A Study on Drawing in Isfahan School and its Artists

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Abstract:

Drawing is generally founded on the presentation of the line and its visual features. In Iranian painting, the oldest drawings in the pen-and-ink drawing style belong to the Mongolian period. During Safavid era, particularly under the reign of Shah Abbas the Great, due to various reasons, including the reduction of court support, the entry of European gravures and ... artists were more interested in single-leaf pen-and-ink drawings. In this era, attention to literary themes that were in the past an inspiration source for magnificent works of art, was replaced in the majority of works with figure and portrait or recording daily events.

Reza Abbasi, the great artist and representative of Isfahan School, invented a particular method of his own based on the linear features. In his drawings, he gave much importance to the facial modes and movements more than previous artists. The influences of Reza Abbasi on his contemporaries are undeniable.

This research seeks to study the place and the course of evolution of drawing in Isfahan School, as one of the influential schools of painting in Iran, based on the historical textual works. The basic hypothesis of this study is that single leaf drawings due to their prompt, immediate and low cost implementation managed to replace the official art. Moreover, following the aesthetic patterns shift (as a result of cessation court support, the arrival of western paintings and the formation of new class of buyers including the merchants and business people), drawing reoriented itself towards a type of humanism that had no historical record until that moment.

Key Words: Drawing, Safavid, Reza Abbasi, Isfahan School, Figure.
Introduction:

Iranian painting has a long brilliant history. It embodies a unique set of intellectual and spiritual treasures of a nation that have been pictured. Iranian man preferred to experience beauty based on a special Iranian understanding and interpretation and beauty as conceived by Iranian artist implied depiction of the truth of being and a painting was accordingly a full-fledged mirror for presentation of higher secrets that were depicted on a leaf resorting to the terrestrial examples. The painter used line as a means for expression of thought and likewise he took advantage of color for the expression of his personal feeling.

The painter artists made linear drawings alongside their paintings. In drawing, line is the only element by which the artist reveals his feelings. Here the line is a medium for the expression of thought as well as the artist’s feeling in a work.

Although drawing has special manifestation in Isfahan; numerous linear works have remained from the artists from other artistic schools that have been created based on magnification of line with particular subtleties and beauty. However, if we seek to have a clear understanding of how drawing earned such a distinctive importance and validity during Safavid Era as compared to other historical era and why it became submerged in repetition and complication and finally declined, we should pay careful attention to the past.

According to historical evidences, a brilliant era in painting at starts from thirteenth century and ends by late seventeenth century. Many believe that the magnificent movements of post-Islamic art of miniature started almost about the first half of thirteenth century, i.e. after the invasion of Mongols to Iran. From this time onward several factors caused Iranian painting to obtain its special pictorial elements after almost two centuries.

Mongols conquered Baghdad the center of Abbasid caliphate in 1258. After then Iranian artists had more freedom to be active in various areas of visual arts. The arrival of Chinese elements to Iran during Ilkhanid era was inspiring for Iranian painters. The new qualities that were effective on the elements and were observed in the depictions of faces, garments, hills, clouds and also the figures of fictitious animals like dragons, did not follow their original blueprint and were of an Iranian bent.

One of the most fruitful works of this era was the organization of artistic workshops and invitation of artists to join group works in these workshops that were arranged by the financial support of rulers. This process finally led to the flourishing of the creativities of artists and the development of a national style in painting. Later on during Safavid era and in the course of the final days of Shah Tahmasb’s reign, the court supports declined (Shah issued a decree regarding the ban of nonreligious arts) and in a unilateral way during the reign of Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh (who was deprived of understanding visual arts due to his blindness) these supports were completely cut and thus the artists were forced to immigrate to other lands or even change their occupation.

One of the interesting events of this era is a type of painting mostly in a single leaf drawing in large numbers. Since this type of painting was quick in implementation and also had lower costs, the new supporters of these arts including the princes, merchants and sometimes the middle class of the society were interested in it. Naturally, the taste of the new clients and their financial status could not support the past luxurious collections. Finally in the era of Shah Abbas I paintings and drawings of ordinary issues were replaced by the portraiture for literary books. In the current era, drawing was almost of the same independent and particular status as that of the European examples. To this reason, the distinctive extensions of Isfahan School are mostly drawings instead of paintings.
In this research, we have used a descriptive-analytic method and due to historical nature of the study numerous library and documentary references (including certain sets of pictures) have also been used. To begin with, the features of Isfahan School have been extrapolated and then the author have proceeded to introduce the eminent artists of this school and enumerate the drawing qualities. Moreover, the reasons for prevalence of single leaf drawings in this era can be assayed from various points of view.

