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### Original Research Article

## Statement in the Contemporary Iranian Painting from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis (Case study: Painting Exhibitions in Tehran Azad Art Gallery between 2006-2016)\*

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### Abstract

**Problem Statement:** The exhibition statement is one of the linguistic modes separate from the work, which, along with the visual mode of the works in contemporary art exhibitions, forms a multimodal discourse. Linguistic and visual modes interact in the form of a single discourse to achieve a unified goal. Statements today are an important part of the process of creating, reading, or shaping exhibitions, especially in situations where conceptual implications outweigh aesthetic meanings. Therefore, one of the new issues in contemporary art is the function of exhibition texts and notes and their relation to the visual mode of artistic discourse. What is the function of these texts? What is the relationship between this part of the language mode and the visual mode in the exhibition and how are their roles related to the functions of the statements?

**Research objective:** The purpose of the present article is to examine and classify the additive relationships of the linguistic mode to the visual mode in contemporary Iranian painting.

**Research method:** This article pays attention to the main function of statements through a qualitative study and to this purpose, we examined solo painting exhibitions in the Gallery of Free Designers in the period of 2006-2016. The theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis was used to extract and classify linguistic (statements) and visual relations in the fabric of contemporary painting.

**Conclusion:** An effective statement can enhance the image by adding details or enhance it through elaboration, and most importantly, it can extend the visual mode. These additive relations conceptualize the visual mode, which is one of the most important functions of the statement as a linguistic mode and moves towards an integrated communication and interdisciplinary formulation that is the result of the process of mode relations.

**Keywords:** *Multimodal discourse analysis, Written language, Statement, Contemporary Iranian painting.*

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## Introduction and problem statement

The two modes of language and image are in a long historical relationship with each other, and while there are similarities, there are many differences. Although these two modes are not completely equivalent and do not coincide with each other, in contemporary art, the two are combined in works and exhibitions and are placed next to each other. Lack of compatibility and adaptation of language and image is not a reason or obstacle to avoid them in creating, holding, and interpreting works; Rather, this connection already exists and in order to understand contemporary art, we must approach it from this perspective. Artworks are intertwined with text<sup>1</sup>, and therefore mediators have a decisive role in creating and receiving works.

The relationship between contemporary painting and language has expanded over time especially in relation to modern visual arts, which have shown resistance to language. "Modern artists objected to the use of words to interpret images, arguing that if the viewer wanted to praise a painting, let him learn the language, color, shape, texture, and space, rhythm and harmonies, not the text and the title" (Symes, 1992, 23). The attachment of the linguistic mode to the visual mode in contemporary art not only shows the breaking of this resistance, especially about a classical medium, namely painting but also, with the awareness of its temporal, spatial, and media conditions, painting has created a struggle between the aesthetics and the concept. The conflict between image and language can also be equated with drawing a clear line between the arts and their contrast in the modernist tradition. But in contemporary art, this line is intertwined in what Michael Fried calls Theatricality (or theatrical mode) in the necessary combination of visual/linguistic codes in a theatrical play. He believes that anti-modern or postmodern art (that is, what Fried called literal art) achieves this theatrical orientation through the use of language. Contemporary art is in the middle of the arts with intermediate empiricism. This has been described by Craig Owens as the eruption of language into the field of visual arts, indicating that postmodernism is a barrier between vision and language in terms of its explosive collapse (Mitchell, 2020, 20).

As a result, visibility or purity and reading, are placed side by side rather than facing each other, and a change of direction from the creation of a painting and aesthetic image leads to the creation of a semantic and conceptual network.

One of the manifestations of the expansion of the visual mode of painting and language in the use of language as a conceptual sign, is in the form of being attached to the work and also separated, as titles of works and exhibitions, and also as attached written notes including statements. In this way, the contemporary painting resists the imagery refinement and object-centralization and expands its grounds. Perhaps in contemporary Iranian art, especially in media such as painting, from which absolute aesthetic expectations are still expected, there is resistance to such an impure view. On the other hand, considering the linguistic eruption, we are faced with a variety of exhibition notes in contemporary art. Therefore, addressing this issue scientifically can clarify the position as well as the dark and obscure points of this issue and help the actors in this field, from artists to the curators and the organizing institutions, to create an exhibitory semantic network. The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between language separated from painting in the form of statement and image and its examples, using the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis (MDA). This study attempts to answer the following questions: a) what is a statement and how does it work? b) what do the examples of the modes of language and image in the statement and painting have to do with each other?

## Theoretical foundation

### • Multimodal discourse

The concept of discourse in multimodal discourse is rooted in the functional and social meaning of language. From the point of view of thinkers like Van Dyke, discourse is the concept of using language in a specific context (Dyke, 2008, 16). He considered speech first and then writing. Other modes, such as imagery as well as their connections, were added to the approach after criticisms of the mere linguistic view of discourse studies. This opens the door for discourse analysis

to address the issue of synthetic modes. There is a consensus among most discourse analysts in believing that they should “consider the relationship between language and image in their analysis” (Jurgensen & Louise, 2016, 111). Some believe that the connection between discourse and the concept of multimodality has occurred specifically in the works of Kress and van Leeuwen. (They owe this approach to Roland Barthes’s ideas on the relationship between language and image). Kress cites cases such as visual journalism, captioning for documentary and news photography, and archiving works as examples of multimodal discourse (Kress, 2010, 79). Halloran, one of the theorists in this field, considers multimodal discourse studies, studying language in combination with other sources such as image, music, gesture, etc. (O’Halloran & Smith, 2010, 2). Jewitt also defines multimodal discourse analysis as an approach in which communication is beyond language and includes forms of communication and the relationship between them (Jewitt, 2009, 14). Therefore, discourse analysis with this combined feature and proximity would not be limited to the one-dimensional study of language and writing and pays attention to the system and network of multimodal coding and the relationships between modes; Modes that, with the help of different semiotic sources, form the semantic process, thus creating a suitable format for examining multimodal discourses in specific contexts and situations. For example, in the field of contemporary art, where the linguistic mode is more visible in its main body, and in the overlap with the visual mode, which is the main distinguishing feature of the visual arts, it forms a multimodal visual and linguistic discourse.

