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Original Research Article

A Study on the Relationship between Language and Art in Conceptual Art of Iran (1965-2003)

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Abstract

Problem statement: Parallel with the confrontation of the East and the West in the fields of worldview and philosophy, the comprehension of contemporary artistic approaches and movements also has its own complexities. Among these, conceptual art is one of the most controversial issues in the art world due to its characteristics and its view of aesthetics, media, audience, and institutions. This subject by its very nature is directly related to the language. The question that arises is what is the connection between language and art in Iranian conceptual art?

Research objective: The aim of the present study is to gain a deeper understanding of conceptual art in Iran so that the weaknesses and strengths of the relationship between art and language in this movement can be better explored and, if possible, solutions for the future can be considered.

Research method: In this study, the first step was to examine conceptual art by delving into the background of the study and its related spectrum. In the second step, the relationship between art and language, was first analyzed in general and then were scrutinized in conceptual art by referring to the opinions of artists, current trends, and works, and to extract its components and principles. In the third step, the Iranian conceptual art and the relationship between art and language in this fledgling art movement were studied and the works were analyzed based on the mentioned components and principles. In this study, the main purpose was to analyze the relationship between art and language in conceptual art, and show the weaknesses and strengths of the process of understanding and absorbing conceptual art in Iran.

Conclusion: By studying the relationship between language and art in Iranian conceptual art, the results can be summarized in two dimensions. First, the three components of the formation of conceptual art in the West are very different from the context of its development and absorption in Iran. Second, this difference has created a weak link between language and art in Iranian conceptual art, which is contrary to the two principles derived from Western conceptual art. It seems that these two dimensions should be considered next to the strength of this movement, namely being related to tangible issues.

Keywords: *Art, Language, Conceptual art, Contemporary Iranian art.*

Introduction

Language is one of the most basic themes in thinking about oneself and others. Perhaps the emphasis of philosophers, psychoanalysts, and theorists on the subject of language is itself

evidence of the claim that human cognition and language are two highly intertwined matters. When it comes to the East-West confrontation, all language issues come to the fore; So that one cannot speak of the entry of a certain kind of Western worldview in the East and remain indifferent to the language that carries this kind of

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thought and at the same time shapes it. One of the aspects of the Western way of thinking that Eastern countries -like Iran- face is art and theories related to it -whether they want to or not. If two basic aspects can be considered for art in the West – meaning that this art (artists, movements, and their works) can be considered both as the manifestation of Western thought and also, as an influential factor in that- It can be seen that the process of perceiving Western art is not far from the concerns of Iranian thinkers about the relationship between West and East.

It can be said that presently, of all the movements and schools of art, the last approach that has occupied the minds of most contemporary Western artists is conceptual art. Therefore, it seems necessary to study the process of perception, absorption, and action of conceptual art in Iran. Apart from this, in this issue, the emphasis on the language, in addition to its role in understanding the West, is doubly important and necessary. This means that in conceptual art, one of the basic and frequent axes is the frequent rethinking of language and its application. The main question of this research is what is the relationship between art and language in Iranian conceptual art? And the secondary question is what has been the trend of this relationship in the West? The hypothesis that arises in connection with these two questions is that language and art in Iranian conceptual art do not have a dynamic relationship to construct new ways of artistic expression and enable a novel type of thinking for the artist and the audience (two principles derived from the relationship between art and language in conceptual art), which can be attributed to the weakness of theoretical backgrounds and, on the other hand, to the lack of necessary components to create this relationship, which will be examined later.

To analyze the correctness or incorrectness of this hypothesis, the first part of this article deals with the subject of conceptual art in three sections: the historical and theoretical backgrounds of conceptual art, the spectrum related to conceptual art, and the basic themes and motifs of conceptual art. In

the second part, an attempt is made to look at the relationship between art and language through different theories related to art in general and in conceptual art. The purpose of these two sections is to extract the components and principles of the dynamic relationship between art and language in conceptual art. In the third part, considering the two turning points in the history of Iranian conceptual art, the flow of developments, works, and events are analyzed based on the relevant components and principles. The focus of this study is on those works that are somehow related to the relationship between art and language.

The limitation of the present study was the lack of sufficient resources on the conceptual art in Iran (1965-2003), which due to the need to address the western aspects of art and language in conceptual art, it was not possible to conduct field research, which can be subject for further research. The method of collecting data in this basic theoretical research is bibliographic and the method of processing data is descriptive-analytical. It is also possible to prove or disprove the hypothesis through logical induction. In the third section, the works are analyzed based on components and principles in this way so that the necessary explanations and interpretations can be collected to answer the main question and prove or disprove the hypothesis.

Research background

Little comprehensive and coherent research has been conducted on Iranian conceptual art in recent decades. An example entitled “The Functions of Conceptual Art in the Concepts of the Art of Resistance, Case Study: The Garden of the Sacred Defense Museum” focuses more on the potential of conceptual art in the resistance art and less on the history of conceptual art in Iran. In the feedback and critiques that have been written briefly on conceptual art exhibitions in Iran, it is not possible to see sufficient coherence and organization (Fatemi & Tawhidi, 2015, 61). In Persian language, books related to conceptual art are mostly about the history of this movement in the

West and describe its basic features. One of the books that is directly related to the subject of the present study is "Image and Text in Conceptual Art", Written by Yves Kaliva. Of course, numerous articles and books in non-Persian languages have dealt indirectly with this subject, which are cited many times in the text. At last, the thesis entitled "The Study of the Position of Conceptual Art in Contemporary Iranian Art" is quite useful and instructive in Iran, but due to the comprehensiveness of the subject, many more detailed issues related to conceptual art and language remain unsaid (Ahmadvand, 2009, 1-4). The present study tries to analyze the conceptual art of Iran through the lens of art and language by examining the basic issues in more detail and examining the weaknesses and strengths of conceptual art in Iran from this aspect. For this purpose, we must first deal with the backgrounds, spectrums, and themes of conceptual art in the west, regardless of its linguistic dimension, so that in the next steps, the implications of the relationship between language and art in conceptual art will be clearer.

Conceptual art

• Conceptual art backgrounds

It is very difficult to define something that is significantly rooted in the very concept of "definition"¹. Conceptual art is essentially made up of ideas and concepts, and its final "product" is seen more as a document than as an artifact. Verbal language is a special medium but theoretically, anything can be used instead, as long as it lacks visual appeal. Conceptual art discards the material embodiment of an idea in favor of schemas, writings, and instructions, to force the audience to think or act (Pakbaz, 2016, 1093). This art also says no to the commercial aspects and the economic benefits of contemporary art. The starting point of Conceptual art goes back to the famous work of Marcel Duchamp called Fountain (1917), which is a toilette with minimal changes; In fact, "what Duchamp paid deep attention to was the continuity and action and reaction of objects to each other and

the spectator. These ideas created a new context of artistic creativity, which was later called art based on mental imagination or conceptual art" (Lucy Smith, 2002, 181).

