

Nature in Urban Environment; Iranian Men and Women Artistic Feedback

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ABSTRACT

In order to return the nature to cities, there have been various solutions and theories suggested by researchers, architects and urban planners during recent years. Although some researchers present the solutions in global scale, nature in local cultures represents its own meanings. However, are city dwellers reluctant to return the nature to their cities? Does nature own the previous position in citizens' mind and today's urban environment? Are there any differences between men and women's probable request of returning the nature back to their social life?

A routine questionnaire among people, in order to discover their opinion about nature, may result the stereotypical answers. To avoid this problem, in this research the "nature" and "garden" themes are analyzed in the framework of twelve contemporary painting exhibitions as a case study. With the assistance of random sampling, the compare and contrast process shows the qualitative and quantitative differences between men and women artistic feedback as Iranian citizens in terms of considering the nature.

KEYWORDS: Iranian citizen, Environment, nature, garden, contemporary painting.

1. INTRODUCTION

Duo to the crisis in interrelationship quality of human and nature, there have been solutions and theories suggested by researchers. In general, in a religious approach, people are recommended to believe the dignity and sainthood of the nature. [1] In ecological approaches destructive human interfere in nature is discouraged. [2] Moreover, from an economical point of view, the use of renewable energies has been recommended in order to decrease the nature destruction as well as the energy efficiency. In the sustainable development model¹, the three factors including society, economy and environment are considered simultaneously to improve people's quality of life.

In the all mentioned approaches both in theoretical and practical solutions², the human's approach toward the nature is extremely significant. Since this crisis is global, there have been global solutions or theories suggested to deal with. The suggestions in local and regional scale are needed to accurate the global ones. These could be achieved through recognition of the nature position in people's mind and their urban environment in a particular culture.

2. Nature and the Garden in Iranian view

What make the garden different from nature in people's thoughts are the conceptual layers, the specific aspects in different places, and the meanings. Persian garden is a cultural, historical and physical phenomenon in Iran. It is usually an enclosed area in which combine the plant, water and building in order to create a comfortable and safe place for people. The garden is an architectural composition of using plants and buildings as well as an alive artwork.³ The garden reflects people's culture and the climate conditions of its own region. [6-7] Therefore, in Iranian people view, the Persian garden is an organized nature on the basis of human abstract thought and an example of heaven.

3. Art, Nature and the Citizens' Interaction

The garden's lives as well as the nature depend on human in contemporary world. The human plays the role in nature both as a user and as a protecting factor. Therefore, the citizens should culturally responsible to their urban environment in order to return the nature to their own cities.

The cultural products can demonstrate whether citizens are interested in presence of the nature in their urban environment. The artistic works reflect the culture of a society. Moreover, the people are impressed by the messages of those artistic items. So, the artistic works act as a powerful media in relation with their society. They not only show the existing values of the community but also regenerate the past cultural values and develop new suggestions.

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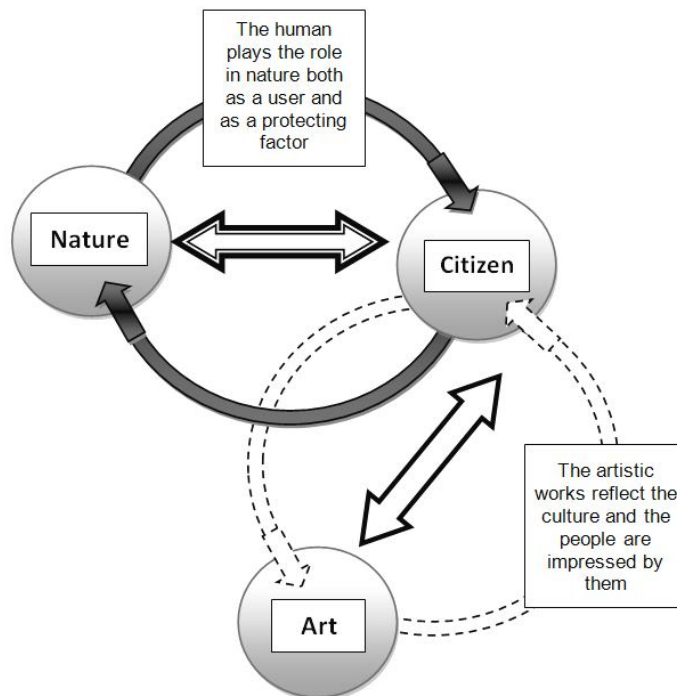


