

different things.

Q: Tell me, the people who donated their collections, how did they profit? How did the donators profit?

Diba: I don't think they profited in the sense that it was more -- there was always a tradition in Iran and I think in any royal society of giving presents. This has been an Iranian tradition always in the hope of having favors granted to you or in return for things. So someone like Naseri [who] had been a close friend of the King for many years -- I don't know exactly what because this was all before my time; but I assume this was a kind of return for a favor, because I don't think he was actively involved in anything at the time. Someone like Reza'i who was an absolutely major industrialist, had many, many irons in the fire, but was also a very close friend of Princess Ashraf would simply want to hope to increase his favor. There was nothing specifically involved with these collections and nothing wrong with their being donated from my point of view, that nobody was asking me for anything. And I don't think anyone expected any direct return for these things. I don't think so.

Just as in America, you know, because of the tax laws here, there is tremendous incentive for people to give works of art to the museums and there's also tremendous possibilities for illegalities in America. There are a great many things that happen in terms of tax write-offs. There's been a great deal of

taking advantage of the tax laws by major collectors. In this case, their major tax write-offs are obtained by people who have huge incomes by donating to museums and having their art works evaluated at the very, very high level, not necessarily actually what they are worth. So this is how you get works of art. Obviously you draw the line somewhere. You wouldn't want Al Capone to give you a collection. [laughs] Besides that, this is how collections are made.

[break]

About the nucleus of the Qajar collection, as I said, I wasn't involved with the purchase in terms of dollars and cents of anything until I got my own budget. So it was by osmosis that I knew things or indirectly what they cost, because one thing we didn't have was, say for instance, an insurance. Obviously you were in a country in which you really didn't need an insurance in terms of theft because everything was so secure. But this was one major thing that was about to be resolved just before the revolution. In other words, there was a great deal of secrecy about what the things are worth and who they belonged to. It was made very clear that from the time the museum was opened that this was a national museum, a national heritage, that the Queen was donating it to the state. But in terms of my actual knowing the purchase price of things, I was not given the purchase prices of things. And this would have happened when I had my own budget, but specifically when I was insuring the things. I think

I had an approximate value for things but not the specific purchase price.

Now how I know it I don't remember, but the original Amery Collection was purchased for a few hundred thousand dollars. It was not that much, and I think was obviously one of the controversies surrounding the Queen's art purchases was that after this purchase which was relatively reasonable, prices went up tremendously and there were a lot of machinations on the part of mainly Persian dealers for the prices to go up. And I know for instance, that there was one other major painting purchased separately from Sotheby's in London that was installed for the museum, and this was a huge painting of the sons and grandsons of Fath-^CAli Shah. And it was one of the major things you saw as you entered the museum. I think they paid almost the same price for that as they did for the whole collection. Again, here it was Bahadori buying directly; I don't know exactly what he paid for it.

Again, the artistic value of the collection: well, from the point of view of a Qajar scholar, it was one of the major collections in the world. From the point of view of many traditional Islamic scholars of the West, they didn't like Qajar art very much. They thought it was degenerate and they felt that Iranian art stopped in the Safavid period. But in terms of in the art world or in the world of art appreciation the paintings are constantly being reviewed and things are being re-evaluated. So Qajar painting, like Western Victorian art, was undergoing a

period of change in terms of its evaluation. As a matter of fact, there's a British scholar called Basil Robinson, a very famous scholar, who had been writing about Qajar art more than anybody for about ten or fifteen years when it was still in salesrooms and wasn't illustrated in catalogs and was going for a few hundred pounds at a time. And he felt that this art was a very beautiful art and he equated it with Western Victorian art; he called it Persian Victorian. Maybe he was right about that. So in terms of this collection, it was one of the major three collections in the world. The only other comparable collections were in Leningrad or in London, and the London [collection] in the Victoria and Albert Museum was nowhere near the range in terms of artists or quality or subjects illustrated or historical time that the Amery Collection was. The Amery Collection began with one or two signed works of the eighteenth century just after the Zand period and it ended a little bit too soon. In other words, what I felt was lacking in terms of representation was late nineteenth, early twentieth century, end of the Qajar period, because if you took the Qajar period as beginning in 1770-79 and continuing through 1925, you really had to hit both holes. It was a little weak on both ends. Again it was a collection formed by a connoisseur not by an art historian.

