

# THE STATUS OF IRANIAN PAINTERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL FESTIVALS AND ARTS EVENTS

Farzaneh Farrokhfar\* and Sara Parangi

Faculty of Arts, University of Neyshabur, Iran

## ABSTRACT

**\*Corresponding author:**

Farzaneh Farrokhfar  
farrokhfar@neyshabur.ac.ir

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The world's extensive attendance of Iranian artists started with establishing the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art in 1983, which paved the way for international activities of artists, particularly painters. Today, the significance of participation in international events is considered a career goal for most Iranian artists. Such a reason causes painters to devote part of their activities to it, which serves as an important reference for evaluating the quality of their work. The present study was intended to consider socio-political developments in Iran and to investigate the position of Iranian painters in the international festivals and events of art over the last decade. The results indicated that Iranian painters actively attended the international events of art from 2010 to 2020, especially during the first four years of Hassan Rouhani's presidency. However, some factors are of utmost importance: male painters dominated the events, but the mean age of females was greater than that of males. The majority of Iranian painters participating in these events resided overseas and had university education. Also, the end of this decade was associated with a sharp decrease in visual and painting displays, and painters took part actively, when compared with other artists involved in different forms of visual arts. This study is a basic research that adds further knowledge to the actual knowledge on Iranian contemporary art. Moreover, it is a practical research that is useful for solving practical problems in Iranian culture and sociology.

**Keywords:** Iran's contemporary art; international events of art; visual arts; Iranian painters

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Iranian art has gone through a massive transformation since the turn of the twenty-first century, the first decade of which has produced an unprecedented proliferation of Iranian artists and work, putting them firmly within the global art discourse. (Mahlouji, 2013: 287). Since the last decade, after September 11, 2001, in particular, a considerable change has occurred in the world's interest in Iran's contemporary art in the international art market. In the summer of 2001, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art hosted the first large exhibition that played a pivotal role in shaping Iran's contemporary art stream. After a long period of limitations faced by Iranian artists in their relations with art organizations worldwide, the contact between these artists and foreign countries increased. Subsequently, international contact with conventional arts turned into a serious concern in Iran's visual arts, leading to efforts to organize Iranian art exhibitions abroad. Opening cultural borders resulted in the attendance of Iranian artists, including painters, in international art events and biennials and art fairs, as well as the organization of solo or group shows (Keshmirshakan, 2007).

Another goal supported by the artistic officials of the country effectively was to gain credibility and reputation internationally in the art world. The artistic movement that already occurred in the mid-1990s exerted its effect on the important art centers of the country, thus ending up with new progress in Iran's contemporary art. After that, many artists believed that worldwide recognition is important (ibid: 348).

During the presidency of Mohammad Khatami from 1997 to 2005, cultural art activities were carried out in a more open atmosphere than previous and next administrations. Khatami presented the theory of *Dialogue among Civilizations* in the *United Nations* at the international level, and he is known as the one who formulated this theory (Khatami, 2012). In his first year in office, regarding the notion of freedom, he stated that:

"Serving the religion is that we say the religion and freedom are compatible together, and the religion, which imparts dignity to human, grants them freedom at first. We must overcome the obstacle to freedom." (Khatami, 2008)

Such a theory led to the formation of freedom for artists in the country to a greater extent. However, with the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad in 2005, the situation surrounding the activity of artists, women in particular, changed in a way that some western media maintained that women's rights declined during his administration (Human Rights Watch, 2008). Yet, Ahmadinezhad unprecedentedly introduced three women to the Parliament in order to hold the position of minister for the first time in the history of the Islamic Republic of Iran. One of them succeeded in gaining the vote of confidence (Tisdall, 2009), which raised women's general belief. Some studies exhibit that as of 2009 and after the 2009 election of the second presidential term of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, many of the artistic and cultural figures were forced to continue their activities overseas, and even some of them were banned from leaving the country. Following the change in Iran's administration in 2013 and the beginning of Hassan Rouhani's presidential term, which was associated with the advocacy of reformists and the supporters of Khatami's government, the field of Iran art underwent changes (Böhm, 2018), which caused painters to participate in external events. Even though such desire has faded since the second term of Hassan Rouhani's presidency due to the depreciation of local Iranian currency, unfavorable economic conditions, intensification of the political sanctions, and the outbreak of Covid-19, it has left a marked impact on the artist's activities.

The theory of *Quadruple Roles of the Government* by Harry Hillman Chartrand stated that governments play four principal roles in cultural policies. The first role is to facilitate, which means governments allocate a certain financial source for arts. The second role is to support, and independent administrative councils are designated by governments for the art fields. As for the third role, governments act as an architect and can establish a bureaucratic system to employ artists, i.e, governments are able to recruit those artists who are unemployed. When it comes to the fourth role, governments are an engineer that exploits their own political tools and state, for example, that a specific show must be produced in the field of the Holy Defense this year, with a definite budget (Hillman Chartrand, 1986). A study by Rasouli and Kiomarsi concerning Hillman-Chartrand's theory and Iranian arts in recent years has revealed that:

"Reformist administration (Rouhani) facilitated and supported, whereas Ahmadinezhad administration functioned as an architect and engineer that recruited artists. Khatami administration also considered independent administrative councils along with financial resources, which, in fact, facilitated and supported the growth of artistic activities. Nevertheless, Ahmadinezhad took advantage of his own policies to employ artists." (Rasouli and Kiomarsi, 2019).

