

in terms of the meaning attributed to letters in the Arabic or Persian alphabet.

What is the relationship between the tradition of levha (the art of making 'sheets' or 'plates') making and hat?

The word levha in fact comes from levh-i mahfuz, the protected, the secluded. Levha is related not to a sign that indicates something, but rather to the cultural codes of the shape, writing or form placed on it. The letter or shape you place on the levha has a cultural holiness. That makes it a levha, and so it must be conserved and protected. You cannot hang it just anywhere, you hide it. It is in a corner in a room. It is not something that everyone can easily observe or examine. Whereas the painting is the exact opposite; it addresses the eye, it surrenders itself to the observation of the eye. The painting is a pornographic structure. You show it to everyone. You exhibit it, everyone can enjoy it, like it; and the more it is liked, it becomes an object of desire. In this sense, all the works exhibited in Western museums seem very pornographic to me. The museum itself is pornographic, too. A museum is opened to the viewer, it is presented. Capitalism draws you towards the museum. The audience collectively observes pornography. What I am saying is that the thing we call painting, defined by the West and produced by the painter, and even the painter himself or herself, are pornographic. Pornography has nothing to do with sexuality. It could be a landscape. Pornography is exposure, exhibition, it is the eye examining everything to the smallest detail. Pornography exists in all spheres of life.

As in the government's recent charity trip to Somali?

Of course. They make sure everyone sees they are charitable. However, the left hand should not see what the right hand is giving. This is the definition of pornography: When the left hand sees that the right hand is giving. **If you had not been through the Academy, an institution of Modernity, would you be painting in the same manner today? Is the path you passed through in the meantime not reflected in your work at all?**

Western education became the signifier of what I do. That particular form that unsettled me and made me feel uneasy gave me a stronger feeling that my own work was the right path to take. That education showed me the weaknesses of my opponent. By learning what was presented to me I gained more competence over the other side.



Call me puppeteer, engraver, sign painter, it makes no difference at all. But I am not a painter. A painter is someone who mixes paints.. Someone who follows an adventure that involves the paint he uses. And the artist is the one who takes on that attribute. He has to take it on after all, this is the name the system gives to the profession he assumes, but I have no such worry.

Like computing a checksum?

Precisely. You want to check your calculation, and you enter into the subject with added interest in order to study your opponent.

Could we expand a little on this word, "opponent"? Do you oppose every painting that has been produced in the West since the 1300s?

No, no, I don't mean it like that. This process we call modernity has severed the ties with the folkloric life that makes humanity human.

In those instances when it did not contain folkloric, local, authentic elements I felt that we were on opposite sides with Western painting; it made me feel unsettled. Perhaps because I am very folkloric, very local. The customs we call "local" are traces of the tradition you are part of.

For instance, is Brueghel on your side, or is he an opponent?

Brueghel can at times be close to me. In a sense, Brueghel is very similar to Siyah Kalem.

So where does Chagall stand according to this division?

Chagall is not close to me.

Is Chagall not "local" and "folkloric"?

Chagall is not local, he uses the local element. It is not about the theme. Chagall uses the themes, he uses that social activity in the painting. It is a trick. When I say a trick, I mean it is a painterly act imposed by Western painting.

It is the adventure of the paint on the surface; the paint more than the colour.

So when Chagall adds some local elements, or images that relate to their origin to his painting, it does not change anything. He is still making a painting by playing with tricks, with various flavours of paint on the surface. And the eye loves this.

What about all the details in Brueghel, are they not designed to attract the attention of the eye, are they not geared towards a pleasurable viewing?

What is important is not how much flora and fauna we see, but how the elements are organized on the surface, how they are brought side by side.

For instance, "Children's Games" by Brueghel is a painting that can go very strongly against what was taking place in painting in that part of the world during that period.

Are there any young painters you admire?

The young and the old, the distinction is muddled today. There are many young painters