

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/modernisms-iranian-turkish-and-indian-highlights-from-nyus-abby-weed-grey-collection-review-globe-trotting-to-build-a-unique-collection-11568745993>

## ART REVIEW

# 'Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights From NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection' Review: Globe-Trotting to Build a Unique Collection

The patron acquired about 1,000 works by artists of the Middle East and Asia during the 1960s and early '70s, when few Americans were interested in the cultures of these regions.

*By Michael FitzGerald*

Sept. 17, 2019 2:46 pm ET

*New York*

**'Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights From NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection'** is a tale of two intertwined histories. Each is remarkable.

One is the life of Abby Weed Grey (1902-1983), who during the 1960s and early '70s acquired about 1,000 works by artists of the Middle East and Asia at a time when few Americans were interested in the cultures of these regions. Moreover, she seemed completely unprepared to make this commitment. Having grown up in St. Paul, Minn., and married a much older Army officer at age 27, she spent several decades rotating among bases in the U.S. When he died in 1956, she found herself bereft and unexpectedly wealthy from his investments in railroad stocks and bonds. In 1960, she joined 13 other women on a world tour that inspired her devotion to "one world through art." During the next 13 years, she took eight trips to Iran, and four each to

**READ NOW**

**Amazon Changed Its Search Algorithm**

A move, contested internally, that could favor Amazon's own brands.





M.F. Husain's 'Virgin Night' (1964) PHOTO: GREY ART GALLERY, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY ART COLLECTION

This quest would remain an idealistic, personal story if it had not coincided with the pragmatic confrontations of Cold War politics. In order to oppose the U.S.S.R.'s expansion of Communist influence into the Middle East and India,

t  
h  
e  
U  
·  
S

---

**Modernisms: Iranian, Turkish, and Indian Highlights From NYU's Abby Weed Grey Collection**

*Grey Art Gallery  
Through Dec. 7*

**READ NOW**

Information Agency and other government entities sponsored cultural programs to promote political alliances and cultural understanding between the U.S. and countries including Iran, Turkey and India. Without explicitly joining this effort, Grey not only relied on U.S. consular staff to recommend artists in these countries but worked with the government to organize cross-cultural exhibitions as she amassed her own collection of these artists' work.

**Amazon Changed Its Search Algorithm**

A move, contested internally, that could favor Amazon's own brands.



breadth by any other in the U.S. Whether visitors are interested in the politics of this time and region or the artistic achievements of individual artists, the exhibition offers unique opportunities to satisfy one's curiosity.

The clearest case is Iran, where Grey's involvement coincided with the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, who was one of America's strongest allies in the Middle East until his overthrow during the 1979 Islamic Revolution. For the shah and his wife, Queen Farah, contemporary Iranian art was an important instrument to demonstrate both Iran's participation in Western modernism and deep local traditions that joined his dynasty with ancient Iranian culture. Among all the artists whose work she collected, Grey was closest to Parviz Tanavoli. His bronze sculpture "We Are Happy Locked Within Holes" (1970) represents a high point of the Saqqakhaneh movement, which dominated Iranian art during the shah's reign. The sculpture mixes references to traditional Islamic fountains with the formal play of solids and voids common in Western art to construct a rich interplay of global and local themes.

Grey did not limit herself to artists in the good graces of officials. She became an important supporter of Siah Armajani, whose involvement with pro-democratic parties caused him to leave Iran in 1960 for Minnesota and develop his career in the U.S. His "Calligraphy" (1964) is a virtuosic collage of passages of Persian poetry and numerical series inscribed in a dazzling variety of strokes.



In Turkey, Grey again took the advice of U.S. and local officials by patronizing artists associated with the leading academies, yet her choices reveal exceptional support for female artists at a time and place when few women pursued this career. One family particularly attracted her—the sisters Fahrelnissa Zeid and Aliye Berger and their niece Füreya Koral, all of whom descended from Ottoman aristocrats of cosmopolitan tastes and became leading artists in Ataturk's modern Turkey. Koral is particularly interesting because she chose to revive the great Ottoman tradition of ceramic tiles. Her "Hittite Sun" (1956) is a study for a wall-size installation and captures the breadth of her references—from Turkey's ancient past to the biomorphic abstraction of mid-20th-century Western art.

#### Amazon Changed Its Search Algorithm

A move, contested internally, that could favor Amazon's own brands.





Parviz Tanavoli's 'Heech' (1972) PHOTO: GREY ART GALLERY, NEW YORK UNIVERSITY ART COLLECTION/PARVIZ TANAVOLI

Grey purchased some works by M.F. Husain and other artists of the Progressive Artists' Group, which was identified with this conception of modern India. The Madonna-like figure of Husain's "Virgin Night" (1964), fits Grey's belief by suiting Hindu, Muslim and Christian traditions.

Grey's aesthetic was shaped by her experience with contemporary art in the U.S. as well as by her explorations of the Middle East and Asia. So it is not surprising that she often chose works that share the painterly freedom and abstraction of Abstract Expressionism—styles that many Indian artists found of little value in communicating national identity. Nonetheless, Grey acquired major works by Indian artists, including Ambadas's "Faceless Divinity" (1968) and Mohan Samant's "Door of the Heart" (1964), which move away from realism to harness dense layerings of pigment.

By the time Grey donated her collection to NYU in 1975, the geopolitical map had changed.

#### Amazon Changed Its Search Algorithm

A move, contested internally, that could favor Amazon's own brands.



Copyright © 2019 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <https://www.djreprints.com>.

## Amazon Changed Its Search Algorithm

A move, contested internally, that could favor Amazon's own brands.

