

IRANIAN CITIES PUBLIC ART MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Despite European cities with a long history in public art -such as the city of Rome with numerous sculptures in its urban spaces- public art in Iranian cities is recently going to be developed and new movements are being seen. After a long time with non-sculpture urban spaces-because of some Islamic religious beliefs-the new Sculpture gardens , the sculptures which are being installed daily in Iranian cities, the amount of art orders by municipalities, Tehran international sculpture symposium , Site specific public art in Shiraz, children wallpainting with the help of artists in Kerman....all these events together show this movement in the cities of Iran. This paper discusses main issues of this movement and presents some of its well done works. It is structured as follows . first, investigates changes throughout the time which took place in the viewpoints about the artforms with the focus on sculpture ; second , talks about obstacles; third, the cultural ,political and bureaucratic context in connection with public art in Iranian cities are considered; fourth , suggests the relations between place, people and public Art and argues the importance of having in hand guidelines and principles for public art project and process in Iran; Fifth, introduces precisely a wide range of activities that can be defined as public art and then presents conventional definition of public art in Iranian cities' and artforms which have become so common there; sixth , three main governmental sectors who order and support and implement public art projects are introduced ;seventh , speaks about the optimistic future of the public art in Iranian cities and some of endeavours in this field are considered; In the conclusion , some points which are necessary to be taken into consideration for Iran's public art development are suggested. This paper carried out by the present situation analysis as well as interviews with Tehran municipality key officers , art council members and artists.

RESUMEN

A pesar de que las ciudades europeas con una larga historia en arte público-como la ciudad de Roma con numerosas esculturas en sus espacios urbanos públicos, el arte reciente en las ciudades iraníes está en desarrollo vinculado a nuevos movimientos. Tras mucho tiempo sin escultura en los espacios urbanos, debido a algunas creencias religiosas islámicas-los nuevos jardines de escultura, las esculturas que están siendo instaladas a diario en las ciudades iraníes, la cantidad de pedidos de arte por parte de los municipios, el simposio internacional de escultura de Teherán, el arte público "site specific" en Shiraz, los murales realizados por niños con la ayuda de los artistas en Kerman todos estos acontecimientos, demuestran este movimiento en las ciudades de Irán. Este documento analiza las cuestiones principales de este movimiento y presenta algunos de sus trabajos. Está estructurado de la siguiente manera. En primer lugar, investiga los cambios que tuvieron lugar sobre los puntos de vista acerca del arte con especial atención a la escultura. En segundo lugar, habla acerca de los obstáculos. En tercer lugar, trata de los aspectos culturales, políticos y burocráticos en relación al contexto del arte público en las ciudades iraníes. En cuarto lugar, sugiere que las relaciones entre el lugar, las personas y el arte público y defiende la importancia de disponer de las directrices y principios para el proyecto de arte público y su proceso en Irán. En quinto lugar, precisamente introduce una amplia gama de actividades que puede definirse como arte público y, a continuación, se presenta la definición convencional de arte público en las ciudades iraníes, un arte que se ha vuelto tan común allí. En sexto lugar, se introducen tres grandes sectores gubernamentales encargados del apoyo y la realización de proyectos de arte público. En séptimo lugar, habla sobre el futuro optimista del arte público en las ciudades iraníes, y se presentan algunos de sus logros. En la conclusión, se sugieren algunos puntos que deben, necesariamente, tenerse en cuenta para el desarrollo del arte público en Irán. This paper se basa en el análisis de la situación actual, así como en entrevistas con funcionarios clave del municipio de Tehran, miembros del consejo de arte y artistas.

I. Points of views and visions about public art in the past , present and future

This part investigates changes throughout the time which took place in the viewpoints about the artforms specially sculpture in the case of Iran.

Public art in the Past

Studying sculpture's history of Iran reveals these points: In ancient time sculpture was as epigraphs of Kings' victory events and states' stories carved on the rocks on the sides of the main roads. It sounds as if sculpture was a sign of power . There were also small tiny sculptures used for religious purposes. No sculpture in dwellings. After coming Islam to Iran Some religious beliefs that

representing the nature –particularly portrait painting and sculpture-is not religiously legitimate led to iranian cities public spaces with no sculpture . Instead of it symbolism developed extremely particularly by Eslimi¹ art. So, for many centuries sculpture have been considered as a non-religiously legitimate art form because of the association with the story of idolatry among Arabs in the ages before Islam. The significant fact is that in the history of Iran there wasn't idolatry among it's people; at least ,not as common as it was among arabs. So there shouldn't be any worry about sculptures to become idols in this country. Now, the point of views have changed so much and it can be seen new movements in the artworld of this country.

