

thing we did was close down the restaurant. We kept open the library; I had people who used the library. And then we had a small area and we started developing an art education program. I don't remember how we did it; we started getting kids to come in and have art education courses. We set up cases downstairs in which they could see the crafts and how they were made, and he (i.e., Hazave'i) was starting to teach things.

At the same time as this, I did an exhibition on Persian religious paintings which I had nobody's backing to do. Nobody wanted anything to do with this. And then the people came in; they flooded in.

Q: You're kidding!

Diba: I got a nagqal to come to the museum. A nagqal came and everywhere I had these huge paintings of the tragedy of Karbala, the day of judgment, etc. I had people.

Q: And all different types of people?

Diba: No, mainly middle class and lower middle class, once the first show was over. This was '77. I sort of put my finger on it by then. I think the museum was becoming relevant. But I'd found someone; I'd found someone of the people who was helping me. We had art education; I think we were making some progress there. We came up with a show that meant something to people.

The next show I was going to do was Turkaman and that was going to mean something. It was going to mean a tremendous amount to the tribes that I went and saw and worked on it with. I worked on this for, god, eight months, just before the revolution happened.

And then I was starting to realize what I could do with this museum to reach out to people. It wasn't going to be the Qajar paintings that were going to do it. It was going to be finding what people wanted and using the museum as a what? Loudspeaker. But that took years. Now this was my museum. As I said, you were kind of going blindly. It was a totally novel concept, and I was stunned by the effect of the religious painting exhibition. I was just stunned. And I think, given time, I would have developed a formula in which I did some artistic, intellectual shows, some shows for the people -- there were millions of things you could do. Maybe some prestige shows, and still keep the museum as part of the "imperial tour" type of thing. And I think it could have happened with every museum.

Now, T.M.O.C.A. (Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art) is a problem, because you -- the same as with Qajar art, you didn't have a museum to tell people what to look at before Qajar art, not that they'd relate to Qajar art if they didn't have a museum of eighteenth, seventeenth, sixteenth century. There was nothing. It was happening; but we needed time. But one of the reasons, maybe, we could do Qajar art was because Qajar art wasn't represented in the Ministry of Culture and Arts. Did you

notice that? The Ministry of Culture and Arts dealt with archaeology. Maybe it even dealt with Islamic periods, but it wasn't dealing with Qajar art; so we could work on that. So we weren't competition for them in that sense even though we were of course. But in a way it was like an extension of the Golestan Palace which was more under the Court aegis so we could do that. There were so many reasons that we can't even guess at as to why thing were lopsided.

I could formulate ideas. But you could get three people here together and you'd find out the real reasons why things were done in sort of this hodge-podge way, I suppose.

At Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art the problem was that it was a museum of contemporary art. Why was it a museum of contemporary art? Because they had a project some years ago to do a museum of modern art in Shiraz. And because there was this conflict, that wound up being a contemporary art museum. This was one of their real big problems. Then once it was built they realized, "You can't just do contemporary art here; they don't know what modern art is." So then it became everything. I don't know if bad planning is inherent to the Iranian psyche or if it was just symptomatic of those years or if it had to do with politics being in every facet.

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Q: It probably had to do with all of those things.

Diba: All the things together. But I don't know in 1978 if I

was optimistic or if I was discouraged. I'd come to a point where I was realizing all the difficulties. I realized that my museum had not been reaching out to people before, but that I'd done a show that had reached out to them. It was kind of --

Q: You were groping in the dark, but you were groping.

Diba: Yes. I was getting somewhere, and one of my great questions is: what would have happened to that Turkaman exhibition? It was very important in terms of it was going to be the first exhibition in Iran of the tribes.

Q: And you got an O.K. on that one?

