

CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN WOMEN ARTISTS:
A VIRTUAL EXHIBITION AND CATALOGUE

BY

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CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

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This capstone report consists of an essay followed by a catalogue of a virtual art exhibition that can be found in two formats:

1. A presentation on Prezi, permanently live: <http://prezi.com/tdz-jx5u6ndc>
2. A 3D virtual gallery exhibition, live until May 13, 2017:

<https://publish.exhibit.com/28086777/by-sima-shabani-supervisor-dr-martin-rosenberg>

The art works for the virtual exhibition are selected to provide visual examples to support the hypothesis suggested in this essay. In the essay, I argue that the political and social events of an artist's era influence their creative visions and, therefore, their artistic creations. Being a woman of Iranian origin, and my own life being severely influenced by the political events of the last four decades in Iran, I have focused on the works of contemporary Iranian women artists. The sociopolitical event in Iran that I have examined for this research is the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

I have compared and contrasted the works by three categories of artists, to demonstrate that the artists from the same generation who have lived through the same event, in this case the revolution of 1979, share many commonalities in their works,

specifically in their representation of Iranian female identity. In contrast, the art works by younger generation of artists, who were not alive at the time of the revolution, and lived their entire lives under different social norms, are different from those by the older artists, particularly in their portrayal of Iranian female identity.

The collection of artworks displayed in this virtual exhibition is an accurate demonstration of the dichotomy in the essence of works by the younger and older generation artists. The older generation, having experienced a westernized style of freedom for women during the pre-Islamic era of Iran, recurrently portray views and themes, such as: the loss of female liberation, oppression, and despair. In contrast, the younger artists, who have lived their entire lives under strict Islamic laws of the current Iranian government, particularly those regarding women, frequently demonstrate ideas such as universal feminist issues, openness, appreciation of female sensuality and sexuality, and also resilience.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my gratitude to those who have assisted me with this research. Special thanks go to my wonderful Capstone research supervisor, Dr. Martin Rosenberg, the former Chair of the Department of Fine Arts and Professor of Art History at Rutgers University's Camden Campus, who guided me diligently through this process and provided me with the most valuable advice and insights. I am also sincerely grateful to the young and brave Iranian artists from Tehran- Zeynab Movahed, Alemeh Bagherian, Najva Erfani, and Zahra Shafie- who patiently answered my numerous questions and generously shared their life stories with me. Many thanks also go to Iranian scholars Dr. Hamid Keshmirshakan and Zahra Safazadeh Haghghi, for providing me with information and sources that I wouldn't be able to obtain without their help. Finally, I'd like to send my deepest gratitude to my loving parents, to my dad, for bringing me books from Tehran that I needed and couldn't obtain in the United States, and to my mom, for her constant emotional support during this research.

I, Post- Revolution Iran and the Practice of Veiling

Wednesday, September 23, 1981, exactly one day after the Iran-Iraq war broke out, was the day that I started elementary school. Early in the morning, all students were guided to stand into ten lines of about 30 students each. The school principal and her assistant stood on a stage and gave speeches about the rules and guidelines we must follow. When it came to the description of appropriate attire for school, the principal pointed at me and asked me to go up on the stage and to stand next to her. I walked timidly toward the stage, passing students who were staring at me curiously; I went up the stage and stood next to the principal. She then said, “Look at this student. Do you see what is wrong with her attire?” I had no idea what she was talking about. I was wearing the school’s gray uniform: a loose long sleeved dress and a pair of matching pants. She then continued: “This student is not wearing a headscarf. At school all students have to wear headscarves. As of tomorrow, if you come to school without one, your parents will be called and you will be sent back home!” From that day on, I never left home in Tehran without a headscarf. I was seven years old.

Iranian Woman Identity and Veiling

From the establishment of Pahlavi monarchy in 1925, until today, Iranian society has gone through major social and political upheavals, which have certainly influenced Iranian culture and consequently, Iranian identity narratives.¹ More than that of men’s, Iranian women’s position has been affected by the political and societal transformations of the past 92 years. During all this time, veiling has played an enormous role in shaping

1. Nina Ansary, 2015. *Jewels of Allah: The Untold Story of Women in Iran*. Revela Press, 2015, 3-10.

and defining Iranian female identity.² The veil, for Iranian women, has not been just simply a traditional form of attire. Veiling has been the symbol of patriarchal control and a defining notion, representative of the violation of women's rights. Both mandatory veiling and unveiling have taken away the very basic right of Iranian women to choose for themselves something as simple as their clothes.³

Iran is the only country in the world that has imposed both mandatory unveiling and mandatory veiling on its women. In 1935, Reza Shah, the first king of the Pahlavi Monarchy, dictated that women were no longer allowed to cover their hair with headscarves or *chadors* (Iranian traditional veil) in public. In 1980, Ayatollah Khomeini, the first supreme leader of the Islamic government, a man, commanded that women were no longer allowed to be seen in public without *hijab*. This law is still in effect today.⁴

Most outsiders view Iranian women's position on a path, moving towards the ultimate western style liberation during the Pahlavi era, up to the Islamic revolution when the dark time of women's oppression starts. This is an oversimplification of a rather complex situation. I am convinced that portrayal of the Pahlavi era's woman as liberated in her western cloths and Iranian woman of Islamic era as oppressed in her chador is not a correct representation of Iranian women's positions and their constant battle for freedom and equality.

