

Original Research Article

## Semantic Implications of Representing Fragmented Body in Postmodern Iranian Painting (Late 14<sup>th</sup> Century S.H.)

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** In postmodern art, the body has been a focal point as a subject, medium, and tool for artistic creation, as well as a site for experiencing and perceiving art. Scholars in the humanities have challenged conventional definitions of the body, and artists have visually depicted these new interpretations. One postmodern approach to body representation in painting is the depiction of fragmented bodies and disembodied limbs. This study aims to explain the theoretical origins of the emergence of disembodied limbs in Iranian paintings of the late 14<sup>th</sup> century A.H. and the semantic implications of this visual fragmentation. The research seeks to answer the question: «What is the reference for depicting disembodied limbs in 1990s Iranian paintings, and what themes do these visual representations convey?»

**Research Method:** This qualitative research employs a descriptive-analytical method based on documentary data. From the statistical population, which includes paintings by Iranian artists featuring fragmented bodies or disembodied limbs from the 1990s, samples that primarily depict disembodied limbs were selected and analyzed based on the theoretical foundations of the study.

**Findings:** The decentralization of the body's unity in the research samples does not refer to disability, physical suffering, or death. Instead, it signifies abstract concepts such as transformation and metamorphosis, challenging classical definitions of the body, social critique, expressions of mental and metaphysical states, and recollecting a lost past that exists only in memory.

**Conclusion:** The emergence of disembodied limbs in 1990s Iranian paintings is influenced by postmodern rationality and a shift in human perspectives towards the external and internal worlds. By defamiliarizing conventional methods of body representation, painters create a space for critiquing and challenging predetermined thought patterns and generating new concepts that reflect the human condition in the contemporary era.

### Keywords

Body Representation, Body without Organ, Fragmented Body, Disembodied Limbs, Postmodern Iranian Painting.

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### **Introduction and Problem Definition**

The representation of the human body in painting is not only rooted in humanity's longstanding desire to overcome death and destruction but also serves, in various ways, as an expression of individual perspectives regarding the functions of the body and its relationship to the self. The depiction of the body throughout different periods has always been inseparably linked to the prevailing rationality of the era. From the highly abstracted human figures in cave paintings to the idealized portrayals of Neoclassicism, the representation of the body has consistently functioned as a visual sign referring to broader concepts. With the emergence of artistic modernism in the early 20th century and the inclination toward pure form, the visual representation of the human body as an object lost its dominance. However, since the mid-20th century, the body has increasingly gained attention in new contexts—as an object, as a subject of visual representation, and as a medium of artistic expression. The body in contemporary/postmodern painting is represented in ways previously unseen. Examples include depictions of the body in states of disintegration and fragmentation, the grotesque body, the sick body, and the body as dismembered fragments. This new status of the body in contemporary art reflects the current condition of humanity in the world, a condition theorists such as Merleau-Ponty, Foucault, Deleuze, and Nochlin have sought to elucidate. Among the new trends in representing the body, the depiction of bodily organs as severed and isolated fragments by Iranian painters has not yet been systematically studied. Therefore, the present research aims to elucidate the semantic and aesthetic implications of representing dismembered body parts in Iranian postmodern painting. To this end, the study will review the theoretical background concerning the definitions of the body in modernism and postmodernism and will examine a selection of works from the research sample that portray dismembered body parts. This study seeks to address the question: what is the referential meaning behind the depiction of severed body parts in Iranian paintings from the 1990s, and what themes are conveyed through the visual representation of these fragments?

### **Research Method**

This research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the representation of fragmented bodies in Iranian postmodern paintings. The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in concepts such as grotesque, abjection, and hybridity. The analysis focuses on selected artworks from the 1990s that depict fragmented bodies, examining them in the context of their socio-cultural and historical backgrounds. The data collection process involved identifying relevant artworks and conducting a detailed visual analysis of these pieces. This analysis included an examination of the composition, color, form, and texture of the paintings, as well as the symbolic meanings associated with the depiction of dismembered bodies. Among the artists whose works depicted dismembered bodies and body parts, selected works by «Seyed Amin Bagheri», «Arghavan Khosravi», «Fakhteh Shamsian», «Nasser Bakhshi», and «Samira Abbasi» (which had the most alignment with the research approach) were chosen as research samples. The selected works were then analyzed in relation to the theoretical perspectives discussed earlier, focusing on how these fragmented depictions reflect the broader cultural and philosophical shifts of the time.