Diba: Oh, yes. I had very little interference. I made my own policy. The Queen never told me not to do anything. Never! And it's very hard -- there were shows that I was told to do -- The English silver. Why? Because I was part of the Court and these were sort of Court projects, and you had to really do it. But the other things, the wedding contracts -- funny things happened with that one. One of the guys that was lending me the wedding contracts [laughs] couldn't pass the SAVAK test and they wouldn't let him come to the opening. [laughter]

Q:

Diba: [laughs] This man -- he was Dr. Parviz Owsiya; he was a lawyer.

Q: Sure. I know him well.

Diba: You know him. Oh, that's funny. "But he's lent many of the works, you must let him come!"

Q: Did they tell you why, in what way he didn't pass the test?

Diba: No.

Q: It was just that he didn't get the O.K.

Diba: Oh, he came; he was allowed to come. There were difficulties. I don't know how that came up. Anyway, what was I saying?

Q: We were talking about your shows and you said what would happen if you gave a Turkaman show, what sort of response you would have gotten. And also, you said that the Queen never interfered aside from what she told you to do which surprises me.

Diba: Not at all.

Q: Because I think a religious exhibition and a Turkaman

exhibition were --

Diba: Pretty controversial.

Q: Were, horribly. But I think we were all blind to all these issues at that point. Everything had gone haywire.

Diba: The wedding contracts was not controversial. First I had the opening exhibition. Then I had Roloff Beny. Nobody cared about that either. Then I had wedding contracts. Then I had the British show. That was one case where I really saw propaganda, you know. Nobody came. Nobody. It was very interesting. Then a showing "Recent Acquisitions." Then I did the religious painting. That came at a point -- I think I would go to her once in a while and say I'm doing this or that or whatever and she would just sort of nod and suggest ways of helping out or people I could talk to or whatever, informally.

Q: You'd go to her in private and just discuss these things over the table.

Diba: Yes. I really was given a lot of leeway when you think of it. I don't remember in terms of the religious paintings. One interesting thing though was the religious painting was done in the time that Nahavandi was in charge and I didn't have a terrific relationship with him and he really wasn't that

interested. He was very busy doing other things. So I didn't even need to get a go-ahead from anybody to do that, because nobody wanted to be involved with it. They'd say, "I support it or I wouldn't support it." It was just kind of "do it at your own risk." So I did a lot of maneuvering there to cover myself, because I realized that it was a potentially sensitive thing, and I got all sorts of people from the universities and various mollahs and that to agree on the title. And the funny thing about that exhibit was, was that Farideh Khanum, the Queen's mother, Mrs. Diba, was always very, very supportive of me. She was always very wonderful, and I always invited her to various functions and things. But I thought, "I'd never invite her to this because she wouldn't want to come," because I was so sure it was controversial. So I just called her a few days before the opening and I said, "You know, I didn't ask you to come and open this because I thought it would be politically sensitive." She said, "No. It won't be politically sensitive. I think it's absolutely wonderful. I'll come and open it for you." This is on about three days' notice, two days' notice. And you know the protocol involved if any of these people showed up. Well, I practically fell through the floor when she came and she loved it. And it was a big success.

Q: How did people react to this particular reaction? It must have been a shock to someone. Was no one interested in the fact that you had this incredible turnout of university middle class,

all those sectors of the society that were never interested in you?

Diba: No, I don't think so. [laughs] I knew that it was something unusual happening. I think we finally did have some articles in newspapers and we had a big opening. One thing that I know that happened was that Nahavandi sent a message to me and he said, "You've done good; you come to me if you ever want anything," which was the first kind of anything I'd ever had from this man ever since he'd been involved with this. So that was the only way I can tell you it was a success, because we had no way of measuring success. An article would appear in Kayhan International and maybe there'd be a review somewhere.

Things weren't organized in that sense for the art world. So how did you know if you were having an effect? You knew because you walked out there and saw your museum was full every day and that there were people you'd never seen before. And that they were just coming in droves. I mean, I knew something was being done right. And I knew from people's reactions because I had a film of Moharram ceremonies down in the South going on at the same time as the projection and I had the Qahveh-Khaneh [coffee house] painting, and then I had all the things that were involved with the Moharram ceremonies. And it is amazing to think that all these things were taken out of a religious context and they were put in a state institution and that the common people had no problem with this.