2. Mahnaz Afkhami, 1994. *Women in exile*. n.p.: University Press of Virginia, 1994.

3. Farzaneh Milani, *Veils and Words: The Emerging Voices of Iranian Women Writers*. Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1992. 19-45.

4. *Ibid.*, 1.

For instance, during the years of mandatory unveiling, Reza Shah enforced discriminatory laws for women. For example, teachers who refused to remove their *chadors* or headscarves were denied their salaries and students were not given their diploma unless they attended school without *hijab*. This law resulted in many girls who came from religious and traditional families to be prevented by their parents to attend school. In 1977, only 42% of Iranian girls attended primary school.⁵

It is true that the Islamic government halted the modernization plans of the Pahlavi era soon after the revolution; yet, interestingly some of the government's anti-Western laws inadvertently created bases for women's empowerment. After the mandatory veiling laws and mandatory gender segregation of all schools, most Iranian girls including those from rural areas and religious families attended schools. It might come as surprise the fact that today, 98.5% of women between the ages of 15-24 are literate and 65% of the 3.7 million university students are women.⁶

Portrayal of Iranian Women's Identity Through the Art

During this long and turbulent path for Iranian women, many female artists created works of art expressing their own identity as women, as Iranians and as artists.⁷ I argue that the evolution of Iranian Women's Identity depicted in female artists' creations are powerfully influenced by the political and social atmosphere of the times in which they lived.

5. Ibid., 1

6. "Iran, Islamic Republic – Statistics",
https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iran_statistics.html

7. Hamid Keshmirshakan. "The Question of Identity vis-a-vis Exoticism in Contemporary Iranian Art." *Iranian Studies* 43, no. 4 (September 2010): 489.

Alterations in the governing rules of the country not only affected Iranian women's day-to-day lives; it shaped and reshaped Iranian female identity.⁸ In this essay and virtual exhibition, I would like to present, compare and contrasts works of art by three group of female artists whose lives and works of art, and the meaning of Iranian female identity to them, have been influenced not only by their gender, but also by the political and social events of their time, as well as their location where they work, whether inside Iran, or abroad in exile.

The Islamic revolution of 1979 was a pivotal point in the last half-century's history of Iran, that caused a serious alteration in the Iranian women's lives and their narratives.⁹ Hence, in my effort to identify the changes in the Iranian female identity through Iranian female artists' works, I first divided the Iranian female artists into two categories: First, I consider women who were born before 1961, those who experienced Iranian life and largely formed their sense of female identity as adults, before the Islamic revolution. Therefore, they had the first-hand experience of going through the course of the revolution, with its tremendous social and political transformations, as at least young adults. The second group were those who were born after 1980, the members of the younger generation, who were born after the revolution and never experienced life in pre-Revolutionary Iran.

For the purpose of this research I am excluding women who are born between 1962 and 1979, a generation of Iranian people known as *nasl-e sookhteh*, or simply "the

8. Ibid., 1-3.

9. Ibid., 1.

burnt generation” in Iran.¹⁰ The reason for this exclusion is that this generation of Iranians, including myself, went through a unique and horrifying experience in their life of being children at the time of the revolution and going through their year of childhood and adolescents during the vicious Iran-Iraq war. Investigating their discourses is a large effort beyond the scope of this project. In addition, for the purposes of this research project, excluding this intermediary group heightens my ability to differentiate between the life experiences that shaped the two groups identified above.

Additionally, I am subdividing the artists of the first category—the ones born before 1961—into two sub-categories of Iranian women: those who stayed in Iran after the revolution, and those who are living in exile, having left the country around the time of the revolution. I believe it is important to consider the migration and exile status of the artists, as I assume that the diaspora that comes with living in exile is a major factor that influences people’s identity. Many Iranians, including a large population of scholars and artists who did not agree with the strict rules of the Islamic government, left Iran for Western countries. Over 5 million Iranians live in exile today.¹¹ There are many established Iranian female artists in the international art scene who live outside of Iran.¹²

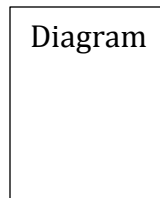
The diagram below shows the categories of artists whose work I would like to include in this essay. In my research, I came across wonderful young female artists born

10. “*Nasl-e Sookhteh*” - – Translated by the author, <http://www.shafaf.ir/fa/news/>

11. “Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home”, <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iran-vast-diaspora-abroad-and-millions-refugees-home/>

12. Asia Society. Museum., Fereshteh Daftari, and Layla S. Diba. *Iran Modern*. New York, NY: Asia Society in association with Yale University Press, New Haven, 2013.

after 1980, who left Iran at a very young age. I deliberately exclude this group of artists because a major part of my focus is on Iranian identity, and I believe this younger generation of Western artists of Iranian origin does not provide as clear a group as the ones we are considering, for exploring how the experience of Iran shaped their identity.



