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The Crisis of the Subject and the Semiotic Body in Contemporary Iranian Painting

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Abstract

Contemporary Iranian painting during the 2000s and 2010s (1380s and 1390s in the Solar Hijri calendar), in a number of its most significant examples, has moved away from the direct representation of the external world and has become a site for rethinking the relationship between image, reality, and identity. One of the most notable manifestations of this transformation is the destabilization of the subject's position and the transformation of the body from a bearer of presence and identity into a semiotic construct within the pictorial structure. This study investigates how the crisis of the subject and the semiotic body are articulated in contemporary Iranian painting and examines their relationship to post-reality and pseudo-modernity. The research is qualitative in nature and employs a descriptive-analytical methodology. Using criterion-based purposive sampling, it analyzes four selected paintings by Omid Hallaj, Mehdi Farhadian, and Khosrow Khosravi. The analytical framework is based on such components as the status of the body within the composition, bodily coherence, facial representation and individuality, the relationship of the body to space, time, and narrative, its relation to cultural and historical signs, and the degree of mediation in representation. The findings indicate that, through the obscuring or attenuation of the face, the disruption of bodily integrity, spatial and narrative suspension, the repetition or multiplication of figures, and the dissolution of the body into a network of historical, mnemonic, and visual references, the body departs from its conventional status and becomes a semiotic construct. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that this transformation is not merely the outcome of formal developments in contemporary art; rather, it is closely connected to historical non-synchronicity, the unstable coexistence of tradition and modernity, and the pseudo-modern experience of Iranian society. Accordingly, the crisis of the subject in the selected works does not signify the complete disappearance of the human figure; instead, it denotes the displacement of human presence from its position of centrality, coherence, and authority within the pictorial field.

Keywords: Post-reality, Pseudo-modernity, Crisis of the subject, Semiotic body, Contemporary Iranian painting.

1 | Introduction

Contemporary Iranian painting during the 2000s and 2010s (1380s and 1390s in the Solar Hijri calendar) has not merely served as a medium for representing the external world; rather, it has become a significant site for rethinking the relationship between image, reality, and identity. In a number of these works, the body no longer appears as the bearer of a stable presence or a clearly defined locus of identity. Instead, it is situated within a semiotic, mediated, and at times suspended structure. This transformation may be understood as an

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indication of a shift in the position of the subject within the image a shift in which the body ceases to function as the privileged site of stabilized meaning and instead becomes one of the central problematics of representation. The significance of this transformation becomes more apparent when examined in relation to both the conditions of contemporary art and the cultural context of Iran. In contemporary art, the proliferation of media, the multiplication of images, and the increasing complexity of representational mechanisms have distanced the relationship between image and reality from the traditional model of direct reflection. Consequently, the image no longer functions merely as a reflection of the real; rather, it plays an active role in structuring experience and producing meaning [1]. In such a context, the subject likewise no longer remains the stable center of perception and meaning. Rather, it is reconstituted within a network of visual references, memories, and signifying relations [2]. Within the Iranian context, this issue is intertwined with a distinctive experience of modernity. The Iranian experience of modernity has not been complete, linear, or institutionally consolidated; rather, it has been characterized by historical non-synchronicity, discontinuity, and the unstable coexistence of tradition and modernity [3]. Therefore, the crisis of the subject in contemporary Iranian painting cannot be explained solely through reference to the general transformations of global art; rather, it must also be understood in relation to the pseudo-modern condition of Iranian society, a condition in which identity, memory, history, and contemporary experience interact with one another in a tense and unfinished configuration [4]. Accordingly, the main issue of this research is to examine how the crisis of the subject and the semiotic body emerge in contemporary Iranian painting and to elucidate their relationship with post-reality and pseudo-modernity. The study focuses on those works in which the body, rather than functioning as a site for the consolidation of presence and identity, becomes a domain of suspended meaning, unstable identity, and mediated representation. From this perspective, the study of the semiotic body can serve as an appropriate entry point for understanding some of the semantic and visual transformations occurring in contemporary Iranian painting.

2 | Statement of the Problem

In many prevalent interpretations of contemporary Iranian painting, artworks are primarily analyzed based on subject matter, style, technique, or in relation to binary oppositions such as tradition and modernity, realism and abstraction, or individuality and collectivism. Despite their significance, these approaches often remain confined to the level of describing formal characteristics or broad classifications, and they pay less attention to the question of how transformations in contemporary visual language have altered the position of the subject itself and the mode of the body's presence within the image. However, in a number of works of contemporary Iranian painting, the issue is not merely a change in form or content; rather, signs of a destabilization of the subject's centrality can be observed. This means that the body no longer functions as the bearer of an integrated presence, a fixed identity, and a clear reference point for meaning. Instead, within the structure of the image, it operates as a mediated, suspended, and semiotic element. The significance of this transformation lies in the fact that, within conventional traditions of representation, the body has been one of the primary sites for the consolidation of identity, individuality, and lived experience. Therefore, whenever the body in an artwork departs from this position and becomes a semiotic construct, the transformation involved extends beyond the level of aesthetics; it also concerns the logic of meaning production and the relationship between image and reality. In such a condition, the image is no longer merely a site for the manifestation of an established subject; rather, it becomes a field in which presence, identity, and the authority of meaning are placed in suspension. It is from this point that the issue of the crisis of the subject in contemporary Iranian painting gains significance, a crisis that should be understood not merely as an expressive or formal characteristic, but as an indication of a transformation in the structure of representation. This issue becomes more clearly articulated in relation to the concept of post-reality. In this study, post-reality refers to a condition in which representation moves beyond its secondary status and assumes an active role in constructing what is perceived as real. Within such a framework, one of the first domains in which this shift becomes evident is the subject itself; for the subject is no longer the definitive point of departure for experience and meaning, but is instead reconstructed amid images, memories, references, and cultural codes. Consequently, the body too ceases to be merely the site of human presence