Q: That should be, looking back, very indicative to us of how blind we were.

Diba: I think we broached on a lot of things just in trying to say whether there was a lot of art planning or not. There was a lot of art activity and not so much planning.

End of Interview #1

Interviewee: Leyla Diba

Interview #2

Interviewer: Tanya Farmanfarmaiyan

Place: New York

Date: August 13, 1984

Q: This is a continuation of my interview with Mrs. Leyla Diba, August 13, 1984.

Leyla, let's return to your job at the Daftar [Bureau]. Any comments you want to add to what you said yesterday?

Diba: When I came back to Iran and really started working in the fall of, no it was February of '74 -- I just can't remember chronologically exactly what happened. But the first thing that I was involved with was what has been called the I.C.O.N. Symposium or I.C.O.M. Seminar. I.C.O.M. is the International Council of Museums, and I think it's sort of relevant to talk about it because it shows you that the Daftar-e Makhsus [Special Bureau], the only official representative of Her Majesty, was trying to get advice and information from abroad to formulate some sort of modern museum policy. It wasn't as if everything was just happening alaki [haphazardly]. I also found out later that they had had quite a bit of high level contact with the Metropolitan Museum, that people had come over and advised them. From the Islamic Department. Who was it? Hoving at that time. They had also given them quite a bit of advice; they had come over and talked about the Carpet Museum before.

The purpose of this symposium was to gather ten experts from

Europe and Asia, particularly I remember Dr. Grace Moorely from India. She was one of the great, old grande dame of museology and she had been responsible for setting up the whole Indian museum system. She was the person who stuck the most in my mind because I think she was the one who was more influential in terms of that she had dealt with problems similar to ours, and I was very much impressed by the number of museums that they had in India. They had about a hundred museums in India, even though you realize that in our part of the world things are very much more on paper than they are in reality. We also had maybe forty or fifty museums, but when you went to see them, many of them were not more than a room with a storage area and a few cases of things in it. So I realized it was not necessarily as impressive as it sounded. But still she was the most interesting person among them. The other people there were curators and directors of museums from France and Belgium and England. So they had a lot of so-called experts come over.

And at the same time that these experts came over they were supposed to look at all the projects, many of which had already begun and try and help us out. I just remembered for some reason the name of the Czechoslovakian was Professor Fritch. So if that helps at all, I think that's what his name was. Anyway, a conflict developed between the I.C.O.M. people and Professor, let's call him Fritch, and his way of installing museums because he wasn't a museum person. He was a man who developed trade pavilions. So there was a very different outlook. From the time

the I.C.O.M. Seminar started -- they were called over as museum experts to advise us on our projects -- there was a conflict.

The second thing they were doing was they set up a sort of mini-seminar and we went to Teheran University and had a kind of contest and tried to get as many young students as we could to try and start training them. It was an attempt at making a sort of "Introduction to Museology," if you like, that we were trying to reach out to the college students. And we had part of the sessions at Teheran University at the very beginning.

Q: What sort of training were these students being given at the University?

Diba: Well, that was one of the problems. You see the University didn't have Islamic studies. In other words, the Persian university system was set up in a very different way. They had an archaeology department, and they didn't teach anything say after, what was relevant to archaeology, since there were not that many Islamic digs, "Islamic" meaning post 621 A.D. The main emphasis was on say Marlik which was discovered by Negahban or the other sites. Marlik is the one that I particularly remember. But there were other sites, but they were all pre-Islamic sites. So the students were only aware of ancient Iranian art which had been the emphasis up until that period really in terms of archaeology. There was a tremendous gap in their knowledge for what we were trying to get them to

which was contemporary European art or modern European art or in my case Qajar art. So this was one of the big difficulties we saw from the beginning.

