



WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM
ART / CULTURE / ACTION



Art/Culture/Action
هنر/فرهنگ/کنش
artcultureaction.com



Woman, Life, Freedom
Anonymous, October 2022, Tehran

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Unknown, October 2022, Jina
Mahsa Amini Memorial, Aichi
cemetery, Saqez, Kurdistan.



ART/CULTURE/ACTION

WOMAN, LIFE, FREEDOM

THE ROLE OF ART IN THE STRUGGLE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS





Acknowledgments

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Thanks to Nazanin Noroozi for curating this project and Hamed. And to all members of the Art/Culture/Action coalition for their incredible labors and invaluable contribution to the archive of the role of art in the struggle for human rights in Iran.

◀ November 2022. "Pledge." Live performance by the students of Tehran University of Culture and Arts.

Foreword: On Woman, Life, Freedom

– Amir Soltani

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet, they are the world of the individual person, the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seek equal justice, equal opportunity and equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world.

Eleanor Roosevelt, On the Tenth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Few documents in modern history speak more deeply to our fears and aspirations as human beings than the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 10, 1948. None have greater resonance in Iran today.

Visionary women played a key role in the committees involved in the framing, drafting and passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Eleanor Roosevelt from the United States; Hansa Mehta and Lakshmi Menon from India; Minerva Bernadino from the Dominican Republic; Bertha Lutz of Brazil; Isabel de Vidal of Uruguay; Begum Shaista Ikramullah from Pakistan; Bodil Begtrup of Denmark; Marie-Hélène Lefauchaux of France; Evdokia Uralova of Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic, all these women made universality, equality and inclusion—the



Unknown, 2017, Vida Movahedi, also known as “The Girl of Enghelab Street” stands on a utility box and took her white headscarf off to protest against hejab in Iran.

guarantee of equal rights to everyone—the bedrock of human rights. They breathed life into each and every article, the price of each word, the gravity of every sentence, the framework of the document.

Consider the power of the words enshrined in the very first sentence of Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: **“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”**

Now contemplate a revision—or rather a reversal—in language, from “all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” to “all men are born free and equal in dignity and rights.”

The freedom and equality, dignity and rights of half of humanity—the born as well as the unborn—rested on the difference between the words “all men” and “all human beings.”

One formidable woman—Hansa Mehta of India—is widely credited with stepping into the breach and changing the phrase “All men are born free and equal” to “All human beings are born free and equal.”

Those women knew that a declaration was not binding but they did not doubt the power of the words or principles for which they stood. As Eleanor Roosevelt noted, “one should never belittle the value of words, however, for they have a way of getting translated into facts, and therein

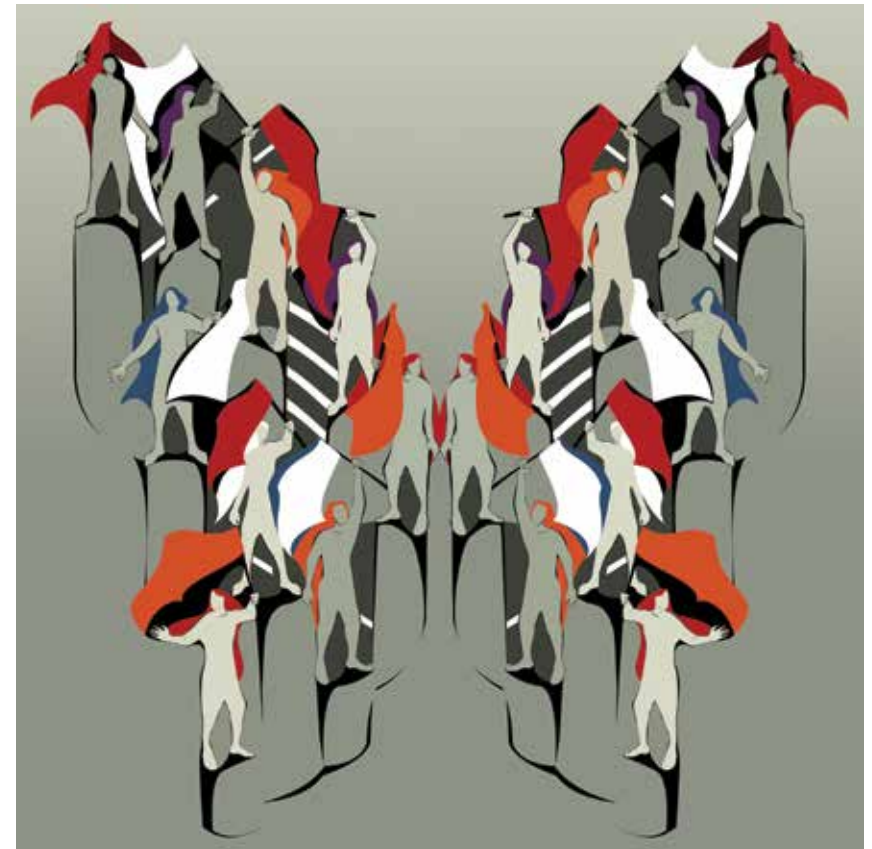
lies the hope of our universal declaration.”

