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## A Comparative Study of the Grid Geometry in the Urbanism and Painting of the Pahlavi Era\*

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### Abstract

**Problem statement:** During the Pahlavi era, the authoritarian modernization with the government support had included all fields of culture, art, and society. During this period, Tehran's morphology and spatial patterns have been gradually expanded that cause disregarding urbanization traditions of the Qajar era by replacing these traditions with the Modern urbanism, the painting also had surpassed the pictorial tradition of Kamal-ol-Molk's representation and adopts a Modernist approach. The study attempts to compare Modern painting and Modern urbanism in the context of modernization and the prevalence of Modernist approaches of the Pahlavi era from a new perspective. This parallel and interdisciplinary study represent events that have formed in the short moment of history based on the same theoretical foundations and have been the cause of the appearance of forms as well as the same content in urbanism and the painting of the Pahlavi era.

**Research objective:** The primary purpose of the research is a comparative study of similarities and differences of the dominating geometric pattern in urbanism and the painting of the Pahlavi era. But the overall purpose of this research is to form an interdisciplinary study, with the assumption that methodological and interdisciplinary study from a new point of view can lead to newer horizons and interpretations.

**Research method:** This essay based on Grounded Theory will examine two fields of urbanism and the painting in a descriptive-analytical view and with a comparative approach, and the grid geometry as a common formal principle will be studied in urbanism, as well as the works of Modernist painters such as Jalil Ziapour and Marcos Grigorian.

**Conclusion:** Modernization and the prevalence of artistic Modernism can be known as the cause of formation of the new form and the content in urbanism and the painting during the Pahlavi era. Attaining new interpretations of the paintings and commonalities between the two fields of urbanism and the painting, including separation from history, attention to the novelty and the New, as well as the prevalence of new forms are the findings of this essay.

**Keywords:** *Tehran, Modern urbanism, Modern painting, Grid geometry.*

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Tehran" under supervision of Dr. Mohsen Marasi at Shahed University, School of Art, in 2018.

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## Introduction and Problem statement

During the Pahlavi era, especially in the second Pahlavi period, Iran enjoyed the support of policy-maker institutions in Modern urbanism, architecture, and art. The transformation of Dar-ol-Fonoon's educational system to the University of Tehran, the transformation of Tehran of Qajar era to Tehran of Pahlavi, and the transition from the Kamal-ol-Molk's pictorial tradition to Modern painting are examples of Pahlavi era alterations. Urbanism, meanwhile, had an imperiously and elitist approach determined to the citizens by the sovereign, and the transformation of Tehran's image to a Modern and grid-plan city was not an event that aroused public sensitivity and was a matter of conflict and debate between two groups of Modern urbanism advocates and opponents. The Pahlavi ignored all the Qajar era and Tehran style urbanism achievements that were rooted in the Isfahan school<sup>1</sup> and which was like a European preindustrial city and created a city similar to modern American cities with a scattered, geometric, and grid urban fabric. Along with urbanism, Modernist painters, including Jalil Ziapour and Marcos Grigorian, had turn back on the Kamal-ol-Molk's representation tradition that encompassed the late Qajar and early Pahlavi eras. Although with the death of Kamal-ol-Molk and the founding of the College of Fine Arts, the dominance of Kamal-ol-Molk's pictorial painting had come over, but the beginning of Modernism movement have been known at the 1940s, with the returning of the professors like Javad Hamidi and a few graduates of the College of Fine Arts, such as Hossein Kazemi, Jalil Ziapour, and Mahmoud Javadipour who had gone Europe to continuing education. At this time, the painting had exempted from exhibiting in court palaces and exhibiting of it in the private galleries<sup>2</sup> in Tehran's Modern and grid urban fabric, had created a new link between the city and the painting. This paper deals with the linkages between the two fields, with a study of common grid geometry in Modern painting

and urbanism of the Pahlavi era. Examining grid geometry as a formal principle in both domains raises and responds questions such as: What are the similarities in form and content of the city and the painting of the Pahlavi era? And can the chequered geometric shape in the Modern painting be a representation of the grid plan urban fabric of Tehran of the Pahlavi? The necessity of forming such an interdisciplinary narrative, in addition to analyzing new points of view, can also be the foundation for addressing the sensitivities of the Post-modern era.