Now for the other collections: We had a collection of Bohemian glass and English ceramics made for the Iranian market. I do not know where it came from. I think I found out afterwards. But this came again by Mr. Zoka. So I don't know what the

purchase price was or where it came from. Afterwards I found out -- I'm trying to remember now -- that it was part of a larger collection that was split up into three pieces, and one third came to the Negarestan, one third went to the palace, and there was another third of it that went somewhere. Who was the original owner I can't remember.

Q: Why all the secrecy?

Diba: Anything touching on money was secret as much as there is to say. Any financial dealings were secret, and I think that's true practically anywhere.

The other collection as I said, was the Qoli Naseri Collection. Visually it was very attractive, but historically it was very weak. It didn't have the beginning or the end at all; it didn't have early pieces; it didn't have signed pieces. And I felt for the Negarestan that's one area that really had to be collected. Again, I don't know if the collection was sold or donated. Conceivably it was sold, but I can't say.

The Aghdashlu Collection was the temporary installation in the museum was eventually sold to Daftar-e Makhsus. Again, I don't know the price. This was direct from Aghdashlu to Bahadori, the head of Daftar.

The enamel collection we had was the finest in the world, for the period and the style and the range of things. Except for what was in the crown jewels collection, this was the best you

will find. Here the emphasis was on painted enamels, Mina-Kari. It was wonderful.

Q: Where did that come from?

Diba: As I said, the nucleus of it was a gift from Mr. Reza'i. The other things which were jewelry and swords and so on were purchased again by Mr. Zoka over a period of time.

In other words, I'm sort of coming out like a glorified caretaker. I was a very junior person. They were putting me in charge of everything but I wasn't directly involved in the purchases and they weren't about to let me know what the whole thing was worth until much later.

One thing I would like to speak about. As I said, I pointed out areas where I would have liked to have collected. There was a great deal of activity; there were a great deal of material available from the Qajar period. I think you would divide Iranians into two categories: those who wanted to sell who sold either via dealers or auctions and those who were afraid that they were going to be forced to sell or that things were going to be taken away from them.

I was very naive when I came to Iran and I didn't understand this until I had been running the place for a while. People from my own social circle or friends of mine -- I felt a certain reticence on their part. Eventually, I don't know how I found out, someone told me, that they were literally afraid that if I

went to their houses and saw a painting or something that I would somehow put pressure on them to sell. I personally knew I would never do something like that. The point of having a museum was not for personal profit, was not for personal power. The point was simply to make things available to the public. The point was to education, to elevate. You weren't going to do that by ripping people off. I know I felt this way and I know that whoever else was in charge of the museums felt this way and I certainly know that the Queen would never have allowed something like this to her knowledge to be done. I think that this was a new attitude in Iran. Now that I look back, I understand that there have been many other precedents where some things like this had happened, where people had got greedy, where people either businesswise or familywise had been forced to sell or had lost things. But we weren't going to do that; we were going to be different!

Q: Do you have any specific examples of this happening in the past?

Diba: I don't know any specific instances of this happening. I deduced it later. I think one of the collectors, maybe Cyrus Ghani, may have felt comfortable enough with me to say something like this. Somehow a year or two into running the museum I understood this, that collectors were wary of me. Then later on also looking at things that happened in business and industry in

which various influential people would take over something other people had done and either not remunerate them or simply take it over, I somehow had put all this together to realize that this was the atmosphere of distrust, the same as there was an atmosphere of distrust in my relations with the university. Once or twice I tried to get people to come and lecture. For instance, I'd heard of someone called Homa Pakdaman (Nateq) -- scholar at the university in the Qajar period -- and I would call them and ask them to come and lecture and would get a very cold "no." And it would take me a while to understand that the reason was that "no" was, was that they were on the other side of the fence politically; they wouldn't dream of being associated with or becoming a tool of the monarchy by coming and lecturing at Negarestan. So I was learning a lot of things. And another thing is that also people simply didn't talk to me; they didn't feel comfortable speaking to someone related to the royal family, and I guess they couldn't come up to me and say what they really were afraid of or things that had happened in the past. And since I had not lived in Iran and my father was dead, maybe if I'd had someone who would have honestly said, "I remember what happened twenty years ago" or whatever, I would have been more in tune to what was happening. But no one would come up to you and say these things. So in a sense it was a disadvantage being a Diba, because people didn't feel comfortable talking to you and no matter what you were like personally it was an uphill struggle.