Almost fifty years after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the idea that women's rights were human rights was embraced at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China in September 1995. The Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action reaffirmed the fundamental principle that “the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of human rights.” 189 member states committed themselves to a roadmap for gender equality and women's empowerment.

But only twenty years later, in 2015, then UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon was warning of the emergence of “new forces threatening to curtail the rights of women and girls.”

Eleanor Roosevelt, of course, was not one to underestimate the power of concerted citizen action. In the case of Iran, her question—“where do human rights begin?”—and her answer—“in small places, close to home, so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any map of the world,” proved prophetic.

On December 27, 2017, Vida Movahed, an Iranian woman's rights activist breathed new life into the Beijing Declaration. She turned a utility box on Tehran's Revolution Street into her own Platform of Action—taking off her headscarf and waving it on a stick. Her protest against the compulsory hijab went viral. She went to prison, as did others. These women became known as “The Girls of Revolution Street.” Soon thereafter, the human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh, was arrested and sentenced to a combined 38 years in prison and 148 lashes. Among the charges brought against her for defending four of the women who refused to wear the compulsory hijab, was that of “encouraging corruption and prostitution.”



Parastou Forouhar, 2023, from the *Butterflies series II, Women of Enghelab Street*, digital drawing.

The United Nations' reaction was swift.

“No one should be coerced to wear religious symbols that they consider not essential or contrary to their religion or beliefs,” said the UN experts. “A woman or girl's choice in manifesting or expressing her identity, including her religion or belief, is protected under the freedom of religion or belief and the freedom of expression as provided by international human rights law.”

What was at stake was not only the compulsory hijab. The sentence against Nasrin was an assault on the legal profession—a lethal desire to strip away the rights protecting the body of women and girls. Such impunity reflected contempt for the entire edifice of the UN Charter: the authority of the word, the integrity of the law and the sanctity of the oath itself.

But beyond the breakdown of language, law and religion, there was something more insidious at work. It was the equation of compulsion with the fundamentals of religion, and even worse, its internalization manifest as self-censorship and conformity—the death of creativity and imagination. It was a vision of Iran as a stunted and stagnant civilization, with no cultural, artistic or scientific foundation outside the confines of state and religion.

But even in the bowels of Iran's Evin and Qarchak prisons, Nasrin and other women resisting myriad forms of compulsion turned pins, buttons, ribbons, and textiles into art—a goofy seal for a son, a floppy doll for a daughter, cats and dogs with loopy eyes and funny tails for friends. It's not high art to be sure, but it's handicraft that is intensely human, that insists on converting time back into life, connection, remembrance even



◀ Nasrin Sotoudeh, 2012, From *Evin with Love*, collection of The Museum of Iranian Women's Movement. This piece is made by Nasrin Sotoudeh, a lawyer, women's, children, and human rights activist. Sotoudeh is charged with action against national security, disturbing public peace, assembly and collusion, fighting against forced hejab and sentenced to 36 years in prison and 148 lashes. She is currently on medical leave since March 2022. Photo by: Martin Block. Special thanks to Mansoureh Shojaee, women's rights activist, writer, and researcher.

touch no matter how severe the separation and how long the absence behind the veil of glass. Even in Evin, where death rules supreme, there is art—the breath of life.

Still. The death of Jina Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman arrested in Tehran and beaten while in the custody of Iran's morality police, allegedly for being improperly veiled, exposed the truth of Secretary General Ban Ki Moon's warning.

Jina had been severely beaten at a "re-education center," fell into a coma, and died on September 16th, 2022.

The scale, spread and spontaneity of the protests over the violation of Jina's human rights took everyone by surprise. The synchronicity and symbiosis connected small places, close to home. Human rights had champions in the world of the individual person, in neighborhoods, schools and colleges, factories, farms and offices, even in the bazaars and mosques, the barracks and prison.

No one, least of all Iran's supreme leader, could have imagined the tipping of his turban: a feminist revolution in the heartland of Islamic fundamentalism. Our collective trauma, once masked as historical coma, was now manifest as an awakening, a summoning of spirit, of art, and of love through a hail of batons and bullets.

There is no turning back the clock. The Islamic Republic's expulsion from the UN Commission on the Status of Women on December 14, 2022 is a testament not only to the rising power, presence and unity of women and girls but a tribute to the women—and men—at the United Nations who laid down the foundations for resisting gender apartheid in 1948.

