

Museum of Modern Art
11 West 53rd Street
New York City

For publicity file

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The first showing in this country of reconstructions of Persian frescoes which European critics have found "surprisingly modern" in spirit, although the originals were painted in the seventeenth century, will open at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on October 12.

The original frescoes decorate the walls of two palaces in Isfahan, the Ali Kapu and the Chahil Sutun, both built by Shah Abbas the Great. The frescoes are little known even to visitors to Persia, due to the fact that many of the paintings are in dark rooms, have been damaged by vandals, or have suffered such surface disintegration that their beauties are hidden.

The copies and reconstructions of the original murals were made by a living Persian artist, Sarkis Katchadourian, who devoted more than two years to the task. His facsimiles are painted in tempera on paper.

Following the exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, the paintings will be seen in several Eastern museums and in other parts of the United States. Plans for the tour now are being made by the American Institute of Persian Art and Archaeology which brought the paintings to this country.

The quality of modernism in the Persian murals was pointed out by French critics when the exhibition had its first showing last Spring at the Musée Guimet in Paris. "The most surprising and interesting aspect of these paintings is their quality of modernism," wrote one critic. "They are distinctly in the post-war manner. Some of the portraits of women are like Marie Laurencins. The woman bathing is a Modigliani and if one wanted to go on with the comparison, one could find at the Ali Kapu, Picassos."

"Evidently in the seventeenth century, the Persians were already imitating M. Henri-Matisse," remarks a correspondent in Figaro.

"As soon as one sees the long succession of pictures, one exclaims, 'How modern they are!'" wrote another critic. "Modern art dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, modern art from Asia, that is what these paintings seem to be, as fresh and light as the gouaches of Marie Laurencin, combining the most daring freedom of draftsmanship with a charming conventionalization."

The Palaces of the Ali Kapu and the Chahil Sutun, whose walls were decorated with these murals which are proving of interest to modern critics and art-lovers, are among the few palaces remaining out of hundreds built by Shah Abbas in Tabriz and Isfahan. Both are nearly intact, and both are considered by experts to be among the finest of the famous ruler's elaborate palaces.

"The Palace of the Ali Kapu or the High Gate (Sublime Parte), was the principal palace of Shah Abbas," writes Arthur Upham Pope, in the catalogue of the exhibition. "It stood in the middle of the south side of the great maidan or royal square. The great portico was sufficiently high to overlook Isfahan and the purple ring of mountains which guard it. In every direction were domes and minarets, while below were the parade and polo grounds, the scenes of processions, animal combats, and every sort of game.

"The building is six stories high with a great variety of charming little chambers, with lovely open porches fitted with outdoor fireplaces. Many of the rooms are small, but all are decorated with a lavishness that has rarely been equalled. The little figure paintings -- for many of them are not more than 30 inches square -- are to^{be} found principally in the lofty reception hall, and in some of the chambers.

"Fortunately, Mr. Katchadourian appreciated the infinite charm of these murals, and sensed the loss that the whole world would suffer if they disintegrated before they could be recorded. With no help other than a burning zeal and a wholly sympathetic touch, he set to work to reproduce them, -- a very arduous task performed under constant difficulties and discouragements but done with perfect understanding. A study of the originals shows that he has been faithful to an extraordinary degree."

The exhibition of Persian frescoes will be shown at the Museum of Modern Art through Nov. 19.