and becomes a surface upon which the suspension, fragmentation, mediation, and instability of identity are inscribed [2]. However, the analysis of this condition in contemporary Iranian painting cannot be adequately achieved solely through reliance on the general developments of contemporary art or broad postmodern concepts. Within the Iranian context, the experience of modernity has been accompanied by discontinuity, historical non-synchronicity, and the unstable coexistence of tradition and modernity. Consequently, transformations related to the subject, identity, and representation have also taken on a specific and context-dependent form [3-5]. Therefore, the issue of the crisis of the subject in contemporary Iranian painting should also be understood in relation to the pseudo-modern condition of Iranian society, a condition in which historical memory, remnants of tradition, mediated forms of life, and unfinished modes of being modern simultaneously contribute to the formation of the image and the identity of the artwork. Accordingly, the primary gap in existing research lies in the fact that, on the one hand, analyses of contemporary Iranian painting have largely focused on stylistic movements, spatial structures, or the relationship between tradition and modernity; and on the other hand, studies based on Baudrillardian concepts have predominantly addressed photography, media, interactive art, or installation. Consequently, there remains a significant absence of research that specifically examines the crisis of the subject and the semiotic body in contemporary Iranian painting, particularly through their simultaneous relationship with post-reality and pseudo-modernity. Thus, the central issue of this research is to demonstrate the ways in which the body, in certain examples of contemporary Iranian painting, departs from its conventional position as the bearer of presence, identity, and semantic centrality and becomes a semiotic element within the network of the image. It further seeks to explain how this transformation can be understood in relation to the precedence of representation over reality and the pseudo-modern condition of Iranian society. In this regard, the present study attempts to analytically examine, through a focus on specific examples of contemporary Iranian painting, the relationship between the transformation of bodily representation, the crisis of the subject, and the cultural-historical context of contemporary Iran [6].

3 | Main Research Question

Through what processes does the body in contemporary Iranian painting depart from its conventional position as the bearer of presence, identity, and semantic centrality, and become a semiotic element within the network of the image?

3.1 | Sub-Questions of the Research

Through which visual and representational components can this transformation be observed in the selected works of contemporary Iranian painting?

How can the relationship between this transformation and the logic of post-reality be explained?

What role does the pseudo-modern condition of Iranian society play in the formation of this crisis of the subject and the semiotic body?

3.2 | Research Background

The background of this study can be traced through two main lines of inquiry. The first concerns studies that have examined concepts such as simulation, simulacrum, hyperreality, and post-reality in relation to the ideas of Jean Baudrillard and contemporary visual culture. The second involves research addressing the transformations of contemporary Iranian painting, its relationship with modernity, and the developments in representation within the works of Iranian artists. The significance of reviewing these two lines lies in the fact that the issue of the crisis of the subject and the semiotic body in contemporary Iranian painting can be formulated at the intersection of these two fields. In the first area of inquiry, some studies have attempted to transfer Baudrillardian concepts from the domain of philosophical theory to the analysis of art and media. Heydari (2014) in his study on the simulation of truth from Jean Baudrillard's perspective, demonstrates that, in the postmodern condition, the boundary between reality and representation becomes weakened, and the

