

## Original Research Article

# A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Manifestation of Cultural Values and Idealism of the Principlist Era in Contemporary Iranian Calligraphy-Painting (Case Study: Fajr Visual Arts Festival)\*

Jamshid Mollapour<sup>1</sup>, Asgar Javani<sup>2\*\*</sup>, Alireza Khoddami<sup>3</sup>

1. Department of Art Studies, Faculty of Research Excellence in Art and Entrepreneurship, Art University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
2. Department of Painting, Faculty of Visual Arts, Art University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
3. Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Islamic Azad University, Jahrom Branch, Jahrom, Iran

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## Abstract

**Problem statement:** This research aims to study the ideological influences of one of the significant social practices of the Art of the Islamic Revolution, namely the Fajr Visual Arts Festival during the Principlist era, and the manifestation of its cultural values in the characteristics of contemporary Iranian Calligraphy-Painting. The importance of this period in the history of Iran's cultural developments lies in its efforts to revive and return to the ideals of the Revolution. Therefore, the reflection of cultural values in the discursive structures and the systematization of this event as a crucial institution of ideological regulation and the discursive realizations of the festival are evident and worthy of study.

**Research objective:** The objective of this research is to explain the cultural values emerging from the Principlist era as manifested in the works and statements of the Fajr Festival, which have led to the systematization of this festival as a discursive tool during this period.

**Research method:** This study is developmental in terms of its objective and employs a descriptive-analytical method of analysis based on Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach. Data were collected through purposeful, non-random sampling from statements, discourses, interviews, documents, and selected works of this festival. The statistical population consists of documents and selected works from the editions of the Calligraphy-Painting section of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival.

**Conclusion:** The findings of this research indicate that contemporary Calligraphy-Painting in the editions of this festival not only reflects the identity-based, cultural, and ideological elements of the Principlist era but also serves as a discursive tool for consolidating and reproducing cultural and political values.

**Keywords:** *Critical Discourse Analysis, Calligraphy-Painting, Contemporary Art, Art of the Islamic Revolution, Cultural Values*

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\*\*Corresponding author: 09132888870, a.javani@aui.ac.ir

## Introduction

The period known as the Principlist era began with the formation of the ninth government and the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on June 24, 2005 (3rd Tir 1384 AH). Within this era, discourses

of justice-seeking, alongside efforts to revive the values and ideals of the Revolution, were articulated around the pivotal role of “Velayat” (Guardianship) and concepts such as “justice-expansion,” “compassion,” “material and spiritual progress and excellence,” and “service delivery” (Akhavan Kazemi, 2009, 204). The formation of this political current in Iran’s post-Revolutionary cultural sphere and its discursive construction is recognized as a form of return to revolutionary values following the Reconstruction<sup>1</sup>. In effect, the general policies of the Islamic Republic system were revised during this period, and efforts were made to reproduce the discourse of revolutionary and cultural values from the first decades of the Revolution in a new form, regarding them as indicators of enduring cultural values<sup>2</sup>. This political and cultural shift was markedly observable in cultural policies and efforts to produce visual arts works within the official discourse of the Islamic Republic. Endeavors to organize the cultural current influenced by these values materialized within certain cultural events of this period. Among these significant and influential events on the discourse of the aforementioned period was the holding of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival starting from 2008 (1387 AH). An important point that underscores the general approach of this research is that the festival serves as an instrument for consolidating the dominant and hegemonic discourse. This paper seeks to examine the discursive construction of this important event as an instance of cultural efforts to reproduce the aforementioned ideals, through an analysis of the reproduction of cultural values in the Fajr Visual Arts Festival during this period. Furthermore, this study focuses on the Calligraphy-Painting works of this festival as one of the notable modes in post-Revolutionary visual arts for conveying the message of the Revolution. The research problem, in fact, is to explain the discourses manifested in the statements, speeches, and the organizational structure of this event as a manifestation of the discourse of return to revolutionary values during the first to fifth editions of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, relying on Norman Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis method.

## Research Background

Amani et al. (2021a), in their article “The Change of Meaning in the Discourse of Contemporary Iranian Calligraphy from the Perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis,” assert that Iranian Islamic calligraphy benefits from the backing of the divine word, cultural heritage, a treasury of wisdom, mysticism, and literature. In confronting modernism and rival discourses, it has undergone a change in meaning in the process of transferring meaning among social actors, especially contemporary artists with a calligraphic inclination. This has led to its separation from its function and dignity in some cases, transforming it into a mundane and trivial element. In another study, Amani et al. (2021b) in their article “Islamic Calligraphy as a Symbol of Resistance against the Westernization Process (Based on Postcolonial Studies Theory)” consider two fundamental factors effective in the reasons for the resistance of Islamic calligraphy against the Westernization process: social conditions and the quest for identity resulting from a postcolonial perspective, which, through a return to the self and the theory of resistance, has protected the calligraphic tradition from colonialist and cultural imperialist thoughts. Ali Mohammadi Ardakani and Pazhouheshfar (2015), in their article “An Analysis of the Representation of the Traditionalist Approach in Calligraphy-Painting Works of the 2000s (1380s AH) in Iran,” assert that Iranian Calligraphy-Painting in the 2000s was influenced by the traditionalist approach. The author in this article examines how the traditionalist approach influenced Calligraphy-Painting works in Iran during this decade. This research, with a social approach, attempts to show through which components these themes have been reflected in Calligraphy-Painting, and some recurring indicators in the works are represented as signs of the concept of tradition in these works. Ahad Ravanjoo (2022), in his article “An Inquiry into the Iranian Modernist Art Movement in Calligraphy-Painting (Based on the Tendency toward Traditional and Modern Art Aspects)”, by

examining the formation of Calligraphy-Painting in contemporary Iranian art, has shown how artists reached a modernist movement in Iranian art by combining elements of traditional Iranian calligraphy and modern visual art approaches. Furthermore, Moridi & Taghizadegan (2012) in the article “Discourses of Iranian National Art” have examined how the cultural policies of power systems affect the concept of national art and the flow of art production in Iran. By employing the analytical method of Laclau and Mouffe, and concepts such as articulation, nodal point, and floating signifiers across three discursive periods, they have demonstrated how artists reproduce the dominant discourse and create different forms of national art. Additionally, Moridi et al. (2013), in the article “Discourse Analysis of Art in the Geopolitics of the Islamic World”, while re-emphasizing the methodological approach of Laclau and Mouffe, focus on nodal and floating signifiers and the articulation of modern art in the Islamic world. Emphasizing the commonalities of cultural resistance discourses, they have identified the discourse of modern Islamic art emerging from the Painting Biennials of the Islamic World as the most successful discourse in each region in terms of potential for “globalization.” Tanhaei et al. (2010) in the article “Discourse Analysis of Middle Eastern Art: A Study on the Formation of Artistic Rules in Iran’s Painting Society” have examined the formation of artistic rules in contemporary Iranian painting. Critiquing the limitations of the style theory in analyzing modern art, they emphasize discourse analysis as an alternative approach. Utilizing a discursive approach, they have examined the four rules of the formation of a discourse—namely unity of theme, unity of expressive styles, unity of the system of concepts, and unity of strategy—in Middle Eastern art. Also, Meysam Yazdi (2017), in his doctoral dissertation titled “Critical Discourse Analysis of the Organization of Contemporary Iranian Painting after the Islamic Revolution with a Focus on National and International Painting Festivals and Biennials,”

divides the painting movement after the Revolution into two discourses: an official quasi-liberal discourse and revolutionary tendencies. He believes that both currents, for reasons such as lacking a roadmap based on indigenous and contemporary theories, an instrumental view of artistic events, and the politicization of festivals, have led to a deep cultural blockage in Iran’s official contemporary art. Raheleh Ehsani Qomishloei (2020) in her Master’s thesis titled “Critical Discourse Analysis of Contemporary Iranian Painting from 1997 to 2005: A Case Study of the International Biennial of Contemporary Painting of the Islamic World” argues that the Islamic Revolution, by creating profound transformations in the power structure and the rise and fall of various political currents, also altered the value system of society and cultural and artistic productions, leading to the formation of various artistic discourses. Considering the aforementioned research, the distinguishing feature of this study is its focus on analyzing ideological influences on the organization and systematization of visual arts festivals as an important institution of ideological regulation in the history of the Revolution. This can provide insight into understanding some of the most important social and political transformations of this significant period in Iran’s history.