I feel that people really looked at me as a question mark:

who exactly is she? It would take time to prove that they could trust me, and that's what I was building on. That's why whenever I did temporary exhibitions people would lend me things, every time was a step forward. If Mr. Forughi lent me something; if Mr. Mas^Cudi lent me something; if Dr. Owsiya lent me something; if Eskandar Eriyeh lent me something -- all these major collectors. The more people lent me and got things back -- I think literally people were even afraid that if they lent to the museum it wouldn't come back. So in one way you had people who were coming to you and wanted to sell things, people who were trying to ram exhibitions down your throat and you're saying, "I'm not interested; I don't think it's educationally important at this time or it doesn't fit in with my plans," and on the other you had collectors who were afraid to lend. SO this was something that as I became aware of I was working on. I was developing relationships with all the major collectors and I was lucky because my own aunt, Mrs. Sudavar, was a major collector as was another close friend, the Kuros family, also major collectors. Mr. Forughi was a friend and a major collector. So I was getting to a point of trust with people. But I think I was working against an atmosphere of distrust in the arts and in many other areas. So I think that one was working towards establishing a relationship with collectors. I was realizing that there was a zero relationship with the intellectuals. This I became aware of as I was going along. Real distrust.

I suppose it was one of the things that made me aware that

things were wrong. Normally there shouldn't be an atmosphere of distrust between a museum which is an educational institution and the university teachers. There should be an attitude of cooperation. And as I realized it I was slowly becoming aware that there was a gap between me, and becoming aware of why there would be a gap between me and say university or old administrative people. It was not personal. There were some people who personally disliked me like Mr. Khonsari. He was the man who had run the Malek Library for years and he was also a dealer.

Therefore, he was a man who was bridging two worlds. And this is a man who was very resentful that I was made the curator of the Negarestan. Because why? He had written an article about a painting of Fath-^CAli Shah and his court that had been in the actual Negarestan Palace. He felt he was qualified to take over the job. But were coming at it from a different viewpoint. All I could think of was that this man was a dealer. How could a dealer be made a museum director? Iranians didn't see this distinction. In the years that I was director of the Negarestan I didn't buy a single art work for myself.

Q: Part of your ethics?

Diba: It was part of my ethics. And I didn't have dealings with dealers. If I got anything on loan, I tried my ultimate to get it from a private collector. Why? Because I didn't want

anything to touch me. There are certain notions one brings to the job which is why I was so startled to find out people didn't trust me. It went per se in the West that there had to be an atmosphere of trust between the curator-director and the collecting public and the public at large. Otherwise it doesn't work. Ideally this is true. In reality obviously there's a lot of finagling that goes on in the American museum world. But not that much. There are limits that are set, and one of them is the sort of relationship of trust that has to be established. This is the atmosphere in which one was working.

Q: What about later one? You said you were sort of a glorified caretaker from the beginning, but afterwards you went into the process of acquiring pieces. Would you like to discuss that?

Diba: As I said, one of my major ambitions at the Negarestan was to complete the collection. And one way in which we did this was, I never, never went to a private collection and not once, and ever suggested that I would like something. I was aware that this was not the thing to do. And as I said, there were so many things around; you didn't need to. I mean, private collectors were a little paranoid, too. There was a tremendous amount of Qajar material on the market; there were a lot of dealers, and anything you wanted you could have gotten. I think I was trying to establish if there was something I was interested in that was historically unique, you could lend it to me. I would exhibit

it; it would go into a catalogue. You would benefit; I would benefit. And people started realizing, "Oh, well if I lend something, it goes in a catalogue, it acquires more value and I'll get it back." But this is a new notion; this is all new and it's on a very small scale. I don't know where else in society this sort of thing was happening, but I hoped, I suppose, that it was happening in other areas. These were things that were being built.

But in terms of the collections there were major, major sources, because there was greed, there was money. There was a great deal of money. When the Queen came into the art market, there was a huge infusion of money there. The art market is such a small area compared to the national budget, but a lot of money all of a sudden was being poured in.