### Research Background

The body has always been a central subject of representation in artists' works, and significant studies have been conducted on body depiction in visual arts. However, the emergence of deformed, disintegrated, and fragmented bodies in art is considered a result of modernity. Perhaps the most significant impact of modernity on body representation can be seen in the depiction of «grotesque» bodies. «Bakhtin» views the grotesque body as a visual metaphor for an unfinished and ever-changing world. Through its openings and orifices, the grotesque body is open to the world; thus, unlike classical aesthetics, which viewed the body as a unified and complete surface, it appears ugly and strange (Bakhtin, 1984, 317). «Fan» (2016), in the article «The Metaphor of Disease in Contemporary European Painting», does not consider contemporary European painters' tendency to depict diseased bodies as an attention to the issue of disease; in his view, in these artists' works, the diseased body is a metaphor for what affects human life in contemporary societies. «Emami and Kamrani» (2019), in «Examining the Characteristics of the Grotesque Body in Four Contemporary Iranian Painters», consider the grotesque as one of the forms that contemporary art uses to depict the body and its sufferings. In these works, the body's coherence and entirety are lost, and defamiliarization is an attempt to create shock in the image. «Emami, Kamrani, and Nasri» (2020), in «Analyzing Vahid Chamani's Works Based on the Concept of the Grotesque Body in Mikhail Bakhtin's Thought», also examine the three ideas of inversion, carnival, and death in this contemporary painter's works. Chamani's grotesque bodies, with masks on their faces, have a transformed state that reflects unknown realms and a new perspective on social life. «Chaboksavar and Farrokhfar» (2023), in «Nightmare Representation of Reality or Realistic Representation of a Nightmare; Semiotic Analysis of Grotesque Elements in Human Figures; Case Study: Mehrnoush Badpar's Paintings», have shown that in this artist's works, the addition of non-human elements to the human figure gives it a grotesque aspect and turns the real into a fantastical display. The «body without organs», a fundamental concept in «Deleuze's» philosophy and postmodernism, is another common approach to body representation in contemporary art. Following this new understanding, artists at the turn of the 20th century create or produce images of body defects. The production and reception of these works revolve around the lost or forbidden body (Nelson and Shiff, 2016, 235-236). «Ardalani, Salimi, Akbari, and Goodarzi» (2015), in an article titled «Embodiment of Emotion in Gilles Deleuze's Thought; Examining Francis Bacon's Paintings», emphasize the fact that the body must receive words in literature and colors in painting before the mind, and art must be felt through the body. They conclude that artworks are not merely representations of a scene related to being but are connected to existence. «Feizi-Moghadam and Ardalani» (2018), in «Reading Anish Kapoor's Works with a Focus on the Concept of the Body without Organs from Gilles Deleuze's Perspective», also concluded that Kapoor's sculptures, a prominent postmodern artist, are influenced by Deleuze's thought and the concept of the body without organs. With their unique biodiversity, his works display a lifeless body and evoke a sense of life. «Reading Picasso's Paintings with Deleuze's Philosophical Concepts», written by «Choubak, Akvan, and Rahbarnia» (2020), is a study that shows that bodies in Picasso's paintings are in a state of becoming and present in the moment, confirming Deleuze's approach. «Reading Rei Kawakubo's Works with a Focus on the Concept of the Body without Organs from Gilles Deleuze's Perspective», written by «Ardalani and Hosseinpour»

(2021), is another article that examines Kawakubo's works to answer what elements make it possible to categorize her works as postmodern. The result indicates that in her designs, the concept of the body with indeterminate organs, constantly influenced by forces, the pressure of the surrounding space, and their continuous experience of them, can be understood. «Nochlin» (2020), in the book «The Fragmented Body: The Piece as a Metaphor for Modernity», considers dismemberment, mutilation, and destruction as visual metaphors of modernism by examining the works of 19th-century artists. According to this, modernity in these artists' works appears as an irreversible loss, a poignant regret for the lost entirety, and a ruined totality. Finally, Nochlin emphasizes that the fragmented body in visual representation should be examined as a set of distinct and non-generalizable situations. «Larsen» (2000), in the article «The Fragmented Body: A Study of Some Aesthetic Implications of Body Parts in Théodore Géricault's Paintings», analyzes the reasons for depicting fragmented bodies in some of Géricault's works from various biographical, historical, and aesthetic perspectives. He considers the importance of this study to be the development of the tendency to represent body parts in contemporary art. He states that not only do some contemporary theories help clarify the status of artworks in a specific position, but some contemporary artworks are also explained by similar previous examples. A review of related studies on changes in body representation methods in contemporary Iranian painting shows that researchers have paid more attention to grotesque body images than to the body without organs and body parts without the body. Since the representation of dismembered body parts in Iranian painting, in the way this research intends, is the result of globalization and the development of intercultural communication at the individual level, the research is limited to the last decade of the 14<sup>th</sup> century A.H. This research distinguishes itself from previous studies in two levels: First, in the theoretical foundations emphasizing the body without organs, and second, in the temporal and geographical scope of the research population.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The representation of the human body and its parts has been a central theme in art and continues to be a focal point in artistic approaches (Baruch Blich, 2010, 108). Consequently, the depiction of the body in each era elucidates the concepts of perfection and imperfection concerning the body and its parts. «Mirzoeff» attributes the desire to represent the body in art to the aspiration for perfection and the rectification of flaws that lead to the loss of the integrity of the depicted body (Mirzoeff, 1995, 21). In the mythical world, there was unity between the body and the soul and between the body and the world. «Pythagoras» and his followers believed that the soul was not distinct and separate from the body and its parts; in fact, Plato's dichotomy of human existence into soul and body is a legacy. Since then, the body has been regarded as inferior to the soul, and this dichotomy has persisted to this day (Zarghani; Aghababaei Khuzani; Eyzanlou; Jahangpour, Khademi; Sharafaei; Farrokhfar, 2018, 43-44). Plato defines the body as the «external environment of the soul» in Descartes' Cartesian separation of mind and body. Descartes, in complementing his famous statement «I think, therefore I am», adds that «the soul, which constitutes my essence, is entirely distinct from the body» (Nelson & Schiff, 2016, 219). Thus, in Western thought and almost all non-Western religious teachings, the body is considered inferior to the soul; the body possesses a flaw that representation seeks to complete. Idealism, the dominant approach to