## Theoretical Foundations

### • Calligraphy-painting as the manifestation of modern art discourse in iran

Calligraphy-Painting, as a contemporary approach<sup>3</sup> in Iran’s visual arts, is the result of a conscious synthesis of modern painting techniques and Persian calligraphy, the primary and notable prototypes of which can be found in the Qajar era (Fig. 1). With the advent of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 (1304 AH), the tendency towards pre-Islamic history and civilization gained more support and was adopted as part of the cultural policy of this period. This policy, as part of the modernization process adapted from the West, sought to establish a link between this process and historical traditions and ancient

glories (Keshmirshekan, 2014, 15). During the reign of the first Pahlavi, Calligraphy-Painting did not make significant progress and even declined. However, in the time of the second Pahlavi, a movement known as the Traditionalists emerged. The artists of this movement, deeply influenced by the intellectual, social, and political atmosphere of their time, endeavored to establish a connection between the visual heritage of the past and the modern and contemporary artistic language. After the coup d'état of August 19, 1953 ( 28 Mordad

1332 AH), with the consolidation of Mohammad Reza Shah's power and the establishment of a kind of political and economic stability, the general policies of the government shifted towards modernization and expanding relations with the West. Nevertheless, they continued to emphasize ancient nationalism. Therefore, in the realm of official art, it was necessary to both keep pace with modern artistic developments and, on the other hand, represent Iranian identity (Figs. 2 to 4) (Pakbaz, 2016, 65).

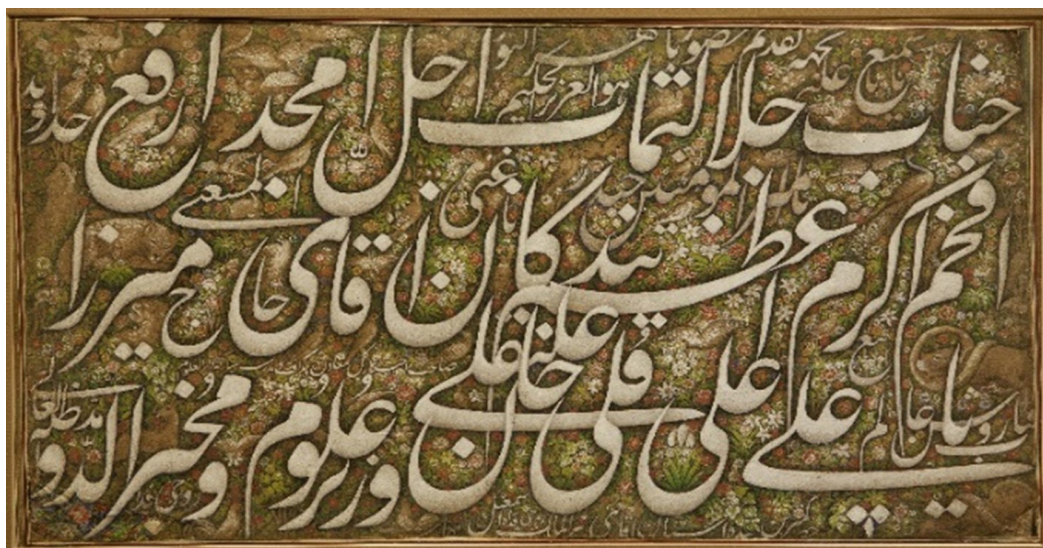


Fig. 1. Example of Calligraphy-Painting by Esmail Jalayer. Source: <https://sadmu.ir/detail/5322>.



Fig. 2. Calligraphy-Painting from the Saqqakhaneh School by Faramarz Pilaram, 1976 (1355 AH), Location: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Source: Keshmirshekan, 2014, 138.

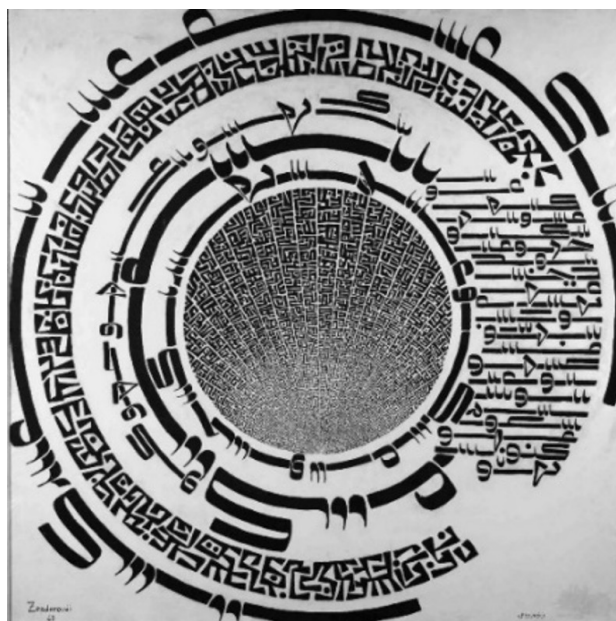


Fig. 3. Calligraphy-Painting from the Saqqakhaneh Movement by Hossein Zenderoudi, 1963 (1342 AH), Location: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Source: Keshmirshekan, 2014, 134.



Fig. 4. Modern Calligraphy by Faramarz Pilaram, 1970 (1349 AH), Location: Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Source: Keshmirshekan, 2014, 175.

#### • Calligraphy-painting and the art of the islamic revolution

With the victory of the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1978 (1357 AH), “the challenges arising from modernization during the Pahlavi era led to a rapid and abrupt transformation of traditional values within Iran’s religious society and threatened those values. This issue gave rise to new crises in various spheres of Iranian society, particularly at the level of national identity. In response to these

crises, the Islamic Revolution, by drawing upon the foundations of Shi’i political thought, introduced a new discourse concerning national identity” (Zohairi, 2005, 36).

In the field of Calligraphy-Painting, due to the particular conditions that emerged after the Revolution and in light of the Islamic Revolution’s fundamental approach of returning to lost roots and traditions, traditional Islamic art forms were gradually encouraged

(Fig. 5) (Keshmirshekan, 2014, 277). Consequently, with the renewed flourishing of the Calligraphy-Painting movement after the Revolution, the perspectives and intellectual foundations emphasized in this art also underwent significant transformations, which can be categorized and studied as a discourse influenced by the Islamic Revolution<sup>4</sup>. In brief, after the Islamic Revolution, under the dominance of revolutionary thought, Calligraphy-Painting moved towards populism and a form of mystical orientation, alongside an attention to the characteristics of revolutionary and doctrinal art, which constituted the prevailing aesthetics of artworks created in the early years of the Revolution. Meanwhile, the issue of cultural and artistic identity was once again raised in artistic circles as a fundamental concern. Given the government structure's focus on religious and cultural values, most forms of traditional art were revived at various levels and, through extensive support, achieved considerable flourishing (Keshmirshekan, 2014, 277).

