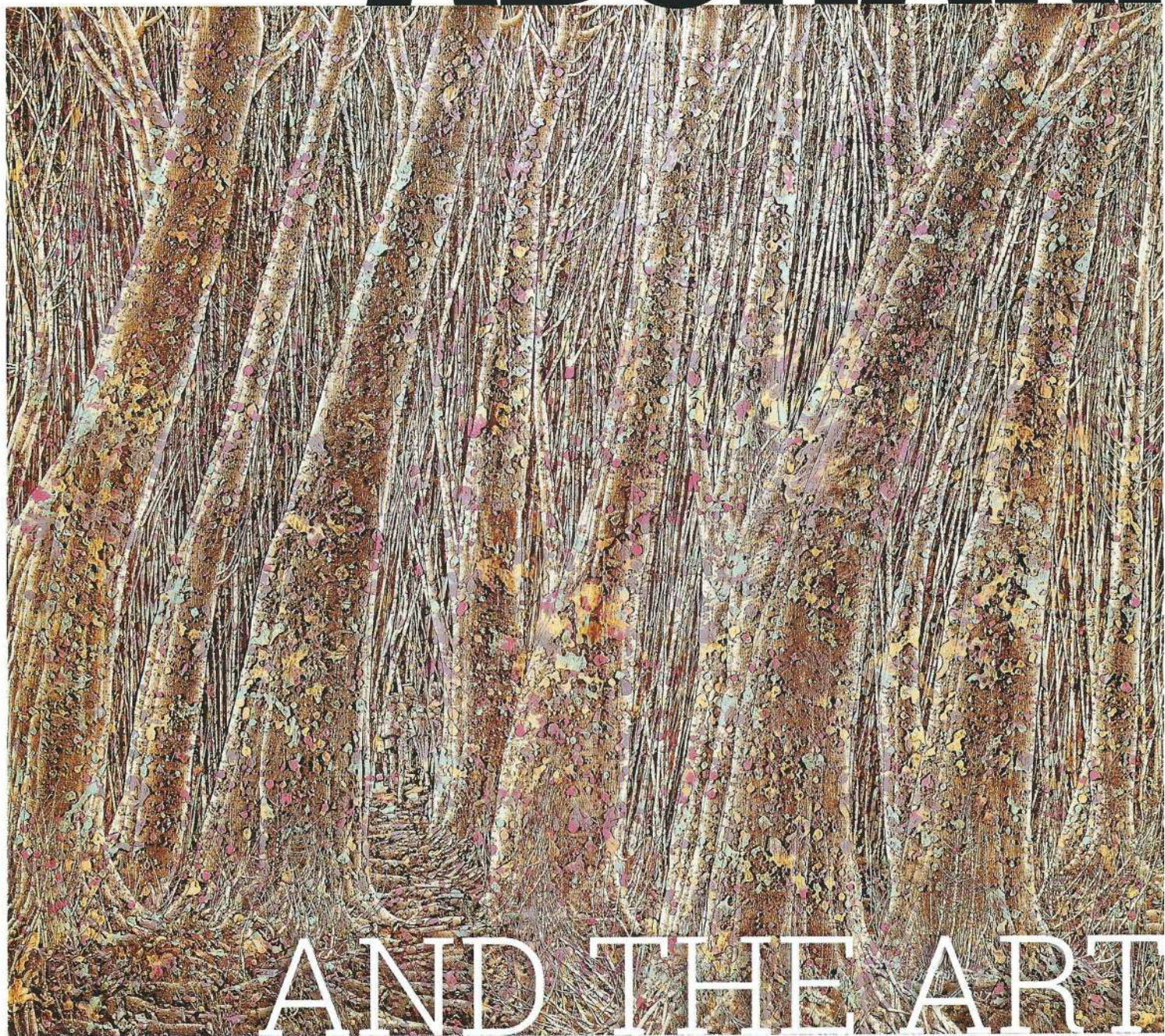


SHOLEH ABGHARI



AND THE ART
OF CULTURAL ENRICHMENT



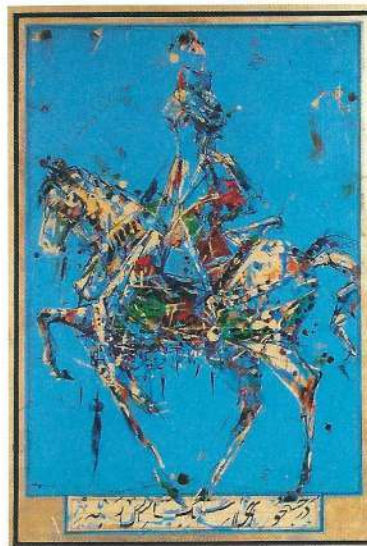
Marbella is a fabulous destination for anyone who values the wonder of seaside living and the tranquillity of such a peaceful, happy town. However, for Sholeh Abghari – who founded Sholeh Abghari Gallery on the Golden Mile alongside her husband, Tarek Beshara – one thing was missing: the enriching gift of art. A Sotheby's graduate specialised in Art Business, Sholeh has changed the cultural landscape of Marbella, bringing high-level Iranian and international art to our shores. In addition to presenting temporary exhibitions featuring work by internationally renowned artists, Sholeh will also be holding numerous cultural events, with a view to making art a key pillar of our leisure pursuits.