**Research Background:**

Several articles and books have been authored on Isfahan School. YaqubAzhand (2005) in an article entitled “organization of library and painting house in Isfahan School” has assayed the factors involved in the separation of the distinctive artists of Isfahan School from this organization and conducted a review of the history of libraries and painting houses in the early years of Safavid regime. AtoosaRasooli(2005) in her paper entitled “the impact of Nastaʿlīq script on the drawings of Isfahan School” introduces Reza Abbasi as the inventor of curved and measured lines with changing thickness in drawing and describes his method as calligraphic. In the aforementioned article, she studies the qualities and similarities of broken nastaliq with drawings of Isfahan School. MoqadamAsharafi (1988) in a book called “the concordance of painting and literature” discusses the pioneering methods of the artists of this school for depiction of man, using the linear features for demonstration of behavioral qualities, representation of live movements and real harmonies of human body as well as the distinctive properties of painting of Isfahan School. Mohammad Khazaei (1989) in a book entitled “Alchemy of Drawing” presents a magnificent collection of works of brilliant painters of Iran and deals with Iranian artistic schools from Mongol era to the final days of Safavid regime.

**Political, Social and Artistic Circumstances of Shah Abbas Era**

Shah Abbas I crowned in Qazvin in 1587 following the resignation of his father Sultan Muhammad Khodabandeh. He was 17 when he started to lead the country and there was chaos across the land and only a political leader of his power and stature could manage the situation. Robert Shirley has described Shah Abbas I in the following words: “his personality is in a form as if the nature has made him just for the mission that was supposed to be trusted to him” (Dehmashegi and Janzadeh, 1987: 19). The only thing that the new Shah could do in that critical situation was prioritization of problems. The priorities consisted of “first, reviving internal security, rule of law and discipline, renovation of army’s structure and reforming the financial system. Second, pushing Uzbeks out of Khorasan and third, regaining the occupied lands under the control of Ottomans”. (Savory, 1993: 74)

The magnificence of Safavid Empire begins when Shah Abbas the Great moves the capital from Qazvin to Isfahan in 1597. After this great movement, the Shah personally pitched in to build the city and decorate it. He built Isfahan to such great heights and magnificence that deserved a great empire. In fact, this city is full of historical monuments of Safavid Era. Wilfrid Blunt has rightly stated: “Isfahan is the memorial city of Shah Abbas: if you want to watch buildings you have to travel to Isfahan” (Savory, 1993: 153).

1Shah Abbas I (1571-1629) better known as Shah Abbas the Great is the most famous king in Safavid Era. He was the son of Shah Muhammad Khodabandeh and the fifth king from the Safavid dynasty who ruled Iran for 42 years with utmost power and sovereignty.

2The bureaucratic organizations movement to Isfahan was made in a gradual fashion and it began in 1588 and finished in 1597.
With the new changes that were made in Isfahan, the population grew to vast proportions. Shah Abbas acted in a way that he managed to turn Isfahan to a secure place for economic and artistic works. Of course, it is said that he forced thousands of Armenian Christians to leave the North West Iran and immigrate to Isfahan so that through these businessmen the national economy develops. “In the new capital, there were Iranians with various religious creeds (Shia and Sunni Muslims, Christians from different denominations, Jews and Zoroastrians) as well as merchants from China, India, Central Asia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Europe” (Dehmashagi and Janzadeh, 1987: 20).

Contrary to his Grand Father Tahmasb, he allowed the Europeans to visit the court. Accordingly, Iran’s commercial relations with the West expanded and as a result a considerable amount of money came to the country. “Anthony Welch refers to the striking differences between Shah Abbas I and Shah Tahmasb and states that the former appreciated the place of aesthetics and personal genius and made important contributions to the development of aesthetics. Welch describes how Shah Abbas was after the expansion of artistic markets in Iran. Then those arts that had particular economic aspect and could be invaluable in commerce like pottery, cloth-weaving and carpet-weaving, were supported and encouraged” (Dehmashagi and Janzadeh, 1987: 21). Thus, in this era those arts that were more economic had more space to grow as compared to the less economic arts that are of personal aesthetic value. This is to say that less attention was paid to the preparation of luxurious private expensive books.