Its closeness and, in some cases, its overlap with schools, movements, and other approaches complicates the discussion of conceptual art². In addition, it is obvious that conceptual artists did not follow the same path throughout their lives. In fact, it can be said that conceptual art in the broadest sense of the word, applies to performance art on one end, and to the ideas that are presented in the form of text, design, diagrams, and photographs on the other (Harrison, 2014, 7). Henry Flint, an American theorist and artist of the Fluxus movement, first used the "art of concept" in 1961 and explained it later in 1963 (Osborne, 2012, 14; Wood, 2004, 11). In this explanation, the distinguishing feature of conceptual art is dealing with language³ (Marzona, 2017, 8).

Sol Levitt's two writings, published in 1967 and 1969 under the titles of "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art" and "Sentences on Conceptual Art", are an essential beginning to understand conceptual art⁴. The starting point of conceptual art and its orientation towards its contemporary schools is evident in these sentences⁵. What conceptual art sought was meaningful in response to and in opposition to formalism in the general sense of the word⁶. A formalism that, with its extremes, downplayed meaning, content, ideas, and concepts. Before addressing the relationship between art and language, it is necessary to refer to the general atmosphere of conceptual art. The spectrum ranges from abstract and minimalist sculpture to physical art and land art.

• Art spectrum related to conceptual art

In relation to many of the issues and contexts of the contemporary world, it is more efficient and accurate to speak of the spectrum rather than fine-grained divisions with many exceptions. In fact, the set of artistic antitheses that emerged after "abstract modernism" were not completely separate disciplines, movements, and contexts. One of the pioneers of minimal art, Tony Smith, turned to

sculpture after a period of painting in the style of abstract expressionism⁷. It seems that the most important feature of minimal art in the present discussion is its questioning and rebellion against abstract expressionism and the creation of a zero point without which it might not be possible to think of conceptual art.

Land art artists, artists of light and space, and pop artists are important because they were indirectly the forerunners of later movements. Land art uses the earth, rocks, soil, etc. as a work of art. Instead of representing nature, by intervening in it or performing in the natural environment, Land art artists try to raise ecological, cultural, and social awareness. Land art was inherently connected to a logical idea or design, but also in its simplicity and instability was closely linked to conceptual art, minimal art, happening, and performance⁸. Another dimension that is closely related to conceptual art is Body art. In this art, the artist often engages in self-destructive action. He or she tries to counter the general situation with which contemporary art is involved by removing the object (something that is exchanged or encourages new art to be traded in museums and galleries) (Linton, 1393, 374). This radical tendency seems to have been directly influenced by the political and social situation around the 1960s⁹.

• Conceptual art themes

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy identifies five philosophical themes of conceptual art as follows: the definition of art, the ontology and media of art, the aesthetic value of art, the interpretation of art, and the cognitive value of art (Schelkins & Hilpinen, 2017, 29-52). The claim here is that in all of these themes, conceptual art has attempted to ask a question, or question a subject, or offer a new theory. It was said, for example, how conceptual art questioned and changed the classical definition of art. On the other hand, it was argued that in conceptual art, the media refuse the form of galleries and museums, and it was along with the dematerialization of art. The aesthetics and beauty

of the work were no longer relevant, but categories such as ideas, thoughts, and mental conflicts with the theme of the work became more prominent. In addition, in the interpretation of art, conceptual art is between two common views, one is paying attention to the intention of the artist and the other is paying attention to the personal perception of the audience. What is important for conceptual art in the field of interpretation is trying to understand the idea, and this understanding can be formed from a completely new and innovative path specific to the audience (ibid., 47). In the last theme, the cognitive value of art, it is argued that conceptual art seeks primarily cognitive value, not aesthetic value.

The relationship between language and art in conceptual art

• Language and Art

Language and art are two concepts largely intertwined and closely related. Language, due to the fact that it is a method of interpersonal communication, gives structure and social aspects to art¹⁰. But beyond this, language also plays a determining role in the context of artistic production and its presentation and understanding by the audience. The possibility of saying how the work was created, how the work is understood, or the experience of confronting the work and communicating with its creator is shared; all of these can fit into the subset of the threads that connect language and art. The path that can be taken to explore the relationship between art and language has been interpreted throughout the history of art theories from representational theory to institutional theory, which will be discussed briefly below.

The relationship between art and language from Plato to the expressive view of art is an approaching relationship (Kalyva, 2016, 16). The path taken until the Enlightenment in the history of human art is the path in which art as an imitation of nature became art as a language of expression. The context of considering art as a form and a kind of tendency to separate art and language in the modern period can be considered in Kant's system of influences on human

thought, and it seems that the Greenberg tradition of looking at art is rooted in Kant's attitude towards art (*ibid.*, 17-19). Indeed, the general tendency in art and language in the formalist point of view is the tendency to separate from each other (*Wood, 2004, 38*). The current ideal in the formalist theory of art is to, for example, abolish all talk of the artist's biography, meanings, and symbolism of the work of art that are based on the artist's mindset and on the basis of atmosphere and social conditions. All subjects rely on the art form itself. It is obvious that language cannot be eliminated altogether (*Harrison, 2001b, 59*). For example, the same talk about the pure form of the work of art itself requires language, but what is fundamental is this desire and tendency to eliminate language-based approaches to art. At the heart of this multitude of theories is the institutional theory. In fact, the importance of Danto's theory is that it draws attention from the formalist and anti-historical theories of artistic quality and focuses on historical knowledge of the social networks of art. In this section, one can examine Danto's theories and then Dickey's theories about institutional theory, alongside a more general tendency that might be called a kind of linguistic revolution.

In addition to these two issues, two other areas should be considered to gain a clearer understanding of the relationship between art and language in contemporary times. The first is the general tendency of art for Greenberg art, so-called the crisis of formalist modernism (*Newman & Bird, 1999, 49*); And the second is the political and social situation of the sixties (*Godfrey, 1998, 187-192*). All four areas together paved the way for a new kind of connection between language and art in conceptual art. The main point is that the study of the relationship between language and art in the sixties -if the focus would be only on the institutional theory of art- will lead to an incomplete perception. It is obvious to what extent all the elements related to these four areas are intertwined¹¹. The next section specifically addresses the complexities of the relationship between art and language in conceptual art.