The objective of this study is to explain the status of Iranian painters in international art events from 2010 to 2020. This time period is selected due to the fact that Iran witnesses a myriad of socio-political events which consequently exert effects on art. On the subject of international art events and Iran's contemporary art, a wide variety of studies have been carried out, but, to our knowledge, there is no similar study concerning the attendance of Iranian painters in international art events during that time. Studies that provide some information about Iran's contemporary painting are as follows: a book by Hamid Keshmirshakan (2015) entitled *Contemporary Iranian Art, Roots and New Perspectives* and published by Nazar investigated the most recent Iran's artistic achievements in the modern era. The last chapter of this book addressed the activities of Iranian artists in the West, their concerns about the issue of identity, and other contemporary discourses. A thesis was written by Seyedeh Samira Rahbani (2011) entitled *A view toward the presentation and demonstration of Iran's and world's artworks (visual arts especially painting)* at Art University of Isfahan. The thesis dealt with what goes by in the contemporary era about artwork demonstration. In his research entitled *An introduction to Iran's contemporary painting* which was published in the *Journal of Visual Art Studies*, Mostafa Goodarzi (1998) evaluated Iran's contemporary painting from the beginning of its development to the

present. This study included information about fairs and large activities, such as Tehran Biennial, that have impacted Iran's contemporary painting.

In another study on the subject of *Contemporary Iranian art: the emergence of new artistic discourses* which was published in *Iranian Studies*, Keshmirshakan (2007) focused on concerns and emerging discourses prevailing in the artistic society of Iran from 1997. Finally, he asserted that under each condition and despite limitations, Iranian art would develop. Böhm (2018) presented a thesis on *The provocation in art as a political and social act with a focus on Iran*. This work pointed out provocative art in the West and the Middle East with an emphasis on Iran's art, the relationship among art, politics, and provocation, and advantages and risks of provocation strategies, particularly at the exhibition venues. Venetia Porter et al. (2021) in *Reflections: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa* bring together an extraordinary collection of work from the British Museum, which explores the selection [like Iranian paintings] within themes such as faith, abstraction, and the female gaze.

Reviewing the existing resources in comparison with the objective of this study, it seems that, with a different approach, the current research determines the status of Iranian painters considering gender, education, place of residency in the country or abroad, type of work, and mean age in the international art events. Also, this study elucidates the contribution of the country policies to it.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This was a basic and practical study. In the present research, the eight international events held periodically (annually, biennially, triennially, etc.) were selected from 2010 to 2020. The events were accredited according to Article 4 in the Regulation of Scientific Conferences approved by the Research Deputy of Iran Ministry of Science, Research and Technology (2010-1-12 No. 268085) and were supported by a prestigious cultural or scientific organization or institution. The evaluation criterion in this study is the world's events in the range of 2010 to 2020. There are several demographic factors including gender (male and female), the place of residency (outside or inside the country), education, type of work, and mean age. It is important to consider that the statistical data are obtained through searching library and electronic resources as well as field research such as interviews and conversations with some artists who have already participated in the international art events. Additionally, it is critical that Iran's contemporary painting and its situations in recent decades are reviewed before evaluating the status of Iranian painters in the international events to understand why they were interested in or kept away from participating.

## 3. IRAN'S CONTEMPORARY PAINTING

After the first world war, due to the global situation and anti-colonial movements demanding independence, there was a necessity to change economic, social, and cultural structures in many traditional societies. In general, such societies tended to copy the industrial world of the west in their developments. Even most of the cultural agents and intellectuals in these countries tried to imitate western achievements to compensate for backwardness. This was why modernism, like other phenomena, penetrated in these societies superficially (Pakbaz, 2001: 591). The establishment of Faculty of Visual Arts in Tehran is known as the most important base of modernism in Iran. A number of the students of this faculty were in Europe, and with their return to Iran, modernism entered a new stage. To establish modernism in the Iran's society, many art centers and associations were founded, with some other activities like organizing exhibitions, conferences, and papers by the press. Painting, architecture, and sculpture were among the majors offered in this faculty. As the first principal of this faculty, Andre Godard was responsible for planning the training and recruitment of the teaching workforce. Although, at first, the curriculum of this faculty copied that of the Fine Arts in Paris, the result of teaching art was ineffective at that time due to lack of professional professors (Keshmirshakan, 2015). Since the mid-1960s, Iran's art has witnessed support as well as an increase in art activities and events (such as art festivals and biennials) and publication of magazines and newspapers. A significant part of their content dealt with art news and, at times, criticism. In the meanwhile, Iran's modern art experienced a new and flourishing time throughout the 1970s. Establishing large cultural and artistic spaces, organizing international and domestic festivals and exhibitions, and developing the art market supported by the governments and/or private sector boosted the quality of cultural life. Therefore, domestic and international exhibitions, including the First International Art Exhibition in 1977, which European contemporary galleries participated in, and Iran's Contemporary Art in 1974, which was held on the occasion of the Seventh Asian Championship, were organized in Tehran. The attendance of Iranian artists in other European and American galleries such as Art

Basel in Switzerland was arranged by Farah Pahlavi and the Ministry of Culture and Arts. Their aim was to enhance Iran's contemporary art, both in the country and on the international scene (Keshmirshekan, 2015).

The post-war years, are characterized by the difficult economic and social transition (Melandri, 2014: 5). In the early 1990s, the art society of Iran was evidently in need of organizing comprehensive exhibitions where different artistic activities and tendencies after the revolution could be on public display. Following several years of irregular activities, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art began to organize systematic biennials and triennials. In this regard, painting biennials were the greatest and most important of these events. The first painting biennial in fall 2013 was held 13 years after the Islamic revolution (Keshmirshekan, 2015). One of the significant aims presented in the first and second biennials was to take part in the international art scene. There were many comments and discussions about inviting foreign referees or turning national biennials into international ones and exhibiting Iranian art in other international exhibitions. One of the main conditions for successful participation in the international arena was the preservation of artistic identity (ibid: 232).