However, the historical evidences show that Shah personally supported the artists in an unconditional way and had particular human relations with them. In his Golestan-e Honar, Qazi Ahmad Ghomi writes on the relationship of Shah with Reza Abbasi as follows: “once he had drawn a picture that the King of World (Shah Abbas) kissed his hands as his prize” (Ghomi, 1973: 150). It is also related that when his favorite calligraphist Ali Reza Abbasi worked he liked to keep the candle for him. But the situation was not always this way. Those artists who breached the orders of Shah would have never been forgiven. Shah Abbas always acted based on this rule, i.e. crackdown of the opposition and traitors. It is said: “in 1615 Shah Abbas sent Mir Emad an amount of money as the earnest of scribing Shahnameh. After one year Mir Emadscribed the opening lines of Shahnameh and dispatched it to Shah and declared that the money was the price of these few lines. This enraged Shah and caused a lifelong hatred that finally led to the preparation of Mir Emad’s murder” (Hamid Safdi, 1996: 63).

Visual arts (painting and drawing) entered a new stage in this era. “One of the features of the majority of paintings drawn in the royal workshop since Shah Abbas I onward is that they have not been meant to decorate a book rather they are single leaf paintings and drawings that have been probably drawn for selling to lower social classes. The other novelty is that these single leaf drawings and paintings do not have necessarily any relation with the traditional literary subjects” (Savory, 1993: 128).

Thus, such literary subjects as Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh, Nezami’sKhamseh, Sa’di’sBoostan, Jami’s Haft Orang and the like, that inspired the creation of magnificent works of art in royal workshops were less popular. “Court artists no longer worked exclusively for the royal system. Some of them sold their works to the lower aestheticians and even merchants, and their products were transferred to India and Ottoman Empire. Although the later kings of Safavid dynasty ordered their royal artists to work on calligraphic books, the works were mostly repetitious in style and content, prepared in hasty fashion, and composed of lesser materials as compared to their past examples. In a nutshell, in most cases they were not brilliant” (Dehmashegi and Janzadeh, 1987: 24).
The distinctive place of single leaf drawings among artists and also the shift that had occurred in the artist’s vision of his own environment and ordinary life affairs in this era is interesting. “Most of the artists who were active in this era preferred the quick drawing with minor shades of color to illustration of calligraphic books that took longer times and more energy. This style had numerous fans because it was easier to manage” (Gray, 1975: 168).

The most famous painter who was active in this era is Reza Abbasi who invented a new method while he retained the traditional principles. One can describe him as the master of representation of human types in Isfahan school of drawing. Furthermore, he influenced the drawing method of the artists after him. The argument presented by Ettinghausen regards the qualities of new era is as follows: “style shift in the era of Shah Abbas and its continuation by his successors were not just signs of decline, rather they were the expression of quick degeneration of Iranian sensitivities and capabilities in artistic and technical fields. It seems that paying attention to the realities and life of ordinary people is indeed an expression of the revolutionary turning in Iranians’ contact with the outside world. Suddenly the old pattern broke and something new emerged that was maybe rough and unbeautiful. However, it presented the world as such not in the form of an evolved concept of past” (Savory, 1993: 131).

Somewhere else Ettinghausen states: “In this visual discovery of the world, there are manifest consciousness and absorption in the ordinary affairs and mostly the trivial that were neglected before or considered worthless. Accordingly, in this era we come across simple linear drawings of the most trivial daily affairs” (Ettinghausen, Yarshater, 2000: 273-274).

Thus, the conventional subjects regarding the heroes of literary stories and past lovers are replaced with description of men and women in real contexts. Sceneries of the daily life, ecstatic young people, darwishes, or single figures in a linear mode in a white or colorful context and with green background make the major themes of works inherited from this era. “Even when the subject is traditional its method of presentation is realistic. Khosrow watching Shirin while she is bathing, of course if such thing would have happened at all, was an old-fashioned subject, but Shirin does not have any elegant and ethereal body, rather she has more human and terrestrial form and she is probably like the women whom Reza Abbasi knew” (Savory, 1993: 132).

Features of Drawing in Isfahan School:

Generally speaking, Isfahan School could be divided into three stages. In the first stage we have the works of SadeqiBeygAfshar, Reza Abbasi and the pupils who followed his method including AfzalHosseini and MoeinMosvar; in this stage traditional method of drawing in past was used with the particular features of Isfahan School. In the next stage the pupils of Reza Abbasi made certain modifications on his methods and used them including Mohammad Qasem, Mohammad Yusef and Mohammad Ali; we can declare this stage the stage of transition from tradition to modernity and in the third stage an eclectic method combined of tradition and modernity driven from European paintings emerges that is manifested in the works of such artists as Ali QoliJebadar and Mohammad Zaman.