image can acquire a function more convincing than reality itself [5]. also demonstrates, in her study of the concept of simulation and hyperreality in postmodern photography, how new visual strategies, including rephotography and appropriation, contribute to the weakening of the authenticity and referential authority of reality [7]. Furthermore, with an emphasis on the works of Richard Prince, have highlighted the difficulty of distinguishing reality from simulacra in the age of hyperreality [7].Baudrillardian concepts in relation to installation art and interactive art, respectively, demonstrating that artistic experience in these fields can, through the dominance of representation, be transformed into a hyperreal experience [8], [9]. Despite the significance of these studies, their primary focus has largely been on media, photography, installation, and interactive arts rather than contemporary Iranian painting. Furthermore, these studies have not placed the issue of the crisis of the subject and the semiotic body at the center of their analyses as an independent problem. Therefore, although these sources are valuable for understanding the logic of the precedence of representation and the weakening of the referential authority of reality, they do not directly address the central question of the present research. In the second line of inquiry, a number of studies have addressed the transformations of contemporary Iranian painting and its relationship with tradition, modernity, and the evolution of visual language. Naji et al. [10], in examining realism in contemporary Iranian painting, demonstrates that the representation of reality during the 1370s and 1380s (Solar Hijri calendar) moved away from a direct and objective model toward the subjective and interpretive reconstruction of reality [11]. Gilchrist [11], in her study of the tendency toward multi-spatiality in contemporary Iranian painting, likewise emphasizes the layered nature of space, intertextuality, and the coexistence of different temporalities and levels of signification [12]. Furthermore, in their study of the influence of painterly perspectives on the works of painter-illustrators, point to the intermediary condition of Iran's encounter with modernity [12]. These studies are significant for understanding the transformations of contemporary Iranian painting; however, they primarily focus on spatial structures, stylistic developments, or the relationship between tradition and modernity. They pay less attention to the question of how these transformations have altered the position of the subject and the mode of the body's presence within the image. In other words, in these works, the body is mainly examined at the level of form, style, or cultural signs, rather than as a site for the emergence of an identity crisis and the suspension of presence. Alongside these two lines of inquiry, theoretical texts related to modernity and pseudo-modernity in Iran, particularly the works of Ashouri [3], are significant for explaining the historical and cultural context of this research [3-5]. These sources describe Iranian society as one characterized by an incomplete, asynchronous, and contradictory experience of modernity. However, these texts do not directly address contemporary painting or the issues of the body and the crisis of the subject; rather, they primarily provide the contextual framework for the study. Accordingly, the main gap in existing research is that, on the one hand, the concepts of simulation, hyperreality, and post-reality have been examined primarily in relation to media and non-painterly arts; and on the other hand, studies of contemporary Iranian painting have paid less attention to the crisis of the subject and the formulation of the body as a semiotic construct. Therefore, there remains a lack of research that simultaneously connects these two fields and demonstrates how, in certain examples of contemporary Iranian painting, the body shifts from being the bearer of presence and identity to becoming a semiotic element within the network of the image. The distinct contribution of this research lies precisely in this point: connecting the analysis of contemporary Iranian painting with the concepts of post-reality and pseudo-modernity, while focusing specifically on the crisis of the subject and the semiotic body.

4 | Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this research is based on three interconnected concepts: post-reality, the crisis of the subject, and pseudo-modernity. Together, these three concepts make it possible to analyze the body in contemporary Iranian painting not merely as a formal element, but as a site where transformations in representation, the instability of identity, and historical non-synchronicity intersect. Within this framework, post-reality clarifies the changing logic of the relationship between image and reality; the crisis of the subject refers to the transformation of the position of the body and human presence within structures of meaning; and pseudo-modernity explains the specific historical and cultural context of this transformation in Iran.

5 | Post-Reality and the Primacy of Representation over Experience

In this research, post-reality is not used in its common sense within the domains of politics and public discourse; rather, it is employed as an analytical concept in the field of visual culture and art. It refers to a condition in which representation moves beyond its subordinate role and assumes an active function in constructing what is perceived as real. In terms of its theoretical origins, this understanding is closely related to Baudrillardian concepts of simulacrum and simulation. Baudrillard argues that in the contemporary world, signs and images no longer necessarily refer to a stable external referent; instead, they operate within a self-referential network and gradually replace the real itself [2]. Under such conditions, the image is not merely a reflection of reality, but rather a mechanism through which reality is reorganized and perceived. The significance of this concept for the present study lies in the fact that, with the weakening of the authority of the real, the position of the subject is also transformed. If the image is no longer merely a tool for reflecting the world, then human presence within it can no longer be understood as self-evident and transparent. Consequently, the body may move away from its status as a lived reference and a stabilizing force of identity, becoming instead a surface of representation, mediation, and suspended meaning. From this perspective, post-reality provides this research with a conceptual framework for analyzing how the "image of the body" replaces the "present body."

6 | The Crisis of the Subject and the Semiotic Body

In this research, the crisis of the subject does not signify the complete elimination of the human figure from the image; rather, it refers to the destabilization of its position as the center of identity, experience, and meaning. Within conventional traditions of representation, the body has been one of the primary sites for the consolidation of individuality, presence, and lived experience. However, when representation becomes independent from an external referent, and meaning is formed within a network of visual, historical, and cultural significations, the subject can no longer maintain its previous centrality. Consequently, the body moves away from being a transparent bearer of presence and becomes a semiotic construct. Within this framework, the semiotic body refers to a body whose meaning is shaped not through an immediate and unified presence but through intra-image relationships, cultural references, historical memory, and structures of representation. Such a body may still occupy the center of the image, yet it no longer guarantees identity, individuality, or presence. Therefore, elements such as deformation, the fading of facial features, disruption of bodily coherence, spatial suspension, the elimination of narrative context, repetition of figures, and the dissolution of the body into heterogeneous elements are considered in this research as visual indicators of the crisis of the subject. In this sense, the crisis of the subject is not a psychological state, but rather a representational condition in which the body shifts from being a site for the stabilization of meaning to becoming a surface for the suspension and displacement of meaning.