• Language and Conceptual art

One of the most important features of conceptual art is its direct and indirect use of philosophy and language¹². Conceptual art examines the state of art in the contemporary world with a self-centered view. In essence, the use of language, whether in the form of nomenclature or in the form of propositions and phrases, gives the art a critical aspect (*ibid.*, 350). Conceptual artists analyze how meaning is produced in an artistic context and how works of art can manipulate a chain of meanings and take meaning beyond that artistic context¹³.

For Duchamp, language colored the object, and it did so by combining visual experience and non-painting forms and through the content of their signs (by changing our cognitive relationships to different and complex visual forms). Marcel Duchamp's preparations are in fact a means of creating "visual indifference" to the object, an attempt to get rid of "aesthetics". Duchamp produced these preparations in small numbers to avoid what he called the "habit-forming drug" of the audience. But he could not stop their aesthetic state and the joining of his works to museums (*Osborne, 2012, 36*). This issue should be placed next to notes written by Duchamp and a kind of ironic tone in his works, the changes he was making in his installations, and most importantly in his critiques and writings from the very beginning. It reinforced a different view of the category of language in art (*Wood, 2004, 19-20*). If we consider the famous quote of Kosuth about Duchamp: "all art (after Duchamp) is conceptual (in nature) because art only exists conceptually". If this quote is partly related to Duchamp's questioning aspects, the other part will certainly be related to Duchamp's use of language.

To enter directly into art and language in the conceptual art of the sixties and seventies, with all the contexts and branches of conceptual art discussed in the previous section, we can point to two issues. The first issue is the popular Art and Language Magazine that was founded in 1968 by its main members Michael Baldwin, Terry

Atkinson, David Bainbridge, and Herold Harrell for cooperation between these artists. In the spring of the following year, they published the first issue of *Art and Language* in Coventry. Mel Ramzden is also an English artist who worked in New York in the late 1960s. In 1970, he and Ian Byrne, an Australian artist who had previously worked separately from the group, joined the *Arts and Language*. In the summer of 1969, Kosuth was invited as an American artist to become an art-language editor. Although he worked independently, he maintained relations with the *Art and Language* group until he left the group in 1976 following a legal affair (Harrison, 2014, 8-9).

This group used the means of philosophy and linguistics to present the results of their research and analysis in different ways. They first addressed the logical contradictions of minimalist aesthetics, examined different systems of meaning construction, and later critically discussed the ideological conditions for the institutionalization of art. Conversations, classes, philosophy, and art criticism were part of the open discourse, which at the time was considered itself art. Between 1969 and 1975, the group changed its staff several times and new artists joined, while some of the group's founders distanced themselves from the group due to political disagreements. When conceptual art established its position, relatively quickly, in the art market, from the mid-seventies, the history of conceptual art became the center of theoretical reflections on art and language (Marzona, 2017, 20). In addition, it should be noted that the fruits of the *Art and Language Project* from 1968 to 1972 were vague and that the results of this project were not just visual, not art, and even a position hostile to art (Harrison, 2001a, 59).

But the second stream concerns a group of artists who partnered with Seth Siglab, the founder and owner of a gallery in New York, and worked with a theoretical orientation on the re-foundation of art. The four artists were Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, and Lawrence Weiner. What united the group's work in the first steps was

Siglab's perception of the violation of the distinction between primary and secondary information, which made the exhibition catalogs a priority over the works themselves. Siglab's view on this subject is from his own words was that when art no longer has any dependence on its appearance and becomes an abstract thing, it cannot be distorted or altered in the form of a book or a catalog. In this case, it becomes primary information, while the reproduction of conceptual art in books and catalogs is necessarily secondary information. When the information is secondary, the catalog can be a display and there can be a catalog to complete it (Osborne, 2012, 38). Lawrence Weiner worked on minimalist images before the group was formed. He usually left the colors and sizes to his buyers and customers and tried to remove the expressive elements from his paintings with the monochrome of his works. He did not sign his works and even questioned the idea that the artist should display his work¹⁴. In a book that brings together a collection of interviews with conceptual artists, when the interviewer asks Wiener what he thinks about language, he gives an answer that largely introduces us to his attitude. "I'm very interested in language because it is vague. The ambiguity of language fascinates me more than anything. For example, a picture is static and there is always just a picture (...) when you read the language or translate one language into another, which is basically part of what I am doing right now, it adds to the ambiguity." (Alberro, 2001, 107).

Along with Weiner, it is important to examine the approach of Robert Barry and Douglas Huebler. The common denominator of all three artists is that their approach is related to a reality, which is not always perceived by the senses, and also excludes the supply of objects because their qualities are immediately perceived by sensory perception. These three artists, instead, adopted the use of language. They, therefore, denied Greenberg's official statement that the experience of art is necessarily visual. In each concept, perception of language is expressed and each is significantly different from the other

(Marzona, 2017, 19). For example, Barry's most famous works are those performed with invisible gasses that challenge the entire aesthetic and artistic habits of the audience. On the other hand, Huebler's famous quote "The world is full of more or less interesting objects; I do not want to add anything else." And a collection of his works, including a collection of drawings and photographs, as well as an artwork in the 1969 Konzeption-Conception exhibition, which contains a text "Something that is unknown to me, but affects me." And "something that is very close to me in time and space, but still is unknown to me." (ibid., 21 & 18). All of them put the burden of negating the object on the language in a special way and try to discover its new capabilities in art. All of these ideas are very closely related to the various dimensions of philosophy. From Husserl's phenomenology, which emphasizes a kind of return to phenomena themselves by postponing all presuppositions, to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, which explores the meaning, use of language, and language games.

But when it comes to Joseph Kosuth, one of the most iconic images of conceptual art comes to mind: One and Three Chairs (1967). This work is one of the most prominent works in the history of conceptual art, along with a collection of works entitled "Titled /Art as Idea". In this work, all presuppositions should be discarded and we should start with the smallest details, for example, that the name of the work is one and three chairs, not one or three chairs. This work is more of a question than an answer, an impact, and an expression, and the simplicity of the questions that comes with it shocks the audience more than any other complex and visual work. Which one of these three chairs really is a chair? Which is closer to the concept and truth of the chair? Is it possible, according to Wittgenstein, to imagine something through words or images? If our world and our language are a collection of bricks that are piled on top of each other and climbed, this is a work that questions the most basic and lowest possible bricks and makes people think. If Magritte had said,

"This is not a pipe", Kosuth is not satisfied here with the apprehension of the discrepancy between image and word. He notes the discrepancy in our lived experience, which is based on language, collapses with a small shake, with the questions audience asks himself.