As previously mentioned, numerous social, political, economic and cultural factors were involved in the prevalence of the single leaf drawings in Isfahan School and as a result of the impact of these factors new qualities emerged in the drawing. The single leaf drawings in Isfahan School represent an alternative vision of humanity as compared to the traditional drawings of the past. In personifications, the aesthetic patterns are mostly oriented towards humanism. Magnification of human picture in drawings and the emergence of single figure drawing is one of these features. “In fact, the relationship
between painting and literature has been weakened. Leaving the limited field of book illustrating allowed the painter to record the daily events and visible affairs in the form of single figure drawing” (Pakbaz, 2000: 124).

The interest in exact depiction of the faces and also presentation of various modes with love or carnal themes that were more popular is the other side of the developments in this era that has its root in the tastes of the shallow clients.

In this era artists had more freedom of action than past times and painting and drawing were not limited to the decoration of calligraphic books. Using thick and thin paint brushes in illustration of figures that contributed to the depiction of volumes, reaches its zenith under the influence of calligraphy in this era. The invention of Nasta’liq in this era brought more freedom to the artists than previous eras. “Drawing in this era did basically take form with the liberation from the rigid library-centered system. Then, the artist could experience new things without having any attachment to the past heritages and draw with creativity and freely. Using curved lines in this era is a consequence of this liberation” (Rasooli, 2005: 97).

One of the other characteristics of Isfahan School of drawing is the artists interest in signing their works. From this era onward, in fact, scribing artistic works turns to an ordinary process. Promotion of a type of scribing along with describing the events in the margins of the drawings was among the initiatives of the artists who were active in this era.

Artists:

Reza Abbasi (circa. 1572-1634) is undoubtedly the most pioneering and famous artist and painter in the artistic school of Isfahan. Historical sources contain few things as to his works and life as well as his impact on his contemporary artists.

The period of artistic development of young Reza should have coincided the time when SadeqiBeygAfshar (1533-1608) was the dean of royal library. According to EskandarBeyg, Sadeqi in his youth time started to learn painting by OstadMozafar Ali and since he could prove his genius the master sought to prepare the ground for his development (EskandarBeygTorkman, 1971: 175). “The first paintings of Sadeqi for the royal courts and also the portraits represent the characteristics of Qazvin School: slim body, high and subtle with fluffy lips and ideal beauty” (Canby, 1999:96).

However, when he started his service for Shah Abbas his drawings became more professional. (Picture 2)Sadeqi’s works in this period as compared to his previous works enjoy of more freedom and fluidity and are sensitive about calligraphic features. Being disposed towards the representation of ordinary and vulgar issues that is one of the characteristics of Isfahan School is visible in this painting. A sad Darwish and a young man with smiling lips who looks in the eyes of Darwish and points forward. Both figures are leaning forward and this is also one of the achievements of this era for dynamization of drawing. It seems that Sadeqi in his later works was under the influence of Reza Abbasi. In 1626 he was fired from the management of royal library. It is argued that the wild and haughty nature of Sadeqi has brought about an unhealthy atmosphere in the library. Nevertheless, he continued his work as a painter until his death in 1639.

3In past times, the artists did not show any interest in signing their work due to certain reasons including the indeterminateness of social status, group character of artwork, and moral criteria (Pakbaz, 2002: 255).
The decline of Sadeqi was followed by the emergence of a creative figure of that time, Reza Abbasi (circa. 1572-1634). Young Reza hugely influenced his contemporary and future artists. Qazi Ahmad in his Golest-e Honar describes him as follows: “Mr. Reza is the son of MowlanaAsgharKashi⁴. He is a distinguished man and he deserved to be proud of himself because he is unrivaled in portrait drawing and if Mani and Behzad were alive would have encouraged him hundred times a day and kissed his hands. All masters of time endorse his professionalism while he is still in his youth” (Ghomi, 1973: 149-150).

He pursued his earlier education under his father. We cannot ignore the influences of Sheikh Mohammad in his initial works. Here is the painting whose design is by Sheikh Mohammad and it has been drawn by Aqa Reza. (picture 3) Thanks to his serious efforts, Abbasi managed to highlight a distinguished line in drawing in Isfahan School. His paintings were based on the realisms of Kamal al-Din Behzad⁵ and Mohammadi⁶ and represented a new path in this area. Abbasi’s works are of such stature that some scholars who have worked on the Isfahan School of art refer to the latter as the school of Reza Abbasi. His school is the presentation of nature. Nature as it is. According to Qazi Ahmad, Abbasi was skilled in portrait and he has recorded all movements and modes of the faces. “Among the other characteristics of Aqa Reza’s works one can refer to the fluid and beautiful lines and sensitivity of various contexts. He loved drawing the sleeve cloth or the circles of hair and beard and more than anything else the wrinkles of sash and turban”(Gray, 1990: 142). His interest in special drawing causes his students and followers to part their ways from him (picture 4).