Fig 1. Art, Nature and the citizens' interaction, source: Authors

In Iran, we can also learn about the Iranian citizen's opinion about nature and garden⁴ through their historical and cultural beliefs to present new solutions for architecture and urban planning. However, a routine questionnaire among people to discover their opinion about nature may result the stereotypical answers. Therefore, we decided to investigate the artistic works in terms of their contents. In order to do so, the contemporary paintings have been selected as a reflecting media of Iranian citizens' opinion toward the garden as well as nature. The differences between men and women ideas play a significant role during this research.

The quality and the quantity of the presence of the garden and nature in contemporary paintings explain following subjects:

- How people pay attention to the garden and nature in urban environment.
- How paintings may encourage the attention towards the garden.
- How can the paintings remind the visitors about their past values of nature?

In this research, with the assistance of random sampling, twelve contemporary painting exhibitions including "seven contemporary painting biennials" [8-13] with both men and women painters and "five contemporary painting exhibitions"⁵ [14] with only women artists are studied.⁶

The contemporary painting biennials start from 1991 until 2007. There were no special themes so that every artist can reflect his or her own concerns. The presented paintings have been published as a book.

In order to avoid any personal paraphrase the paintings have been studied in which either their title includes the garden term or there is a garden and nature element obviously. The following figures represents the quantity of presence the intended themes.