In the multimodal discourse of contemporary art, the discrete linguistic mode can broadly include the titles of works, exhibitions, statements, and on the other hand, the artist’s diaries, correspondence and letters exchanged between him and others, interviews, lectures, and critiques about the visual mode. This means that even if the language does not accompany the visual mode materially, it is still surrounded by a linguistic flow and thus affects its reading and perception. As “interviews and lectures by artists are at the same level

of the work of art and even expand the linguistic part of the art” (Garrett-Petts & Nash, 2008). Other forms of linguistic modes, such as statements, can clearly play the same role, creating broader formulations and visualizing, shaping, and presenting new combined visual and linguistic knowledge.

#### • The linguistic mode of the statement

The word statement has a detailed meaning, but as far as the field of art is concerned, it has been translated into ‘declaration’, ‘testament’, or ‘proposition’, and recently the phrase ‘exhibition note’ has been added to other expressions in Persian language. Experts and critics of contemporary Iranian art each prefer one over the other for some reason. Some also insist on using the word in its original form, ‘the statement’. All of these words represent a single meaning; A text about works of art that plays a role in communicating and understanding them, because it carries with it information that is related to the context of the work of art. Therefore, this article does not specifically emphasize the use of one over the other. Propositions such as the title of the exhibition and works as paratext can be a threshold and entrance to the world of works. In metaphorical form, a proposition can act as an introduction or preface to a book.

When hung on a gallery wall, the statement (or “didactic”) becomes an invitation, an explanation, and, often indirectly, an element of the installation itself. When statements are published alone or among other linguistic modes, they present different narrations of the pieces. Yet the visual arts community nonetheless employs artists’ statements as key liminal documents, as writing that both directs the viewer’s gaze and indirectly announces or affirms the artist’s rite of passage. Artist statements are palimpsests, presenting, in words, a narrative or argument apparent beneath or overlaying, or in some kind of proximity to each principal visual representation. As public documents, what artists say or write about their own works is inherently interesting. Their words, their statements, may provide us with unique insights into their practices and the statement is an articulation of the artist’s aesthetic position, free of intervention by an art critic bent on interpretation (ibid., 2008). Many biennials, galleries, and awards

now require propositions, and art schools around the world have educational proposition writing units.

In a 2010 study, two experiments were designed to examine the effect of a statement on receiving works of art (both representational and non-representational). The findings of this study show that primarily statements can affect how the effect is evaluated, and in the next step, a general question cannot be asked about how the statement affects audience perception. Instead, one should search for particular characteristics of a statement whose prominence manipulates the audience's perception of the work (Specht, 2010, 201 & 202). Interestingly, in this study, participants interacted with non-objective works more than representative works after reading their statements. The author of this article believes that if a visual experience is combined with a properly formulated statement, the artist will have a better chance of communicating with his audience, whether individuals or galleries, biennials, etc. Thus, it can be concluded that statements not only convey information but can also evoke the emotions of the audience. Stimulating the audience will cause more conflict, friction, and interaction with the presentation, and it creates a kind of connection between the artist, the audience, and the rest of the art world. Since the relationship between the two modes of language and image in this article is ran through the framework of multimodal discourse analysis, we will discuss it in the following.

#### • **Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA)**

To study the multimodal discourse of painting - the separate linguistic mode of the statement and the pictorial mode of the painting - it is important to use a framework that can examine the relationships between the modes. As mentioned, multimodal discourse analysis considers the relationship between modes in the process of constructing a semantic network as the most important analytical component. In this approach, communication methods, both visual and verbal, are integrated; None of them are irreducible and none can take up the other's place. In fact, the modes do not overlap but are present in a complementary role together.

Given that multimodal discourse analysis is a very new branch that has branched out from discourse analysis, a

clear framework for the analysis of multimodal discourses and the interaction between modes has not yet been formed; As is seen in most studies with this conceptual and theoretical framework. But based on what has been interpreted in this field since its inception, two of the main approaches in shaping it can be distinguished. The first approach remains loyal to its roots and traditions in Hallidayan systemic-functional linguistic (SFL). The second approach is not limited to these boundaries and goes beyond them; Although in terms of methodology, it uses SFL tools but seeks to discover the manifestations of truth by considering the critical mode. These two approaches are not in conflict with each other but complement each other and in some cases overlap with each other (Constantinou, 2005, 603 & 604). This sub-approach is currently an example of a combination of other methods of discourse studies that are used in accordance with the research problem. In this article, a combination of McCloud's theories about the relationship between text and image, as well as Martinez and Wu's method, which is rooted in Halliday's approach, is used to study the relationship between linguistic and visual modes.

The text/image relationship in a multimodal text can be studied in terms of the relative contribution of each mode to the construction of meaning. McCloud categorizes text/image relations into equal/unequal participation of modes in meaning as follows, and represents a general view about the balance between literal-visual meaning.

Word-Specific: Images describe but do not add significantly to the text

Picture-specific: Image is paramount and words do not add significantly to the meaning of image

Duo-specific: Words and images basically send one message

Additive: Words reinforce images or vice versa

Parallel: Words/images follow different paths without intersection

Montage: Words act as an inseparable part of the image

Interdependent: Words and images both state the same meaning which each cannot convey solely (Wu, 2014, 1416).

Apart from the word-specific relationship, which is not

consistent with the duo-modal discourse of painting, other relationships can be traced in it. There is a relation of montage in works that use language in a way that is attached to the work and is used as a part of the work. Among the present relations, the one that is most related to the role and function of the separate exhibition language is a part of the fourth relation, where language strengthens the image. Expansion is one of the fundamental inter-clause relationships that Halliday addresses, and it can be extended to McCloud's additive relation. "Halliday's inter-clause relationships are abstract enough to be extended to the relations between text and image" (Martinec, 2005, 342). Scholars have considered the multimodal texts of the paragraph as each of the modes and have examined this relationship between linguistic and visual modes. Here the painting image and the separate linguistic text (statement) are each considered as separate paragraphs. According to the definition of the statement, the relations of linguistic mode with the image in the context of the exhibition situation are of the additive type. In a painting exhibition, we consider the visual text as the first paragraph/ mode and the statement as the second paragraph/ mode. However, in chronological order, this relationship can be reversed. This means that language can exist before the image and be attached to the work, or in the process of creating the work, it can be written and placed in a semantic connection with it. On the other hand, reading order of the audience can be different and they can each choose one before the other. But for a duo-modal study of the composite text of the exhibition, it is necessary to consider a specific order. The additive relation of the second paragraph, the linguistic text, expands the first paragraph, the visual text, and is achieved in three ways: Elaboration, Enhancement by description, and Extension by adding new items.