After Mohammad Khatami's presidential election in 1997, Iran's artistic environment was changed considerably, and art activities along with exhibitions became more free. In large cities, Tehran in particular, the visual arts took on a new meaning, and the position of Iran's contemporary art was associated with cultural and identity challenges (Keshmirshekan, 2007). In the late 1990s, Iran witnessed pressure for political reform and pursued a transnational stage. The 1997 presidential election affected art activities as a turning point. After the election, new policies, including efforts to build relationships with the outside world, were enacted (ibid: 340). New artistic currents, tendencies, and methods emerged in the late 1990s. Numerous factors were influential in causing these new and dynamic changes in Iran's art. First of all, the number of artists who entered the art world during this period was greater than at any other time in the past. Perhaps one of the most notable changes at this time was the emergence of an active group of young artists with a very prominent presence of women. Secondly, the establishment and expansion of organizations sponsoring art, such as educational institutions, artwork exhibition centers, private artists associations, and art magazines, played a pivotal role. At the same time, the advent of the information age and the emergence of new tools of mass communication also confronted Iranian artists with the dominant contemporary artistic discourses and patterns in the international art scene (Keshmirshekan, 2015). After Iran's presidential election in 2009, along with the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad and during the election campaign and mass demonstrations, Iran's art changed dramatically. As of that time, many artists have scrutinized sexist roles, and, consequently, the government attempted to reduce artistic activity (Böhm, 2018). Throughout the past decade, many Iranian galleries abroad focused on Iran's art and sought to promote their national art. The struggle between the tradition and modernity of artists, especially women, has been one of the topics displayed in the works of these artists (ibid: 64–65). Since the Green Movement in Iran, most gallery owners and artists decreased their connections with the Museum of Contemporary Art. In 2016 and 2017, the Peruvian Cultural Heritage Foundation in Berlin in collaboration with the Lebanese Museum of Contemporary Art in Rome brought the Tehran Museum collection back from a dungeon to light. Iran's society is always composed of two fractions of reformists and conservatives. Therefore, politics in Iran is strongly intertwined with the Iranian art scene (ibid: 66–67). Such developments played an important role in the ups and downs of Iranian artists' participation in international art events, which will be studied in detail in the following section.

#### 4. INVESTIGATION OF THE POSITION OF IRANIAN PAINTERS IN THE INTERNATIONAL ART EVENTS

This section addresses the status of Iranian painters in international art events. Among them, the most prestigious events are evaluated in two groups: painting and visual arts. In order to estimate the true status of Iranian painters in these assemblies, the results of the study in each event are determined separately, and at the end, the position of Iranian painters in the international art events is summarized.

##### 4.1 International art events

In general, international art events are held by a local specialized community periodically and at a certain time and provide an opportunity to showcase the work, compete, have conversations, and enhance the interaction of cultures. Art events take place in a variety of forms, some of which are directly related to the visual arts. Since the number of prestigious international events intended only for the field of painting is limited, this section introduces the international events of the visual arts, of which painting is a sub-branch. The most prominent world's art events that are of utmost importance and are considered for this study include:

- **Istanbul Biennial:** Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Art (IKSV) arranged Istanbul Biennial in 1987. This biennial is one of the most comprehensive international art events that plays a key role in

introducing contemporary artists around the world (Biennial Foundation, n.d.b.). The content of the work submitted to these events every other year follows their titles as follows: Istanbul Biennial, 2011: no title but focusing on social and political topics; 2013: “Mom, Am I Barbarian?”; 2015, “Saltwater”; 2017: “A Good Neighbor”; 2019: no title but focusing on connecting the existing sites for cultural and civil exchanges

- **Venice Biennial:** It is one of the most prestigious festivals in Europe with a history of more than 120 years, which has started to work since 1895. This international event is held every two years in May and finishes by November (La Biennale di Venezia, n.d.). The titles of these events were “ILLUMInazioni-ILLUMInations” in 2011, “The Encyclopedic Palace” in 2013, “All The World’s Futures” in 2015, “Viva Arte Viva” in 2017, and “May You Live in Interesting Times” in 2019.

- **Asian Contemporary Art Triennial:** Queensland Art Gallery has started to work since 1993. This triennial has become the flagship of the International Contemporary Art Exhibitions and is the only large collection in the world focusing on Asian, Pacific, and Australian art (Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art; Biennial Foundation, n.d.a). There is no information available on the titles of these events.

- **Florence Biennial:** It is the largest exhibition of contemporary art in Florence, which was first established in 1997. Its international jury consists of art historians and critics and presents the *Lorenzo il Magnifico* and *Lifetime Achievement* awards to the best artists and institutions that have reached the pinnacle of artistic achievement (Florence Biennale, n.d.). The three events in 2013, 2015, and 2019 respectively entitled “Ethics: DNA of Art”, “Art and The Polis”, and “Toward Leonardo da Vinci’s Legacy of Similitude and Invention”, intended to celebrate Leonardo da Vinci’s genius. There is a lack of information on Florence Biennials 2011.

- **Sharjah Biennial:** This event took place in 1993 and turned from a traditional exhibition to an internationally recognized event. The Sharjah Department of Culture and Information sponsors this biennial, which is held every two years in March (Biennial Foundation, n.d.c.) The titles for Sharjah Biennials 2015, 2017, and 2019 were “The Past, The Present, The Possible”, “Tamawuj” (i.e., an arabic word meaning rising and falling in waves), and “Leaving The Echo Chamber”, respectively. For 2011 and 2013, no title was provided.

- **Beijing International Biennial:** This biennial started to work in 2002 with the help and financial support of CFLAC, the Beijing Municipality, and the China Artists Association. The Beijing Art Biennial was founded with the aim of creating a world full of peace and development through artistic expression. Most of the art disciplines of this event are painting and sculpture (Beijing International Art Biennale, n.d.). Beijing International Biennials were entitled “Environment Concern and Human Existence” in 2010, “Future and Reality” in 2012, “Memory and Dream” in 2015, “The Silk Road and World’s Civilizations” in 2017, and “A Colorful World and A Shared Future” in 2019.