What impressed me was the amazing eagerness of the students to learn. I couldn't believe it! They just came in droves, and we had endless interviews. Everything was being done for the first time. I remember we had to make up a formula, so that we'd be able to interview them just to find out what kind of a background they had, what they were interested in, and so on, and if they spoke any languages. And it was via this process that we selected a certain number that we were going to train and use in the museums. So the idea was there; it was just not that easy to implement.

Some of them got scholarships which was basically why they came in droves, because they knew there was a scholarship involved. One or two were sent to Europe. Others were subsidized to work in the museums. But it was a very small number. And I think what stays in my mind about this is here we were setting up five museums but we really didn't have the educational technology, if you like, to form the people. And this again was one of the major problems. We simply did not have enough people to run the museums, once you built the building.

Q: Could you give me a list of those five museums?

Diba: The museums involved from the very beginning in 1974 we

knew were being built were the Negarestan, the Museum of Contemporary Art (we didn't know if it was going to be one or two museums), the Abgineh or the Glass Museum which covered the entire range of glass from the Islamic period through the late Qajar period, the Carpet Museum. These are the things that either were in progress, being built, or that there were plans for. So this was actually four. Eventually another museum was added to this, and that is the museum that evolved out of the collections that were in the Private Secretariat [the Queen's Bureau]. Many of the collections turned out to be of the Islamic period, and since they couldn't all fit in the Negarestan a sort of museum developed in the Secretariat, mainly because the power was in the Secretariat, the money was in the Secretariat, and they had people working there. So it developed into a sort of center of its own where it was never meant to be.

As I think of it, I think other things got added to this. Maybe later I'll be able to think of some other things. One thing I remember is that, and this is part of the whole series of things that were going on in terms of formulation, was the idea of cultural centers. And so this in a way, I think, sort of had something to do with the children's centers that Lili Amir Arjomand was running. The idea of cultural centers as a kind of focus for the youth to be attached to museums belongs specifically to Firuz Shirvanlu.

When we were having this I.C.O.M. Seminar -- he was a very prolific writer and speaker. He was a major intellectual who was

one of a group of revolutionaries who tried to kill the Shah a few years earlier, and he had been one of the people who had publicly recanted, and he had been brought into the Daftar-e Makhsus [Queen's Bureau] to work and he was in charge actually of the cultural section which I was working with. So he was head of the cultural section; I was working there; Feri Daftari was working there, Claude Karbasi, a translator, and one or two other Iranians. I don't remember at the very beginning who else was there.

Q: Where does Aghdashlu come in?

Diba: He comes in later. As long as I was at the Daftar-e Makhsus Shirvanlu was running the cultural section. Now, one of the problems involved is that since Shirvanlu was a recanted revolutionary, he didn't have a very strong power position. Therefore, many of the things he wanted to do or accomplish he couldn't get done. So this was one of the problems; you didn't have a very strong, influential personality running the cultural and arts section. That happened when Aghdashlu came in and took over the job from Shirvanlu, basically sort of eliminated him.

But the period that I'm talking about, '74, and that's before all of this happens, and what is happening as I said, is the Daftar-e Makhsus has brought over a group of foreign intellectuals and museum experts to try and help us with our program. On the one hand to try and give us an idea how to train

some Iranians, on the other to help us with the problems of how to install a modern museum. We were not asking them for help in terms of the collections. We were asking them for help in terms of: how do we make a museum, because people were aware enough to realize that there were major problems involved.

Now in the course of this, Shirvanlu had written a major study of what he proposed as a series of cultural centers throughout Iran, and this I remember as an exhausting project, a seventy or eighty page book he wrote up, that we were all working on in the Daftar-e Makhsus to present it in time for I.C.O.M. to make an evaluation of this project which they never did. One of the big problems was that Shirvanlu needed someone to evaluate his idea of cultural centers to be able to --

[end of side two of tape one]

As I said, the reason that it was important for Shirvanlu to submit this to I.C.O.M. was they were being billed as an advisory board, and since he himself didn't have that much influence, he needed what he hoped would be their approval to help him push this idea. As I said, if a group of cultural centers was going to be set up in Iran and Shirvanlu was going to be behind it, it was going to be obviously a position of political influence. But what happened was that I.C.O.M. never delivered. In other words, we found again and this is something you have to talk about in terms of Iran, often you would call in foreign experts and they



wouldn't help you; they would just confuse you more than when you had begun.