As I said, I was kind of a glorified employee for about two years. I would spend a certain amount of money and then I would get it back from the Daftar-e Makhsus. This is when Bahadori was there, and no purchases. But what I did was through my contacts and influences I knew that they had bought the entire collection of a dealer called Mehdi Mahbubiyan, one of the major dealers. They paid a fortune for it, a couple of million dollars, a very, very high price to pay for this; and everybody knew this. But the point was that there were a lot of objects in this collection that were relevant to my period. So when Nahavandi came in, it coincided approximately with his tenure, he was very anxious for visible things to start happening that he

would be responsible for. He wanted a high profile, and since he wanted a high profile, I went to him and I said, "Why don't we do an exhibition at the Negarestan of new acquisitions basing it on the Mahbubiyān Collection," which was simply sitting in crates out in a warehouse near Karaj. Nobody was doing anything --

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So what we did was come up with a viable alternative and at the same time we did a show. At the same time I increased the collection tremendously. The works of art were transferred from crates to a decent museum storage. This was in 1976-77.

It was a major project because there were thousands of objects in this collection that we had to unpack, catalogue, and then choose to exhibit. So we did an exhibition of recent acquisitions at the Negarestan.

Q: What was in that collection? What period?

Diba: The collection ran the gamut from the Achaemenid to late Qajar. What happened was there obviously was a full catalog of the collection, not an official catalog, but he had had the collection cataloged by Islamic scholars including Basil Robertson when it was in New York which is where it started off. So I went through everything and found the relevant things period-wise. I had specified that I wanted the museum to be

somewhat wider in scope and work from the late Safavid period to the Pahlavi period. So that within this area I chose everything that was relevant to the museum, unpacked it with people from the Daftar and other experts, and "acquired," if you like, a whole other collection without paying for it. And obviously again, through various things I would know what the collection was worth as a whole.

When I started out at the museum, I would say we had maybe a few hundred pieces and by the time we finished which included the Mahbubiyani Collection and all the other collections, we had about three thousand pieces. It had increased in volume tremendously thanks to the Mahbubiyani Collection, which was very good quality. The reason I wanted it was because it was the major source -- there were things in that that I couldn't buy for love or money anywhere! I didn't need to go to Iranian collectors; I knew that everything was in Mahbubiyani. He had a Qahveh-Khaneh painting that was a nineteenth century dated piece in the Zand style. It was as if he'd given me the crown jewels. Just another specific example, he had wonderful textiles, and these were something we didn't have at the Negarestan. A wonderful series of eighteenth and nineteenth century Persian textiles. We got manuscripts; we got late Safavid manuscripts. We got wonderful albums of Qajar paintings. There was, for instance, the only set I've ever seen of lithograph newspapers that were actually produced in the Qajar period on lithographic presses in Iran with designs of Sani^Colmoluk. So there were very unique things in this

collection; he was a great dealer and had put together a wonderful series of things.

In '76 there was a major Festival of Islam in London, and one of the major events in terms of Iranians was a gallery called Collnaghi which had an absolutely major collection up for sale of Islamic paintings, and a lot of Persian material from the Rothschild Collection -- it was based on the Rothschild Collection, one of the legendary collections. They came to Teheran hoping to sell the entire thing to the Queen's office for her various museums.

For some reason they didn't want to buy the whole collection. But what happened was that all of it was bought -- this is in '76, about the same time I'm getting the Mahbubiyan Collection into the museum. Iranian collectors, private collectors, bought many of the things and some of the collection was bought by the Daftar-e Makhsus by Mr. Bahadori. Now what happened, since I was aware of all this -- one way of increasing the collection was simply to know what was being bought and sold. If you didn't have the money yourself but you had some influence, you could say, "Aha, I know you bought this; I need it; give it to me," which is exactly how I put together collections before I had my own budget. What happened was, when I was doing this recent acquisitions thing with Nahavandi, I sort of went to the Daftar-e Makhsus and picked out what I wanted, and one of the things was a very important album of seventeenth century Isfahan paintings called Mansor Album after the name of the dealer who

had sold it; it was not the name of the painter; it was the name of the dealer; that had been in the property of Collnaghi, and five major, so-called Safavid oil paintings which I was very, very eager to have. So again I got those simply because I knew they had been bought and there was no more appropriate place to house it than in this public collection. In other words, what happened then, the process of acquisition was via barter, if you like, of things that I knew had been acquired for the Queen's collection and corresponded to my period. And sort of seizing on the moment and on the fact that people wanted a public temporary exhibition, I was able to get these things. Also, I got, I remember, two very important eighteenth century paintings from the Daftar-e Makhsus and I don't remember where I got them from. I have to say at this point in time Mr. Zoka's influence was definitely on the wane. Eventually he resigned.