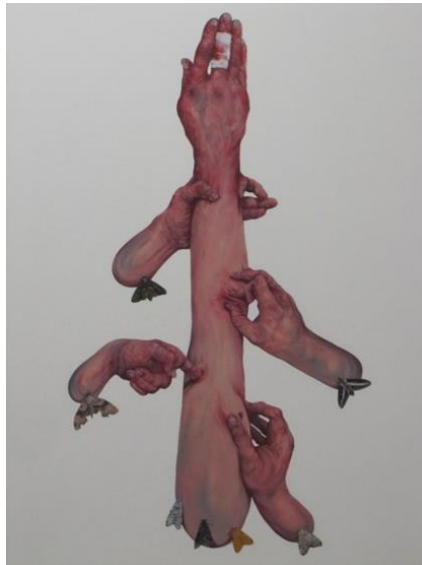
body representation before modernism, confirms this notion. Artists strove to make figures devoid of flaws to achieve god-like beauty derived from precise proportions (Vogiazaki & Krokoski, 2020, 116). In classical thought, the soul was imprisoned by the body, such that the body's actions were imposed on the soul (Mills, 2010, 155). This perspective seems to have lost its superior status in the late nineteenth century, influenced by Nietzsche's ideas. Nietzsche defines the body more materially and using biological terms. In «The Will to Power», he states perhaps the entire evolution of the soul is a matter related to the body; it is the history of the advancement of a superior body (Nietzsche, 1968, 385). According to «Nietzsche» (in contrast to Descartes), knowledge is subordinate to the body. In fact, he considers the most essential part of the human body to be the ability to acquire knowledge (Lash, 2004, 110). This change in perspective towards the body significantly impacted Merleau-Ponty's body-centered phenomenology and Deleuze's theory of the body without organs, which form the philosophical foundation of body representation in contemporary/postmodern art. «Merleau-Ponty» states that the body is our intersection with the world, but it is not merely a container or surface... the body is an entity open to others and other objects. Neither our body nor another person's body is ever fixed and stable... the body is constantly changing... it is both subject and object (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, 167; Nelson & Schiff, 2016, 230-231). «Deleuze's» approach to the body shares with «Merleau-Ponty» the fundamental belief that the body constantly changes. However, according to «Foucault», Merleau-Ponty is opposed to Deleuze in that he considers the relationship between the body/organism and the world to be mediated through a network of primary significations resulting from sensory perception (Lash, 2004, 104). Nonetheless, Deleuze and Foucault share with Merleau-Ponty the view that the living body is without organs (Deryfus & Rabinow, 1982, 111-112; Lash, 2004, 105). «Deleuze and Guattari» use the term «body without organs» broadly to refer to the potential aspect of reality in general, which is also called the «plane of consistency» or «plane of immanence» (Rashidian, 2014, 93). «Deleuze and Guattari» mean by the body without organs that we cannot and should not understand our body through its biological organization (Deleuze, 1981; Lash, 2004, 109). The body without organs does not merely signify the absence of organs but emphasizes the absence of an organism. This means a general organization has no place here, and a specific organization is formed by indeterminate organs (Pourkasmaei, Nadealian, & Marasi, 2020). Deleuze considers the body without organs as a machine that opposes production in a specific path and organization. Consequently, it can be said that it is anti-production and, by destroying a specific and uniform organism, it creates the possibility of forming new types of organisms (Sadr al-Hafezi & Rikhtegaran, 2018). Thus, the body without organs is a body that is constantly changing or becoming and can never be, but always becomes (Hosseini-Pour & Ardelani, 2021). He considers life as an intermediary between the actual and the potential. Something that is dynamic and has no stability. This thing is constantly changing and becoming - although we perceive it when it has become actual and mistakenly interpret the truth. He sees the existence of a body in its change and believes that a life shaped according to predetermined norms is no longer flowing (Colebrook, 2008, 106). The instability of the body in its Deleuzian definition represents the essence of the contemporary era; as «Smith» states in «Contemporary Art: World Currents», understanding change as the organizing principle of the world is the fundamental principle of the shift from modern to contemporary art (Smith, 2011, 8). The

