioneered by Tanavoli and other artists of his time, took a different direction. Numerous galleries opened in the capital city and modern calligraphy saturated the market to satisfy the thirst of new bourgeois clients, who were looking for modern art to decorate the walls of their homes and offices.¹⁸ In response to this commercialization of art and calligraphy, Tanavoli decided to make *nothing*. The idea of nothingness manifested

in three-dimensional form in a variety of shapes and scales for more than half a century.

The concept of the *Heech* sculptures can shift in meaning and interpretation from one piece to another. From sociopolitical critique to spiritual and Sufi interpretation to manipulating the aesthetic qualities of Persian alphabets, the artist played with the concepts and the physicality of the word *heech*. These alterations became the impetus for Tanavoli's most iconic work. The continuous reinvention of the word *heech* in so many iterations such as *Heech Coming out of the Cage*, *Heech and Table*, *Heech Sitting on the Chair*, *Heech and the Wall*, and *Heech and Its Lover* treat the "word as a being with no gender, a graceful figure with elasticity."¹⁹ It elongates when it leans on the table or twists and turns when it hides under the table. Sometimes it appears as a lover or a beloved in the company of another *Heech*. The *Heech* sometimes demands a new interpretation when it comes out of the cage (fig. 2a, 2b, 2c).

The importance of writing and the adaptation of Arabic as the imperial and cultural language by early Muslim rulers had a great impact on the development of calligraphy, not only as a mode of communication, but also as a sacred medium. A variety of scripts

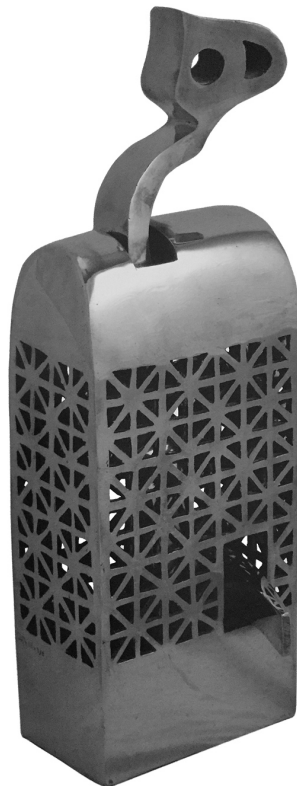


Figure 2c. Parviz Tanavoli, *Heech and Cage*, 2006. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.

were developed for different purposes, from copying the Quran and literary texts to decorating the interior and exterior façades of buildings to embellishing luxury objects.²⁰ As a result, varieties of scripts emerged across geographies and histories. For example, Maghribi script was developed in North Africa, while Nasta'liq originated in Iran and Central Asia.²¹ Nasta'liq and its derivatives were mainly used as an elegant and lyrical script in poetry and literary contexts in Iran.²² From pen and paper to painting and sculpture, calligraphers have applied a wide range of scripts in various shapes, colours, and compositions. Calligraphy embodied a variety of forms and styles from vertical and angular to cursive and horizontal, from abstract and illegible to refined and readable.²³ Contemporary artists took advantage of the aesthetic and abstract qualities of calligraphy to transform it into a modern visual expression that could speak to global audiences. For example, Iranian artists used calligraphy both to convey the mystical qualities of Persian poetry, superseding the literary meaning and emphasizing aesthetic possibilities.²⁴ Many artists used the freedom that modern styles and forms provided to break away from the confines of tradition and express their feelings and frustration with social and political oppression.²⁵

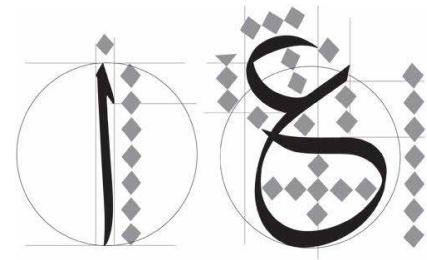


Figure 3. Parviz Tanavoli, *Heech*, 1971. Hamline University, Minnesota. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.