Q: Why?

Diba: I think that he had been accused of profiting from his position.

Q: Did you ever see any signs of that or hear any rumors?

Diba: No, no I didn't personally see anything. But rumors, yes. But I personally never saw anything. As I've tried to show, I was not allowed to be directly involved with the purchasing of

things until I had my own budget. So anything I would know would be indirectly. But I know that there were rumors. The buying and selling of works of art was a very visible thing in which money passed hands. So it was a very visible thing in which people would say there was corruption of some kind going on.

Q: Would you like to talk about those rumors?

Diba: No, because, as I said, I would only like to talk about what I personally saw. And I didn't personally see anything of this kind going on. so that's the most that I can say about it. In any case, as I'm thinking back now, I remember that he resigned and that his influence was very much on the wane. And in one sense when his influence was on the wane, I had greater access to what was going on with the Bureau collections, and I was able to get them to the museum. Because while he was there, he had his own aspirations and ideas of what these things were going to be used for, and once there was less of that I think there was a more open kind of atmosphere. So there were changes going on that affected everyone. So in the course of '76, a great deal of new material came into the Negarestan.

It was the same period in which the Carpet Museum opened, and the Daftar-e Makhsus set up a museum which Mina Sadeq was very much in charge of. She was the curator with Aghdashlu.

Q: Who was Mina Sadeq?

Diba: Mina Sadeq was a young, Western-educated woman related to the Queen from her mother's side. Her mother was the Queen's aunt's sister. And as I said, she was Western-educated; she was the daughter of a prominent architect and collector, Dr. -- I don't remember his first name -- Sadeq. She was educated at the University of Pennsylvania with an M.A., and her special field was pre-Islamic, as far back as Achaemenian and Iranian art. She was very competent in terms of curatorial work and cataloguing and that sort of thing, installation and taking care of some things. She also had a lot of contacts with Western archaeologists in that. So she was building the Daftar-e Makhsus collections and taking care of them as they came in, and really making the place a center of its own. Even though it was considered a temporary center until some other museum was just going to appear, it was still called the Cultural Center, but some people were calling it museum. So it was kind of a transitional thing even though there were no specific plans on the board ever to build a museum of Iranian art.

This was kind of a tricky situation, because you had Iran Bastan Museum and all the other Queen's museums filled gaps in a sense if it were not provided by the museum that were run by the Ministry of Culture and Arts. You have to remember that these things were going on concurrently. And Iran Bastan for instance, had a great collection. The trouble was they didn't have money; they didn't have the staff to really use it properly. We had the

money; we had potentially the staff even though it was very difficult to find people to work. But we didn't necessarily have the works of art that they did. So it was kind of a strange situation. I think in a way there was almost a policy of, "don't try and duplicate any of what they're doing." So that was an open question. That's why you had a Qajar museum; you had a carpet museum; you had a museum of contemporary art. These things were not things that were being done by the Ministry of Culture and Arts. Even though this was never articulated, you have to come to the conclusion that we were filling voids. Something like a carpet museum -- people were horrified to know that there was no carpet museum in the country of carpets. These things were definitely needed.

Something like the Abgineh Museum, which I didn't speak about before, the museum of glass which was being planned -- that was a unique project. It was housed in an historical, old Iranian house on the Qavamossaltaneh Street which was again in the same sort of historic neighborhood as the Reza Shah period where the Negarestan was. It was a wonderful old house that I went to visit. It had been used at one point as the Italian Embassy, and it was associated with Qavamossaltaneh, the famous Iranian Prime Minister. And this house had been preserved, bought by the Queen's office, restored -- this was the one that Nasrin Schlemminger was going to be in charge of. Now I would mention that a great majority of its collections came from Iraj Hedayat. That was the basis of their collection and they were

complementing and adding things in it. It was interesting in the sense that it was one of the last museums; it was just in the stage of being planned. And it was a turn-key operation. They gave everything to a German company of designers and architects who planned the entire lay-out.