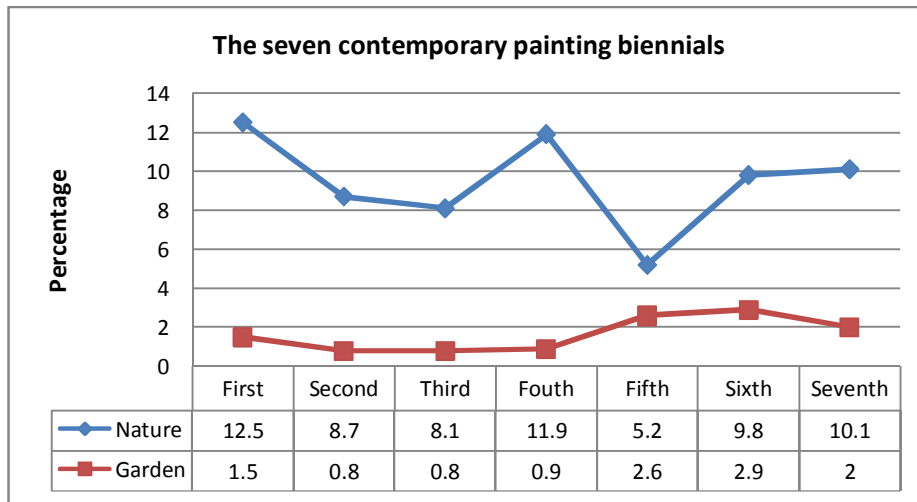


Fig 2. The percentage of Nature and garden themes paintings, Source: Authors

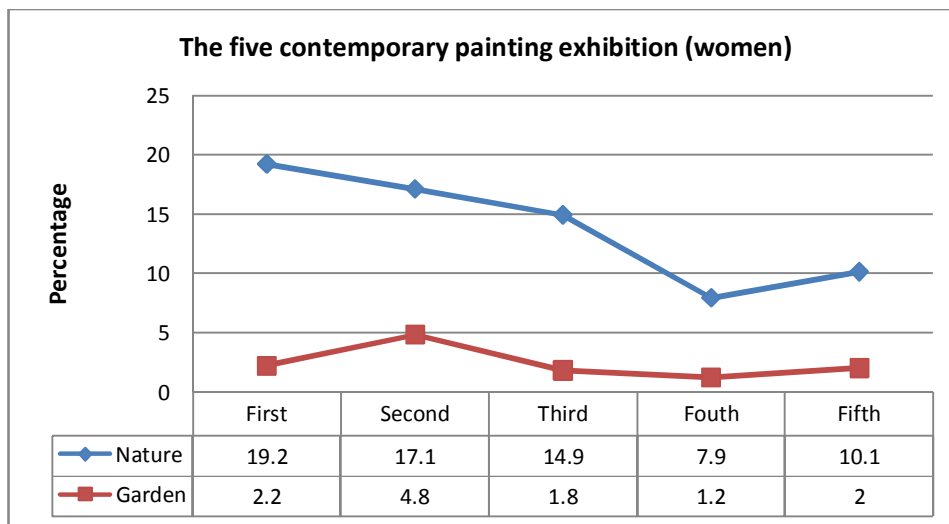


Fig 3. The percentage of Nature and garden themes paintings, Source: Authors

4.1. The quantitative data analysis of the “nature” and “garden” presence

The quantitative study of the nature and garden in the sampling process of the contemporary paintings indicate the following results:

- 1- Despite the fact that there were unspecified themes in all the seven contemporary painting biennials, from %5.2 to %12.5 of paintings either reflected the nature theme or named as nature. Also, there are from %0.8 to %2.9 of the paintings included the garden theme. It seems to be a small number in statistics. However, since there were no specific themes for the artists at the exhibitions, the above statistics about “nature” and “the garden” are noticeable.
- 2- In all the seven contemporary painting biennials, from %5.2 to %12.5 of paintings include the nature theme. This number for the five contemporary painting exhibitions (women artists only) includes from %7.9 to %19.9 of all the paintings.
- 3- In terms of attention to the “garden”, %0.8 to %2.9 of the paintings were interested at the seven contemporary painting biennials, while %0.9 to %4.8 of paintings were interested at the five contemporary painting exhibitions (women artists).
- 4- Regarding attention to “nature”, the highest rank belongs to the first contemporary painting biennial (1991). In terms of attention to the “garden” theme, the sixth contemporary painting biennial (2003) ranks as the first.

- 5- Meanwhile, at the first contemporary painting exhibition (women artists), there is the highest statistics regarding attention to “nature”. Moreover, in terms of attention to “the garden” the second contemporary painting exhibition (1995) ranks the first.
- 6- Figures 2 and 3 indicate how Iranian contemporary painting and in other words the Iranian culture look at and pay attention to the significance of the “nature” and “the garden”.

4.2. The qualitative data analysis of the “nature” and “garden” presence

Some researchers believe that the main reason of returning the nature to the artists’ works is due to the today’s distressful urban life and environment. Petgar⁷ (2006) believes that the new approach of new generation of artists towards the nature and its calmness is because of the existing cultural and social crisis in metropolitan areas as well as the stress in today’s urban environments such as traffic jams. (In Tehran) [15]

It is obvious that the qualitative and content analysis of an artistic work, because of the hermeneutic approaches, requires the accuracy. In this research, in order to avoid the errors, the reasons of reflecting the nature and the garden in the paintings of the twelve studied exhibitions are recognized in some categories.

The nature and the garden presence in the Iranian contemporary paintings reflect in following manners:

- 1- Describe the “nature”.
- 2- Praising the “nature”.
- 3- Emphasis on the crisis in “nature”.
- 4- The image of nature and garden in citizen’s mind. (Figure. 4)
- 5- Reminding the public memory.
- 6- Emotions to the nature and garden.
- 7- The nostalgia of the past garden areas. (Figure.5)
- 8- Personal souvenirs of the artists.



Fig 4. The Persian garden by:Fatemeh Davoodi. Source: Tehran museum of contemporary art archive



Fig 5. In the garden by:Razieh Tavasolli Ashrafi. Source: Tehran museum of contemporary art archive

5. Conclusions

The study of the Iranian contemporary painting shows that the contemporary artists pay enough attention to the nature and the garden themes. The quantity of such attention is completely noticeable.

The qualitative study of the paintings shows that the nature and the garden presence in the art works reflect the subjects such as describe the “nature”, praising the “nature”, emphasis on the crisis in “nature”, the image of nature and garden in citizen’s mind, reminding the public memory, emotions to the nature and garden, the nostalgia of the past garden areas, and personal souvenirs of the artists.