## Background

There were much research conducted in contemporary urbanism and architecture. "Modernity and its benefits in Iranian Architecture and Urbanism" (Saremi, 1995) was the analytical-historical study of architecture and urbanism of the three periods of Naser al-Din Shah Qajar, Reza Shah, and Pahlavi II. According to Saremi, urbanism of the second Pahlavi period was far more logical and rational than the architecture of this era, and the extremist and functionalist view of the second Pahlavi era made urbanism devoid of any human, artistic or historical factor. In the field of urban fabric, "The Study of the Impact of Neighbourhood Texture on Social Identity Focusing Neighbourhood Identity in Isfahan City" was an essay by (Gasemi, & Negini, 2010) that was a survey-based comparative study of social identity in the two neighborhoods of Abbas Abad and Mardavij of Isfahan city. The study of the Mardavij neighborhood of Isfahan, which had a grid urban fabric, indicated the sensitivity about quality of this type of urbanism in different parts of the country. There has been much research and study in the field of Modern painting and the stream of Modernism. "Modernism, Identity, and Tradition in Iranian Contemporary Painting", written by (Asaadi, 2010) was a descriptive-analytical study of the current trends in Iranian Modern painting. This paper examined three types of painting, including

of the Kamal-ol-Molk's, Modern Painting in line with International Language, and Modern Painting, which claimed the restoration of the legacies of ancients in today's format-neo-traditionalism."Contextual Analysis of Neo-traditionalism in Iranian Contemporary Art (1960s), from Foucauldian Discourse Analysis Perspective" is an essay by (Refahi & Sabaghian, 2017) that studied neo-traditionalism in the Iranian Modern painting by looking at keywords such as Westoxification (Gharbzadegi) and Reversion to identity. In this study, three discourses of institutions, intellectuals, and artists that have influenced contemporary painting have been examined (Esmailzade & Shad Ghazvini, 2017). In the essay "Discourses of "nationality" and their role in the development of Iranian Modern art trends in the Pahlavi era with an emphasis on art patronage institutions as mediators" they have studied the art of the Pahlavi era with a sociological approach. In this paper, have dealt with the modernization and development of modern and national art institutions, the establishment of the University of Tehran and other influential and governmental institutions. The authors of this essay do not regard Jalil Ziapour as a Cubist painter and consider his works as more of a regionalist exploration and pastoral pursuit and see the Modernist aspect of Ziapour's national and personal style only in the form. While in our paper, Ziapour is considered a cubist painter based on the theory of cubism. "The characteristics of audiences of Modern and Popular painting in Iran" (Ravadrad & Shayegan, 2013) is a sociological study about painting audiences in Iran. This essay with field research and surveying, examines the differences between the audiences of Modern and popular painting based on audiences individual, social and artistic characteristics. Based on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, the authors of this essay, consider Modern painting and its audiences having the following characteristics: The target audience has cultural competence. These artworks were equipped with concepts that go

beyond tangible properties and require cognitive empathy, and the characteristics of the popular painting and its audience: They did not have the necessary codes, the audience analysis stopping at tangible properties.

## Theoretical Foundations

### • Grid geometry and its representation in literature of the Pahlavi era

The policies of the Pahlavi era in the field of urbanism were to separate from Qajar urbanization and to form a Modern city. Thus the urban growth with the grid urban fabric was systematically pursued in this period. The demolition of the city walls in 1930 and the creation of new streets until the time of 1937 had been transformed Tehran a city beyond Tehran of Qajar era. In 1937 the first urban planning map of Tehran was developed which also focused on the urban growth. 1937 Map was influenced by the Modern architecture and urbanism movement and was prepared by French counselors. Grid urban fabric, the separation of urban functions by functional zoning were fundamental concepts of this map. Habibi states about it: "The map of 1937, which had provided with an alien mentality, depicted a city different from the historical background of Tehran. The modern city which had formed for an industrial and productive purpose like the Western cities, in this plan, was intended for the city of Tehran" (Habibi, 2017, 167). Modern urbanism was the dominant approach of Tehran's urbanism during the second Pahlavi era and in the Comprehensive Plans of the '60s and '70s. During this period, Tehran, inharmonic with the whole country, experienced an astonishing development and by bringing four and a half million people within the boundaries set by the Comprehensive Plan, it becomes a country within a county around 1976. At the time, the government demanded an identity of the society that was defined by purely external and western concepts, while society was seeking an identity that was rooted in internal concepts. Therefore, in

dealing with the issue of identity and the city, the state and society had involved in a philosophical confrontation and opposition (Ibid, 210); (Fig 1).