⁴EskandarBeyg describes him as follows: “He was a unique and healthy painter and his coloring was unsurpassed and his drawings of mountains and trees had no rival. He served Sultan Ibrahim Mirza and became a member of royal library in IsmaelMirza’s time” (EskandarBeygTorkaman, 1971: 176).
⁵Kamal al-Din Behzad (circa. 1460-1535) was a pioneering painter who inaugurated a new path in Iranian painting. Behzad’s paintings represent a delicate equilibrium between sense and sensibility. In fact, his vision of humanity is in total harmony with his use of colors and lines and the structure of his works (Pakbaz, 2002: 423-424).
⁶MohammadiHerawiss was active in the second half of sixteenth century. He is the inventor of a particular version of realism in art that makes him a distinguished figure in the history of Iranian painting (Pakbaz, 2002: 423-424).
His name’s similarity with the names of a number of the contemporary artists was the source of conflict. His name was much similar to the name of Aqa Reza Jahangir “who was not much in touch with Isfahan School and seemingly most of his activities were in the court of Mongols in India. Eperor Jahangir in his memoire refers to the name of Reza Harati\textsuperscript{7} who was serving him before he mounts to the throne” (Upham Pope, 1999: 123).

The second artist who was mistaken with Reza Abbasi is Ali Reza Abbasi the calligraphist of Shah Abbas I era who wrote Thulth and Naskh in a very professional manner and numerous works have been inherited from him though there are even a number of paintings from him that are of course in different style and differ from the works of Reza Abbasi.

Until Reza’s time, painters were less likely to sign their works. Nevertheless, he signed many of his design works. Among the many names attributed to him, “Today it is believed that all the works of art named by (Reza, Aqa Reza and Reza Abbasi) belong to the same artist.” (Pakbaz, 2000: 123). At first, we recognize his works with these titles, Reza (Aqa Reza), Scribed by Reza (Aqa Reza), written by Reza. Most of these drawings share features of his works and follow his brush.

After a while, he was able to demonstrate his style preferences to contemporary artists. Drawing with a pen that began in the past (the tenth century) was so heightened by him that it made him the master of his time. "About 1602 AD, Reza was honored with the title of Abbasid, and since then he has been given the name of Abbasi with his name." (Canby, 2012, p. 101) Many of his works, titled "scribed by Humble Reza Abbasi", remain intact.

Both historical sources of that era (\textit{AlamAray-eAbbasi} and \textit{Golestane Honar}) confirm that he has left the Royal Library for a while and spent most of his time in gymnasiums. "He is at the service of His Highness Shah Abbas the great, but he is totally engaged with flirtatious scoundrels and they are

\textsuperscript{7}His works were usually signed as “scribed by Reza known as Morid” and also “the work of Reza, the servant of King Salim” during the throne king Salim and “Aqa Reza Jahangiri” when Jahangir mounted to the throne.
ruining his life and he loves to watch wrestling matches." (Ghomi, 1973:150) EskandarBeyg considers him to be a sincere and bitter man, and maybe, as a result of his actions, he was dropped out of court, but after some time the financial hardship forced him to return.

"At the time of Reza Abbasi, Europeans came to Iran. Although he sometimes made European men the subject of his work, he never tried to use shading and perspective techniques." (Pakbaz, 2000: 123) (picture 5)

Reza Abbasi's unique methods of drawing continue in the works of his disciples and pupils. Although it is difficult to identify his true students, we can refer to such names as MoeinMosaver, ShafiAbbasi, Afzal Hosseini, Mohammad Youssef, Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Qasim.

Perhaps among his numerous pupils there is no one to compete with MoeinMosaver (circa. 1615 to 1703). In fact, he was the loyal person in his teacher's way. His works have been created in an almost seventy years span. In this long period of life, he remained immune to many of the then prevailing devious tendencies, and the movement of westernization that had begun from a certain time had no effect on his work. While admiring his teacher, Moein imitated his master's works in a very effective way. Among the characteristics of Moein's drawings, one can refer to the description of the events as well as the exact date of the performance in the margin of his work. In the (picture 6), Moein in the margin of a drawing of his master while he is working, points out: the work has been drawn in 1634, one month before the master's death. This is the only document that clearly identifies the exact date of death of Reza Abbasi. In this drawing, Reza Abbasi is busy with drawing a portrait. The state of eyes and eyebrows, which looks from the back of the glasses to the drawing, the sitting position, as well as the smile on the lips, all are witness to the esoteric calmness of the master's soul.