In the *Heech* works, Parviz Tanavoli plays with the ironic interpretation of the word *nothing* to convey multifaceted ideas, while simultaneously revealing the flexibility of Arabic/Persian script. One notable result of Tanavoli's process is the transformation of the concept of nothingness into a freestanding monumental sculpture in 1971 (fig. 3), almost eleven feet tall.²⁶

Later on, the *Heech* sculptures gained a spiritual dimension as well, imbued with mystical interpretations of religion, and the ultimate destiny of human beings to unite with their creator.²⁷ This mystical dimension was inspired by Rumi and Attar, thirteenth-century poets from Iran.²⁸ The mystical aspect of the word *heech* challenges materialistic views of the world (and art) and questions the essence of being. In an interview with scholar and art historian Shiva Balaghi, Parviz Tanavoli explains:

Figure 4. The rhombic dot as a guide to proportions. (www.intechopen.com)



Is there truth in the thing or truth in nothingness—how are they together? Which one is really the one we should become attached to? Rumi says: “Abandon that which looks like something but is nothing. Seek that which looks like nothing but is something.”²⁹

The *Heech* series’ deep spiritual association questions humanity’s biggest fear: non-being, or nothingness. Did God make this world out of nothing? Should we abandon our attachments to reach the state of nothingness in order to surpass the constraints of our world? This ambiguity in meaning transcends the word *nothing* from its immediate meaning to a conceptual expression.

As part of his ascension into the global art sphere, Tanavoli dug into literary and philosophical sources, and moved away from the classical and accepted conventions of sculptural practices. With Iran participating in international art exhibitions, Tanavoli realized that with limited sculptural heritage, his innovation could rejuvenate sculptural practices that had been forsaken for centuries. Tanavoli

explains in his interview with Shiva Balaghi that a sculpture doesn’t have to have human features to be expressive, but the embedded meaning and the hidden story behind it makes it a work of art.³⁰ For example, *Poet Turning into Heech* (fig. 2a), part of the permanent collection at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, starts with the two-eyed *h* while the rest of the word fades into a cylinder. The script on the cylinder reflects the poet turning into nothing, with references to Rumi’s mystical poetry.³¹ The poet turns into nothingness in order to reach spiritual connection and unity.³² The devotional practice of a poet, a Sufi, or an artist has close associations with spirituality.³³ Sufis spend years seeking truth through a spiritual journey by following their master in purifying their soul. The life of Rumi and Attar show that they believed in the human being as a holistic whole whose ultimate destiny is unification with the source of wisdom, not to follow the strict rules of religion.³⁴ As Fariba Enteshari explains in *Rumi’s Poetry*, “A seeker is the one who sees beyond the boundaries of his/

her existence and accepts a wider realm of reality.³⁵ A calligrapher, a Sufi, a poet, and an artist share common qualities of devotion and contemplation in acquiring knowledge and wisdom. This infusion of *heech* with a poet is another symbolic reference to Tanavoli’s multidimensional understanding of cultural heritage represented through his novel approach to sculpture.

Even though the works in the *Heech* series vary by shape and size, one of the distinct features of this series is its monumentality. Elements such as proportion, harmony, and rhythm are among the shared elements between the *Heech* series and Islamic architecture. For example, a proportionate writing system was developed based on two basic elements in the tenth century; a circle with a diameter of the letter *alef*,³⁶ and a rhombic dot created with one stroke of the nib of a reed pen (fig. 4).³⁷

The two Persian letters *alef* and *ayn* demonstrate basic principles of proportion. The six most common proportionate scripts

originated from these geometric foundations.³⁸ The use of the golden mean³⁹ in proportional geometry is the foundation of design in Islamic art and architecture,⁴⁰ and the function of proportional geometry in aesthetic expressions has close associations with spirituality.⁴¹ Geometric measures become tools to understand the harmony and rhythm found in humans, nature, and the Islamic cosmos. Indeed, the fundamental principle of calligraphy lies in the precise science of geometric forms and rhythms,⁴² and the law of proportion used in Islamic architecture shares the same logic with calligraphy.⁴³ *Heech Lovers*, *Heech* in front of the Aga Khan Museum in Toronto, and *Big Heech* at Hamline University in Minnesota (fig. 3) are all examples of *Heech* sculptures executed on a monumental scale that share the proportion and harmony of Islamic architecture.

