Representation of Social Issues in Contemporary Iranian Paintings (1979-2015)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is representation of social issues in contemporary Iranian painting in perspective of artists. This qualitative study was performed using semi-structured interviews. The statistical population of this study includes all artists working in Iranian painting. However, due to some problems, among about 30 selected artists, 15 were interviewed. The results showed that contemporary paintings often involve various social issues such as war and discrimination. Most of the interviewed artists believe that art should help people think, and this upgraded works should not only be understood by the people, that depend on the artist's perception, as well as on the type of thinking, mindset, motivation and origin of a painter. Personal characteristics and environmental concerns can lead artists to create works of art. The results showed that, some of the arts are generally representation of critical views, and sympathy with the people is not the main concern. The results also showed that painters often believe in both criticism and sympathy, but to them, criticism affects more than sympathy to improve the situation. Most artists know the imposed war eligible to be reflected on paintings today. Also, civil liberties, class differences, and social abnormalities are of main interests of most painters.

Keywords: social issues, contemporary paintings, presenting social problems in painting, painters views about the role of art in social life

Introduction

Art, as one of the highest human attributes, has long been admired by thinker and philosopher. Aesthetic aspect of art is one of the most important features, which creates a sense of sublime in human, and this feeling of calm and uplift has an important role in the human spirit. Since in different definitions the art is known as one of the man-made entities, therefore, it has a very close relationship with the man and his character. Man, as a creature that grows and is nurtured in the society, always carry some common features with the society. The social characteristics have a great impact on his work. This impacts which is caused by concerns and issues of the artist, are manifested in the artist's works. On this basis, we can explain and interpret works of art with a sociological perspective, and look at the category of art from the perspective of sociology. Many sociologists believe that no object in itself is a work of art, and artistic value is not an integral part of a work of art, but the art should be categorized with respect to its acceptability in different social groups.

Given this, anything recognized by a particular social group as art is a work of art, an art that is attributed and linked to the group and their ideologies. But in the meantime, the appeal must be unintentional and unconscious. Chernyshevsky, in one of his first critical essays, said that: "Art for art's sake" is currently as strange and far-fetched as "wealth for wealth or science for science". Every kind of human activity must benefit the humanity, otherwise would fruitless. Wealth must be used properly, science is to guide human, and art is supposed to be an essential service, rather than an incentive to have fruitless pleasure (Fischer, 2006). Watno believes that the art and social structure" are always in an ambiguous and complex relation to each other". The relationship is in the form of the letter "Z". If a straight line at the bottom of the letter "Z" be considered as "social structure" and the straight line above it as art, in this case one of the most important tasks of cultural theory is to play the role of the cross line , that is, connecting these two to each other (Mehraein, 2007).

Sociology of art include a variety of issues, from low-level analysis including research into the effects of people's perception about the artist's on his work, to a higher level of analysis, such as the place of art in the structure of modern societies. One of the key points for understanding art is considering the fact that we cannot realize any intrinsic value of art and accept it without other considerations. In the contemporary West, the word "art" usually refers to certain dominant such as painting, sculpture, books, theater, musical performances, and works like either of them (Inglis, 2005). Artwork in any society is influenced by social conditions in the community, and on the other hand, the reproduction of social relations. Social issues deny social security and prevent development. If people are sometimes damaged psychologically and biologically, possibly the most

annoying factor is resulted from social issues, which significantly affect people's lives (Najm al-Iraqi, 1997). Doctor Faramarz Rafi-Pour described Iran's most important social issues as follows:

"There are many social issues to us: poverty, inflation, corruption and embezzlement, social and enterprise chaos, reduction of unity and social cohesion, reduction of religiosity and empty mosques, pride and luxury, lack of motion, distrust, air pollution , environmental degradation, waste of labor and money, lack of medicines, addiction, favoritism, reduced production, and many other issues. These issues, that are even more, have also failed authorities like a confused tangle "(RAFIPOUR, 1998). Social issues are reproduced through socialization process. Accordingly, Hall considers triple concepts in the language as concepts, objects, and symbols and believes that a set of processes relate these three categories to each other. Hall calls this process "representation" and believes, based on such an idea, that meaning is constructed on representation systems. Based on such a look at the language and the centrality of the issue of language for Hull, theories can be represented in a new form. Accordingly, reflective approach believes that language works like a mirror, reflecting the true sense of the world (Hall, 1997).

