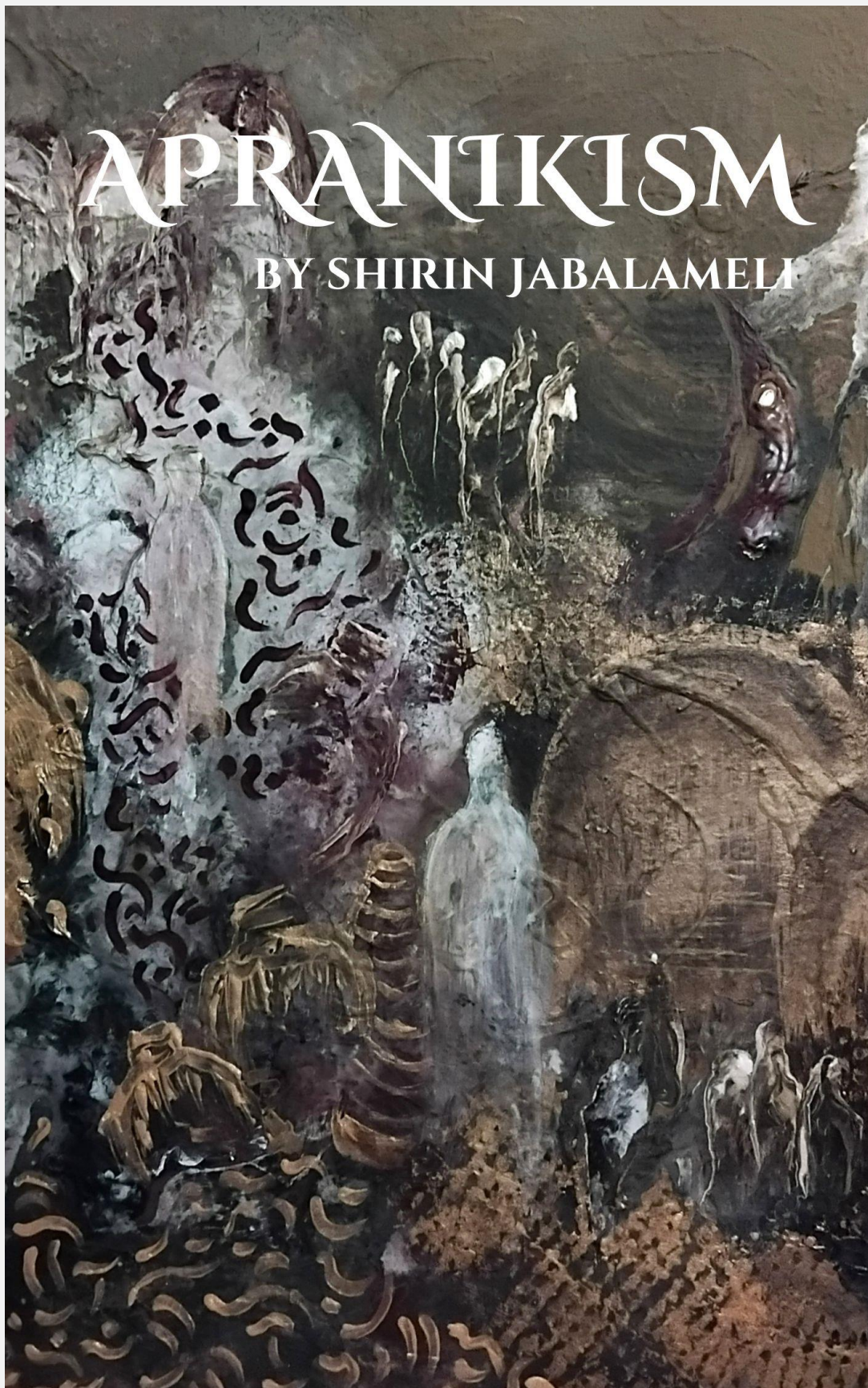


APRANTIKISM

BY SHIRIN JABALAMELI



Title: Apranikism as an -ism: The Birth of a New Artistic Style Rooted in the Unconscious and Creative Resistance

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Abstract – The Apranik Vision

In a world where contemporary art seeks new languages to articulate lived experiences, resistance, and the unconscious, the "Apranik" style emerges with an emphasis on improvisation, courage, and myth. This paper explores the mythological and linguistic roots of the term "Apranik," outlines the foundational principles of the style, and compares it with Surrealism, Expressionism, and Art Brut. By analyzing three artworks in this genre, the paper provides a clear operational definition of Apranikism, positioning it as a new -ism in contemporary art.