concept of the body in Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze is significantly linked to the experience of modernism and postmodernism in art. Merleau-Ponty considers the body, due to its overlap with its appearance, comparable to a work of art (Mahjal & Asghari, 2022); from this perspective, the body is the center of living meanings, not fixed concepts (Merleau-Ponty, 1995, 150). In a similar but opposite direction, Deleuze says we should approach art as a hysteric perceives their body. That is, when we listen to music, for example, the ear should become a multi-capacity organ that hears, sees, and feels (Deleuze, 1981; Lash, 2004, 110). Thus, it can be said that just as the denial and repression of the body led to the absence of the body from the dominant discourse of modernist art, in the discourse of postmodern art (from around 1960 onwards), the body increasingly appears (Smith, 2011, 46). Nietzsche's approach to the body - in which the unconscious becomes the dominant organizing principle - is the precursor to postmodernism in art (Lash, 2004, 120). In contemporary/postmodern art, the body has become a site for manipulation, identification, projection, and display (Nelson & Schiff, 2016, 224-225). Contemporary art - particularly contemporary painting with its renewed and intensified interest in body representation - has become a field for illustrating body theories. Deleuze and Guattari deconstruct the fixed and predetermined functions of the body's organs. They say, why not stop seeing with the eyes, breathing with the lungs, and speaking with the mouth; why not walk on the head, sing with the sinuses, see with the skin, and breathe with the stomach? (Smith, 2017, 12). This approach led to the representation of the body and its organs in unprecedented situations; among them, the depiction of dismembered organs in contemporary painting can be mentioned. Dismembered organs, with their defamiliarized functions, became symbols for expressing implicit meanings in contemporary art. Nochlin traces the tendency to represent the fragmented body back to the late eighteenth century. She, referring to the works of artists such as «Henry Fuseli», «James Gillray», and «Théodore Géricault», claims that during that period, the widespread prevalence of the fragment - in various forms and with a wide range of possible connotations - was related to the visual representation of the French Revolution; a revolution caught in the liminal position of destroying one civilization before creating a new one. «Nochlin» considers the center of this iconography of destruction to be the guillotining of victims during the Reign of Terror (Nochlin, 2020, 38-39). "Germer" also mentions the invention and use of the guillotine and the fear it caused as reasons for the depiction of the fragmented body in Géricault's paintings (Germer, 1999). Thus, the representation of the fragmented body does not always have a metaphorical function and sometimes appears as a historical reality (Nochlin, 2020, 49). Given the avoidance of positivist theorizing among postmodern thinkers, it is clear that neither Deleuze nor Nochlin have provided a methodological theory for semantic or genealogical analysis of the ways the body is represented in contemporary art. However, the concepts presented and the deconstructive approach in their analyses inspire the present research.

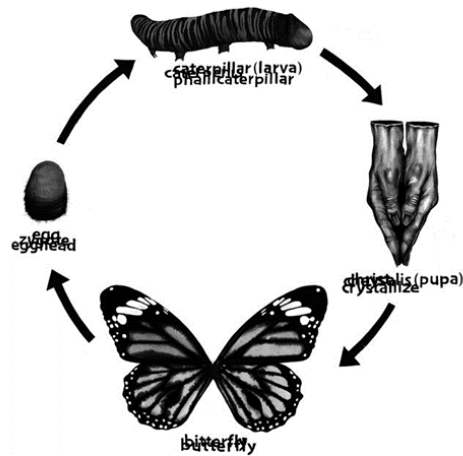
Deconstruction is a term that «Derrida» first used to mean a precise analysis involving dismantling and reconstructing to understand how a text is constituted. Deconstruction is not a method of text analysis. Still, it occurs when the dominant logic of thought in a text (in this article, embodied representation) reaches an impasse and opens up the possibility of creative and new thinking (Emerling, 2021, 136-137). This research also attempts to address the theoretical foundations and semantic possibilities of this visual iconoclasm by considering the representation of organs without the body as a sign of decentering the entity of the body.