So the relationship between art and science of sociology seem clear and undeniable, and the impact of the social concerns of the artist's artwork is a natural process. With regard to this, since 1979 to the present Iran's society has undergone events such as the Revolutionary War, war consequence and social issues such as addiction, women's problems, the environment, etc. Iranian artists, and in particular Iranian painters, have been affected by these issues. The problem here is assessing extend of these influences on their artwork, and if their tries have had any significant effect or not? This research will aim to find that whether social issues are represented in contemporary Iranian painting or not?

Background
Mazinani and Modarres (2011) studied the representation of women in the artworks of contemporary Iranian artists (with an emphasis on sexual look at the woman). The population included the biennial paintings of women as "a manifestation of feeling" consisting 1327 artworks. By an overall view of the results we find that sexual look overcome the asexual look. But a detailed look shows that there are traces of resistance against gender stereotypes in the works of women painters. Niel Qaz (2011), in a study entitled contemporary realist painters in Iran and the social conditions of development, has studied social and cultural developments and its relationship with paintings. He pointed out that the paintings have a deep representation to the community and audience, and the artists involved in this field try develop their people beyond the visualized society, and even convey their opinions to social and political elites. He also says that the content of contemporary paintings are representations, rethinking, and critique themes of political and social issues of the artist, as well as the representation of the artist's personal experiences and individuality. Hosseini Rad (2014) had a review on contemporary paintings. This study on recent half-century paintings shows that the cultural power of Iranians have always been able to internalize and absorb the environmental impacts, and then express it by interpreting according to Iranian taste. Painting with Iranian and at the same time modern identity is a main concern of young contemporary Iranian artists wished at globalization, while keeping national and cultural identity in their work. Iran's Islamic Revolution revived Iranian contemporary painting with a spirit that is completely rooted in Islamic mysticism, seeking to interpret the world in a way that desires human dignity.

Mehdi nadrian (2013) has examined the tendency of Iranian Painters to social issues, with a case study of Mexican painters and contemporary Iranian artists (1950-2000). He concluded that social painting is one of the major artistic trends from the dawn of history inscribed on the walls of caves, and has been continued until now. Many artists around the world have tended to this type of painting with different approaches. Analysis of this type of painting needs more recognition about the society where the artist has lived and been affected. So, for research on the subject, we need to learn historical and social space where the artist lived, and then checking the art collections of that period, and the reasons caused a visual media be preferred compared to other media. Social painting genre, based on the origins of formation of the social arts, such as painting or social literature, can lead to analysis of paintings that have social themes and orientation. This study is a reflection of social issues in art, and how to configure and organize painting as a visual media. The aim of this study was to investigate and analyze the social Paintings by video documents and social analysis of the image and aesthetic of form and content in connection with the audience. In addition, adaption is a basis for comparative studies in this field, which are so brilliant.

A.Iqbal Jahromy (2012) has examined the idea of artistic discourse in Michel Foucault's view, with an emphasis on the representation. Works of art have always been evaluated from different perspectives. Some theorists separate the art from social context, as something that has an end in itself, and refers to nothing; Immanuel Kant and followers of art for art are categorized in this category. On the other hand, other theorists believe that the art is formed through society and communication.

According to this view, the art is shaped by culture and thinking governing a society and it is not separated from it. Michel Foucault is a thinker who, accompany with his discourse system, is placed in the second category.

The aim of this research is to study how Foucault considers these different discourses together? Then some separator lines between discourses, on the basis of which different properties over a historical period can be identified?

Astrandvad (2012) studied the development of socio-cultural perspectives, including socialism and materialism. This study suggests that humans communicate with a product based on their personal experience. Therefore, the products and social relationships share dependencies and relationships with each other, and we have made a big mistake if this relationship is not analyzed. La Fuente (2010) in a study entitled "In defense of pluralism theory and methodology in sociology of art: critics on Georgina Born," examined the suggestions of Georgina Born which claimed that the sociology of art inherit and learns from the adjacent areas. The analysis of mediators is the core of this debate. Georgina Born suggests that the sociology of art can use the study of corporeal components of networks of artworks and the role of the aesthetics and art agencies forming the society. The results of this study suggest that maybe the mainstream sociology of art should not try to communicate detailed the whole views, or the future of Humanities and Social Sciences.