September 16 is now the cradle for a new calendar. Jina's death marks a



Excerpt from *Zahra's Paradise*, 2011, by Amir and Khalil, all rights reserved.

civilization's pivot around a unifying vision of life, with our bodies, homes, schools, streets, pavements and even cemeteries and tombstones as sites of translation where our faith in the dignity and rights of "all human beings" get located as facts on the ground.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is now translated into a universal language as art that derives its light from Jina's face, its gravity from her tombstone and its life from the Iranian people.

One Iranian-American artist calls this presence "pulse," this pulling back of the veil to experience the creative essence and energy behind and beyond the medium. The beauty of this pulse—manifest as a process of collaboration between PEN America and the Art/Culture/Action collective, including this booklet curated by Nazanin Noroozi—is simple: the continuous creation of platforms and projects, the generation of images and connections, acts of translation and transmission, deliberation and association that bring us closer together, so close that we discover new alphabets, symbols and vessels for breathing life back into beings.

Parvaneh Eskandari Frouhar, the dissident Iranian poet and activist, whose pen summons Iran's spirit out of captivity anchors this coming and becoming together in the word "hambood."

"Woman, Life, Freedom" is not three separate words, categories or states. It is the creative instinct and shimmering humanity of the Iranian people—the promise of an Iranian renaissance—manifest in a single breath.

With women and girls shifting the idea of the body politic, we present you, in this small space, a constellation of artists and poets, some anonymous, others not, who dare to imagine and inhabit a new map—an uncensored Iran.



About

"Art/Culture/Action" is a global collective of Iranian artists, critics, and art practitioners who came together in Fall 2022 in response to historic changes brought about by the "Woman, Life, Liberty" movement.

"Art/Culture/Action" is focused on the social and political rights and liberties of artists, writers, and scholars in Iran and across the world. Above all, the collective defends and works to expand a) the unalienable rights of artists and writers to freely express their ideas about all cultural, political, and social issues; b) the unalienable rights of women and people marginalized due to their ethnicity, race, sexuality, or personal beliefs; c) the unalienable rights of students and scholars to unreservedly share and discuss their thoughts and political ideas on university campuses and other academic environments. Beyond political persuasions or affiliations, "Art/Culture/Action" works against systemic mechanisms of censorship, threat, suppression, intolerance, and illegal surveillance or control which stymie the free flow of information in democratic societies. The collective aspires to achieve these goals by calling the members of its community to various types of social actions; organizing public and private events to raise awareness about violations of free expression; and, documenting the records of such abuses and providing help to people who have been negatively impacted by them. "Art/Culture/Action" invites artists, writers, critics, art historians, and curators in all media and fields, including visual arts, film, performance, and design, to join the collective in the cause.



Iranian Artists, Scholars, Critics, Art Historians and Curators Support Art Students' Protests in Iran

30 October 2022

Hundreds of Iranian artists, academics, and writers voice their solidarity with the Iranian art students, who have been under brutal attacks by the government security forces for their protests against systemic violations of human rights by the Islamic Republic state.

A Statement by Iranian Artists, Scholars, Critics, Art Historians and Curators in Support of Art Students' Protests in Iran drafted by more than 600 Iranian artists and cultural practitioners - artists, scholars, writers, critics, art historians, and curators - was released on 29 October 2022 on social media. The renowned signatories include many prominent Iranian artists and cultural practitioners, such as Shirin Neshat, Nairy Baghramian, Sonia Balassanian, Nicky Nodjoumi, Sussan Deyhim, Parviz Tanavoli, Bahram Beyzai, Ruyin Pakbaz, Tala Madani, Shirazeh Houshiary, Reza Deghati, Hengameh Golestan, Layla Diba, among many others.

The statement condemns "all forms of arrest, intimidation, and suppression by the regime" in the strongest terms. Iranian artists and writers demand "the immediate and unconditional release of all students who have been detained".

The students' peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience at universities against human rights abuses, compulsory *hijab*, and sex segregation have been faced with violence, killing, torture and physical abuse, confiscating of their electronic devices, arbitrary detentions in

◀ Khoda-Nur Lojei, an Iranian protester from Zahedan was arrested and killed during the 2022 Zahedan massacre. A picture of him with his hands tied to a flagpole became a symbol of renewed protests, inspiring students to stage performances mourning his death.

undisclosed locations, abductions, and disappearances. University campuses have been forcibly attacked, sieged, or occupied by the regime's security forces, and students are being threatened with being expelled from the school and dorms.