- **Berlin Biennial:** This biennial is one of the most important events in the contemporary world, which started to work in 1998. It is constantly acclaimed by avid audiences as a special exhibition. The event is sponsored by the German Federal Cultural Foundation (Kulturstiftung des Bundes) every two years in Berlin in September (Berlin Biennale, n.d.). Berlin Biennials were held under the particular titles of “What Is Waiting Out There” in 2010, “How Art can Allow Citizens To Influence Reality and Foster Critical Attitudes In Society” in 2012, “A Propositional Gesture of History and The Mechanisms” in 2014, “The Present In Drag” in 2016, “We Don’t Need Another Hero” in 2018, and “The Crack Begins Within” in 2020.

- **BP Portrait Award:** This event is one of the most prestigious painting competitions in the world, which took place in 1990 for the first time at the National Portrait Gallery, London. It shows the best portrait painting of the contemporary period. This award was launched with the aim of encouraging artists to develop and pay attention to portraits in their works. It is held every year (National Portrait Gallery, n.d.). The focus of all work in this event is on the design of portraits, with no limitation on their subject.

In the following, the status of contemporary Iranian painters in international art festivals and events are analyzed separately in five parts.

#### 4.2 Participation rate of Iranian artists by gender

From 2010 to 2020, Istanbul Biennials were held in 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2019. The total of artists participating in these events were 133 artists, art groups, and studios in 2011, 88 artists and collectors in 2013, 100 artists and groups in 2015, 59 artists in 2017, and 58 artists and collectors in 2019. The results of the reports on Istanbul Biennials indicated that Iranian artists took part in the remaining periods apart from 2013, with only men attending in 2015 and 2017.

Venice Biennials arranged different sections including central exhibition and booths. The participation rate in booths around the world was 75 in 2011, 80 in 2013, 83 in 2015, 83 in 2017, and 87 in 2019. Given the information obtained from 2015, two booths were present from Iran. In 2011 and 2019, we observed three booths from Iran, along with other booths from different countries worldwide. In 2019, participants were all women from Iran. However, the final results revealed that the presence of Iranian male artists has been much more predominant than that of women. Although no artists from Iran attended in 2013 and 2017, the participation of Iranian artists is visibly abundant in 2015.



The total artists from different countries across the globe taking part in Asian Contemporary Art Triennials during 2010–2020 were 165 in 2010, 75 in 2013, 118 in 2016, and approximately 158 in 2019. In the mentioned years, Iranian artists, along with other artists from all over the world, attended these triennials in various visual art fields. The total number of Iranian male artists participating in the Asian Triennials was more than that of female artists. In 2010, however, the number of females was greater than males, and in 2013, only Iranian female artists were present.

The number of artists who attended Florence Biennials during 2010–2020 from different countries was 548 in 2011, 368 in 2013, 436 in 2015, 499 in 2017, and 516 in 2019. According to the resultant data, the total number of Iranian female artists was larger than that of males. In 2011 and 2019, the number of females was equal to that of males. In 2017, the presence of women was significantly greater than that of men.

During 2010–2020, the number of artists that took part in Sharjah Biennials from the different field of visual art was 89 in 2011, 117 in 2013, 55 in 2015, 72 in 2017, and 23 in 2019. In the meanwhile, half of the Iranian artists were females. In 2013, only women attended the biennial, but men had a much greater number than women in 2011. When it comes to 2019, no artist from Iran participated in the event.

In Beijing International Biennials, the number of Iranian artists, whose works were selected from a variety of visual art fields, was 11 in 2010, 14 in 2012, 10 in 2015, 7 in 2017, and 6 in 2019. In these events, two Iranian painters were present in two biennials, one artist in five biennials, and one artist in three biennials. The total number of female artists was 25, greater than that of males (N = 23).

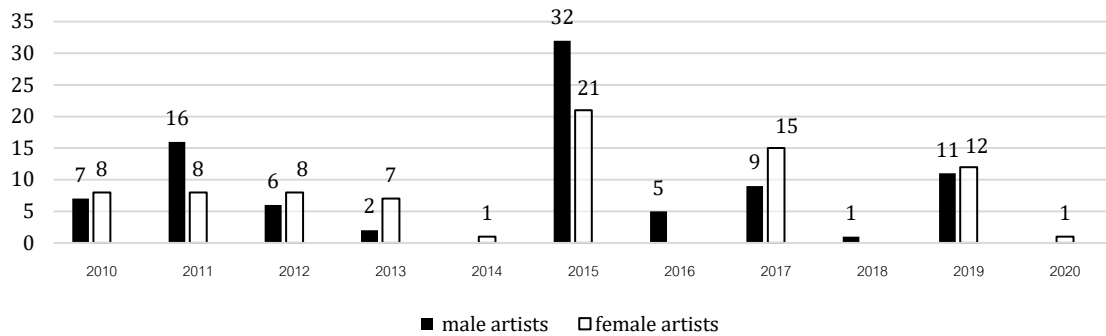
As for Berlin Biennials, the total number of artists worldwide who participated in various visual fields was 45 in 2010, 43 in 2012, 53 in 2014, 69 in 2016, around 47 in 2018, and above 75 in 2020. From 2010 to 2013, no one was present from Iran.

The number of artists whose paintings around the world made it to BP Portrait Awards was 53 in 2010, 50 in 2011, 51 in 2012, 77 in 2013, 55 in 2014, 55 in 2015, 80 in 2016, 53 in 2017, 88 in 2018, 44 in 2019, and 48 in 2020. As a result, the 2012, 2014, 2018, 2019, and 2020 events included no Iranian artists. Totally, the number of female and male painters from Iran was 3 and 5, respectively (Table 1).