The state imperious modernization program of the 60s and 70s affected all economic relations, social institutions, and cultural forms of the country. So that traditional social structures, such as guilds, families, religious organization, and physical layouts in the urban centers that had undergone change, created severe tensions by resisting the modernization program. The Pahlavi’s modernization, without leading to changes in the structure of political power or cultural modernity, involved only some fields of the citizen’s life and the sovereignty, hence, many people felt alienated from it and in many cases, either resisted or even fought against it (Mirsepassi, 2014, 138).

Sadeqh Hedayat’s novel *The Blind Owl*<sup>3</sup> presents an image of a modern city with geometric, temporary, and gray shapes that can represent a kind of resistance to modernization: “The sun was already high in the sky and the heat was intense. I found myself walking along deserted streets lined with ash-grey houses of strange, geometrical shapes—cubes, prisms, cones—with low, dark windows. One felt that these windows were never opened, that

the houses were untenanted, temporary structures and that no living creature could ever have dwelt in them.

The sun, like a golden knife, was steadily paring away the edge of the shade beside the walls. The streets were enclosed between old, whitewashed walls. Everywhere were peace and stillness, as though all the elements were obeying the sacred law of calm and silence imposed by the blazing heat. It seemed as though mystery was everywhere and my lungs hardly dared to inhale the air. All at once I became aware that I was outside the gate of the city” (Hedayat, 1994; Quoted by Habibi, 2014, 93).

In the historical course, Ahmad Shamlou in 1959 compose a poem called *Alley (Koocheh)*, whose theme is also a critique of Modern urbanism, and in particular the grid-plan urban. Shamlou describes the grid urban designing as a scream from above and the prescriptive that people respond to it by shouting:

“Continuous atrial/ Between the two walls, and solitude with heaviness as an old man carrying cane passing through the silence atrium/

And then / the sunshine / and the diffract shadow, anxious and diffract / Houses / Houses of the House.

The people, and a cry from the above: The chequered city! The chequered city!

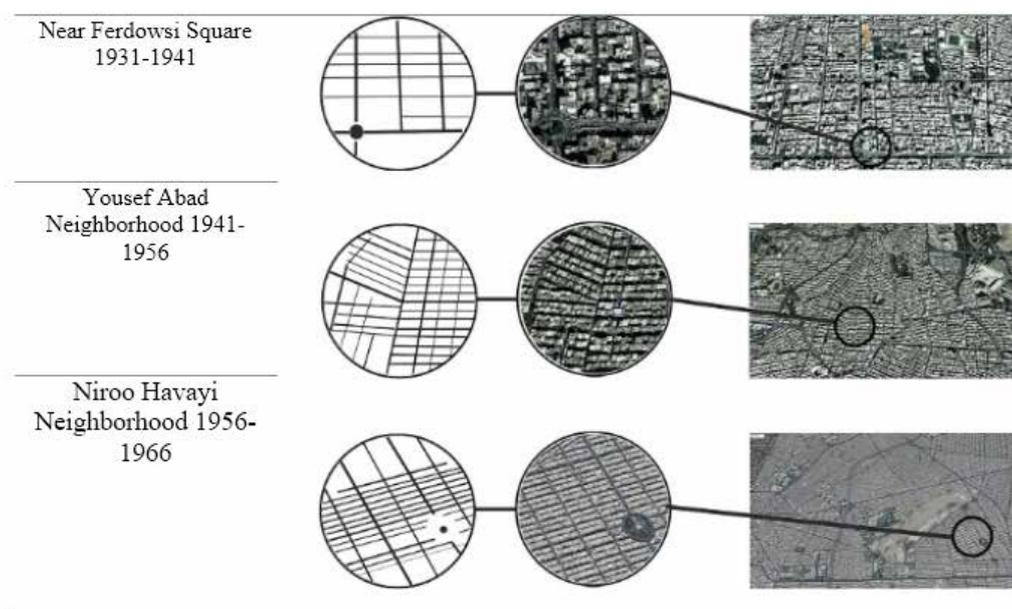


Fig. 1. The growth of Tehran’s grid-plan neighborhoods during the years of 1931 to 1966 Source: <http://www.googlemap.com>.