Milner (2010) in a study entitled "collective consciousness, the stupidity: aesthetics, philosophy and sociology of art, " criticized the theory of sociology victory on aesthetic philosophical, which is rooted in the work of Emile Durkheim and Ernest Gellner. The results of this research show that normalized sociology requires an understanding of the art, such as advanced theories of Pierre Bourdieu and Franco Moretti. La Fuente (2010) in a study entitled "the art enforced me: an introduction to the new sociology of art", explored new perspective on the sociology of art, the "art and the agency" initiated by Alfred Gell (1998), and then evolved. The results suggest that the new sociology of art have shared (or some common) components with materialist cultural research; and now that art is strongly tied to the lives of individuals, stronger arts institutions are needed. La Fuente (2008) in a study entitled the art of social forms and social forms of art: aesthetic-social relationship in the minds of George Simmel, examined the relationship between beauty and sociology in George Simmel thoughts. The results suggest the cases where Simmel shown as aesthetic factors essential for social ties, and creates a vision in understanding the relationship between aesthetic theory and sociology.

Analysis Method

This qualitative study was performed using semi-structured interviews. The statistical population of this study includes all artists working in Iranian painting. The interview was conducted in thirteen matters as follows:

1-The view of painters about representing social issues in their works

2- Impact of society

3- Social concerns of painters

4- Effective factors in the creation of the work

5- The necessity of showing social issues and reflecting social developments by creating concerns

6- Reflection of Social Issues in Paintings

7- The relation of painting and cultural space of society

8- Reflection of events and social issues in their affairs (critique, empathy)

9- Creating social stimulation through painting

10- The Impact of Criticism or Empathy on Improving Social Issues

11- Empathy with people after the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979)

12- The Impact of the Artists (Iranian Painters) on Reflection on Social Issues

13- Important social issues of the present society

Statistical Population

The statistical population of this study includes all artists working in Iranian painting. However, due to some problems, among about 30 selected artists, 15 were interviewed. As bellow (based on age):

Iraj Eskandari, Niloufar Ghaderi nezhad, Habibollah Sadeghi, Mehrin Mokhtari, Reza Hedayat, Sedigheh Nayereh Aledavood, Behnam Kamrani, Katrin Charkhian, Hamidreza Andarz, Saeed Rafiee Monfared, Ahmad Talebi, Iman Afsarian, Alireza Masoudi, Amin Bagheri, Shohreh Shirzad.

Data Analysis

Interviews were conducted with fifteen painter in three generations since 1979 to present in the form of semi-structured interviews; the results are as follows.

1. According to the results, painters believe that for a society like Iran that is in a hard historical period, any of the social and political problems such as the Revolutionary War, the special look at the woman, the personal problems, and the changing face of the city in developments can be a focus point to represent. Although a number of artists have said that they have not had any effective point for beginning such a kind of painting and sensitivity of artists to the community and even more generally, to the whole world increases by sensing the issues through the media, as well as in public and seeing the

everyday problems of the society. Therefore, despite observed consensus among the painters about the approach reflected in the sociology of art implying the total influence of the art on social developments and events, there is no robust belief in this regard among interviewed Iranian painters.

2. In the discussion the views about the influence of artists in society, social, political, economic, and cultural issues, as well as ethical framework have been examined. The results show the fact that, in opinions of painters, social, political, and economic issues depend on people, and in most of the answers, the artists say: there is no obligation that the artwork certainly reflect social issues. They mostly believed that the art, on one-side, need to help people's minds upgrade, and this must not necessarily be simply perceived by people, and refers to the artist instead, which on the one hand, depends on the type of thinking, mindset, motivation and origin of a painter. Sometimes, a painter may be affected by all of the above (social, political and economic conditions and moral framework of society), and refer to all to create a work of art, and sometimes an artist, or even groups of the artists, may do not have any response to these issues and take a different career path. On one hand, the art reflects the society. As, according to the theory of reflection in sociology of art, which consists of a broad field of research, the main emphasis is therefore on the idea expressing that the art is the mirror of society. In other words, the art is conditioned and determined by the society. Therefore, in line with the theory above, the result of the most interviews also suggest that Iranian artists interviewed believe that there is no "must" for the artists. The art can be revealed in many contexts, and sometimes a painter draws a painting stored long in the museum, still attractive for visitors.