That was the case with I.C.O.M. It was very, very unproductive. We were unhappy; we didn't feel they really contributed anything to our problems. They certainly didn't give us our analysis of Shirvanlu's idea of cultural centers. They didn't really produce anything positive. There again is an example of an experience in which Iranians had projects they were trying to put through but really didn't get much help. And also, we were paying I.C.O.M. So there was this attitude kind of on our part also, that we were paying these people, that they didn't come for free. We always had the feeling that we were paying through the nose for whatever we were getting. So this was kind of the atmosphere in which the museums started being developed.

One thing, in terms of the actual museums, when I had gotten there, the projects had already started, and in Iran as elsewhere in the world, the first person who has to deal with the project is an architect. An architect also comes into conflict with preservation or conservation or curatorial problems in terms of setting up a museum. This is a world-wide occurrence, and we had that in Iran. So when the I.C.O.M. people came, we started getting conflicts, and from the beginning we felt we had to keep people apart. It happened in my museum and it happened in the Carpet Museum. These were the two museums that were already standing. The person who set up my museum was not a museum expert. For instance, he used a kind of lighting that the

I.C.O.M. people felt was destructive in the long term to the paintings.

So here we were faced with the fact that we already had someone who was doing this project and then we had a group of consultants who were telling us that, "You're going to destroy the paintings ultimately with this kind of light, with the heat from this kind of light." Then you had the Iranian architect who was in charge of the project, Iranpur, screaming because he said, "I can't change the lighting and I won't change the lighting," and on the other hand the I.C.O.M. people -- you know what the museum people can be like -- the experts, were in horror about this kind of lighting. And they were right! I understand the viewpoint. On the one hand Iranpur said, "We've done it all; we can't change it," and the kind of lighting he had chosen was very beautiful for the paintings, a golden light. Whereas what they said was a kind of cold lighting which was a white light which would not look as attractive on the paintings. So from the day I took over this museum, I was faced with this problem.

The other problem we were faced with and this I.C.O.M. people again pointed out, the air conditioning was done in such a way that there was a tremendous difference in temperature between the upper, middle, and lower sections. But it's the same works of art. And this again is a problem that I was constantly dealing with, because we didn't have a proper system of air conditioning. There was buckling; these are oil paintings and they move according to temperature, according to humidity, and

according to the temperature variations. This is a problem the I.C.O.M. people pointed out that should have been dealt with from the beginning. But you couldn't; you had an old castle that had been renovated by someone who did not give that much importance to the physical problems involved with maintaining works of art, and then you had the committee that was brought in later. All they could do was criticize! They just wanted to show how much they knew as opposed to saying, "Well, this has been done already. Here are some solutions for you to try and deal with." And I knew I was going to be running this place and these were the problems from day one.

In the basement it was so freezing that nobody could work there. My workers were freezing to death all the time because the air conditioning just was not proper. The works of art were O.K. in the basement because at least it was cold there. These are the sort of things I had facing me.

I.C.O.M. was an interesting example of all the problems involved with setting up these museums, why it wasn't easy to develop a policy. Now, with the Carpet Museum there was also a big problem because, again, there you had a building where there were certain things installed that were going to be detrimental to the carpets that were going to be installed there. The I.C.O.M. people again said that -- you had exhaust vents directly above where the carpets were, so that air and dirt and so on was going to be directly in contact with the carpets or you had another problem which both buildings had, [and that was] the lack

of thermostats to measure the temperature and the humidity. In my case, I never had any thermostats. In the case of the Carpet Museum, the thermostat was very high up and difficult to see. So these were the kind of things I.C.O.M. pointed out to us, but without giving us any constructive means of dealing with them. I guess partly because they weren't called in from the beginning, and from the beginning if you hadn't had cooperation between the Iranian architects and the I.C.O.M. people you would have gotten perhaps some solutions. But as it was from the beginning we were having to deal with these problems.

