

# Tehran Auction rakes in over \$2.1mn, sets new sales record

## Arts & Culture Desk

The 23rd Tehran Auction closed Thursday night with total sales topping \$2.1 million, marking a record-breaking moment for Iran's premier art market, organizers announced after the event at the Parsian Azadi Hotel. Collectors packed the ballroom as 100 works of Iranian modern and contemporary art went under the hammer. The final tally came to just over \$2.1 million — the highest gross in the event's history. Ninety-seven lots were sold by the end of the night, IRNA reported. The top-selling piece was 'Organs' by Hossein Zenderoudi, which sold for about \$172,900. The intricate canvas, blending calligraphy and geometry, led a strong showing for modern masters. Zenderoudi, known internationally for his bold graphic style, was also named the most valuable artist of the auction. Sculptor Sahand Hesamiyan, part of a younger wave of contemporary artists, made a strong statement with 'Hidden Side', which sold for nearly \$122,300. That placed third overall, behind an untitled bronze work by Masoud Arabshahi, which brought in roughly \$141,000. The sale opened with a tribute from

auctioneer Shahriar Rabani, who honored four Iranian visual artists who passed away this year, including Parvaneh Etemadi and Kamran Katouzian. Rabani described the evening as both "a celebration and a farewell," acknowledging the role of past generations while showcasing new voices. "This year's lineup leaned younger," said one curator at the event. While past editions often centered around giants like Sohrab Sepehri and Bahman Mohasses, this edition shifted focus to emerging names and underrepresented figures. Still, classic artists such as Manoucher Yektai, Parviz Tanavoli, Monir Farmanfarmaian, and Aydin Aghdashloo drew significant bids. Farmanfarmaian's 'Mirror Ball', a luminous geometric sculpture, sold for \$95,800. An untitled piece by Kourosh Shishegaran followed closely at \$90,400. In total, 40 works crossed roughly \$12,000 at current exchange rates. Three pieces failed to sell. The auction's final sales figure includes a 10% buyer's premium on all successful bids. Founded in 2012, Tehran Auction has grown into the most visible and influential art marketplace in Iran.



## Kerman serving as hub in revival of ancient spice route



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Iran's Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts says the ancient city of Kerman is poised to play a "key role" in a major tourism revival project centered on the Spice Route — a trade network that stretches back more than 7,000 years. Speaking at a high-level provincial meeting on Wednesday, Mostafa Fatemi, Director General of Domestic Tourism Development, said the ministry is focusing on two national tourism corridors,

with the Spice Route being "the oldest trade path in the world." The route, Fatemi explained, begins in the Spice Islands of Southeast Asia and makes its way through Iran's Kerman province. From there, it branches off toward Shush in the southwest and on to North Africa, while another path heads northwest toward Isfahan, then Turkey and Europe, IRNA reported. "Kerman sits at a crossroads," Fatemi told attendees at the 110th session of the Public-Private Dialogue Council held in Kerman Chamber of Commerce. "It deserves a dedicated corridor of its own." Fatemi cited archaeological findings — including ancient spices discovered in Iran's Burnt City — as evidence supporting Kerman's historic place on the route. Similar finds in Egypt and Morocco further validate the theory, he said. Officials are eyeing the Hindu Caravanserai, a historic travelers' inn in Kerman, for redevelopment under a joint agreement between the Ministry and Iran's Endowments Organization. The site could soon welcome investment and restoration efforts led by a tourism development company. Beyond

the Spice Route project, the ministry is urging a multi-pronged push to boost Kerman's tourism sector, which has long lagged behind other regions. Fatemi called for international events to be hosted in the province and suggested leveraging the region's railway network to remove transport bottlenecks. "We can't talk tourism without talking trains," he said, urging cross-ministerial cooperation to fix railway issues. Fatemi also laid out a vision to engage Kerman's industries in protecting its cultural heritage. He proposed that each major company adopt a historic site, taking responsibility for its preservation, restoration, and promotion. The plan would be formalized through the provincial council and overseen by the Chamber of Commerce. A similar initiative in the city of Yazd — involving the purchase and restoration of old homes as second residences — could be replicated in Kerman's historic core. Fatemi said the model worked there and "could bring real value" to the aging urban fabric of Kerman. The director also floated creative penalties for

heritage violations. "Instead of jail time," he said, "let them make adobe bricks, help restore sites, or print brochures for tourists." Such community service models had shown success in the past, he noted. Looking ahead, Kerman is preparing for a major new tourism campaign: Smile of the World to Kerman 1405, referencing the year in the Iranian calendar that begins in March 2026. Fatemi urged provincial leaders to rally every agency to develop events and unveil promotional materials before the year kicks off. The province may also become Iran's pilot region for geotourism, with the ministry ready to relocate the National Geotourism Secretariat to Kerman. The council meeting coincided with Iran's first National Ecotourism Festival, which opened in Kerman on May 21 and runs through May 23. Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts attended the launch. Fatemi called for stronger private-sector support and a dedicated task force to clear investment hurdles. "You can't draw investors if past ones walk away unhappy," he warned. "Support is not optional — it's foundational."

## Nearly 1,000 film figures malign Israeli genocide in Gaza

In a growing wave of global outrage against Israel's war on Gaza, nearly 1,000 film industry figures, from Hollywood icons to European auteurs, signed an open letter denouncing what they call a "genocide" and lambasting the international film industry's silence on the matter. The letter, part of an initiative dubbed Artists for Fatem, surfaced just ahead of the prestigious Cannes Film Festival, casting a long shadow over the glamour and celebration associated with the event. Among the prominent signatories is Ralph Fiennes, famed for his role in Schindler's List, a film that many critics now see in stark contrast to his stand today. He is joined by Oscar-winning actress Juliette Binoche, who currently chairs the Cannes jury, and a diverse coalition of actors and filmmakers including Rooney Mara, Jonathan Glaz-

er, Jim Jarmusch, Susan Sarandon, Pedro Almodóvar, Mark Ruffalo, Richard Gere, and French actor Omar Sy, Middle East Eye reported. The campaign was sparked by the death of 25-year-old Palestinian photojournalist Fatima Hassouna, affectionately known as "Fatem," who was killed in an Israeli airstrike alongside ten members of her family in northern Gaza. The attack came just one day after a documentary featuring her life and work was announced as part of Cannes' ACID selection. The letter, published by Middle East Eye, reads in part: "As artists and cultural players, we cannot remain silent while genocide is taking place in Gaza and this unspeakable news is hitting our communities hard." It continues: "Fatem was not just a journalist. She was a storyteller. She gave voice to a people relent-

lessly silenced by occupation and war. Her loss is not only personal — it is political." The signatories are calling not only for an end to the violence but for accountability in the institutions that have, in their words, "turned away" in the face of mass civilian suffering. The petition critiques the complicity of silence, especially from industries that so often pride themselves on championing human rights and justice through art. The ongoing Israeli onslaught on Gaza, which has killed tens of thousands and displaced over a million Palestinians since October, has been widely condemned by human rights organizations, but receives continued political and military backing from the United States and its allies. The Artists for Fatem initiative is being hailed by activists as a rare and brave break from the often



cautious tones of the entertainment industry, particularly in the U.S., where criticism of Israel can come at a professional cost.