#### • The festival and discursive approaches to power

Festivals function as social institutions that powers establish in the form of celebrations to consolidate their position, and critics also hold celebrations to overcome power. Hence, festivals are, in a sense, a production and reproduction of power

discourses and are held as cultural-artistic events on various occasions. These events, through the granting or withholding of awards and certificates of appreciation to artists, delineate the discursive boundaries of art acceptable to policymakers and judges (Moridi, 2016, 11). Based on this definition, it can be acknowledged that festivals are organized with an ideological approach and seek to realize the hegemony of power. Governments establish cultural and artistic festivals to consolidate their ideologies. Festivals, through the celebration and introduction of desirable art, present a model of legitimacy and normativity, and the normative and selected works within these hegemonic events serve as prominent examples of the reproduction of dominant discourses. Thus, the painting biennials in the pre-Revolution years (1958 CE/1337 AH), as well as other cultural festivals such as the Shiraz Festival of Arts (1967 CE/1346 AH), the Festival of Culture and Art (1967 CE/1346 AH), the Tus Festival (1975 CE/1354 AH), the Folklore Festivals (1977 CE/1356 AH), and the People's Culture Festival (1977 CE/1356 AH)—which pursued cultural nativism or authenticity—operated in line with the reproduction of the cultural policies of the Pahlavi regime, intending to offer an alternative to the religious traditionalism that was becoming radicalized during those years. In continuation of this pattern, post-Revolution state-



Fig. 5. Right): Post-Islamic Revolution Calligraphy-Painting by Nasrollah Afjei; Left). Post-Islamic Revolution Calligraphy-Painting by Nasrollah Afjei. Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/nurulainadam/khat>.

sponsored festivals also took steps in reproducing the revolutionary ideological discourse, which was essentially a continuation of the discourses of authenticity and nativism, albeit having shifted—regardless of their focus on revolutionary slogans—through a radical turn towards revolutionary ideals. However, in subsequent years, with the discursive changes in Iran’s cultural landscape, the approaches of festivals also underwent transformation. Nevertheless, the primary approach of post-Revolution festivals, namely the revolutionary discourse, always remained implicit in their ideals and objectives (Table1) (ibid., 2014).

### Method of Analysis

The main subject of research in critical discourse analysis is to reveal the role of discursive practices in producing and stabilizing unequal power relations and to examine the role of these practices in advancing the interests of power holders (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002, 114). Fairclough believes that “critical discourse analysis aims to systematically explore the often-opaque relationships between texts, events, and discursive practices, and the structures, relations, and processes of culture and society on a broader scale” (Fairclough, 1995, 135). Fairclough designates the process related to text analysis as Description, the process related to the analysis of discursive practice as Interpretation,

and the process of analyzing social practice as Explanation (Ghajari & Nazari, 2021, 88). The purpose of text analysis in the first stage is to describe the linguistic structure to discover the ideological influence of society on the reproduction of the text (Fig. 6).

In the second level, or discursive practice, it focuses on how language is employed to create text, relying on existing discourses, and clarifies that the subject in discourse does not act independently. Here, the domains of text interpretation, such as “intertextuality,” are not inherently indicative of power relations and the dominance of hidden ideologies but are analogous to social orders and historical interaction (Fairclough, 2000, 215), (Fig. 7).

In the third dimension of analysis, i.e., explanation, discourse is considered a social practice. In this stage, the text is seen as part of the process of social relations and its interaction with power relations. This stage can be termed reproduction,

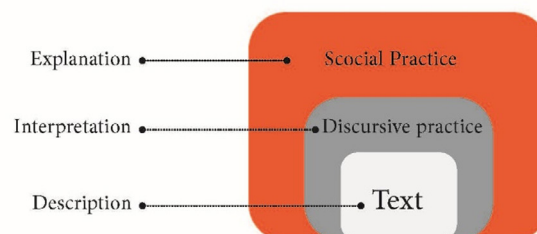


Fig. 6. Methodological Stages of Critical Discourse Analysis from Fairclough's Perspective. Source: Fairclough, 2020.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival. Source: Authors.

| Characteristic                                              | Description                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Comprehensiveness and diversity of artistic branches        | Diversity in holding various sections including painting, miniature painting, calligraphy, sculpture, photography, graphics, illustration, cartoon, caricature, and contemporary art |
| Scope and inclusiveness of the festival as a national event | Acceptance of works from all provinces and cities of the country                                                                                                                     |
| Efforts to promote contemporary art                         | Preserving traditional arts and supporting new arts and new media                                                                                                                    |
| Efforts to instill a competitive aspect                     | Awarding prizes, Golden Tuba (Touba-ye Zarrin), and appreciating distinguished artists in various sections                                                                           |
| Holding research and educational sections                   | Holding workshops, conferences, and publishing festival books                                                                                                                        |
| Efforts to connect with cultural and social identity        | Exhibiting works related to the Fajr Decade, Iran’s luminaries, and national honorees                                                                                                |
| Efforts to create a network and artistic interaction        | Providing communication between artists, critics, researchers, and interested audiences                                                                                              |

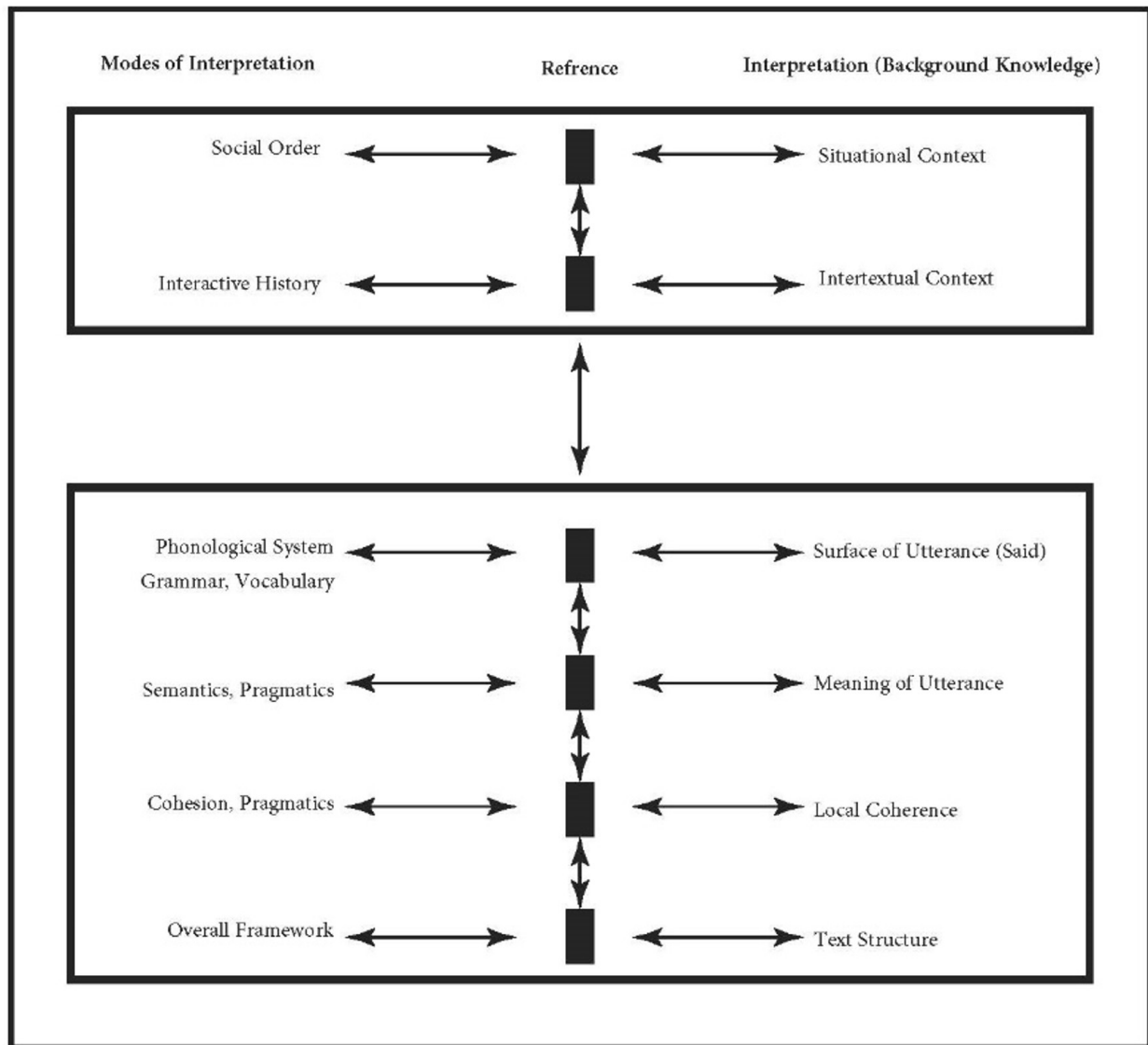


Fig. 7. Critical Discourse Analysis from Fairclough's Perspective at the Level of Interpretation. Source: Mohseni, 2012, 78.