Artist Selection Diagram

Discussion

Artistic work from the following three groups of Iranian Women is included in this essay: 1) Those who were born before 1961, and, therefore, were at least 18 years old at the time of 1979 revolution and remained in Iran after the revolution; 2) Similar in age to group 1 and left Iran at the time or shortly after the revolution; and 3) Those who were born in Iran during or after 1980, and still live in Iran. This last group of young artists never experienced life in pre-revolutionary Iran.

Being an immigrant myself, I originally assumed that there should be a large contrast between the Iranian female identity represented in the works by female artists

living in exile (group 2) and those who live in Iran (groups 1 and 3). To my surprise I discovered many similar elements and concepts between groups of 1 and 2, while there seems to be a drastic shift between the works of two generations, groups 1 and 2 versus group 3.

One explanation for similar elements between the two groups of women who were adults at the time of revolution could be that these women shared a common experience, although in very different settings. Those who left their country experienced a sense of loss and culture clash due to the very different nature of the eastern culture where they were brought up on and the western culture they entered into.¹³ At the same time inside the country, the governing laws, especially for women, changed so rapidly and drastically, that Iranian women who continued living in Iran suddenly felt as if they didn't recognize their own homeland any longer. Although both groups of women experienced the position of marginality and loss, although in different ways, it influenced them and their works similarly. For example, women's hair or body being covered is a theme that appears in many works, as the symbol of Iranian women's oppression. The Iranian women depicted in their work are resilient, even though their freedom is taken away. They are sad and nostalgic, as it seems that their liberation was the story of past. The subjects' eyes are deep and sad, communicating their internal power and external silence as if their voices are imprisoned inside. Their melancholic faces and body gestures tell the audience the story of their despair and loss.

13. Sharon LaVon Walker Parker, 2006. "Embodied Exile: Contemporary Iranian Women Artists and the Politics of Place." *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A: The Humanities And Social Sciences* 66, no. 9: 3295.

It seems to me that a major shift on the view of Iranian women's identity started happening about fifteen years after the revolution, in the mid-1990s, among the new generation of Iranians. The new generation never experienced the views of modernity of Pahlavi era; all they knew was the Islamic Republic of Iran. Unlike the previous generation, who had lived some years in the pre-revolution Iran, for whom freedom meant going back to the previous regime, the new generation had had little to no picture of the past, either in reality, or appearance.¹⁴ The Islamic regime did a thorough job destroying the evidence of the ways of living and the culture of Pahlavi era. All information sources, including books, magazines and news, were meticulously filtered and censored by the government, before being accessible to the public.¹⁵ The stories young girls heard from their mothers and At this point, they began to create a new narrative of young Iranian women, who were beaten by the hijab police because a strand of their hair was showing, who were jailed because they were walking too close to a young man, who were not allowed to express who they were, who were not allowed to sing, play music or dance, but never gave in to the unfair and oppressive rules, and never stopped resisting.¹⁶

I believe that the younger generation of Iranian women, who experienced living as adults only after the revolution, found powerful voices in the midst of the oppressive rules of the Islamic government. Many young female painters of today's Iran, along with young women writers, poets, actors, directors, and journalists, have found many

14. Ibid., 1.

15. Ibid., 2.; Ibid., 3.

16. Ibid., 1.

unconventional ways to express their identity and to practice their agency.¹⁷ For example, the veil, which was used by the previous generation of artists as the symbol of oppression and Iranian women's identity, has lost its significance in the works of new generation of female artists.¹⁸ Even if the women depicted in the works of this group of artists are covered, the headscarves do not seem to be presented as a limiting factor. They look strong and determined despite all the oppressive forces around them. This generation of Iranian women never experienced the freedom of leaving their houses without their scarves; and yet, the headscarf or *chador* doesn't seem to define who they are, or to prevent them from accomplishing what they want to achieve.

17. Zeynab Movahed (Painter), in discussion with the author, February 2017.

18. Zahra Shafie (Painter), in discussion with the author, April 2017.

Catalogue

Category I

1. Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian

“Around 1971, I went to a certain shrine [in Iran], and I became very awed with the way the mirror pieces were reflecting back images of the people there – the beggars, the holy men. It was so beautiful, so magnificent. I was crying like a baby.”¹⁹

01_MonirFarmanf
armaian@Work

Farmanfarmaian in her studio, 1975

Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian also known as Monir Farmanfarmaian was born in Iran in 1924; she currently lives in Tehran, and is still an active professional artist at the age of 93. Farmanfarmaian is a painter, sculptor, photographer, and fabric and Persian carpet pattern designer, who is known as one of the more important figures in Iran’s contemporary art world. Farmanfarmaian comes from an educated family, who provided painting lessons for her from a very young age. Farmanfarmaian graduated from the University of Tehran School of fine art with a bachelor’s degree in 1944. After graduating, she travelled to New York. She remained in the United States and studied fashion illustration at Cornell University. During her years in New York, she became a member of the city’s art scene and became acquainted and friends with contemporary and avant-garde artists such as: Andy Warhol, Willem de Kooning, Joan Mitchell and Jackson Pollock. She also lived for a while and studied art in Paris, France.