Fereshteh Daftari explains that artists such as Parviz Tanavoli and Hossein Zenderoudi, the pioneers of the neo-traditionalist movement,⁴⁴ travelled to southern Tehran to working-class neighbourhoods, visiting the Grand Bazaar, welders, pottery shops, foundries, blacksmiths, and street vendors to discover an authentic material culture as a source of inspiration that would resonate with Iranian identity.⁴⁵

Twelfth-century Persian poet Nizami Ganjavi depicted Farhad as a pre-Islamic legendary figure who carved a mountain to win the love of Shirin (the beloved of the Sasanian king). His strong hands and his devotion became a source of inspiration for Tanavoli's *Farhad the Poet* series.⁴⁶ Tanavoli took the legendary figure Farhad as his ancestral sculptor, and searched for inspiration in the poems of Nizami Ganjavi. *Poet and Beloved* (fig. 5), installed outside the Tehran City Theater in 1972, is one example from this series.⁴⁷ The head is in the shape of a lock with grid windows resembling the shrines of Shi'i imams. The arms are bulky and muscular, underlining the tremendous task that Farhad had performed—made possible only by his deep love for Shirin. The lock and the gigantic key in Farhad's hands are derived from a combination of Saqqakhaneh iconographies⁴⁸ and the literary sources that Tanavoli relied on. Parviz Tanavoli's fascination with locks and keys (as popular motifs) and their symbolic associations are a strong presence in his works.

The *Birds and Cage* series reflects the significant presence of birds in Persian poetry: the bird as a metaphor for the poet's spirit imprisoned in his chest, and the cage as the metaphor for the chest.⁴⁹ The nightingale's love for the rose, a theme continuously

repeated in Persian poetry, and the ubiquitous presence of various love stories in Persian literature (such as *Farhad and Shirin*) had a clear impact on Tanavoli's works, but the same themes and stories brought forth a strong spiritual-mystical dimension too. The bird often functioned as a metaphor for Tanavoli as a poet and an artist imprisoned in his bodily cage, struggling to free himself and his soul to become one with the creator.⁵⁰

Coming out of this context, his experiments continued with the seven-foot *Heech Tablet* (fig. 6),⁵¹ while other variations included *Heech on a Ring*. However, with the *Heech Tablet*, in the collection of New York University, Tanavoli's historical references moved beyond the Islamic past of Iran and incorporated cuneiform-like markings.⁵² The locks in the front and the shadow of the word *heech* on the back of the tablet with the end of the letter *ch* sticking out engage the viewer with multiple layers of meaning and references. The markings reference cuneiform scripts from Persepolis, and the monumentality of the tablet reminds us of other ancient works, such as the Hammurabi Stele.⁵³ Together with the hanging locks—in reference to locks of prayers placed on the shrines of the imams—the markings underscore how Islamic and pre-Islamic aspects of Iranian

identity are locked together.⁵⁴ *Heech Tablet* was the beginning of a series of sculptures called *Walls of Iran*, which reflect Tanavoli's admiration for Iranian architecture and ancient monumental remains.

It is difficult to discuss Tanavoli's work in this context without referencing Hossein Zenderoudi. One of Tanavoli's contemporaries, he also had a great influence on the development of Iranian modern visual culture in the early twentieth century.⁵⁵ Zenderoudi is acknowledged for his employment of popular religious art in a highly innovative manner.⁵⁶ His interest in popular culture and Shi'i iconography⁵⁷ took him to neighbourhoods in south Tehran,

Figure 5. Parviz Tanavoli, *Poet and Beloved*, 1972. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.



and the extensive use of popular prints, zodiac signs, talismanic artifacts, amulets, apotropaic charms, astrolabes, and props used in religious mourning became the signatures of his oeuvre.⁵⁸ Zenderoudi was the first Saqqakhaneh artist who divorced calligraphy from its legibility, and furthermore, divorced the word from meaning, emphasizing the aesthetic aspects of the letters themselves.⁵⁹ Zenderoudi graduated from the *École des Beaux-Arts* in 1960, and continued to live in Paris. He became acquainted with Western artistic movements such as expressionism and lettrism.⁶⁰ His interest in the abstract and geometric qualities of Persian/Arabic letters contributed to the Iranian modernist movement. Undoubtedly, Zenderoudi was an innovator in his own right, moving calligraphy from its traditional medium of ink and paper to oil on canvas, and using bold and expansive brush strokes.⁶¹ His experimentation with letters proposed a new reading in calligraphy. "I am a scholar in calligraphy, but I am not a calligrapher, I use calligraphy to construct my painting, like an architect who uses stone and bricks to construct a building," he explains in an interview with *Canvas* magazine in 2009.⁶²

Along with Tanavoli, Zenderoudi gradually abandoned religious motifs and folk culture