7 | Pseudo-Modernity and the Iranian Context of the Problem

If post-reality explains the logic of the transformation in the relationship between image and reality, the concept of pseudo-modernity clarifies the historical and cultural context of this transformation in Iran. Based on perspectives such as those of Ashouri and Mirsepassi, the Iranian experience of modernity has not been a complete, linear, and institutionalized process; rather, it has been an incomplete, asynchronous, and contradictory experience in which modern signs and manifestations are present, while the epistemological, institutional, and social foundations of modernity have not been fully established [3], Under such conditions, tradition and modernity do not coexist through an organic process, but rather appear alongside one another in the form of unstable and, at times, tension-filled juxtapositions. The significance of this condition for the present study lies in the fact that the body and the subject in contemporary Iranian painting are likewise formed within this very asynchronous and intermediary experience. In other words, the crisis of the subject in these works is not merely the result of general transformations in contemporary art or the influence of global visual language; rather, it is connected to a condition in which historical memory, remnants of tradition,

mediated forms of life, and unfinished modes of being modern simultaneously contribute to the formation of the image and the identity of the artwork [5]. Therefore, in this research, pseudo-modernity is not merely considered an external context, but rather one of the explanatory factors for understanding the emergence of the semiotic body and the crisis of the subject in contemporary Iranian painting.

8 | The Relationship Between Concepts within the Research Framework

The function of these three concepts in the present study is complementary. Post-reality explains how the body, within the structure of the image, distances itself from its lived referent and becomes a semiotic construct [14]. The crisis of the subject conceptually formulates this transformation from the perspective of the status of human presence and the destabilization of the centrality of meaning. Pseudo-modernity, in turn, clarifies why this process takes on a particular form in contemporary Iranian painting and how it is connected to historical non-synchronicity, the suspension of identity, and the unstable coexistence of tradition and modernity. Based on this framework, the body in the selected works is analyzed not merely as a visual form, but as a field in which tensions between presence and absence, identity and suspension, and reality and representation emerge. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this research ultimately serves to address the question of how, in certain examples of contemporary Iranian painting, the body shifts from the position of the bearer of presence and identity to become a semiotic element within the network of the image.

8.1 | Research Methodology

This study is fundamental in terms of its objective and qualitative in nature, employing a descriptive-analytical approach. The primary method of the research is the qualitative analysis of visual artworks, based on an interpretive reading of the body, the figure, and the structure of representation in contemporary Iranian painting. Within this framework, the research does not seek to quantitatively measure data; rather, it aims to explain how the crisis of the subject emerges and how the body is transformed into a semiotic construct within the selected works. Accordingly, the research process is based on the detailed description of artworks, the extraction of visual components, and their interpretation in relation to the concepts of post-reality, the crisis of the subject, and pseudo-modernity.

8.2 | Research Population and Sample

The population of this research consists of contemporary Iranian paintings from the decades of the 1380s and 1390s (Solar Hijri calendar), particularly works in which the human body or figurative representation occupies a central position or one of the primary focal points of the image. From this population, the samples have been selected through purposive criterion sampling. The criteria for selection were that the artwork or body of works should prominently demonstrate at least several of the following characteristics:

The presence of the body or figurative representation as one of the main elements of the image structure;

The weakening of the subject's individuality or established identity;

Disruption in the bodily, spatial, or narrative coherence of the figure;

Signs of suspended presence, mediated representation, or temporal and semantic multilayering;

The potential for analysis in relation to the concepts of post-reality and pseudo-modernity.

Accordingly, four works by three artists, Omid Hallaj, Mehdi Farhadian, and Khosrow Khosravi, have been selected as the research samples. The rationale behind this selection is that each of these artists reveals a distinct dimension of the crisis of the subject: in the works of Omid Hallaj, this crisis primarily emerges through the direct transformation of the body and the suspension of action; in the works of Mehdi Farhadian, it appears through the dissolution of human presence within memory, history, and layers of representation; and in the works of Khosrow Khosravi, it is manifested through the spectral quality of the figure, the fading of individuality, and the body's connection with a deteriorated and heterogeneous environment. Therefore,

these samples have not been selected with the intention of representing the entirety of contemporary Iranian painting, but rather for the purpose of analyzing significant and problem-oriented examples that reveal the specific issues under investigation.

9 | Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in this research is each painting, rather than merely the artist's name or the overall body of their works. Accordingly, the analysis focuses on the visual organization, the manner of the body's presence, the relationship between the figure and space, and the semantic structure of each artwork. However, in cases where the relationship between two works by the same artist is necessary for clarifying the broader logic of their practice, intra-collection comparisons are also employed.

9.1 | Data and Methods of Collection

The research data have been collected from two main sources: First, theoretical and library-based data, which include books, articles, and theses related to the concepts of simulation, simulacrum, post-reality, the crisis of the subject, the body in contemporary art, as well as discussions concerning modernity and pseudo-modernity in Iran. Second, visual data, which consists of selected works of contemporary Iranian painting. In selecting the works, images published in written sources, exhibition catalogues, and reliable visual documentation have been used. The criterion for using these images was that they possessed sufficient visual quality to allow the observation of the details required for analysis.