**Table 1:** The Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by Gender in the Eight International Arts Events (N=170)

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
<b>Istanbul Biennial</b>	Male	-	2	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	2.35%
	Female	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2.35%
<b>Venice Biennial</b>	Male	-	5	-	-	-	19	-	-	-	2	-	15.29%
	Female	-	2	-	-	-	13	-	-	-	2	-	10%
<b>Asian Contemporary Art Triennial</b>	Male	1	-	-	-	-	-	3	-	-	2	-	3.52%
	Female	2	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2.94%
<b>Florence Biennial</b>	Male	-	2	-	1	-	3	-	3	-	4	-	7.64%
	Female	-	2	-	2	-	2	-	8	-	4	-	10.58%
<b>Sharjah Biennial</b>	Male	-	6	-	-	-	3	-	1	-	-	-	5.88%
	Female	-	2	-	2	-	1	-	2	-	-	-	4.11%
<b>Beijing International Biennial</b>	Male	6	-	6	-	-	5	-	3	-	3	-	13.52%
	Female	5	-	8	-	-	5	-	4	-	3	-	14.7%
<b>Berlin Biennial</b>	Male	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	1.17%
	Female	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	1.17%
<b>BP Portrait Award</b>	Male	-	1	-	1	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	2.94%
	Female	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1.76%

As the results showed, the total number of male artists present in these eight events over the mentioned time period was 89, with that of females being 81. Figure 1 presents the total number of male and female artists at each time period. The 2015 events had the highest number of participants, whereas the lowest participation of both genders was found in 2014 and 2018.



**Figure 1:** The Mean Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by Gender

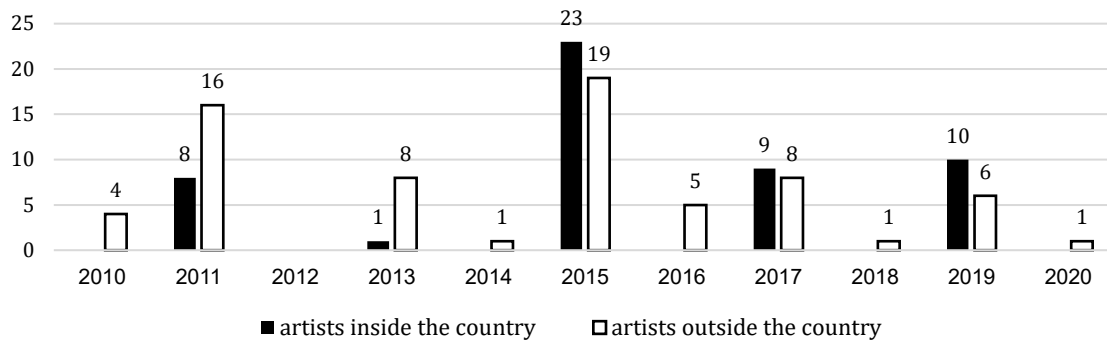
#### 4.3 The participation rate of Iranian artists by the place of residence (inside or outside of the country)

Out of a total of 170 Iranian artists in this section, the information of 50 artists was not available and a total of 70.58% of them were studied. (48 artists who participated in the Beijing event and two in the Venice and Florence biennials had no information). Investigating Istanbul Biennials demonstrated that Iranian artists outside the country participated considerably as compared with those inside the country. The only attendance of artists from inside the country was in 2011. A higher percentage of Iranian artists in Venice Biennials resided in Iran. In 2013 and 2017, any artists from Iran were not seen. Likewise, in Asian Contemporary Art Triennials, the number of the participants residing in Iran was significantly greater than that of the participants coming from an overseas country. The only period of the presence of Iranian artists from inside the country is related to 2019 with the number of one person. Considering Florence Biennials, it was found that domestic artists also had a more predominant presence than artists living abroad. The greatest number of domestic artists was observed in 2017. For Sharjah Biennials, Table 2 presents that domestic artists had a smaller number than artists abroad. Only in 2011, those who participated were from inside the country. As for the attendance of artists in Beijing Biennials, there was a lack of information; therefore, Table 2 has no statistical data. From 2010 to 2020, Berlin Biennials and BP Portrait Awards showed the presence of Iranian artists who resided abroad.

**Table 2:** The Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by the Place of Residence (Inside or Outside of the Country) in the Eight International Arts Events During 2010–2020 (N=120).

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
<b>Istanbul Biennial</b>	outside	-	3	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	2	-	5.83%
	inside	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.83%
<b>Venice Biennial</b>	outside	-	4	-	-	-	13	-	-	-	1	-	15%
	inside	-	3	-	-	-	18	-	-	-	3	-	20%
<b>Asian Contemporary Art Triennial</b>	outside	3	-	-	2	-	-	3	-	-	2	-	8.33%
	inside	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	0.83%
<b>Florence Biennial</b>	outside	-	2	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	1	-	5.83%
	inside	-	2	-	1	-	5	-	9	-	6	-	19.16%
<b>Sharjah Biennial</b>	outside	-	6	-	2	-	4	-	3	-	-	-	12.5%
	inside	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.66%
<b>Beijing International Biennial</b>	outside	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
	inside	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
<b>Berlin Biennial</b>	outside	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	3.33%
	inside	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
<b>BP Portrait Award</b>	outside	1	1	-	2	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	6.66%
	inside	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

According to our analyses, the status of Iranian artists in international arts events based on their place of residence showed 69 participants were abroad, and 51 were inside Iran (out of 170 Iranian artists who took part in these eight events, there was no information available for 50 artists). As can be seen in Figure 2, the highest number of Iranian artists living abroad occurred in 2015, while, on the contrary, the lowest was observed in 2014, 2018, and 2020. The attendance of domestic artists in 2015 was the highest, with a number of 23. In 2010, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2020, no Iranian artist from inside the country participated in these events.



