

MOMEN Biography

(For use at will after September 10, 2006)

Karl Momen, painter and sculptor, is truly an international artist in his cosmopolitan temperament, life experiences and artistic expression.

Born in 1934 in Masshad, Iran, Momen was the youngest child in a large family. His father was one of Masshad's most notable Persian rug designers and producers from the 1880s to the 1950s. His father's abstract designs and the family's collection of Persian miniatures in the home gave Momen an early interest the arts.

From his early youth, Momen showed strong interest in painting. He began to paint when he was seven years old and was exposed to the works of **Urie Popow**, an important early Russian avant garde painter who had fled to Masshad following the Russian revolution in 1917. In Masshad, few appreciated Popow's abstract art, but he made a good living producing wall patterns for businesses and residences. Momen benefited greatly from being around the Popow workshop and studio.

Momen had precocious skills in portraiture, and at age 15 he was commissioned by Masshad's Soviet Cultural Center to paint a six-foot-high official portrait of Stalin. Several years later, Momen completed a twelve-foot-high portrait for the Shah of Iran which was exhibited at the Tehran Hilton. That painting, according to Momen, "became a door mat in the first days of the 1979 Islamic revolution."

Following high school and after completion of military service, Momen moved to Germany to study architecture and art at the Kunst Academy in Stuttgart. There he worked for the academy's **Professor Pheninger** and, through him, met and became friends with **Max Ernst** (1888-1943), one of the founders and masters of surrealism. Ernst was an admirer of 14th and 15th Century Persian miniatures, which proved to be a common ground for discussion and interests of the two artists.

From 1959 - 1960, Momen worked as an architect trainee for the famed European architect **Le Corbusier**.

In February 1962, Momen moved to Sweden and started work as an architect there, designing hospitals in Sweden and internationally. During this time, Momen continued to work on and refine his art, but he did not show it publicly.

Momen began to work full time as an artist in 1977. In his paintings, there is a synthesis of his various art influences, including the Russian Constructivists, the avant-garde Bauhaus movement, European surrealism, and the modernist movement. Momen's works are bold, often simple and elemental shapes, but frequently with strong symbolic connections. These bold symbols seem to float suspended in rich and highly textured backgrounds.

Momen has had a lifelong interest in astronomy, religion, and literature. During his time in Germany, he also developed a fascination with music and theater, and these two interests frequently emerge in his major works. His ten-painting Wagner suite (now in the permanent collection of the Nordic Heritage Museum, Seattle, Washington) reflects on the

operas of famed German composer **Richard Wagner** and offers Momen's interpretation of the myths, symbols and moods of these operas.

Similarly, his eight-painting suite on **Shakespeare's** dramas present Momen's elemental and symbolic reflections on eight individual Shakespeare plays.

Over the last 29 years, Momen has exhibited widely in museums, art centers and biennials in Europe, the U.S. and Japan, and his paintings and sculptures are widely held in public and private collections.

His monumental sculpture "Metaphor: The Tree of Utah" was completed in 1986 after nearly five years of planning and construction. This great work of public art, which rises 87 feet above the Bonneville Salt Flats near Interstate 80 in Utah, is now seen by millions of Americans and tourists each year.

From 2004 through 2006, Momen's "Nexus" exhibition, including the complete Shakespeare and Wagner suites and more than 30 other Momen works from 1960-2000, was featured at four American museums, sponsored by the Swedish Embassy in Washington, D.C. and organized by International Arts and Artists (Washington, D.C.). The Nexus exhibitions appeared at the Swedish-American Museum (Chicago, 2004), Hillstrom Museum of Art at Gustavus Adolphus College (St. Peter, Minnesota, 2004), Nordic Heritage Museum (Seattle, 2006), and the Krasl Art Center (St. Joseph, Michigan, 2006). At the Krasl Art Center, the exhibition was also sponsored by the Michigan Art Council and the National Endowment for the Arts.

His two-gallery show in Laguna Beach at Endangered Planet Gallery and Marion Meyer Contemporary Art (October-December) is his first gallery exhibition in California in more than a decade. At age 72, Momen is energetic, youthful and very active. Since 1980, Momen has maintained residences in both Stockholm and San Francisco. He holds dual citizenship in Sweden and the U.S.

A lifelong bachelor, he spends much of each year traveling to museum and art events worldwide and, between traveling, continues to create new paintings and sculptures. He speaks four languages: Persian, German, Swedish and English.

A new biography on Momen's life, "An Odyssey of an Artist," is due for release later this year, to be published by The Edwin Mellen Press (Lewiston, New York). The book, written by **Herman du Toit**, head of audience education and development at Brigham Young University Museum of Art, will trace Momen's evolution from his youth in a historic Iranian city to his emerging fame as one of the most talented and enduring of Europe's modern artists.

Momen's current art interests are, in his words, "to travel over geographical and cultural borders in a mixture of oriental and Occidental myth, cultures and colors, and to reflect like a '*Fata Morgana*' [a mirage or optical phenomenon] on the past and, hopefully, towards a bright global future, combined with peace."

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