9.2 | Specifications of the Selected Works

The works examined in this research are as follows:

Omid Hallaj, Untitled, 1396 (Solar Hijri calendar)/2017 (CE), oil on canvas, 135 × 184 cm
Omid Hallaj, Untitled, 1396 (Solar Hijri calendar), oil on canvas, 150 × 200 cm
Mehdi Farhadian, The Autumn of Peace, 1397 (Solar Hijri calendar), acrylic on canvas, 130 × 180 cm
Khosrow Khosravi, Untitled, 1397 (Solar Hijri calendar), acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm. Providing the specifications of the selected works in this section is essential because the analysis of the research is based on specific and referential artworks, thereby avoiding generalizations.

9.3 | Operational Framework of Analysis

To enhance analytical precision, the interpretation of the artworks in this research is conducted based on a set of operational indicators. These indicators are derived from the theoretical foundations of the study and form the basis for the comparison and interpretation of the selected samples:

I. The Position of the Body within the Composition This indicator examines the position occupied by the body or figure within the image: whether it is central, marginal, suspended, integrated with the background, or fragmented. This criterion demonstrates whether the body still functions as the perceptual focus of the image or whether it has moved away from this position.

II. The Degree of Bodily Coherence Within this indicator, the continuity or disintegration of the body's structure is examined, including deformation, the removal of bodily parts, elongation, transformation, or fragmentation of the body. The aim is to assess the extent to which the body distances itself from the condition of being a unified whole.

III. The Condition of the Face and Individuality This section examines the presence or absence of the face, its clarity or fading, the neutrality of expression, and the degree of individual distinction of the subject. This component is significant for analyzing the weakening of individuality and the decentering of the subject.

IV. The Relationship between the Body and Space
This section analyzes the manner in which the body is situated within space: whether the body exists within a specific and identifiable environment or within a neutral, suspended, and non-referential space. It also

examines the relationship between the figure and the background, as well as the stability or instability of the spatial structure.

V. The Relationship between the Body, Time, and Narrative
This indicator determines whether the image refers to a specific temporal-narrative situation or whether the body exists outside linear time, within a multi-temporal or suspended condition.

VI. The Relationship between the Body and Cultural and Historical Signs This section examines the coexistence of the body with historical, mythological, traditional, urban, media-related, or architectural elements in order to clarify how the body is positioned within a network of cultural references and distances itself from direct lived reference.

VII. The Degree of Mediation in Representation This component examines signs that indicate second-order representation, reflection, reproduction, the image of an image, visual memory, or the indirect reconstruction of reality. This indicator is directly related to the concept of post-reality.

Stages of Artwork Analysis

The analysis of each artwork in this study is conducted in four stages:

Stage One: Description of the Artwork :At this stage, the basic information about the artwork is presented, including the artist's name, the title of the work, the year of its creation, the technique or medium used, and a brief description of its main visual elements.

Stage Two: Identification of Visual Components .At this stage, visual components, including body posture, facial expression, spatial setting, narrative, corporeal coherence, and the relationship between the body and its surrounding elements ,are identified.

Stage Three: Intra-Pictorial Interpretation :At this stage, the relationships among the visual elements are examined to clarify how the body acquires meaning within the structure of the artwork and how it relates to presence, identity, suspension, and mediation.

Stage Four: Theoretical Interpretation :In the final stage, the findings derived from the analysis of each artwork are interpreted in relation to the concepts of post-truth, the crisis of the subject, and pseudo-modernity, to determine the position of each artwork in addressing the research questions.

10 | Analytical Validity and Research Limitations

To enhance the analytical validity of this study, three principles have been observed: First, reliance on specific and verifiable artworks; Second, a clear distinction between visual description and theoretical interpretation; Third, comparative analysis across the selected works to reveal both their shared characteristics and their meaningful differences. At the same time, this study does not seek to formulate a comprehensive judgment about the entirety of contemporary Iranian painting. Rather, it focuses on the qualitative analysis of selected case studies. Accordingly, the findings pertain to the significant patterns of meaning identified in the artworks under examination and should be understood within the context of these specific examples. Furthermore, access to all artworks or complete bodies of work by the selected artists was not always possible, and the quality of available image reproductions of certain works may have influenced the scope and depth of the analysis.

10.1 | Analysis of the Selected Case Studies

To address the research question, four artworks by three selected artists are examined. The rationale for this selection is that each case exemplifies a distinct trajectory in the transformation of the body and the destabilization of the subject's position. In the works of Omid Hallaj, the crisis of the subject is manifested primarily through the transformation of the body, the suspension of agency, and the disruption of the figure's centrality. In the work of Mehdi Farhadian, it emerges through the dissolution of human presence into

memory, history, and multilayered representation. In the work of Khosrow Khosravi, the articulation of the body through spectralization, the erasure of individuality, and the placement of the figure within an incongruous and decaying environment are evident. Each case study is analyzed according to the operational indicators established in the methodology, namely: the body's position within the composition; corporeal coherence; facial expression and individuality; the relationship between the body and space; the relationship to time and narrative; the relationship to cultural and historical signs; and the degree of mediated representation.