The two walls and the silence atrium. And then the shadow that respires of the downfall of the sunshine. People, and a cry from the depths:

*We're not a chessman! We're not a chessman!"*

## Research Methodology

This research examines and reviews information in a qualitative method and in accordance to the principles of Grounded Theory. In the Grounded Theory, the scholar checks in the data in a flexible and saturated manner so that discovering the new findings can be made possible to the scholar. A descriptive-analytical method with a comparative approach was used to conduct this study. Hence, first, in a qualitative manner, we discuss the status of Pahlavi's Modern urbanism and its representation in literature. Next, we have considered grid geometry as a formal common principle and will study the effects of Pahlavi's modernization in the fields of urbanism and painting. Then, taking into account the common principle of grid geometry, we will analyze the case studies of Modern painting—works of Jalil Ziapour's personal and national style and a series of Earthworks by Marcos Grigorian.

### • Grid geometry in Modern painting

Modern painting by separating from former pictorial traditions aligned itself with changing lifestyle in the society. Artists and audiences of art had gained a greater understanding of Modern art through the change in the educational system and the support of public and private institutions to the stream of Modernism. Accordingly, it had been possible to go beyond the pictorial tradition of Kamal-ol-Molk to the creation and viewing of the decorative works with different semantic layers. This transition from the tradition of naturalistic representation of Kamal-ol-Molk's to the works of Modernist painters such as Ziapour and Marcos Grigorian is a transition from pictorial theory to decorative theory (Delzende, 2017, 298). In the following, this paper will look at some of the works of these two artists in which grid geometry as a subject matter has a formal and influential component. Both categories

of artworks can be divided into the two image layers the grid pattern foreground and the background. The relationship between foreground and background in these artworks can give connotations of the controversy of the New issue with previous traditions. As in Modern urbanism by the complete destruction of the Arg district and the Qajar palaces, only the buildings of the Golestan Palace, Shams-ol-Emareh and Tekyeh Dowlat had been excluded from destruction by museum-like thoughts of the Modern movement (Habibi, 2017, 167). The backgrounds of these artworks can also represent Modern museum-like thoughts.

Jalil Ziapour and Marcos Grigorian have put ahead abstraction and the creation of the New issue in the following artworks and created decorative works with new forms using two-dimensional, non-perspective surfaces that are not pictorial and representational. Throughout the history of Modern art, the grid geometry has been a Modernist symbol, and in the works of Modernist artists such as Ziapour and Marcos, grid geometry will have an effect beyond a simple subject matter and being in the foreground and combining it with a museum-like background connotes a kind of transition from traditions.

### • Grid geometry in Jalil Ziapour's national and exclusivestyle

Jalil Ziapour was one of the pioneers of Iranian Modern art. Ziapour would consider cubism as the most comprehensive school of painting and was accounted it as an expression of the art's inherent need for explicit design, lines, and geometric surfaces. Ziapour in France was a student of André Lhote, a theorist of Modernism and Modern painting, who was widely known for a tendency to theorize Cubism in his writings (Keshmirshekan, 2017, 83). In its essence, Cubism painting refuses historical, narrative, sensational themes as well as emotional and personal perceptions and it only deals with geometric shapes and diagrams of objects. Cubists remove representations from painting and, using geometric shapes, make content and

form subordinate to their rational purpose. The Cubists had come to the conclusion that not only things should be seen in the holistic view, but also that the appearance of the shell had to be split and looked at inside. In fact, the Cubists would claim that conceptual realism and visual realism was not their aim (Pakbaz, 2016, 427). Concerning Modern painting, and transition from the Kamal-ol-Molk's representation, Ziapour stated: "Natural forms accurately were not able to translate the artist's perceptions and as they did not work well, the painters due to the need had to moderate the forms to express more comprehensively the subject. It is understood of the modification of these natural forms and their transformation into unnatural images that the painter seeks to portray other than the forms, and that the natural forms are no more than a pretext of insufficiency and weakness for portraying his souls... Artists inferred the changes on the natural causes and necessities and embraced taste, and so much more sought to bring the pictorial paintings to the stage of decorative paintings and add to the beauty of their purpose by mixing the two stage." Ziapour would consider the shift from the pictorial theory to the decorative theory by appealing to the Cubism, as the first step towards a path in which Iranian Modern painting would find its way through Cubist practices (Del-zende, 2017, 296). The national and exclusive style in the historical course of Ziapour's artworks is a point where he has abandoned the purely Cubist tendency of the works such as The Sepahsalar Mosque (Fig. 2) and has attained more personal achievements by taking a theoretical approach. The Ziapour's national and exclusive style can be seen as an attempt to achieve common conceptual realism in Cubism. These artworks of Ziapour (Fig. 3, 4 & 5) are attempts at the theoretical foundations of cubism, where the shell appears to be split and viewed within, and in parallel to the form, the content also enters into the work. The readable content of Ziapour's national and exclusive style works takes on a new horizon in this comparison to urbanism. With these