Elaboration is possible through exposition and exemplification. In the exposition, the image and text describe each other by retelling or modifying the meaning in each of the modes. Of course, each of the modes, namely the linguistic and visual elements, achieves this in different and unique ways. In the second type which is exemplification, the text or image serves as an example or allegory for another. The addition of details may be

defined as a similarity relationship between semiotic modes in such a way that no new element of thought is introduced by language or image. However, the meaning in this section is not simply repeated or copied, rather details are added to the first text (McCloud, 1994, 154).

In enhancement relation, a paragraph adds to another's meaning by qualifying it through reference to time, place, behavior, casuality, and condition (Wu, 2014, 1416). The type of extension is also divided into two subsets of augmentation (resonance) and divergence. In resonance, the image or text adds new meanings to another mode and in divergence, the speculative meaning of a text is different or even contradictory to another meaning. This concept also applies to cases where the meanings are contradictory. In this way, it can be said that a multimodal text conveys three meanings in this regard: the visual, the linguistic, and the third ironic meaning, which emerges from the differences between the first two (ibid., 1416-1418). Divergence is opposed to the convergence of meanings, corresponds to McCloud's "parallel composition", and is used for expression where words and images follow different paths and directions without intersecting with each other. At this stage, the basis and status of the two modes towards each other lead to equality and independence. Additive subsets are different in different sources according to the case under study. This study has also expanded the subsets to the point where they can be used to construct a study model. Types of these relationships can be traced in the multimodal discourse of art, including painting. Relationships can play a role simultaneously and with a different share in a composite text. Statement functions can be summarized in the additive relation. A summary of additive relationships, their types, definitions, and examples are given in Table 1.

## Literature review

The present research is divided into two parts: first, the studies related to the analysis of multidimensional discourse, and second, the scientific studies in the field of exhibition statements. The multimodal discourse analysis approach was developed mainly after 2000 with the works of linguists such as Van Lyon and Kress. The famous book of these two authors entitled "Reading



Table 1. Types of additive relationships in multimodal discourse analysis. Source: Authors.

Relationship	Types	Definition	Examples
Additive	Elaboration	Adding details	Exposition, Exemplification Reference to time Reference to place
	Enhancement	Describing by	Reference to behavior Reference to causality & condition
	Extension	Adding new items	Resonance, Divergence

Images: The Grammar of Visual Design” (Kress & Leeuwen, 1996), became the influencer. The authors of this book address non-verbal modes such as the image and examine the social function of signs in the form of social semiotics.

Further studies were carried out based on their theoretical model, such as an article entitled “Interacting with the Multimodal Text: Reflections on Image and Verbiage in Art Express” (Macken-Horarik, 2004). In this article, the author has used social semiotics to read two photos with their accompanying writings in a photography exhibition, which is similar in subject to the present article. But the closest examples in terms of the methodology are the articles “A Multimodal Analysis of Image-Text Relations in Picture Books” (Wu, 2014), and “A System for Image-Text Relations in New (and Old) Media” (2005), which borrow from Halliday’s theories to develop a practical framework for analyzing the relationship between language and image in picture books as well as new and old media, some of which we have used in the theoretical method of the article.

In Persian language articles, multimodal discourse studies are much less discussed than other sub-approaches. In some cases, such as the article “Interdisciplinary Tendencies in the Analysis of Critical Discourse from Theory to Practice” (2019), only a general reference has been made to it. In the field of art, the articles that have used this sub-approach are mostly focused on the study of graphics and animation and different theoretical methods. The article “Analysis of Multimodal Discourse in Reducing Tehran’s Environmental Crises: A Case Study of Tehran Municipality Environmental Banners and Billboards” (2018) is one of these examples. In this

article, Ghiasian and Vandhosseini used the method of Cheong (2004) to analyze the samples, which is also rooted in Halliday’s approach. It should be noted that none of the articles used either the relation between the linguistic mode of the statement and the work of art, or on the other hand, the desired theoretical framework.

In the second part of the research background, the article “Artists’ Statements Can Influence Perceptions of Artwork” (2010), can be noted for examining the effect of statement on evaluation and perception of the artwork. As mentioned earlier, this article only mentions the persuasive function and clarification of the meaning of the image by the statement. Tom Palin, painter and art teacher has published his 123 statements that were written in 21 years in the book “Tom Palin: Artist Statements 1992-2012”. In general, these writings serve to explain or expand the visual mode or move in parallel with them. In the introduction to this book, Dr. Michel Belshaw divides the meaning and characteristics of the statements according to several fixed themes, including the subject, the process, and the distinction between the artist’s private and public statements.

In studies and scientific currents in Iran, except for some courses on statement writing and conferences with the same subject, we can refer to “Ketab-e Hafteh”, which in collaboration with the Association of Visual Critics has assigned a number to statement. This issue in the form of several separate articles on the what, why and functions of the statement and some reasons for its emergence in contemporary Iranian art, as well as studying and classifying about 300 statements in a year and several galleries, deals with their pathology and presents statements of artists from the western art history

as examples. In this collection, the relationship between modes has not been specifically considered by the authors. Apart from the above-mentioned cases, we have not encountered any scientific articles in Persian that study “statement” in relation to the visual mode in contemporary art until the point of writing this. The present article uses the background achievements in defining the statement and its roles in the field of contemporary art, as well as the concept and theoretical framework of multimodal discourse to study the function of this type of linguistic mode based on the theoretical framework, and considers the relationship between the linguistic text of the statement and the visual text of painting in the form of an additive one.