**Figure 2:** The Mean Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by the Place of Residence

#### 4.4 The participation rate of Iranian artists by education

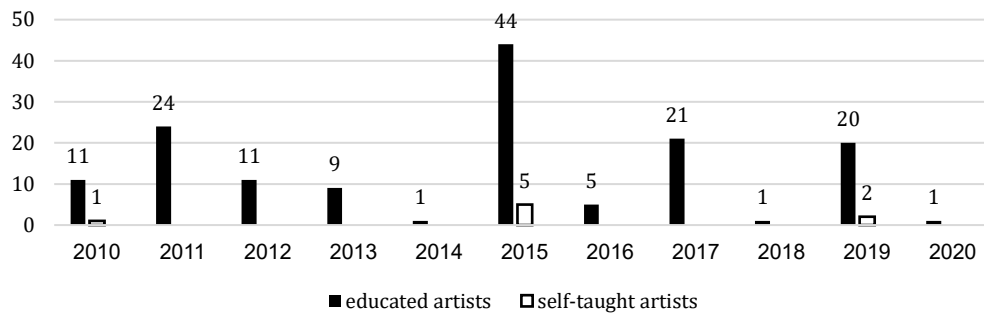
In this section, information about 14 artists (12 in the Beijing event, 2 in the Florence and Venice events) was not available. In total, the analyzed statistics in this section constitute 91.7%. Table 3 demonstrates that the number of Iranian artists with academic education was much higher than that of artists who participated in various fields of visual arts with self-teaching. Such difference was significant in 2011 versus other time points. Of note, there was an equal number of self-taught and formally educated artists in 2019. In case of Venice Biennials, the attendance of formally educated artists was remarkably greater than those with self-teaching. The only period during which the number of these artists equaled 4 was 2015. In Florence Biennials, just self-taught artists participated in 2015 and 2019, and the highest attendance of artists with academic art education was seen in 2017. Our findings from Beijing International Biennials indicated that the Iranian artists participating in these events were all formally educated although in 2010, there was only one self-taught artist. For the other international events, including Asian Contemporary Art Triennials, Sharjah Biennials, Berlin Biennials, and BP Portrait Awards, all the attended artists had higher education.

**Table 3:** The Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by Education in the Eight International Arts Events During 2010–2020 (N=156)

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
<b>Istanbul Biennial</b>	educated	-	4	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	4.72%
	self-taught	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	0.67%
<b>Venice Biennial</b>	educated	-	7	-	-	-	27	-	-	-	4	-	25.67%
	self-taught	-	-	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	2.7%
<b>Asian Contemporary Art Triennial</b>	educated	3	-	-	2	-	-	3	-	-	3	-	7.43%
	self-taught	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
<b>Florence Biennial</b>	educated	-	4	-	3	-	4	-	11	-	6	-	18.91%
	self-taught	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	1.35%
<b>Sharjah Biennial</b>	educated	-	8	-	2	-	4	-	3	-	-	-	11.48%
	self-taught	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
<b>Beijing International Biennial</b>	educated	7	-	11	-	-	7	-	4	-	6	-	23.64%
	self-taught	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.67%
<b>Berlin Biennial</b>	educated	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	1	-	1	2.7%
	self-taught	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0
<b>BP Portrait Award</b>	educated	1	1	-	2	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	5.4%
	self-taught	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

Totally, a number of 148 formally educated artists were present in these eight international events, with only 8 self-taught artists (there was no information available about the education of 14 artists). Figure 3 shows that the 2015 events had a considerably greater attendance of educated artists. In 2010, 2015, and 2019, self-taught artists were present at the events. These artists were highly present in 2015 as opposed to 2010 and 2019 (Figure 3).





**Figure 3:** The Mean Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by Education

#### 4.5 The participation rate of Iranian artists by the type of work presented

Of 170 Iranian artists participating in these events, information was available for 161 artists in this section, and 9 artists lacked information (one artist from the Florence Biennale and 8 artists from the Beijing event). The total number of analyzed statistics is 94.7%. The results revealed that the number of Iranian artists who participated in the Istanbul events while presenting paintings was about one-half of the artists in other visual arts. The selected works of three painters using techniques of oil paint, acrylic, and pencil on canvas and linen, print combination, ink, and lacquer paint were displayed on the board in these biennials. In Venice Biennial 2019, no Iranian artist was present with painting. The techniques used in the works of the invited painters and the works displayed in booths include: oil paint and acrylic on canvas, a combination of silk and acrylic printing, traditional and geometric patterns with pieces of mirror and glass. Most of the Iranian artists participating in the Asian triennials with visual works and those who presented paintings were smaller in number. These painters applied various materials such as glass, beads, tapestry, fabric, and oil paint to create their works. When it comes to Florence Biennial 2017, the number of artists who participated with paintings and other visual works was 10 and one, respectively. In 2015, two artists won Lorenzo Magnifico Award. Various techniques like oil paint, acrylic, collage on canvas, ink on paper, and combined materials can be observed in the works of these painters. The data obtained from Sharjah Biennials exhibited that the number of artists with paintings in these international events was significantly lower than that of the artists who participated with works in other visual fields. In 2011, a higher number of artists participated with paintings, while, in 2013, it was equal to the number of artists with other artworks. Iranian painters created works with oil paints, collages, and glass and mirror materials. There were more artists with paintings than other visual artists in Beijing Biennials. The technique employed in the majority of the selected paintings in these events was oil paint and acrylic on canvas. In Berlin Biennials 2018 and 2020, artists were present with paintings made of combined materials. In 2014 and 2016, there were two artists, one with an installation artwork and the other one with behind the scene. All selected works in BP Portrait Awards were painting (Table 4).