After Farmanfarmaian moved back to Iran in 1957, she created and introduced Iranian abstract art to the Iranian art world. She borrowed elements from Iranian culture, such as mosaics and mirrors, and combined them with western techniques, to paint or create sculptures made of geometric patterns. Her works have been exhibited in the most

19. “Monir Farmanfarmaian: 'In Iran, life models wear pants'”, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2011/jul/12/monir-shahroudy-farmanfarmaian-jameel-prize>

prestigious art museums and galleries all around the world. Her recent exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum in New York, “Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Infinite Possibility” was of mirror works and drawings from 1974 to 2014. She is internationally recognized for her critically acclaimed works and is the recipient of many awards, including the gold medal at the 1958 Iranian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale.

02_MonirFarmanfarmaian1

03_MonirFarmanfarmaian2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.²⁰

20. “Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian: Infinite Possibility. Mirror Works and Drawings, 1974–2014” <https://www.guggenheim.org/exhibition/monir>; “Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian, <http://www.thethirdline.com/artists/monir-shahroudy-farmanfarmaian/selected-work/>; “A Portrait of an Iranian Artist Who Went Home After 25 Years in Exile”, <https://hyperallergic.com/276470/a-portrait-of-an-iranian-artist-who-went-home-after-35-years-in-exile/>; “Monir Farmanfarmaian, Iranian and Nonagenarian, Celebrates a New York Museum First”, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/21/arts/design/monir-farmanfarmaian-iranian-and-nonagenarian-celebrates-a-new-york-museum-first.html>; “From Tehran to the Guggenheim, Iranian artist reflects”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wf5Jr3uJx0Y>

2. Samila Amir Ebrahimi

“I want my works to be viewed by everyone, artists, critics, scholars and also ordinary people who don’t know much about art. I like to listen to the questions of ordinary people about each piece, “what is this thing down there?” a type of question that doesn’t come to the mind of an art connoisseur. These questions make me think and view my own work from a different perspective”²¹

04_SamilaA
mirEbrahimi
Portrait.jpg

Samila Amir Ebrahimi was born in Tehran, in 1950. From a very early age, she has been an art lover. At the age of 12, she started her training under the renowned painter Behjat Sadr, who was one of the first female professional artists and the first female dean of the Fine Arts department of the University of Tehran. Amir Ebrahimi continued her artistic exploration as an avocation, while pursuing law as her profession. She graduated from the University of Tehran School of Law in 1972. During her years of law school, Amir Ebrahimi found out that her real passion was art and decided to change her profession.. She then lived in Paris for one year where she studied Etching and Printmaking at the “Cours Supérieurs de Dessin Appliqué à l’Art et l’Industrie”. She then moved to the United State and attended the California College of Arts and Crafts in Oakland, where she obtained a bachelor’s degree in fine art in 1978. Right around the time of the revolution, Samila returned to Iran. Since then, she has been living and working in Tehran.

Amir Ebrahimi has published three books of her work, based on her series:”To the Poet,” “The Maze”, and “Cycles.” She has had several exhibitions in Iran and abroad. Certain symbolic elements, such as mazes, night scenes, urban settings and shadows are

21. “An Interview with Samila Amir Ebrahimi” – Translated by the author, <http://www.noormags.ir/view/en/articlepage/168621>

commonly used in Amir Ebrahimi's works. The main medium used by Amir Ebrahimi is oil on canvas; however she has numerous outstanding works utilizing collage and mixed media.

05_SamilaAmirEbrahimi1

06_SamilaAmirEbrahimi2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.²²

22. "Samila Amir Ebrahimi", <http://vistaart.gallery/samila-amirebrahimi/> ;
"Samila Amir Ebrahimi",
<http://www.caroun.com/Painting/IranPainting/SamilaAmirEbrahimi/SamilaAmirEbrahimi.html>

3. Rana Javadi

“My photographs are made of three layers: one, the original picture from 70 years ago, which is a dead and forgotten moment; the second layer is often made of dried flowers and fabric belonging to those days; and the third one is a reflection of the current environment, captured in the glass or a mirror. Of course, by creating this new layered picture, the present moment dies too, but in a way that starts another life in a new form.”²³

07_RanaJavadiP
ortrait

Rana Javadi is a self-taught photographer and collage artist. Javadi was born in 1953, in Tehran, where she still lives and works. Besides being a professional artist herself, Javadi has been a strong advocate of photography in Iran. She is the founding member of the first museum of photography in Iran (Akshaneh Shahr, established in 1997). Javadi’s signature works are photographic collages of Persian historical symbols and motifs, along with pictures of people, mainly females. The blend of old and new imagery in Javadi’s works depicts the contrast between the present and the past.