Since its release, the statement has been endorsed by more than 5000 signatories linked to Iranian arts. The translation of the statement and the full list of signatories can be accessed through the link below.



www.statementiranianartists.wordpress.com/

✓ Unknown, 2022, *Basiji Trap*.

In recent years, popular fruit juice "Sandis" has become a sign for the militia (the basijis), who could be easily bribed by the regime with cheap petty goods to oppress people. Sandis is freely given away in pro-regime rallies. These humorous "Basiji Traps" made by students use Sandis as a bait to capture Basijis.



› Unknown, 2022, top: artwork by students of Bu-Ali University, Hamedan, protesting the Islamic regime of Iran. Bottom: The same artwork censored by the University administrators.





∧ Maryam Ashrafi. Northern, March 2016, Iraq, Dohuk.
On a tomb in a cemetery near Khanke IDP (internally displaced person) camp in Dohuk, Yazidi female members of a family left their cut plaits on a tomb of a close male relative as a traditional sign of mourning.

› Maryam Ashrafi, October 1, 2022, San Francisco
Following the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, hundreds of people marched on the streets of San Francisco to show solidarity with the protesters in Iran and to condemn the government's violent response to it. While some were shouting her name and slogans in solidarity with the Iranians, some women cut their hair, an act which became symbolic during the protest both in Iran and outside and amongst those who wish to show their solidarity and support for the Iranian people. Holding a photo of Jina Mahsa in one hand and part of her hair in another hand, the young protester shouts her name in anger and seeks justice for her death.





↗ Halle Saint-Pierre. 2023, *Musée d'Art Brut & Art Singulier*, in collaboration with *International Federation for Human Rights, 40 Braids, Iranian Women of Graphic Design, and Armanshahr*, hosted an exhibition titled "Woman Life Freedom" in March 2023. This exhibition co-curated by Maryam Ashrafi consisted of a wall covered with more than 100 posters made by the Iranian graphic designers in response to the recent uprisings and movement in Iran.

Hundreds of Renowned Artists and Writers Expressed Their Solidarity with Iranian Colleagues

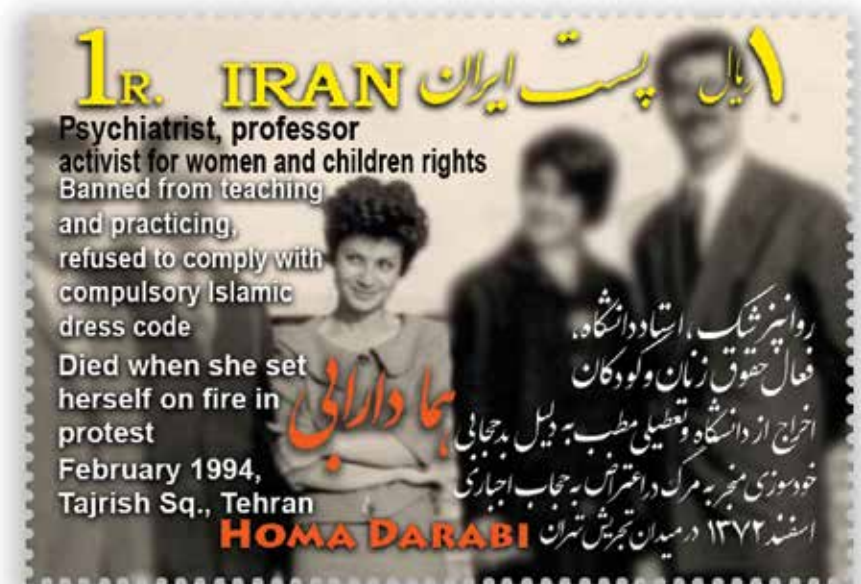
6 December 2022

In a historic statement released today, over 500 artists, writers and academics from around the world condemned the Islamic Republic's violent crackdown on protesters in the strongest terms.

For nearly three months, the Iranian people have been under brutal attacks by the government military and security forces for their protests against systemic violations of human rights by the Islamic state in Iran. Known as "Woman, Life, Liberty," the protest movement is largely led by the younger generation and women. The statement acknowledges the Iranian people's fight for their "desire to renew the nation's social contract."

The statement has been signed by renowned artists, writers, curators, and academics from across disciplines and various countries. Cindy Sherman, Kara Walker, Hélène Cixous, Judith Butler, Barbara Kruger, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, Isaac Julien, Boris Groys, Yanis Varoufakis, Orhan Pamuk, Hans Haacke, Janaane al-Ani, Aohni, Willem Dafoe, Adam Weinberg, Jerry Saltz, Jihan El-Tahri, Roselee Goldberg, Marina Abramović, Kiki Smith, Amy Sillman, Tanvir Hassan are among the signatories who expressed solidarity with their Iranian colleagues. The statement was released on 6 December 2022, but it is still collecting signatures from all cultural practitioners.

