

Iranian artist's vision turns Shiraz area into cultural hub, enlivens rustic district

In the winding alleys of southern Iran, artist Adel Yazdi has taken it upon himself to turn his rustic old neighbourhood into a cultural and tourist hub through vibrant paintings and carved relief faces.

Narenjestan, a neighbourhood characterised by crumbling, uninhabited houses, is nestled in Shiraz, a southern city celebrated for its historic architecture, lush gardens and revered poets, AFP reported.

"Most of the dilapidated walls in old Shiraz have no historical value," said Yazdi, a bushy-bearded, bespectacled 40-year-old artist who has dedicated himself to revitalising Narenjestan. Yazdi has over the years turned the long-neglected neighbourhood walls into a vivid visual tapestry "telling the stories of the people living here," he said.

Arabesque patterns and relief faces carved with intricate details and painted in an array of vivid hues of greens, pinks, blues and purples now adorn the walls.

With its striking designs and bright colours, Yazdi's art can be reminiscent of Surrealism. It often comes across as surprising, showcasing a different side of Iran's artistic heritage that goes beyond the conventional focus on Persian or Islamic architecture.

The artwork includes the face of Scheherazade, Yazdi said, referencing the legendary storyteller from the 'One Thousand and One Nights' collection of folktales.

Yazdi's work stands out in Shiraz where graffiti and murals are rare, becoming a social media sensation

and a tourist attraction.

One visitor, Mahdieh, discovered Yazdi's murals through Instagram.

"I arrived in Shiraz yesterday... and it was the first site I wanted to visit," said the 40-year-old, who declined to give her last name.

At the end of one alleyway, Yazdi has established his workshop in a century-old building with small rooms encircling a serene garden.

He also lives in the building, with a traditional Persian architectural style.

It is filled with artefacts and sculptures, resembling a museum warehouse. Replicas of Shia Muslim mosque doors feature prominently.

To Maedah, a 30-year-old engineer, Yazdi's house brings to mind "other historical places in the city, such as the Eram Garden and the Mausoleum of the Poet Hafez".

Yazdi said he drew inspiration from the Pompidou Centre in Paris, a cultural hub that transformed the heart of the French capital in the 1970s.

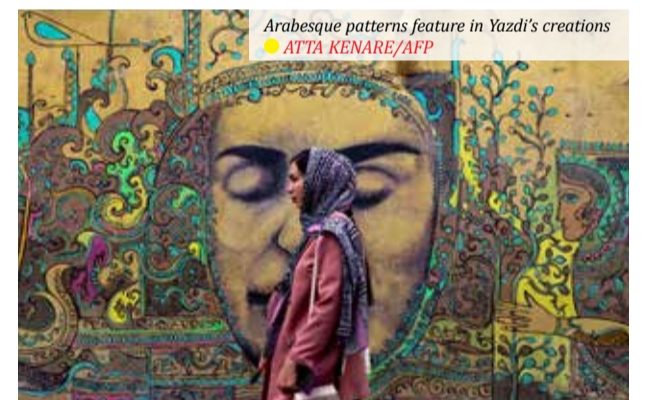
He hopes his efforts can turn Shiraz's alleyways into even more of a vibrant cultural centre as well.

At his residence, visitors are particularly drawn to what Yazdi calls "the Finger Room."

Inside, he installed around 14,000 finger sculptures on the ceiling, all pointing downward.

"The room is inspired by the legend of an angel that counts raindrops with thousands of fingers," he said, referring to an Islamic fable.

"These fingers are there to constantly remind us that the present moment is precious and that we must seize it."



Women dominate 12th Iranian Ceramic Biennial with 75% of representations



Arts & Culture Desk

The 12th Iranian Ceramic Biennial opened on January 3, 2025, with a remarkable display of talent from women artists, who constitute more than 75% of the works on display.

The event, attended by prominent figures including Zahra Behrouz-Azar, Vice President for Women and Family Affairs, and Nadereh Rezaei, Deputy Culture Minister for Artistic Affairs, underscores the growing influence of women in the traditionally male-dominated field of ceramic art, ISNA reported.

Zahra Behrouz-Azar expressed her delight at the event's turnout, emphasizing the responsibility of officials to support these female creators and their ability to craft authentic narratives through art.

Behrouz-Azar noted the 7,000-year history of ceramics in Iran, emphasizing that the

exhibition reflects the ongoing brilliance of women in this ancient art form.

She called for strategies to enhance income opportunities for artists and foster job creation in the sector, acknowledging the need for more support and recognition of their talents.

Nadereh Rezaei reiterated the importance of maintaining the biennial amid competing festivals, stating that the Culture Ministry is committed to prioritizing such events to promote artistic equity across the country. She highlighted the potential of ceramics and other cultural fields in various regions of Iran and emphasized the need for a decentralized approach to cultural events, aligning them with local capacities and educational advantages.

Mojtaba Qorbani-Shahkoochaki, the biennial's secretary, pointed out the rich heritage of Iranian ceramics and the challenges faced by artists, especially amid economic pressures.

He stressed the importance of establishing university courses in ceramics to bolster this art form.

Qorbani-Shahkoochaki also celebrated the collaboration among different generations of artists, showcasing that collective efforts can lead to significant achievements in the arts.

The biennial will continue until January 31, 2025, inviting art enthusiasts to explore the diverse and vibrant expressions of ceramic artistry from talented women and men alike.

Surge in influenza cases in Iran raises alarm for vulnerable groups

Social Desk

Iran is experiencing a notable increase in influenza cases, with reports indicating a 20% rise in the disease's prevalence.

Health experts warn that the current peak of influenza cases is expected to continue until January 20.

He urged these groups to avoid crowded places and wear masks to prevent infection.

Iran's Health Ministry stated that in the last week of December, influenza accounted for approximately 22% of all respiratory infections reported in the country, making it the leading cause of respiratory illness.

According to Qobad Moradi, head of the health ministry's division of communicable disease control, nearly 40% of patients hospitalized for respiratory infections are being treated for influenza. The dominant strain is identified as H1N1, which is recognized as the seasonal flu. Recent laboratory findings show that between 21% and 23% of respiratory infections in late December were attributed to influenza, indicating a gradual increase over the past two months.

Moradi emphasized the importance of adhering to health guidelines, particularly for high-risk groups, which include the elderly, individuals with underlying health conditions, pregnant women, and those with weakened immune systems.

Hamid Emadi, an infectious disease specialist, highlighted that children typically encounter respiratory infections 6 to 12 times a year, but the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted this pat-



tern, leading to a resurgence of infections in recent years.

Vaccination against influenza is crucial, especially for vulnerable populations.

Infectious disease specialist and professor at Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences Shahnaz Sali noted that while the effectiveness of the vaccine is around 60% to 65%, it significantly reduces the severity of symptoms and complications.

She also stated that the best time for vaccination is between late September and mid-October, but those who missed this window can still receive the vaccine at the end of December or early February.

The Health Ministry continues to provide vaccines, urging the public to take vaccination seriously to help reduce the spread of the virus and alleviate pressure on the healthcare system.