

PARVIZ

1970s Prints

TANAVOLI



Grosvenor
Gallery



PARVIZ TANAVOLI

1970s Prints

26 APRIL – 8 MAY 2021

*“It’s like a family when they’re all together.
They look good together.”*

Parviz Tanavoli, Tate Shots, 2015

All works in the exhibition are different editions to those mentioned in the provenance.

The sizes stated are for the entire sheet.

CONVERSATION WITH PARVIZ TANAVOLI

Charles Moore, April 2021

CM: *To the outsider your print work seems a great departure from your sculptural work. How did the series of prints come about?*

PT: From late 60s to early 70s and while I was collecting lion rugs, I went through tribal areas of Fars province, who were the creators of these rugs. It was during this period that I became acquainted with Qashqa'I and Lori weavers and I noticed they weave their rugs by looking at another rug, and do not use cartoons like city weavers. That is how I decided to make my own rugs through the Qashqa'I and the Lori weavers of Fars. For the first rug, I gave one of my paintings to a young girl and ask if she can make a rug like that. A month later, the rug was ready and I couldn't believe my eyes, how good the weaver had executed my painting into a pile rug (I). Later I gave the same painting by a Lori weavers, although the subject was followed as good, but in colouring and the weavers part differed (II).

CM: *The colours used are wonderful. You mentioned in a previous interview that at that time you were 'hungry for colour, that bronze didn't satisfy'.*

PT: Yes, although bronze is my favourite media, but working on it for long time, causes me a physical and mental scarcity for colours. That is why from time to time, I take a break from bronze and changed to colours.

CM: *Where were the prints produced?*

PT: The prints were made in the heating room (the basement of our house). Once I was sure the screen-prints were the best models to give to the weavers to execute in rugs, I decided to set a print-making studio in the basement of our house and asked a few of my students to come and help me. I managed to set a well-organized print shop and spent most of my time there. All the prints dated 1974, were made during the summer of 1974, when myself and my students did not have to go to school.

CM: *You started producing the rugs at the same time? Which came first? Were the prints a necessity when working with the weavers?*

PT: The first rug was made from the painting below (III). Then I realised it was not a good idea, since paintings were unique and being stretched on wooden frames, were not practical. Therefore I switched to screen-prints which was ideal for rug-weaving. That is how I decided to produce screen-prints and spread the copies to different weavers.

CM: *How did you find the weavers to reproduces the images of rugs? Did you give them any specific instructions?*

PT: I just gave them one of my prints or a coloured drawing and let them free to weave

as they liked. They were free to choose the colours and change the proportions. Most of the weavers followed the model pretty close, but some changed the proportions. The attached lion rugs are a good example of the second group (IV, V, VI). Tribal weavers do not work with cartoons. They often use an older rug as a model, but change the colours and motifs accordingly.

CM: *How did they react to the imagery? It must have been familiar yet totally alien to them?*

PT: They weren't shocked, they didn't even question my ideas or the imageries. These women love colours and live with colours, they

wear most colourful dresses. They were always happy to take my imageries, in fact it was like a challenge to them. We should not forget that their own rugs and gabbehs are among the most colourful ones.

CM: *Have you done other collaborative work in your career?*

PT: Yes, I have worked with various craftsmen, among them coppersmiths, potters, jewellers and carpenters. Iranian craftsmen are humble and working with them not only was a pleasure, but was educational. What I gained from them, I could not obtain it in any college or university.



I. *Farhad and I*, 1974, Qashqa'I weave



II. *Farhad and I*, 1974, Lori weave



III. *Farhad and I*, 1973
Oil on canvas, 81 x 61 cm



IV. *Lion and Sun*, 2003
Qashqa'I weave, 173 x 232 cm



V. *Lion and Sun*, 2003
Qashqa'I weave, 172 x 240 cm



VI. *Lion and Sun*, 2003
Qashqa'I weave, 183 x 274 cm

ON PARVIZ TANAVOLI'S PRINTS

Shiva Balaghi, *April 2021*

Though Parviz Tanavoli is known as the father of modern Iranian sculpture, over the course of his seven decades as an artist he has created a diverse range of artworks from ceramics to rugs, from painting to prints. Through the years, Tanavoli's art has been deeply influenced by his work as a teacher, a researcher, and a collector. And it is in his prints from the 1970s that one can clearly see the themes and motifs that would become central to his creative expression. Recalling his early works, Tanavoli said, *w*

In 1960, Tanavoli opened his studio Atelier Kaboud in south Tehran. He found artistic inspiration on his daily walks through the surrounding neighborhood with its traditional workshops and bazaar. "*The scenery of every day life stays with me. I mean something not intended to be art, but it's improvised art made by ordinary people in the bazaars, in the streets. These are very inspiring to me,*" he told me. Back in his studio, these scenes mingled together with Persian poetry, his constant companion. "*A verse of poetry sometimes follows me for days and days. I live with it,*" he explains.

In a way, Tanavoli's early prints are a visual record of these various sources that mingled together in his artistic imagination. In the poetry of Nizami and Hafez, Rumi and Attar, Tanavoli found some of his subjects — Farhad, the nightingale, the mythic *simorgh*, the lover and the beloved. In the bazaar, he watched craftsmen forging steel into padlocks, standards, and kohl containers, ordinary objects whose surfaces were etched with beautiful designs. On the streets, he'd come upon the *saqqakhanehs*, votive fountains, with their decorative metal grills. In historic ruins, he observed majestic lions, ancient script, and figures carved from stone.