Keywords: Apranik, unconscious, improvisation, resistance, myth, contemporary art, new artistic style

1. Introduction

The cultural and psychological transformations of the twentieth century gave rise to multiple artistic movements such as Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism—each responding to the crises of modernity. In recent decades, there has been a growing absence of a language that simultaneously embraces the depth of the unconscious and mastery over form and meaning. The "Apranik" style offers a response: a path emerging from collective unconsciousness, myth, and creative resistance rooted in the Iranian cultural context.

2. Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Etymology and Myth of Apranik

The term "Apranik" derives from an ancient Iranian myth associated with a warrior heroine from the Sassanid era, belonging to the Suren family. Apranik symbolizes resistance against both military and cultural invasion, and her legendary motto—"Neither surrender, nor retreat"—embodies the essence of this style. Phonetically and semantically, "Apranik" also resonates with words such as *apophysis* (sudden emergence), *aporia* (philosophical doubt), and *organic*—indicating natural formation and intuitive shape.

2.2 Conceptual References

Apranikism is informed by Carl Jung's theory of the collective unconscious, Gilles Deleuze's notions of difference and repetition, Adorno's aesthetic theory, Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, and Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis of myth. These thinkers collectively shape a multidisciplinary foundation for the style.

3. Core Principles of Apranikism

1. **Improvisation and Intuition:** Artistic creation occurs spontaneously, through immediate dialogue with the material, without prior planning.
 2. **Collective Unconscious and Myth:** The use of symbolic, mythological imagery reveals deep layers of personal and collective psyche.
 3. **Boundary Transcendence:** Apranik works blend media—painting, performance, sound, installation—and often utilize unconventional, raw, or decayed materials.
 4. **Disrupted Language:** Nonlinear writing, broken phrases, and sonic distortions form part of the visual vocabulary.
 5. **Existential Courage:** The artist confronts chaos, danger, and the unknown, defying conventional aesthetic and conceptual frames.
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4. Comparative Analysis with Artistic Movements

- **Surrealism:** While both Surrealism and Apranikism explore the unconscious, the latter emphasizes mythic-cultural roots and collective memory specific to Iranian identity.
 - **Expressionism:** Unlike Expressionism's emotional spontaneity, Apranikism stresses conscious presence and spiritual awareness.
 - **Art Brut:** Apranikism follows an intentional path between form and disorder, distancing itself from raw instinct and embracing reflective engagement.
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5. Operational Definition of Apranik Works

An artwork can be identified as Apranik if it meets the following criteria:

- Created through improvisation and intuition
 - Uses mythic or collective unconscious symbols
 - Disrupts linguistic or formal structure
 - Employs organic, decayed, or nontraditional materials (e.g., coffee, rust, wood, clay)
 - Aims to transfer an inner experience—not merely aesthetic beauty
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6. Analysis of Sample Works

Three selected works— “TEH”, “The Vow of Faith”, and “My Heritage”—demonstrate how Apranikism’s theoretical concepts manifest in form, symbolism, and medium. The use of coffee, cardboard, earth, gold, and fragmented text convey a synthesis of memory, matter, and myth.

7. Conclusion

Apranikism is not merely a visual style but a worldview that seeks to reawaken myth, intuition, and existential defiance in an era saturated with signs and surface. Positioned within contemporary Iranian art yet resonant beyond its borders, Apranikism can be recognized as a new -ism in global art, provided it continues to be theorized, practiced, and presented in international contexts.

