

## **A Critical Discourse Analysis of the National Biennial Exhibitions of Contemporary Pottery and Ceramics from 1981 to 2021**

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### **Introduction**

The pottery and ceramic biennials held from 1981 up to 2021 were a context of the intertwining of artistic trends with social changes. Iran experienced four decades of ups and downs in social changes, and artists achieved various experiences in this turmoil. Artists have not only reflected these changes in their works but also developed identities that simultaneously show the stability of identity against the instability of conditions and the historicity of identity against the contemporary situation in their works. In this way, they express cultural interpretations and narratives in works of art. The aim of this study was to explore how biennials are arenas for artists' competing narratives of traditional-contemporary identity, and traditional-modern art in the four decades from 1981 to 2021. It was also to recognize the influence of pottery biennials on socio-cultural changes and their semantic implications.

### **Research Method**

This study deployed a qualitative approach and used discursive analysis for its method; discourse analysis shows how signs, texts, works, and events are formed around a central signifier that expresses an idea-centeredness and stabilizes a cultural discourse. This study deploys Laclau and Mouffe's critical discourse analysis method. From the perspective of the objective, it was classified as fundamental research, and the data was collected through library methods, observation of works in museums and exhibitions. This article also addressed five dominant discourses that advanced Iran's cultural developments and influenced events, trends, biennials, and works of art. These discourses included the discourse of cultural revolution, cultural invasion, cultural interaction, cultural engineering, and cultural moderation.

### **Research Findings**

The biennial pottery exhibitions were influenced by cultural and political discourses after the revolution. These discourses can be identified in terms of five important political periods in Iran. These periods include: the first period from the beginning of the revolution to the beginning 1989; the second period from 1989 to 1997; the third period from 1997 to 2005, the so-called Reformist government; the fourth period from 2005 to 2013, the so-called fundamentalist government, and the fifth period from 2013 to 2021, the so-called Moderate government. These periods offered a context for the conflicting dominant/marginal discourses in which the pottery exhibitions took shape. In the discursive space of pottery and ceramic exhibitions and biennials, these two types of

dominant/marginal cultural discourses were also in conflict and, thus, influenced the trend of contemporary pottery. The conflict between dominant/marginal discourses in the gaps, ruptures, and fissures of contemporary Iranian society and culture took on many forms, such as city/rural, Iranian/Islamic, traditional/modern, male/female, reformist/ fundamentalist. The lived experience of potters in these situations, gaps, confrontations, and conflicts shaped and reflected in their works.

### **Conclusion**

The research findings showed that the pottery biennial was an arena of confrontation and conflict between identity narratives: the conflict between traditional/modern art, religious/national art, naturalistic/abstract art, global/native art, applied/pure art. it was a conflict that ultimately led to the formation of new meanings in the flow of committed art, religious art, critical, feminist, environmental art, and other contemporary artistic experiences. Accordingly, the eleventh pottery biennial was also recognized as an arena of resistance, influenced by cultural discourses, and put forth the pottery movement as an exception in traditional arts, in the ups and downs between practical and semantic aspects, between tradition and modernity

**Keywords:** biennial, pottery, art developments, traditional arts, discourse analysis.