### **The Status of Organs without Body in 1990s Iranian Painting**

The body has been represented in various ways in contemporary Iranian painting, ranging from idealism based on traditional Iranian painting to social realism, objective realism, and surrealism. Accordingly, the semantic implications of the body as a sign also vary among different artists. For instance, the symbolic and ideological body in the works of artists from the Hozeh Honari (Nasri & Saeedzadeh, 2018) contrasts with the grotesque and dismembered body in the works of a new generation of postmodernist artists (Emami & Kamrani, 2019). What distinguishes the representation of detached limbs (pieces) from other types of body representation in 1990s Iranian painting is the unprecedented nature of this subject in the history of Iranian art. Although wounded bodies, severed heads, and limbs have been common in depictions of war scenes, the detached limbs in the examples of this study are represented in a completely different manner, indicating a change in the concept and function of the body. A review of the works of «Seyed Amin Bagheri» shows that the body is the main subject of his works, featuring grotesque bodies, distorted and terrifying faces, multi-handed and multi-headed figures, and bodies combined with other elements. Bagheri's works present a novel and personalized perspective on common human life themes. His attention to the semiotic function of words and challenging human perception of the titles he gives to his collections is evident. In a collection named MAPipulation - a combination of the words Manipulation and MAP - he creates images combining the human body and the globe. The importance of the exhibition title in interpreting Bagheri's paintings is further emphasized when the artist claims that his collections start with naming. «Middle Great» (Fig 1) is a piece from the «BITTERFLY» collection, exhibited in 2013. «Bitterfly» evokes the word butterfly but is not itself and has no specific reference in the real world (Aliha, 2014). On the other hand, Bitter refers to something unpleasant, and in combination with Fly, it creates a new sign that merely refers to a mental concept. The works in this collection include various forms of «hands» combined with «butterflies». Bagheri believes that hands, after faces, are important and universal elements for expressing thoughts and feelings. He also considers the butterfly a symbol of the transient beauty of existence. In the statement published for this collection, he mentions that we are ruthlessly and vengefully destroying classical beauty, but conventional ideologies hinder this. He sees humanity's futile efforts to create a perfect and complete image as disturbing his imaginary and free world and insists on removing the separating distances between imagination, illusion, memory, life, and creation to be able to paint freely for his creations, creations sufficient with skin, flesh, and blood! (Aliha, 2014).



**Fig 1.** Seyed Amin Bagheri, «Middle Great», BITTERFLY collection, 2013. Source: <http://www.seyedaminbagheri.com/Gallery.aspx?Id=10#lg=1&slide=17>



**Fig 2.** Seyed Amin Bagheri, «Bitterfly Life Cycle», BITTERFLY collection, 2013. Source: <http://www.seyedaminbagheri.com/Gallery.aspx?Id=10#lg=1&slide=1>

In the painting «Middle Great», the large hand is the center and focal point of the image. The contracted form of the fingers suggests a desire for growth and elevation despite the presence of wounds; however, several hands, almost severed at the wrist, are trying to harm and prevent its movement. The hands are bluish, and the upper hand is ultimately strangling the large hand, with the last painful struggles of the central hand for survival being observed. The severed hands in Bagheri's painting can symbolize an absent body; a type of signifier-signified relationship called «synecdoche» in semiotics. This sign is a part of a whole that represents the entire whole (Rose, 2014, 163). Both the collection title and the butterfly's placement on the hands refer to metamorphosis. Perhaps this metamorphosis is made possible through suffering. Not only is the butterfly a symbol of metamorphosis due to its stages of maturity from cocoon to caterpillar and from caterpillar to butterfly, but Bagheri also depicts the «Bitterfly» life cycle in another painting from this collection (Fig 2). The body parts in Bagheri's paintings are in motion and change; a change emphasized in the life cycle. Bagheri not only wants to challenge classical aesthetics but also tries to defamiliarize the common function of body parts (and at the same time their entirety). Both the body parts in these paintings escape stillness, and the viewer's focus constantly shifts from the present and visible to what is absent and invisible. «Arghavan Khosravi» -an Iranian painter residing in the USA- is another contemporary Iranian artist whose works feature body parts and fragments prominently. Khosravi's emigration from Iran marked a turning point in developing her unique artistic style. The challenges faced by American immigrants led Khosravi to draw images on her expired passports, a style she continued in her later works. She also depicts Eastern paintings on American banknotes to highlight ideological and social contrasts through visual distinctions (Rostamian, 2019).



Women, migration, and identity are the main themes of Khosravi's works; she gives women a central and heroic role in her paintings. Body parts in Khosravi's paintings are used as symbols to express her recurring themes. Female legs are drawn as steps for men to climb, hands sometimes appear cut or bound, embracing and pressing a light to their chest as if keeping memory and hope alive, and in another painting, they carry a suitcase filled with wide-winged birds and lush cypresses, representing the artist's land full of beauty.



