

## Farah Ossouli Press Release

Farah Ossouli, the grande dame of contemporary Persian art, will present seven powerful paintings from her series *Ars Poetica* at the Paul Robeson Gallery in Newark from September 4, 2012 to January 9, 2013, as part of the multi-venue and multimedia exhibition: *The Fertile Crescent: Gender, Art, and Society*. Ossouli was one of the first artists to appropriate miniature paintings as an authentic, personal, and contemporary artistic expression to portray women's lives. Rarely shown in the United States, the gouache paintings on view depict the predicament of women in regions of conflict, transnationally and transculturally. Her works is widely collected, most recently by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, and exhibited internationally in the Middle East, Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia. She is considered one of Iran's top five contemporary artists.

In *Ars Poetica*, Ossouli transforms iconic images by Frida Kahlo, Francisco Goya, Fra Angelico, Giovanni Lorenzo Bernini, Reza Abassi, and Leonardo da Vinci by rendering them in the style of Safavid miniature paintings. While her painting style may appear traditional, a closer look yields layers of meaning, references, and innovations. Enframed in decorative motifs, the depictions resonate with hand-written Farsi quotes from contemporary poems by Ahmad Shamloo and Forough Farrokhzad. Image, color, and design create an intricate dialectic of Eastern and Western, old and new references and symbols to depict women afflicted by violence.

Ossouli's embedded theme in this series is the discrepancy between world events as portrayed in packaged news and sanitized media images with the realities under the surface. Correspondingly and in accordance with the Persian artistic spirit, Ossouli's exquisitely delicate and intricate designs rendered in exceptional color compositions attract viewers, who then bear witness to disconcerting events that are either about to happen or have already happened. The artist says:

The contrast between serene surface beauty and lurking violence also exists in traditional miniatures, but in *Ars Poetica* it reflects the tension and conflict I feel about the gap between appearance and reality in the country, the region, and the world I live in. Internet and satellite images connect us instantaneously to many things around the world. It does not matter where we are located geographically. News and images travel quickly. We witness upsetting events live on TV or on the web. As a viewer, I experience a dialogue in my head in which I am alternatively judge, prosecutor, witness, and defendant. These images stay with me and become a source of pressure and anxiety. I process them through my personal filters into my work.

Ossouli's style evolved over three decades after the 1979 revolution and cultural isolation in Iran. Searching for a meaningful form of self-expression, she found it in the rich tradition and refined beauty of Persian paintings, architecture, and decorative arts. The impassive look of miniature figures was well suited to her universal themes of female and male protagonists. In *Ars Poetica*, she also incorporated other traditional characteristics of miniatures -- calligraphy, *Tazhib* (decorative arts and

book illuminations), and painting -- but with new features, such as personalized hand-written contemporary Farsi poems, invented *Tazhib* designs with weapons, and other surprising motifs.

Ossouli's recent work draws on her wide-ranging background, experience, and passionate involvement in painting, photography, film, animation, graphic design, literature, and theatre. Born in 1953 in Zanjan, Iran, she graduated from Tehran High School of Fine Arts (Honarestane Honarhaye Ziba) in 1971, and received her B.A. from the Department of Fine Arts (Daneshkadeye Honaryae Ziba), Tehran University, Iran in 1977. The cultural isolation after the 1979 Iranian revolution forced many artists who remained in the country to reexamine their identities. It propelled Ossouli to pioneer and revitalize miniature paintings, which was one of the many genres she had studied in art school as a painter.

Ossouli occupies a prominent position as an artist in Iran, not only because of her unique artistic style and prodigious oeuvres, but also because of her active involvement in Iranian contemporary art. She was a co-founder of the first women's art group DENA in 2001, which introduced three generations of Iranian women's artists with different voices both in Iran and abroad through workshops in conjunction with traveling exhibitions. Ossouli also advises graduate students on their art theses, curates national and international exhibitions, including the 6th Painting Biennial of Tehran (2003), and regularly mentors young artists in juried showcases, since 1998.

**Additional information about the artist can be found at [Farahossouli.com](http://Farahossouli.com).**

Opening reception will be held in the Main Gallery of the Campus Center  
September 13 from 5pm to 7pm.

For further information, please contact  
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