### Research methodology

This fundamental study describes and analyzes what statement is, its functions, and its role. It also provides the Multimodal Discourse Analysis framework for extracting the communication components of language and image, as well as their classification in the context of contemporary Iranian painting. This is done through study, observation, and collection of documentary information and exhibition archives of the Free Designers Gallery during the second half of the 2000s and the first half of the 2010s. It should be noted that the two decades mentioned have seen a multimodal turn in contemporary Iranian art and painting more than ever before. The Free Designers Gallery has been active in the mentioned period, and its landscapes have been compatible with contemporary manners of expressing, including the language policy of art. On the other hand, unlike many galleries, it has uploaded a relatively complete archive in terms of the number of works, mentioning their identity cards, including the title of the works and, most importantly, the statement of each display on its own site. From the exhibits in the gallery site and in the desired period (230 exhibits), 75 solo paintings along with their statements were reviewed, and among these, 6 exhibits were purposefully selected in line with the research issue. The selected exhibits were examined for the statement and its relationship with the visual mode in the context of multimodal discourse analysis.

### Research findings

#### • Statement functions

The most important function of a statement is to conceptualize artworks so that the audience can read the works in that field. Therefore, this linguistic mode “can be a valid and constructing complement for the artwork” (Liese, 2014). In other words, the proposition provides a platform for the types and possibilities of reading works. “In a world full of images, for us to be able to reflect on an image, we need to create a platform for it” (Ruhbakhshan, 2018, 33) and the statement in exhibition is one of the most important tools to create a common ground with the audience; Especially in that part of the context of contemporary art that deals more with ideas and the field of signification, than with the objective senses and the realm of modern aesthetics. In this case, the work needs a context to form a network or semantic system; Statements are very effective in building this context.

Communicating with the audience does not simply mean that the proposition helps answer questions about the work, but that “the statement, while informative, forms questions in the audience’s mind. They can also try to find personal answers by creating turbulence in the mind” (Sharifzadeh, 2018, 21). Creating a question is one of the most important reasons for the existence of this linguistic text, and its possible answers are provided by the audience partly in the works and partly in their minds. The statement, on the other hand, answers some of the questions about the visual mode and thus is effective in the perception of the audience from the works. In the surfacing of perception, the features of the visual mode are overshadowed, and in deepening of perception, the statement helps to create a multi-layered connection. The balance between answering and creating more questions is important in statement writing. The statement, on the other hand, emphasizes individuality, here the individuality of the artist, in addition to conceptualizing the work and its role in the audience’s interpretation; Especially if it is written by the artist. “The period of reproduction and multiplication, the period of escapism from the common categories of modernity, and the period of

reproduction of artists everywhere and all the time, and the period of all-are-artists, took the opportunity to formulate the group statements common in the modern period. The rise of the media has taken away the opportunity to categorize artists, human categories that have always been criticized from the perspective of poststructuralists like Foucault” (Khankeh, 2018, 9). The media and their ways of presentation and the themes in contemporary art are very diverse and different, and the individual mode is more prominent; Therefore, the need for a statement is felt more. Because the audience’s interaction with the works is part of the process and the use of language facilitates this interaction and conflict.

What makes a work of art seem like more than its constituent material is the intersubjective process between the creator and the audience of the work of art. The process by which a work of art acts as an intermediary. In this process, sometimes the creator of the work, even after finishing it, looks for a way to transmit his ideas to the audience. Thoughts that in many cases are not even visualized in the visual phenomenon. Statements, propositions, and peripheral texts provide the tools for this process for the creators and exhibitors of artworks (Khalil Nejad, 2018, 46). In this way, the linguistic mode puts the visual mode in a process, and on the other hand, the linguistic mode becomes a part of this process and display of works itself; The boundaries of the display expand and conquer new areas.

#### • Statement in Contemporary Iranian Art

Audiences of contemporary art, including contemporary Iranian art, are confronted with statements in different ways. For some, reading a statement only happens when they cannot relate to the meaning of the works, even slightly. They want to think beforehand and communicate with the work independently of the proposition. If this goal is not achieved, they use the option of language. Some continue to insist on the pure modernist tradition of the visual matter, while others emphasize the linguistic mode of the exhibition regardless of its function. Before considering the main point, it is important to distinguish between the statement and the artistic manifestos (declaration) that were prevalent in the modern period, while having similarities. Because the statement relates

to a collection of personal works; Even if it is written on a group exhibition, it ultimately relates to the small collective works of artists in that particular place and time and a common subject and theme. However, art manifestos had polemical features and also covered a wider range of artists.

One of the pre-experiences of manifesto writing in modern Iranian art goes back to the “Khrousi Jangi” Association, which was established in 1948, and was founded by Jalil Ziapour. The motto of the association was this verse by Farrokhi Sistani: “It became old and a legend, the tale of Alexander / bring a new word that new is sweetness” (Ziapour, 1989, 84). This slogan established a multimodal network of meaning with the name of the association and the main purpose of the group which is “Confrontation with the old style and context common in art and literature” (Monfared, 2014), and represented a large number of modern artists of that time and the characteristics of their works. The second round of the association began with changes in the members, with the artistic and literary statement of the “Salakh-E Bolbol” association in thirteen paragraphs. “The art of the battle rooster is the art of the living,” the statement said in part. “This rooster will silence all the voices that lament at the tomb of ancient art” (ibid.).

Some questions and answers from artists were published in the special issue of the art of painting in Gardoun magazine in 1991. The question was: Most people find the visual language of painting more difficult and even more ineloquent than the written language of literature. If the comparison of these two types of languages is correct, what is your opinion as a painter about this? Most of the respondents in that poll believed that the problem of relating to painting, especially modern works, was mainly due to the visual language being unknown in our society, which requires teaching this language at different levels (Pakbaz, 2019, 50). Some experts have found the historical reason for Iranian artists going to proposition writing in this feature. “Modern art in Iran seems narrative-less and sometimes meaningless, a trend contrary to the conventional narrative of Iranian art” (Khankeh, 2018, 6) as the narrative and the media of literature in Iranian art has been very important. For



this reason, short writings were sometimes placed next to modern paintings (contrary to features of modernist art) to establish a connection between the audience and new works in terms of visual language. If we consider these writings as the first examples of the statement in Iran, they caused the narrative to enter the visual art once again, or in other words, the borders of language and image were blurred. However, it is not clear to us that today's statements are the result of this predictive process or of following a new trend in contemporary art on a global scale.