Contemporary public art

It's more than fifty years that sculptures have found themselves in the cities of Iran. Public art in Iran began with the aim of introducing iranian culture and history by installing statues of famous people in cities' main squares and public spaces. Some of these statues are Nader shah ²monument in Mashhad ,1956 (figure1); Hakim Abolqasem Ferdowsi³ statue in Mashhad (figure2) and in Villa



Figure1 : Nader Shah



Figure2 : Ferdowsi statue,Mashhad Bahman park

borgheese in Italy⁴,1958; Ebne Sina⁵ statue in Hamedan, and Khayam ⁶statue in Laleh park of tehran at the same time all by the artist Abolhasankhane sediqi.

Nowadays in Iran, artworks including ones in the city; are understood in two forms as follows .formalist artworks : doesn't provide any meaning or concept or philosophy and meaningful or conceptual :follow some meanings and concepts. Because of some beliefs that formalism doesn't exist in eastern art philosophy It's too hard and sometimes impossible for an abstract formalist artwork to be approved by Iran's art councils. Another point is that the subjects and concepts of the artworks are mostly about Islamic Values⁷;Iran Islamic Revolution ⁸ and Sacred Defence Against Iraq⁹. Hence the most public arts are monuments or portraits of martyrs (figure 3) ; Islamic religious leaders (figure 4) and symbols of martyrdom (figure 5) , located in cities' squares or painted on the streets' walls .Sometimes they are not well-done and don't have a good effect on people and don't interest them. It' not that war monuments were not good enough while this could be a cause of some success in civic art that we are witnessing now. In the other words

these monuments were to help art particularly sculptures come to urban spaces. The faith and loyalty to war victims left sculpture's opponents no more excuse for rejecting such art. So these monuments helped city sculptures to be taken into consideration.

Although artworks are becoming more and more in the cities of Iran the term 'public art' hasn't entered seriously to the urban literature yet. The term rarely is used in the academic realm whilst the term 'civic art' is used increasingly by municipalities.

The future of Iran's public art

However it's not a long time that Iranian cities public art is making it's way toward art history ,the future approaches have to be determined at the present time. A sustainable urban future requires strategies in which dwellers empowered to construct concepts of the city (Miles, 1997:p18). Therefore these approaches should lead to the contribution of public art alongside other policies in making an active society living in desirable qualified urban spaces ;the society that is abled and empowered to make it's own city. These approaches can come through discussions , seminars and action plans .Furthermore to achieve this goal Public art in Iranian cities should change it's view from looking at people as passive single elements to active social actors.

2.Obstacles

There are still many problematic issues , which the artists should rise to the challenge of them. Artistic imaginations are arrested by a wide range of worries in the artist's mind. The main basic big worry about sculpture in Iran has been this question, that *"Is this type of artform religiously legitimate or not?"*. But fortunately it is seen obviously this worry is going to fade in according to the new religious visions. The second is the prohibitions and limitations made by governmental regulations for artists and artworks. These regulations are applied to artistic concepts and ideas; artworks' forms and places. According to these regulations all artworks shouldn't be contrary to Islamic religious rules and State's objectives. The other one is that who are ordering, financing and commissioning public art projects ,such as sculptures and wallpaintings; are usually governmental sectors and private patrons do not support the public art extensively neither financially nor commissionary. Furthermore in many cases people are considered as whom need to be educated and also reminded of their religious obligations to Islam. *"What's the people's idea about these works?"* *"Isn't it much more better to regard people's preferences and consider them as active patrons?"* not regarding people's opinions and ideas may cause them having less interests in the artworks existing in their environment.

3.The context of public art in Iran

Public art can't be understood in a separation form from the cultural , political and bureaucratic context of where it takes place. This section is about the cultural ,political and bureaucratic context



Figure3: Martyr ,Chamran highway



Figure5 : Mother of Martyr, 22



Figure4

for definition and implementation of public art projects in Iranian cities and about democracy one of the most important issues in public art projects.