Every museum was sort of experimental and every one in terms of installation or architecture or whatever was different. In a way it was very refreshing, because each one -- and I think people learned from the problems as they went along. I'm sure people learned from my problems; mine was the first museum, and I was in a museum where I was stuck with very bad problems in terms of the conservation and upkeep of the works of art and I was dealing with an historical building that you couldn't change the outside and you could do very little with the inside in terms of how it was built. But I think people really learned as the museums were being built.

You know, where something like T.M.O.C.A. was conceived as a museum from the beginning, and it was very well conceived if you compared it with many, many museums, [they] really did a very good job in terms of sufficient gallery space, it was well lit, there were offices, there was storage area -- it really was a whole concept by one Iranian (Kamy Diba, the architect/director). Whereas the other museums were not quite like that. You were dealing with different factors.

But this museum of glass was an interesting example of what could also be achieved. And I think it's sort of ironic that it

did open; it was opened after the revolution, and I heard that they had put up a little, handwritten or typed sign on paper saying, "The Islamic People's Republic opened this museum" on such and such a date. [laughs] And of course, all the work had been done. They took it as it was and opened it and claimed the honor of opening it for the new people.

In a sense this brings us to the very little we know about what is going on with museums in Iran today. I myself have gotten practically no information. We simply know that the collections have not been dispersed publicly, certainly. There was a rumor about a year or two ago that Sotheby's had been approached to do something, and whether this was for all the museums or some, I don't know. It never got any further than a rumor when I tried to track it down. But it was just that.

Q: There are also a lot of rumors that certain pieces have been found on the market in Europe.

Diba: Yes, I've heard that about private pieces; in other words say, for instance, like Senator Mas^Cudi, who was a major collector -- just after the revolution his house was taken over by the revolutionary guards and we know that it was looted and the things very easily could show up in Europe. And I think this is one of the cases where they've found something. I think it's more personal property that may have been looted out of private houses or that was taken from one of the palaces. In other

words, if you think of Princess Shams or Princess Ashraf's palaces, there I know that they had auctions of the things that were there. So it's very conceivable that things from those palaces would show up. I have no evidence that something came directly out of a museum, which is strange. I think it's a very good sign. They have not touched these things as far as I know. Of course, there are always people who will buy things illegally; but I have not yet heard. I don't know, [laughs] I might not hear. Sometimes you're the last person to know, but I have no knowledge that these things have been illegally taken out of the country, that they've done anything with them. As a matter of fact, I think that the first thing if they were going to do it with anything, they'd do it with the Crown Jewels about which there was also a rumor, which also didn't pan out. So it's kind of interesting, they don't seem to have touched things and that they don't seem to have dispersed them; but they're not using them.

The glass museum perhaps because it was non-representational is the only one except for T.M.O.C.A. which they put to any use. And T.M.O.C.A. was put to a propaganda use at the beginning of the revolution, and then they found out it was sort of a Frankenstein they couldn't control and there were a lot of internal problems with the curator, and they shut it down.

Q: Who was the curator at that time?

Diba: I don't remember. He was someone who was connected with the museum and he was put in charge after the revolution. So there was a certain continuity with the past; he mounted at least one exhibition of revolutionary art. But it got out of hand. There's tremendous censorship in Iran now, and there was a potential there for some sort of freedom of expression, so that's where it got shut down and he got removed from his post. I assume they put some local "Guard" or something in charge. So it's kind of interesting to see the history of the museums afterwards. Reza ^CAbbsi [Museum] was definitely looted at the time of the revolution. So it's possible that things can have come out of Reza ^CAbbsi also. But the Negarestan was not touched; what I do know is that everything -- you see, in one sense, the whole collection was catalogued, everything was numbered and catalogued; and that in a sense is a deterrent. Even though I had left the country, my curator -- I haven't had a chance to talk about the people who worked with me. Maybe this is the time to do it.

The young woman who was my curator before I left did stay on a few months in to the revolution long enough to witness the process of turning over all the collections piece by piece. So what they did was they sealed them once everything was given over or tagged. And this young lady was Asiyeh Ziya'i.