(Saqqakhaneh iconography) and developed modern calligraphy as an independent pictorial representation.⁶³ He expanded the boundaries of calligraphy to universal audiences by transcending it from conventions of categorization and definitions. He disassociated calligraphy from any specific religion, culture, history, or geography by emphasizing the aesthetic aspects of the letters. However, while calligraphy was a dominant aspect of both artists' work, Zenderoudi worked in painting while Tanavoli transformed the Nasta'liq script into three-dimensional sculptures. The rhythmic placement of the same letters as the main structural elements of his paintings makes Zenderoudi one of the first artists to use calligraphy—and specifically letters and words—as the sole elements for his compositions. Similarly, Tanavoli took a radical step, and removed calligraphy from any direct historical or traditional association by transforming words into three-dimensional sculptures, a medium where calligraphy had no historical presence. The two artists' exploration of complex and multilayered relationships between word and image has had long-lasting effects.⁶⁴ Many Iranian and Middle Eastern artists have used modern calligraphy in expressionist and abstract expressionist manners, breaking away from the constraints of



Figure 6. Parviz Tanavoli, *Heech Tablet*, 1973. Reproduced by permission of Parviz Tanavoli.

tradition to find new modes for social and political criticism.⁶⁵

From the first inception of *heech* in painting, its continuous evolution and transformation over sixty years reflects the endless possibilities that this three-letter word provides. Its graceful form combined with ever-changing interpretations provide the perfect ingredients for the artist to be expressive and innovative. The allegorical representation of nothingness recreates itself in each new piece, reconstructing part of the historical past in a modern aptitude. It seems the artist rebuilt part of his own historical being and collective memory of Iran's cultural past in each new configuration. *Heech Lovers* revitalizes the tradition of calligraphy, acknowledges the strong presence of love in Persian poetry, and supersedes the sculptural practices of Tanavoli's time. *Heech* and its amalgamation with *Cage*, *Poet*, *Lovers*, and *Walls* evokes multiple allusions and interpretations that always provide possibilities for further exploration. Tanavoli's emotionally charged series, specifically *Farhad* and *Shirin*, *Bird and Cage*, tell us the story of devotion, sacrifice, and sorrow.

Parviz Tanavoli's art is deeply inspired by the cultural aspects of Islamic and pre-Islamic periods in Iran. He fused this

cultural past with novel modes of representation that could speak to the global audiences of the twentieth century. Architecture, calligraphy as high art, and popular culture such as talismans, seals, metalworks, textiles, zodiac signs, locks, keys, grill-shaped shrines, and everyday objects as popular art have all been sources of inspiration for him. Although, there is no distinction between high and popular art in Iran, it is important to recognize the diversity of sources that Tanavoli relied on in his artistic practice. Whether an everyday object or a royal manuscript, whether a Shi'i shrine or an Achaemenid rock relief, they all amounted to his understanding of Iran: a diverse and multilayered land with an equally diverse visual and architectural histories that could be the inspiration for modern art.

Heech Lovers reflects the reinterpretation and appropriation of calligraphy for such a modern context. The transformation of calligraphy from being a craft and decorative medium into conceptual expression in sculptural form is a novel attitude towards a mode of representation that has long been associated with religion and literature. Tanavoli moved beyond common practices of modern calligraphy and extended calligraphy as a traditional medium into a

sculptural domain. His interest in combining sacred and secular, Islamic and pre-Islamic, has been manifested in the *Heech* series specifically. Islam's view on idolatry has prompted the use of abstraction in artistic expression extensively in different parts of the Muslim world, including Iran. The challenge and innovation lie in dismantling the hegemony of calligraphy as a sacred medium and extending it into the sculptural domain that has been prohibited for a long time.