WORDS **MARISA CUTILLAS** PHOTOGRAPHY **KEVIN HORN**

Sholeh and Tarek, who (alongside their baby) now call Marbella home, wish “to create an educational nucleus for people who are interested in art. We want Marbella to become a place where art is appreciated, loved, and discussed.” Sholeh herself has always been enamoured by art, having honed her craft under a teacher who was “an important role model in the Iranian art world.” Such was her passion for the subject that she bought her first piece at the age of 18. Her vision and sense of taste would find another creative outlet – that of designing interiors. She received compliments from friends and continued to delve into art buying, becoming an expert in both Iranian and international art.

Soon, Sholeh would take it to the next level, studying to be an Art Specialist at Drouot (Paris) and becoming versed on the business side of art at Sotheby's.

Throughout this time, she continued to buy and sell works, building an extensive private collection in the process. The connection to Marbella was the magnificent summers she spent here. “We had a summer house here and I thought it would be lovely to move here.” Some two and a half years ago, a life-changing event would occur: “I met my husband Tarek. We were both members of the Nobu Owners' Club. If you had told me at the time that two years down the track I would be married with a baby, I would have laughed,” she says. Tarek also has a passion for art, so much so that when the couple decided to found a gallery here, it was he who discovered the perfect spot – a beautiful two-storey space that is easily accessible yet exclusive in style and positioning. Tarek also had close ties to Spain, having been born in Mallorca and having German and Lebanese roots.



As we go to print, Sholeh Abghari Art Gallery is about to present a brand new exhibition. If you didn't manage to see the last one, you can always hope it comes back in the future. On my visit, I was taken by surprise – perhaps because of the raw emotion evoked by some pieces – and admittedly astounded by the beauty of the art in this elegant space in Marbella's centre.

On display were some of Iran's best-known, most exclusive artists. *Iran Contemporary* was the title of the exhibition, and it gathered 14 artworks from Iranian

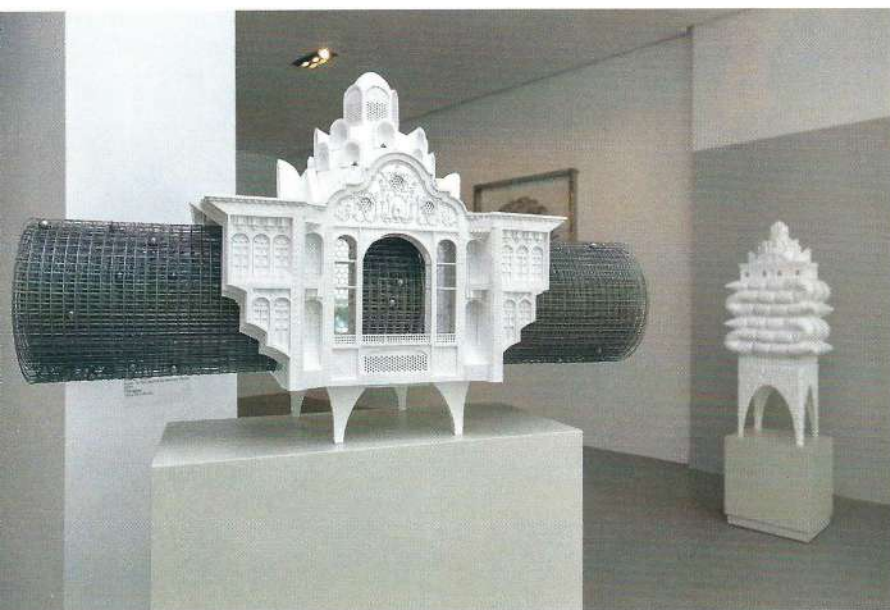
artists spanning a period of six decades. Works are inspired on Iranian tradition, including Persian poetry, Iranian and Islamic architecture, calligraphy, and the Iranian landscape. It may be a challenging time in history but artists are more prolific than ever, and Iranian culture is every bit as rich and fascinating as it has been since ancient times. It reflects a 5,000-year civilisation that has been shaped by a diverse culture. Various art forms have contributed to a vast body of work comprising paintings, woven rugs, pottery, ceramics, poetry, calligraphy and music.