11|Omid Hallaj: The Body in Suspension, the Body in Multiplicity

Among the works examined in this study, those of Omid Hallaj establish the most direct engagement with the notion of the body as a signifying construct. In these paintings, the body does not appear as the bearer of a stable and clearly defined individual identity. Rather, it emerges within a network of natural, mythological, historical, and pictorial elements, through which its meaning is continuously negotiated and reconstituted.



Fig. 1. Untitled. Omid Hallaj, 1396 (Solar Hijri calendar)/2017(CE). Oil on canvas, 184 × 135 cm. (URL: 1)

In the first selected work, Untitled (2017), oil on canvas, 184 × 135 cm, human figures, animal forms, and natural motifs are brought together within a shared yet unstable spatial environment. The visual description of the painting indicates that the body does not appear as a complete and stable figure; rather, it is presented as a partially obscured, layered, and interwoven presence integrated with the other pictorial elements. From the outset, the first indicator of the crisis of the subject becomes evident: although the body remains present within the image, this presence no longer guarantees perceptual or semantic centrality. With regard to the body's position within the composition, the human figure does not occupy a fully stabilized focal point; rather, it is dispersed among a multiplicity of heterogeneous elements. Consequently, the viewer's gaze is not directed toward a single, central body but is instead distributed across a broader field of visual signs. In terms of corporeal coherence, the body lacks natural and self-contained integrity. The relative transparency of the figures, the unusual twisting or elongation of the limbs, and their integration with the surrounding environment prevent the body from functioning as an autonomous and unified whole. Regarding the face and individuality, although the human presence is not entirely erased, the face no longer functions as the locus for the stabilization of identity. Individuality is established neither through facial expression nor through clearly articulated action. As a result, the subject appears less as a determinate individual than as a trace or sign of presence. In relation to space, the work does not possess a clear, stable, and identifiable setting. The pictorial space is neither entirely natural, nor architectural, nor narrative-based; rather, it assumes a state of suspension and in-betweenness. This condition causes the body to become detached from its lived and objective context, transforming it more into an "image of the body" than a "present body."

With regard to time and narrative, the work does not follow a linear narrative structure. The coexistence of human, animal, and natural elements, together with the dreamlike and multilayered quality of the image, transforms time into a suspended and multi-temporal condition. Consequently, instead of being situated within a specific moment of action or experience, the body floats within a network of deferral, suspension, and reference. This condition brings the work closer to the logic of post-reality; [15] since the body does not acquire meaning as an immediate lived reality, but rather through representation and in relation to other signs.



Fig. 2. Untitled.
Omid Hallaj, 1396 (Solar Hijri calendar)/2017(CE). Oil on canvas, 150 × 200 cm. (URL: 2)

In the second selected work by Omid Hallaj, oil on canvas, 150 × 200 cm, this transformation takes a different yet even more evident form. In this work, horse figures are repeated in states of leaping, falling, and suspension. Through the removal of the rider or the human agent of action, a disruption in the centrality of the subject emerges. Although the human body is not directly positioned at the center of the image, this very absence constitutes one of the significant mechanisms of the crisis of the subject; the image displaces the human acting body and instead places repetitive, referentially indeterminate bodies within the visual field. From the perspective of composition, the multiplication of figures eliminates centrality and replaces a singular presence with bodies that appear in an equivalent and repetitive condition. In terms of time and narrative, movement in this work does not lead toward a clear destination or meaningful action; rather, it remains within a cycle of suspension and repetition. Thus, the body is detached from linear narrative and historical causality. In relation to space, fragmented and layered surfaces, the absence of a stable perspective, and the proximity of the figures to the background weaken the boundary between figure and environment. These characteristics prevent the body from being situated within a stable and referential space, causing it instead to appear within a suspended and post-reality condition. Therefore, in Hallaj's two works, the crisis of the subject is formulated through two interconnected trajectories: on the one hand, through the dissolution and layering of the human body within a network of signs; and on the other hand, through the removal of the human agent and the substitution of repetitive and decentered figures.

Mehdi Farhadian: The Body in Memory, the Body in Layers of History



Figure 3. Autumn of Peace. Mehdi Farhadian,1397 (Solar Hijri calendar)/ 2018(CE).
Acrylic on canvas, 180 × 130 cm. (URL: 3)