(Picture 5). Left side. Reza Abbasi, young woman with European dress, Isfahan school, 145 × 250 mm. (picture 6). right side. Moein Mosavar, Reza Abbasi is painting, 1672 m, 190 x 110 mm, Princeton University.

The value of these drawings is very much due to the lack of historical resources in this regard. This kind of chronicle sometimes contains one or more sentences in the description of a character or a longer description than an interesting story (picture 7). On the margin of this drawing Moein writes: "On Monday, the eve of Ramadan al-Mubarak 1082 AH (1671 AD). It was the lion that Ilchi Bukhara
had brought with Rhino for Nawab Ashraf, the Shah of Solomon. At Darwazeh Dowlat, in a grocery store a fifteen or sixteen year old worker ignored the safety points and was eaten by the lion. We have not seen the scene personally rather this is the report that has been given to us as to this event. And in the same year, from the beginning of the Shaaban month until the eighth day of the Shawwal ... a huge snow came and bothered people a lot. And the rate of most goods has risen ... ". (Khazaei, 1989: 384)

(Picture 7), Moein Mosavar, the lion attack to the grocery boy, 1671, 100x177 mm, Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

Without this description, the drawing did not succeed in capturing the momentous story. Perhaps it is due to this very fact that he used such a long sentence to fill the visual gaps in his work. Moreover, in this drawing, we do not see a trace of his personal way, which is clearly seen in (picture 8). Here, with a free rhythm and a quick brush movement, he reaches an exclusive notion of the master's drawings.

In his world, Moein seeks to combine creatively the elements inside the page, and sometimes it takes some form of mixing. For example, a dramatic design of the head of a lion with four bodies or two heads of human in different situations. (Some drawings have also been inherited from Reza Abbasi, such as the combination of two horizontal horse and two vertical horse in one image) (picture 9)
Among the other painters who were active in this era one could refer to Mohammad Shafi Abbasi (active in the second half of the 11th century, son of Reza Abbasi). Although he did not inherit the title Abbasi from his father, rather from Shah Abbas II, he was one of his father’s pupils and most likely he has finished his father's incomplete work. "Due to family relations, Shafi may be more appropriate than any other person in this regard, since others did not hesitate to refer to the low-profile and lesser known scholars of Isfahan for a moment, and therefore it was difficult for later generations to understand the merits of the paintings of this perfect artist" (Upham Pope, 1999: 139).

In (pic. 10), a drawing of Mohammad Shafie is presented with two figures in front of each other. The drawing on the left seems to be by the painter's father (Reza Abbasi) who is seen with his glasses (similar to the glasses that Moein has drawn on the eyes of his master). This work clearly follows the rules of free drawing, but on the other hand, in the opposite side of the page, there is a picture of a young boy (probably Mohammad Shafie) who is depicting a flower shows that the father’s style continues to thrive. Shafie’s skepticism over choosing the father's way and the European styles is well illustrated here.
Another example of his free style drawings (picture 11) shows that he has been using irregular lines for this type of drawings. Here, the head and body, like the other drawings of this school, have come a little forward, as if he intended to move his drawing by repeating the lines.

(Picture 11), Mohammad Shafei Abbasi, A Man with a Horn, Seventeenth Century, Monsch Collection.

Shafi is more famous for his drawings of the flower and the bird. In these works, which are based on the precise presentation of birds, butterflies and flowers, he confirms the influence of European practices on Iran.

