



Iran launches ‘new chapter’ in tourism diplomacy with Egypt, Turkey, Vatican: *Minister*

Arts & Culture Desk

Iran opened a “new chapter” in its tourism diplomacy with Egypt, Turkey and the Vatican, Cultural Heritage Minister Reza Salehi Amiri said on Wednesday, announcing five strategic incentives to draw foreign investment into the sector.

In comments made on the sidelines of the cabinet meeting in Tehran on May 28, Salehi Amiri said Iran is stepping up efforts to make tourism a “key pillar” of its foreign policy, citing recent “positive” talks in Cairo and Rome, and growing cooperation with Ankara, IRNA reported.

The renewed push signals Tehran’s broader effort to balance cultural exchange and economic gain by leveraging tourism as a soft power tool. The new government-approved investment package—based on the Seventh Development Plan—includes

fast-track permits for mixed-use tourist complexes that combine hotels with commercial and residential units.

Speaking of Egypt, Salehi Amiri said a “shared will” exists to deepen cultural and tourism ties. “Soon, we’ll witness reciprocal travel between Iranian and Egyptian tourists,” he noted, citing destinations like Cairo and Alexandria on one side, and Tehran, Isfahan, Shiraz and Mashhad on the other.

Talks with Turkey have also gained ground. The Iranian minister said two expert-level meetings were held in the past fortnight with Turkey’s tourism minister, resulting in “effective agreements” aimed at boosting two-way tourism.

Currently, some 3.5 million Iranians visit Turkey annually, but Turkish tourists account for less than a third of that number. “We’re working to redress the imbalance,”

he said, adding that Turkey’s tourism minister is expected in Tehran soon for a regional tourism summit.

Salehi Amiri also spoke of his official trip to Rome, where he attended the Vatican’s recent inauguration ceremony and held meetings with senior Holy See officials. These discussions covered religious, cultural and tourism collaboration.

He described Iran’s embassy in Rome as “instrumental” in facilitating the talks.

The five new investment regulations aim to “pave the way” for private sector involvement in building tourism infrastructure, according to the minister. One of the most important provisions allows developers to combine hotel construction with retail and housing, enhancing profitability and regional development.



“Tourism is a language that needs no translation,” Salehi Amiri said. “It can de-

liver Iran’s message of peace and civilisation directly to the world.”

From sketch to canvas; Bozorgmehr Hosseinpour blends satire, fine art

By Saeideh Ehsani Rad
Staff writer

INTERVIEW

When cartoonist-turned-painter Bozorgmehr Hosseinpour opens a solo exhibit titled ‘Wandering Cafés’ at Sohrab Gallery, it marks more than a shift in medium—it signals a broader transformation in how satire, fantasy, and fine art collide.

Hosseinpour, whose caricatures were once a staple in Iranian print media, now brings his distinct visual language to the canvas. His latest exhibition, ‘Crookedness’, on view at Sohrab Gallery, blends painting with the same playful fantasy that has long defined his work.

The exhibition opened on May 16 and will run through June 2.

‘Crookedness’ is the result of five years of sketching in cafés—spaces that inspired a continuation of his earlier series, ‘Crookedness’. In that collection, Hosseinpour explored the idea that every fracture gives birth to a new form. “We live in a time when rules are dissolving,” he says, “and being replaced by more flexible frameworks.” This new series reflects the instability and awkward shapes of today’s world—both literally and metaphorically.

Accompanied by fellow cartoonist Jamal Rahmati, reporter of Persian-language newspaper Iran toured the exhibition and conducted an interview about Hosseinpour and his evolving creative journey. The full text of the interview follows:

IRAN DAILY: When did you first become familiar with Bozorgmehr Hosseinpour?

I first saw Bozorgmehr Hosseinpour’s work in Kayhan Caricature magazine when I began my career in the early 1990s. We were both young back then. Even from the start, his work stood out—both in content and technique. He had a distinct personal style influenced by miniature art, which later evolved into a more exaggerated, unique aesthetic that diverged from the trends of the ‘90s. He has a remarkable ability to portray faces and excels even in the most fantastical forms.

RAHMATI: What’s your opinion of Hosseinpour’s painting exhibition?

Cartooning used to be split between press work and gallery work, with some in the press dismissing gallery cartoons as inferior. But the truth is, art finds its own place. Though cartoons started in the press, they’ve expanded beyond it. In this exhibition, Bozorgmehr categorizes cartooning into three branches, offering a new and accurate definition of gallery cartoon art—pieces meant for display and sale. It moves beyond the outdated press/gallery divide.

Do you think this exhibition was a success?

Absolutely. Bozorgmehr has opened a new door in this field, and buyers have responded positively. Previously, cartoons weren’t seen as collectible or decorative, partly because they were seen as tied to a specific time and place, unlike timeless paintings. But in this show, he created a cohesive theme centered on cafés, both conceptually and technically.

Can you discuss the form and content of the works in this exhibition?

Form-wise, Bozorgmehr plays with the frame itself—it’s dynamic and interacts with the composition, a first in his work. He customizes the frames to match the shapes inside; there are no static, straight-edged borders here. His use of deformation comes from comic aesthetics but veers into abstraction. Faces may become rods with eyes—exaggerated but expressive. Sometimes it leans toward reality, sometimes pure abstraction, and he blends the two seamlessly.

Color-wise, he uses bright, vivid tones and controls them through contrast and harmony. He uses both light/dark lines and related color families to guide the viewer’s eye. You can tell he understands both form and color deeply.

And what about the conceptual side?

Cartoons inherently distort reality. While Bozorgmehr usually handles cartoon themes well, here he doesn’t focus on traditional cartoon topics. Instead, he presents everyday people in

café settings through a humorous lens, not bound by typical cartoon structure. His perspective is exaggerated in some works, pushing both spatial and thematic boundaries.

The paintings clearly show the weariness and bittersweet laughter of contemporary life. They carry an absurd, timeless, placeless feel—just like a café, where people come to escape boredom. But Bozorgmehr even questions that escape; the café itself becomes part of the dull routine.

How has his background in journalism influenced his paintings?

Working in journalism trains you to produce consistently, regardless of your mood. In painting, you might go weeks without touching a canvas. But in the press, you learn that output matters more than feeling. This discipline has helped Bozorgmehr create continuously. His persistence is a product of his journalistic roots.

Unlike many contemporary artists who exhibit abstract or obscure work, Hosseinpour seems to respect his audience—especially younger viewers.

That’s also thanks to his press experience. In journalism, the audience is key. You create to connect with them. Bozorgmehr understands this and creates with the viewer in mind. He also chooses relatable subjects, like cafés, where younger people often gather. His time at Chelcheragh magazine, which had a youthful readership, also influenced this connection.

What sets Bozorgmehr Hosseinpour apart in the visual arts world?

His unique style and distinct perspective. He brings humor and satire into everyday life and has played key roles during important phases in the press. He’s technically skilled and has worked in places where his art was widely seen. That exposure, along with his distinctive voice, makes him a major figure.

How do you see the state of caricature in today’s media?

Previously, there was a system where even censored work eventually made



it to print. That structure is gone. Censorship in print media today is more of a joke—it exists but isn’t effective. Print newspapers have almost no audience now, and the remaining caricatures are published in only a few outlets with limited readership. Publishers use them for political leverage, not because they care about readers.

So is caricature in the press dead?

Yes. There’s barely any work in this field anymore. You can’t even call it a profession at this point. Many magazines shut down, and with social media, the entire landscape has changed.

No one waits to be published—they just share their work directly with an audience online.

What’s Bozorgmehr’s role in this changing landscape?

He’s bridged a gap. Traditionally, the “artistic” side of visual work was reserved for tragedy, not comedy. Comedy was seen as entertainment, not art. But Bozorgmehr has challenged that. His cartoon works are funny, exaggerated, and stylistically distinct, yet they fit naturally in a gallery. He’s made it possible for collectors to see cartoons as legitimate art with future value. That’s a major step forward.