The other thing that was going on while I was there was the collecting. The Amery collection had been purchased before it was due to be put up for sale at Sotheby's. This was done before I came to Iran.

Q: This was the Qajar painting collection.

Diba: This was the Qajar painting collection that had been put together by an English M.P. and his family in the early twentieth century and taken to England. So I guess it was a very visible way of showing the Iranians' interest and power in bringing back works of art to Iran. And that's what happened. Instead of going on the block at Sotheby's, they purchased it en masse and brought it to Iran.

Other things were being collected at that time. The modern art collecting was kind of on a pretty low level while I was

there. Basically it either came directly via dealers who had access to Mr. Bahadori or it came via an advisor called Mr. Vakili, who was our representative to the Vatican. He was kind of the agent, or there were purchases -- for instance, there was a huge international art fair that happened while I was still working at the Daftar [Bureau] (this must be '74) in which all the galleries in England participated, and it was a major, major cultural event in terms of Iran. Fairs were a very big medium for bringing Western culture and Western artifacts to Iran because they could bring them in without all the problems of customs and not sell them. And somehow things stayed. So I was sent there with Feri Daftari and we bought a series of mainly engravings and a few modern art works that would eventually make their way to T.M.O.C.A. - the Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art.

The I remember we had a major collection that came by way of Pascal Sernet. He was a dealer in Paris. So there were multiple ways in which things were purchased. But there was no strong guiding hand really until Donna Stein came to the office and she was hired as a consultant.

Q: Who was Donna Stein?

Diba: Donna Stein was an American curator. I don't know who recommended her, but she was quite a well-known figure. She had worked at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and was especially well-known for her work in graphics. And she was hired to put

together a graphics collection, and then advise as an advisor not as an agent -- she was a salaried employee -- on the purchase of other, major modern paintings that went eventually to the Teheran Museum of Contemporary Art.

Q: There was no Iranian who could have filled that particular job in the place of Donna Stein?

Diba: I don't know. No. There was no Iranian that had her background for graphics. There was no Iranian that I knew of that had a thorough knowledge of Western European graphics on the kind of level you're talking about, and no, I don't think we had an Iranian even that had the professional expertise to be able to do it. Maybe people would disagree with me; I don't know. I always look at things unfortunately from the level of a young, Western-trained person. It's my habit to always say, "Is the person Western-educated?" If you're going to be buying Western art, you must have a Western formation; I don't see that you can do it any other way. So I would say, no. But again this is the dilemma. The Iranians would always say, "Why don't we have an Iranian?" How can you say to people constantly, "I don't feel you're qualified." But that's what it always came down to.

Now Donna Stein had a terrific amount of problems in the Daftar-e Makhsus. Everybody resented her. They resented the fact that here was an American who had her finger in the best pie, where the money was. So people resented her. And she's a

very nice person, but she had an awful lot of trouble in the Daftar. People were constantly putting spokes in her wheels for everything she wanted to do and she wasn't happy.

Q: Was she effective?

Diba: She was effective, yes. She put together a graphics collection that can be really numbered among the very good graphics collections in the world, because she was allowed to do what she had to do. And there was no interference. She put together the graphics collection which I don't think is true for the rest of the T.M.O.C.A. collection. They had some major, very, very good pieces, but they had lots of holes; there were criticisms that there were too many hyper-realists. There were a lot of criticisms about -- even though they had some wonderful paintings; they had major, major paintings there. It didn't have the stamp of one person, and you need the stamp of one person to form a collection.

Q: A continuity.

