

Commemoration of Master Mahmoud Farshchian in Vienna: The Poet of Color and Love Lives on in Memory

Vienna, Austria – In a warm and poignant ceremony held on October 17, 2025 (25 Mehr 1404), organized by the House of Iranian Wisdom in Vienna at the Avicenna Hall, a gathering of art enthusiasts, university professors, and admirers of Iranian art came together to honor the memory of Master Mahmoud Farshchian, the renowned Iranian miniaturist.

Titled *Poet of Color & Love*, the event, held from 5:00 to 6:30 PM, was dedicated to the late artist. It featured profound speeches, a display of selected works by Farshchian, and the screening of a documentary about his life.

The ceremony, held just two months after Farshchian's passing on August 9, 2025, in the United States due to pneumonia, provided an opportunity to reflect on the life and artistic legacy of this great master, who passed away at the age of 95.

Farshchian, laid to rest in Isfahan, was celebrated as the founder of the "surnaturalism" style, which blended traditional Persian painting with global elements, creating timeless masterpieces. His connection to art began in childhood, and a near-death experience at age five profoundly shaped his artistic vision.

Dr. Bahman Namvar Motlagh, founder of Farshchian University, former president of Iran's National Academy of Arts, and faculty member at Shahid Beheshti University, delivered the opening speech: "Master Farshchian was among the rare individuals who made significant and impactful contributions to Persian miniature painting. He was a humble and virtuous man, never tainted by arrogance. He always sat in the humblest seat at gatherings and quietly supported struggling artists, both young and veteran, by identifying their financial difficulties and providing aid. His works combine epic, myth, spirituality, and ritual, encompassing figures from Ferdowsi to Prophet Moses. For instance, one work here alludes to creation, while another references martyrdom and ascension. His perspective was inclusive, avoiding extremes, and he drew inspiration from diverse texts and philosophies. Starting with the Isfahan school, he later incorporated influences from the Tabriz and Mashhad schools, as well as European art, achieving a global aesthetic. His exhibitions in China, Japan, Europe, and America attest to this success. He remained a lifelong student of art and emphasized education, leading to the establishment of a university in his name in Iran, focused on spiritual and aesthetic-centered learning. At his funeral, the presence of people from all walks of life, from children to the elderly, reflected his noble spirit. His loss is a profound blow to contemporary art, and finding a replacement for him will be challenging for decades."

The second speaker, Professor Golmar Kampinger Khatibi, a researcher and architecture lecturer at the University of Vienna, described Farshchian as an unparalleled artist who forged a deep connection between authentic Iranian traditions and modern global artistic movements.

Ms. Khatibi, reflecting on Farshchian's life and artistic journey, said: "His love for painting began in childhood. In one anecdote, when his teacher asked him to practice drawing a gazelle, he

stayed up all night and drew two hundred gazelles. He even wrote on his room's wall: *I must become a genius.*"

She added: "Farshchian grew up in an art-loving family in Isfahan, a city whose architecture and tilework have inspired countless artists. His first solo exhibition at age 18, held at the Iran-Britain Association in Isfahan, showcased his brilliant talent."

Ms. Khatibi emphasized that Farshchian's time in Vienna and studies at the Academy of Fine Arts in the 1950s significantly shaped his personal style. She noted that during this period, he studied under Professor Paris Gouterlou, the father of "fantastic realism," and drew inspiration from Western art while remaining rooted in his Iranian heritage.

She also highlighted two pivotal incidents in Farshchian's life that inspired the floating figures and swirling movements in his works: gazing at the sky from underwater and temporarily losing his vision after falling from a ladder.

Ms. Khatibi continued: "In Farshchian's works, one can see influences from religious ceiling paintings in churches, but with a distinctly Iranian twist, as the geometry and mirrorwork of Persian domes create a mystical, meditative atmosphere."

She suggested that the angelic figures in his works likely symbolized his love and respect for his mother and wife, adding: "His marriage to his wife, Nia, in 1954, led to the formation of a close-knit, artistic family that thrived together for over sixty years."

Next, Professor Mohammad Mastandehi, an Iranian painter, shared: "For about twenty years, painting has been my profession, and my passion for it began in middle school when I encountered Farshchian's works. In my culture and art textbook, the vibrant colors and poetic atmosphere of his paintings transformed my perspective. He studied the works of Rembrandt and Michelangelo in museums worldwide, lingering until he was the last to leave. This dedication led to a fusion of Persian miniature painting with romanticism. After Sultan Mohammad, he sparked a major transformation, drawing inspiration from Hafez and Saadi to present romantic themes in a novel form. The first volume of his collected works adheres to traditional principles, but his later works reflect a bold, innovative spirit. He invested his father's wealth in learning and, rooted in tradition, brought it to the modern world. His black-and-white drawings rival those of Reza Abbasi, showcasing his creativity. We have lost a great human being, but his art remains eternal."

Another speaker, Professor Fargol Leila Khatibi, an Iranian painter, art researcher, and one of Farshchian's students, recalled her time as his student: "I met the master in the mid-1970s when he was teaching miniature painting at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Fine Arts. He was Iran's most renowned miniaturist, both nationally and internationally, bringing traditional art to the masses. Works like *Noon of Ashura* are celebrated even by non-artists. His innovation in technique and theme was remarkable; though rooted in the Safavid style, he influenced contemporary history with unparalleled creativity. In his classes, he taught techniques like coloring and outlining with kindness and precision, and we copied masterpieces. His calm and

open-minded personality, especially his decision not to pressure his children to pursue art, was admirable. Studying under him was a priceless experience, and his name will forever remain in Iran's art history."

Dr. Mohammad Hashemi, a researcher and lecturer in the philosophy of art, offered a philosophical analysis of Farshchian's works: "Parts of Farshchian's oeuvre align with the principles of traditionalism in Islamic art philosophy. In the Islamic view, tradition is sacred and derived from divine revelation, unlike the Western perception of it as outdated. The artist, in this framework, manifests divine imagery, creating a bridge to God through symbolism and mystery. In *Abraham the Idol-Breaker*, a radiant Abraham at the center destroys demonic forces, with circles symbolizing perfection. In *Joseph and Zulaikha* and *Joseph's Shirt*, order and mystique prevail. *Noon of Ashura* connects a religious narrative to the celestial realm through circular motions, reflecting his spiritual experiences."

The final speaker, Dr. Reza Gholami, a university professor and president of the House of Iranian Wisdom in Vienna, added: "Master Farshchian lived in a spiritual realm, speaking through colors and lines like great poets. He merged mysticism with painting, embarking on a spiritual journey with a pure heart. In a film, I saw him emphasize to his students the importance of keeping the heart free of selfishness. Beyond his art, he had a deep love for Iran and encouraged young people of all beliefs to strive for their country's progress. He was a symbol of sincerity and humility, and humanity still needs such masters."

Alongside the speeches, an exhibition of selected works by the late Master Farshchian was displayed, featuring masterpieces like *Pure* and *Noon of Ashura*. This exhibition, an integral part of the event, allowed visitors to engage closely with the beauty of Farshchian's colors and lines. Many attendees, including Iranians residing in Austria, described the exhibition and documentary screening as the highlights of the event, calling it a bridge between generations.

Organized with the support of Iran's Cultural Attaché in Austria, the ceremony concluded with the performance of traditional Iranian music.