Afzal Hosseini Toni (active in the middle of the seventeenth century) was the other painter of this era. Maybe all of our information about him is limited to a number of drawings that have been signed by the same name. He seemed to have been able to combine the artistic styles of several masters. He also reveals his affiliation to Reza Abbasi in his drawings. (picture 12)

Among the prominent painters of this era, one can refer to the names of such artists as Mohammad Yusuf, Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Qasem who were more distinguished than others and were more familiar with the style of their master and continued his way. Mohammed Youssef (active in the mid-17th century) was also a pupil of Reza Abbasi, and followed his master’s style with utmost precision. He was active as an artist during the era of Shah Abbas II and Shah Soleiman. He has scribed his portraits with various names such as Mohammad Yusuf Abbasi, Mohammad Yusuf Hosseini, Mohammad Yusuf Hussein Jami and Mir Yusuf. Mohammad Youssef, like Reza Abbasi, experienced drawing the young men with the western cloth of that time (fedora and cape) (Picture 13)
Mohammad Ali (active in the middle of the 17th century), the son of Malek Hussein Isfahani⁸, did combine his single leaf drawing with a figure in the middle of the page, and the pictures of flowers and bushes around it. First, he was trained under his father; then, probably, he was the pupil of MoeinMosavar. He was active in the drawing of orgy scenes, people and animals. He usually highlighted the bodies using subtle hatchback patterns "(Pakbaz, 2002: 521). In most drawings by Muhammad Ali, there is no consistency between the main subject and the background. (Picture 14)


In the drawings of Mohammad QasemTabrizi (circa. 1557 to 1630), we often see smiling lips on the face of the young lovers and beauties. "Mohammed Qasim used his own particular style in

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⁸Malek Hussein Isfahani was one of the painters of Isfahan School and the follower of Reza Abbasi. Mohammad Ali was trained first under him (cf. Pakbaz, 2002: 521-539).
depicting beautiful women and graceful men." (Pekbaz, 2002: 522). In (pic. 15), he puts together a young man and an old woman with cane and thus achieves a pleasant, poetic mixture. The young man offers a flower to the old woman as a sign of respect. These works of art remind the delicacies of the works of Reza Abbasi.

(Picture 15). Muhammad Qasem, Old Woman and the Young Man, Seventeenth Century, 171×105mm, Satibis Collection.

As we have seen, Reza Abbasi can be regarded as the last innovation artist to come from among the traditional class of painters and matched it with the needs of his time as much as possible. The painters after him never succeeded in achieving significant innovation and creativity in their work and could not obtain experiences beyond those of the past masters.

Anthony Welch provides a comprehensive picture of the decline of painting in the late Safavid period. He writes: "The elegance of the early works of Reza, which was still reminding the previous generation of Safavid painters, was replaced with the tendency towards the superficial values: the curves occupy smaller spaces; the color is less rich; the expressions lose their purity and they are less attractive. These orientations have been emphasized in the works of pupils and followers of Reza. Subjects turn more limited, instead of being expanded, and they emphasize the beauty of appearances. Elegant young men and beautiful young women rejoice, as if they play the role of non-religious symbols. They are elegant and well-formed in the surface, but are empty inside, and represent the desirable example of the modern social order. They have an erotic appearance, and often so, their actions give an unrealistic sense that is more scorching than exciting ... This art is more unspiritual and requires a viewer who is looking for beauty and not seeking meaning." (Savory, 1993: 130)

**Single Figure in Reza Abbasi’s Drawings**

As it was mentioned earlier, in Isfahan School the painting of literary and traditional subjects in most cases was replaced with exhibition of the individuals, objects and natural surroundings of the artist. Reza Abbasi, the key artist of this era, acts very selectively and experiences new subjects in
drawing. He preferred to draw objective forms and never limited himself to the mere presentation of nature, but in his drawings, imagination is naturally manifested in the form of lines drawn in a rhythmic, fluid, and curved manner, and reflects itself in and ideal form in various subjects. "The color system and the structure of space are also very simplistic in his work. In this way, Reza Abbasi departed himself from the exact and complicated aesthetic laws that were experienced in past centuries. In fact, in his art line overcame the color.” (Pakbaz, 2000: 123)

The favorite subject of Reza Abbasi is humanity and showing human types. He was the master of drawing faces and facial movements. The lips in the works of Reza are of partial smiles and the hands are used more than before for expressing individual modes and movements. His passion for drawing the wrinkles of cloth, sash and turban, and the cloak of dervishes, and showing such details as beard and hair, is evident in many of his works. In his drawings, the bodies are slightly leaning forward, and this is more exaggerated in the head and neck area. Drawing a single figure is the most popular theme in Isfahan's school. The achievements of Reza Abbasi are interesting in this regard, because he affects many of his contemporary artists. Among his numerous works, two ones can be distinguished in this regard.