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- Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*
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1. Introduction: The Need for a New Perspective

Since the dawn of the modern era, art has continually evolved under the pressure of shifting social, cultural, and psychological demands. Movements such as Cubism and Dadaism emerged as reactions to the crises of their time; Expressionism rose from bitter personal and collective experiences; and Minimalism sought refuge in the purity of reductionism as a response to excess in form and subject.

Yet, in this current decade, a palpable absence is felt among these well-known movements: a language that is both spontaneous and rich in historical depth—a language that draws from the unconscious while standing in stark defiance of fixed forms and established structures. *Apranik* was born precisely in this fissure—a seemingly disjointed space that, paradoxically, has the potential to bridge the gap between *historical audacity* and *creative chaos*.

2. Etymology and Historical Background

2.1. The Historical Apranik: A Symbol of Sasanian Resistance

The term *Apranik* derives from an ancient Iranian myth associated with a warrior heroine from the Sassanid era, as documented in narratives such as *Tarikh-e Bal'ami* and *Shahnameh*. The Suren family's role in Iranian military and cultural resistance is noted in early Persian historiography (Zarrinkoub, 1975; Tafazzoli, 1989). These sources portray women not merely as passive figures but as symbols of strategy, resilience, and moral courage in pre-Islamic Iran.

Her well-known slogan:
“**No retreat, no surrender.**”

This motto encapsulates the kind of determination that not only triumphs in battle but also refuses to submit to entrenched norms and technical constraints in art—offering instead a pathway through which the *collective unconscious* might find liberation.

2.2. Naming as an Artistic Act

Inspired by the historical Apranik's character—*boldness, guerrilla tactics, and steadfastness*—Shirin Jabalameli chose this name for an artistic style that seeks to resist outdated norms and rigid conventions. While many “-isms” in art derive from arbitrary French or Italian terms, *Apranik* defies this trend with a name rooted in history—one that invites the viewer to momentarily look beyond “beauty” and “form” and remember that within each work lies a battle against imposed frameworks.

3. The Term and Worldview of Apranik

3.1. Word Formation and Meaning

In contemporary linguistics, *Apranik* is a neologism with layered resonance:

1. Phonetically reminiscent of *apó* or *apophysis* (meaning “emergence” or “manifestation”).
2. Semantically linked to *organic*, suggesting “natural birth” and the spontaneous evolution of form.
3. The fusion of these two invokes a model of *natural emergence of inner forces* as the essence of artistic creativity.

3.2. Key Elements of the Worldview

Historical Boldness: Just as the historical Apranik did not back down in the face of defeat, Apranik art refuses retreat in moments of creative instability. Each Apranik work carries an inner courage inscribed with its own motto: “*No pause, no surrender.*”

Creative Turbulence: In defiance of artificial order or predetermined structures, Apranik affirms that art springs from the chaos and turbulence of the mind. While traditional aesthetics seek harmony and form, Apranik views disorder as a meaningful source.

Accumulated Unconscious:

The influence of psychoanalytic theories—particularly Jung and the concept of the collective unconscious—is clearly visible in the Apranik movement. Symbols that frequently recur in Apranik works—such as birds, tilted buildings, Medusa, shells, mythological profiles, shipwrecks, domes, statues and shadows, staircases, and the crippled goat—represent layers of memory, myth, and dormant imagery buried in the unconscious.

Infusion of Persian Mysticism: Like Rumi and Shams, who regarded language as inadequate and sought transcendence through experience, Apranik favors *direct presence* between artist and viewer. Art is not for depicting an outer world, but for *simultaneously experiencing the self and the world*. This worldview resonates with motifs found in Persian Sufi literature—such as the works of Rumi, Attar, and Sohrawardi—where transcendence is not achieved through language alone but through presence and unveiling (*kashf*). In this respect, *Apranikism* revives the aesthetic-spiritual interface known in traditional Iranian miniature and calligraphic art (Grabar, 1980; Nasr, 1987).

4. Foundational Principles of Apranik

4.1. Intuitive Improvisation

Principle: Artistic decisions arise from the moment itself, not from extensive pre-planning. The artist engages in a continuous dialogue with their inner self and surroundings during creation.

Manifestation: Fragmented forms, unpredictable gestures of hand or tool, and densely layered paint—often applied without prior intent—are typical features.