Editors:
Joe Salmon, Claudine Yip

NOTES

1. Fereshteh Daftari, "Another Modernism: An Iranian Perspective," in *Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights from NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection*, ed. Lynn Gumpert (Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2019), 53–55.
2. Fereshteh Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," in *Persia Reframed: Iranian Visions of Modern and Contemporary Art* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2019), 41–42.
3. There is more than one letter with the "h" sound in Farsi. In teaching this specific *h* to schoolchildren, it is often referred to as *two-eyed h*.
4. Nasta'liq is one of many calligraphy scripts. This script is composed of elongated sweeping diagonals and short ascending strokes.
5. Leyla Diba, "The Formation of Modern Iranian Art," in *Iran Modern*, ed. Fereshteh Daftari and Leyla Diba (New York: Asia Society Museum, in association with Yale University Press, 2013), 54–55.
6. Diba, "The Formation of Modern Iranian Art," 50–51.
7. Wijdan Ali, "Continuity through Calligraphy," in *Modern Islamic Art: Development and Continuity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 152–60.
8. Keshmirshakan, *Historiography of Modern Iranian Art*, 20.
9. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 44.
10. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 50.
11. Keshmirshakan, "Historiography of Modern Iranian Art," in *Iran Modern*, ed. Fereshteh Daftari and Leyla Diba (New York: Asia Society Museum, in association with Yale University Press, 2013), 18.
12. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 58–60.
13. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 57–58.
14. Parviz Tanavoli, "Oh Nightingale: Parviz Tanavoli," in *Oh Nightingale: Parviz Tanavoli* (West Vancouver: West Vancouver Art Museum, 2019), 11–20.
15. Shiva Balaghi, "Rethinking Modernity," in *Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights from NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection*, ed. Lynn Gumpert (Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2019), 37–38.
16. Balaghi, "Rethinking Modernity," 33–35.
17. Ali, "Continuity through Calligraphy," 155.
18. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 45–47.
19. Tanavoli Parviz, "The Memory of Locks and Cages, Poetry and Bones: Parviz Tanavoli's Sixty-Year Artistic Career," interview by Shiva Balaghi in *Parviz Tanavoli* (Wellesley, MA: Davis Museum, 2015): 12–16.
20. Maryam Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), 25–35.
21. Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*, 23.
22. Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*, 31–34.
23. Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*, 40–44.
24. Sheila Blair, *Islamic Calligraphy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 50–60.
25. Ali, "Continuity through Calligraphy," 157–59.
26. "Heech Sculpture," accessed February 26, 2022, hamline.edu/about/virtual-tour/heech.
27. Tanavoli, "Memory of Locks and Cages, Poetry and Bones," 15–17.
28. Attar and Rumi were both twelfth-century Iranian poets and theatricalians of Sufism; they both had great influence on Persian poetry and the development of the philosophical tradition of Islamic mysticism.
29. Tanavoli, "Memory of Locks and Cages, Poetry and Bones," 20–22.
30. Tanavoli, "Memory of Locks and Cages, Poetry and Bones," 12–14.
31. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 45–48.
32. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 40–43.
33. Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*, 30–34.
34. Fariba Enteshari, "Rumi's Poetry: The Journey toward Meaning and Transformation," (PhD diss., Fielding Graduate University, 2013), 30–35.
35. Enteshari, "Rumi's Poetry," 35–38.
36. Alef is the first letter in Arabic/Persian alphabet.
37. Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*, 40–43.
38. Ekhtiar, *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*, 43–44.
39. The golden mean (also known as the Fibonacci sequence) is a geometric proportional system which governs the nature of beauty based on the relationship between two elements of *a* and *b*: $a+b/a=1.61803$. This ratio is used in sacred geometrical designs.
40. Loai Dabbour, "Geometric Proportions: The Underlying Structure of Design Process for Islamic Geometric Pattern," *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 1, no. 4 (December 2012): 380–91.
41. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987), 62–66.
42. Dabbour, "Geometric Proportions," 385–87.
43. Nasr, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, 40–45.
44. Kamran Diba, the architect of Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, later called the movement "spiritual pop art."
45. Daftari, "Another Modernism," 55–58.
46. Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209) is considered the greatest romantic epic poet in Persian literature, one who brought colloquial and realistic styles to Persian epic poetry. Nizami's main poetic work, for which he is best known, is a set of five long narrative poems known as *Khamsa of Nizami*. The *Khamsa* was a popular subject for lavish manuscripts illustrated with painted miniatures.
47. *Poet and Beloved* was commissioned by the City of Tehran in support of modern art movements. Visit <http://www.parviztanavoli.com/> for complete information about this collection.
48. Saqqakhaneh iconography is a visual vernacular used by modern Iranian artists in the mid-twentieth century, inspired by popular culture and religious votives. The term "Saqqakhaneh" itself refers to a type of religious structure located in the niches of neighbourhoods featuring pictures of Imams referencing the