Javadi has worked as the director of Photo and Pictorial Studies at the Cultural Research Bureau in Tehran since 1989. Javadi has presented her work in variety of national and international exhibitions. In 2008, Javadi exhibited a critically acclaimed series called *When You Are Dying*. In this series, traditional Persian designed fabric, tarnished mirrors and dried flowers are juxtaposed with vintage photos from the pre-revolution era. Javadi describes the series as a representation of “the death of a beautiful era, the death of a peaceful life”

23. “Iranian captures chaos of conflict”, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2014/01/07/iranian-photographer-captures-chaos-conflict/zk2fcuLTr4vQmedHCEtTyI/story.html>

Javadi was married to the renowned photographer and photography teacher, Bahman Jalali (born 1944), until his death in 2010. Javadi and Bahman Jalali collaborated on many projects.

08_RanaJavadi1

09_RanaJavadi2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.²⁴

24. “When You Were Dying”, <https://www.lensculture.com/articles/rana-javadi-when-you-were-dying>; “Iranian captures chaos of conflict”, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/theater-art/2014/01/07/iranian-photographer-captures-chaos-conflict/zk2fcuLTr4vQmedHCEtTyI/story.html>

4. Shohreh Mehran

“Whatever is veiled makes my imagination soar. What is hiding here? What mustn’t be seen? Behind every veil a secret lies and a mystery swells. In the folds of everyday life, we see objects wrapped in heavy cloth. Strings and stones and ropes and wires prevent the curtain to lift and expose the object. Clarity is impossible, transparency is lost. On the sidewalk, by the roadside, around posts and beams, upon rocks and cement, all across the sky: that which must not be seen is everywhere, veiled and silent. And we accept this obscurity.”²⁵

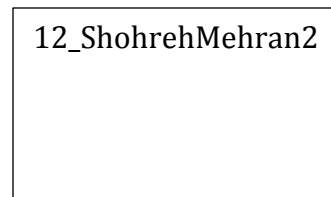
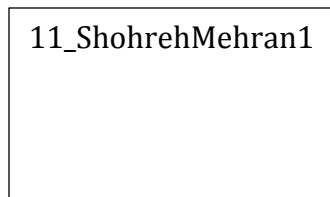
10_Shohreh
MehranPor
trait

Shohreh Mehran was born in Iran in 1958; she holds a BA in Graphic Design from the University of Tehran. She lives and works in Lavasan, a small village which is a suburb of Tehran. Since 1985, Mehran’s works have been exhibited in Iran and all around the world.

In 1989, Shohreh started her professional training in still-life painting, with one of the most famous contemporary painters in Iran, Aydin Aghdashloo. She then used the techniques of still-life painting to paint common objects and scenes from the streets of Tehran. Examples might include a photo booth, and scenes of urban life, such as a girl waiting on the street, calling for a cab. Mehran uses an innovative technique of combining prints and paint, to capture a slice of time in the life of people of Tehran. Mehran is specifically interested in the subject of Iranian women. In many of her works, she portrays young Iranian women in the form of “proper dress,” as dictated by the government. Many of these women are depicted only from the neck down, with their heads cut off from the image. In an interview, Mehran explained that in her series of young women of Tehran, by depicting women who are covered as requested by the Islamic government, she wants to express the struggle of these women in their fight

25. “Tehran in the Paintings of Shohreh Mehran”, Translated by the author, <http://vamostanad.com/?p=2379>

between oppressive forces and for the freedom of choice. The contrasts between the two notions of control by outside forces and freedom of choice is conveyed, for example, when a figure in Mehran's painting is wearing naturally colored loose clothes and a headscarf, while accessorizing with a hipster style bracelets or a pair of fashionable shades.



Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.²⁶

26. "Tehran in the Paintings of Shohreh Mehran", Translated by the author, <http://vamostanad.com/?p=2379>; "Whatever is Veiled Makes my Imagination Soar", <https://www.360cities.net/image/etemad-gallery-nov-2014-shohreh-mehran-whatever-is-veiled-makes-me-imagination-soar-02-tehran>

Category 2

5. Nahid Hagigat

Page 40 from Iran Modern Catalogue:

“Hagigat was [is] among the few women artists active in the period under scrutiny who dealt with issues of gender and politics.”²⁷

13_NahidHagigatPortrait

Nahid Hagigat is a professional artist specializing in painting and printmaking. Hagigat was born in 1943, in Iran. Today, she lives and works in New York. Hagigat obtained her bachelors of art from the University of Tehran. Soon after graduating, she moved to the United States to continue her studies. She received her Ph.D. from New York University in Art. In recent years she also received her second Ph.D. in Art and Behavioral Therapy. Some of her works are now part of permanent collections of Metropolitan Museum of Art and the British Museum.

Women are at the center of Hagigat’s many works. Women of Hagigat’s paintings are mostly covered, in the full in traditional Iranian veil of *chador*. In one of her highly regarded paintings, titled *Escape*, now part of the permanent collection of the British Museum, there is a woman who has removed her *chador*, but while still holding onto it, she lets it fly behind her. She seems to have freed herself from her veil, symbolizing her freedom from oppressions that are represented by her *chador*.

27. Ibid., 12.

14_NahidHagigat1

15_NahidHagigat2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.²⁸

28. "Nahid Hagigat, Paintings by Iranian American Artist", <http://nahidhagigat.com/>; "Heilbrunn Timeline of Art History, The Key, The Metropolitan Museum of Art", <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/2014.690/>; "Collection Online, Escape, The British Museum", http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3691192&partId=1&searchText=nahid+hagigat&page=1

6. Malekeh Nayiny

“I cannot help feeling haunted by these symbols of the past that accompanied me for so many years after my parents were gone. It becomes clear to me that they would always remain inside me, and even though I fought to erase them from my mind, I realize how deeply I still cherish these traces that tangibly connect me to my past, each one telling me a different story of a time gone by.”²⁹

16_MalekehN
ayiniPortrait

Malekeh Nayiny is an author and a visual artist born in Iran in 1955. She left Iran after high school, before the Islamic revolution, to continue her education in the United States. She received her B.A. in fine art and photography from Syracuse University in 1978. She also obtained other certifications in photography from art education institutions in London and Paris. Since 1981, Nayiny has displayed her works in nearly 100 exhibitions, mostly in Europe, with a few in North America, and in Iran as well. Nayiny's hope was to go back to Iran, once she finished her studies abroad, but, because of the revolution, she returned to live in Iran. Only in 1993 did she return briefly to Tehran to attend her mother's funeral. Nayiny lost her father two years after her mother. The loss of her parents, while she was away from them for many years, had a profound impact on Nayiny and her artistic expression.

Nayiny now lives and works in Paris. In a powerful series called *Past Residue*, she displays photographs of the post-revolution streets of Iran, where, on the abandoned fragments of the walls of old buildings one sees remainders of the past, including advertisements for goods, shows and movies. Such advertisements are a significant indicator of the contrast between the two governments, since the Islamic government, in its war against capitalism, forbade any kind of advertisements, during their first 15 years

29. “Malekeh Nayini, The artist's personal website”, <http://www.malekeh.com/>

of running the country. The images on the posters are also from scenes forbidden by the Islamic government, scenes such as a woman not covered in veils, an intimate view of a man and a woman embracing each other, and the portrayal of the pop diva of Iran Googoosh, holding a trophy, while her face and voice was banned from all media. In this series, Nayiny portrays the wrenching contrast between the loss of freedom of the present, symbolized by the rundown remains of buildings, in contrast to the past, represented by the remnants of the advertising posters.

17_MalekehNayiny1

18_MalekehNayini2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.³⁰

30. "Malekeh Nayini, The artist's personal website", <http://www.malekeh.com/>; "Malekeh Nayiny", <https://www.artsy.net/artist/malekeh-nayiny>

7. Shirin Neshat

“Part of me has always resisted the Western clichéd image of Muslim women, depicting them as nothing more than silent victims. My art, without denying repression, is a testimony to unspoken female power and the continuing protest in Islamic culture.”³¹

19_Shirin
Neshat
Portrait

Shirin Neshat is perhaps the most well -recognized Iranian artist, with enormous success in the west. Neshat was born in Qazvin, a conservative city in northwest Iran, in 1957, to an affluent family. She currently lives and works in New York. Neshat is a visual artist with a focus in photography, filmmaking, and installation art. Neshat left Iran in 1974, five years prior to the Islamic revolution, to study in the United States. She graduated from UC Berkeley in 1983, and soon after, moved to New York City and started working as a professional artist. After her departure in 1974, she did not return to Iran until 1990, when she had a short visit to observe the influence of the new Islamic government on people’s lives and the country’s culture as a whole.

Most of the Neshat’s works explore issues of gender, power, and the cultural conflicts of Iranians. Through her art, Neshat makes powerful statements on issues such as gender segregation, and compulsory veiling. In a celebrated series from the mid 1990s , titled *Woman of Allah*, Neshat photographed herself wearing the traditional Iranian veil of *chador*; her facial expressions and body language portray the emotional implications of a woman who veils. In some of her most powerful works, Neshat presents powerful photos of veiled women whose faces or hands are covered by religious texts.

31. “Shirin Neshat: Artist of the Decade”, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/g-roger-denson/shirin-neshat-artist-of-t_b_802050.html

Since 1992, Neshat's works have been exhibited in over a hundred museums, galleries, and biennales. Neshat is the recipient of several prestigious awards, including in 1997, the 48th Venice Biennial prize for her movie *Turbulent*.

20_ShirinNeshat1

21_ShirinNeshat2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.³²

32. "Shirin Neshat, Guggenheim Museum", <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/artist/shirin-neshat>; "Shirin Neshat, Gladstone Gallery", <http://www.gladstonegallery.com/artist/shirin-neshat/biography>; "Art in Exile, A TED talk by Shirin Neshat", https://www.ted.com/talks/shirin_neshat_art_in_exile; "Shirin Neshat: Artist of the Decade", http://www.huffingtonpost.com/g-roger-denson/shirin-neshat-artist-of-t_b_802050.html

8. Afarin Rahmanifar

“My work displays the relevance of life, primarily upon evidence of not only physical but emotional existence as well. I strive to show the body as a vessel, which enables the mind to encounter different experiences; in this case anxiety caused from the act of “Separation”. Telling personal stories and questioning religion, politics or feminism has always been a big challenge for me in my work. My emotional character defines my belonging to the past as an Iranian woman and reveals the desire to tell and portray my personal stories that impacted my life as a woman. My mind processing benefits and holds my intellect and defines my character as an American Iranian Woman.”³³