The components that can be extracted from the study of the relationship between art and language in conceptual art, especially the two currents related to art and language, can be divided into three parts: social backgrounds, the connection point of art and contemporary philosophy as well as the trends of art. As mentioned, part of the roots of the relationship between art and language in conceptual art should be considered in the historical course and social situation of the time, which justifies the return to the language in the context of society. It was also necessary for artists to connect art with philosophical texts in order to make the connection between language and art in conceptual art. The last point goes back to the power of conceptual art in responding to common art currents before it, which would not have been possible without considering the trends of art.

As clearly shown in Fig. 1, the principles that confirm the originality and dynamics of the relationship between language and art in conceptual art are two completely interconnected principles that we have witnessed in the mentioned cases. The first is that this connection in conceptual art should lead to the creation of a completely new way of artistic expression, and the second is that this connection should provide opportunities for the artist and the audience (opportunities which we had not seen before) to think from within by challenging the common methods of artistic activity.

The relationship between language and art in Iranian conceptual art

It seems that it is not possible to comment on the conceptual art of Iran with definite boundaries and turning points. The most important reason is that when the problems mentioned about the history

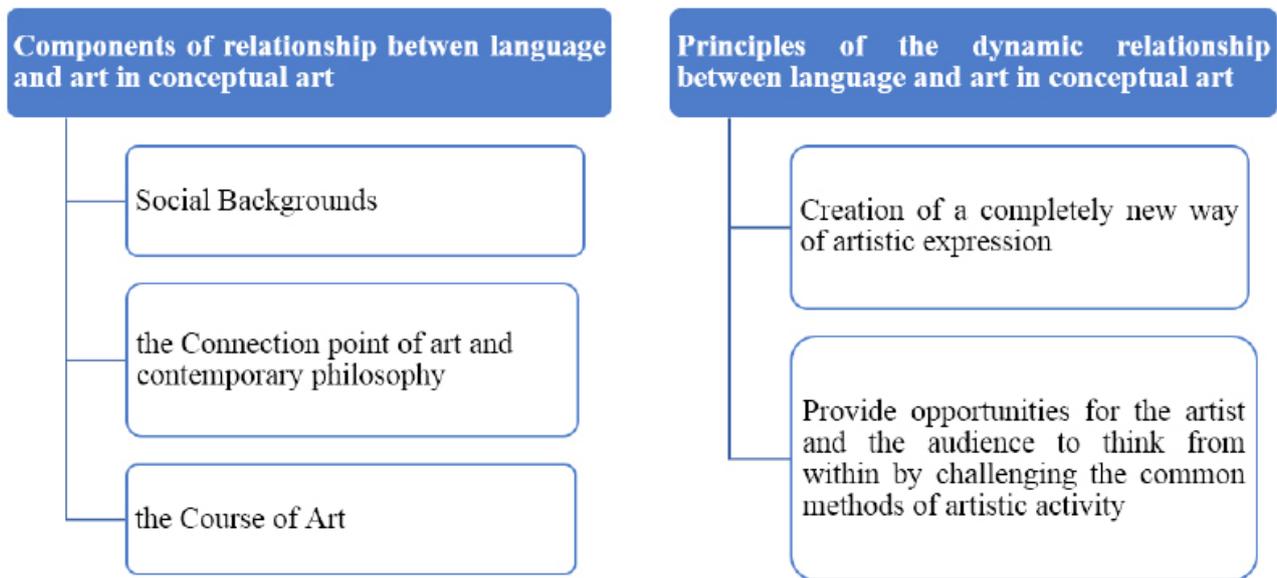


Fig. 1. Components and principles of the relationship between language and art in conceptual art with emphasis on the two currents related to language and art. Source: Authors.

of conceptual art in the West enter the currents of Iranian art, it takes on more complex layers. For example, it is very difficult and somewhat individual opinion to distinguish what is a conceptual work and what is not a conceptual work, claims and words do not accord to the content or reactions of the work, and finally, there is no coherent and integrated source for conceptual art in Iran.

Perhaps the most important turning points for the study of language and art in Iranian conceptual art can be considered the Islamic Revolution of Iran and the first exhibition of conceptual art in the Museum of Contemporary Art from August 2nd to October 10th, 2001. The criterion for this choice is the importance and impact of these two events in absorbing conceptual art in Iran so that after the Islamic Revolution, the process of absorbing contemporary Western art proceeded in a different direction from before the revolution. Also, the conceptual art exhibition of the Museum of Contemporary Art was a very influential event in the understanding of this movement in Iran, which divides the events into before and after¹⁵.

Regarding the selection of works, it should be said that in the first step, in each part of the path of Iranian conceptual art, the most important works

were selected. Then among them, the emphasis was on works that are somehow related to language. These conceptual works related to language were first analyzed independently of the components and principles discussed in the previous section and then analyzed based on them to finally be able to answer the research question.

• **Before the Islamic Revolution**

In these two decades, many artists such as Kamran Tabatabai Diba, Nazi Atri, Marko Grigorian, Mohsen Vaziri Moghadam, Hannibal Al-Khas, Morteza Momayez, and Parviz Tanavoli produced works that, although not initially introduced as conceptual art but were later considered as conceptual art. They were spoken of as land art, happening art, or conceptual art. The forties and fifties (Shamsi) in art had the general tendency that a huge volume of updates had to be formed in a short time, and this was a kind of double enthusiasm and energy in testing trends and styles; with or without deep knowledge of their theoretical and philosophical themes (Pakbaz, 2017, 204-205).

It seems that to study the first examples of new art trends in Iran, which are somehow related to language and conceptual art, it is necessary to go back to the time when these arts began to take shape.

This start point of these arts can be considered with approximate accuracy about 1965. This year, the multimedia work of “Ab-baze Zebardast” by Kamran Tabatabai Diba was exhibited in Seyhoun Gallery. The exhibition was an arrangement of large panels and boxes on which full-length human figures were displayed on platforms instead of statues, water supplies, valves, fittings, and plumbing fixtures. In addition to all this, there was a statement about water, which Diba had composed in the style of a modern poem, with the recorded voice of Parviz Tanavoli and an unknown woman on the tape. This voice was played continuously and repeatedly in space (Rezaei, 2007 quoted by Ahmadvand, 2009, 8).

