





About  
painting  
and coding  
with

# Lohrasb Bayat



Iranian artist Lohrasb Bayat in front of a piece from his latest series, *Qubits*. Over Zoom, we spoke with the artist about his beginnings in the arts, the beauty of precision, and his most recent series.

Hi Lohrasb, it's a pleasure to speak with you this afternoon. Let's start with the basics: can you please tell me about yourself, your background, and how you started out in visual art?

I was born in 1990 in Tehran, Iran. I've been working as a professional artist for 11 years now. Over the years, I've done some experimenting with video and other mediums but mostly I work in paintings. My medium of choice is markers. I really like working with markers because they leave no room for error. It makes it really critical because if you make a mistake you have to get rid of the work. They are really precise, which corresponds much to my nature. As for my background, when I was a kid, my father used to work in construction. At that time, the Iran-Iraq war had just finished and there was a lot of reconstruction to be done in the country, especially in the South-West, cities like Ahvaz, Mahshahr and ... During my early years,

we were constantly on the road, traveling through desert landscapes, war-ridden cities, meeting new people all the time has made a deep impact on me. I think that's really visible in my earlier works. However, later on, I didn't pursue an education in Fine Art. Instead, I went for Computer Software. During the 90s, the computers just took everyone by storm and they became a household thing. Later on, the internet came and changed everything for everyone and I really got into coding. I started writing codes and it responded very well to me, I really liked it.

***“To me, there is this similarity between painting and coding: it's a blank canvas that you can do anything with, the possibilities are endless.”***

It was at that point that I made the decision to go into the direction of Computer Software and I got a Bachelor's degree in computer science. However, all my life I have had issues with the educational system and with authority. I do not respond well to authority and so you could say that pattern repeated during my university years.

***“I realized that my calling was the arts and how much I value the freedom that comes with the life of an artist.”***

So, right after graduating I decided that that was it for me, and I left the field. I made the decision to pursue a career in painting and the question was how because I didn't know anybody and hadn't been in art school. I was lucky, however, that the parents of my girlfriend back then were art collectors. They had a serious art collection with names like Sohrab Sepehri, Behjat Sadr and Farideh Lashai hanging on their walls. So after talking to them about my plans, they introduced me to a Painter working in Tehran, Mostafa Dashti and I started working at his studio when I was 22. I was at that studio for about 2 years. I didn't learn that much about the techniques while I was there, but rather how an artist manages his daily life and studio, how he sells his work, runs his studio and how he comes up with his ideas. Practical stuff like that. I think the most valuable thing I got from that era was to be a man of action and bring my ideas into the world. Then, after a couple of years there I decided to leave his studio and do my own thing.

**You create your works with markers and I imagine that it must be quite a lot of work to finish a piece. Would you mind walking me through your process? How do you start a piece and from there, how do you proceed?**

My process starts theoretical. For me, it has to be planned out first. Usually, it starts with something that I read, not a visual experience. It's a theoretical thought process. I'll give you a couple of examples. In my older series, “Domesticated”, it all started with a poem by Greek poet Constantine P. Cavafy, and the name of the poem is “Waiting for

the Barbarians”. Briefly explained, it's about someone who walks into a city and sees everyone in panic and people tell him, “Don't you know, the Barbarians are coming?” Then, he asks the Senators why they aren't giving speeches and they answer that it's because the Barbarians hate long speeches. The pattern repeats and in the end he sees that people are returning home in despair. When asked what happened, he is told that the Barbarians aren't coming and that, in fact, the Barbarians are no more: “What do we do now without the Barbarians, they were kind of a solution.” I liked the idea and wanted to work it into a visual format. At that time, I was obsessed with facial recognition software and identity concealment and I was thinking about how to use that. So, I started to work with these so called “Barbarians” that were supposed to come but maybe never would. Who are very crazy about their own identity, just gazing out of the painting, hoping for nothing bad to happen.