The second case study is Autumn of Peace (2018), acrylic on canvas, 130 × 180 cm, by Mehdi Farhadian. The significance of this work for the present research lies in the fact that the crisis of the subject does not emerge through an overt deformation of the body, but rather through the dissolution of human presence within a multilayered, memory-laden, and asynchronous structure. Here, the body or human presence does not appear as an explicit and firmly established figure against a clearly defined background; instead, it becomes part of the overall arrangement of pictorial elements, an arrangement in which the past, memory, cultural signs, and

remnants of historical narratives are brought together and superimposed. In terms of the body's position within the composition, human presence in this work does not occupy a distinctly established central position within the image. The body is not the definitive focal point, but rather a component of a broader field of signs and references. This condition destabilizes the centrality of the subject from the very beginning. Regarding individuality and the face, the work lacks the clarity required to establish a distinct personality or individual identity. Individuality is not fixed through facial features, through a specific action, or through a direct narrative. Here, the body is perceived primarily as a presence dissolved within the texture and structure of the image. In relation to time and narrative, the work does not possess a linear structure. The layering of elements, the juxtaposition of historical and cultural signs, and the collage-like quality of the image disrupt the continuity and uniformity of time. [16] The past and the present, memory and cultural remnants, overlap on the surface of the image without being resolved into a unified narrative. Consequently, the body in this work exists within a condition of multiple temporalities and suspension. From the perspective of the relationship between the body and cultural-historical signs, the presence of familiar traditional, historical, and architectural elements yet emptied of their direct and lived functions—is of particular significance. These elements no longer operate as parts of an integrated world; rather, they have been transformed into visual and referential surfaces. The body itself is situated within this network of references and moves away from its direct lived authority and immediacy. Regarding the mediation of representation, Farhadian's work is one of the clearest examples in this study. What appears in the image is not a direct representation of a lived situation, but rather a reconfiguration of visual, cultural, and historical layers. For this reason, human presence is not understood as a "present subject," but rather as part of a represented and memory-laden field. While in Hallaj's works the crisis of the subject emerges primarily through the direct transformation of the body, in Farhadian's work this crisis appears through the dissolution of the body into memory, history, and multilayered representation. Therefore, this work demonstrates that the signifying body is not necessarily the result of corporeal deformation; rather, it can also emerge from the absorption of the body into a network of references, temporal layers, and unstable fields of meaning.

Khosrow Khosravi: The Spectral Body and the Erosion of Presence



Figure 4. Untitled. Khosrow Khosravi,1397 (Solar Hijri calendar)/ 2018(CE).
Acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm.

(URL: 4)

The third case study is Untitled (2018), acrylic on canvas, 150 × 150 cm. In this work, the crisis of the subject is not articulated through a multiplicity of elements or a dreamlike complexity, but rather through the reduction of the body to a fragile, bent, and fading presence. The human figure appears within a sparse yet incongruous space and, from the outset, lacks complete stability, coherence, and distinctiveness. For this reason, the work represents one of the clearest examples of the crisis of the subject through the spectralization of the body and the erosion of human presence. From the perspective of corporeal coherence, the body is positioned in a compressed, unbalanced, and bent state. This condition removes the human figure from a stable and complete form, granting it a fragile and unstable quality. Regarding facial expression and

individuality, the fading or incomplete definition of the face plays a significant role in weakening individuality. Here, the face no longer functions as the site of identity formation; instead, it becomes a partially present and indeterminate surface. Consequently, the subject appears not as a defined and self-sufficient individual, but rather as a trace of human presence. In relation to space, the work possesses an in-between and heterogeneous quality. The juxtaposition of natural elements such as water, leaves, and soil with urban and metallic signs creates a space that is neither pure nature nor a structured urban environment. This heterogeneity deprives the body of any definitive spatial grounding. The subject does not appear within a clear and lived location, but rather within a suspended, deteriorated, and fragmented environment. This condition is significant from the perspective of pseudo-modernity, as the surrounding environment, like the body itself, lacks coherence and organic continuity, emerging instead from the unstable coexistence of heterogeneous elements. Regarding the mediation of representation, Khosravi's work also possesses a distinctive quality. Human presence is understood here not as a direct experience, but rather as a reflected, weakened, and reproducible image. The reflective, repetitive, or multiplied quality of presence gives the image a mediated and reproducible dimension, demonstrating that the human figure in the work does not appear as a singular and referential presence, but rather as an interchangeable and replicable image. Therefore, in this work, the crisis of the subject is formed through three main components: the reduction of individual identity through the fading of the face and the compression of the body; the suspension of place and identity through the juxtaposition of natural and urban elements; and the mediation of presence through reflection and the substitution of the image for lived experience.

12 | Analytical Summary of the Selected Case Studies

The analysis of these four artworks demonstrates that the crisis of the subject and the signifying body in contemporary Iranian painting does not take a single fixed form; rather, it emerges through several distinct trajectories. In the works of Omid Hallaj, this crisis occurs primarily through the transformation of the body, the dissolution of figurative coherence, the suspension of agency, and the removal or weakening of the human agent. In Mehdi Farhadian's work, the crisis of the subject emerges more through the dissolution of human presence into layers of memory, history, and multi-temporal representation. In Khosrow Khosravi's work, this crisis appears in the form of a spectral, fallen, faceless figure entangled with a deteriorated and heterogeneous environment, reducing human presence to the level of an unstable trace. Accordingly, the selected case studies demonstrate that the body in these works no longer functions as a site for the stabilization of identity and definitive meaning; rather, it operates within a network of representation, memory, repetition, suspension, and historical asynchrony. Thus, the body shifts from the position of a reference point of presence to that of a signifying construct, and the crisis of the subject becomes one of the clearest manifestations of the connection between post-reality and pseudo-modernity within the visual language of these artworks.