The important point about these works is that Kamran Tabatabai Diba has not introduced these works as concept art. But the features of these works were very little related to the relationship between art and language. The current language play in his works, which with the help of the word and the subject of water produces sentences such as “water reached above my head” is one of the first steps of the intersection between art and language, which deals with objective, social, economic, and also the environmental concerns. Moreover, his “Earth sculptures” in the Niavaran Cultural Center (1977) or his “prayer hall” in the Carpet Museum (1977) are associated with Land art. Due to his direct connection with contemporary art currents in the world, he played a major role in the development of Iranian art, and all of this may indirectly refer to the role of the Museum of Contemporary Art, which undoubtedly identifies and promotes the new trends of art.

In the two works of “Nan va Dizi” in 1976, Marco Gregorian examines aspects of the art of arrangement. However, there are criticisms of these two works that cast doubt on their artistic authenticity. These criticisms can be summed up with the following quote: “We did not think that art is a universal expression and did not know borders and ecosystems, but what environment the artist lives in,

from what society he came from and Which cultural background it feeds on should also be considered. In the way of these experiments, sometimes the experimenter may approach the style or manner of another artist or accept the influence of another work or thought without knowing. This can be accepted as long as we are experiencing it, but as soon as a work is on display, the art critic unravels the fabrics of it and evaluates the sources of inspiration or the extent of its originality. The question is, to what extent the idea of the creator of the work is unique to him?” (Waziri Moghaddam, 1977 Quoted by Afrasiabi, 2009, 20).

Another example of artworks before the revolution is the poster of Kurosh Shishegaran, in which Shahreza Street is introduced as a work of art. On the other hand, the impact of the lessons of Mohsen Vaziri Moghaddam and Hannibal Al-Khas should also be considered, which led to a new generation of artists. But it must be taken into account that before the revolution, Iranian conceptual art had not yet reached the stage of growth, flourishing, and creativity to introduce personal themes and ideas unique to the artists.

But the important issue that arises is the first component or the socio-historical atmosphere of that time. In the sense that the revolutionary atmosphere of those years and the political concerns were flowing in the heart of society. “On the one hand, the regime was moving towards dictatorship and tyranny, and on the other hand, the fighters were finding more reasons and desire to work for freedom and liberation from the tyranny of the violent regime. What covers the general atmosphere of the 1960s is the constant conflict between libertarianism and tyranny” (Ranjbar, 2007, 46).

In addition, the weakness of philosophical and artistic resources, the second component of the connection between art and philosophy, which did not allow topics such as language to be actively introduced into art or be used to create new ideas, must also be considered. Because the works of thinkers and artists in this field in the West had not

yet been read or translated inside Iran. In addition to weakness in artistic action, this void is also felt in “Nan va Dizi”. It is as if the art and the thought that made it do not match well.

But the last issue is related to the third component, namely the course of art, which is very different in Iran from the course of Western art. As we can see, for example, in “Ab-baze Zebardast”, the artist does not have to react to an established tendency or practical background, because in fact, abstract painting entered Iran at the same time as the subsequent approaches. However, the Western conceptual artist considers it necessary to react in some way to the artistic background of his society by using language or other tools. A quote from Morteza Momayez could be useful for concluding this period of Iranian art: “I think the only common denominator we had was that we wanted to abandon that monotonous routine of painting and sculpture and move on, to create something new. (...) The problem was that we came together without full awareness of each other’s mindsets, views, and goals, and only for the sake of friendly enthusiasm, and without a principled and thoughtful orientation. (...) After one or two initial exhibitions, the group’s power came out of harmony. (...) The disintegration of the group was more due to an internal factor than an external one (...)” (Nami, 1996, 38-40).

Although the components of the absorption and development of any form of art are different in each place, in the three works selected as examples from this period, there is not much direct connection between language and art in its Western sense. Although traces of this connection can be seen in the work of the “Ab-baze Zebardast”, and although the naming of a street as a work of art is creative (as in Huebler’s famous phrase “the world is full of more or less interesting objects; I do not want to add something else” (Marzona, 2017, 18), but this effort has not provided a new way of expression and has not created a different possibility for the artist and the audience to think, therefore, it does not have the two principles of a dynamic relationship

between art and language in art. It is a contradictory concept. From this perspective, the above works can be considered as the first steps in introducing new artistic styles and not the original application of the relationship between art and language in conceptual art.

• After the Islamic Revolution until 2001 (the first conceptual art exhibition)

After the Islamic Revolution and the era of the Holy Defense, in 1992, 1998, and 1999, three events with a similar theme and format took place, which may be considered as a background for the conceptual art of later years. Talking about this format, which is the use of an old house as a spatial element of works, should be done more carefully because this format has very close roots to the culture and concerns of the Iranian artist. Thinking of a lost place and on the verge of being destroyed, and placing the works of art that are the product of the minds of artists, knowing that after a while the whole place will be destroyed with their works, provides a very creative context, which is used in the exhibition of Blue Children, Black Sky. This issue can also be considered one of the strengths of the works of this period.

In 1992, Ali Dashti and Shahrokh Ghiasi, Sasan Nasiri, Farid Jahangir and Mostafa Dashti and in 1998, Farid Jahangir, Sasan Nasiri, Khosrow Hassanzadeh, Beta Fayazi, and Atallah Hasheminejad and also in 1999, in the exhibition of “Blue Children, Black Sky” Sadegh Tirafkan, Maziar Bahari, Beta Fayazi, and Khosrow Hassanzadeh addressed the problem of air pollution in Tehran. Despite the novelty of this experience and the value of some of the works in this exhibition, there is no innovative tendency towards the relationship between language and art. Perhaps it can be considered a weakness that the atmosphere of the works is too emotional and tends to evoke emotion only through new experiences or the use of Western methods, rather than moving towards an introspective and ontological attitude to the art itself with philosophical and theoretical backgrounds, which is, in fact, the essence of conceptual art.

The other three events, which took place in 1999 and 2000, were steps forward for a deeper experience of conceptual art. "Y2K", an artwork by Afshan Ketabchi at Barg Gallery was one of the three events. In this work, on the occasion of the year 2000, we can talk about a confrontation with the history of humanity. A hall in which a strip of iron displays important events of history one after another and invites the audience to think about this history. "Relationship" by Mandana Moghadam in 1996 is another of these events that more directly achieves the conditions of an arrangement and makes the audience think about the impossibility of real communication in the present era. The first biennial of painters in the Islamic world is the third event that completes all the efforts of the second part that were studied, namely the artworks of the 60s and 70s. The two works "Existence" by Ahmad Nadalian and "Four Elements" by Afshan Ketabchi are two works that, although there is still no trace of a direct connection between language and conceptual art, is in itself a novel experience in approaching the personal concerns of the artist. This approach must have taken place in a context of harmony between form and content, which is on the rise in the late 1970s; In fact, it is this coordination that can be the basis for dynamic communication between language and art.

During this period, artworks have not components needed to form a dynamic relationship between language and art. On the other hand, the social and political situation of those years (the first component) did not allow this connection (artists in the post-war years were more concerned with real issues and problems of the outside world, and thinking about art itself and the language of its expression was not a priority) (Pakbaz, 2016, 1992). For example, in the exhibition of "Blue Children, the Black Sky", artworks are much more concerned about the subjects outside the art, rather than other issues such as rethinking the language, media, or concept of art. More importantly, in artists' works, such as Y2K, there is no strong indication of the connection point

between philosophy and art (the second component), and the artist's focus is on absorbing form (in this work, installation). These two issues should be put aside by the fact that the art movement was more inclined to use new tools to create art and was completely far from the theoretical space related to art and language. It is only the work of "Rabete" that, through contemplation of the relationship between two persons (rather than language), raises linguistic concerns about the impossibility of fully understanding signs in general.

As we can see, apart from the components related to conceptual art, there is a significant growth in the works from the perspective of the mentioned principles. In choosing a dilapidated house as a place to display works, Y2K, Relationship, Existence, and Four Elements, there is a change in the way of expression and thinking in terms of form but this change is in line with the discovery and use of the new medium of installation. In the general sense, the form is in conceptual art, not in the connection between language and art, or challenging the former methods with thinking and contemplation on the language and theoretical backgrounds.

• 2001 (the first conceptual art exhibition) and after

It can be said with confidence that one of the most important events regarding conceptual art in Iran was the exhibition from August to October 2001 in the Museum of Contemporary Art entitled the Exhibition of Conceptual Art. Various works were exhibited in this exhibition, but it is not possible to cover all of them. There are three of these works that are significant in terms of concern and efforts to create a kind of pure art related to Iran itself. The first artwork is by Kafshchian Moghaddam, which is a coffin with pigeons enclosed and birds flew by opening the coffin. Kafshchian Moghaddam says about this work: "Based on a limited space-time idea and using a coffin, a flag, 169 warriors' Pelak, 160 small blue bags, 160 commander's names, 160 bits of Hafez's poems and 160 pigeons, I did a performance. This work tried to affect three groups

of audiences. The group that was present at the opening exhibition, the other group of free audiences that caught the pigeons' attention, and finally the audience that got the messenger pigeons that were carrying bags. The bag contained the name and verse of a poem that the audience had to find their connection in mental exploration"¹⁶ (Kafshchian Moghaddam, 2002, 38) . If this work clearly refers to the concepts surrounding martyrdom and is somehow related to language based on numbers and poetry, the second work is related to environmental concerns. "The river still has fish" by Ahmad Nadalian is in fact an indication of something tangible that has been continued by the artist and has received worldwide feedback. The third work, however, deals with concerns about women's daily lives and issues. An artwork by Afshan Ketabchi, entitled "My Common Face, Rudabeh and Oralial", has a humorous atmosphere and is critical of the situation of women today¹⁷. The artist's concerns about tangible issues and his social responsibility in these artworks is one of their strengths.

But there is a work in this exhibition that is directly related to the global experiences of conceptual art around art and language. This is the work of a group called 30+, in which an attempt was made to examine and explore a simple object such as a chair from different points of view, and to confront the audience's perception with a kind of doubt. This goal was accomplished, for example, in a variety of ways, such as using light and changing the shape and function of the chair, and adding other things. Although this work evokes the work of Joseph Kosuth in one and three chairs, it cannot be called a profound understanding of the linguistic themes of conceptual art in the West. Firstly, because in this work, the seriousness and multi-layeredness of the works of artists in the field of art and language are absent. Second, the work has little to do with the artist's spontaneous point of view, or in other words, this work can be considered a kind of reconstruction. It is the subject that takes the artwork away from the two

principles of the relationship between language and art¹⁸.

The second exhibition of conceptual art was organized in 2002 at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Although this exhibition is considered as a growing step of the Iranian art community in two very important areas, it cannot be said that much has changed in terms of the relationship between art and language in one year. These two basic areas of progress are the preference for conciseness over rhetoric and the preference for theoretical studies rather than haste and pointless work. But what seems interesting is that it can be said that in a new movement, artists are more inclined to understand the technological aspects of that movement than the aspects that are more related to theory, philosophy, and consequently to language. A multitude of different aspects of video art and the multiplicity of such works show this dimension of the Iranian version of modern art.

This opens a space for analyzing the works of the third period of Iranian conceptual art from the perspective of the third component, namely the course of art. The artists of the four exemplary works of the first exhibition of conceptual art, like the other works of the second exhibition, are obliged to react to the former approaches of their society. By thinking about the content and form of these works, we can understand that the reaction of artists, due to the different artistic backgrounds of Iran and the West¹⁹, occurs more in the space of medium and technology and not in the space of theoretical backgrounds and Thinking about language. In other words, the reaction of artists to the current course of art, for example in the case of group 30+, takes place in the form space, and there is nothing new to be said about the content of the work and the rethinking of the language. Perhaps this focus of artists on form and technology is influenced by the nature of the course of art and the period in which we live. A period that requires focusing on the formal dimensions of the work of art, and because the Western art trends have recently found their way

to Iran, the artist cannot react to its theoretical and linguistic backgrounds.

This issue takes on a more prominent aspect in the second component, the point of contact between art and philosophy. In the works of the third period, especially in the three works belonging to the Kafshchian, Nadalian, and Ketabchi, we see that considerable progress has been made on this component. In these works, the artists maturely combine theoretical and practical concepts. But the direction of this combination, as we see in the works, is towards the world outside of art and its concerns. In the first work, which belongs to Kafshchian, although language has been used as a means of conveying meaning, this application is about concepts outside of language and does not take a closer look at language itself or art itself. That is why the connection between language and art in these works of conceptual art either occurred to induce concepts outside of art and language or, like the work of the 30+ group, is an underdeveloped application of the concepts of Western conceptual art²⁰ and it is still far from the Western form in the works of artists like Joseph Kosuth.

But regarding the first component, namely social backgrounds, another tendency that is significant in the study of Iranian conceptual art is the tendency towards ideological, religious, and revolutionary concepts. For example, in the exhibition "Parvaze Paydari" in June 2007, we see a collection of works about war, Holy Defense, and martyrdom, which may not be a step forward in terms of theoretical-linguistic tendencies, but it seems to have some points of strengths²¹. The element of time should be considered in updating the theoretical-linguistic tendencies of modern Iranian art²². In fact, it is fundamental to understand that, for example, questioning the category of art through thinking about language or an absolutely "art for art" view requires a special kind of socio-economic-political context. It seems that in the third period, by analyzing works such as the work of Ketabchi or Nadalian in the first exhibition based on the

components, it can be concluded that with all the calm situation established in the society -after the years of Revolution and war- living in the West Asian region cannot distance itself -in the short time- from social concerns such as the condition of women, the environmental issues, etc., and focus on concepts such as language itself or the truth of art.