22_AfarinRah
manifarPortra
it

Afarin Rahmanifar is a painter, art curator, and university professor, who was born in Iran in 1958, and currently lives in the United States. Because of the oppressive conditions forced upon people, especially on women, by the Islamic government, Rahmanifar left Iran with her family and emigrated to the United States in 1989, ten years after the Islamic revolution. She faced a new type of challenge with different types of oppressive forces in her new adopted country. She expressed her experience after living in the United States as: “...to leave one country with oppressive expectations for women in favor of another country with a different set of oppressive expectations for women. No matter where you go, this is a struggle...”³⁴

Rahmanifar received her Masters of Fine Art from the University of Connecticut. Rahmanifar was a former vice president of Connecticut Women Artists and was the curator of an exhibition titled *Iranian Women Create* at the AKUS gallery in Connecticut.

33. “East meets West: Persian’s artwork captures struggle of female identity”
<http://www.altoonamirror.com/life/area-life/2015/08/east-meets-west-persian-s-artwork-captures-struggle-of-female-identity/>

34. “Iranian Artist 'Unraveling Stories' At Charter Oak”,
<http://www.courant.com/entertainment/museums-galleries/hc-charter-oak-iranian-artist-0325-20150324-story.html>

Rahmanifar makes her work contemporary by transforming visual elements of traditional Persian miniature in combination of texts from mystical poets, such as Rumi. (give a citation here, identifying Rumi) In an interview, Rahmanifar has expressed the significance of the intersections of eastern and western culture in shaping her identity as an Iranian American woman, and as the source of inspiration for her art. She also focuses on universal struggles for women, including the dichotomy between the real and the ideal image for women's bodies.

23_AfarinRahmanifar1

24_AfarinRahmanifar2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.³⁵

35. "Afarin Rahmanifar, The artist's personal website", <http://afarin-rahmanifar.net/>; "Iranian Artist 'Unraveling Stories' At Charter Oak", <http://www.courant.com/entertainment/museums-galleries/hc-charter-oak-iranian-artist-0325-20150324-story.html>; "Where Lies Beauty part 1/5 - Afarin Rahmanifar 14min. Directed and photographed by Carina Rosanna Tautu", <https://vimeo.com/23870775>

Category 3

9. Zeynab Movahed

“I am a woman, I am an artist, I am an ambitious person with a great deal of perseverance. I love being a woman with all it brings, the beauties also the hardships.”³⁶

25_ZeynabM
ovahedPortr
ait

Zeynab Movahed is a young and outspoken artist, born in 1981, in Tehran, where she lives and works as a professional painter. Movahed received her Bachelor’s degree in art 2007, and her Master’s degree in 2011, from Azad University in Tehran. Movahed has been a very successful artist commercially and critically and has participated in many group and solo exhibitions all around the world.

Movahed considers herself a fighter, whose perseverance has allowed her to achieve unthinkable goals for young woman in the patriarchal society of Islamic Iran. She believes the limitations imposed on women by the Islamic government have stimulated creativity, in a peculiar way. Movahed identifies the “woman issue” as her main concern as an artist. Women figures are prevalent in the majority of Movahed’s work. Movahed filled her paintings of women figures with beautiful flowers, symbolizing femininity and beauty. Movahed tackles the dichotomy between the private and public spheres in relation to women’s position in society. Domestic roles forced on women, and the role they play in isolating them are profoundly rendered in Movahed’s art. Books and magazines in Movahed’s paintings symbolize the connection of women with the public sphere, as if they are the means for these women to attain their desire to escape from domesticity and oppression.

36. *ibid.*, 17.

Movahed's latest works, such as a series entitled *You Are Awake While We Slumber*, is all about the domination of men over women. She uses roosters as the symbol of men and male power. To her, the floral patterns of fabrics symbolizes sex, the bedroom and woman's privacy, that is invaded forcefully by the patriarchal power. In this series, the sky and wheat fields are the symbols of breaking through the constraints of female submission.

26_ZeynabMovahed1

27_ZeynabMovahed2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.³⁷

37. Zeynab Movahed (Painter), in discussion with the author, February 2017.; "Zeynab Movahed, The artist's personal website", <http://www.zeynabmovahed.com/>

10. Alemeh (Zeinab) Bagherian Jamnani

“I don’t see a relation between chador and Iranian women’s identity. Nothing that is forced on people without their consent can be positive. To me, Iranian woman’s identity can be described with adjectives such as patience, beauty, and authenticity.”³⁸

28_AlemehB
agherianPor
trait

Alemeh (Zeinab) Bagherian Jamnani, also known as Alemeh Bagherian, was born in 1984, in Ghaemshar (Qaem Shahr), a beautiful town in the northern part of Iran, by the coast of the Caspian Sea. Bagherian currently lives and works in Tehran. In 2003, Bagherian studied for a bachelor’s degree in designing traditional Persian Carpets. Later, Bagherian received her Masters degree in painting. In many of her works Bagherian juxtaposes Persian motifs, mainly coming from the Epic Poems of Kings (*Shahname*), over the paintings of sensual women, to celebrate the timeless beauty of being a woman from the Persian culture.