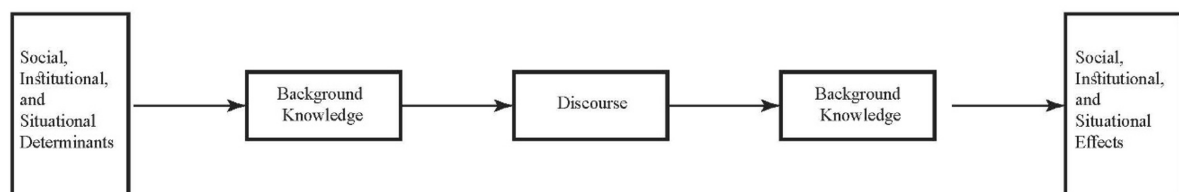


Fig. 8. Critical Discourse Analysis from Fairclough's Perspective at the Level of Explanation. Source: Mohseni, 2012, 80.

which links text analysis and discursive practice (Fairclough, 2000, 245), (Fig. 8).

### • Data Analysis

#### - Analysis of spoken and written texts

In this part of the study, first, the nature and generalities of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival are briefly discussed. Then, the description and interpretation of

the formal features (vocabulary, syntactic structure, and coherence of sentences) of the spoken and written texts produced by the spokespersons of these festivals during two editions of Calligraphy-Painting in the calligraphy section—namely the third and fourth editions of the festival during the Principist era—are addressed, as a comprehensive discourse

that articulates the thoughts and intentions of the organizers and supporters of this artistic event. It should be noted that the holding of Calligraphy-Painting has always been considered as a side section of the festival, especially within the calligraphy discipline, and has not been continuously present in all editions. Therefore, our focus in this research is on the periods in which the Calligraphy-Painting section was present (Table 2).

The Fajr Visual Arts Festival during Ahmadinejad's era was designed to be an "artistic-revolutionary event," not merely an aesthetic one. This period reflected the cultural policy of the Principlist government, which defined art in service of the Revolution's discourse. Key sections such as the Islamic Revolution, Sacred Defense, Islamic Awakening, Justice-Seeking, and Resistance were designated as the main axes of this event.

### • The Third edition of the fajr visual arts festival

#### - Description

The third Fajr Visual Arts Festival opened on February 5, 2011 ( 16 Bahman 1389). Prior to this, Mahmoud Shaloui, the head of the Visual Arts Center, had announced the holding of the third Fajr Visual Arts Festival on January 3, 2011 ( 13 Dey 1389) at the library of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. In this meeting, Shaloui first referred to the history of the Fajr Biennial of Visual Arts and acknowledged that by relying on the previous two editions and benefiting from the

opinions of experts, this festival will be held with a high capacity. Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini<sup>5</sup>, the then Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, in a message, explained the cultural values of this festival with a quote from Saadi, the famous Iranian poet, and then said:<sup>6</sup>

"The world is the manifestation of divine beauty, and everything is in its proper place! In the most perfect form and the best of molds! The artist, through intelligence and sagacity, taste and subtlety, conforms phenomena, as perceived by the senses, to his own feeling. Pen and ink, pen and color, flower and hand, gaze and image—all are mental and interpretive! And visual arts are created in this way to astonish creation to the extent of the artist's subtlety and delicacy of spirit... And the secret of immortality lies in connection with truth and reality. When art intertwines with religion and piety like a lock of hair and casts a glance upon human sanctity and dignity, it will be eternally recorded on the page of love. Our beloved Imam said: "The only art acceptable to the Qur'an is that which polishes the pure Muhammadan Islam (peace be upon him and his progeny), the Islam of the guiding Imams (peace be upon them), the Islam of the suffering poor, the Islam of the barefooted, the Islam of those who have suffered the lash of bitter and shameful history and deprivations."

Youth-orientation is another significant discursive mechanism examined in this edition of the festival, emphasized by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic

Table 2. A Structural Comparison of the Editions of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival during the Presidency of Ahmadinejad. Source: Ehsani, 2020.

| Main Themes                                                            | Prominent Ideological Characteristics                                                                                  | Year              | Edition |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------|
| Islamic Revolution, Sacred Defense, Religious Identity                 | Redefinition of the Fajr Festival after its independent establishment: Emphasis on "committed" and "revolutionary" art | 2008<br>(1387 AH) | First   |
| Islamic-Iranian Identity, Value-Oriented Painting, Exquisite Art       | Increased role of value-oriented institutions: Focus on "exquisite art" in opposition to Western modern art            | 2009<br>(1388 AH) | Second  |
| Spiritual and Religious Art, Iranian-Islamic Art, Revolutionary Values | More cohesive organization: Spirituality-oriented view, growth of traditional sections                                 | 2010<br>(1389 AH) | Third   |
| Islamic Awakening (Special Theme), Global Justice-Seeking              | Peak of festival politicization: Direct connection with regional movements, official theme of "Islamic Awakening"      | 2011<br>(1390 AH) | Fourth  |
| Resistance, Regional Identity, Modern Islamic Civilization             | Reflection of government cultural policy: Emphasis on "civilization-building" and "art of resistance"                  | 2012<br>(1391 AH) | Fifth   |
| Revolutionary Identity, Family, Iranian-Islamic Lifestyle              | Stronger presence of Islamic lifestyle concepts: Summary of the cultural ideology of Ahmadinejad's era                 | 2013<br>(1392 AH) | Sixth   |

Guidance and cited as a distinguishing feature of this event from other festivals. Of course, emphasizing youth was among Ahmadinejad's policies, and this attitude was directly manifested in the festival's objectives and processes. Supporting young artists, in addition to generating new currents and creativity in contemporary art, led to the reproduction of the government's discursive hegemony in the art field. This was because the artistic activities of the youth were guided within the framework of values and identity defined by official policy, and this event sought to hegemonize its discourse through such policies. The connection between the festival's objectives and the government's cultural policies indicates that the selection of works, judging criteria, and emphasis on Iranian-Islamic art and youth-orientation were all purposefully designed to consolidate the dominant discourse of art and the government's cultural policy. In other words, the festival, as an intermediary institution, has reproduced and legitimized the identity-oriented and youth-oriented discourse in contemporary art.

Hamid Shah-Abadi, the then Deputy for Artistic Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, in explaining identity-orientation and cultural values in this festival, stated<sup>7</sup>: "The Fajr Visual Arts Festival has provided the country's artistic space for creating works imbued with Iranian-Islamic threads. This space directs the youth and artists of the new generation towards transcendent art that carries the fragrant scent of religious and Iranian identity." Mahmoud Javadipour, the head of the festival's headquarters, believes<sup>8</sup>: "One of the most important duties of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival is to establish a connection between the youth and Iranian-Islamic art, thereby guiding contemporary Iranian art towards a clear path. The Fajr Visual Arts Festival is the best opportunity to review and evaluate the works of young artists, thereby discovering top talents." Thus, according to the documents of this festival, the objectives of holding it can be enumerated as follows: creating a favorable atmosphere for the flourishing of artistic

creativity and conveying the message of artists, respecting spiritual and religious art, promoting and teaching the superior values of Iranian-Islamic art, highlighting the lofty values of the transcendent art of the Islamic Revolution, strengthening the bond among contemporary Iranian artists, and discovering and introducing active and innovative contemporary artists. In addition to the above, [Table 3](#) attempts to provide a more detailed description of the texts from the third edition of the Fajr Festival.

