

# AZRA AGHIGHI BAKHSHAYESHI



*Crimson*, 2010, 200 x 200 cm, oil on canvas

Azra Aghighi Bakhshayeshi, a descendant of the famous court Calligrapher Mirza Karim Khoshnevis Tabhari, is the only professional female calligraphic artist working in Iran. Her work explores the rich aesthetic possibilities inherent in the internal architecture of Persian script. For her, there is beauty not just in the meaning letters express but also in the form and texture of those letters.

Aghighi was born in 1968 in Qom, Iran into a literary family. In the early years of her calligraphic training, she was inspired by the beauty and variations of Persian letters. Her interest in understanding Persian logotype led her into graphic design, and she continued her studies of contemporary calligraphy scientifically. In university, she chose to study *Kufi* script with the renowned Calligrapher Master Nasrollah Afjai. Under Afjai's guidance, she discovered the freedom and potential for artistic expression available through calligraphy, especially in the minimalist forms of *Kufi* script. Working in this script, Aghighi, who considers herself a "Painter's Scribe," has found a way to express beauty with words – but in a non-literary way. For her, viewers need not understand the meaning of the letters and words to gain access to the meaning of her art; in fact, not understanding the words is exactly what she wants from viewers:

When viewers do not understand the meaning they are not reading the letters. I am looking for viewers who are seeing and not reading. These writings are whispers in my mind that do not mean too much, like a meditation. Sometimes they could be poetry, prayers, or just a conversation. I am not trying to convey spirituality with my writings. Speaking only one language creates a barrier between me and the viewer if they do not speak the same language. I am hoping to reach out to a broader audience with my art as a universal message.

While Aghighi is inspired by religion (especially early Islamic writings), the heart of her practice is not religious: "it is not my intention to pass [my religious inspirations] on to the viewer. I think my religious feelings in my work reveal my inner feelings. For me, these are very personal. I am delighted viewers appreciate my work and hope they can see that it is a contemporary artistic work. I am trying to show the viewer that my artistic inspiration continues to be part of a rich heritage from the golden treasure of Middle Eastern culture."

Although there are more than 1,500 women calligraphers in Iran, Aghighi's art is unique; she is a pioneer among women in the exploration of the potentialities of calligraphy as visual art. As she explains, "I sadly realized that I am the only professional calligraphic woman artist in Iran. I do not claim my works are unique but can say that I am the first woman using conceptual calligraphic writing as an art form."

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# AZRA AGHIGHI BAKHSHAYESHI

Born in Qom, Iran in 1968  
Works and lives in Tehran, Iran

## EDUCATION

- 1994 BA in Graphic Design  
1984 Degree from Calligraphy Association of Iran, Tehran, Iran

## SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2013 Homa Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
2011 Homa Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
2007 Quran Works, Khorramabad Provincial Culture Directorate, Khorramabad, Iran  
2005 Quran Works, National Islamic University, New Delhi, India  
Kish Free Zone Organization, Kish Island, Iran  
Noor va Ney, Aasar Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
1995 Naghsh va Besmeleh, Iran Art Gallery, Iran

## SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2012 The Next Generation: Contemporary Iranian Calligraphy, Galerie Kashya Hildebrand, Zurich, Switzerland  
Alternative Calligraphy, Homa Art Gallery, Tehran, Iran  
2010 Female Calligraphers, Cemal Resit Rey Cultural Center, Istanbul, Turkey  
Calligraphy Festival, ECO Cultural Institute, Dushanbe, Tajikistan  
2009 Iranian Art Exhibition, Ehdeniyat International Festival, Al-Kobra, Ehden, Lebanon  
Fajr Conceptual Arts Exhibition, Vahdat Hall, Tehran, Iran  
2007 Ashura Posters, Hoze Honari Visual Arts Center, Tehran, Iran  
Women Artists of Quran, National Quran Karim Museum, Tehran, Iran  
2004 "Artist Women", Kuwait  
2003 International Hand Craft Exhibition, Kish International Exhibition Center, Kish Island, Iran  
Women and Communication Festival, Kish International Exhibition Center, Kish Island, Iran  
2001 "Quran Karim" Exhibition  
Tajalli-ye-ehsas (manifestation of sensation), Niyavaran Cultural Center, Tehran, Iran  
1997 Besmellah, Arasbaran Cultural Center, Tehran, Iran  
1990 Conceptual Arts Festival, Islamic Propaganda Bureau of Qom, Qom, Iran  
1988 Conceptual Arts Festival, Islamic Propaganda Bureau of Qom, Qom, Iran  
Hazif Celebration, Calligraphers Association of Iran, Shiraz, Iran

## PRIZES AND AWARDS

- 2009 "Fajr Conceptual Arts Exhibition", Vahdat Hall, Tehran, Iran  
2006 First round of Sa'adi Prize, New Delhi, India  
2005 Participating at competition of designing symbolic statue of Tajrish, Tehran, Iran

## PUBLICATIONS

Calligrapher Women, 2009  
Calligraphers Association of Iran, various Albums  
Tafsire-Jamal, Imam Reza Institute

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