3. Impressions discussed by the majority of respondents were based on the belief that the mind of the artist, his personal morale, motivation and personal problems can greatly concern the artist's. Environmental concerns play a crucial role in forming the concerns for a person. Art and art institutions in the community can be effective to bold an issue and the concerns of the people of art. So both personal and environmental characteristics may affect this area. Therefore, its root must be found in the theory of structuralism ontology laid out by Goldman. Goldman believes that the main theme of an original artwork is a transpersonal worldview and knowledge, which is presented by artists who are members of different groups, and as a special group of elite groups and campaigns. The worldview, mindset is needed with social class as the umbrella group. Also, in this structural whole, there is a historical-dialectical unity between subject and object, thought and action, agency and structure, individual and society; in other words, the work of art is the product of this dialectic.

4. Painters' views on the factors influencing the creation of an art follow the Marx's approach; because Marx uses a fundamental and superstructure model in his analysis. According to Marx's concept, Economic facts can be the origin and fundamental for the creation of many ideologies, including art (Raphael, 1999: 148). Therefore, in his view, economic realities and fundamental can be the origin of many types of ideologies, including art. If the economic situation and production in a society is transformed, the art and the artistic community will be changed. So, based on this, Iranian painters participating in interviews were asked if the artwork of is influenced by economic, social and political issues? And do personal characteristics and social factors surrounding the artist including economic benefits, social recognition, and gallery owners can have an impact on creation of a work of art? Conclusion indicates that there are noteworthy differences between the views of the interviewees. According to some of painters of first and second generation after the Iranian revolution, sponsors and economic issues can be greatly effective on the younger generation, as were important for themselves previously; but over time, this issue vanished and economic, political, and social factors are no longer fundamental. A number of younger respondents believe that the technique is a great contributing factor. Lack of strong and correct techniques causes serious obstacles in creation of an art.

5. In considering the issue of individual or social background of the creation of art, conclusion of the results was not possible. Some results suggest that the painter show social concerns in his/her works of art. In this regard, some artists believe that addressing social issues is different in different perspectives, so it would not be possible to have a unilateral judgment. But in another approach, it is suggested that the pressure on the artist prompts him/her to create reflecting the society; this raises from a collective unconscious comes. The artist is not alone in the decision, but only a representative of the society. However, among the interviewees, there were those people insisting that there is no "must" to include social background in artwork, and paintings can be a reflection of internal and personal development. In other words, the individual and social context of the work of art can be created by social change. This is while, according to Giddens, agency and structure are dual phenomena. Every social action includes a structure and any structure needs social action. Agency and structure are strongly intertwined in current human efforts.

6. The question about social issues reflected in the paintings, which three generations of contemporary Iranian artists were asked about, is the process of sustainability and social concerns. Most respondents

believed that, when these concerns are created, its reflection can be seen directly in their works. They also believed that social problems, which in any case are always part of our life, involve our minds. As the theory of reality reflection suggests, works of art show realities in society. Most interviewees believed that social issues are included in contemporary paintings. This belief is stronger among pre-revolutionary generation of painters. Having mentioned discussions, it reveals that the type or class is of great importance in critique of society, and it is one of the fundamental issues of theory of reality reflection.

7. In an indirect approach, once again, Marx's viewpoint about the influence of fundamental effects of economic issues in creation of art, with social themes, was cross examined. Of course, some artists mentioned financial sponsors as the most influential factor. Also, some stipulate the adverse effect of them. This effect can most be seen in paintings at the span of the imposed war. Also, some believe that Islamic Azad University could have an important effect to promote the ideas.

