

Russian artist finds inspiration in Iranian culture



Maria Zenkova, a Russian artist, who was one of 600 artists to take part in the 'Patterns of Friendship' festival, said she was captivated by Iran's rich cultural heritage after seeing paintings of the country's historical sites.

Zenkova noted that many of the artworks on display, including her own, feature traditional Iranian clothing. "After seeing the selected works, I realized that Iran has a rich cultural heritage, which really caught my attention," she said. "I thought to myself, 'Iran must be a fascinating country'."

Her painting of Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi was selected for the festival's final round, IRNA wrote.

Zenkova said she wanted to create a majestic image of Raisi as a tribute to his services. "I used contrasting colors to convey his

grandeur, with a dark background and bright clothing," she explained. Raisi was both a political and spiritual leader in Iran, and Zenkova said she was drawn to his importance in Iranian society.

The festival, which was organized by the Iranian Embassy's cultural counselor, brought together 100 Iranian and 100 Russian artists, as well as 40 works by renowned masters. The exhibition is currently on display at the Moscow Academy of Watercolor and Fine Arts, and will travel to other Russian cities before being sent to Iran for display in Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz.

Zenkova's participation in the festival was her first introduction to Iranian culture, but it has sparked a new interest in her. "I was struck by the richness of Iranian culture, and I'm eager to learn more," she said.

Archaeologists uncover 3,000-year-old evidence in NE Iran

Arts & Culture Desk

Archaeologists stumbled upon evidence dating back around 3,000 years in northeastern Iran.

The discovery was made during an excavation program at the Yenge Ghale hills in North Khorasan Province, which has been ravaged by looters and farmers in recent decades, ISNA wrote. The hills, which date back to the Iron Age, were registered as national heritage sites in 2007. The recent excavation program aimed to determine the boundaries and propose a preservation plan for the site.

Reza Naseri, a member of the excavation team and a professor at Zabol University, said the Yenge Ghale hills consist of two large mounds that contain evidence from the first millennium BC. "We found cultural materials and pottery from the first millennium BC at both sites," Naseri said. "Their livelihood was based on agriculture and animal husbandry."



Naseri said that during the excavation, 20 test trenches were dug across the site, showing that it was constructed on nat-

ural ridges on the edge of the Bojnourd plain, and was probably used by nomadic groups as a temporary settlement.

Iranian film 'Maral' makes cut for Tirana Int'l Film Festival



Iranian short film 'Maral' will compete with six other films in the Divergent Minds category of Panorama Competition program of the 22nd Tirana International Film Festival, one of Europe's most prominent cinematic events.

The film, written and directed by Parinaz Mehri and produced by Amir Etminan, tells the story of a 15-year-old girl forced to marry her mentally disabled cousin in the absence of her father. Arben Lami, Jonid Jorgji, Irena Prici, and Jona Hasija will serve on Panorama Competition of the festival's jury. The Tirana International Film Festi-

val, which runs from September 22 to 28, brings together filmmakers, producers, and distributors from around the world to share their passion and knowledge of cinema. The festival, which is recognized by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the European Film Awards, aims to create a friendly space for cinema enthusiasts to come together and celebrate the art of filmmaking.

'Maral' marks Mehri's debut as a writer and director, and its selection for the festival is a significant achievement for the Iranian film industry.

Iranian children with autism, Down syndrome demonstrate musical talents

The second music event for children with autism, Down syndrome, and visual impairments was held at the Tehran Conservatory of Music.

Twenty-five children, including 11 with autism, three with Down syndrome, and four with visual impairments, took part in the competition. What made the event stand out was the participation of children without disabilities, who performed alongside their peers with autism, Down syndrome, and visual impairments, IRNA reported.

The children performed a range of musical pieces, including Chopin's 'La Minor' and Schubert's 'Serenade'.

Ailin Agahi, the event's organizer and judge, said the aim was to "break down" misconceptions about children with autism and Down syndrome. "We want to show that these children are no different from others and can participate in all activities, including music," she said. Agahi added that society needs to change its attitude towards autism and Down syndrome. "We need to look at these conditions in a different way, so that these individuals can succeed more and more every day," she said.

Behzad Mo'afi, head of the Tehran Conservatory of Music, expressed his delight at the children's performances.

Israel's economy to ...

Since the deadly retaliatory attacks by Hamas on October 7, the Israeli stock market and currency values have gradually declined and remain unstable. The damage to Israel's IT sector alone is estimated to be around \$45 billion, yet concerns about the national economy persist. Earlier this year, Moody's and S&P also downgraded Israel's credit rating. The consumption of goods, trade, and investment in Israel are all on a downward trend, a significant setback for the Israeli regime, with effects

likely to be felt over the next 10 to 12 years unless Israel recognizes Palestinian rights and fosters a climate of peace.

Fitch has separately warned Israel to reduce the level of escalating tensions with Iran, as additional military expenses could be catastrophic for its already shaky economy. The Bank of Israel has estimated that the daily wartime expenditures for 2023-2025 could reach \$55 billion. These funds will likely be secured through a combination of increased borrowing and budget cuts, which means that

military actions are exerting pressure on the economy. On Sunday, Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that the first half of 2024 will see a 2.5% annual growth rate, down from 4.5% during the same period last year. Before the war began, Israel's economy was predicted to grow by 3.5% last year, but it ended up growing by only 2%. Other sectors of the economy have taken a significant hit. In the last quarter of last year and in the weeks following the start of the war, Israel's overall GDP declined by 20.7% on an

annual basis. This downturn was due to a 27% decrease in private consumption, a drop in exports, and reduced business investments. At the beginning of the year, household expenses dropped by nearly 50%, as Israeli citizens curtailed their spending to cope with future uncertainties, resulting in reduced industrial production. The war has also led to a massive increase in public expenditure. According to Elliot Garstide, a Middle East analyst at Oxford Economics, military spending in the last three

months of 2023 rose by 93% compared to the same period in 2022. Garstide further noted that monthly figures for 2024 indicate that military spending has nearly doubled compared to the previous year. Most of this increase will be allocated to reservist wages, artillery, and interceptors for Israel's Iron Dome defense system. Israel has also received approximately \$14.5 billion in additional funding from the United States this year, exceeding the \$3 billion annual aid typically provided by the US. According to Garst-

ide's study, there have not yet been significant cuts in other budget areas, such as health care and education, although it is likely that increased conflict will lead to cuts in these areas as well. Oxford Economics has estimated that if a new front with Iran does not open, Israel's economy will grow by 1.5% this year. However, due to slow growth and high deficits, further pressure will be placed on Israel's debt profile, potentially leading to increased borrowing costs and reduced investor confidence.