In the study of statements in contemporary Iranian art, we encounter a wide range of their types in terms of form and content. Some of them are placed on the wall of the exhibition and some of them are printed only in catalogs. A number of others are provided to the audience in a single sheet. Propositions can range from short sentences to long text that looks like an article, from very clear to complex text, from independent text to related and referenced one and from very personal to historical and social text. Sometimes propositions are written by the artist himself and sometimes by others (who are aware of the process of creating works or are unaware and merely write to provide legitimacy for the exhibition or the name of the person in question).

The language of the exhibition has undergone changes not only quantitatively but also qualitatively and in terms of content. The titles of works or exhibitions, as well as propositions, have changed in terms of content as they become more complex. Arbabi and Malek in their study on 13 galleries in Tehran have concluded that: "If the text of the catalogs can be related to the motivation of the audience/buyer, a kind of theorizing effort can be clearly seen. Previously, in the few cases where brochures were published, these texts used to be simply resumes and biographies of the artist, now they are more complex analyses about contemporaneity, fragmented mentality, extra-introversion, and so on, which usually show off the author more than the work. Perhaps these are effective in making the work and the sales important" (Arbabi & Malek, 2016, 698). The complication and the theorizing and the movement from simplicity to complexity are among the strategies that

are sometimes used consciously or unconsciously by the artist or the institution in charge of presenting works. These strategies are carried out through eloquent and complex sentences or in-text references and numerous sources in the linguistic part of the multimodal discourse, including statements as well as catalogs of contemporary art,

Given that there is no definite way of writing statements, if we know what a proposition is not, we can understand its nature even more. One of the types of propositions that can be seen in Iranian exhibitions is the explanation and description of a collection of works or each of them, and even their interpretation. These propositions, not only do not add a new item to the image, creating a duo-modal image-specific discourse but also reduce it. This reduction has consequences; "The most important thing is that it closes the way to any effort, discovery, and intuition in understanding the artwork on the audience and is opposed to getting and being interpretable". Another result is that the artwork is reduced to the illustration of an idea" (Naseri, 2018, 16). It is as if the work of art leads to only a definite and final meaning, and since it has not been able to express it, the proposition intends to reveal the hidden meaning of the works. This method can have other causes besides the lack of mastery of the proposition writer over the features of the proposition. "The order of the gallery owner or the curator about understanding the work and, of course, this type of statement writing is more justified in the economic market of art when communicating and understanding the work becomes a very important matter in attracting the buyer" (ibid.). The advertising aspect of this writing, sometimes in the form of complicating and sometimes simplifying the presentation of art as a commodity, cannot be ignored.

In a study, Khalilnejad analyzed about 300 artistic statements written on domestic exhibitions in 2016 and summarized the identifiable issues in this field study as follows: omniscience, poetry, the form conditions governing the work, misuse of quotes, complex and confusing language, special attention to the stages of creation, and revealing technical methods. On the other hand, unconscious concepts and the image

of the contemporary world have been among the most widely used words and concepts in statements (Khalil Nejad, 2018, 40-50). From the perspective of the present article, simplicity or complexity, more or less references, being short or extended, and ... are not in themselves to be criticized as long as the mode of language is able to add to the visual text through discourse relations and place it in a semantic network.

### Statement in Contemporary Iranian Painting from the Perspective of Multimodal Discourse Analysis

#### • (review of the solo painting exhibitions in Tehran Azad Art Gallery between 2006-2016)

In this section, we will study cases by selecting painting exhibitions in which works as a visual mode and statements as a linguistic mode interact in an interconnected network. As can be seen in Table 2, out of the four painting exhibitions (and of course all 11 exhibitions held and archived in other mediums), only the statement of one exhibition was written, while in 2016 all solo exhibitions (and in fact all 27 exhibitions) have a statement. From these cases, those exhibitions and works are selected that can be used to answer the question of the article.

In the gallery site archive, the first statement is related to video art by Rozita Sharaf Jahan (2003) entitled "Maybe the light is in another direction" and the first statement on the painting exhibition is related to the exhibition "Dreams" by Hamed Sahihi (2004). In the proposition of this exhibition, the artist repeats the keywords of sleep, memory, and also dream, as if he has written a description of the visual mode of his works, which depicts twisting and rolling figures in space with a surrealistic context. But the first statement in the period under study is related to another exhibition by Hamed Sahihi (2006) entitled "Dreamed" (Fig. 1). The surreal atmosphere connects his collections. The dream and the subconscious, as the two driving forces of the creation of works, are the narrators of the story, but in terms of the simultaneous and co-location characteristics in the practice of dreaming, they seem to present a distorted narrative. Roads with unknown beginnings and endings, placement of

miniature human figures in space, integrated structures with indeterminate uses, etc. The status of this exhibition in two parts forms the context for reading the works: the first part adds details to the visual text by describing and mentioning extra examples: "When dreaming [...] places and images are formed when the brain makes a decision or suggests where we are; If before opening the door, we think that behind the door is a beach full of people, after opening the door, the beach will be on the other side". In the second part, the work process is described. "From random points without a predetermined plan, places begin to form, and at other points at the moment of awakening, the act of painting stops". The artist's statement in this exhibition adds only details after the description corresponding to the painting, but it still has a lot of overlap. This means that reading or not reading it does not play a significant role in the process of its meaningfulness or re-reading. Since the beginning of 2006, with the increase in the number of nominations and the writing of statements on exhibitions, addition of more or fewer details to the visual text has been widely used in multimodal discourse analysis and is still widely used.