The signatories have aired their grave concern not only for "colleagues and students in the arts and cultural spheres who have stated their demands in several actions and open letters ... but for citizens from all



↪ Jinoos Taghizadeh, 2015, *Letters I Never Wrote*; Homa Darabi. From the series *Letters I Never Wrote*, 2016-present. Digital print on the back of IRI official postal stamp. 6.75 x 4.65 cm.

↪ Azad Art Gallery in Tehran repurposed its gallery space into artist studios during the Woman Life Freedom movement.



over the country who face an increasingly brutal, violent, and deadly state crackdown."

The signatories pledge to use their intellectual and cultural leverage to support Iranian artists, writers, and academics who resist the abuses of human rights in Iran. They have also vowed to stand against "apologists who misappropriate anti-imperialist discourses in the west or other parts of the world to deflect attention away from the well-documented state violence committed against the people."

The country-wide protests were ignited by the killing of a 22-year-old woman, Jina Mahsa Amini on 16 September 2022 at the hands of the Islamic state police enforcing the regime's mandatory "hejab." The protests quickly turned into the "Woman, Life, Liberty" movement, demanding the end of the theocratic rule by an unelected clerical system in Iran. The Iranian people's peaceful protests and acts of civil disobedience against human rights abuses have been faced with violence, killing, torture and physical abuse, arbitrary detentions in undisclosed locations, abductions, disappearances, and threats of mass execution.

In the end, the signatories pledge to "raise awareness concerning the crimes against humanity committed by the Islamic regime in Iran."



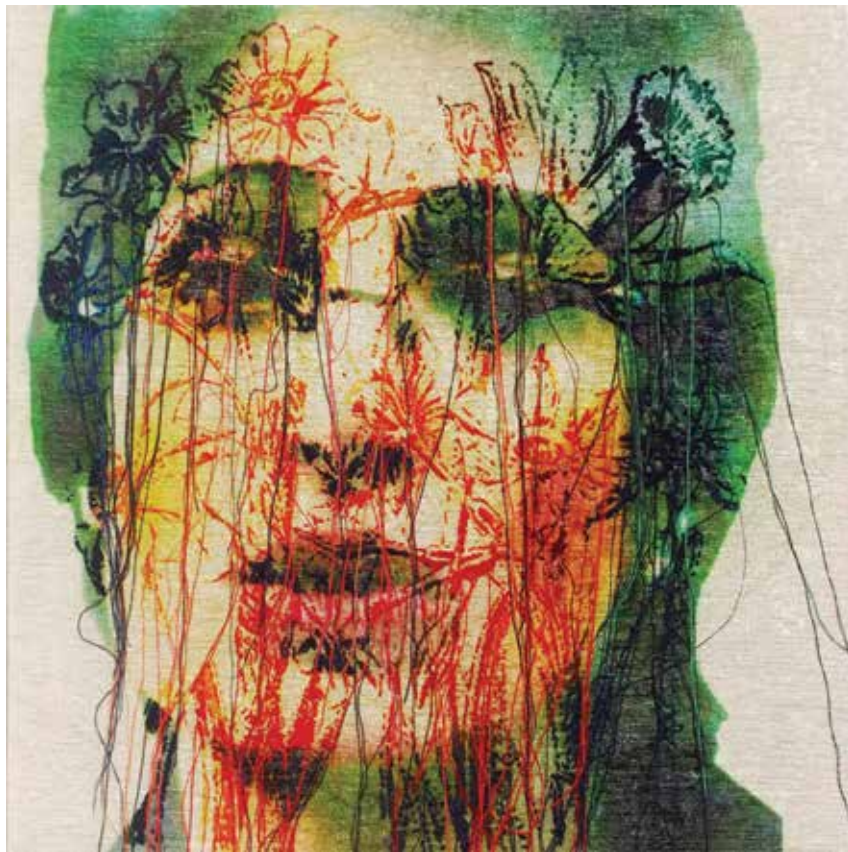
solidarityiran.wordpress.com



Barbad Golshiri, 2022, *Ali Roozbahani's Tomb*. Iron, human hair Behesht-Zahra Cemetery, Tehran

Ali Roozbahani was a revolutionary from the "Woman, Life, Freedom" uprising. He was shot on his birthday, October 26th, in Bani-Hashem neighbourhood in Tehran from close range. He was hospitalised under tight security measures. He passed away on November 4th, 2022. On his family's request, Barbad Golshiri has designed a tombstone for him, although it is not possible to build and install it under current security conditions. For this reason, a portable metal sculpture is built that Ali's family can take to his tomb, and then bring back to protect it from vandalism and destruction by the security forces.

The sculpture is composed of the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" in Farsi, Kurdish, Azeri Turkic, Balochi and Arabic, combined with the name of Ali Roozbahani below. Mourners cut their hair as sign of protest and grief, and hang it on the sculpture. A QR code is pasted on the current tombstone that takes the visitors to the past and the future of Roozbahani's tomb.



^ Rozita Sharafjahan, 2017, *Portrait of Nasrin*. Digital Print and Embroidery on Fabric, 35 x 35 cm



Abandoning political prisoners, and being silent about what they endure, would only benefit the repressive regime. That's why the artistic community of Iran, as part of Iran's civil society, follows the situation of the prisoners and seeks justice for the victims of the progressive revolution "Woman, Life, Freedom," including their imprisoned and murdered peers. The confirmed number of artists who have been killed, jailed, or are out on bail, since the beginning of this revolutionary movement has reached 159 people. However, the actual number is much higher as many families and friends were forced to keep silent and not seek justice due to the pressure and threats from the brutal security forces.

فراخوان جامعه‌ی هنری ایران برای پشتیبانی از
دانشجوها و هنرمندهای بازداشت‌شده و زیر فشار

Call by the Artistic Community of Iran to Support
Imprisoned and Persecuted Students and Artists

بانگه‌وازی کومه‌لگه‌ی هونه‌ریی ئیران بۆ پشتیبوانیکردن له
خویندکاران و هونه‌رمه‌ندانى ده‌ستگیرکراو یان له‌ژیر فشاردا

Appel de la communauté artistique iranienne à
soutenir les étudiants et les artistes détenus et
opprimés.

ایران‌ین صنعتچی توپلومونون توتوقلو و باسقی آلتیندا اولان
اؤیرنجی و صنعتچی‌لره دستک چاغریشی

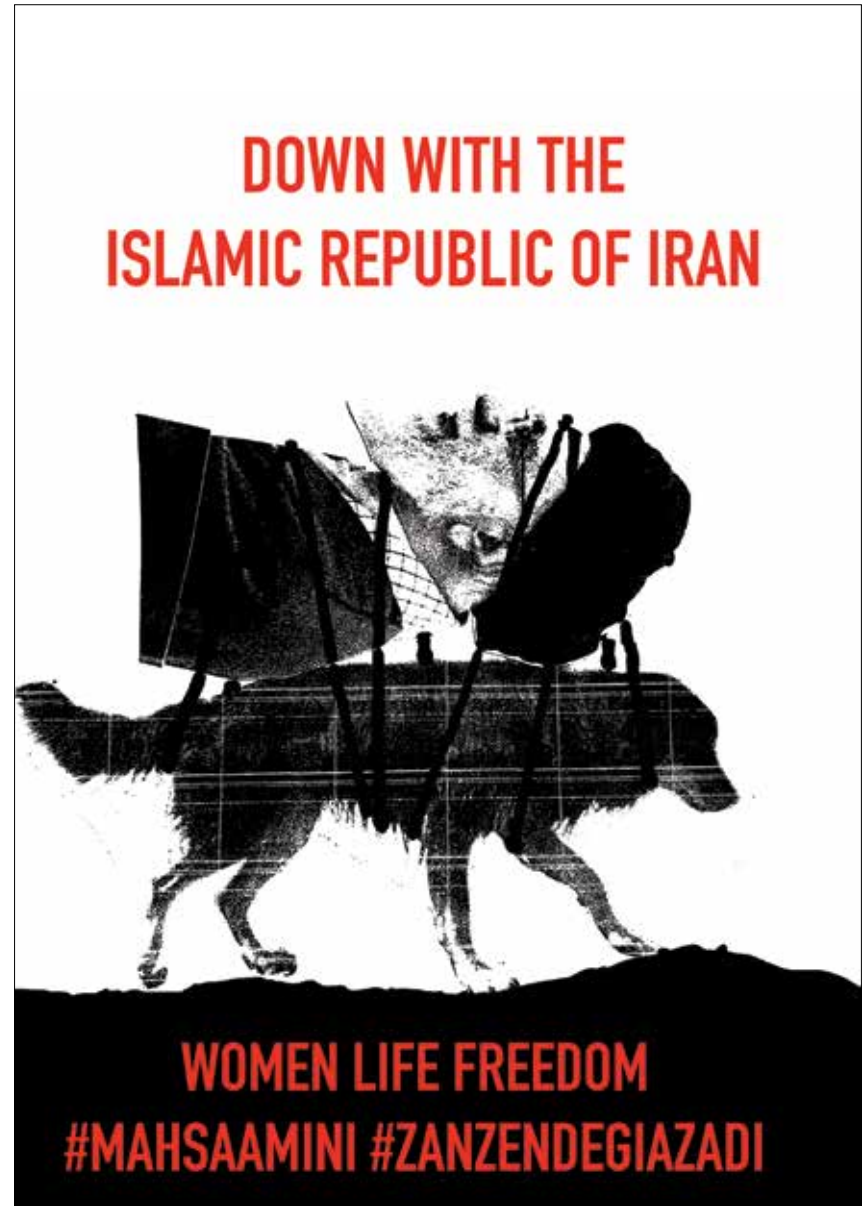
Aufruf der iranischen Kunst und Kulturschaffende zur
Unterstützung der festgenommenen und unter Druck
stehenden Studierenden und Künstler*innen.