NOTES

- Battle of Karbala in 680 AD. People place locks and tie rags and light candles for votive reasons. Locks, grid-shaped windows, and the hand of Hazrat Abbas are a few examples of Saqqakhaneh iconography.
49. Tanavoli, "Oh Nightingale," 11–14.
 50. Tanavoli, "Oh Nightingale," 10–14.
 51. Daftari, "Tanavoli in Context," 58–60.
 52. Fereshteh Daftari, "Redefining Modernism," in *Iran Modern*, ed. Fereshteh Daftari and Leyla Diba (New York: Asia Society Museum, in association with Yale University Press, 2013), 30–33.
 53. Daftari, "Redefining Modernism," 33–38.
 54. Hamid Keshmirshakan, "Questions of Identity: Nativism and Nationalism alongside Modernism in Art and Sociopolitical Culture," in *Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives* (London: Saqi Books, 2013), 97–100.
 55. Keshmirshakan, "Questions of Identity," 130–32.
 56. Shi'i iconography is mainly inspired by the Battle of Karbala, when Imam Hossein, the son of Imam Ali, was martyred in 680 AD. Hazrat Abbas was also martyred while bringing water for his family in the dry desert climate of Karbala. His hand has become a symbolic reference to this event. Saqqakhaneh artists looked into this religious symbolism as a source of inspiration.
 57. Keshmirshakan, "Questions of Identity," 96–98.
 58. Keshmirshakan, "Questions of Identity," 94–99.
 59. Keshmirshakan, "Historiography of Modern Iranian Art," 17–18.
 60. Charles Hossein Zenderoudi, "The Letters of a Sonata," interview by Myrna Ayad and James Parry, *Canvas Magazine* 5, no. 5 (September–October 2009).
 61. Keshmirshakan, "Questions of Identity," 135.
 62. Balaghi, "Rethinking Modernity," 34–36.
 63. Ali, "Modern Islamic Art," 165–70.
 64. Keshmirshakan, "Historiography of Modern Iranian Art," 20.
 65. Keshmirshakan, "Historiography of Modern Iranian Art," 22.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ali, Wijdin. "Continuity through Calligraphy." In *Modern Islamic Art*, 152–60. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997.
- Balaghi, Shiva. "Rethinking Modernity." In *Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights from NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection*, edited by Lynn Gumpert, 33–38. Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2019.
- Blair, Sheila. *Islamic Calligraphy*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.
- Daftari, Fereshteh. "Another Modernism: An Iranian Perspective." In *Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights from NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection*, edited by Lynn Gumpert, 43–60. Munich: Hirmer Publishers, 2019.
- . "Redefining Modernism." In *Iran Modern*, edited by Fereshteh Daftari and Leyla Diba, 25–40. New York: Asia Society Museum, in association with Yale University Press, 2013.
- . "Tanavoli in Context." In *Persia Reframed: Iranian Visions of Modern and Contemporary Art*, 41–63. New York: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2019.
- Dabbour, Laoie. "Geometric Proportions: The Underlying Structure of Design Process for Islamic Geometric Pattern." *Frontiers of Architectural Research* 1, no. 4 (December 2012): 380–91.
- Ekhtiar, Maryam. *How to Read Islamic Calligraphy*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018.
- Enteshari, Fariba. "Rumi's Poetry: The Journey toward Meaning and Transformation." PhD diss., Fielding Graduate University, 2013.
- Keshmirshakan, Hamid. "Historiography of Modern Iranian Art." In *Iran Modern*, edited by Fereshteh Daftari and Leyla Diba, 17–24. New York: Asia Society Museum, in association with Yale University Press, 2013.
- . "The Question of Identity vis-à-vis Exoticism in Contemporary Iranian Art." *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 4 (September 2010): 489–512.
- . "Questions of Identity, Nativism and Nationalism alongside Modernism in Art and Sociopolitical Culture." In *Contemporary Iranian Art*, 93–175. London: Saqi Books, 2013.
- Nasr, Syeed Hossein. *Islamic Art and Spirituality*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1987.
- Tanavoli, Parviz. "The Memory of Locks and Cages, Poetry and Bones: Parviz Tanavoli's Sixty-Year Artistic Career." Interview by Shiva Balaghi. In *Parviz Tanavoli*, 12–16. Wellesley, MA: Davis Museum, 2015.
- . "Oh Nightingale: Parviz Tanavoli." In *Oh Nightingale: Parviz Tanavoli*, 11–20. West Vancouver: West Vancouver Museum, 2019.
- Zenderoudi, Hossein. "The Letter as a Sonata." Interview by Myrna Ayad and James Parry. *Canvas Magazine* 5, no. 5 (September–October 2009).