Salman Khoshroo presented a collection of paintings in an exhibition entitled "Protagonist" in 2014, displaying the torsos of people (men and women) in various poses (Fig. 2). Poses that relative to their models are sometimes simple and sometimes complex, and along with the type of staring, clothes, and other details, they reveal a part of their identity psychologically. But since the models belong to a specific age group, a sociological context can be considered for the works. The title of the exhibition as a special name in Greek means champion or main hero; the main character of the story in Greek classics who was at the heart of action and conflict with the opposite character or antagonist; The protagonist in ancient Greece was called the main speaker in an argument. The stylistic features of the visual mode, especially next to the title of the play, form a wide field for reading; from the glorious portrayal of the human body in macro-narratives to the portrayal of modern man as it is in micro-narratives. But by considering individual characteristics in the works in relation to the linguistic mode of the display in the

Table 2. Number of solo painting exhibitions held in the Free Designers Gallery and the years 2006-2016, and the number of exhibitions with a statement based on the exhibition archive of the gallery website. Source: Authors.

Year	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Number of solo painting exhibitions	4	4	10	8	8	5	10	7	16	13	10
Number of exhibitions with statements	1	1	4	3	7	4	8	4	13	11	10



Fig. 1. Hamed Sahihi, Untitled, 2006, from the collection of dreams, Acrylic on canvas, 160×140 Cm. Source: <http://azadart.gallery/fa/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?id=20>.

nomination of the works and the statement, the field of reading becomes more limited and deeper. Paintings took the names of their subjects such as Salman (artist's own name), Rana, Sahand, Shima, and ... thus emphasizing their individuality. These works will have different meanings for the artist, his models, and those who know these people and other audiences as there is no reference in the mind of the general audience to match the name, icon, and reference. But from another perspective, the representations together can represent the human soul as a whole and the representation itself. Beyond the technical and representational capabilities of the works, the statement adds details to the works by elaborating the subject. On the other hand, these works are exemplifications of the general title of the exhibition and statement.

The statement of this exhibition begins with the phrase "The narration of the first role", which points out the meaning of the title of the exhibition and can be divided into three parts. The second part is the verbal description

of the works: "The canvases contain bodies that have been drawn in their actual dimensions and are frozen in a moment of behavior and contemplation". The third part describes the stages of the exhibition: "I planned this collection to both learn the history of art and discover the method of this media". The main part of the statement is the first part, which, with the help of the questions it raises, adds more details to the visual text than any other relationship, and thus explains the main idea: "Are we just interested in our individual narratives? Or are there larger narratives that have multiple central characters? What is the opposing force in these narrations or who is it? Is opposition necessary for narration? If the controversy in art and narrative is very attractive, but in the real world it has serious consequences, and the question is to what extent we seek to adapt the world of narrative with the real world?". These questions, along with the names of the works as well as the unique characteristics of each work based on the characters displayed, help the visual mode not to be reduced to a purely representative process and to form new relationships between the individual and the collective in the constant communication of linguistic and visual modes in this multimodal network.

In the middle of the decade under study, enhancement is slowly added to the addition of details, and exhibition writing takes on a more prominent role in interpretations; For example, in the exhibition "Clowns do not have children" (2009). The visual representation of the title can be examined in one of the works of this collection (Fig. 3), a clown is listening to a sentence (the same as the title of the exhibition) from a character in a style similar to comics. This collection, like other works by Eskandarfar, expresses the bio-artist in the social



Fig. 2. Salman Khoshroo, Sara, 2014, from the collection of Protagonist, Oil paint color on canvas, 140×100 Cm, Source: <http://azadart.gallery/fa/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=38>

context. The works depict parts of human and animal figures separately and sometimes in combination with each other, including writings that have replaced part of the visual mode. “Thinking about unknown and long grief, often with sad and uneager faces, are the subjects of Samira Eskandarfar’s paintings and (videos). In fact, she shows the visual expression of grief, sometimes by adding humor and a sense of emptiness to it. From this point of view, socio-political interpretation becomes one of the inseparable features of her works” (Kashmirshakan, 2015, 311). As stated in the display statement, the subject of this collection is based on mutual human feelings with emphasis on the issue of gender, but the difference is that they narrate the deeper and more unconscious layers.

In the relatively long statement of this display, which is the kind of ‘other-wrote’<sup>6</sup> ones, the main part resembles a pseudo-article about the history of photography and its influence on the arts, because the painter in this

exhibition used photographs to create her works. In the second part, this collection and related issues such as “gender” are specifically discussed, and through this, the linguistic text enhances the image through historical references and adds details to the visual text. In the explanation of the use of writing in the works, it is stated: “because of the using text in this collection of the painter and her previous ones, an interesting phenomenon occurs at the moment the audience sees the work. First, the audience sees the painting, where he/she cannot read the text beforehand, as the painting usually shocks the audience and displays itself to them very fast. Thus, texts usually have complementary functions and come in last. Here is when the second chock happens, because there is always an unpredicted statement appearing in the text”. In this text, the complementary role of language to the image is emphasized, of course, the language that is connected to the works. The statement itself plays the same complementary role to the visual text.

The next example is the “Black Forest 2” exhibition (Fig. 4). This title refers to its pre-text, the “Black Forest 1” exhibition (Fig. 5), which is also mentioned in the text of the statement. The three concepts of nature, architecture (in other words, geometry), and abstraction, as well as the importance of texture, can be traced also in the new collection. The difference is that the design behavior in small dimensions has reached large works and paintings. Comparing the two images, the geometry that shaped the texture and form of the work (see Fig. 5) has become its general body in Fig. 4. In Black Forest 1, the name of the collection is associated with the visual mode: “This collection is a pre-thing before it being anything. In other words, looking and touching fully happens when the thing-being of the whole thing has not yet arrived; Like a stranger in a black forest”. The description of the image in the Black Forest 2’s statement has enhanced the visual mode by referring to the causality and conditions of the formation of the collection; The reason for empiricism, for choosing the technique, for the importance of form and ... “I owe the value of ‘empiricism’ to Pablo Picasso more than anything. Picasso is the first person who taught me ‘the possibility if art occurring anywhere’ lesson”.





Fig. 3. Samira Eskandarfar, Untitled, 2009, from the collection of clowns do not have children, Acrylic on canvas, 120×100 Cm, Source: <http://azadart.gallery/fa/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=170>.



Fig. 4. Javad Modaresi, untitled, 2016, from the collection of Black forest 2, Acrylic on canvas, 200×250 Cm, Sources: <http://azadart.gallery/fa/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=249>.

