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## Exclusive interview with Reza Derakhshani - Tirgan

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July 21/2011

By: Kaveh Khazra  
Salam Toronto English Service

It takes a lifetime for some to master an art form. But for Reza Derakhshani, a few years can be a lifetime.

Born atop the mountains near Sangsar, Iran, Derakhshani was a student from birth studying the “constellations of light made by moonlight shining through tiny holes in the tent.” He was a natural artist at a young age and was “madly interested” in several art forms.

“For no reason, I knew how to do calligraphy, and for no reason I started doing portraits and it came out nicely,” Derakhshani told Salam Toronto.

Derakhshani’s first solo show was held at the Ghandriz Art Gallery in Tehran at the age of nineteen. From there, an internationally renowned career awaited him. But to reach that pinnacle, he still had to find an original identity.

Derakhshani studied visual arts in Iran and in California. After the completion of his academics, he returned to Iran to teach art and graphic design at the University of Tehran.

Following the Islamic revolution, Derakhshani was forced to migrate to New York City, living and working there for 20 years. Eventually, Derakhshani made his way back to Iran in 2003, staying for seven years before heading to the U.S., where he is now creating a home in Austin, Texas.

Derakhshani says that early in his career, his inspiration mostly came from non-Persian influences. His true artistic identity was yet to be established. Persian traditions and the long and complex history of the region soon became a vital part of his vision and identity.

“For years, I didn’t even think about it. I was experimenting with international art from classical renaissance to American abstract. At one point I thought I needed to add something. It needed a different flavour,” said Derakhshani. “It made me have a flashback on my cultural heritage and look at history of Persian art and make it personal.”

“I got inspired by (poets) Hafiz, Rumi and all the traditional music I studied for years,” he said.

His music and visual arts seemed to uniquely compliment each other. As a composer, vocalist and multi-instrument musician, Derakhshani blended his music and art together, often playing during exhibits. Many critics see his musical talents within his visual arts and vice versa.

“Music touches hearts instantly. Persian music by nature is very free and improvisational and liberating. I find that in my paintings too,” he said. His talents led him to collaborate with some of the world’s leading musicians like The Doors drummer John Densmore, Madonna and Branford Marsalis to name a few. His paintings have been collected worldwide.

His deeply textured and emotionally charged style can be found in all of his art forms. Derakhshani admits that the liberation and release of his senses and emotions are the key to his success.

“It’s the language of feelings and the language of senses. I think the more emotion, the more appealing and effective,” he said.

Derakhshani is among the top 500 world artists in Artprice’s 2009/10 Contemporary Art Market Annual Report and will be showing three of his paintings at the Tirgan Iranian Festival in Toronto which takes place July 21 to 24 at Harbourfront Centre. For more information, visit: [www.rezaderakhshani.com](http://www.rezaderakhshani.com) and [www.tirgan.ca](http://www.tirgan.ca).

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