

**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

- 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 *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 *Besmeleh*, 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

OTHER

2003 – 2007 Art Adviser, Women Affairs Department, Kish Free Zone Organization, Kish Island, Iran

1991 – 1999 Jurywomen in different Art Events

1988 – 1990 Taught Calligraphy at The Calligraphers Association of Iran

COLLECTIONS

Malaysian Islamic Museum, Tehran Contemporary Museum

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."