When I started the museum I started with myself, a secretary, an Iranian lady curator, Mrs. Huri E^Ctesam(i) who was very knowledgeable in an old fashioned Iranian way; she had

excellent Persian, excellent literary and historical background, but no formal training. But she came from a very cultured and literate family. Her cousin was a poetess of the fifties; but anyway, she came from an interesting background and she was very helpful to me for about two years. And then after that she left and went to work at the Reza^CAbbasi.

And within the first two years -- first I began it with a series of guards, and my guards were former royal guards which means that they were six foot ten, [laughs] very burly types; I had a little difficulty with them considering I was only twenty-five. They were very disciplined; I had very little problems with them. The only problems I had was that since they were so used to dealing with people as potential threats to the Royal Family, they didn't always have quite the right approach to visitors; and I constantly had to give them little training sessions and lectures about how this is not a private palace, that we are guarding against people -- we want people to come in and be comfortable. So eventually it was very interesting. My guards actually started becoming guides. This is the kind of thing you can only see in Iran -- huge, burly, sixty year old men having heard me or various people in the museum giving talks, guiding and lecturing whoever would come into the museum.

[laughs] It really was wonderful! They did change; they went from being very stiff and concerned about the art work to really, really feeling more open towards people and being a little less imposing.

So I started out with a very small staff really, and within the three years I was running it, we acquired things like a manager, an accountant, extra curatorial staff, and so on. In the last year I was given a certain amount of leeway. As I said, I was running it almost as if it were a section of the Daftar-e Makhsus until it finally became part of the Foundation [Queen Farah Foundation]. So I had a revolving budget. It was very difficult to hire people at the kind of salaries the Daftar-e Makhsus paid; they paid absolutely minimum salary, and this was again a great source of conflict for everyone involved, because you just couldn't offer people a decent salary and run a museum. This is something that really concerned me. I was in a sort of interesting position; it was a one-woman show. So I did everything including paying out salaries and knowing what people lived on, and it was horrifying to know what my employees lived on. So you were constantly trying to find ways of giving them "perks" or supplementing their incomes or getting a minibus to bring people back and forth. It was just something that you realized -- that these people were almost making sacrifices to work for you. The government salaries were extremely low, and this was a very big problem which got resolved when we became part of the Foundation.

I think any manager of any government institution on my level had the same kinds of problems. You were short staffed; they were underpaid, and you were constantly having to deal with their problems. So it was a very interesting experience, not

just artistically, but socially, really knowing how people lived. You couldn't close your eyes and get in your car at night and not know how these people lived; you'd have to be blind. In any case what happened was there was sort of a double standard which was I don't know healthy or unhealthy, but this was something they worked out, in the sense that you could not overpay regular employees of the government who eventually would be getting social benefits on the other end -- you know that they had guarantees; we had an almost socialistic system. Even though the salaries were low, in theory, they were going to get pension and pension funds and so on. But what you could do was hire people as consultants; and there, there was no specific salary deal. There you could offer them a lot. As a matter of fact, one of the people I hired was Juni Farmanfarmaiyan, and she came and she did a research project for us, I guess, it was a few months in the summer, involving foreign travelers to Iran. And there I had leeway. So what happened was as long as I was still under the aegis of the Daftar-e Makhsus, I would farm out work to people because I could pay them better that way. Therefore, I could get work done! Most of these people were foreigners. Juni was the only Iranian. Oh, lord, I don't remember! Various Americans who were going to Iran could be hired; because they were foreign they could have a better salary than the Iranians. This created problems; it was bound to. But it was a double standard. You had to work with it because you had to get your work done somehow! So this was the case. So I was really in a bind for an

assistant curator because I had to do everything myself in terms of the exhibitions. It was a difficult time.

Then at one point towards the very end I got a competent woman, Barbara Schmits, as a guest curator for an exhibition I was doing. I had some staff and then I also got Asiyeh Ziya'i, who actually was a cousin of mine, who was again very well-trained from American colleges and had an M.A. from the Institute of Fine Arts which is my alma mater, also. She had come back to Iran and she had all the qualifications. So I hired her I think, as an assistant curator. I was a little wary of immediately bringing her into a curatorial position. So in terms of the staff we were really quite well equipped by the time we went to the Foundation. That's the last year, '77 - '78.