**Fig 3.** Arghavan Khosravi, «Black Box», 2022.  
Source: Darz Art, 2020.



**Fig 4.** Arghavan Khosravi, «Garden», Mixed Media, 2021. Source: Darz Art, 2020.

In Fig 3, a woman's torso is shown, cut from the shoulders and waist by the picture's frame. This work is part of an installation where a black box covers the woman's head at the top, and at the bottom, straps tied to her wrists are connected to a heavy sphere. This painting also features body fragments and disembodied limbs. Nochlin distinguishes between two opposing interpretations of body fragmentation: full occurrence (influenced by 19<sup>th</sup>-century realism in literature and the development of photography in the 20<sup>th</sup> century) and full determination, based on the artist's conscious choice and aesthetic selection (Nochlin, 2020, 86). In Fig 3, the artist deliberately places the head and neck outside the painting frame to emphasize the central position of the hands as a symbol of the whole and the inevitable issue of presence and absence (life and death) in visual representation. The represented body within the painting frame is distinctly feminine - the use of pink color further emphasizes the gender of the depicted torso. The female figure breaks out of the restrictive frame of her body and the painting frame as if simultaneously escaping the invasion of stone hands and the audience's gaze. The intertwining of tradition and modernity in Khosravi's works is represented by combining modern and traditional painting techniques and using the artist's inventive symbols. The themes of women's bondage and liberation are recurring in Arghavan Khosravi's works. Here, the stone hands symbolize rigid patriarchal traditions. The artist's other works use the black straps around the stone wrists to bind women's hands or mouths. Arghavan Khosravi uses real threads to depict this. The threads purposefully

move through the image, sewing lips together (Fig 4), tying hands, or connecting parts, sometimes leading to nature, evoking a sense of freedom, and sometimes reaching heavy black spheres that symbolize captivity. As Nochlin describes in her study of Manet's works, body fragments are a metaphor for the whole and a symbol of a kind of fetishism (Nochlin, 2020, 89). Body fragmentation in Khosravi's paintings also emphasizes sexual identity. Here, the fragment represents the whole, but a whole that goes beyond the physical body. The cut torso in Fig. 3 refers both to femininity as a conventional concept and deconstructs the institutionalized contrasts within this concept (soft and hard, free and bound, light and dark). Contrary to the symbolic function of representing body parts separate from the body in the paintings of Seyed Amin Bagheri and Arghavan Khosravi, «Fakhteh Shamsian» in the collection «Inverted Tree», which was exhibited at the «Aaran» gallery in February 2021, takes a deconstructive approach to body representation. In the statement for this collection, the artist said: The inverted tree in mythology is a tree whose roots grow in the sky, and its top and branches grow in the heart of the earth. A transformation of the echoes of sounds that have become eternal in the heart of the wind and a reference to the fact that «the earth and the sky were initially very close to each other» (Gallery Info, 2021). She says that in this collection, she has examined how aesthetics is influenced by issues such as dying and being injured. For example, an image of a mutilated body is very horrifying, but seeing a dismembered plant does not create such a feeling. Shamsian has a phenomenological view of the body and wants to emphasize this issue by distancing herself from existing assumptions about the body: what would happen to this type of aesthetics if we did not feel pain and were not mortal (Art Online, 2021). In the painting «A Garden of Unmade Humans» (Fig 5), a landscape similar to dense forests is observed, where instead of plants, human body parts have grown from the ground; parts that oscillate between being human and being plant. Since the representation of a disabled or otherwise different body can be a physical metaphor for abstract concepts that indicate the position of humans as a specific species in the world or a specific range, a text (in the general sense) is also dependent on and benefits from the materiality of the body (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000, 50). Shamsian, by placing body parts in the position of plants, has created a situation that challenges the audience's assumptions about the limitations and sufferings of the body. The fear of amputation and losing the integrity of the body for humans disappears with the possibility of regrowth and regeneration of limbs. This approach is best depicted in the painting «Blooming Animals» (Fig 6). Shamsian has transformed horrifying images into a colorful landscape. The paintings in this collection both evoke the audience's aesthetic taste and question her approach to amputation and mutilation of the body.



**Fig 5.** Fakhteh Shamsian, «A Garden of Unmade Humans», 2019. Source: Darz Art, 2020.



**Fig 6.** Fakhteh Shamsian, «Blooming Animals», 2019. Source: Darz Art, 2020.

In the «Inverted Tree» collection, the artist has created such a deep connection between humans and plants that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two, and this leads the audience to accompany the painter in a plant-centered world. The combination of human and plant veins and roots and tying these two types of life together, along with the use of bright colors, alleviates human suffering and horror and carries Shamsian's final belief that «one can be without suffering and not fear death» (Darz Art, 2021). Shamsian considers her works as studies on possible aesthetic conditions, and based on this, it can be said that the «Inverted Tree» collection emphasizes «the representation of fragments and the aesthetics of the ambiguous and unfinished in Romantic art» (Larsen, 2000). The body parts in Shamsian's paintings do not evoke suffering and decay but rather are a visual equivalent of Deleuze's recommendation that we should change our approach to body parts as fixed organs with predetermined functions. «Blooming Animals» (Fig 6) shows the human body in a state that, according to Deleuze, «is an intermediate limit between potential and actual» (Colebrook, 2008, 106). «Nochlin» considers photography one of the primary sources for Impressionist painters to depict fluidity, vaporousness, fragmented structure, and free brushstrokes in representing fragmented urban bodies (Nochlin, 2020, 63). Not only did cutting the world through photography become a prelude to fragmented perceptions of the world, but the photograph itself, as an index of reality, occupies a position between death and multiplication and rebirth. From this perspective, the history of technological developments in photography can be seen as a desire to create an image of the body in its entirety and truth (Nelson & Shiff, 2016, 226). Although photography stems from our desire to prevent destruction/death and to know things through their reproduced image, capturing things that existed in the past ultimately becomes a sign of mortality (Nelson & Shiff, 2016, 228-229). This is the same approach observed in the representation of body parts in the works of «Nasser Bakhshi». Bakhshi has no limitation in executing his works and, in addition to the canvas, uses various materials such as old boxes, which, combined with

