

'Art & War' exhibition

Tehran museum show traces Iran's epic tradition from 'Shahnameh' to Ashura



Arts & Culture Desk

Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art opened the fifth exhibition in its ongoing Art & War series, showcasing 12 rare coffeehouse paintings that trace Iran's centuries-old tradition of epic storytelling from Ferdowsi's 'Shahnameh' to the tragedy of Ashura. Titled 'Iranian Epic Narratives: From the Shahnameh to Ashura,' the exhibition, which opened on June 22 and runs through July 3, draws exclusively from the museum's permanent collection. It explores how artists transformed heroic and religious narratives into a visual language that has shaped Iran's collective cultural memory across generations, IRNA reported. The exhibition features works by leading masters of Iran's coffeehouse painting tradition, including Mohammad Modabber, Abbas Bolukifar, Ahmad Khalili, Hossein Hamedani, Ali Akbar

Larni, Mohammad Farahani, Hassan Esmailzadeh, Reza Hamidi and Ganji. Museum expert Salar Rafieian described the paintings as far more than folk or religious art, calling them "a popular medium for recreating collective memory" that extends a visual tradition from Mani's legendary Arzhang, through Persian miniature painting and Shia iconography, to the oral performances of Naqqali (Iranian dramatic storytelling). "These artists were not passive guardians of the past," Rafieian wrote. "They continually reinterpreted a centuries-old narrative tradition to address the social, ethical and political realities of their own time." He added that the paintings place the heroes of the Shahnameh alongside the martyrs of Karbala, forging "a shared moral memory" centered on justice, truth and resistance against oppression. University of Science and Culture pro-

fessor Mohammad Mohammadi said battle has remained one of the defining themes of Iranian art throughout history. Yet, unlike many Western depictions of war, Iranian visual traditions illuminate conflict through divine light rather than darkness. "The world is illuminated by divine grace," Mohammadi wrote. "That is why these scenes largely avoid the graphic violence one might expect." The exhibition marks the latest chapter in Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art's Art & War program, launched earlier this year to revisit the museum's collection through the lens of conflict and its enduring impact on artistic expression. Previous installments have featured works by Pop artists, Spanish modernists including Pablo Picasso, Antoni Tàpies, Robert Motherwell and Juan Gris, Mexican printmakers, and post-war European painters.

Iran launches WhartoCell, umbilical cord cell therapy for Osteoarthritis

Social Desk

Iran launched WhartoCell, an umbilical cord-derived stem cell therapy for osteoarthritis, after the product received approval from Iran's Food and Drug Administration for clinical use.

The therapy was developed by researchers at the Royan Institute using domestically developed technology. Mehdi Lotfipannah, the institute's director of public relations and international affairs, said the treatment is designed to reduce inflammation, promote cartilage regeneration and improve joint function in patients with osteoarthritis.

"The introduction of innovative cell-based therapies requires a scientific and evidence-based approach to ensure their appropriate integration into clinical practice," Lotfipannah said, adding that greater awareness among physicians and healthcare providers would facilitate broader adoption of regenerative medicine technologies. WhartoCell is an allogeneic stem cell therapy derived from Wharton's jelly of the neonatal umbilical cord. The mesenchymal stem cells used in the product possess anti-inflammatory and immunomodulatory properties while supporting tissue repair and regeneration.

One of the product's distinguishing features is that it does not require genetic matching (HLA matching) between donor and recipient, allowing physicians to administer the treatment without lengthy preparation

procedures. As an off-the-shelf therapy, it is expected to improve patient access to advanced regenerative treatments. According to the institute, the product is manufactured under Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) standards, with quality and safety monitored throughout the production process. Although initially approved for osteoarthritis, researchers say the technology may have broader applications in regenerative medicine, including cartilage repair, tendon and ligament injuries, bone fracture healing, avascular necrosis (AVN), and the management of inflammatory joint disorders.

Lotfipannah said the product also represents an important achievement in the development of indigenous biotechnology, reducing dependence on imported therapeutic products while expanding access for healthcare providers across the country. He noted that Royan Institute plans to increase scientific communication surrounding WhartoCell through specialized workshops, educational programs for physicians and patients, and scientific meetings, including activities alongside the upcoming 27th International Royan Congress. Established as one of Iran's leading centers for stem cell research and regenerative medicine, Royan Institute has developed several advanced cell-based therapeutic technologies over the past two decades as part of the country's growing biotechnology sector.

Iran seeks broader ECO academic partnership at Turkey EdTech meeting

Attack on universities 'assault on humanity's shared heritage': Minister

Social Desk

Iran's Minister of Science, Research and Technology Hossein Simaei Sarraf called attacks on Iranian universities "an attack on humanity's shared heritage" as he met ECO Educational Institute (ECOEI) President Akif Kirecci on the sidelines of the Turkey Educational Technologies Summit (TETZ 2026), where the two sides agreed to expand cooperation in artificial intelligence, academic exchanges and joint research.

Speaking during the meeting, Simaei Sarraf said science "has no geographical identity and belongs to all humanity," adding that universities represent a common human legacy. Referring

to the recent 12-day conflict, he said dozens of professors and students had been killed and thanked the Turkish government and people for their support, MSRT reported.