But can it be said that the works of the third period have achieved two principles derived from the relationship between art and language in conceptual art? Can it be said that these works have created a new way of artistic expression or have opened a novel possibility for the artist and the audience to think? The answer to these two questions is largely negative. Most of the artworks of the third period, such as "The River Still Has Fish", are good examples in which we could claim that the artist's concern has been performed harmoniously and maturely in a new artistic way. This is an important step that many artists have tried to implement. It is enough to compare these works with the works of a few years ago to see that the concern and the new art form have been expressed more homogeneously. Although this is considered a positive trend, in terms of the relationship between language and art, it cannot be claimed that a new way of artistic expression has arisen through thinking about language and art itself. Also, the audience and the artist are dealing with a new medium, and they are not provided with a different background or possibility of thinking by challenging the theoretical background and artistic background of the past.

Conclusion

In the first two parts, the present study was focused on the analysis of Western conceptual art and the relationship between language and art, through which two principles and three components on the relationship between language and art were extracted. This connection in conceptual art is a dynamic and deep relationship through which the artist -with his theoretical knowledge- tries to question the conventional assumptions and creates

new ways to express his art and thinking. According to the analysis of works (based on principles and components), in the relationship between language and art in Iranian conceptual art, these two principles, considering some developments, have been faced with some weaknesses. To find the reasons, we must refer to the components of the growth of this relationship in the West.

On the other hand, the Islamic Revolution, the holy defense, and the social and economic problems of the following years created a completely different social atmosphere in Iran than what we saw in the West. It seems that, as it is clear from the analysis of works based on components, the artist in this period, could not simply question the nature of art or think about the language (first component) without considering the concerns of the world outside of art (war, environment, etc.). On the other hand, by considering the path of conceptual art, examining the various dimensions of the relationship between art and language in it, and comparing it with domestic works in the past decades, it can be concluded that the relationship between art and language in Iran, not because of a lack of creativity or artistic concern, but because of a weakness in the theoretical and philosophical background, is a relatively weak relationship that can be seen in some examples of works (Like the work of the 30+ group) that have been performed immaturely (second component). Apart from this, to promote conceptual art in Iran, a strong artistic current is needed for a conceptual artist to use the relationship between language and art to challenge the common methods and question previous approaches. In the case of Iran, there are relatively few lines of this trend, and perhaps in most cases, a reflection of what happened in the West (a few decades ago) can be heard. On the other hand, as mentioned in the analysis of the works, the art history of several decades of the West, overtime should be absorbed and understood by the Iranian art movement, and this is the duty of the artist to distinguish and react spontaneously because this matter caused many problems for the Iranian artists (third component).

Nevertheless, the artistic events of previous years in the field of conceptual art show a significant improvement over the previous decade. This development faces many challenges, one of the most important aspects of which is the language and theoretical and philosophical background. It is through becoming stronger in these two dimensions that one can reach maturity in artistic activity or give spontaneous aspects to the questions and themes of conceptual art. As mentioned, the present study did not use field research, especially in the recent decade, due to the need to address the various dimensions of Western conceptual art and the extraction of principles and components. The proposal for further research on this topic emphasizes interviews with artists, gallery owners, and critics.

Endnote

1. Perhaps in a sense art is a reflection on the cultural role of definition; A role model, not exclusive, in defining something called "art". In any case, conceptual art is more than anything else the art of questions, and it brings with it many questions about itself" (Osborne, 2012, 14).
2. Conceptual art is in fact trying to question what we tend to assume. There is this controversy in the nature of conceptual art. A particular way in which conceptual art explores is to question where the realm of art ends and the realm of utility begins. In fact, in the words of Joseph Kosuth, conceptual art "both assimilates the tasks of the critic and makes the mediator unnecessary." The effect here is the process, not the material object. This claim not only affects the ontology of a conceptual work of art, but also profoundly changes its role by placing the artist in the position of the thinker and not the creator of the object (Schellenks, 2017, 15-23).
3. "Since concepts are related to language, art is the concept of art whose main material is language." Interestingly, Lucy Lipard says that Flint's definition of conceptual art, which came from the activities of the Fluxus group, has nothing to do with his conception of the pioneer work of art in New York in the mid-to-late 1960s. "They seldom knew about it, and it was a different kind of 'concept' anyway." (Wood, 2003, 12)
4. The works, life, and theories of Sol LeWitt, a leading minimalist artist and one of the first conceptual art theorists, show the closeness of conceptual art to minimalist art, as well as the intricacies of conceptual art itself. Influenced by Bauhaus and Constructivism, LeWitt began creating three-dimensional works with geometric forms. Later, with works in which cage-like, lattice, and cube-like structures intricately and repetitively coexisted, it came closer to minimal art and subsequently conceptual art. His works include the three-part transformation of three different types of cubes (1967), two modular cubes (1972) and ten thousand three-inch lines (1972). He was in fact the connection point between minimal art and conceptual art (Pakbaz, 2016, 1286).
5. The first five sentences written by Sol LeWitt in "Sentences on Conceptual Art" are essential for following the path of artists in this type of art. "Conceptual artists are more mystics than rational," he says in the first sentence. In the second sentence, he says, "Logical judgments repeat logical judgments." In the third sentence, "irrational judgments lead to new experiences." And in the fourth and fifth sentences he says that "formal art is necessarily logical" and "irrational thoughts must be pursued completely and logically." (LeWitt, 1969, 1).
6. It is important to note that Sol LeWitt's writings were published in the first issue after the introduction in the Journal of Art and Language.

The subtitle of this magazine was "Concept Art Magazine". (Marzona, 2017, 9) And it was also in 1969 that Joseph Kosuth declared that "all art [after Duchamp] is inherently [conceptual, because art exists only conceptually." (Kosuth, 1969, 11).

7. "I want my sculptures to create space and light, not material" he says of his large sculptures, which are located outdoors and people can pass through them. American minimalist art quickly went beyond the direction of a particular artist and included a wide range of artists: Carl Andre, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, John McCracken. But the most prominent figure of this artistic movement was Donald Judd (Lucy Smith, 2002, 190).

8. The most famous land artists are Walter De Maria with two parallel white lines in the Nevada desert and a room full of dirt, Michael Heiser with two negatives (1970) and two huge pits in the Nevada desert, Robert Smithson with a spiral wharf (1970) Finally, Richard Long is in Alaska (1977) with a circle.