painting, become a diary to tell a story from the past (Fig 7). His paintings have an extreme photographic realism that aligns with the way they are arranged next to the boxes as things left from the past. According to Bakhshi, the entirety of each person is in memories (Ramazani, 2016). Depicting fragmented bodies in his collections can remind us of fragments of memories or reflections of human memory. Let's look deeper into our past and try to recall moments and events. We might only see a hand washing dishes, an eye talking. Lips and teeth laughing - similar to the relationship between photography and reality. Nasser Bakhshi, in the painting related to the installation «Unfinished Dream» (Fig 8), shows eyes removed from their sockets inside boxes. Each eye has its own story; like old objects kept in small boxes, they can refer to individual memories and fleeting moments of the artist's life or, like a collection of archived documents related to a social event, indicate the human desire to capture a moment of reality that ultimately leads to the fragmentation of reality and the loss of its entirety.



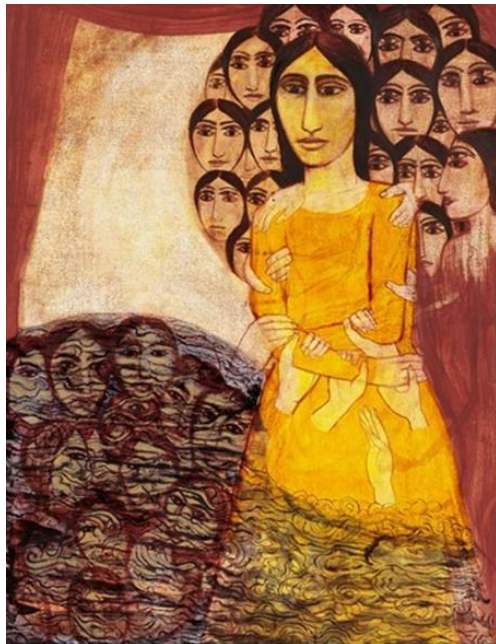
**Fig 7.** Nasser Bakhshi, «Vibration», 2019.  
Source: Darz Art, 2020.



**Fig 8.** Nasser Bakhshi, «Unfinished Dream», 2020.  
Source: Darz Art, 2020.

«Samira Abbassy» is another artist whose works are characterized by depicting and combining body parts. As an immigrant artist, Abbassy incorporates various Iranian (Qajar), Western, and Hindu cultures into her works. In most of her works, severed heads and hands and the diversity of limbs are seen (Fig 9). The artist has explained that the main subject of her paintings is how metaphysical characteristics are depicted in the physical representation of the body (Abbassy, 2024). In the painting «Love and Ammunition 2» (Fig 10), Abbassy uses body parts as ornaments or additional limbs and combines humans and animals to depict inner states such as joy or sorrow, love, and sin. She says the secret of her figures lies in Dante's statement about hell «Bodies change shape according to their sins» (Abbassy, 2024). The artist illustrates these ideas with multi-headed and multi-eyed figures or severed

organs and their repetition and connection with plants, birds, or animals like horses and wolves. Visual traditions and symbols from Hindu, Christian, and Islamic art are a component of Abbassy's works. The multiplicity of body parts in Abbassy's paintings is reminiscent of multi-headed and multi-armed Hindu gods, and the combination of humans and animals is inspired by Dante's descriptions of purgatory and hell in the «Divine Comedy» (Abbassy, 2024). Thus, the disembodied limbs in the paintings of this Iranian-born artist living in London and New York both refer to the artist's Eastern roots and separation from the homeland and serve as a tangible sign of the invisible characteristics of humans inspired by mythology. Ultimately, it can be said that Samira Abbassy represents bodies in her paintings that do not have an objective reference but are a visual sign that reveals the soul.



**Fig 9.** Samira Abbassy, «Anastasis», 2021. Source: Darz Art, 2020.



**Fig 10.** Samira Abbassy, «Love and Ammunition 2», 2014. Source: Darz Art, 2020.

### Discussion

The representation of the human figure in paintings transforms the body from an objective entity into a conventional sign. In the represented body, there are always features that cannot be identified solely through objective references, meaning the experience of the cultural body is different from the physical experience of flesh and blood (Nasri & Saeedzadeh, 2018, 25). Thus, the representation of body parts in the examples of this research is influenced by various theoretical foundations that have somehow affected the philosophy of postmodern art. On the other hand, in these paintings, by decentering the entity and perfection of the body in the classical view, the possibility of creating a new visual sign is provided, which can refer to specific concepts of contemporary human life. To summarize

the research findings, the relationship between the deconstruction of the central signifier, and the explanation of theoretical foundations and semantic implications, the analysis of 5 examples of the research is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of Deconstructive Analysis of Research Examples. Source: Authors.