4.2. Unveiling the Unconscious and Myth

Principle: While reminiscent of Surrealism in its interest in the unconscious, Apranik goes further by drawing from shared cultural myths as symbolic driving forces.

Manifestation: Symbols such as a snake crawling in an unnatural direction, a half-naked Medusa on a ship, or a one-legged sleeping goat are part of a common unconscious archive, equalizing the interpretive space between viewer and creator.

4.3. Transcending Medium Boundaries

Principle: Apranik is inherently interdisciplinary: each work may traverse painting, sculpture, performance, sound, or even literature.

Manifestation: An Apranik canvas may contain a mixture of coffee, charcoal, acrylic, tar... and a random ambient sound recording.

Note: As long as the *inner flow* remains intact, the medium is secondary and subordinate.

4.4. Embracing the Limits of Language

Principle: Thoughts and words are inherently locked—Apranik seeks expression *before language*.

Manifestation: Narrative fragmentation, broken or partially illegible writings accompanying visual elements, and repeated abstract sounds all invite the audience to *feel* before they *read*.

4.5. Expanding the Concept of Boldness

Principle: In Apranik, boldness means *daring to cross both mental and material boundaries*. As Ibn-Abdi wrote in a historical treatise: “If art dares not step toward the abyss of the unknown, it is like an uninflated balloon.”

Manifestation: Many Apranik works confront viewers with scenes that seem destructive moments after their creation—as if the artist holds the canvas on the brink of explosion, unafraid of retreat or regression.

5. Comparison with Other Contemporary Movements

Movement	Commonalities	Fundamental Differences
Surrealism	Depiction of the unconscious, use of chance	Surrealism is largely rooted in the “Western art historical canon” and feeds on specific European cultural layers; in contrast, <i>Apranik</i> is intertwined with Iranian-global mythologies and also transgresses the “boundaries of form.” Unlike Surrealism, which merges the unconscious with unbridled imagination, <i>Apranik</i> adopts a more balanced, conscious, and purposeful approach to the unconscious.
Expressionism	Emphasis on inner emotions and visual impact	Expressionism considers <i>expression</i> an end in itself; <i>Apranik</i> , by contrast, values <i>living presence</i> —expression in <i>Apranik</i> is philosophically always <i>post facto</i> . Compared to Expressionism, <i>Apranik</i> is less reactive and more meditative in nature.
Art Brut	Spontaneity, rejection of academic training	Art Brut is often created by individuals outside the institutional art world; however, <i>Apranik</i> is for those who <i>consciously choose</i> the anti-form while still being situated <i>within</i> historical discourse.
Minimalism	Rejection of excess, emphasis on silence	Minimalism seeks a “meaningful emptiness” through reduction; <i>Apranik</i> , however, finds meaning in “dense chaos”—not through minimization, but through <i>disordered flow</i> .

Unlike **art therapy**, which focuses on psychological healing, *Apranik* is concerned with *individual awareness* and the artist’s *ontological growth*.

Summary:

What distinguishes *Apranik* from the movements above is both the *historical roots of its name*, which conveys a spirit of resistance, and its emphasis on *boldness in confronting creative danger*, forming the core of its theoretical and practical structure.

6. Aesthetic and Technical Characteristics

6.1. Medium Fusion

Apranik works often feature a fusion of materials—both fluid (coffee, ink, diluted acrylic) and solid (steel fragments, wires, shards of glass)—without boundaries. Each material simultaneously acts as a *dissolver* and a *separator*, pulling the work toward the *death of form* while activating a wave of *mythical rebirth*.

6.2. Color and Texture

- **Earth-tone palette (coffee, soil-inspired hues):** Suggests a passage from being to non-being; dried blood, the seed of soil.

- **Dense and semi-transparent layers:** Encourage the viewer to perceive the “depth of collective memory.”
- **Rough and disordered textures:** Abrupt brush strokes, real or artificial cracks, paint drips and lumps that reinforce the sense of a *wounded artwork*.