Perhaps more than any other form, though, Tanavoli's prints speak to his interest in tribal rugs which he has been studying and collecting since the 1960s. Observing weavers, he found the infinite possibilities of two-dimensional form. Their use of repetition, symbolism, and pattern to weave together a visual narrative inflected Tanavoli's approach to screenprinting. Perhaps their greatest influence is in his use of vivid colors. "*As a sculptor,*" he said, "*I was hungry for colour.*"

Indeed, Tanavoli's prints are often studies for his own rugs. He made *Disciples of Sheikh San'an* (4) for example, as he worked with weavers on his rug, *Disciples of Sheikh San'an* (1975) that is in the collection of the Tate museum. *Oh! Nightingale* (11), from the permanent collection of the Grey Art Gallery at New York University, was also a design for a rug. And his print *The Lion and the Sword* (13) echoes a rug that is part of the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

In discussing his prints, Tanavoli says he takes up traditional subjects but abstracts them from their original context, recasting them into something his own. This inclination is reflected in his *Lion and Sun* (14), which brings together myriad cultural traces. At a basic level, of course, it is the artist's interpretation of the historic emblem of the lion and the sun. In Tanavoli's evocation, the body of the lion bears markings that recall ancient cuneiform script. The lion's face references his earlier works, with the metal grill of the *saqqakhaneh* morphing into a locked cage. Inside the cage, we glimpse a nightingale, the enduring companion of the Persian poets.

Shiva Balaghi, Ph.D. is a cultural historian specializing in the modern and contemporary art of the Middle East and its diasporas.



Parviz Tanavoli in his Vancouver studio, 2015, photograph by Hadani Ditmars

1. *Last Poet of Iran, 1974*

Screenprint on silvered paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

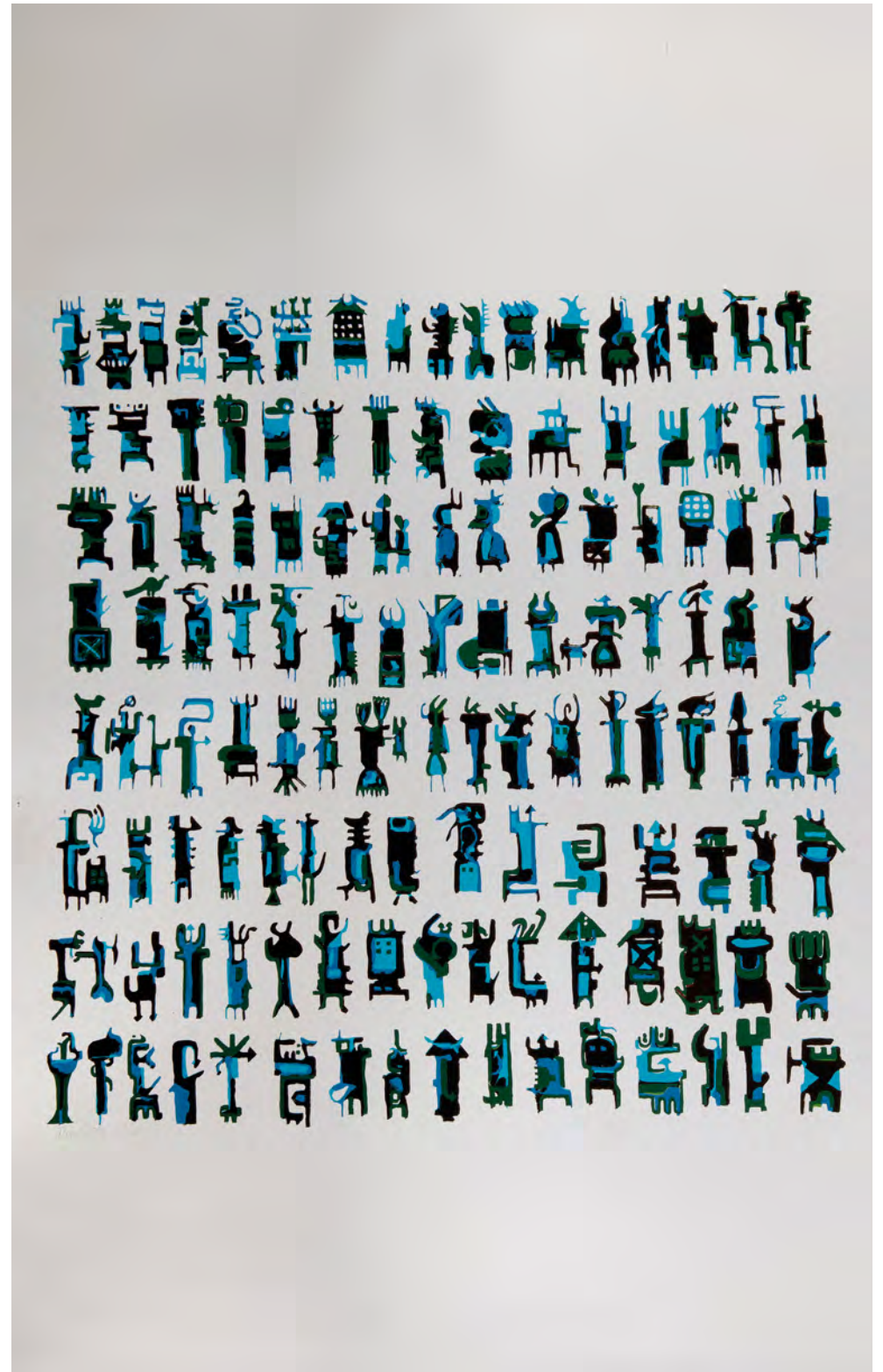
From an edition of 20

98.5 x 70 cm

38 3/4 x 27 1/2 in

“The same themes that had interested me in Milan and Tehran showed up in my work in Minneapolis (1962-64), except that instead of Farhad, whom few would know in America, I chose the ‘Poet’ as a subject. The poet was either alone or alongside his beloved. In my imagination, he was the freest of all humankind. I consider him to be like birds in the sky, belonging everywhere. Sometimes I alternated themes, from the poet to the ‘Prophet’. But while the prophet, like the poet, was superior to the rest of humanity, he could not escape the yoke of obligation, and nothing symbolised such obligation better than the lock, which I would often hang from his body. In terms of form, these sculptures were little more than a few cylinders and cubes stacked atop one another. But the holes I pierced through them, and the writing I interspersed on the surfaces, distinguished them from conventional geometric shapes. Inspired by the idea that I was drawing closer to the unification of poetry and architecture, a combination I always aspired to, I leaned toward geometric shapes and architectural forms and away from soft lines and rounded volumes.”

Parviz Tanavoli, in Sherrill, (ed.), *Works of Parviz Tanavoli*, vol. 6, Poet (2014)



2. *Nightingale with Lock*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 40

50.4 x 70 cm

19 7/8 x 27 1/2 in



EXHIBITIONS

Litho Gallery, Tehran, 1974

Zand Gallery, Tehran, 1978

Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London, *Parviz Tanavoli, Poet in Love*, 2011, illust. exh. cat. p.24

Tate Modern, London, *The World Goes Pop*, 17 September 2015 – 24 January 2016, illust. exh. cat. p.138

West Vancouver Art Museum, *Oh Nightingale, Parviz Tanavoli*, 24 July - 5 October 2019

COLLECTIONS

Grey Art Gallery, New York University Art Collection, New York, USA

Tate, London, UK

“Here my nightingale cannot sing, as he has a lock on his beak. This is the kind of thing I like to play with. I have always been interested in the social and political life of my country, Iran. But it’s not direct. My interpretation is not direct. People cannot read it really. But, putting a lock on the nightingale’s beak, is not too different to putting a lock on humans.”

Parviz Tanavoli, Tate Shots, 2015

3. *Farhad and I*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 38

70 x 50 cm

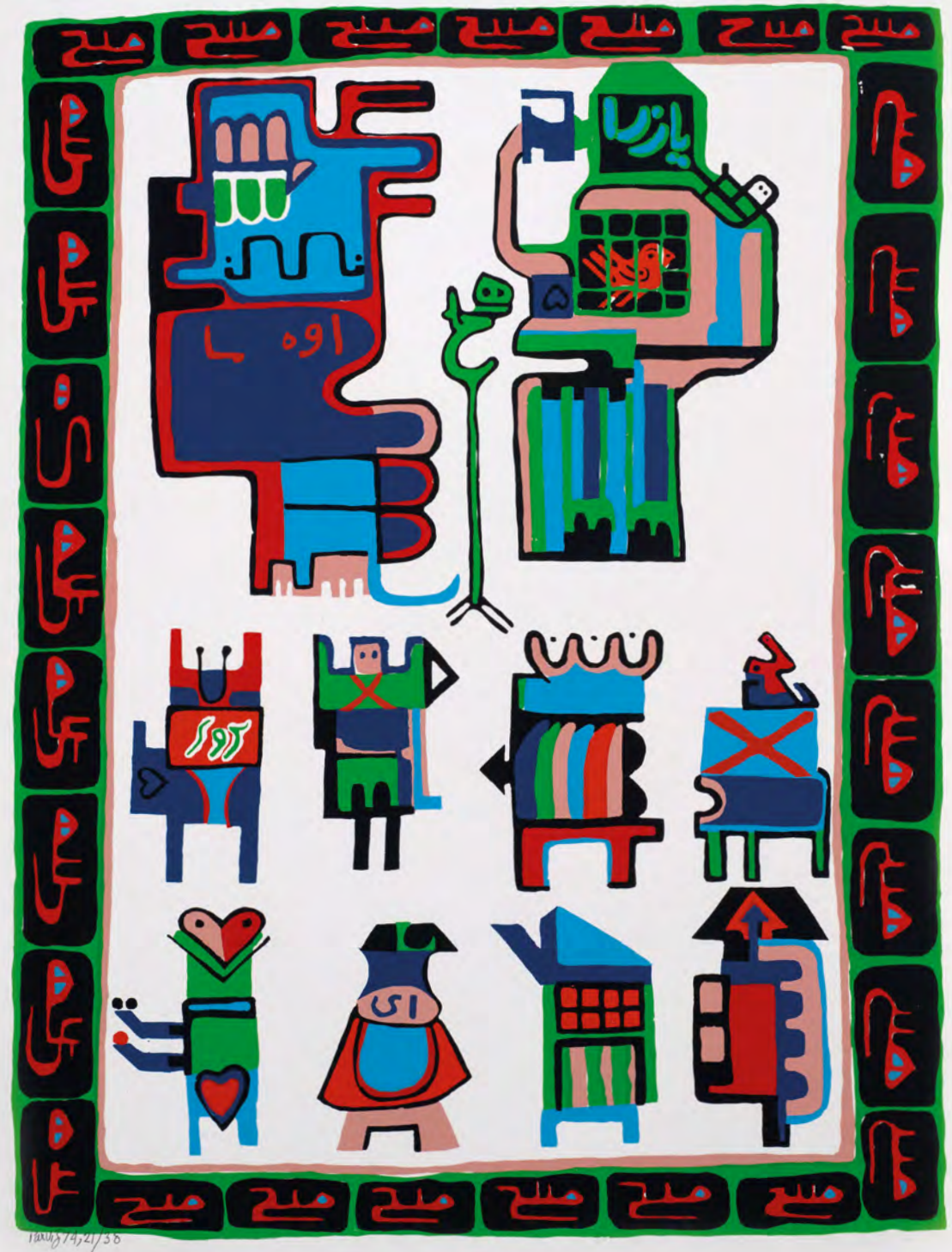
27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in

EXHIBITIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*, 10 February – 7 June 2015, illust. exh. cat. p.132

"I was picking up a traditional subject, but expressing it completely differently, away from all the tradition."

Parviz Tanavoli, Tate Shots, 2015



4. *Disciples of Sheikh San'an*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 38

100 x 70 cm

39 3/8 x 27 1/2 in

EXHIBITIONS

Tate Modern, London, *The World Goes Pop*,
17 September 2015 – 24 January 2016, No.122, illust.
exh. cat. p.139

COLLECTIONS

Tate, London, UK

"Disciples of Sheikh San'an' depicts a stylised architectural scene, in which a number of tall, narrow towers in orange, white, green and red sit flush together on a neutral background. Here Tanavoli refers to the poems and stories of 'The Conference of Birds', written by Faridoddin Attar Neyshabouri (1119–1189). In the story referred to here, the fictitious character Sheikh San'an falls in love with a Christian girl, neglecting his religious duties. Through the prayers of his disciples he returns to his initial beliefs. There are two dominant symbols in this work, which characterise Tanavoli's practice: the yellow caged bird and the two lit candles, which allude to religious prayers."

Leyla Fakhr, August 2011



5. *Two Simorghs*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 30

55 x 75 cm

21 5/8 x 29 1/2 in



6. *Youth of Simorgh*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 28

66.4 x 51 cm

26 1/8 x 20 1/8 in

EXHIBITIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*, 10 February – 7 June 2015, illust. exh. cat. p.134



7. *Lovers in a Garden*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

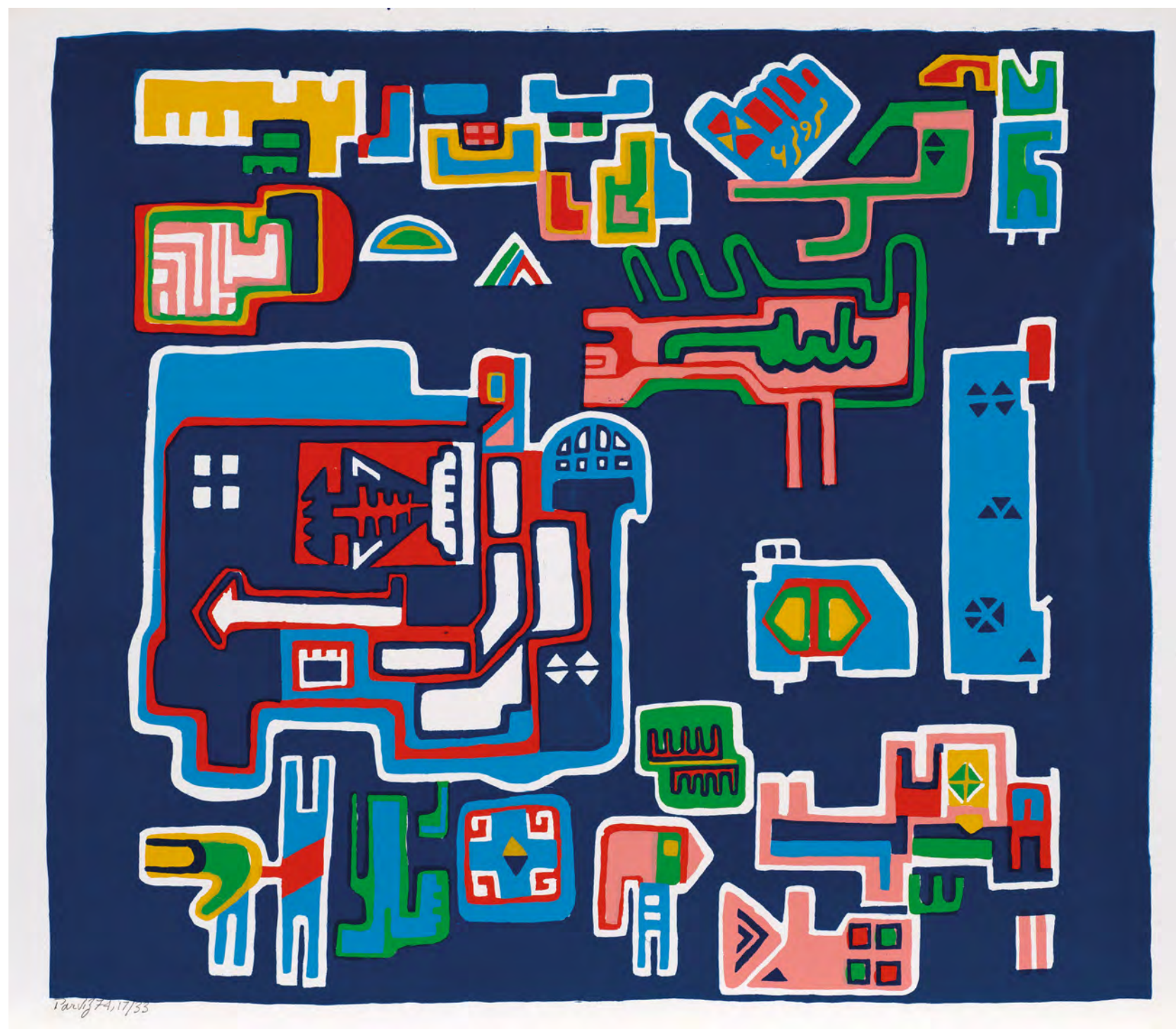
From an edition of 33

50 x 70 cm

19 3/4 x 27 1/2 in

“Generally speaking, my main subject matter in the works in ‘The World Goes Pop’ are lovers: perhaps the most favourite theme for Persians. Although ‘The Poet and the Beloved King (Lovers), 1966’ was made eight years before the screenprints, they all share the same stories. The imagery of the lovers mostly appears in Persian miniatures. I deliberately wanted to shake up the Iranians and get them out of their millennia-old shells. In order to do so, I picked up ordinary material and commercial paint to break down the soft lines of the Persian miniatures and those pretty faces. My lovers in new mediums with geometric lines are completely the opposite of the Persian refined taste.”

Parviz Tanavoli, interviewed in 2015 by Tate



8. *Three Lovers*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' along lower margin

From an edition of 33

49.8 x 70 cm

19 5/8 x 27 1/2 in

EXHIBITIONS

Litho Gallery, Tehran, 1974

Zand Gallery, Tehran, 1978

Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London, *Parviz Tanavoli*,

Poet in Love, 2011, illust. exh. cat. p.24

Tate Modern, London, *The World Goes Pop*, 17 September 2015 – 24 January 2016, illust. exh. cat.

p.138

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts,

USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*, 10 February – 7 June 2015, illust.

exh. cat. p.135

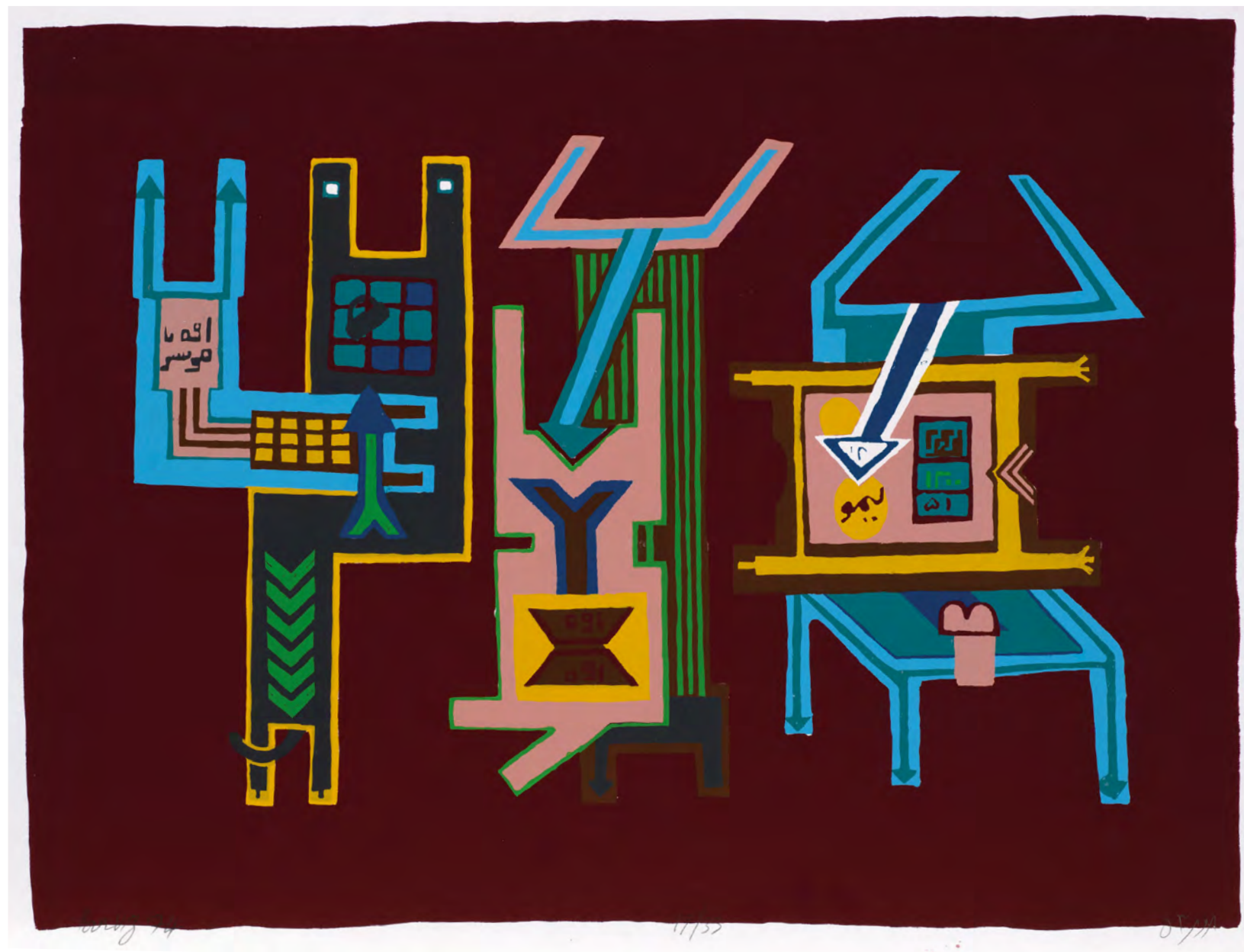
COLLECTIONS

Tate, London, UK



Three Lovers, 1975

Kurdish weave



9. Poet & Nightingale, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz '74' lower left

From an edition of 60

60 x 76.5 cm

23 5/8 x 30 1/8 in

EXHIBITIONS

Tate Modern, London, The World Goes Pop,
17 September 2015 – 24 January 2016

COLLECTIONS

Tate, London, UK

“My main theme is the poet... Iranian art is very much a follower of the Poet. It is part of the daily life culture, every conversation there is a word or two of poetry. The Nightingale is the companion of the Poet, because the poet is up all night, and the nightingale is up all night. The nightingale sings for the rose and poet writes for the beloved.”

Parviz Tanavoli, Tate Shots, 2015



10. Farhad Squeezing Lemon, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 34

70 x 49 cm

27 1/2 x 19 1/4 in

It is interesting to note that the artist has included his last name in the cage at the top of the composition. In a 2015 interview Tanavoli mentioned this was an extremely rare occurrence.

EXHIBITIONS

Litho Gallery, Tehran, 1974

Zand Gallery, Tehran, 1978

Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London, *Parviz Tanavoli, Poet in Love*, 2011, illust. exh. cat. p.24,

Tate Modern, London, *The World Goes Pop*, 17 September 2015 – 24 January 2016, No.119, illust. exh. cat. p.138

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*, 10 February – 7 June 2015, illust. exh. cat. p.135

COLLECTIONS

Grey Art Gallery, New York University Art Collection, USA Tate, London, UK

“This one is also a traditional subject. Farhad the mountain carver. It’s like the Romeo and Juliet of Iran. Here I have sat him on a chair squeezing a lemon. Nothing else!”

Parviz Tanavoli, Tate Shots, 2015



Farhad Squeezing Lemon, 1975
Woven rug



11. *Oh! Nightingale*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 80

70 x 51 cm

27 1/2 x 20 1/8 in

LITERATURE

Shiva Balaghi & Lynn Gumpert (eds.), *Picturing Iran: Art, Society and Revolution*, 2002, London, p.26

Charles Pocock & Samar Faruqi (eds.), *Parviz Tanavoli: Monograph*, 2009, Dubai, p.33

EXHIBITIONS

Litho Gallery, Tehran, 1974

Zand Gallery, Tehran, 1978

Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London, Parviz Tanavoli, *Poet in Love*, 2011, illust. exh. cat. p.24

Tate Modern, London, *The World Goes Pop*, 17 September 2015 – 24 January 2016, No.120, illust. exh. cat. p.138

COLLECTIONS

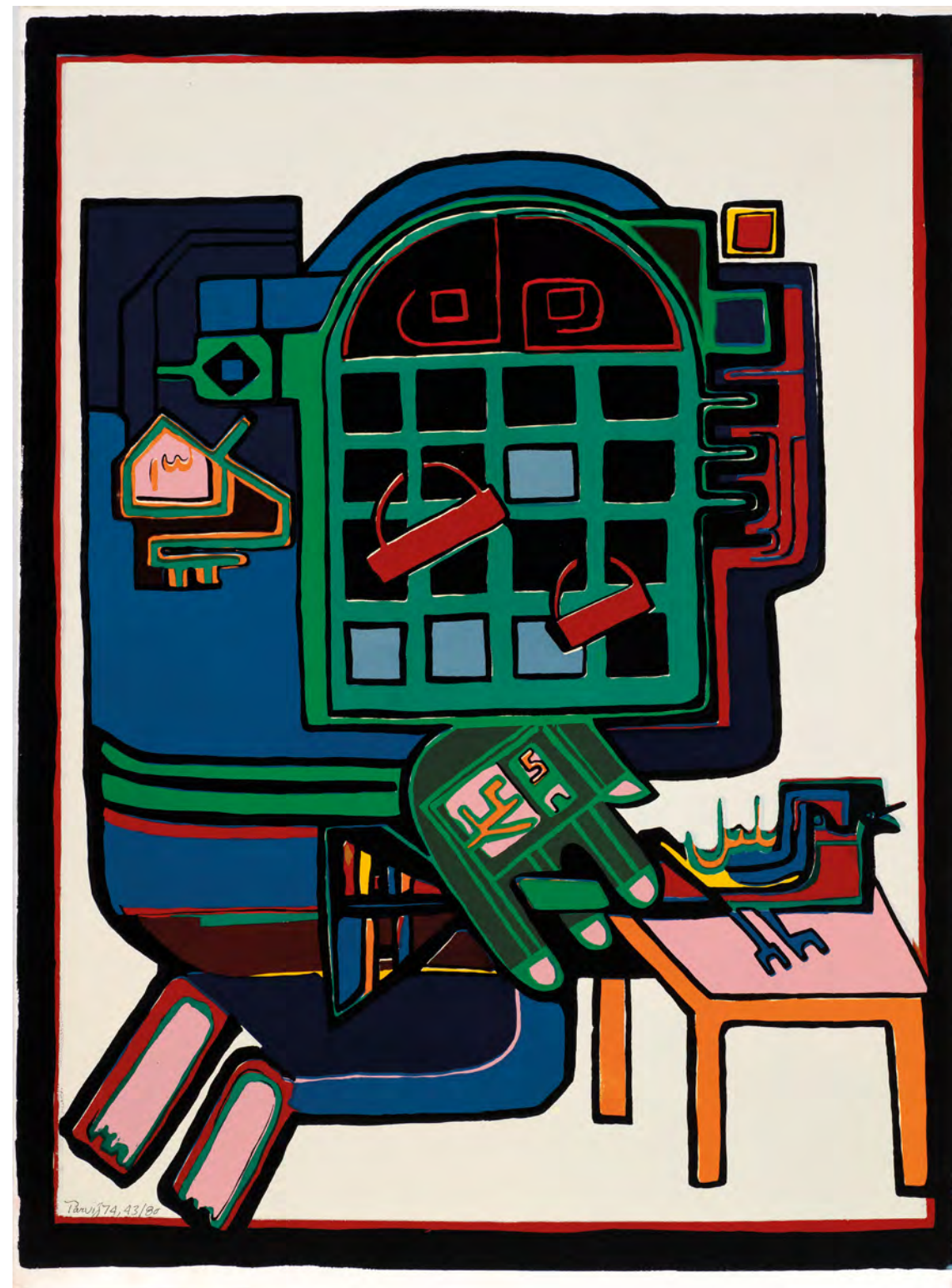
Grey Art Gallery, New York University Art Collection, New York, USA

Tate, London, UK



Farhad and Nightingale I, 1973

Woven rug



12. *Poet & Birds*, 1974

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 74' lower left

From an edition of 50

70 x 50 cm

27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in

EXHIBITIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts,

USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*, 10 February – 7 June 2015, illust.

exh. cat. p.133



Poet & Birds, 1975

Kurdish weave



“My acquaintance with the lion goes back to the end of the sixties and early seventies. At the time, destiny placed a few lion rugs in my path. The stunning beauty of these rugs and their fascinating designs and colours immediately conquered my heart.”

Parviz Tanavoli

Quoted in Satareh Meshkati (ed.), *Parviz Tanavoli, Poet in Love*, Austin/Desmond Fine Art, 2011, p.48

Opposite: Parviz Tanavoli in his Niavaran Studio, Tehran, 2015
Image by Tooka Ahmadi



13. *Lion and Sword*, 2008

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 08' lower left

From an edition of 80

70 x 100 cm

27 1/2 x 39 3/8 in



Lion and Sword

Na'een weave

EXHIBITIONS

Austin/Desmond Fine Art, London, *Parviz Tanavoli, Poet in Love*, 2011, illust. exh. cat. p.24)

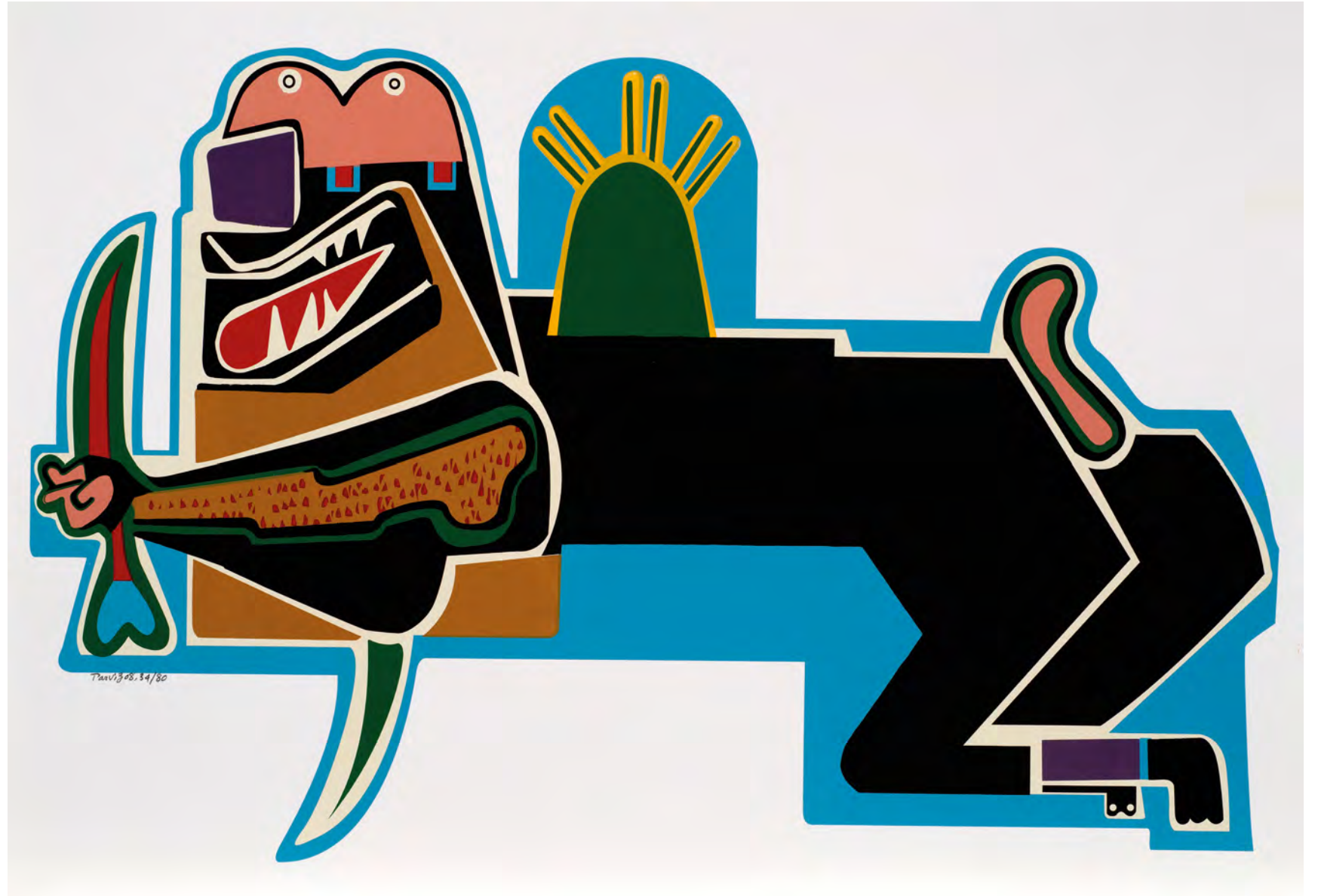
Tehran MOCA, Tehran, *Parviz Tanavoli and The Lions of Iran*, 3 July - 29 August 2017