The statistics of this research shows that women in the five contemporary painting exhibitions pay more attention to the “nature” and “the garden” themes in compare with those (men and women) in the contemporary painting biennials.

It can be also concluded that an Iranian citizen recognizes the significance of “nature” and “the garden” as an architectural phenomenon separately. In other words, although the artist uses the western world artistic techniques, the Iranian local culture of nature and the Persian garden has been represented obviously in their works.

Therefore, in the returning process of nature to the urban environment, the architects and urban planners should have enough concern to the differences of “nature” and “the garden” themes in the Iranian citizen’s mind. (Figure.6)

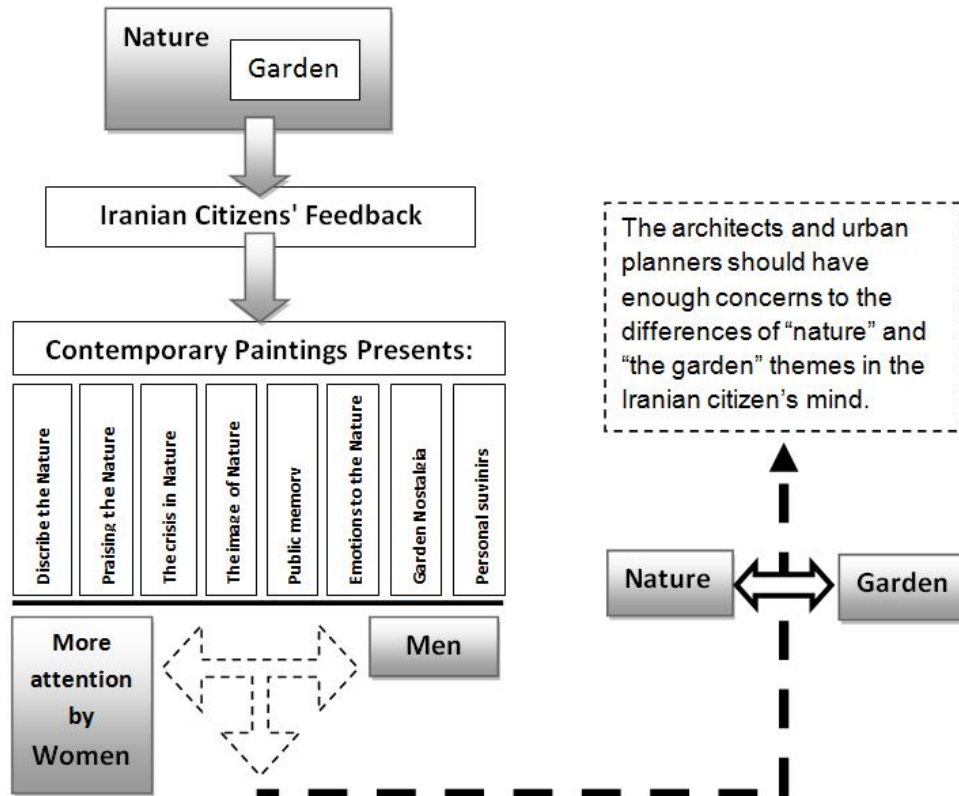


Fig 6. Iranian artistic feedback of nature, source: Authors

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Notes:

¹ World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987

² There are practical solutions such as home gardens, healing gardens (Nikbakht, 2004, p.79), participatory garden-parks, and enclosed public gardens (Aben & Wit, 1999, P.228) during recent years with acceptable and noticeable results. [3-4]

³ In Islamic encyclopedia the term "garden" is described as "a usually manmade enclosed area using water, flowers and trees, and special buildings on the basis of symmetric rules and the people's beliefs." (the Islamic encyclopedia, 2002, p206) [5]

⁴ During the recent years, there have been notices to the garden by Tehran municipality. For instance, there are projects such as Tehran book garden (book fair), the War Garden Museum and Noor garden civic centre.

⁵ Those exhibitions are known as TAJALI-E-EHSAS which means feeling presentation.

⁶ Since the garden and nature are different in some aspects, we studied them in the analyzing process separately.

⁷ An Iranian famous artist