At the level of description, the analysis of the linguistic features of formal texts, opening and closing speeches, the jury's statement, etc., reveals that in the third festival, the vocabulary and syntactic structures are predominantly descriptive-evaluative in nature. The use of declarative sentences, the absence of imperative language, and the employment of recurring words such as Islamic-Iranian identity, the Islamic Revolution, social commitment, Islamic Awakening, committed art, cultural responsibility, and the Islamic world indicate that the message conveyed by these words is value-laden and ideological, rather than neutral or purely aesthetic. The language in these statements is structured in such a way as to define art in direct relation to the value of the message and commitment. Furthermore, the emphasis on concepts such as "enhancing artistic quality," "creativity," "the development of visual arts," and "supporting artists" indicates the predominance of a discourse that represents art as a specialized and relatively autonomous field. Since the language here is less imperative and binding, it allows for the limited but discernible emergence of discursive polyphony.

#### **- Interpretation and explanation**

At the level of interpretation, differences in the process of discourse production and consumption are also observable. In the third festival, although official cultural institutions play a decisive role, the festival's discourse remains closer to professional discourse, and judges and officials appear more in the position of evaluators of artistic quality. The analysis of the discursive field of the Fajr Visual Arts

Table 3. The Description Process of Texts Produced at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Third International Fajr Visual Arts Festival. Source: Ehsani, 2020.

| Description Process:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Experiential Value, Relational Value, Expressive Value                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Painting as a language and a medium for establishing communication; the art medium is positioned to realize opinions and collective will; positive representation of the new generation; explaining identity-orientation; attributing to the “in-group”; positive representation; emphasizing the creation of works imbued with Islamic threads; possessing religious identity, rituals, and patterns; being influenced by religious and national customs and culture; positive representation. | Experiential Value: The Deputy for Artistic Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Hamid Shah-Abadi), in explaining identity-orientation in this festival, delivers the following speech: “The Fajr Visual Arts Festival has provided the country’s artistic space for creating works imbued with Iranian-Islamic threads. This space directs the youth and artists of the new generation towards transcendent art that carries the fragrant scent of religious and Iranian identity.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Connecting the youth with Iranian-Islamic art; contemporary art and the youth; positive representation; identifying top talent; positive representation; participation of artists from over 70 countries; indicating connection; with all those who believe in pure human nature; positive representation of the self and the other (art and artists of the world in relation to human nature); positive representation.                                                                        | Relational Value: The veteran artist and head of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, Mahmoud Javadipour, states: “The most important duty of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival is to establish a connection between the youth and Iranian-Islamic art, thereby guiding contemporary art towards a clear path. The Fajr Visual Arts Festival is a suitable opportunity to review and evaluate the works of young artists, thereby identifying top talents. The International Fajr Visual Arts Festival is a field for the contest of the authenticity and mission of art and the artist of Islamic Iran with a world that, if it has a word of commitment, gives its heart to presence. The participation of artists from over 70 countries indicates that this sacred system has messages worthy of human nature for the world, and they have responded in unison to the call of presence.” |
| Absolutism, certainty, inflexibility; positive representation; juxtaposition of two thoughts—worldliness and power-seeking versus Islamic and transcendental thought; rejecting the thought of worldliness and power-seeking through the creation of ugliness, conflict, blood, and rage; negative representation; highlighting the strengths of transcendental thought through attention to truth, beauty, and the creation of unity and kinship; positive representation.                     | Expressive Value: The jury panel: Creating a suitable platform for the emergence of artistic creativity and conveying the message of artists; honoring spiritual and religious art; introducing and elevating the lofty values of Iranian and Islamic art; emphasizing the values of the transcendent art of the Islamic Revolution; preserving traditional Iranian-Islamic arts; enhancing communication among contemporary Iranian and international artists; introducing the latest achievements of contemporary Iranian visual arts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| The secret of immortality lies in connection with truth and reality. When art intertwines with religion and piety like a lock of hair and casts a glance upon human sanctity and dignity...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Metaphor with Literary Devices: Reference to Hafez’s poetry in the message of the then Minister of Culture <sup>9</sup>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

Festival in the realm of international relations and globalization, and its alignment with the dominant discourse, reveals that the officials of this festival have always sought global connections to expand the discourse of the Islamic Revolution and to reinforce its hegemonic dimension through this event. These texts are interlinked with other political, ideological, and religious texts, interpreting art in line with those narratives. Creating a favorable atmosphere for the flourishing of artistic creativity and conveying the messages of artists, respecting spiritual and religious art, promoting and teaching the superior values of Iranian and Islamic art, highlighting the lofty values of the transcendent art of the Islamic Revolution, preserving and safeguarding traditional Iranian and Islamic arts, strengthening the bond among contemporary Iranian and international artists,

showcasing the latest achievements in contemporary Iranian visual arts, and discovering and introducing active and innovative contemporary artists. In fact, the formation and holding of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival during Ahmadinejad’s era must be analyzed within the context of the political discourse shift from Reformists to Principlists. This period was characterized by a critique of the Reformist discourse, distancing from the policy of cultural dialogue with the world, and emphasizing a return to the values of the Islamic Revolution. In such circumstances, cultural policies focused on justice-seeking, democratization of culture, and confronting manifestations of Westernization and the elitization of art. The connection between the festival’s objectives and the government’s cultural policies indicates that the selection of works,

judging criteria, and emphasis on Iranian-Islamic art and youth-orientation were all purposefully designed to consolidate the dominant discourse of art and the government's cultural policy. In other words, the festival, as an intermediary institution, has reproduced and legitimized the identity-oriented and youth-oriented discourse in contemporary art (Table 4).

#### • The Fourth edition of the fajr festival

##### - Description

The secretary of the fourth edition of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival was Mohammad-Ali Rajabi, and the head of the policy-making council was Mahmoud Shaloui<sup>10</sup>. The then Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance, during the course of this festival, stated<sup>11</sup>: "The sacred Islamic rites that flow from the tongues of believing Muslims, and for the realization of which the pure souls of these free people are offered, possess profound meanings that open a window to the sublime culture of Islam from whichever direction one looks. The evolution of human societies in the contemporary

world has necessitated the establishment of justice in all spheres, and the slogan of justice-seeking has resonated so loudly from across the globe that it has linked the political and cultural East and West of the world. The squares of the world's cities witness the call for justice and the attainment of genuine human rights. What gives meaning to justice is reaching the high and lofty station of humanity, which all religious cultures, including the noble religion of Islam and Islamic culture, regard as the foremost of all rites and the most important harbinger of the advent of the savior of the world, Imam of the Age (may God hasten his reappearance). Visual artists, like all artists who are constantly searching for openings to enter their delicate imagination into spiritual realms to witness an image of the moon-faced ones of God's garden and to depict it on the canvas, can enter into the depths of souls that are manifest on the tongues of today's humanity and grasp their essence and core." Mohammad-Ali Rajabi<sup>12</sup>, in his official speech on identity, the contemporary era, and hope, described the Fajr Festival

Table 4. Interpretation of Texts Produced at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Third International Fajr Visual Arts Festival. Source: Authors.

| Social, Institutional, and Discursive Actors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Processes of Production, Distribution, and Consumption                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Hadi Mozaffari (Festival Director), Ebrahim Haghighi (Secretary of the Festival), Dr. Mahmoud Shaloui (Head of the Artistic Council), Seyyed Abbas Mirhashemi (Secretary General of the Festival), Mohsen Soleimani (Executive Secretary of the Festival), Seyyed Amir Socrati (Artistic Secretary of the Festival)                                                                                                          | Who is involved? (Spokespersons of the Discourse of Authority)                           |
| Political elite, Islamic Left (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad), middle class, cultural elites: politically neutral and low-mobility but leaning towards Reformists (Ebrahim Haghighi, Yadollah Kaboli, Javad Bakhtiari); ideological, religious, defenders of the ruling system (Dr. Mahmoud Shaloui, Seyyed Abbas Mirhashemi, Abdolrahim Siahkarzadeh, Amir Abdolhosseini)                                                             | What is the social identity of the discourse spokespersons?                              |
| The Third International Fajr Visual Arts Festival in the Principlist era (2008/1387 AH), along with the reading of the report of the Executive Secretary and the statement of the jury panel.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | What is the event?                                                                       |
| Worldly politics, world-seeking powers, reactionism and misery, colonialism, oppressors.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | The Other (Trace of Discourse)                                                           |
| The Principlist era                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Sociological context and reflection of political and social issues (Situational Context) |
| The Third International Fajr Visual Arts Festival was held in five venues: the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, Niavaran Cultural Center, Saba Cultural and Artistic Institute, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Palestine, and the Cultural and Artistic Center of the Islamic Revolution (Azadi Tower), across 23 provinces, Kish Island, and six countries: Italy, Austria, Syria, France, Ghana, and the Netherlands. | Institutional Context                                                                    |
| Spiritual art, Iranian-Islamic art, international relations, the values of the transcendent art of the Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense, traditional Iranian-Islamic arts, contemporary artists active in the field of the Islamic Revolution, the elevation of the lofty values of Iranian and Islamic art.                                                                                                            | Core Themes                                                                              |
| Discourse of social justice, return to the ideals and slogans of the early Revolution, compassion, combating cultural invasion, exporting the Revolution and focusing on Muslim nations, emotion, empathy, Iranian-Islamic identity.                                                                                                                                                                                         | Discursive Atmosphere                                                                    |

as a festival of “recognizing roots and authenticity.” He added: “Fajr, on one hand, is about recognizing roots and authenticity; on the other hand, it is about understanding the contemporary era and commitment to human society; and its other characteristic is hope for the future. Artistic works must encompass these three principles: recognizing the artistic heritage of the past, understanding the present era, and giving good news for the future” (Table 5).

### - Interpretation and explanation

Looking at the third and fourth festivals, at the level of interpretation, differences in the process of discourse production and consumption are also observable. As previously mentioned, in the third festival, although official cultural institutions played a decisive role, the festival’s discourse moved closer to the professional discourse of art, with judges and officials appearing

more as evaluators of artistic quality. In the fourth festival, discourse production was more cohesively controlled by official institutions. The intertextuality of the texts from this period also increases noticeably, such that implicit and explicit references to political, ideological, and overarching cultural discourses define the meaning of art within a framework beyond the field of visual arts. Consequently, the assumed audience of the festival also changes: from the “creative and professional artist” to the “committed artist responsible towards dominant cultural values.” Analysis at the descriptive and interpretive levels indicates that the shift in dominant vocabulary, syntactic structures, and speech acts reflects a transition from descriptive to prescriptive and authoritative language. Concepts such as Islamic-Iranian identity, Islamic Awakening, the artist’s social responsibility, and Islamic Awakening

Table 5. The Description Process of Texts Produced at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Fourth International Fajr Visual Arts Festival, Articulating the Ideas and Objectives of the Organizers and Supporters of this Artistic Event. Source: Ehsani, 2020.

| Description Process<br>Experiential Value, Relational Value, Expressive Value                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Text                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Islamic art as a standard; recognition of roots and authenticity; commitment as a language and a medium for communication and interaction with the other; hope for the future; heritage of the past; contemporaneity; positive representation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Experiential Value: Mohammad-Ali Rajabi’s statements in the official speech described the Fajr Festival as a festival of “recognizing roots and authenticity.” He added: “Fajr, on one hand, is about recognizing roots and authenticity; on the other hand, it is about understanding the contemporary era and commitment to human society; and its other characteristic is hope for the future. Artistic works must encompass these three principles: recognizing the artistic heritage of the past, understanding the present era, and giving good news for the future.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| The encounter of the self and the other (art and artists versus ill-wishers); attributing contest to the other; negative representation; attributing qualities such as Muslim identity, commitment, knowledge, resolve, uprising, zeal, awakening, justice to the self; positive representation; the advent of the savior; hope for the future; positive representation.                                                                                                                                    | Relational Value: The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance announced at the fourth Visual Arts Festival: “The Islamic Awakening is a matter to which, if artists pay attention, they will unravel the agenda of the ill-wishers. Every work of a Muslim artist must be a stone thrown at the devil... It must be effective. A Muslim artist must produce a work that reflects his Muslim identity. May the dawn of transformation combine the gaze of the Muslim artist with a ray of commitment from world artists, and cast the light of knowledge upon the soul of art. This definition links its zeal with the momentum of the Islamic uprising and the global ethical movement... What gives meaning to justice is reaching the worthy and lofty station of humanity, which all religious cultures, especially in Islamic culture, have as the foremost of all rites and the most important promise of the advent of the savior of the world, ‘Imam of the Age (may God hasten his reappearance).’ Islamic Awakening means a heart-aware gaze at the Holy Qur’an and a renewal of the covenant with divine word...” |
| Absolutism, identity—national and religious; positive representation; juxtaposition of two thoughts with religious and transcendental thought through attention to national and religious identity and attention to the reserves of Iranian culture and civilization, in contrast to the worldliness of Western culture; negative representation; highlighting the strengths of Islamic thought; contemporaneity; creating an artwork with social awareness of Iran and the world; positive representation. | Expressive Value: The jury panel: Emphasis on the national and religious identity of works and the necessity for artists to pay attention to the reserves of Iranian culture and civilization; appreciation of raising artists’ awareness regarding social issues in Iran and the world, and the role of art in social expression.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| “Intimate with the heart,” “sanctuary of the beloved”—metaphor for the secret of immortality in connection with truth and the Creator; the spirit of loving truth and beauty; positive representation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Reference to Hafez’s poetry in the message and the secret of immortality lies in connection with truth and reality. When art intertwines with religion and piety like a lock of hair and casts a glance upon human sanctity and dignity, it will be eternally recorded on the page of love.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |

become central elements of the discourse. Through the use of imperative verbs and norm-setting propositions, the role and function of art are represented in a predetermined manner. In this framework, art is defined not as an autonomous act, but as an instrument for conveying messages and reproducing dominant cultural values. At the social level, the increased discourse of social justice and attention to the lower classes leads to a redefinition of the audience of official art. Art, which was previously defined mostly within elite and academic spaces, is steered during this period towards an ideological and public function. Thus, visual arts gain a more prominent position in relation to politics and ideology, and are expected to play a more active role in representing religious, revolutionary, and identity-based values.

From an institutional perspective, the concentration of cultural power in state institutions and those affiliated with the Principlist discourse increases, and the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, as one of the official instruments of cultural policy-making, undertakes the task of reproducing the dominant discourse. This situation

leads to the limitation of polyphonic space and the reinforcement of the boundary between committed official art and the independent and critical currents of contemporary art.

The interpretation of the texts of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival in this period demonstrates that the ruling discourse employs art not as a field for polyphonic cultural dialogue, but as a battleground for the consolidation and reinforcement of the dominant ideological discourse. Consequently, in the third and fourth editions, the festival serves more as a means for reproducing the semantic values of the Principlist government's political and spiritual values, rather than functioning as a platform for transnational dialogue (Table 6).

#### • A Reflection on the written and visual characteristics of selected works from the calligraphy-painting section of the third and fourth editions of the fajr visual arts festival

By carefully examining the selected works from the third and fourth editions of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, for which a general analysis of their visual

Table 6. Interpretation of Texts Produced at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the Fourth International Fajr Visual Arts Festival. Source: Authors.

| Social, Institutional, and Discursive Actors                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Processes of Production, Distribution, and Consumption                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (President), Mohammad-Ali Rajabi (Executive Secretary), Mahmoud Shaloui (Head of the Policy-Making Council), Nasrollah Afjei, Abbas Akhvin, Mojtaba Malekzadeh, Sedaghat Jabbari, Mohammad Heydari, Mohammad-Hossein Attarchian, Gholam-Hossein Amirkhani, Iraj Naimaei (Members of the Jury Panel).                                                  | Who is involved? (Spokespersons of the Discourse of Authority)                           |
| Political elite, Islamic Right (Mahmoud Ahmadinejad), middle class, cultural elites: politically neutral and low-mobility but leaning towards Reformists (Mohammad-Ali Rajabi, Mahmoud Javadipour); ideological, religious, defenders of the ruling system (Abdolrahim Siahkarezadeh, Gholamali Taheri, Mostafa Goodarzi, Mahmoud Shaloui).                               | What is the social identity of the discourse spokespersons?                              |
| The Fourth International Fajr Visual Arts Festival in the fourth year of the Principlist era (2011/ Ali Rajabi 90 AH), with the reading of the report of the Executive Secretary and the jury's statement.                                                                                                                                                                | What is the event?                                                                       |
| Worldly politics, world-seeking powers, reactionism and misery, the city of ignorance, colonialism, Western liberal culture.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | The Other (Trace of Discourse)                                                           |
| The Principlist era; international relations and the expansion of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution; Islamic convergence; open cultural space for dialogue and exchange of ideas and diverse cultural opinions, thoughts, and traditions.                                                                                                                           | Sociological context and reflection of political and social issues (Situational Context) |
| The Fourth International Fajr Visual Arts Festival was held at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Saba Cultural and Artistic Institute, Imam Ali (AS) Art Museum, Niavaran Cultural Center, and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Palestine.                                                                                                                                 | Institutional Context                                                                    |
| Spiritual art, Iranian-Islamic art, international relations, development of the discourse of the Islamic Revolution, the values of the transcendent art of the Islamic Revolution and Sacred Defense, traditional Iranian-Islamic arts, contemporary artists active in the field of the Islamic Revolution, the elevation of the lofty values of Iranian and Islamic art. | Core Themes                                                                              |
| Discourse of social justice, return to the ideals and slogans of the early Revolution, compassion, combating cultural invasion, exporting the Revolution and focusing on Muslim nations, emotion, empathy.                                                                                                                                                                | Discursive Atmosphere                                                                    |

and discursive characteristics is provided in detail in Table 7, it can be observed that the selected works in this event predominantly fall within two modes of representation: as manifestations of committed art and within the framework of controlled modernism and the reinterpretation of traditions. Generally, the works of this festival avoid radical deconstruction. It is also observed that these works not only reflect aesthetic transformations but also mirror power relations, cultural policies, and the effort to define Iran’s contemporary artistic identity within a framework of traditionalist redefinition. The tendency to employ Iranian-Islamic themes in these works has significantly increased, and the orientation of the selected works endorsed by this

festival is aligned less with an autonomous course of artistic development and more with interaction with the festival’s broader cultural policies. A comparison of official texts with the selected works from the third Fajr Visual Arts Festival reveals a structural alignment between written discourse and visual language, such that works produce and signify meaning not in opposition to, but in continuation of, the dominant discourse. This alignment signifies the consolidation of the festival’s cultural policy at the level of artistic representation.

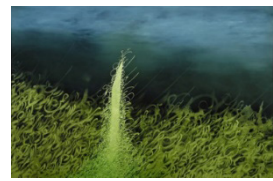
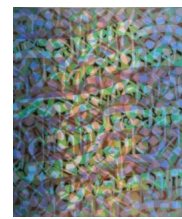
Conclusion

Contemporary Iranian Calligraphy-Painting is regarded as

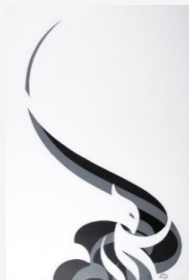
Table 7. Visual and Discursive Characteristics of Selected Works from the Third and Fourth Editions of the Fajr Festival. Source: Authors.

| Discursive Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Visual Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Specifications of the Work                                                                                                                                           | Work                                                                                  |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting as “committed” and faith-based art. An effort to present a work with characteristics of exquisite art, offering a synthesis of Islamic art and modern values. Use of Mu’alla script as a contemporary visual achievement.                                                                                 | In the work, the script (khat) is the central element. However, the artist has not liberated the script from its role of conveying meaning and has not transformed it into an independent visual element. The use of Mu’alla script is evident throughout the frame. The phrase “Ya Ali ibn Musa al-Rida” (O Ali, son of Musa, the Chosen One), rendered in white and in a larger size than the other scripts at the bottom of the work in the lower third, stands out prominently. The framing and division of geometric forms, along with the direction and scale of the shapes, recall miniatures from the Timurid period. | Selected Work, Saeed Naqashian, Calligraphy-Painting Section, Third Edition of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010 (1389 AH).                                        |  |
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting as “committed” and faith-based art. An effort to present a work with religious identity and to combine it with modern visual features.                                                                                                                                                                    | The words “Hu al-Haqq” (He is the Truth) and “Hu al-Aziz” (He is the Mighty), derived from Thuluth script, with greater flexibility and manipulation of letter forms, recall the knotted and intertwined calligraphic compositions of Mohammad Ehsaii. The words “Hu al-Haqq” and “Hu al-Aziz” are partially legible, and the word “Hu” (He) is clearly visible, with its rotation in four directions evident. The letters Alef and Lam, also oriented in four directions, evoke a circular motion within the frame. A notable point is the artist’s skill in the execution of the script.                                    | Selected Work, Mojtaba Zamani, Calligraphy-Painting Section, Third Edition of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010 (1389 AH).                                         |  |
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting with characteristics of modern abstraction. An effort to transition from the traditional authenticity-oriented discourse. An attempt to present a work with contemporary identity and combine it with modern visual features, as a controlled endeavor to create an expressive and contemporary language. | The works of Ali Tan are more readily analyzable as contemporary paintings with calligraphic roots. In his works, an attempt has been made to distance the script entirely from the text, aiming to create abstract calligraphic forms. The reduced importance of text legibility, along with special attention to texture, color, and energetic, swift, and spontaneous lines, has liberated the script from its role of conveying meaning and transformed it into an independent visual element.                                                                                                                            | Selected Work, Ali Tan, Special Appreciation and Certificate of Honor, Calligraphy-Painting Section, Third Edition of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010 (1389 AH). |  |

Rest of Table 7.

| Discursive Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Visual Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Specifications of the Work                                                                                                                                                              | Work                                                                                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting as “committed” and faith-based art with mystical themes. An effort to present a work with the characteristics of Islamic art, combining it with graphic values. Use of Shikasteh script with a visual language derived from contemporary visual achievements.                                                                                                                      | Mashayekhi, by choosing a vertical rectangular frame in red and using small gold squares, evokes traditional Iranian-Islamic tilework. The choice of gold color emphasizes the sacred aspect of the work. The phrase within the frame is selected from Rumi’s poetry, and the ecstatic quality of Rumi’s verses is harmonized with the softness and fluidity of Nastaliq script chosen for the calligraphy.                                                                                                                                 | Selected Work, Sepideh Mashayekhi, Certificate of Honor, Calligraphy-Painting Section, Third Edition of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010 (1389 AH).                                  |    |
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting with characteristics of modern abstraction. An effort to present a work with contemporary identity and combine it with modern visual features, as a controlled endeavor to create an expressive and contemporary language, influenced by the works of Seyyed Mohammad Ehsaii.                                                                                                      | Hamid Reza Qominejad, through the dynamic interplay of positive and negative space and the continuous rotation of letters in all directions of the composition, has created a dynamic composition. The use of dark colors in the background and the overlapping of letters create a visual illusion, causing the eye to oscillate from back to front and vice versa. The aesthetic design and the arrangement of letters, emphasizing the creation of positive and negative spaces, are strongly reminiscent of the works of Master Ehsaii. | Hamid Reza Qominejad, Special Appreciation and Certificate of Honor, Calligraphy-Painting Section, Third Edition of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010 (1389 AH).                      |    |
| Representation of a forgotten calligraphic sub-genre as a characteristic of modern abstraction and its conception as a method in Calligraphy-Painting. An effort to revive forgotten forms within the traditional authenticity-oriented discourse. An attempt to revive forgotten arts and utilize them with contemporary visual features, as a controlled effort to create a contemporary visual language and discourse. | Alireza Astaneh, by drawing upon the forgotten “Sini Nakhoni” (fingernail-style) script and combining it contemporarily with Shikasteh Nastaliq script, has attempted to present a work distinct from others.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Alireza Astaneh, Certificate of Honor for Reviving and Reinterpreting the Nakhoni Script, Calligraphy-Painting Section, Third Edition of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010 (1389 AH). |  |
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting with characteristics of modern abstraction. An effort towards a controlled transition from the traditional authenticity-oriented discourse. An attempt to present a work with contemporary identity and combine it with modern visual features, as a controlled endeavor to create an expressive and contemporary language.                                                        | Calligraphy-Painting approaches Expressionism, indicating the importance of the creative process over the final outcome.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Selected Work of the Fourth Edition, Karimpour Shirazi.                                                                                                                                 |  |
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting as “committed” and faith-based art. An effort to present a work with religious identity and to combine it with modern visual features.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Influenced by the intellectual atmosphere of Reza Mafi’s works, he executes Siah Mashq (black practice) pieces on large canvases. By creating coloration and employing shading, he typically moves from a bright center to darker edges, or from bright edges to a darker center. Along this path, by varying the thickness of the strokes, he inscribes calligraphic chiaroscuro on the canvas.                                                                                                                                            | Selected Work of the Fourth Edition, Hamid Reza Qominejad.                                                                                                                              |  |
| Representation of Calligraphy-Painting as “committed” and faith-based art, influenced by traditionalist artists (Seyyed Mohammad Ehsaii and Jalil Rasouli).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | In another work from the festival, Ms. Mina Karami, by utilizing Nastaliq Siah Mashq practices, attempts to create a novel composition. By adding color to the work, she seeks to enhance its visual impact.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Joint Selected Work of the Fourth Edition, Mina Karami.                                                                                                                                 |  |

Rest of Table 7.

| Discursive Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Visual Characteristics                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Specifications of the Work                                 | Work                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| An effort to present a work with characteristics of exquisite art, offering a synthesis of Islamic art and modern values, aligned with the works of traditionalist artists, especially Seyyed Mohammad Ehsaii, in which graphic visual effects are evident. | In the work of Fayege Khaledi, another selected piece from the fourth edition, what stands out most is the play with positive and negative space and the formation of various forms with limited colors. An attempt is made to create a figurative bird-like form in contrast with the interplay of positive and negative space. | Joint Selected Work of the Fourth Edition, Fayege Khaledi. |  |

one of the most significant sites of convergence between the tradition of calligraphy and modern art. The Fajr Visual Arts Festival, as an official cultural institution, has played an effective role in directing and legitimizing this movement. Within this framework, Calligraphy-Painting has become a tool for the reproduction of the “sacred tradition” in a contemporary visual language—a tradition that stands in opposition to the secular modernism of the Saqqakhaneh movement. Works in which relative legibility of the text, a direct connection with religious tradition, and the avoidance of extreme formalism become defining features. Thus, in response to the question of how the cultural values emerging from the Principlist era have manifested in the works and statements of the Fajr Festival and have led to the systematization of this festival as a discursive tool during this period, it can be asserted that Calligraphy-Painting arising from the atmosphere of the Fajr Festival—particularly in works that rely on Qur’anic concepts, prayers, and mystical themes—represents a conscious effort to restore calligraphy to its position as a carrier of meaning and sacred word. Furthermore, traces of inspiration from the works of artists such as Hossein Zenderoudi (Ehsaii), Jalil Rasouli, and Nasrollah Afjei, as well as second-generation artists (Sedaghat Jabbari, Ein al-Din Sadeqzadeh, Ali Shirazi), whose practices were shaped in direct interaction with the dominant cultural ideology and identity policies of the post-Revolution period, can be observed in the selected works. Ultimately, the findings of this research indicate that the orientation of the selected Calligraphy-Painting works endorsed by the Fajr Festival not only reflects aesthetic transformations but also mirrors power relations, cultural policies, and the effort to define Iran’s contemporary artistic identity within a framework of traditionalist redefinition. The tendency

to employ Iranian-Islamic themes in these works has significantly increased, and the direction of the selected Calligraphy-Painting works endorsed by the Fajr Festival is aligned less with an autonomous course of artistic development and more with interaction with the festival’s broader cultural policies. A comparison of official texts with the selected works from the third and fourth editions of the Fajr Visual Arts Festival reveals a structural alignment between written discourse and visual language, such that works produce meaning not in opposition to, but in continuation of, the dominant discourse. This alignment signifies the consolidation of the festival’s cultural policy at the level of artistic representation.

## Endnote

1. The “Reconstruction era” in Iran’s political literature refers to the presidency of Hojjat al-Islam Hashemi Rafsanjani from, during which efforts for post-war reconstruction and cultural and economic development policies grew significantly.
2. In fact, all significant discourses in the history of the Revolution, including Reconstruction and Reformism, are products of the historical conditions of their own era and have strived to realize revolutionary ideals. However, each has manifested in specific discursive forms, and each period has its own particular obstacles, problems, and characteristics. For further study on the cultural and artistic discourses of Iran’s Revolution. Moridi, 2016.
3. Contemporaneity in art is not merely limited to what exists here and now; it must be recognized as a conscious and theoretical artistic structure that specifies its own “impermanence” and “situatedness.” In a broader view, modernity, or being contemporary, although in some cases involves attention to past historical identity, is not reactionary, because being contemporary, in its inherent concept, is not progress but merely a kind of harmony and adaptation to the spirit of the times.
4. Among the main representatives of the Calligraphy-Painting tendency after the Islamic Revolution are Seyyed Mohammad Ehsaii, Nasrollah Afjei, Jalil Rasouli, Gholamali Ejli, and Sedaghat Jabbari. For further reading on the characteristics of Calligraphy-Painting in the Art of the Revolution. Goodarzi, 1989: 13-19.
5. Bulletin of the Third Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010, 5.
6. به جهان خرم از آنم که جهان خرم از اوست عاشقم بر همه عالم که همه عالم از اوست
7. Bulletin of the Third Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010, 2.
8. Bulletin of the Third Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2010, 3.
9. هر که شد محرم دل در حرم یار بماند و آنکه این کار ندانست در انکار بماند
10. Additionally, the members of the council included Jalil Rasouli, Manijeh Armin, Mahmoud Javadipour, Bahman Abdi, Mohammad-Ali Rajabi, Ali Faridouni, Abdolrahim Siahkarzadeh, Gholamali Taheri,

Mansour Azari, Mostafa Goodarzi, Mohammad Khazaei, Seyyed Abbas Mirhashemi, Seyyed Hassan Soltani, Davoud Samari. The executive secretary was Abdolrahim Siahaarzadeh; the secretary of the conference and scientific articles was Mohammad Khazaei; and the secretary of calligraphy was Hossein Gholami.

11. Bulletin of the Fourth Fajr Visual Arts Festival, 2011, 4.

12. Mehr News Agency, 31/01/2012 (11/11/1390).

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