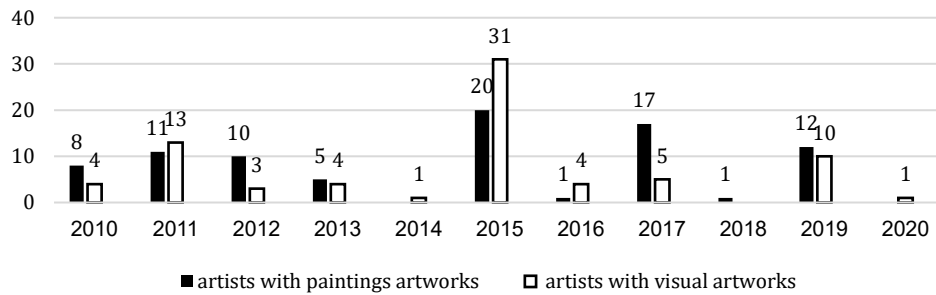
**Table 4:** The Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by the Type of Work Presented in the Eight International Arts Events During 2010–2020 (N=161)

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
<b>Istanbul Biennial</b>	paintings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	2	-	1.86%
	visual artworks	-	4	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	3.1%
<b>Venice Biennial</b>	paintings	-	2	-	-	-	12	-	-	-	-	-	8.69%
	visual artworks	-	5	-	-	-	20	-	-	-	4	-	18.01%
<b>Asian Contemporary Art Triennial</b>	paintings	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2.48%
	visual artworks	1	-	-	2	-	-	3	-	-	1	-	4.34%
<b>Florence Biennial</b>	paintings	-	3	-	2	-	2	-	10	-	4	-	13.04%
	visual artworks	-	1	-	1	-	3	-	1	-	3	-	5.59%
<b>Sharjah Biennial</b>	paintings	-	5	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.72%
	visual artworks	-	3	-	1	-	4	-	3	-	-	-	6.83%
<b>Beijing International Biennial</b>	paintings	5	-	10	-	-	5	-	4	-	4	-	17.39%
	visual artworks	3	-	3	-	-	3	-	1	-	2	-	7.45%

**Table 4:** The Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by the Type of Work Presented in the Eight International Arts Events During 2010–2020 (N=161) (Continued)

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Total
<b>Berlin Biennial</b>	paintings	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	0.62%
	visual artworks	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	-	-	-	1	1.86%
<b>BP Portrait Award</b>	paintings	1	1	-	2	-	1	1	2	-	-	-	4.96%
	visual artworks	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0

According to our results, a total of 85 Iranian artists with paintings and 76 with other visual artworks were present in these eight events (no information was available on the type of artworks by 9 Iranian artists). As Figure 4 presents, the 2015 events had the largest number of artists with paintings and visual artworks. In 2018, only one artist attended with a painting, whereas, in 2014 and 2020, all artists were present with visual works (Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** The Mean Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by the Type of Work Presented

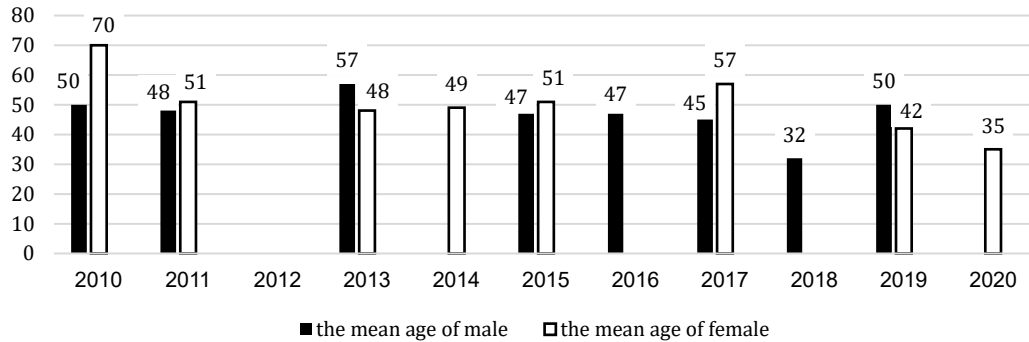
#### 4.6 The participation rate of Iranian artists by mean age

The results of our study indicated that the mean age of the artists participating in Istanbul Biennials were 46 years for males and 45 years for females during 2010 and 2020. In case of Venice Biennials, the mean age of male artists was about 52 years, with women about 50 years. The Asian triennials had artists within the age range of 35 years to 70 years (mean age: 51 years for men and 52 for women). There was a mean age of 43 years for females and 45 years for males in Florence Biennials. In these events, the youngest (35 years) and oldest (53 years) men were found in 2011 and 2013, respectively. The analyses of the mean age for the participants in the Sharjah events exhibited that male artists were between 43–58 years old, and female artists were between 54–69 years old. As for the attendance of artists in Beijing Biennials, there was a lack of information; therefore, Table 5 has no statistical data. According to Table 5 for Berlin Biennials, the mean age of male and female artists was 35 years and 42 years, in order. The mean age of male painters in BP Portrait Awards was 51 years old. Two women participated in these events, and the age information available for one of them, was 32 years old (Table 5).