Cultural context

It's obvious the Islamic religious beliefs -that mentioned before- constitute some part of the cultural context as well as inner-looking culture and traditional architecture background. Having the inner-looking culture and architecture background - in which all well designed elements such as colorful glass windows and beautiful yards were located inside with no sign outside and in the streets what is seen is just simply solid thatch covered walls and doors with no sign of what is happen inside- may be some of the causes of not so much attention to outdoor spaces by people. Nowadays the desire to design buildings' facades have kept public art disregarded. In Iranian cities people aren't sensitive to their environment. Of course it is not the same in different social groups. Diversity of social groups with different beliefs and ideas is another important matter in the cultural context which has an important role in public art. As Tehran Sculpture Department officer mentioned, the sculpture which is going to be installed in south areas of Tehran can't be the same as the north areas' for the different social pattern, art knowledge and eye education level among their dwellers. For instance in some areas people prefer and enjoy realist artworks rather than abstract ones. But, this question will reveal : "what about other social groups if just dominant groups be considered ?"

Cultural context in summary :

- Some Islamic religious beliefs
- inner-looking cultural and architectural background
- less aesthetic concerns by people
- extensive diversity of tastes depends on the social statuses and origins

Political context

Human has always used art to express his views and beliefs. Art particularly public art can't be seen in the separation form from political issues. A more democratic political context provides public art extensive artistic imaginations, more political artistic manifestations and let all social and political groups' presence and engagement. Hence public art can influence politics. The importance of the role of political issues can be seen by comparing number of sculptures installed in Tehran before president Khatami's period-before 2000 when often just one sculpture was installed each year in Tehran-with during and after his presidency career- 2000 until now when more than one hundred sculptures have been installed. The more democratic and open political space of Khatami's presidency career provides a context where many debates and discussions about citizens' rights revealed. This includes art and public art issues too.

A problematic issue is that In some cases public art serves political purposes. In such cases war and martyr's monuments are located in cities with the aim of reminding people of the worth of martyrs' dedication along eight years war and encourage them to accomplish their owe by following Islamic rules and remaining loyal to the regime.

Bureaucratic context

There are three groups of organizations for public art projects: who order such art, who commission it, who approve it. Most of public artworks are ordered by areas' municipalities, then by Islamic development organization and religious committees to Municipality Beautify Organization. Beside ordering they often determine the concepts and subjects of the artworks too. Then Municipality Beautify Organization call for proposals. All delivered artworks have to be approved by many councils and departments. In other words each artwork should meet several approval sessions and this often raises so many debates in these meetings- once these debates caused the Tehran art council to be closed. Thus all public art process take place only in state's sectors. Thus the main problematic issue here is institutionalism .