Most of these drawings have been done by ink and pen. In drawing these figures, black ink was mostly used (in some occasions with a different color, such as brown, red, etc.) on a bright background. Using the experiences of past masters, Reza Abbasi created an exquisite combination of a set of fluid lines in his drawings, which, in terms of motion and rhythm, were very similar to the Nastaliq and Broken Nastaliq lines (pictures 16 and 17) "Reza Abbasi's new style was based on the visual values of the line and its importance was in discovering the expressive values of the line. He used rotational and fluid lines in his drawings. Moreover, his paint brushing enjoyed the same rhythm and twist that one would find in Nastaliq calligraphy. By changing the lines by means of a pen, he could finally reveal the size and delicacies in the finest way. "(Pakbaz, 2000: 123)

(Picture 16), left side, DarvishAbdulmajidTaleqani, Broken Nastaliq Calligraphy, mid-Eighteenth century.  
(Picture 17), right side, Reza Abbasi, A Dreaming Young Man, 1586, 76x127 mm, Fug Art Museum, France.
Other drawings have been left from him in ink and pen style, in parts of which color is used. In this style, usually in drawing the parts of the body, dyed colors, sometimes coated, were often used, and often the background remained in the same ink and pen mode (picture 18).


The majority of characters in these projects are young men and women from the wealthy class who have a glass of wine or a flower in their hands and their eyes are looking ahead. In (Picture 19), a young man, with a cup of wine in his hands, and a bottle of wine in the other hand is kneeling down. Here, his eyes and body are in such a mode as if he is offering the cup to someone else outside the image. The dance of lines are completed in this work, with the elaborately bold and thin line drawing, which has been professionally replaced with the light and shade effect. The lines themselves bring forth a happy and refreshing moment. The artist depicts the type of the young man’s hair with utmost delicacy, and also notes that he should not be aged over 15 or 16 years old. The eyebrows are continuous, the nose is slim, and there is a smile on the lips of a round face (picture 20). These can be often seen in the young men and the woman whom he draws. Identification of the gender of these young people, without heeding their cloth is very difficult. The presentation of sensuality and eroticism of some of these drawings is very extreme and far from the general rule and purpose of traditional painting.
The other favorite subject of Reza Abbasi is dervishes and sheikhs who are usually studying and reflecting or resting in a state of tranquility beside trees and shrubs. His drawings of these subjects should have been related with his tendencies toward Sufism. Drawing this mystical state is well illustrated in the visual elements (picture 21). The lines in this drawing take on a descriptive mode. The fluidity of lines in this drawing is very similar to mystical dancing. In depiction of the face some highlights have been used and the type of beard is shown, however, the imported patterns do not do any harm to the original style. The surrounding nature of the Darvish (shrubs, tree, stone) has not made any contribution to making the scene more attractive. Here, the use of these elements that are seemingly meant to fill the field is not substantially related to the drawn figure. Reza Abbasi never succeeded in landscape drawing, and this point is revealed with seeing his numerous drawings.

Another set of these drawings is devoted to more popular subjects. In these drawings, the depiction of characters involved in everyday routines refers to the attention that is paid by the artist to the tradition of ethnography, which is a heritage of Mohammadi. An individual is bothering to raise a bucket, a tailor is working, and a pilgrim has taken his turn off and scratches his head, and ... In these
drawings, his interest in recording realistic characters is manifested in the type of lines as well as facial expressions and movements and the body. (Picture 22)

![Reza Abbasi, Pilgrims from Holy Mashhad, 1598, Washington Art Gallery.](image)

**Conclusion**

Drawing in Isfahan School is the last major trend of visual arts in Iran, which, while innovating, remained loyal to the visual features of traditional painting and resisted the influence of western culture and art, although it was subject to substantial changes and had many differences with the past in performance. Perhaps the greatest achievement of art in this era is the independence of drawing and painting from the imaging of manuscripts. Artists in the past used to portray legends and literary stories that were usually narrated from the past, but in this era the painter was interested in drawing what is happening in his time and place. This drew their attention to the drawing of objective subjects and more tendency to record the reality. The fact that the artist was associated with the community. Realism in drawings of this school was not only due to the choice of the subject, but also the details of how it was executed, such as the brushings that contain more shades, as well as the finer and more detailed depiction of the face. Although these influences were the result of the penetration of European painting elements, they still had an Iranian taste.

The outstanding artist of this era, Reza Abbasi, devised a new method of drawing that was based on curved, rhythmic lines with varied thickness, and was very similar to Nastaliq calligraphy. Using the expressive and descriptive capabilities of the line in his drawings he reached the ultimate peak. Although his style was followed by his followers, it soon turned complicated. Among his disciples and followers, none of them was able to offer anything more than master plans. In this way, traditional drawing gradually declined, and subsequently was replaced by imitation of Western practices.

**References:**


Pictures Reference: