Particularly striking among the work of artists of the Middle East is the way in which their history and the recent crises and wars that have so deeply affected the region are passionately felt and articulated. Using images and the language of the past, through photographs and books, this section has a very different mood, and the works and their words tell particular stories. Included here are snapshots of history – the Qajar era of Iran, for example, is a particular preoccupation of Iranian artists working with photography, whilst the Iran–Iraq war (1980–8) has become the focus of others. For Iraqi artists there are works concerned with the 1991 Gulf war; also with the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 and its consequences, such as the destruction of Iraq’s libraries. The Egyptian artists included here make reference to historical figures, such as the well-known singer Umm Kulthum (d. 1975), and to social questions; a Palestinian artist touches on issues of identity and conflict, while Lebanese artists speak of the effects of the Lebanese civil war (1975–89).

4
Identity, History
and Politics
Khosrow Hassanadeh

I'm in love

WATERCOLOUR AND PASTEL ON PAPER, 1990
H: 32.5 cm, W: 23.3 cm
IRAN
1989-28-01
BROOKE SNADEF PERMANENT FUND

Khosrow Hassanadeh's experiences
fighting as a young boy in the Iran-Iraq
war (1980-8) have deeply marked his
work. The first impression provided by
this self-portrait recalls a classical
Persian miniature. The text behind the
figure tells a different story, however:
It consists of philosophical musings
on the human condition and starts
with a poem:

'I am in love
Right
But what hearing
When the storm twists
The tent of loneliness
The torn maps of the tent
And my simian destiny
Now'

It continues:

'And this act of demolishing becomes a
basis for another destruction, and each
destruction follows a demolition after a
construction. And when everything is
destroyed, it is only the legend that were
real. Now if this world - which I am making
or destroying - can be called a world, looks
unfamiliar, irrational and ugly, it is not my
fault. Our present world suffers from these
unfamiliarities, from being torn apart and
breaking into pieces of values, or at least
my world suffers from this imagination and
only storms can animate my chaos.'

(Translated byAtefeh Farnia)

Ansh Mohammed Taheri

Husayn, the martyr par excellence

MIXED MEDIA ON PAPER, 1998
H: 49.8 cm, W: 34.0 cm
IRAN
2000-7.74-01
BROOKE SNAYDE PERMANENT FUND

This painting consists of a shadowy portrait of Imam
Husayn, the Shi'a martyr killed at the battle of Kerbels
in Iraq in 680, an event which has powerful resonance
for Shi'a Muslims everywhere. Covering his face is a prayer
scroll - inexpressible, it recalls script. Much of Taheri's
work refers to aspects of past and present traditions of
Iran and Central Asia.
Jalali described this image as follows:

34 years ago a photo studio was opened in a town called Chehr-e-Haran. This studio was one of the most important studios in the history of photography in Iran. After the revolution, I came across the sign for the Chehr-e-Haran studio (in Persian akashkabeh chehr-e-haran) which had been closed years ago. Someone had drawn with red paint on it in order to mark it. From what I have heard, women’s pictures without the veil were taken in that studio and maybe this was in reaction to that. Because of my interest in the history of photography in Iran I collect anything concerning photography. After finding this sign and having portraits of women taken in those days’ studios in my archive, I came up with the idea of mixing these two—the sign and the portraits. I mixed two eras, the present and the past, and their reaction to the pictures of women.”

[Personal communication]
Jalali described this image as follows:

"34 years ago a photo studio was opened in Isfahan called Chehrehvama. This studio was one of the most important studios in the history of photography in Iran. After the revolution I came across the sign for the Chehrehvama studio [in Persian alaashkhabchehrehvama] which had been closed years ago. Someone had thrown red paint on it in order to ruin it. From what I have heard women's pictures without the veil were taken in that studio and maybe this was in reaction to that. Because of my interest in the history of photography in Iran I collect anything concerning photography. After finding this sign, also hearing of women taken in those days' studios in my arid, I came up with the idea of mixing those two: the sign and the portrait. I liked two masts, the present and the past, and their reaction in the pictures of women."

(Personal communication)

Najivy writes as follows:

"Now they are to start with in black and white, stowing other self consciously into the camera. My mother not yet in her turn but already sporting a chador, with her little cousin in a flaky little dress. Grandfather and friends seated around a table against a panaramic backdrop."

Using computer technology as a 'time machine', she has altered the images in this series which she calls (playing a Family Album) to take them out of their original setting. The garments have been overlaid with early twentieth-century Iranian postage stamps of exotic birds. These were among the items in her father's cabinet of curiosities, which she kept in order to establish links with her parents and her past.

"I had the feeling that what I was trying to accomplish was a prolongation of my separation with the past. It became evident to me that if I was to go forward with my life I had to somehow assemble all these bits and pieces of my life before."

(Artist's statement)