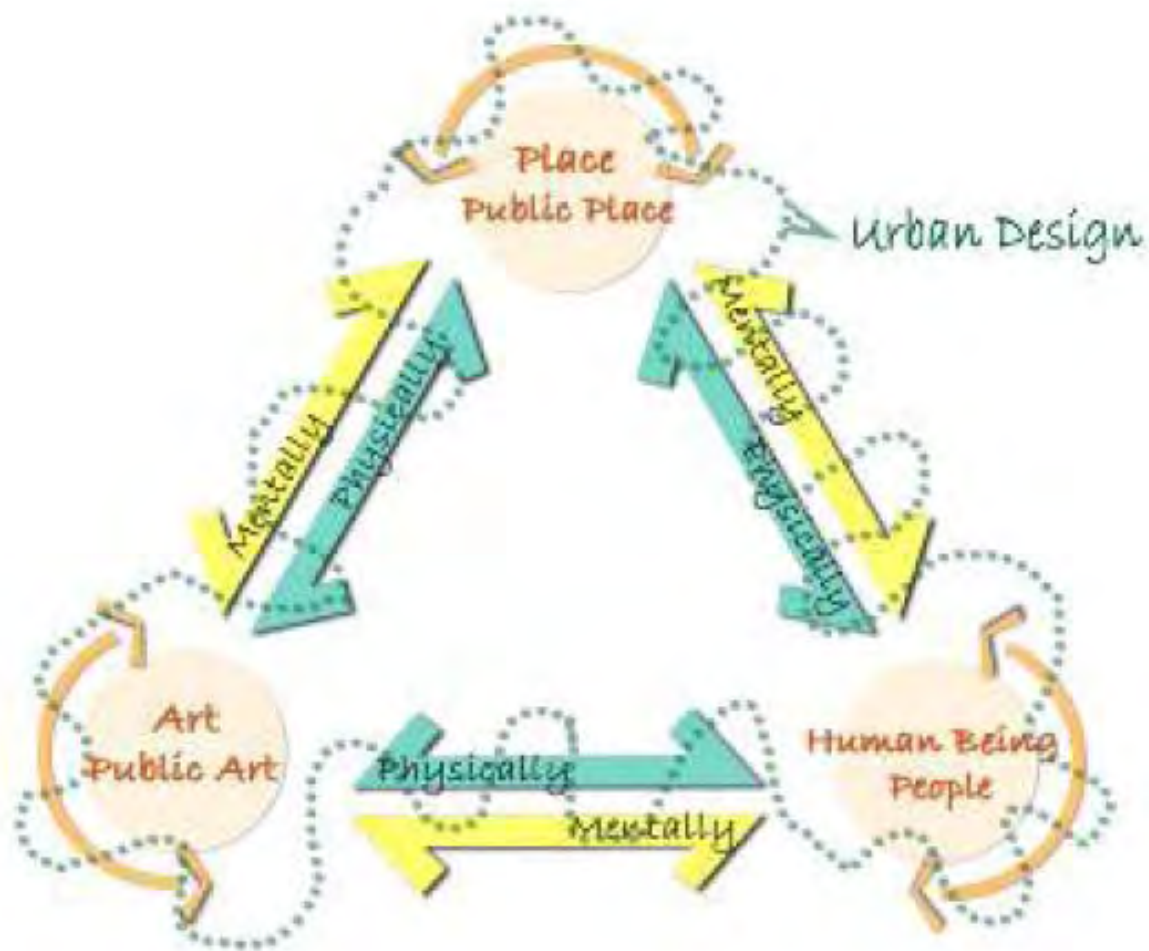


Diagram 1: Place, People, Public art by Hoda Kanani Moghadam

4. Public spaces and public art

When an artwork comes to the city it's audiences are no more specialist and professional ones. It deal with a great extent of dwellers ranging from uneducated people to professional ones. artworks influence on culture and make people sensitive to their environment. The three main elements in

a urban space with an artwork are: Public Place, People and Art . Public place serves as the vessel of urban life with the aim of reaching to the eminent active society. Public art should help to bring about a kind of dialogue and dialectics between people and place. Reviewing public art discussions bring us to the notion ,that most controversies' focuses are on the relations rather than elements. It means the relations between these elements are very important rather than themselves.(Diagram I)

This point is neglected in public art in Iran. Therefore it's necessary that Iranian cities public art commissioners become aware of the importance of the role of these relations, for without taking them into consideration there will be less improvement in the field. There exist two types of relations between them: physically and mentally .The dialogue and dialectics between people and place and art have to be improved both physically and mentally.

Though there are so many years that artworks have come into urban spaces unfortunately there aren't still any principles for selecting and assessing and evaluating urban spaces artists and artworks. After having a look on some artworks in urban spaces of Tehran it will complain ,that many of them are installed without taking into consideration the perceptual, social, visual, dimensions of urban design -such as paintings of martyr's faces on the streetwalls which hasn't been done well or sculptures which are located in inappropriate places with having no good views of them. On the other hand, in most cases area municipality order a sculpture or wallpainting for a square or street in that area. A critical point is ,that ,what is determined as the subject of an artwork by area municipality, is the name of the the street or square, which itself , is a controversial issue because old and new streets' and squares' names are replacing with the name of islamic religious leaders or war victims and martyrs. It's interesting that most people still call these with the old names. It doesn't mean in any cases the name of the street can't be the concept of the artwork but it should be mentioned public art have to be socially ,physically and functionally appropriate to it's site the point that is mostly disregarded .

The public art strategies should set out several specific criteria for selection of public art and it's process and provide guidelines and principles for site selection and artworks form and material ,that have take into consideration all urban aspects as well as possible.

Public art projects can't be commissioned in separation form from urban development projects. It will be beneficial to put public art in urban redevelopment , regeneration and placemaking projects. It means public art commissioners, urban designers, artists, architects and... have to come to together for implementing a public art projects that contribute to livable urban spaces where social and urban life is going on .