interpretations, Ziapour's national and exclusive style can be considered a type of theory-based cubism that, by creating foreground and background layers, the lack of pictorial representation, creation of new forms, readable content, and a new voice are offering for new audiences.

#### • Grid Geometry in Marcos Grigorian's Earthworks

Since about 1954 the Modernist ideas of Ziapour and The Fighting Cock Society had been given way to new voices, including Marcos Grigorian (Del-zende, 2017, 293). Grid geometry can be seen in Marcos's work on soil and cob (clay and straw) almost after 1961, and in the works of this artist by the name of Earthwork series. At this stage, viewing the world from the bird's-eye view appeared in Marcos's works (Figs 6, 7 & 8). Marcos has been looking at the earth from this bird's-eye perspective for a long time. He has said about it: "My Earthworks are of two categories. One is earthworks that propound the effects of the human hand on the soil. Human creates various patterns and lines on the earth to use the soil. Draws the line, digs line and creates a tunnel, and so on exploiting the earth. In all this, the effect of human hands on the earth can be seen. The second category is products that are close to the soil and the spirit of the soil can be seen in them. Like bread that depends on straw and wheat" (Parnian, 2015, 171). The artworks investigated in this research are of the Earthworks and from the first category. In selected artworks of Marcos Grigorian, the grid geometry of the foreground has been combined with the background of the cob and soil. The museum-like backgrounds of these artworks are made up of cob and Iranian vernacular materials. According to the artist's statements and in comparison with the common grid geometry in urbanism, these grid geometry foregrounds take on a new meaningful horizon. A grid urban fabric that was taking form, regardless of urbanism, socio-cultural infrastructure.

In this historic course of the presence of a grid geometry foreground on a museum-like background,

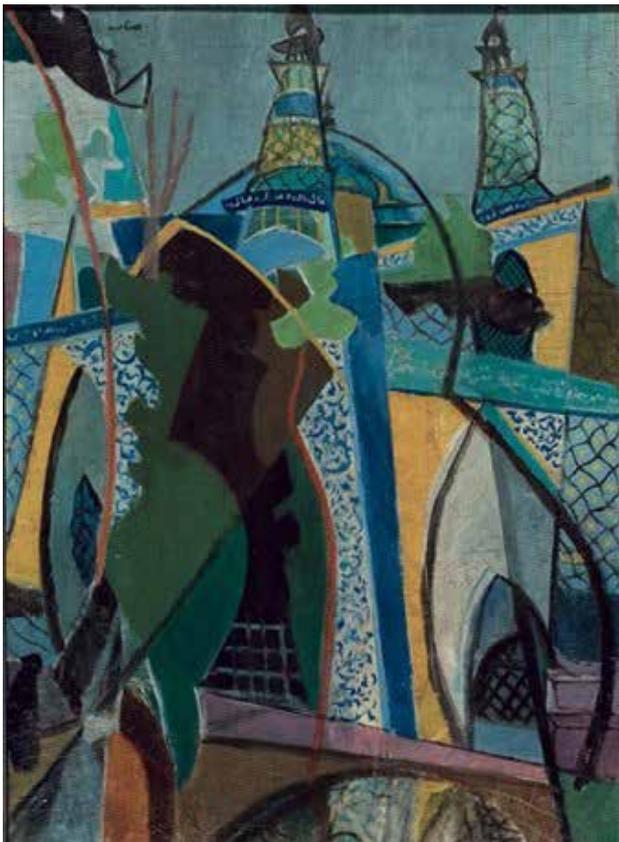


Fig. 2. Jalil Ziapour. "The Sepahsalar Mosque". - Cubist tendency of Jalil Ziapour. Source: Keshmirshakan, 2017, 82.