6.3. Visual Symbolism

Symbol	Conceptual Meaning	Recurrent Mythic Recasting
Medusa	The fragile power of the feminine gaze	Woman as “the eye that refuses to submit”
Broken ship	Struggle in facing one’s fate	Life’s uneven flow; intertwined hope and despair
Sleeping goat	Life’s imperfection and endurance	The possibility of movement and resistance even in complete helplessness
Cracked seashell	Hidden inner secrets	Layers of the unconscious opening piece by piece
Broken urn	Reservoir of historical experience	Acceptance of fragmentation in memory and history

These symbols may appear repeatedly across different works, offering the viewer a space for *symbolic focus* and *layered interpretation*.

Functions and Aims of Apranik

- **Self-Knowledge through Art:**
The Apranik artist turns inward to connect with deep psychological structures and the cosmos.
 - **Bridging Meaning and Matter:**
Apranik works attempt to give material form to transcendent and spiritual experiences.
 - **Inviting the Viewer to Personal Understanding:**
The viewer is not merely a spectator but a *co-traveler* on the journey.
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Conclusion

Apranik is not merely an artistic style—it is a way of *living creatively, thinking freely, and experiencing truth through beauty*. In a world oversaturated with signs where meaning is often

lost, Apranik emerges like an inner-global whisper, calling humanity toward its essence and the unity of existence.

On the Medium: Body as Instrument

While Apranikism is not bound by any fixed method or tool, many of its foundational works—including my own—are created without traditional instruments such as brushes. Instead, the act of painting is performed directly with fingers, palm, or nails. This choice is not stylistic, but intuitive: it stems from a desire to bypass the symbolic distance between artist and canvas, letting form emerge from the body as an extension of the unconscious. However, this is not a rule. Future practitioners of Apranikism are invited to follow the movement's spirit—not its surface techniques.

7. Analysis of Selected Works

This section explores three key examples from the Apranik oeuvre, providing a concrete lens through which to understand its aesthetic logic and symbolic vocabulary.

7.1. Title: *TEH* (2024)

Dimensions: 42 × 30 cm

Year of Creation: 1403 (2024)

Support: Cardboard

Style: Apranik

Technique: Coffee



Form Analysis

In creating *TEH*, I used coffee as a medium to generate an organic, living texture. The lines and colors emerge not from geometric precision but from an instinctual, subconscious dance—the hand grappling with matter, the mind entangled with memory. The forms are intricate, the lines curvilinear, and the overall atmosphere is dramatic and dreamlike—reminiscent of a vision from a forgotten city.

The tonal variations of coffee produce visual and symbolic depth, evoking earth, ash, and the dust of time. At first glance, the image appears wholly abstract. Yet with closer inspection, familiar architectural elements emerge: stairs, towers, arches, tunnels.

The staircases flanking both sides of the composition symbolize, for me, ascent and descent—passage through layers, whether social or psychological. Spiral paths, cylindrical structures, and column-like forms unconsciously reference ancient architecture, perhaps Iranian or Mesopotamian, tying deeply to my historical memory.

At the center lies a brighter space—an aperture opening outward, or perhaps a light emanating from within. This focal point, created through stark light-dark contrast, becomes a breathing space in the work—possibly a symbol of hope, the future, or the possibility of liberation.

Symbolic Analysis

The title *TEH* clearly alludes to Tehran, but not as a literal city. Rather, this is an inner, mental, even psychological reflection of Tehran—not a geographical capital but a hidden memory, a wounded urban body, a mental construct.

The staircases might represent the strata of society, the ascending and descending classes, and the layered complexity of living in a city like Tehran. The rough, scratched texture echoes erosion—for me, an erosion of memory, buildings, and even personal and collective identity. This visual harshness resists the polished surface of rootless modernity.

Coffee, as a material that stains and settles over time, recalls history, memory, and rootedness. It offers a poetic, human quality that contrasts the fast-paced mechanical urban world. Just as memory settles in the mind, coffee settles in the work.

The light at the center represents, to me, a lamp within the darkness—a light that emanates not from outside, but from within. This light may symbolize the presence of humanity, or perhaps resistance, hope, and that which still survives.