5.Common and conventional public artworks

Art plays an important role in human being life. Everything in human life has a very close relationship with art. Whatever people do in their urban life and appears in urban spaces has a reflection of their aesthetic preferences and willings and also shows how much they are sensitive to their environment. In other words In a city All kinds of things ,which are made intentionally or unconsciously which holds aesthetics matters and appears in the cityscapes can be a kind public art. It can be found different layers of public art ranging from artworks created by artists to the appearance of public tastes and willings in the urban spaces. These layers have relationship and interaction and cooperate in making and beautify the cityscape. They can be categorized in 5 layers as follow:

- 1-The appearance of public aesthetic tastes and willings : the way people appear or intervent in their urban environment
- 2- The presence manifestation of different social and political groups
- 3-Self-grown public art : art works and activities done by non-specialist
- 4-Public art as a social process : artists and people make an artwork together
- 5-Artistic artworks :done by specialist artists with aesthetic matters.

Eventhough public art can be mentioned as all these layers (Figure 10), because of the conventional definition of public art in Iran - the art objects located in urban spaces- the focuses of this paper is on this kind of public art. Conventional public arts can be recognized in Iranian cities:

- 1.sculptures
- 2.wallpaintings
- 3.lightening and city beautify elements. (Figure 6)

New subjects are going to be added to the previous ones and it can be seen some artworks with new subjects such as motherhood, children, life, traditional Iranian art and also with social subjects. (figure 7,8,9). But yet Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense are the most common subjects because as told before mostly there are governmental organizations who order a public artwork and they care more about these subjects rather than the other ones.



Figure6 : drinking water box



Figure7: People Valiasr Avenue



Figure9 : The Life ,Valiasr Avenue



Figure8: Tar.Plover Sculpture

6.Institutions and organizations

There are three main governmental sectors who define and support and implement public art projects: Tehran beautify organization, Cultural-art organization of Teharn Municipality, Islamic development organization .The main goals of each of these departments are different.Tehran beautify organization use public art as a mean for beatifying the city especially in lightening and urban furnitures.Cultural-art organization of Teharn Municipality do public art projects to enhance the historical and cultural identity of the city and to make the city beautiful. Islamic development organization use public art to extend and promot and maintain Islamic values and identity among people especially young.But obviously there is a great need to have a clear definition and organization of such activities and find a solution for two main questions:” *How it’s possible to gather all these non-union experiences under the umbrella of public art movement?*”,”*How it will become possible for people to participate in their city beatifying?*”

Two main public art commissionaires are :Tehran beautify organization Sculpture department where all artworks should meet the approval by art council and that define, plans and does more large scale projects such as first Theran International symposium .

Beautify organization in most cases receives bespoke sculptures ordered by area municipalities as was told before according to the name of a street or square but Cultural-art organization organize projects itself. The viewpoints of these two organizations are different too.

7. Triumphs

The optimistic future of the public art in Iranian cities can be realized from recent works and events such as follows. Increasing number of sculptures installed in the cities, for instance in the case of Tehran before 2000 in each year only one sculpture was installed in but from 2000 until now one hundred sculptures have been installed in the city. Some redevelopment projects use public art policies, one of them is the regeneration of Mrvi commercial Street which is going to be designed by epigraphs and seven-color ceramics, Mrvi street located in the traditional and historical commercial zone. The first Tehran international Symposium which became a turning point in Iran public art area. It strongly and bravely broke the barriers and paved the path for sculpture art come into Iranian cities; The wallpainting did by children with the title 'The City I like, The City of mine' in the city of Kerman ; Sculpture gardens; The first Tehran public art strategy ; Shiraz Site specific public art and....

Tehran International Sculpture Symposium offered artists in Iran and the other parts of the world the opportunity to put their talents and ideas at the service of beautify Tehran with The Focus on three central themes of science, art and spirituality. The designs have been judged by an art council and the finished sculptures will be erected in Tehran city squares and public places.

The First Tehran International Sculpture Symposium

The Cultural-Art Organization of Tehran Municipality was the organizer of the First International Sculpture Symposium in 2007. The symposium offered artists in Iran and the other parts of the world the opportunity to put their talents and ideas at the service of beautify Tehran, the capital city of the country with a 7000-year civilization. The finished sculptures are going to be erected in Tehran city squares and public places

'Focusing on three central themes of science, art and spirituality, the International Sculpture Symposium welcomes new ideas by sculptors, and invites them to submit their designs before the deadline (November 21, 2006) to the symposium secretariat. The designs will be judged by an art council who will select 5 works by Iranian artists and 15 works by foreign sculptors and will invite the artists to execute their designs in a Tehran workshop.' (The First Tehran International Sculpture Symposium, 2007)