Diba: A continuity. I mean, for instance, with the Negarestan, we started out with a very strong basis with the Amery Collection. I felt that I knew enough about Qajar art and had enough influence that from the day after I started working on it, I said, "This is not enough. It only represents the middle

spectrum. We had no eighteenth century painting; we have no seventeenth century painting; we have no decorative arts." So the Negarestan was going to be and it was by the time I left, a collection that had some meaning. It had a beginning and an end because one person was allowed to deal with it. But that often didn't happen.

As I said, the Daftar-e Makhsus was sort of the major center for all kinds of collecting including Iranian-Islamic and pre-Islamic art. For these things the resident art consultant was Yahya Zoka and Mohsen Forughi was a big advisor even though he was never employed; he was simply an advisor.

Q: Could you give me some background on Mr. Zoka?

Diba: I don't know any background on Mr. Zoka. He was an Iranian-trained consultant; he spoke no foreign languages which was a major drawback in one sense, but he was very, very knowledgeable about the Qajar period. He had written a book on the Golestan Palace. Before coming to Daftar-e Makhsus he had been the director of one of the other museums. It was either the Museum of Mardom-Shenasi - sociological museum or the Museum of Decorative Arts. He was extremely knowledgeable about Iranian art of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, but not knowledgeable because he didn't have training in formation in earlier art. He had a sort of selective training, a selective eye. There were things that he knew that no foreigner could ever



know! I don't know where he got his education. I know he wasn't a "doctor" otherwise they would have called him doctor if he had a Ph.D. degree. He was the most knowledgeable person about the Qajar period.

Q: And you mentioned Mr. Forughi. His background?

Diba: Mr. Forughi was a French-trained architect. He was one of the major collectors in Iran and he was perhaps the major collector in Iran for everything from Achaemenian and through to Qajar painting. He had some very beautiful Qajar paintings, and he was very interested in the arts. He advised the Queen; he was always very helpful to people. Anyone who had anything to do about art would go and talk to Mr. Forughi. And even though I didn't know for sure, he must have been influential in the purchase of the Amery Collection, because as you know he himself had some of the most beautiful Qajar paintings and lacquer work and all sorts of other things. So that was generally his background.

I don't know who else was advising them. I imagine there must have been other people, but I didn't come into contact with them.

The actual process of collecting was very "hush-hush." In other words it was the thing that was not talked about. You sort of found out later. The most important thing was for people not to know how the art works actually got there. So, in terms of my

work these are the things that I was doing. And then when we got the red light that we were going to open the museum -- and I will eventually remember the exact date we opened the museum; it was early summer of '75. It was early summer, that much I remember. So we worked on it about six to eight months. I have to say night and day. We had a terrific deadline. What we had to do was bring the paintings -- oh, and I forgot [to mention this].

While we were working at the Daftar-e Makhsus, the whole Qajar collection, as well as the collection -- they had another collection that they had bought, of coffee house paintings, a major, major collection. Both of these before the museum was set up were doing a world-wide tour. And I remember the last stops were Ankara, and before that Brussels, and before that Paris. So before the whole thing came back they had been traveling through Europe. They were due to come back to Iran. You notice I really didn't see the paintings until just before the museum opened.

And I think this was a very good, major propaganda for Iranian art because they got a lot of press and they were very visible. It was sponsored by the Queen. So we were actually waiting for these paintings to come back to open the museum.

And what was involved with opening the museum was: the installation, the cataloguing, the labeling, the publications, and the making of the storage facilities -- all of this. This was very difficult because again you had the architect who was given full power and the potential curator-director who had to sort of navigate her way in there and make the suggestions, as

well as the head of the art department who had to put his two cents in. So there was not a clear demarcation of power. I would say, Iranpur, Shirvanlu, and myself were all sort of equal in terms of the influence we had at that point. None of us would go directly to Bahadori or the Queen to say, "I want it this way; I want it that way."

So in the long run, I guess it came out pretty well. We wound up with a permanent collection installed. We wound up with storage area. Shirvanlu's idea that a museum should not be just a series of exhibitions of a permanent collection was very, very important, because it meant that we had two very large rooms, large enough if you remember them, to make major exhibitions, which were left. We really fought for this, to have temporary exhibitions. Then we had a library downstairs; we had some space downstairs to conduct classes if we wanted to, art education classes and so on. So all of these things were being proposed and accepted as we were working on our museum.