Before I get to the Foundation, which is basically an important transition for us, I just mention that because of this interest in cultural centers from the very beginning, from the day the Negarestan had first opened, there had been plans for an underground cultural center that was built on the land adjoining ours which was originally part of the Princess Shams' private secretariat. And it was planned to be underground because everyone had decided that this was an historic area, and you didn't want to have ugly, modern buildings popping up all around. So we were trying to do things; work was started on this and the major architect of the Bureau was Manuchehr Iranpur and he was in charge of this project. I had very little control or access to this thing. And it was obviously a source of problems to me,

because it was going to mean eventually I was going to be running this cultural center. And as an idea it was excellent because one wanted the Negarestan to become a teaching institution; obviously it was already an institution which scholars could come to. I had lectures; whoever I could get -- we had regular lectures, and it was open in terms of research. But that wasn't enough. So the cultural center would have expanded all our other activities, specifically the educational activities, conference facilities. One of my dreams was to eventually do a Congress of Qajar art or a symposium of Qajar art or a culture history, whatever, which would have happened eventually when the cultural center opened. Hopefully, it would have been a very vital addition to what we were doing at the museum. But again, it was kind of a little strange project; it was all underground. It was like five stories underground. [laughs] And in a country like Iran you sort of would rather be above ground [laughter] [not] under it! I know some of my employees were already getting very worried about what the working conditions were going to be there. I mean, they were not thrilled about going underground with no oxygen. You know, you had to think about these things. Heaven only knows what would have happened to that! But that was all part of our planning from the beginning, and certainly in terms of the activities of the Negarestan and the budget, it would have been given and set aside for us. It would have been a major factor.

Here I'd like to say a few more words in terms of the

curatorial help that I got when I was doing the exhibitions. Mrs. Huri Ectesam(i) was very helpful for the Wedding Contracts; Mr. Aghdashlu basically did half the curatorial work with me on the Farsi end of it for the Recent Acquisitions show; particularly there were some manuscripts that he read and identified, and he specifically helped in the printing of the catalogue. That was done by the Special Bureau as were most of the things until I had my own budget at least myself. Also, I had a young curatorial assistant who was working with me called Mary Anderson, who, after she left Iran, came to the Institute of Fine Arts where I was working and is now a student there finishing her Ph.D. So we encouraged her in that. I also did an exhibition of religious painting, and for help in the printing of the catalogue and curatorial advise I turned to Laleh Bakhtiyar, who was the wife of Nader Ardalan and had written with him an important book called The Sense of Unity which was about the concept of Sufism in art. We worked together; it was very interesting because this woman was a Sufi. She was a student of Dr. Nasr but she was also a very Western-educated woman, and she spoke with a very heavy American accent, and yet she wore the chargad [scarf]. She brought her children up in extremely traditional religious ways. And in a way she was my first introduction to the revolution, because this woman did stay on in Iran afterwards and became a spokesperson at the very beginning of the revolution for Iranian women. So I think it's interesting to see how close the contacts were at the same time and how

potentially far away we were. She was, as I said, very well versed on various aspects of Persian mysticism and so on. So we made quite a good team in selecting and putting together the exhibition. Again, this was another example of farming out the work.

She was in the process of getting a divorce from Nader Ardalan, who is a major, major Iranian architect and had gone back to Harvard where he had been educated and started an architectural firm there. Anyway, she had also begun a company for printing and free-lance work. So it was very convenient for me to be able to use her. So I was able to get a budget and farm out the work to her.

The last exhibition was really a major, major effort that was very close to my heart, and there were a lot of people who worked on it. It was the biggest-budgeted thing I'd worked on. It was my first major thing on my own in terms of my own budget. It was the Turkaman Exhibition, and I had a co-curator, an American woman, Barbara Schmits. She was the curator for the show; we did a major catalogue which was printed at Soroush Press with the help of Karim Emami, and this was a very interesting and knowledgeable figure of Iranian art. He was one of the few people who had ever given a public lecture about Qajar art. He was also a modern art critic. He was one of the people who really know, and he had not much of a relationship before this started. He was chief editor over there. I don't know how it came about -- oh, I know. The reason I took the work over there