<b>Artwork Details</b>	<b>Central Signifier</b>	<b>Theoretical Foundations</b>	<b>Semantic Implications</b>
<b>Great Middle</b> Seyed Amin Bagheri, 2013	Life and growth of an organ independent of the body (In this work, the dependence of the life of body organs on their connection to the body is undermined).	Deleuze's definition of the body without organs as an organ without fixed and predetermined functions, rejecting the organism	Metamorphosis in hardship (Aesthetics of suffering)
<b>Black Box</b> Arghavan Khosravi, 2022	Gender contrasts (In this work, organs separated from the body have become a sign of the concept of gender - not sex. Roles that are institutionalized in their place).	Feminism and women's liberation. Critique of the relationship between representation and the gaze	The necessity of revisiting the relationship between gender and captivity and liberation (Feminist aesthetics)
<b>Flourishing Animals</b> Fakhteh Shamsian, 2019	Immortal human (Rejecting the relationship between the severance of body organs and death)	Deleuze's definition of the body without organs as an organ without fixed and predetermined functions (assuming a plant organism for humans)	Flourishing life is a life without presuppositions (Aesthetics of ambiguity and unfinished Romanticism)
<b>Unfinished Dream</b> Naser Bakhshi, 2020	Lost reality (In this work, the inability of representation to capture reality in its entirety is the central signifier).	Replacing plurality and relativity instead of unity and totality in modernity	The inaccessibility of memories in their entirety
<b>Love and Ammunition</b> Samira Abbasy, 2014	Visibility of the soul (In this work, the visibility of the body and the invisibility of the soul are reversed).	Unity of body and soul in myths	Spiritual states and sins change the physical characteristics of the body.

**Conclusion**

Visual representation from the beginning has been accompanied by selection and fragmentation, as the visual medium cannot show all aspects of reality and is forced to choose a specific perspective. This limitation of representation makes it a suitable field for studying the relationship between humans and themselves and the world. Painting is an appropriate medium for depicting concepts that do not have objective reality because it is less dependent on the material (compared to other visual arts) and deals with the sense of sight. From this perspective, the representation of the human body in paintings is not merely a reference to the outer shell of the body. The body as a medium and the representation of the body as a visual sign to refer to concepts other than the body became more prominent in postmodernism than ever before. The representation of strange and ugly bodies, fragmented, disintegrated, and limbless bodies in postmodern painting is not necessarily influenced by the opinions of thinkers who have theorized about this concept; rather, every change in the thoughts and writings of both groups (painters and philosophers) stems from

changes in contemporary human life. These changes began with modernity and the rapid development of technology and globalization, ultimately creating a space where decentralization and constant change became the only principles explaining the present time. The representation of dismembered bodies in postmodern Iranian painting revolves around the central signifier of the deconstruction of the body and challenging existing assumptions about the body and its functions. Although the analysis of research samples showed that dismembered bodies in these paintings display different characteristics and have their own theoretical foundations and semantic implications, in all samples, defamiliarizing the typical image of the body has provided a space for reflection and thought. By depicting incomplete bodies and severed organs, artists have brought life back to the represented body, turning it into a dynamic body and a medium for expressing their thoughts and goals. The study of a selection of works by postmodern Iranian painters, whose primary subject was dismembered bodies, showed that the representation of dismembered bodies, in general, can be the realization of visual thinking about the body or the relationship between body and soul. In the research samples, dismemberment and dismembered bodies, in some cases, refer to the suffering and transformation resulting from it (paintings by Seyed Amin Bagheri) and, in other cases, to the possibility of liberation from suffering by proposing a novel approach to the body (in the works of Fakhta Shamsian). The representation of dismembered bodies does not refer to a specific object in the real world. Still, it is a sign for expressing abstract concepts that can only be manifested through metaphor. Painters have used the representation of body parts as visual metaphors to depict fragmented identities in the era of globalization (works of Arghavan Khosravi), the impact of war on human life, coping with memory loss and forgetting memories (paintings by Nasser Bakhshi), and realizing the psychological characteristics and invisible dimensions of human existence (paintings by Samira Abbasi). Giving life to dismembered bodies - a unique capability of art - places the audience in a dual state of accepting the death of the body and recreating it in a new perspective, allowing the imagination of the body in unforeseen situations. With this technique, the artist creates a space that separates the audience from everyday life and prompts reflection on possible states of the body.

## Author Contributions

This research was written with the participation of all authors. All authors discussed the results and reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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The author (s) declare that there are no potential conflicts of interest related to this research, in writing, and publication of this article

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