دعوة من المجتمع الفني الإيراني لدعم الطلاب والفنانين
المعتقلين أو الذين يتعرضون للضغط

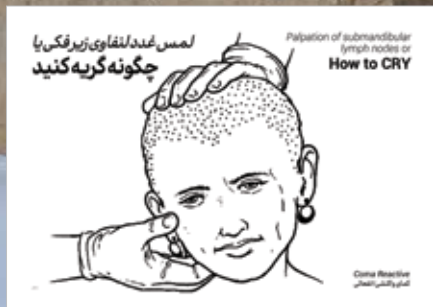
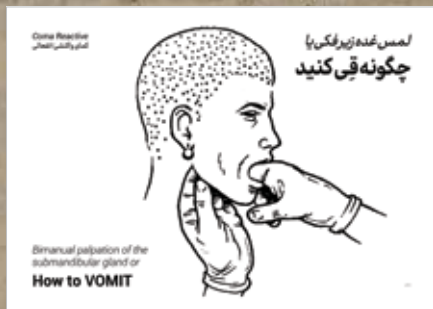
إزم و هنری مۇچیان ئے جار پە لگتال و بندیگین
دانشجویان و هنرمندان



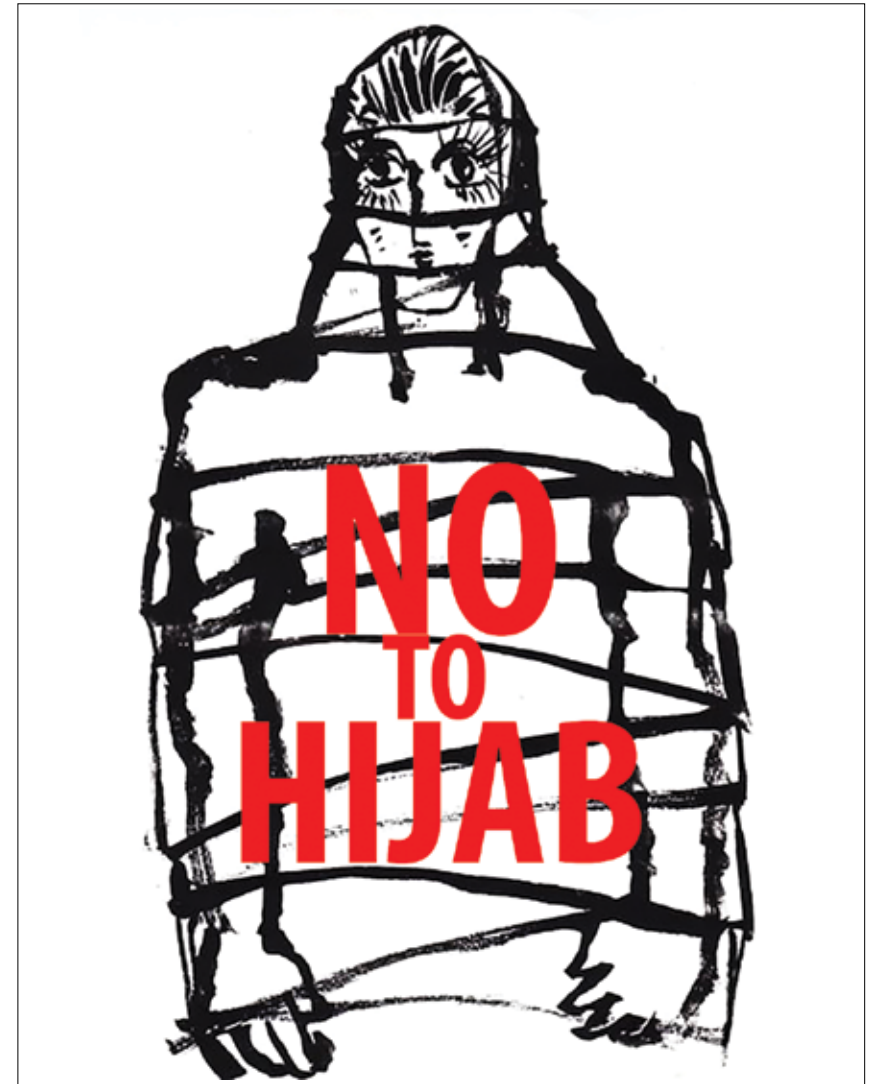
Jinoos Taghizadeh, 2022-present. *Revolution Diary*. Pen on paper. 8 x 11 inches
 Taghizadeh has been documenting semi-fictional narratives on the daily protests, uprisings and events of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement since September 2022.



