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New Word, Other Value

Artistic Modernism and Private Patronage: Associations and Galleries
in Pre-Islamic Revolution Iran

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English Summary

Artistic modernism, in the form of a collective and cultural work by Iranian modern artists, came to light at the first private art associations and galleries since the 1940s. That means, the project for institutionalization of modern art in Iran began as being promoted both culturally and privately by artists on their own. This book tries to spotlight both cultural and private qualities, to question the essentiality behind these two features, and to compare them against their commercial and public alternatives. By raising questions around these features, it draws more attention to the formative bases of the idiosyncrasies in Iranian artists and the new dispositions that made them work differently—a different work being recognized as “Iranian modern art” and being investigated not for its fidelity to a homogenizing set of definitions, but for those being definitive on their own.

The book concentrates on Fighting Cock as the first private art association (1948) to investigate the particularities around artistic modernism in Iran. The decision to work with this association, on the one hand, is to show how the Iranian state’s cultural policies, economic developments and a political atmosphere influenced artists in their first measures for the promotion of modern art and, on the other hand, to explore how they worked out the new idiosyncrasies as first modern artists within these contexts. In doing so, the book brings into view the collective work between Fighting Cock and Apadana (first private art gallery) and pays particular attention to the association’s manifesto, magazine and debates as essential tools of a cultural and private patronage.

Two artistic approaches are discussed in Fighting Cock’s different phases of work and the book discloses the extent these inclinations influenced the association for its cultural and private strategies: an early phase beginning with emphasis on a “national school of art” and the other with more concern for “art for art’s sake.” Also, the book works out to show how, drawing into later decades, important artists’ groups and galleries adopted the same cultural and private role as in Fighting Cock and how their similar advocacy of modern art accordingly divided the artistic space into two mainstreams (with national attributes or art for art’s sake). Although emergence of the commercial galleries and formation of a market for modern art took control of these developments and disturbed the significant role played by the pioneering artists since the 1960s, the book contends that the artistic modernism in Iran owes to the cultural contributions of the modern artists and should be studied under what it defends as a “cultural patronage.”