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Urban Iran



Synopsis

Writers, photographers and artists reveal everyday life in contemporary Iran.

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Customer Reviews

great read.

The focus here is on graffiti and street art in contemporary Iran along with streets scenes depicting everyday life, especially in the bustling, angry metropolis that is Tehran. Karan Reshad and Sina Araghi do the photography while writing about what life is like today in Iran and about the life and intent of the artists. There are also essays such as "Slab City" by Brian Ackley, and "Roots of Rebellion" by Coco Ferguson. There is some information about the artists, some of whom are young taggers who operate underground away from the censoring eyes of the theocratic regime. In a sense this book is about rebelling against established authority as urban taggers are wont to do throughout the world. In another sense this is a graphic report on life in Iran and how it plays out under the authoritative eyes of the ayatollahs. One gets a sense of flux and unsettlement, a culture in transition, part of it resisting change, part of it hoping for change. The street art is colorful, more thoughtful perhaps than that of other cities, and at times whimsical. A1ONE, one of the featured artists has a most distinctive style combining cartoon figures with something like science fiction Cubism tinged with a noticeable edginess. He also does stencils including the ambiguous but clearly ironic "ILOVEATOMBOMB." The influence of the West is sprinkled throughout as it mingles with the values of the traditional society. An example is from the street artist BigChiz who gives us,

on what appears to be a metal maintenance door, an enigmatic drawing of Kurt Cobain. One of the essays by Coco Ferguson and Sohrab Mohebbi entitled "Hair Is for Head-Banging" is about Iran's metal scene ("...away from thrash toward progressive, almost funk metal..."). Some of the photos are of published art, which in the case of Gholamali Maktabi tends to the colorful, the smiling, and the non-political: art for children's books. There is an abstraction by Ali Biyashi also apparently from a children's book. Photos of book covers in which one can see the ghost of the influence of Western artists like Paul Klee and others are presented. In addition to the sense of the old ways struggling against the new--the theocratic culture vying against the mass Western culture--I also had a sense of life being lived irrespective of the politics: people selling brooms and watermelons, men's shirts and soccer jerseys. I also had the sense that Tehran is more like one of the planet's great urban centers than it is like the rest of Iran. Perhaps it is a truth to realize that cities have a culture of their own partly independent of the country in which they formed, each having more in common with their huge sister cities in other countries than they have with their rural areas. At any rate, the people at Mark Batty have chosen in some of their books to focus on the art culture of the cities and have shown the similarities.

URBAN IRAN is yet another fine book on design and graphic art from Mark Batty Publishers. Some casual readers might view this well designed and edited survey of art as yet another aspect of the plentiful books on graffiti art, but for the reader who takes time to not only enjoy the richly colorful pages so generously offered here but to also read the fine essays, there is much to learn, appreciate and understand about Iran as a country cramped by years of censorship. The effects of harsh laws against self-expression are bound to be most obvious in the street graffiti, that universal sounding board for resentment and anger and fatigue over the establishment. Photographers Karan Rashid and Sina Araghi have captured the vistas of the countryside and the cities (especially Tehran) both with and without art and with and without people. The results are richly personal - each photograph making a statement in visuals alone. The commentary that accompanies the images of street art (including a particularly sensitive introduction by Editor Buzz Poole) allows the reader to appreciate the daring strides made by street artists in a government so very closed. Chapters such as 'The 206' (a popular automobile in Iran) allows the reader a journey through the countryside, demonstrating the differences between the East and the West in commentary and in images; 'A1ONE' speaks volumes in graffiti images on the streets without words; PORTRAITS OF THE EVERY DAY utilizes excellent commentaries along with images of the people and the buildings to inform us of life as it continues to exist under constantly changing influences from the outside. For

this reader the last half of the book devoted to THE ART OF PUBLISHING is the most satisfying. After the necessary 'climate information' offered in the first half of the book, this section is a treasure house of colorful, imaginative art and design that stands as Iran's image to the world outside its borders. The art here is magnificent and the graphic design elements are some of the finest published in this series of Mark Batty books. It is here that all the peripheral clutter of a country surrounded by wars and factions is secondary to the words and images of the artists of Iran. It is a tender statement and one that needs wider exposure. Iran is rich in culture and history and art, and finally we have a book that brings this to our attention - today- when we need to see and hear it. Highly recommended on many levels. Grady Harp, February 09

Urban Iran by Mark Batty, Publisher This book made me sad. The photos depict art found in today's cities of Iran, principally in Tehran. With the political strife of the last few decades and the iron leadership of a theocratic government artists have been severely limited or censored in what they are allowed to say or portray, so art in every form nearly died. Yet artists are born and yearn to create. Recently they have become emboldened in what they are presenting, often disguised but giving hidden messages, which people are beginning to discern. This book catalogues the often angry art found in public places and in even children's books today in Iran. The artists were interviewed and speak out with careful articulation about their plight and the stirrings of protest. It is a fascinating book but makes one sad to see the grief expressed in the art. This is a bold, history-making book, important for the world to see and important as future documentation of life in today's Iran.

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