He also described Iran's higher education sector as an attractive destination for educational investment and voiced hope that scientific cooperation would deepen under peaceful conditions.

His remarks followed Iranian officials' reports that more than 30 universities sustained damage during the conflict, affecting research laboratories, classrooms and student dormitories, while dozens of faculty members and students were killed.

Kirecci said the ECO Educational Institute had enjoyed productive cooperation with Iranian universities despite perceptions that working with Iran could be difficult.

"Our experience has been very positive," he said, noting previous collaboration with Iranian academic institutions, including a conference in Isfahan that helped doctoral students publish in leading international journals.

He said the institute is ready to expand cooperation on artificial intelligence and educational technologies and is also advancing a regional initiative to digitally preserve UNESCO-listed cultural heritage across ECO member states. The project includes three heritage themes from Iran and four from Turkey and is being implemented with



Ankara University's technology center and a team of historians.

The two sides also agreed to pursue closer university partnerships, faculty and student exchanges, joint training programs, collaborative research projects, technology development and wider use of AI and emerging educational technologies.

Global streaming opens new doors for Iranian animation

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PERSPECTIVE

Today's global screen entertainment market is more audience-driven than ever before. As viewer preferences continue to diversify, video-on-demand (VOD) platforms have evolved into ecosystems where films and animated features can reach audiences across the world without being confined to a single dominant taste or commercial formula.

The global film and animation marketplace has become increasingly fragmented over the past decade. It is no longer meaningful to speak of a single "global audience" with uniform, predictable preferences. Viewers in different countries make choices shaped by their cultural backgrounds, historical experiences, languages, and even their media consumption habits. A production that resonates with mass audiences in one market may appeal only to a niche demographic elsewhere. This diversity has significantly elevated the role of VOD platforms in how content is distributed, discovered, and brought to wider attention. Unlike the traditional theatrical model, where screen availability, release schedules, marketing campaigns, and box-office projections largely determine a film's prospects, streaming platforms operate on the principle of audience choice. Viewers are free to seek out the films or animated works that genuinely interest them, whether

a family-oriented feature or a historical, religious, or culturally rooted narrative that may not command broad theatrical appeal but carries strong resonance for a specific audience segment anywhere in the world. This is precisely what makes VOD services an effective launchpad for productions that do not necessarily cater to homogenized mainstream tastes.

The experience of numerous countries over the past several years demonstrates that online platforms can serve as a vital gateway for non-Hollywood animation to break into international markets. Japanese anime, for example, has long leveraged streaming services and digital distribution to expand well beyond its domestic audience, cultivating dedicated fan bases worldwide. South Korea offers another compelling case, illustrating how sustained international distribution of cultural products gradually broadens global recognition of a country's creative output. Even across Europe, many independent animated productions from France, Ireland, and Spain have built international audiences less through theatrical box office than through streaming platforms, film festivals, and digital distribution networks. Against this backdrop, the arrival of an Iranian animated feature on major global VOD platforms is more than a symbolic milestone, it represents a tangible opportunity. The release of "The Boy and the Sword" (originally "Sword and Sorrow") on platforms such as Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV is significant because it demonstrates that Iranian anima-

tion is capable of clearing the professional gateways of established international distribution. Naturally, gaining access to such platforms requires meeting rigorous technical, production, and presentation standards; without those benchmarks, content simply does not make it onto these services or reach audiences at this level. The significance of this development extends well beyond a single title. Once one Iranian animated production secures distribution through global streaming platforms, it effectively helps pave the way for others. It sends an encouraging signal to domestic distributors, investors, and producers that the international marketplace is not the exclusive domain of a handful of countries. High-quality productions with a distinct identity and professional packaging can, in fact, earn international visibility. Every successful release of this kind strengthens confidence within Iran's animation industry while broadening its long-term horizons. Equally important, VOD platforms allow Iranian productions to be placed directly before global audiences without having to navigate the traditional gatekeepers of theatrical exhibition. Viewers are no longer dependent on the programming decisions of cinema operators or constrained by limited theatrical windows. Instead, they browse expansive digital libraries and gravitate toward titles that capture their interest. Within this environment, cultural distinctiveness becomes a competitive advantage rather than an obstacle. When Iranian animation is presented with pro-

fessional craftsmanship and international production standards, its unique cultural and narrative perspective can become precisely what draws audiences seeking fresh storytelling.

The challenge now is to ensure that opportunities of this kind are not viewed merely as isolated successes. Participation in global streaming platforms should be recognized as a meaningful proof of concept, one capable of informing clearer cultural export strategies, strengthening international distribution networks, encouraging targeted investment, and raising production standards across the industry. If other countries have successfully leveraged online platforms to cement the global standing of their animation sectors, Iran can likewise capitalize on these opportunities through strategic planning and sustained commitment.

For Iranian animation, gaining a foothold in the international marketplace ultimately depends on access to opportunity, and today, VOD platforms represent one of the most important avenues for doing so. The presence of "The Boy and the Sword" on major international streaming services stands as one of the clearest indicators of that potential. If built upon rather than treated as a one-off achievement, it could help open a new chapter in bringing Iranian animation to audiences around the world.

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