Now as I was working on it, I found out that major collections of decorative arts were coming in. One was the lacquer work was being donated by Qoli Naseri, who was a very close friend of the Shah; he was a collector. I guess now that I think of it, on the level of Mohsen Forughi but more limited. But he was a great carpet collector, and there had been a book written about his carpets in German. [There were] a lot of nineteenth century things. And he had direct access to the King and Queen. It's possible that a lot of things were sold from him

that none of us would know about. But what happened was that for the decorative arts we got two major collections which came via donation. One was Qoli Naseri's and the other was Reza'i's. Reza'i was a major industrialist who had purchased some wonderful qajar enameled pieces in Paris a few years before. And so we had a room -- I don't know whose concept this was, but it wasn't mine [laughs] -- a treasury. It was going to be a treasury and these enameled pieces formed the nucleus of the treasury pieces. And there were other pieces that Zoka had collected that went in there of the Qajar period, jewelry and enameled and jeweled swords, whatever was enameled and bejeweled went into this treasury room.

Then we had all the lacquer work which was a major art form of the Qajar period and had to be represented which was formed by the the Naseri Collection. Then we had a section of other decorative arts. We were trying to hit all the bases even from the very beginning.

I know that I insisted on this but I don't know how influential if at all I was, or if this was just really accepted from the beginning and that we had to do everything. But the point was that you started out with collections that were not historically formed collections. In other words, I had an Amery Collection but it did not represent very early eighteenth century painting and it did not represent very late nineteenth century painting. In other words the Zandiyeh School and the School of Sani<sup>C</sup>olmolck were not represented which is why it was very, very

important to get a budget for the museum to be able to cover these areas so it would make educational sense to people. The idea is that a museum is not just a place to go to look at pretty paintings. The idea is that it is an educational institution and should give people an historical view from beginning to end of a certain period so they learn something. So this is what we were going to be working on and aiming for in getting a budget for the museum. Those were the permanent collections we started off with and a few carpets, too. It was very, very inadequate from my point of view, but there isn't a curator in the world who doesn't feel that her collections are inadequate. Most people would disagree, obviously.

And then we had two temporary exhibition rooms, and what we put in these two temporary collections rooms for the opening was the Aydin Aghdashlu Collection.

Q: Which was?

Diba: Of calligraphy and a few miniatures but mainly calligraphy. It was an historical collection. Again, one man had worked for maybe ten years, maybe fifteen years, putting together a collection. And there were strings attached to it, obviously! The collection was going to be given. It had all the curatorial work done on it. We made a catalog but the basis of the work had already been done by Aghdashlu who was an art critic and collector. And he wanted to sell it. This often was the

case. People made up collections in Iran and had ready-made shows for you, if you like, in the hope that it would be bought, purchased. And this is what happened; obviously we needed it! And since, as I explained, there was not on the government to level the possibility of having advisors and curators and so on. It seemed that people on their own initiative would go out and form collections and then sell them. You see what I mean. It was sort of a different process which meant that there was not much continuity or consistency. There would have been given time. But the process by which collections were formed were individual collections by people who were non-specialists. They were all gathered together in one place. Either they were donated or they were sold. This is how the Negarestan collection came about.

The Negarestan and the other museums would have a director and a curator who would have a budget, and within say the next five years would have filled in all the gaps. I think that's probably true of every major museum in the world when you think of how the Louvre or the Metropolitan was formed. The Louvre was formed on what? The collecting of the kings. On the basis of Napoleon's conquests. You know that when Napoleon conquered Europe and Egypt, he was one of the greatest art rapists of all time. He took from everybody, everywhere and brought it all back to the Louvre. And this was the basis of the Louvre collection. I think American museums were somewhat different, but certainly traditional European museums started out as a hodgepodge of