

# Portraits that speak volumes

## What drew thousands to 'Eye to Eye' exhibition?

The 'Eye to Eye: Portrait in Modern and Contemporary Art' exhibition is showcasing a selection of portraits from Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art's collection, with a research-oriented and psychoanalytic approach to portraiture in the modern world, examining the evolution of this art form through 120 works by renowned Iranian and international artists. You may have also heard about or seen videos of the long lines of visitors on Amirabad Street in Tehran, where the exhibition is being held at the museum. The museum officials describe the reception as unprecedented, saying that no exhibition at Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art has ever received such a huge turnout; although over 10,000 people visited the 'Five Treasures' exhibition during Nowruz of two years ago, the response to the 'Eye to Eye' exhibition has been unprecedented in the museum's history. The exhibition opened on October 6 and was initially scheduled to run until December 20, but due to its immense popularity, it has been extended until January 12.



### Power of social media

However, the story of this sudden popularity, which unfolded in the final weeks of the exhibition (before its extension), began with a viral video of the long line in front of the museum, which sparked curiosity and brought enthusiasts together. Before that, many visitors had posted photos of their visit to the exhibition on social media, and as the viral news spread, many people came to the museum out of curiosity. The exhibition was so popular that even Persian-language networks reported on the event, which further increased the number of visi-

tors, and the exhibition was extended for another week. In the meantime, hearing the experience of visiting the valuable treasures of the museum's collection was not without its charm. We spoke with some visitors to the exhibition about their experience. Ms. Saadi, a 65-year-old retiree who seriously follows art exhibitions, said, "I've always been interested in such exhibitions, and I've contacted the museum several times to ask when they will display the treasures. Finally, this exhibition was held, and I said to my-

self, 'This is it!' As someone who loves genuine art, I think seeing the works of great artists always lifts one's spirits, and such an exhibition is a great opportunity to become familiar with art legends." Maryam Tafreshi, another visitor who learned about the exhibition through social media, said, "I think radio and television should report on such artistic events so that everyone knows about them. The main problem is that often people are not aware of such exhibitions, and that's where awareness and advertising play a crucial role. I myself

found out about the exhibition through Instagram and videos, and my friends sent me links, and eventually, I came to the museum to see the artworks." Farzad Yousefi, a 25-year-old student who is passionate about art, said, "Seeing some of these valuable works, such as Picasso, Van Gogh, Lautrec, and Léger, was my dream, and I'm thrilled to have finally seen a collection of the most important works of Iranian and foreign artists in one place. I think those who are interested in art and history should not miss this exhibition, and I recommend that art lovers and painting en-

thusiasts plan to visit this exhibition." He continued, "I also found out about the exhibition through Instagram and Persian-language networks, and it was surprising to me that there was no advertisement for the exhibition in the city, so people who are out and about during the day can see the advertisements and plan to visit the exhibition." The visit of student groups was another interesting aspect of the exhibition. A group of students from a Tehran girls' high school came to the museum as a school trip, making the museum even more crowded than before.

### Exploring the exhibits?

Upon entering the museum, the viewers begin a visual exploration of how portraiture has developed over time, tracing its progression through different artistic styles and periods, as introduced by an introductory wall display at the exhibit's entrance. Jamal Arabzadeh, the curator of the exhibition, writes in part of the gallery's introduction: "A portrait establishes a necessary relationship with the subject's inner self, but until the late 19th century, a mechanical connection was assumed between

the subject's mental states and their appearance. With the emergence of modern psychology in the early 20th century, people began to study individuals from the inside out, and this perspective encouraged modern artists to explore the psychological and emotional aspects of human beings. Expressionists, with their exaggerated colors and forms, emphasized the subject's inner emotions, while Surrealists, referencing Freud's concept of the unconscious, delved into the complex world

of individual imagination." Gallery 1, titled 'Psyche and Portrait,' features works by Picasso, Francis Bacon, Joan Miró, Ardeshir Mohassess, Alireza Espahbod, Friedensreich Hundertwasser, Gholamhossein Nami, Bijan Basiri, Fernand Léger, and Salvador Dalí. In the final section of this gallery, the massive sculpture 'L'Opportuniste' (The Opportunist) from 1976, a work by Jean Dubuffet, one of the most influential and creative painters of the 20th century, is on display.

### Self-portrait

In another section of the gallery, you will see 'Self-Portrait: Me in Another Mirror'. "The self-portrait has been recognized as one of the most important forms of artistic expression since the Renaissance. Although early self-portraits mostly showcased the artist's social status or intellectual depth, in later centuries, the self-portrait transformed into an artistic tool for exploring personal identity. The emergence of modern psychology in the early 20th century turned the self-portrait into a new form of psychological expres-

sion, and artists used self-portraits as a medium to display their innermost thoughts, fears, and desires. Gallery 2 features works by Diego Rivera, Kamal-ol-Molk, Mehdi Vishkaei, Richard Hamilton based on a photograph of Francis Bacon, Mahmoud Javadipour, Manouchehr Motabar, Ali Heydarian, Georges Rouault, Emil Nolde. Also, on display is 'The Gates of Hell' by the famous Dutch Impressionist painter Vincent van Gogh, one of the most important works in this collection.

### Portraits of the past

Since the beginning of art history, portraits have been reserved for individuals with social significance. With the advent of modernism and the breaking of strict rules regarding representation, formal and stiff courtly portraits gave way to more honest and raw depictions of subjects, to the point where portraits no longer merely celebrated the status of a historical figure, but also mocked their aesthetic innovations. Gallery 3, titled 'Historical Portraits,' features valuable works such as a caricature of Ahmad Shah by Ghasem Hajizadeh, a portrait of Mao by Andy War-

hol, a portrait of Kamal-ol-Molk by Sani-ol-Soltan, a portrait of Sandro Botticelli and Ruhollah Khaleqi by Aydin Aghdashloo, a portrait of Yanaihara by Alberto Giacometti, a portrait of Nassereddin Shah by Kamal-ol-Molk, which has been restored and is now on display, and works by Mohammad Hassan Khan Sadr al-Dowleh, Douglas Johnson, and Robert Rauschenberg are also on display. The next series of works on display in this gallery features photographs of famous artists from around the world by Eddie Navarro; portraits of Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, and Marcel Du-

champ, Parviz Tanavoli, and Bahman Mohassess, which are hung on the museum walls. Gallery 4 is dedicated to 'Portrait of a Woman: Subject or Object,' featuring works such as Mahmoud Javadipour, Ahmad Nasrallah, Ardeshir Mohassess, Nasser Ovisi, Roy Lichtenstein, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec with two famous works 'The Female Clown at the Moulin rouge' and 'Woman with a Hat,' as well as Picasso's portrait 'Jacqueline with a Headband,' and portraits of 'Marilyn Monroe' and 'Jacqueline Kennedy No. 2' by Andy Warhol, Mary Cassatt, and Fernand Léger.

### Celebrities in focus

Gallery 5 is titled 'The Dark Room and the History of Portraiture' and 'The Bright Room: A Tool for Precision,' and visitors can

experience portrait-making in this section. Further on in this gallery, a work from the 'Memories of Destruction' series by

Aydin Aghdashloo and Bahman Mohassess, titled 'Jet Society 1,' are on display, as well as works by James Ensor, Georges Rouault,

Jazeh Tabatabai, Charles Cottet, Marcos Grigorian, and Ali Akbar Sadeghi, offering a showcase for enthusiasts.