Fig. 4. Jalil Ziapour. 1963. "My man is binding Hina". Sources: <http://www.ziapour.com>.



Fig. 3. Jalil Ziapour. 1953. "A Kurdish woman from Quchan". Sources: <http://www.ziapour.com>.



Fig. 5. Jalil Ziapour. 1982. "Lur girl". Sources: <http://www.ziapour.com>

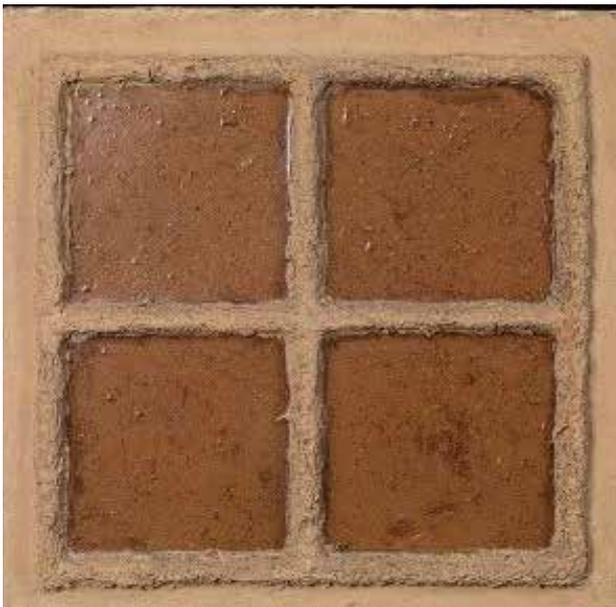


Fig. 6. Marcos Grigorian. 1974. "Four in one".  
Source: www.arthibition.net.

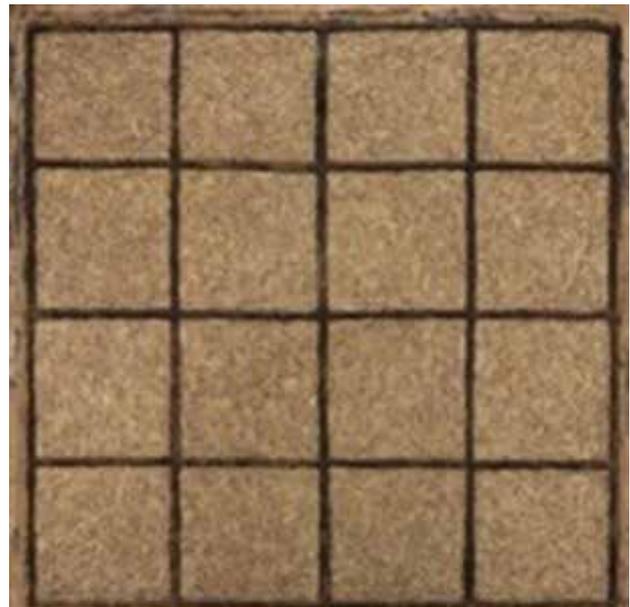


Fig. 7. Marcos Grigorian . 1979. "Earthwork".  
Source: www.arthibition.net.



Fig. 8. Marcos Grigorian . 1965. "Earthwork". Source: www.artnet.com

Jalil Ziapour has continued to use the medium of oil painting on the canvas to create indigenous figurative backgrounds, while breaking away from the pictorial traditions of Kamal-ol-Molk's. Marcos Grigorian, but, with the cob backgrounds—that is a kind of Iranian vernacular material—has separated

from the pictorial traditions of Kamal-ol-Molk's and the medium of oil painting on the canvas, and has taken the decorative approach one step closer to the conceptual approach that he would later become one of its leaders. As we have seen, during the Pahlavi era urbanism and the painting theoretically had come to a link. Both of these fields have associated with Modernist characteristics and there were some commonalities between them. In the study, which we reviewed, unlike Esmaeilzadeh and Ghazvini's research, which considered the cubist aspect of Ziapour's artworks only in form, the adaptation of this artist's work with urbanism opened a new horizon that extends beyond form and into some new content in Ziapour's works. Likewise, the artworks of Marcos Grigorian also take on new meaningful horizons in the adaptation with urbanism. Table 1 has put Modern urbanism and painting together and has dealt with the similarities of form and content in these two fields. Alongside that has formulated the commonalities of the grid geometry in the artworks of Ziapour and Marcos Grigorian.