Perhaps some of the propositions were initially written merely following the relations of contemporary art, and found a decorative role, not in the necessity of creating and presenting works, but through rhetoric and the addition of small details, the omission of which did not interfere with the reading of works, or their existence did

not add more implications to the image, but with changes in the ideas and concepts of creating the work, as well as awareness of the role of the statements, they became an integral and effective part of many exhibitions. Statement of “Shakh Bazi” exhibition (2014) is one of these examples (Fig. 6). Regardless of the text of the exhibition, we are faced with works like little out-of-shape flowers and chickens. The statement begins by defining the phrase “Shakh Bazi” which means “Debate with the intention of destroying the opponent” and then intensifies the meanings of the visual text by extending it to a different context from what is perceived at first glance. The statement reads: “In this display, you are looking at foils used to smoke heroin, which is a group project that started last year [...] the aim this time is to cover up the truth, to hide the burned heroin on the foils and turn them into an acceptable image by drawings and prints of flowers and chickens, decorative elements similar to the existing reality of the society”. The idea-oriented and research-oriented nature of these exhibitions have necessitated the existence of a statement, and language thus have transformed the visual experience. According to Duchamp, “language added color to objects by complicating the visual experience with the help of non-pictorial forms, and also through semantic content by applying changes to them that change our cognitive relationship with the visual form of objects in complex ways” (Osborne, 2016, 24).

Elaborating on the relationship of extension, some exhibitions are not idea-oriented, but still have a statement for the extensive role. In reviewing the types of statements, some of them are quotes or parts of books. This excerpt from the pretexts creates an intertextual relationship with them. At first glance, this type of writing cannot be considered the artist’s statements, because it is not written by him/her or by the curator who was in the process of developing the idea until the creation of the works. But selecting and placing it in the new context as an exhibition note creates a new semantic network. As happened in the exhibition “Nowhere” (2014) by Mohammad Khalili (Fig. 7).

Gigantic stones in a vague, dusty, gray space, and sometimes miniature humans in the distance, or a sign



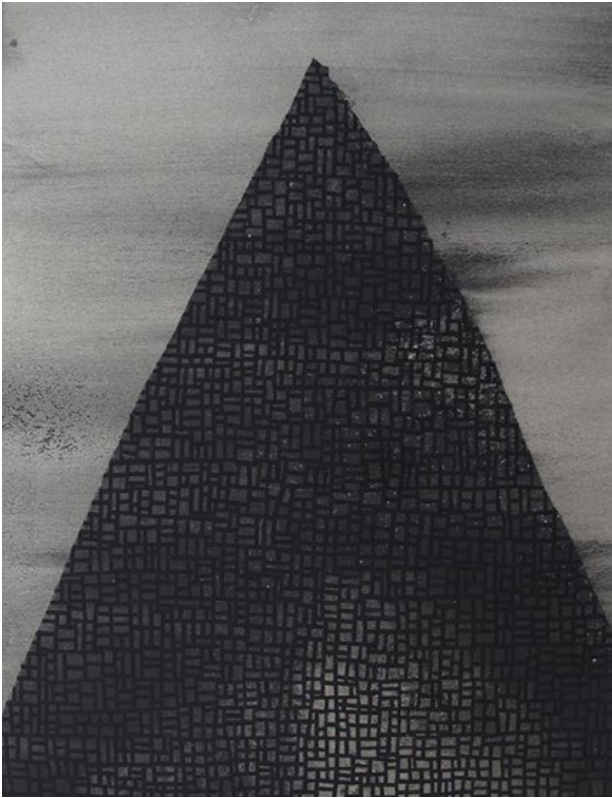


Fig. 5. Javad Modaresi, untitled, 2015, from the collection of Black forest 1, Ink, Gouache and pencil on Paper, 35×25 Cm, Sources: <http://azadart.gallery/fa/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=102>.



Fig. 6. Farid Jafari Samarghandi, Untitled, 2014, from the collection of Shakh Bazi, Digital print and painting of foil, 14×12 Cm, Source: <http://azadart.gallery/fa/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=51>.

of them, like a car, have formed a space on the border between fantasy and reality and nature and culture in this collection. In an interview about this dual, Khalili said: “Sometimes we feel that the space of those paintings is

far from reality, but sometimes we feel that there may be such spaces in reality. Usually, the starting point of my work is reality, but I gradually go towards the point of fantasy and ambiguity. I always keep this border and I never completely detach from reality” (Khalili, 2018). The exhibition statement is selected from a part of the book “Texts for Nothing” written by Samuel Beckett. A part of the statement reads: “I know, no one is here, neither I nor anyone else, but some things are better left unsaid, so I won’t say anything. Elsewhere Perhaps, willingly, elsewhere, could such an infinite place have another place?” The relationship between the written mode and the works can be considered as an example of a duo-modal discourse with a divergent relationship. The text is relatively independent of the image and is juxtaposed from two different contexts in a newly integrated text, but the common word “nothing” in the title and in Beckett’s writing as one of his most important works in literature alongside the concept of silence and the inactivity, as well as the visual correspondence of these concepts in the works, has created a creative and meaningful intersection between the modes. Table 3 summarizes the relationships between linguistic and visual modes in some of the multimodal discourses of the paintings discussed.

Adding new items is the most important role of language mode in the statement in relation to the mode of the image, and can conceptualize the collection of works by creating different references from the image. This function goes so far as to make it difficult to find the intersection of the two visual and linguistic modes. In a way that they become more independent of each other and their overlap decreases. Extension of the visual text to the point where it becomes a form of divergence by itself cannot be considered a positive or negative feature. What defines its function is the way it communicates with the visual text. According to a group of experts, the linguistic mode of the exhibition cannot achieve such complexities and must always serve the visual text. As seen in repeating instructions for writing this type of text to the extent that it has been compared to a meal that wants to invite people to the table because of its aroma (Gordon, 2008). Similar patterns begin



Fig. 7. Mohammad Khalili, 2014, untitled, from the collection of Nowhere, Acrylic on canvas, 130×180 Cm, Source: <http://azadart.gallery/fa/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id= 54>.

with artists' anxiety in writing propositions and, by encouraging them, present their rules, all of which are almost identical (Liese, 2014). These templates even include the number of words, the number of paragraphs, and the topics that should be described in each section<sup>9</sup>.