8. As Goldman indicates:" Any work of art is evaluated in terms of connection to the past, present, and future." The analysis revealed that there are both social criticism and sympathy in evaluated works. The evidences are revealed during the imposed war, poverty, and the like. More clearly, the opinion of the majority of the painters interviewed is that the subject of war is a sanctity to the artist, which there is empathy in it and addressing other issues such as poverty, child labor, Embezzlement and class distinction, contains a painter's critical look at these problems.

9. Unlike solution, representation of social issues is among artist's duties. This is in line with Giddens idea; because Giddens insists that "the functions of human are not caused by social activists, but these activities are continuously recreated in the same way that humans introduce themselves as active. Human Factors create conditions that make these activities possible. "Thus, these activities create neither awareness, nor social structure; while expressed as an active, humans are involved in activities, and through the activity, both the awareness and the structure are created (Ritzer, 2010).

10. Although both the criticism and sympathy are considered, but criticism is of greater importance. However, some other ideas are stated. For example, some believe that none of them have influenced the society. While some others believe in the lack of professional works in criticism field. Finally, one of the interviewees recognized the criticism as a driving force for underlying matter.

11. As it was mentioned before, Goldman believes that the structural totality structure of an artistic work is not predetermined and develops through history and there is a gap between the structural totality of an artistic work and the totality of social conditions in which the artistic work was created. Accordingly the results of some interviews with 15 modern artists on "Time sequence and the historical trend of social issues in artistic works" showed that the majority of artists believe that since The Revolution and after the war between Iran and Iraq, sympathy and friendship are less seen in paintings and one of its reason is the critical look of artists to social issues. But among contemporary artists, Habibollah Sadeghi whose works are about Iran's revolution and the war between Iran and Iraq believes that there are signs of sympathy in the paintings of that period. He says: "I myself follow the sense of sympathy in different works and teach my students the way that they can show that theme in their works".

12. The results concluded from the interviews show that there are some rules and red lines in Iranian artistic communities, both among the members of the government and the public, that in some extend takes the artist towards censorship. Today Iranian community prefers not to enter the issues that are out of one's ability and control, however most of artists believed that they could show the reflection of social issues in their works. So most of them prefer to introduce themselves as social activists who tried to improve the awareness and reform the social structure, as Giddens believed. Of course some of them believe that other media such as photography and mural were more effective than painting in reflecting the social issues.

13. Finally the 15 interviewed artists were asked "among the social issues that affected Iranian society in recent years, which one do you believe that has the required characteristics to be paid more attention in the form of a painting?" The answers to this question showed that they believe that Iran's war has the desired qualifications to be reflected in modern paintings. Lack of social freedom, poverty, class distinction and social disorders are next subjects that should be reflected in contemporary paintings.

Conclusion

Responding to this overly question that "What is modern artists perspective upon the necessity of representing social issues in their paintings?" demonstrated that most of them which are spending a hard historical time within a society like Iran, for very social-political issues include revolution, war, society's perspective on woman, personal troubles caused by the society, initially could play a pivotal role representing social issues in society. However, some artists stated that there were no specific milestones for beginning. Most artists that have been interviewed are believed that art should assist people's thought development which should not purely be related

to understanding works- refer to artist's cognition. Moreover, it is based upon manner of thoughts, mentality, motivation and the origin of a painter. Individual and environmental characteristics are both capable of being artists' concern for creation. Cited to some post-revolution's first and second generation's painters, economic issues can rather be influential on younger generation as well as sponsors as it was matter to them when they were young while it lost its important by time. And no faith remains on economic, social, political fundamentality. Results also indicated that some works generally represent the critical views and empathy with people was not highly considered. Most responders were believed since these concerns are created, their reflections are directly observed within their results. And also believed whether we want it or not social issues are embedding within our lives. We involves with them keep our minds occupied and settled for the part of the mind that reacts to art. Results demonstrated that most painters were believed in both criticism and sympathy while in their opinion criticism is more important for recovering issues. Most artists known war as an eligible variable in order to reflect in modern paintings. Recently, Social freedoms, class divisions and social anomalies have attracted most painters' attention. Therefore most painters indicated that most artists could imitate social issues through their works. Meanwhile, some artists believe that the influence of other media including photography and wall painting was more than painting.

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