**Table 5:** The Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by Mean Age in the Eight International Arts Events During 2010–2020 (N=120)

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
<b>Istanbul Biennial</b>	male	-	45	-	-	-	52	-	41	-	-	-
	female	-	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	40	-
<b>Venice Biennial</b>	male	-	57	-	-	-	51	-	-	-	47	-
	female	-	44	-	-	-	56	-	-	-	51	-
<b>Asian Contemporary Art Triennial</b>	male	57	-	-	-	-	-	42	-	-	53	-
	female	70	-	-	51	-	-	-	-	-	35	-
<b>Florence Biennial</b>	male	-	35	-	53	-	37	-	51	-	50	-
	female	-	53	-	38	-	37	-	61	-	-	-
<b>Sharjah Biennial</b>	male	-	59	-	-	-	51	-	43	-	-	-
	female	-	55	-	70	-	60	-	54	-	-	-
<b>Beijing International Biennial</b>	male	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	female	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Berlin Biennial</b>	male	-	-	-	-	-	-	37	-	32	-	-
	female	-	-	-	-	49	-	-	-	-	-	35
<b>BP Portrait Award</b>	male	44	-	-	62	-	44	62	47	-	-	-
	female	-	-	-	32	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Of 170 Iranian artists participating in the eight events, data on the birth date of 50 artists were not found; because there was not detailed information for 48 artists who participated in the Beijing Biennale and 2 BP award artists. In our findings, the highest mean age was 70 years for Iranian female artists in 2010 and 57 years for male artists in 2013. The minimum mean age of participants in the international events was 32 years in 2018 for males and 35 years in 2020 for females (Figure 5). Among the events studied here, there was no information available for Beijing Biennial 2012. This is why no data were found on the chart.



**Figure 5:** The Mean Participation Rate of Iranian Artists by Mean Age

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study aims at investigating the status of Iranian painters in international arts events and festivals: first, the history of cultural and artistic developments in Iran's contemporary painting was described; then, the status of Iranian painters in the eight international arts events was analyzed during 2010 and 2020. A total of 170 Iranian artists participating in the selected international arts events were identified. Afterwards, their status was evaluated using five demographic parameters: 1) gender, 2) place of residence, 3) education, 4) type of works presented, and 5) mean age. The results were presented using graphs.

The major findings of the present study considering the socio-political conditions in Iran are as follows:

- Reviewing the selected events showed that the number of male artists with 52.35% was greater than that of the female with a rate of 47.6%. In 2010, as compared to 2011, the presence of men and women exhibited a steady trend, which continued until 2012. In 2010, 2012, and 2013, coinciding with the second term of Ahmadinejad's presidency, there was significant participation of women, especially in 2013, as opposed to men. This observation might be related to the government tendency to women's executive and managerial activities, the election of the first female minister during the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the elevation of women's general belief and self-confidence. Unfortunately, from 2011 to 2014, there was a declining trend in the participation of both men and women in the international events, which may arise from a dramatic increase in the foreign exchange rate, intensification of sanctions, and post-election unrest. It was found that since 2014, which was the beginning of Rouhani's presidency, the attendance of artists was increased in the international arts events. Even though there has been a falling trend in 2016 and 2018, the overall participation was more dominant in comparison with Ahmadinejad's presidency, which could be due to more tendency of artists to the international events than before. According to the theory of *Quadruple Roles of the Government* by Harry Hillman Chartrand (1986), this situation demonstrated Rouhani's presidency as a supporting and facilitating government for artists.

- In the period considered in this study, the presence of Iranian artists from inside the country was 42.5%, and abroad was 57.5%. Also, it has been shown that there was an upward trend for the artists living abroad in 2011 and 2013. In 2014, 2016, 2018, and 2020, all participating artists resided abroad, which raised an important issue that may be due to the increased foreign exchange rate in the country, difficult conditions for the international activities of artists in the country, and lack of support from government agencies. Altogether, since 2009 during the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, artistic activities have reduced in the country as a result of political and social events. But, from 2014 onward that is the beginning of Hassan Rouhani's presidency, changes took place in the field of art, and the desire of artists in Iran to participate in international arts events was on the rise, with its peak in 2015. The 2014, 2018, and 2020 events data presented the lowest number of artists and a steady trend.

- The presence of artists with university education in art with a participation rate of 94.88% was indicative of a great difference compared to self-taught artists (5.12%). In the second term of Ahmadinejad's presidency and 2011, the highest participation of formally educated artists was observed so that only one self-taught artist took part in the events between 2011 and 2013. As Rouhani took office in 2013, the majority of the artists participating in the events had academic education apart from 2015 and 2019, when very few self-taught artists were also seen. Overall, the attendance of self-taught artists during Rouhani's presidency was higher than in the previous government.

- Considering the type of works presented in the selected events, the presence of artists with paintings was 52.7% and artists with other visual works 47.2%. The second term of Rouhani's presidency in 2015 revealed the most considerable attendance of artists with visual and painting works compared to other periods. By contrast, 2016, 2018, and 2020 were associated with a sharp decrease in visual and painting displays.

- In most events, female artists had a higher mean age than male artists. In total, the mean age of women was 49 years old and men 47 years old. The least mean age for women was in BP Portrait Awards and men in Berlin Biennials. On the other hand, the greatest mean age for women was seen in Sharjah Biennials and for men in Venice Biennales. The highest mean age of women was during Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2010 and men in Rouhani's government in 2013. The lowest mean age for men was in 2018 and for women in 2020, i.e., during the second term of Rouhani's presidency. In general, the mean age of artists during Rouhani's presidency was lower than in the previous government, indicating the tendency of young artists and the new generation to engage in foreign activities.

In conclusion, the present study indicated that from 2010 to 2020, the participation of Iranian artists in these eight international arts events reached its peak in 2015, which coincided with the first term of Hassan Rouhani's presidency. This year brought about relative freedoms and financial support, leading to a significant difference in participation compared to other years. In 2014, 2018, and 2020, there was a tremendous decline in the attendance of Iranian artists at the international events, occurring during the first and second periods of Rouhani's government that underwent increased exchange rates, intensified political sanctions, and the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, more fluctuations in the participation of artists in the international events were observed during Rouhani's presidency due to the changing and unsettled situation of the government as opposed to the previous government.

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