Medium Analysis

Coffee as artistic material:

The choice of coffee was not merely a formal decision, but a poetic and symbolic one. Coffee is a living, unstable, organic substance. Unlike industrial paints, it possesses a personality, a lifespan, and transforms over time. In this work:

- Coffee settles gently, like memory.
- Its brown tones evoke earth, decay, and time—connecting with the past and the soil.
- Coffee becomes a symbolic critique of the superficiality and rootlessness of urban modernity.

Cardboard as surface:

Cardboard, as the support, is a fragile, impermanent material. This was a conscious choice, as I perceive Tehran and its memory similarly—worn down, temporary, subject to erasure.

- Cardboard absorbs coffee well and enhances its texture.
- Its vulnerability metaphorically mirrors the erosion of memory and urban structures.
- Choosing cardboard instead of canvas or wood communicates impermanence and decay—both formally and conceptually.

In this piece, the medium is not just a tool—it is a carrier of meaning. Together, coffee and cardboard portray a world in decline—yet one that is still alive and rich with memory.

Conclusion

TEH is my portrayal of Tehran—not in a literal or descriptive sense, but as a collective memory, a mental structure, and a battlefield between light and darkness. Using the Apranik style—where forms arise not from prior design, but from the subconscious and a physical engagement with matter—the work creates an inward, sensory experience.

The viewer is not a passive onlooker but is invited to *feel, discover, and lose themselves* in the winding mental paths of this abstract Tehran. *TEH* is an attempt to record what cannot be written: the city as memory, matter as memory, coffee as time.

7.2. Title: *The Vow of Faith* (2025)

Dimensions: 100 × 80 cm

Year of Creation: 1404 (2025)

Support: Canvas

Style: Apranik

Technique: Acrylic



Form Analysis

In *the Vow of Faith*, I constructed a vertically oriented composition centered around a spiritual axis—where light emerges from within darkness. This spatial centrality is surrounded by dark masses and luminous textures, gradually drawing the viewer's gaze upward from the lowest visual layers toward a golden, celestial focal point.

The color palette was deliberately built around stark contrasts: from dense, deep blacks to faint whites, scattered reds, and meticulously detailed golds. This interplay not only achieves visual harmony but also embeds layers of meaning—doubt, faith, suffering, and illumination—all interwoven into the chromatic fabric of the piece.

The golden textures and circular, ordered patterns on the right side evoke, for me, sacred and spiritual spaces—echoes of domed architecture or the serenity of prayer diffused through the atmosphere. In contrast, the shadowy, human-like shapes at the lower left suggest a sense of absence, memory, or anxiety—a ghostly presence that seems to rise from the collective unconscious.

A central arch-like form near the top functions as a portal—perhaps an entrance to the inner world or a sacred promise. Altogether, the arrangement of forms and the visual movement from bottom to top reflects, for me, a spiritual journey: a passage from chaos to serenity, from doubt to conviction.

Symbolic Analysis

The Vow of Faith is a title that emerged from within me—not as a simple certainty, but as a promise forged in the midst of doubt and unease. In this piece, faith is not portrayed as absolute assurance, but as something forged through forgetting, struggle, and internal conflict.

Gold represents light, covenant, and guidance—not a light that shines *outside* the darkness, but one that arises *within* it. The traditional motifs in the upper right quadrant, inspired by Iranian ornamentation and sacred symbolism, suggest the promise of meaning in the heart of meaninglessness.

The human forms—at times spectral, at times dissolving—are reflections of the psychic state of a person in confrontation with faith: lost, wounded, but still seeking. The red hues near the center act as visual wounds—symbols of sacrifice, suffering, and the trials through which every belief must pass.

The central arch, functioning as sanctuary or entrance to inner revelation, represents to me a sacred promise—one that can only be reached through darkness. Where the viewer might ask: "*Where is faith?*", the painting answers: "*Within the darkness, not beyond it.*"

Medium Analysis

In creating this work, the medium was not merely a tool, but part of the meaning itself. Acrylic—with its quick drying time, capacity for strong layering, and intensity of color—allowed me to execute emotional and visual contrasts with precision and immediacy.