But if we look at it from another angle, namely the presence of the statement in the process of creating and perception, the role of the linguistic mode seems more prominent and makes it possible to interact differently with the visual mode. As Petts and Nash write in their article "Visual Review": "The proposition of the artist enters the semantic field differently, complements, conceptualizes, creates contradictions, adds, extends, or moves towards artworks and exhibitions" (Garrett-Petts & Nash, 2008). In addition to the established definitions of the statement, that is, complementary role, contextualization, and addition to the visual mode, they also refer to the creation of a contradiction to create meaning through the divergence between the visual and the linguistic mode. On the other hand, absolute convergence, which means the linguistic translation of the image, to mere divergence, meaning the lack of communication between the modes, is also present in many statements and they are criticized due to the increasing role of language in relation to the image. But the important point is that the two modes of language and image in relation to interdependence and together in the form of a multimodal discourse determine the idea

or ideas of the artist. It seems that no matter how much artists use writing, not only according to writing patterns, to evoke superficiality or fashion, but also as a way of recognizing and presenting differently, they are moving towards a creative interdisciplinary formulation; The network that results from the process of the relationship between the two and their differences. This method creates new ways of seeing, understanding, and engaging with concepts and meanings, and thus the writing process itself can become part of the art collection and destabilize the assumptions about the image, especially in the modernist form, form new questions and different types.

## Conclusion

"Language in use" is part of the diverse meaning of discourse that is considered in this article. Concepts of discourse and multimodality are linked in the sub-approach of multimodal discourse analysis and pay attention to the multimodal encryption network and the relationships between modes; Modes which interact with each other to carry out the process of semantics. This results in a suitable format for the study of multimodal discourses in a particular context, including contemporary art. In contemporary art, the two modes of language and image interact at different levels, and the synthesis of multimodality has established a connection between the two modes of language and image, between which a distinctive wall was erected. In this way, the visual mode and the aesthetic mode, as well as the linguistic mode and the rhetorical mode, are intertwined and work together to achieve a goal. Statements in exhibitions of contemporary works of art, including painting, display linguistic and visual collaboration in the form of multimodal discourse. In this discourse, the linguistic mode separate from the work of art (Statement) creates a broader formulation than the single work of art and forms integrated knowledge.

The most important use of this linguistic text is to conceptualize the visual mode and to create a balance between creating new questions and answering possible questions. At the same time, it emphasizes the individuality of the artist and the process of creating,

Table 3. Multimodal discourse analysis of the painting exhibitions’ statement, Source: Authors.

Relationship	Types	Cases	Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Statement
Additive	Elaboration	Dreamed exhibition, Hamed Sahihi	Adding details to the visual text by exposition and exemplification
		Protagonist exhibition, Salman Khoshroo	Adding details by exposition of the subject
	Enhancement	Clown do not have babies exhibition, Samira Eskandarfar	Combination of adding detail and enhancing the image through historical references
		Black Forest 2 exhibition, Javad Modaresi	Described by reference to the causality and conditions of collection formation
	Extension	Shakh Bazi exhibition,	Extension of the visual text to a different context and enhancing it by adding new items
		Nowhere exhibition	Enhancing the visual text and divergence towards the image

presenting, and reading works. The linguistic mode puts the visual mode in a process, and on the other hand, it becomes a part of this process and the display of works. In this way, the viewer’s gaze is no longer pure, and in fact, he/she becomes the reader/viewer, and in this way, he/she is encouraged to interact multimodally with the work and create more interactions.

Based on the theoretical framework, the study attempts to examine and classify the linguistic mode separate from the work (statement) in relation to the visual mode in contemporary Iranian painting. Considering the functions of this linguistic text, the most basic type of relationship is to add to the visual text in interaction with the linguistic mode by elaborating the image, i.e. exposition and exemplification, and describing the image in reference to time, place, behavior, causality and condition. It is also possible to add new items visually in different types of augmentation and divergence. Some propositions have only the role of elaborating the image or in other words, reproducing the visual text in the form of linguistic text. This role, which has not yet become functional, precedes the additive relationship. In the sense that language does not add anything to the image; And in some cases, it even limits the meanings. Over time, the language of propositions finds an additive relationship, the types of which were examined in the form of six exhibitions in the Gallery of Free Designers in Tehran.

In this regard, changing and modifying the meaning in the presence or absence of language has a decisive role. These changes include a wide range of additions of very little details, to the descriptions of the visual mode by reference to hypertext or extra-textual signs, as well as its extension, which have an important role in giving a historical, theoretical, philosophical, conceptual and ... context to the visual mode. The extension of the visual mode by language is considered as a way of different recognition and presentation, and leads the multimodal artistic discourse towards interdisciplinary networks; The network that results from the process of the relationship between the two. This method creates new and creative ways to see, understand and engage with concepts and meanings.

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**Endnote**

1. Prior to Barthes, the concept of text included only written works. Roland Barthes paves the way for us to get rid of the realm of writing in the old sense that goes back to Plato (Ahmadi, 2002, 49 and 50). Barthes did not distinguish between written recording and spoken expression, or even visual expression. He considered text to be a very general meaning of human communication in the form of various written, pictorial, musical, and other signs. Therefore, the work of art itself is also a text, but we here mean a kind of text, that is, a written text.
2. Translator’s note: Meaning “Book of the week”
3. Translator’s note: Meaning “Battle rooster”
4. Translator’s note: Translation is provided by the translator of article,



since no published translations of the poem were found.

5. Translator's note: Meaning "The slayer of Nightingale"

6. Translator's note: for the lack of a better equivalent, this phrase was chosen, meaning that someone else wrote the text.

7. Translator's note: Meaning "Battle with horns"

8. Translator's note: The sentence is translated from Persian to English and does NOT represent the source text written by the author Samuel Beckett.

9. 26 Jennifer Liese, in her article "Towards the History and Future of the Artist Statement" mentions the artist Nick Fortano, who, in order to critique such guidelines, designed an online project called "Artist Statement Generator 2000" in 2010. He asked the participants to fill in the blanks by answering questions about cartoon characters, favorite museum and ... and receive the statement by pressing the submit button!

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