### Conclusion

Modern painting, like Modern urbanism, was

associated with the separation of artists—or engineers and urbanists from the traditions and the demands of people, with the rationalism of Modernist aesthetics. Although the painting had come to the level of society from the Royal court, still needed its ideal audiences by following Modern elitism. The placement of the content alongside the form in the works of Modernist painters creates various semantic layers that needs the educated audience to understand better, so both artists were also art trainers. Given that the both Ziapour and Marcos have applied chequered geometry on indigenous and local—museum-like—backgrounds as the grid urban fabric grows in urbanism, it gives both categories of the works a common semantic load. The common approach to the form that also is coming to the common meanings in addition to being able to represent the city. The new city of this era like the painting was not a social city, it was a prescription from the superior position that did not pay attention to the traditions of urbanism such as the people-friendly neighborhood, the Bazaar, the town square. Tehran of

the Pahlavi era, with its grid plan fabric neighborhoods, right angle and straightforward streets, actually have made mobility and transportation a priority and was no longer characteristics of the former social city. In the Modern City, the street had disrupted the traditional form of the Bazaar, and traffic-decorative squares such as Ferdowsi Square had replaced the city gates. In the context of grid geometry of the city, these approaches create new content out of speed and mobility in the modern world in the new forms that completely were passing away the prior urban design traditions. The grid geometry foreground of the works of Ziapour and Marcos Grigorian’s can also be considered as a modern and common geometry in urbanism that has had a reaction in the literature as we read in this period. In the comparison that was viewed, such a critical horizon can be observed in the paintings studied. The museum-like backgrounds of these artworks can be the same traditions, cultures, and perhaps forgotten prior city that was influenced by Modernist grid geometry and must be crossed.

Table 1. Similarities of Modern Urbanism and Modern Painting - A Comparison of the Grid Geometry in the Works of Ziapour and Grigorian. Source: Athour.

Modern Painting	Modern Urbanism
	
<b>Similarities</b>	
Separation from the past and Kamal-ol-Molk’s pictorial tradition )Elitist and needs to educate the public (Genius originality of the painter	Separation from the past and the Qajar city Elitism and the City Made by Engineers (Genius Originality of (Urbanist)
Using indigenous characteristics to construct an Iranian version of Modernism	Museum-like attitude and preservation of several buildings from the former city
Attention to Motion, Straight and Geometric Lines and Tendency to Abstraction and the Use of the Grid Geometry	Prioritize vehicles by building straightforward streets and grid urban fabric
Separating from popular painting and the representation of Kamal-ol-Molk’s	Separating from the social and people-friendly city and people’s popular culture
A common feature of selected works by Jalil Ziapour and Marcos Grigorian	
The tendency to abstraction/ Separation from the past and Kamal-ol-Molk’s pictorial tradition /No need for the real subject /Use native and local elements in the background /Grid geometry foreground /Museum-like background /Following the elitist approach/ The transition from visual realism to conceptual realism /The presence of readable semantic layers in the work/The proportionality of form and content /Affected by Modern aesthetic theories /Being up to date and aligned with art history /Scheming new ideas with the new era /Creation of the new forms	

## Footnotes

1. Isfahan became the capital of a powerful government in the year 1597 C.E., which for the first time since the advent of Islam, by unifying the Shia Iranians, had founded the first independent national state. Therefore, the capital of this government should have been a symbol of independent national sovereignty and its unifying religion. Isfahan's comprehensive renovation program transformed the city into a model of urbanization in the Safavid government and even beyond in neighboring countries. The program was developed under the supervision of Sheikh Baha'i, a prominent mathematician, and philosopher of Isfahan Theological School, and was implemented over the following decades.
2. After his return from Paris in 1949, Ziapour founded The Fighting Cock Society along with a group of modern and avant-garde poets and painters - Taleghani Street (former Takht-e-Jamshid Street) - and Apadana Gallery at the beginning of the Bahar Street. Also in 1954, Marcos Grigorian had founded the Aesthetic Gallery in Ferdowsi Square.
3. This novel was first published in 1937.

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