Sholeh Abghari Art Gallery supports upcoming and established artists alike. In the latter category, the Romantic Realist, Manouchehr Niazi stands out. An artist for over six decades, Niazi transforms Iran's stunning landscapes with the wonder of his imagination, giving life to "harmonies obtained by employing the infinite tones and variations of a limited number of colours". He paints in oils but his technique is more similar to that of a water colourist, his works containing infinite hues and a light and grace that is often associated with water as opposed to oil. At

the Gallery, an oil from his *Tree Series 2017* collection stands proudly. As I gaze into this artwork, a small path beckons me through the trees and into a colourful forest where the imagination runs wild and one feels that anything could happen.

Another work that is a joy to lose oneself in is a blue piece from Niazi's *The Masouleh Series 2016*, representing a cityscape – ancient buildings made of mud brick, row upon row of homes and structures suggesting the business of everyday life, majestically transported to a dreamlike realm.





Gracing the gallery window on the day of my visit was a unique artform I had not encountered before: intricate representations of traditional Iranian dresses, seemingly 'trapped' between two slabs of glass so that their detailed work and texture can be appreciated. These garments are the work of Ali Mashadiolasl, whose acrylics are first created on a surface then 'peeled' back as though they were fabric, for final presentation on glass.

Also forming part of the exhibition were modern aluminium and steel works by Alireza Astaneh, spellbinding calligraphy paintings by Fereydoon Omid - powerful in their ability to draw the spectator

into a trance - and sculpture by Kambiz Sabri. The latter's work from the *To the Best of My Memory Series 2019* is a powerful reminder of how modern construction is tragically erasing centuries of traditional Iranian architecture. Thus, his stunning intricate homes, palatial and heavenly, are pierced with mesh wiring - a dramatic symbol of the pillaging of thousands of years of history.

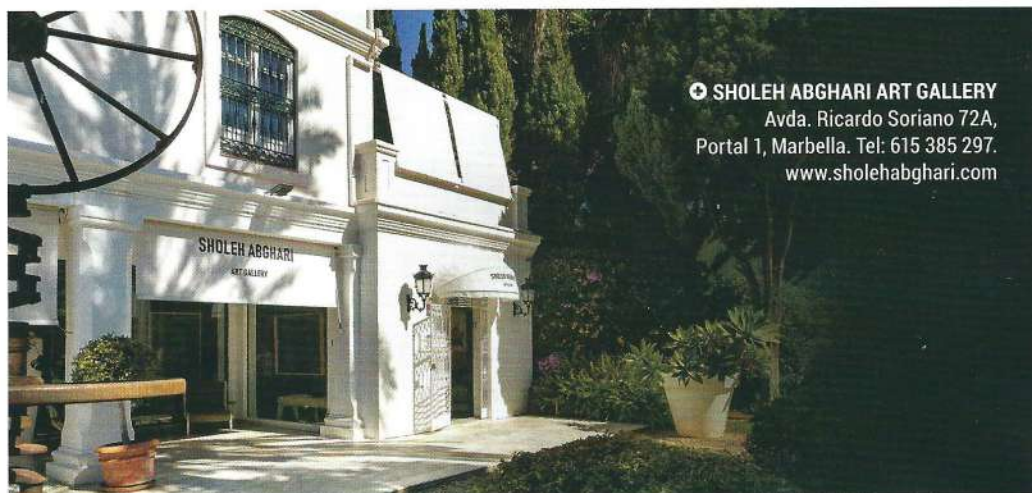
The Sholeh Abghari Gallery comprises two floors, the lower of which is dedicated to feeling, smelling, touching... on the day of my visit, mud bricks - the foundation blocks of Iranian architecture - hung from the walls and a video, *Soil for My*

Roots by Farzane Vaziritabar, expressed the artist's heritage through the production of mud bricks in an artisanal form in Yazd - the old city of Persia. It was fascinating to get close to the mud bricks, inhaling their earthiness and feeling their refreshingly cool temperature.

In addition to hosting exhibitions, Sholeh and Tarek also plan on holding educational workshops for kids, private film viewings, and exclusive dinners for small groups (20 or so people) to discuss art and share vital information. "We will place long tables for children, so they can meet artists and create their own work. We are interested in connecting with artists who

have something vital to share." The dinners, meanwhile, will be catered to those who love wine, food, and art. They will be a meeting point for those who are after an enriching evening of discovery and conversation.

Sholeh Abghari has done something for Marbella that few have achieved before her. Not only has she brought us fine exponents of works that could just as well be hanging at the MoMA, Pompidou, or Tate Modern, but she is also aiming to raise artistic awareness and foster education. Finally, she is presenting art to its future - younger generations, who can discover the magic of creation through works produced by their minds, hearts, and hands. ☉



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