Shahname is a book of poetry written between 977 and 1010 by the great poet Ferdowsi (940-1020). *Shahname* is known as the repository of Persian language and culture, as it only contains words of Persian (Farsi) origin, and tales of Persian kings. *Shahname* was written after the 7th century Islamic conquest of Persia and during the time during which Arabs ruling Iran attempted to make the Persian language vanish and be replaced by Arabic. Bagherian’s art is strongly influenced by the tales of *Shahnameh*, and, by using its imagery, she embraces her Persian heritage. Bagherian pays a great deal of attention to the details, which makes her work visually intriguing. Characters in Bagherian’s paintings convey a complex sense of female sensuality, depth of thoughts, pain and pleasure.

38. Alemeh Bagherian (Painter), in discussion with the author, February 2017.

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.³⁹

29_AlemehBagherian1

30_AlemehBagherian2

39. Alemeh Bagherian (Painter), in discussion with the author, February 2017.; “Seyhoun Art Gallery May 2016 Alemeh Bagherian War Peace Love 03”, Translated by the author, <https://www.360cities.net/image/seyhoun-art-gallery-may-2016-alemeh-bagherian-war-peace-love-03>

11. Najva Erfani

“I do believe in humanity. I do believe in respect for all genders. My main concerns are around women issues and women’s rights. Womanhood is on the center of my thoughts and being. I try to think, be and do free from biases and judgments. I don’t know if I am a feminist or not but I do deeply care about the betterment of the lives of women, especially Iranian women.”⁴⁰

31_NajvaErfaniPortrait

Najva Erfani is young painter born in Iran, in 1984. She lives and works as a professional artist in Tehran. Erfani received a bachelors degree in art and graphic design in 2006, and a Masters degree of art in illustration received in 2011, both from the most prestigious university in Iran, the University of Tehran school of fine art.

Erfani has illustrated more than 40 children books. She has also participated in Tehran street arts paintings across the city. Erfani’s paintings have been exhibited in several biennials and exhibitions, and in galleries all across the country and also abroad. In her creations, Erfani uses the power of symbolism in expressing her own identity and also her position as a woman. Erfani had a very successful solo exhibition in 2016, entitled *Shir Zan*, that translates to “Lion Woman.” In Persian culture, the lion is the symbol of power, courage and resilience. *Shir Zan* in Farsi is an expression and adjective that is utilized to show resilience in women. Erfani uses mystical imagery to represent the position of women of today and in the past. Erfani’s use of weaponry alongside women is to represent the experience of Iranian women during the years of war, when they had to be the pillars of strength in their families. The contrast between war and peace is another key element that can be observed in Erfani’s works.

40. Najva Erfani (Painter), in discussion with the author, March 2017.

32_NajvaErfani1

33_NajvaErfani2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.⁴¹

41. Najva Erfani (Painter), in discussion with the author, March 2017. -- "Najva Erfani", <https://www.instagram.com/najva.erfani/> -- "The Lion Woman, Najva Erfani", <http://azadart.gallery/en/artistexhibitionsingle.aspx?Id=209>

12. Zahra Shafie

“I cherish being a woman. I enjoy and appreciate experiencing the beauty and sensitivity of being female. There is not doubt that being a woman has influenced my artistic view. I experience “being a human” from the eyes and through the body of a women; my being is influenced by my womanhood.”⁴²

34_Zahra
ShafiePo
rtrait

Zahra Shafie, a young professional painter, was born in Tehran, in 1986. She lives in Iran. She holds a bachelor degree in Art and has been working as a professional painter since 2007. Shafie is a fierce young artist, who is not afraid of tackling subjects such as male nudity that are considered the extremely taboo in contemporary Iranian culture.

Many of Shafie’s works are satiric portrayals of patriarchal rules that are forced upon women in domestic spaces. In a series titled *The Kitchen’s Queen*, women are portrayed in the midst of performing their household duties in peculiar ways. Shafie questions and makes fun of patriarchal forces by depicting women posing in odd ways, while in familiar domestic environments. Examples might include: a woman upside down inside a clothes basket, next to a washing machine; another woman pondering the inside of a refrigerator, a woman fixing her hair with an electric mixer, ort one meditating on top of the stove. Along with women, children are also present in Shafie’s work as symbols of family and domestic life. Some of Shafie’s works are direct criticisms of woman’s oppression, with a focus on universal feminist issues, such as the advertised ideal body image for women.

Usage of bright and contrasting colors, scarce compositions, expressionist style, and skilled brushwork make Shafie’s works visually appealing.

42. Ibid., 18.

35_ZahraShafie1

36_ZahraShafie2

Note: Biographical information is driven from variety of sources.⁴³

43. *Ibid.*, 18.; "Zahra Shafie, The artist's personal website", <http://zahrashafie.com/Zahra>

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