9. Regardless of these political and social contexts, body art will undoubtedly seem to be a purely surprising and showy action.

10. Of course, one can think of very distant times and guess that this connection is very close to art and language. Painting and communication were really one thing at the time. Perhaps the practical and, in fact, magical aspects of this overview of the past can also be added to this connection or overlap. During the rituals and ceremonies of the people of that time, or in the whole ceremony of painting and attacking the image or the "soul" of the desired animal, which is scary and strong in the eyes of the cavemen, we see that in the first human steps Image and communication, language in its general sense and art in its general meaning are not far apart (Gambridge, 1393, 31; Marzban, 2017, 1; Kleiner, 1394, 38).

11. It is worth mentioning how much all the elements related to these four areas are interconnected. An example of the connection between the postmodernist, post-structuralist and post-structuralist language space and the political and social situation is an article by David McNally, a professor of political science at York University in Toronto, Canada. This article refers to the complex language situation we are in and that it seems impossible to think of a kind of liberation and resistance to injustice because of our perception of language and the effects of linguistic revolution (Parsa, 2001, 71-72). In this article, McNally emphasizes the need to balance this understanding of language and to activate a kind of practical view in the interdisciplinary field of philosophy-politics. In fact, this intense obsession with language and humanitarian concerns is very much intertwined. Similarly, New York art after World War II and all its ups and downs cannot be separated from institutional theory. And, of course, the details of artistic theories and works and movements of artists cannot be separated from the political, social and economic situation of the sixties. It seems that all aspects of these four areas dialectically required contemporary art to form a new kind of connection between language and art, which we refer to today as conceptual art.

12. We can point to a kind of negative perception of philosophy in artistic activity. It is clear that it is not possible to get an accurate understanding of the depth of the philosophy of language in a short time, but this does not justify a kind of illusion of cognition or disregard for theoretical issues, which is a kind of foundation of contemporary artistic approaches. On the other hand, this disregard is a kind of stereotype; meaning that one or more of the terms used by a thinker are often seems to be enough to describe the ideas of a thinker. Here are a few quotes from Wittgenstein's own sentences to suggest a more accurate, concrete, and out-of-the-ordinary look at the usual philosophical tendencies of art. But in the second step, the aim is to point out that without understanding and confronting Wittgenstein's texts and philosophy, it will not be possible to fully understand the approaches of art and language in conceptual art. This is doubly important for artists like Joseph Kosuth: "I have never really seen black spots gradually become lighter until they are finally white, then white is steadily brighter until it finally turns red. But I know it is possible, because I can imagine it." (Wittgenstein, 1984, 75), "What if someone says: 'I cannot imagine what it is like to see a chair, but when I see it. Does he have the right to say that?'" (ibid, 77), "We tend to say that when we express an emotion to another, something happens in that case that we can never know. Everything we can get from him is an expression." (Wittgenstein, 2006, 300)

13. The pioneers of conceptual art from the very beginning tried to

replace linguistic patterns and verbal expressions with visual images and expressions, so that art could be freed from the abyss of illusion and imagination and fly on the wings of thought and wisdom (Sami Azar, 2017, 87).

14. In 1968 he wrote his famous three-part proposition, the content of which is very similar to LeWitt's sentences on conceptual art: "The artist may create the work. The effect may have been forged. The effect does not have to be made. Each is the same as the other and is in line with the artist's intentions. The decision on which one to make depends on the recipient at the time of receipt." (Marzona, 2017, 17).

15. A very important question that arises is to what extent the original works are related to texts about art and artists themselves? It is very difficult to answer this question because even if the answer is "sufficient", this "sufficient" cannot be defined. One cannot even be sure that an artist who has studied in the West for many years is aware of all the theoretical and philosophical backgrounds of conceptual art and its relation to language.

16. As we will explain later, this work uses language, but this artistic expression is not a reflection on the language. Language is chosen in this work to mediate concerns about martyrdom and death, but this mediation is not a reflection on language itself or on challenging the concept of art.

17. In these two works, the artist tries to express his concern about environmental issues and the issue of women in today's world. Although in these two works, conceptual art has been used in a homogeneous and mature way to narrate, but that aspect of conceptual art that questions art itself is absent.

18. The question is, if Joseph Kosuth's work did not exist, could it have expressed its concern about language? The answer to this question is probably no, because the work does not offer a new idea about language and art, and its main weakness is the lack of innovation.

19. This difference clearly means that in the West, for example, the process of questioning figurative art and the advent of abstract painting took decades. On the other hand, reacting to this formalist conception of art occupied the minds of artists for at least two decades. At the same time, in the course of Iranian art during one or two decades, the whole course of art history had to be quickly absorbed and understood.

20. Conceptual art is more intertwined with philosophy, thought, theory, and, finally, language than other contemporary art trends. In addition to updating the Persian language and introducing the Western system of thought, higher aspects of art and language must be translated into Persian in the true sense of the word. What is meant by translation here is not just the conversion of a text from European to Persian. Rather, it refers to a multidimensional process of absorption, perception, transferability, and the ability to expand and work creatively, without which it is difficult to produce art based on pure and genuine concerns that have a national or global reflection.

21. It is unreasonable to expect that an intertwined set of philosophical and artistic setbacks will be remedied over the years. This requires many years of continuous effort by a large number of thinkers and artists. If the process of contemporary Iranian art can be summarized in two dimensions of "concern" and "theoretical backgrounds", it is largely unjustifiable to marginalize the element of concern in contemporary Iranian art. Living in the West Asian region is fraught with complex and, in some cases, unique economic, political, and social contexts, and perhaps in most places the artist's claim to separate art from these three contexts leads to weaker results.

22. In Iranian conceptual art, we face issues related to environmental issues, women, working children, justice and sacrifice. Can it be said that this general concern is preferable to subjects like the work of 30+ group? What casts doubt on this preference are two fundamental questions. First, to what extent is this category of art related to the artist's own concerns, and to what extent, in line with market laws, is it related to the support of government institutions and a kind of insincere display, and how can this be recognized? The second question is whether in the mass of information of the contemporary world, the "concerned" representation of a work of art without addressing the details of the "theoretical background" is not equal to the same lack of representation? Through these two questions and the relationship between the dimension of "concern" and "theoretical backgrounds" in the conceptual art of previous decades in Iran, the need for further reflection on the subject of art and language is raised. In fact,

this is an opportunity to think multi-layered about contemporary Iranian art. It is also a challenge to strengthen the linguistic communication bridges between Western and Iranian art.

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