Meem Gallery, Dubai, *Iran Print*, 23 September – 5 November 2019

COLLECTIONS

LACMA, Los Angeles, USA

Tate, London, UK



14. *Lion and Sun*, 2010

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz 2010' lower left

From an edition of 70

70 x 100 cm

27 1/2 x 39 3/8 in

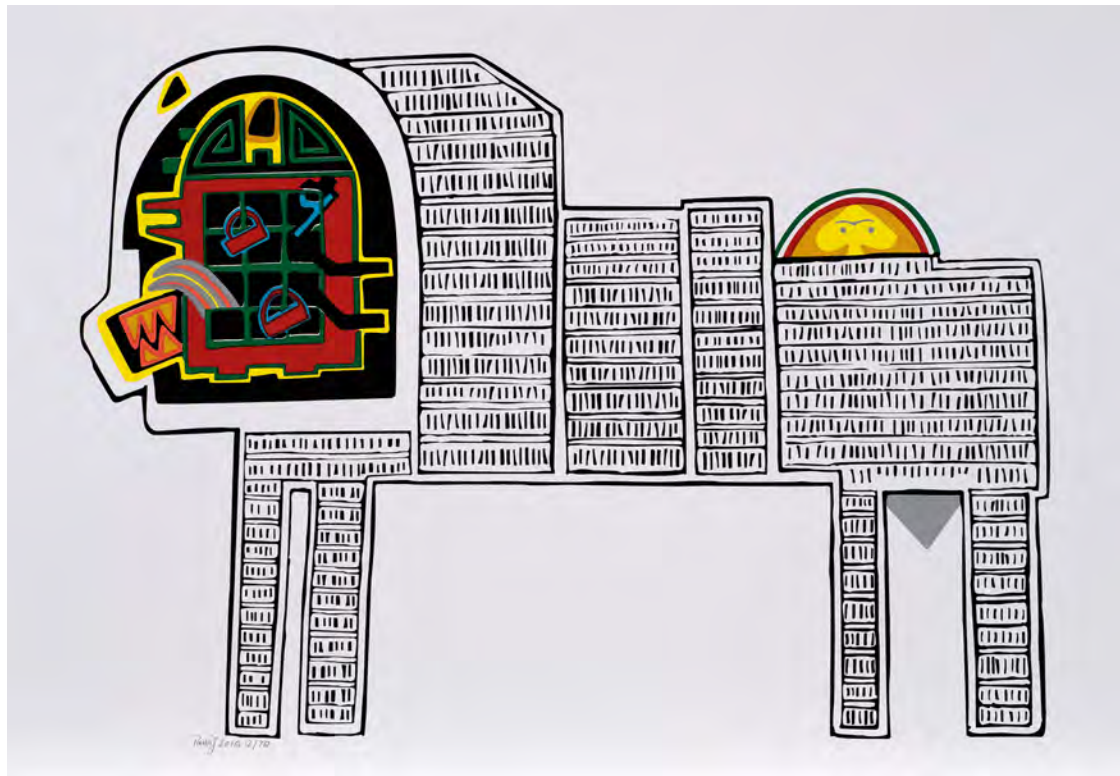
EXHIBITIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*,
10 February – 7 June 2015, illust. exh. cat. p. 143

Meem Gallery, Dubai, *Iran Print*, 23 September – 5 November 2019

COLLECTIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA



15. *Purple Lion*, 2013

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz '014' lower left

From an edition of 80

70 x 100 cm

27 1/2 x 39 3/8 in

EXHIBITIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*,
10 February – 7 June 2015, illust. exh. cat. p.149

Meem Gallery, Dubai, *Iran Print*, 23 September – 5 November 2019

COLLECTIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA



16. Heech on Heech, 2012

Screenprint on paper

Signed, dated and editioned 'Parviz '012' lower left

From an edition of 25

70 x 50 cm

27 1/2 x 19 3/4 in

EXHIBITIONS

The Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Massachusetts, USA, *Parviz Tanavoli*, 10 February – 7 June 2015, illust. exh. cat. pp.126-127 & p.137

“Heech means ‘nothing’. The shape of this work, which is composed of three letters fascinated me so much that for four or five years I worked on it, making many, many heeches... I relate them again to my old chairs and cages. I turn them around; I separate them; I combine them with the human figures because I see, really, the same figure of that poet or the image of the man in the shape of this Persian word... While I worked on those sculptures I was so surrounded by the power of heech that I saw a heech in everything... I must admit that I never before worked with so much love and hope. It filled every minute of my time, and for the four or five years since then, the spirit of heech has followed me in all my other work.”

Parviz Tanavoli, 1976

Interview with Ellen H. Johnson, quoted in *Parviz Tanavoli, Fifteen Years of Bronze Sculpture*, Grey Art Gallery and Study Centre, New York University, New York



Grosvenor Gallery

EXHIBITION

Parviz Tanavoli

1970s Prints

26 April – 8 May 2021

Grosvenor Gallery, London

Credits

Text

Dr. Shiva Balaghi, Charles Moore & Parviz Tanavoli

Photography

Justin Piperger

Images of rugs

Courtesy Parviz Tanavoli

Print

Newspaper Club

GROSVENOR GALLERY

35 Bury Street

London

SW1Y 6AU

+44 (0)20 7484 7979

grosvenorgallery.com



*“Iranian themes had
come to possess the very
fiber of my being and
haunted my thoughts.”*