

A 2,000-year-old art form shines again on glass canvases in Iran

Iranica Desk

The art of painting on glass, one of the world's most distinguished and ancient artistic traditions, boasts a history in Iran's cities of Shiraz and Tehran that stretches back more than two thousand years.

Reverse glass painting has a long and rich history. This art form, often executed in two dimensions with vibrant, luminous colors, has been popular within the folk and ethnic cultures of many countries around the world, according to IRNA.

The origins of such painting in Europe date back to the third century BCE. The oldest discovered example comes from southern Italy: a glass vessel featuring an engraved gold leaf placed between two colorless glass bowls. These objects, known as gold glass, have surviving examples housed in the British Museum. The production of glass objects, along with enameling and gilding on them, reached its zenith during the 11th and 12th centuries CE. During this period, thin painted metal sheets were affixed to the back of glass, with one of the most beautiful examples from the 13th century found in the "Chapel of St. Stephen" within St. Minster's Church in England. Stained glass used to dec-

orate churches became widespread in Europe from roughly the 9th and 10th centuries CE. It was produced by first painting flat glass pieces with molten colored glass and then heating them to fix the designs. The finest example of this technique is from the 12th century at Chartres Cathedral in France. This type of painting, which involves no subsequent heating of the glass objects, is also known as "cold painting." Precise details about how this art form entered Iran are not available. However, it is probable that the art



arrived through merchants from Venice, Italy — which for centuries was a global hub for glassmaking and related decoration. This European art was soon imbued with a distinctly local character thanks to the creativity of Iranian artists.

The earliest reverse glass paintings in Iran were beautiful gol-o-morgh (flower and bird) pieces, which were used in the stucco work of ceilings and walls in aristocratic homes, a tradition dating back to the Zandieh period (1751-1794). The finest examples of reverse glass painting from the Zand era were created by the renowned Shirazi painter Agha Sadegh. He was a student of Ali Ashraf, a famous painter of the 12th century AH (18th century CE). Gradually, reverse glass and mirror painting with gol-o-morgh themes became more wide-

spread. Over time, depictions of young women in European attire, as well as landscapes, were added to these paintings. These changes occurred under the influence of the growing popularity of European-style prints in Iran and subsequent Iranian im-



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itations of them, which had found favor with the general public.

With the beginning of Fath-Ali Shah's reign in the first half of the 13th century AH (early 19th century CE), the style of portraiture and figure painting became prevalent among court painters. Many examples of this style are preserved in the painting collection of the Golestan Palace. At present, the art of reverse glass painting is common in most countries around the world, and notable 20th-century painters have worked in this field, although the art has never regained the popularity it

enjoyed in years past.

The art of painting on glass, which from ancient times played a role in decorating orsi (traditional sash) windows, mirror work, and the stained glass of Iran's historic buildings, has experienced a resurgence in recent years among young artists, adopting a new style and approach. This art form, a fusion of color, light, and transparency, has successfully carved out a place for itself within Iran's contemporary decorative arts.

Painting on glass in the history of Iranian art is rooted in Persian aesthetic sensibilities and its interaction with

Islamic arts. In the past, this art was mainly used in the design of painted glassware and decorative vessels. Today, however, by utilizing new industrial paints and modern techniques, it is finding new life in decorative panels, interior design, and mixed media art.

In this art form, the artist first outlines the design on the glass surface using a resistant outline paste. Then, special oil-based or water-based paints are used to fill in the spaces between the lines. The transparency of glass allows light passing through the colors to create a unique combination of radiance and

shadow — an effect that cannot be achieved on any other type of painting canvas.

Art experts believe that the lack of formal training and specialized workshops in art centers is the biggest challenge facing the growth of this field in Iran. Many artists learn this craft either on their own as self-taught practitioners or through informal workshops. Nevertheless, the market for glass art pieces has seen a growing trend in recent years, thanks to the expansion of online stores selling art supplies. This has helped boost the production of both works for home decoration and for exhibition.

The dynamism and the interplay of color and light in glass painting have made it one of the most promising fields within Iran's decorative arts. With increasing public interest in educational workshops and the presence of Iranian works in international visual arts competitions, it is expected that this discipline will soon be recognized as a part of the country's contemporary handicrafts industry.

The art of painting on glass serves as a bridge between traditional art and the contemporary spirit — an art that shines from within light and places color upon the very transparency of life itself.

Major restoration project underway for Zamankhan Bridge

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The restoration of the historic Zamankhan Bridge in Saman, located in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, has officially commenced, announced the head of the provincial Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts Organization.

Heydar Sadeghi, the Director General of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, stated that the project was officially handed over to a contractor during a ceremony attended by provincial and local officials. The attendees included representatives from the Regional Water Company and the Saman Municipality, and the ceremony was held with the full support of the Saman governor, chtn.ir wrote.

He further emphasized that the restoration efforts are part of broader cultural heritage, tourism, and handicrafts programs, all of which are aimed at preserving and protecting historic monuments for future generations. He noted that the bridge had suffered significant damage in recent years due to hydraulic issues and the strong, relentless currents of the water flowing beneath it. These natural forces caused some

of the surrounding stones to collapse, which in turn resulted in considerable structural damage to this valuable historical edifice.

Over the past two years, comprehensive studies and a detailed restoration plan for the Zamankhan Bridge were developed in close collaboration with the University of Isfahan. Following thorough expert reviews and technical assessments, the plan was officially ap-



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proved by both the provincial technical council and the technical council of the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts. Once approved, the plan was formally communicated and put into action. The contractor selection process was carried out through a public tender, and the necessary funds were provided from

the social responsibilities budget of the Ministry of Oil. Sadeghi confirmed that the restoration project is expected to be completed within a six-month timeframe. He expressed his sincere hope that the restoration of the historic Zamankhan Bridge in Saman would be successfully finished on schedule, thanks to the active participation of the private sector and the rigorous oversight provided by all relevant executive

bodies. Located in the Shahrekord region, the Zamankhan Bridge is one of the historic bridges built over the Zayandeh Rud River during the Safavid era. The bridge measures 30 meters in length and features two spans of unequal length — a unique and remarkable architectural characteristic that distin-

guishes it from other bridges of its time. The bridge rests on three sturdy stone piers and is situated in a pleasant, mild climate, surrounded by stunning natural scenery that includes lush orchards filled with various trees, local rice paddies, and the clear, flowing, pristine waters of the Zayandeh Rud, all of which create an unforgettable and picturesque environment.

The Zamankhan Bridge is recognized as one of the most important historical monuments in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province, and it currently attracts a large number of tourists who come to admire its historical significance and natural beauty. The bridge was originally built by the Safavids to help people cross the Zayandeh Rud River safely and prevent them from drowning. Today, however, it serves primarily as a historical and tourist attraction. The fame of this bridge has grown so significantly in recent years that during peak travel seasons, one can see many tourists visiting Zamankhan for sightseeing and recreation. It may be of interest to know that the Zamankhan Bridge is considered a national heritage site. The bridge has been officially registered on Iran's National Heritage List. Furthermore, after the famous Si-o-Se-Pol and Khaju bridges in Isfahan, it is regarded as the most significant Safavid-era bridge ever built over the Zayandeh Rud River.



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New chapter for Shiraz's bazaars

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The Director General of the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of Fars province has announced the beginning of a new phase of executive operations in the historic bazaars of Shiraz.

Behzad Moridi added that for him, bazaar takes priority over many other matters, because it represents the meeting point of life, lawful livelihood, and the living identity of the city, according to ISNA.

Moridi went on to detail the specific situation of the Ordu Bazaar, noting that approximately one-third of the restoration work in this key area had been delayed. He explained that many people had been asking what the fate of the remaining section would be. Fortunately, with the preparation of financial resources and the resolution of administrative obstacles, precise planning has now been carried out to finalize this

project.

The Ordu Bazaar dates back to the Qajar era and is located in Shiraz, between Saray-e Moshir Bazaar and the three-way intersection of Ruhollah Street. This historical structure has been registered as one of Iran's national heritage sites.

In further remarks, Moridi addressed the concerns of representatives from the Bazaar-e No of Shiraz. He stated that the main focus of the project in the bazaar is the renovation and restoration of public and shared spaces, including roofs and passageways. Bazaar-e No, which is one of the tourist attractions of Shiraz, is located in the northernmost row of the Vakil Bazaar and extends all the way to the Isfahan Gate.

Moridi emphasized the importance of utilizing the expertise of previously experienced contractors, ensuring that with their full knowledge of the historical fabric, the executive operations can begin without interruption.