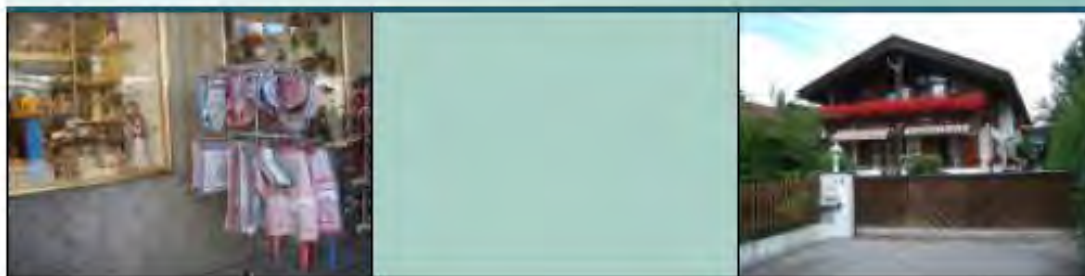
Objectives of the symposium were as follows:

1. Providing favorable conditions for the realization of artists' sculptural ideas.
2. Calling on artists to collaborate in the beautification of Tehran City's living environment through creation of sculptures.
3. Helping to create conceptual sculptures related to selected themes.
4. Paying tribute and honoring artistic endeavors in Iran and the other parts of the world.
5. Introducing Tehran as an art-appreciating city by organizing the workshop of artists and setting up their sculptures in different spots in the city. (The First Tehran International Sculpture Symposium, 2007)

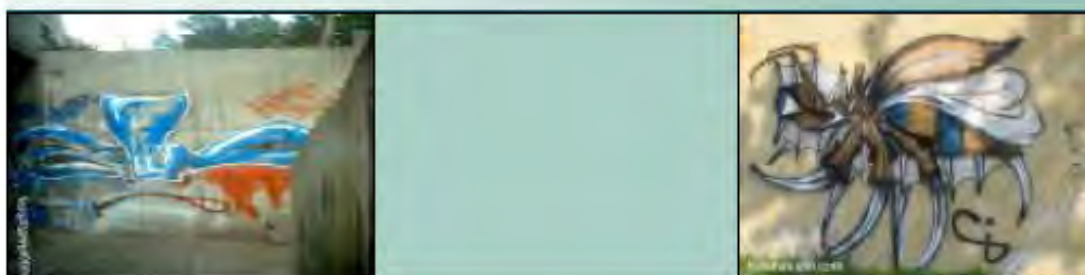
Below is the summary the objectives of the First Tehran Public Art Strategy provided by Tehran Sculpture Department :

- regulating sculpture activities

Appearance of public aesthetic preferences, tastes and willing



Presence manifestations



Self-grown public art



Public art as a social process and activity



Artistic public Artworks



Figure 10: Public art's different layers by Hoda Kanani Moghadam

- centralizing policies in beatifying organization
- placemaking ,promoting identity
- enhancing culture , visual literacy and make dwellers sensitive to their city public spaces
- making good sculpture references for considering national ,cultural and religious characteristics.

Conclusion

To improve public art in Iranian cities it's necessary to:

- embody public art in redevelopment, regeneration , placemaking and tourism projects.
- open section for public art in development plans and urban masterplans .
- provide a framework for analyzing public art context in it's every dimension such as social,economical and urban design dimensions.
- provide a framework for evaluating public art projects
- make guidelines and principles for public art selection, project and process
- empower people to be able to become a part of public art process.
- taking into consideration the city and local image, explained in the vision document.
- do artworks by site and social pattern considerations.
- artwork subjects and concepts have to be concluded from identity and image of the place and also site and social characteristics, not only a general concept.
- encourage artists to take more into consideration the social statue, public tastes and urban design dimensions

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NOTES

- ¹- *Eslimi* is a kind of art that artist visualizes religious beliefs, imaginations and stories such as heaven by symbolic signs. It can be seen in Iranian carpets and mosques.
- ²- *Nader Shah* was one of the kings of Iran
- ³- Iranian poet whom the people of Iran believe he saved Persian language; in the period that the spoken language of most of the countries which were captured by Arabs was changing into Arabic.
- ⁴- dedicated by Tehran to Rome
- ⁵- Iranian famous scientist and physician
- ⁶- Iranian scientist
- ⁷- for example *Hijab*, having faith to Islamic religious leaders and
- ⁸- Iran Islamic Revolution in 1976
- ⁹- the war between Iran and Iraq, 1981; which lasted more than 8 years