Through multiple layers, I built dense textures using both brushes and print-like tools. Gold was applied both thinly and richly—at times radiant and ethereal, at others thick and corporeal—capturing the tension between light and materiality. This duality mirrors the core theme of the work: the interplay of faith and doubt.

The choice of canvas was deliberate. Unlike paper or cardboard, canvas is a stable, enduring surface—worthy of carrying the conceptual weight of a “vow.” Its firm yet flexible character allowed me to navigate between the brutality of dark pigments and the tenderness of golden light.

Ultimately, the medium is not merely the bearer of technique—it becomes part of the narrative itself. A narrative of contrast, passage, and fidelity to an inner conviction.

Conclusion

The Vow of Faith is, for me, a journey through darkness. It neither seeks to offer definitive answers nor lays claim to certainty. Rather, it reflects my inner questions about belief, commitment, and those moments when faith is born—like light—*within* doubt.

Through the personal language of the Apranik style, I’ve tried to fuse unconscious intuition with collective memory, allowing form, color, and medium to serve this internal reflection. *The Vow of Faith* is an invitation to contemplate: what we believe in, the path to that belief, and the shadows through which the light must sometimes pass.

7.3. Title: *My Inheritance* (2023)

Dimensions: 100 × 160 cm

Year of Creation: 1402 (2023)

Support: Canvas

Style: Apranik

Technique: Acrylic painting and manual printing



Form Analysis

In *My Inheritance*, part of the **Haft-Khan** series comprising seven works, I sought to create a multilayered, dispersed, yet interconnected structure. The composition does not follow a linear or traditional logic; rather, it attempts to open the viewer's gaze toward a nonlinear experience of history and memory. The forms I used are derived from ancient visual sources but appear on the canvas through liberated rearrangement and reinterpretation. The presence of calligraphy, printmaking, hand-drawn elements, and textured color passages instills a distinct rhythm and visual movement throughout the work.

I remained loyal to a restricted color palette: black, gold, copper, and earthy undertones. This selection allowed me to evoke a sense of antiquity, decay, and the passage of time—without sacrificing visual balance. The structure of the work resembles, for me, a visual memory: fragmented and seemingly disjointed on the surface, yet inwardly alive and continuous.

Symbolic Analysis

In *My Inheritance*, I aimed to approach my cultural and historical legacy not through a museological or ornamental lens, but through a living, critical, and personal perspective. The figures and faces that appear—ranging from mythical heroes of the *Shahnameh* to legendary beings—do not merely recount history; they function as metaphors for identity, power, forgetting, and my own rootedness in this land.

Scattered inscriptions across the canvas feel, to me, like voices rising from the past—sometimes whispers, sometimes cries. They are part of my inner dialogue with history, language, and self. The birds, occasionally in flight and sometimes still, symbolize transition, journey, or perhaps a dream of liberation. Amidst these elements, recurring motifs of city, home, and soil emphasize both a sense of belonging and estrangement.

Medium Analysis

The choice of medium in this work was entirely deliberate. Manual printing, for me, is not merely a technical tool but the language of memory—an instrument for repetition, transmission, and simultaneously, disruption of the past. Through printmaking, I reproduce the image, yet simultaneously reclaim it. It becomes a play between originality and appropriation.

Acrylic, with its versatility and high coverage, allowed me to build vibrant, dense textures. I applied colors both transparently and opaquely, enhancing or dissolving the printed layers as needed. The integration of these two media was not merely a method of execution but a core conceptual element—embodying the tension between the personal and the collective, the handmade and the mechanical, the traditional and the contemporary.

Conclusion

My Inheritance is not simply a representation of the past. It is the result of a personal confrontation with questions of identity, history, and our role in preserving or reinterpreting them. The Apranik style—part of my conscious endeavor to forge a new visual language in contemporary Iranian painting—became a platform here for expressing this inner and cultural tension. In this work, I tried to see the past not as a frozen narrative, but as a living, interpretable, and transformative substance. *My Inheritance* is an invitation to reconsider what we have inherited—not with nostalgia, but with a critical, affectionate, and responsible gaze.

Shirin Jabalameli 2025



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