For my latest series, I worked the same way. I was reading a book by Sean M. Carroll called “Something deeply hidden” and it's about quantum mechanics- not that I understand quantum mechanics (laughs). It delved me into quantum computing and I got introduced to qubits. The fundamental units of computers are bits, and they are either zeros or ones. But qubits change the game. A qubit can be simultaneously 0 and 1, or different shades of it in between. What caught my attention were these simultaneous states of being which I think all of us experience in some form throughout our lives. And I wanted to work with this. I'm really excited about it, experimenting with it and trying out new compositions, and different ideas.

Schrödinger's cat, a thought experiment in quantum mechanics, illustrates the paradoxical nature of quantum superposition. The blindfolded figures embody ambiguity and multiple possibilities such as the coexistence of vulnerability, resilience, oppression, freedom, and instability, much like the cat being both alive and dead until observed. Combining my artistic sensibilities with a background in computer science and my obsession with history, the series also addresses the socio-political context of the Middle East, touching on concepts like entanglement, inspiring conversations about freedom, expression and punishment.

**The people in these works, are they people that you know?**

Yes, indeed. I know all of them and I take photographs of them. Then I do digital collage sketches and when I start a piece I use the projector to draw the sketch on the paper. But I always change the digital sketch when drawing it on paper. Once I start drawing, it makes me in between 8 and 14 days to finish one of the bigger drawings, but really hard working days, drawing in between 8 and 12 hours a day.

**And for how long have you been working on this project now?**

The idea for this project came to me 8 months ago. After that, it took 3 months for me to start working on the paintings themselves. I had to photograph the people first and construct the compositions.

**I wonder if you have always worked with them or if there was a time when you also worked with other mediums and techniques?**

I've worked with other mediums such as Acrylic paint and others but the moment I picked up markers they immediately responded to me. They are really precise, which corresponds much to my nature. Everything is in your control. But it also has this element of danger to it, they leave no room for error. If you make a mistake you got to start over. And that happens to me from time to time. When that happens, I need to start over. It doesn't happen often though. On a yearly basis, I'd say I mess up one piece.

**You live and work in Tehran and I wanted to know a bit more about the art scene there. How is it in terms of opportunities and being an emerging artist in the city?**

I guess there's some infrastructure that exists in the Iran art scene, but unfortunately the sanctions have stopped foreign investors, gallerists and curators to visit and invest in the art scene. So consequently, Iranian artists have to find their way outside the Iranian art scene to find a larger audience. There are also other problems in regard to publications and magazines; very few of them exist. The ceiling is not that tall, I guess that would be fair to say. What I'm trying to do with my new series is to try to reach out to people outside of Iran, to a bigger audience. I think it's time for me to do that.

**Are there any fellow emerging (or non-emerging) artists that you'd like to recommend?**

Yes! Kara Walker is a really great artist and Yue Minjun, an amazing Chinese painter who I really like. To name a few more, I'd say Hito Steyerl and Kerry James Marshall.

**Thank you for sharing these artists. To wrap up, I have to two more questions for you. First, do you have any advice for artists just starting out in their career? And second, what are your goals and hopes for the future?**

As for advice, I'd say that in the past few years I've realized the value of networking. Trying to get in touch with the right people and creating opportunities for yourself. As you grow older, you keep on learning. It's important to be outside and show up to places. Meet new people and take advantage of the opportunities. In regards to my hopes and goals, I'd say that more than anything it's about reaching a new audience whose culture is foreign to mine. I'm curious about their response to my work, curious to see if what I do resonates with their thought process.

Get in touch with Lohrasb: [www.lohrasbbayat.com](http://www.lohrasbbayat.com)  
Instagram: @lohrasbbayat



Iranian artist Lohrasb Bayat at work  
in his studio in Tehran, 2021



Qubits, Qubit No 1, 2023  
Marker On Paper, 100 x 100 cm



Qubits, Qubit No 2, 2023  
Marker On Paper, 75 x 75 cm



Qubits, Qubit No 3, 2023  
Marker On Paper, 75 x 75 cm



Qubits, Qubit No 4, 2023  
Marker On Paper, 75 x 75 cm





Qubits, Qubit No 5, 2023  
Marker On Paper, 75 x 75 cm

I realized that my  
calling was the arts  
and how much I  
value the freedom  
that comes with  
the life of  
an artist.

- Lohrasb Bayat