Conclusion

The main question of this study was how the body in contemporary Iranian painting moves away from its conventional position as a bearer of presence, identity, and semantic centrality, and becomes a signifying element within the network of the image. The study also sought to explain this transformation in relation to the logic of post-reality and the pseudo-modern context of Iran. Based on the analysis of the selected artworks, it can be argued that the crisis of the subject and the formation of the signifying body in contemporary Iranian painting do not emerge through a single trajectory, but rather through several interconnected visual and semantic mechanisms.

The answer to the first sub-question, concerning the identification of the visual and representational components of this transformation, demonstrates that in the examined artworks the body moves away from the center of meaning through several key indicators: disruption of corporeal coherence, the fading or weakening of the face, the suspension of the body within an unstable space lacking a clear point of reference, the elimination or weakening of linear narrative, the repetition and multiplication of figures, and the placement

of the body within a network of historical, natural, urban, and memory-based elements. These components are present in the works of all three artists, yet they take different forms. In the works of Omid Hallaj, this condition is primarily revealed through the transformation of the body, the suspension of action, and the substitution or weakening of the human agent. In Mehdi Farhadian's work, the crisis of the subject is formed through the dissolution of human presence within a multilayered, memory-based, and asynchronous structure. In Khosrow Khosravi's work, the body appears as a spectral, fallen, and faceless figure that reduces human presence to the level of an unstable trace. Therefore, the first conclusion of this study is that the signifying body in contemporary Iranian painting is the product of a set of visual mechanisms that simultaneously weaken the presence, individuality, and referential authority of the body. The answer to the second sub-question, concerning the relationship between this transformation and the logic of post-reality, demonstrates that in the analyzed artworks the body is no longer understood as a lived and immediate entity. Rather, it acquires meaning at the level of representation and through signs, visual layers, and intra-pictorial relationships. In other words, in these works, the image does not merely represent the body; instead, it reconstructs the very modes through which the body is seen, perceived, and given meaning. As a result, the body shifts from the position of a reference point of presence to the level of representation. This shift constitutes the most significant point of connection between the analyses and the logic of post-reality. Here, the issue is not merely a departure from naturalistic representation or a distortion of reality; rather, it is that the image itself participates in the construction of the real and presents the body not as a pre-existing reality, but as a pictorial and signifying construct. From this perspective, the crisis of the subject in the examined artworks emerges as one of the direct consequences of the primacy of representation over direct experience. The answer to the third sub-question, concerning the role of the pseudo-modern condition of Iranian society in shaping this crisis, demonstrates that this transformation cannot be attributed solely to the general language of global contemporary art. In the examined works, the body is not destabilized merely through formal experimentation or visual play; rather, it is formed within a context in which historical memory, traditional signs, cultural remnants, natural and urban elements, and mediated experiences coexist simultaneously. Therefore, the body in these works is confronted not only with representational suspension but also with a form of historical and identity-based asynchrony. In Farhadian's work, this condition appears through the juxtaposition of layers of memory, history, and cultural remnants; in Khosravi's work, through the coexistence of natural and urban elements and the deterioration and fading of the figure; and in Hallaj's works, through the connection between the body, nature, mythology, and the suspension of action. Accordingly, in this study, the pseudo-modern context of Iran is not considered merely an external background, but rather one of the internal factors shaping the crisis of the subject. Based on these findings, the final answer to the main research question is that, in a significant part of contemporary Iranian painting, the body moves away from its conventional position as a bearer of presence and identity through the mediation of representation, the partial collapse of corporeal and identitarian coherence, spatial and narrative suspension, and its placement within a network of historical, cultural, and visual references. It is thereby transformed into a signifying element within the structure of the image. In this process, the subject is not eliminated; rather, it loses its centrality. In other words, it is no longer a stable source of meaning and experience, but becomes itself a component of a network of significations. Therefore, the crisis of the subject in these works should not be understood as the complete absence of the human, but rather as the withdrawal of coherence, authority, and certainty from human presence. The overall conclusion of the study is that the signifying body in contemporary Iranian painting represents one of the most important manifestations of the transformation in the relationship between image, reality, and identity. On the one hand, this transformation is connected to the logic of post-reality, as representation no longer occupies a secondary position but participates in the construction of the real. On the other hand, it is related to the pseudo-modern condition of Iran, as historical asynchrony, the unfinished experience of modernity, and the unstable coexistence of tradition and modernity give this crisis a specific and context-dependent form. From this perspective, it can be concluded that, in the examined works, the issue is not merely the representation of the body, but rather the representation of the crisis of the possibility of a unified and stable subject's presence. In the final synthesis, the study demonstrates that the body in contemporary Iranian painting, in certain significant examples, has been transformed from a reference point

of identity into a sign of the suspension of identity. Accordingly, the concept of the "signifying body" functions not only as a tool for describing certain visual characteristics, but also as an analytical entry point for understanding a part of the internal logic of contemporary Iranian painting, a logic in which meaning moves away from stability, reality is rearranged within the image, and the subject withdraws from its central position.

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