⤴ Nicky Nodjoumi, 2022, *Down with the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Original drawing 2022-2023.



◁ Anonymous, *Coma Reactive*
This Series has started since October 2022, using the paste-up technique for installation in urban public spaces.



◁ Nicky Nodjoui, 2023, *No to Hejab*. Original drawing 2005.



^ Nazanin Noroozi, 2022, From the series *This Bitter Earth, Tehran 200108 #1*. Pigmented linen pulp on hand-made cotton base sheet, 30 x 40 inches.



< *Meta-Text: Woman, Life, Freedom, 2023*, Artist book, edited by Nazanin Noroozi for Kaarnamaa; A Journal of Art History and Criticism. In collaboration with Hosein Eyalati, Eli Reza Sahaf Zadeh, Milad Rostami, Raha Khademi, and Mahsa Biglow.



Photo by Meraj Bayat. The Fall of Kabul, Day 4, August 19, 2021. Independence Day. "It's our Independence Day. The Talib, with his finger resting on the trigger follows me. To speak of Afghanistan's tricolored flag, of independence, freedom, and national identity, is now a heavy crime."



Photo by Khaled Nora. The Fall of Kabul, Day 2. August 17, 2021 Facing a Taliban soldier. "Weapon in hand, he tears the posters of women from the walls of the city, gathers them from hair salons so that his beliefs are not jeopardized. He is preventing the corruption and commission of sins. And I speak to him of modern values, the mindset that prevailed, the texts and contexts of the society that existed only a week before."

The Fall of Kabul – the Return of Exile.

– Crystal Bayat.

"I am a woman, born of enlightenment and thought, raised in a society that has been in the grips of war for decades. I grew up in war, spent my childhood in war. In Afghanistan's darkest years, with pen and paper, I learned the movement of my mother tongue's alphabet, in the famine of love, in degenerate days, we wrote the blessed name of "freedom" on the blackboard. In the deadly years when blood flowed on the streets of Kabul, I went to my college classes, and fantasized about a future without terror. I did not know that once more, the stars of fortune in the sky of fate would be extinguished. A flood of darkness would arrive to drown the sun of our tomorrow. And that this abomination, wedded to ignorance and plunder, would rule our still half-nascent destiny. Like the fall of my grandmother's portrait, through the cracks in the wall, everything falls apart. Seven heavens glistening with hope, the land of the sun, now finds itself across unknown borders, in exile."



Nazanin Noroozi, 2022, From the series *This Bitter Earth, Kabul 210816 #1*. Pigmented linen pulp on handmade cotton base sheet, 22 x 30 inches.

Poppy flower*

Nesar Mohammadi

I open up my luggage
as if swamplands of solitude
at the foothills of a mountain

the cacophony
of illegal seafarers
fills the room
and the prostitute
whose lover they've killed
in the hubbub of the refugee
boat,
weeps all over my luggage

luggage
that hearkens
to plagues
seclusion
execution...

I open up the suitcase
I open up the labyrinth of these
walls
malignant hands

reach out to me from the depths
a graveyard
that floods the ceiling
like a fountain of death
I ask:
how come I never loved any city?
how come getting intimate with
cities
only drove me to reconcile with
death.
how come death
followed me all the way here?

how were my hands
suplexed to the ground so?
and which interrogator
dimmed the lights
more so than before?
which cold hand
landed
on the very curves
of my distress?

a book
an abyss
an ideal

a greeting from malevolent
hands

with four words
we crossed
gunpowders' borders
berried with blood
and my luggage:
a trainful of lepers
arrived here,
lashed by the seasons

this nowhere
is no different than anywhere

they screamed
"the crescent moon loomed
yet none of our wheat fields
had yielded a single loaf of
bread.
just like freedom on the Aegean
and the waves that raged
from the hardened, bare bodies
of the migrants"

I open up my luggage
with torment
eye sockets

speech
and accidents
that putridly appeared
across the sky of my luggage

and the accident
that chases only the empty-hand-
ed
and the accident that came in the
month of Isfand

and I saw with my own eyes
I am a poppy flower
a poppy flower
somewhere in the corner of a
meadow
weeping
slowly
dying
slowly

* in Persian poetics and political history, the
Poppy flower represents resistance

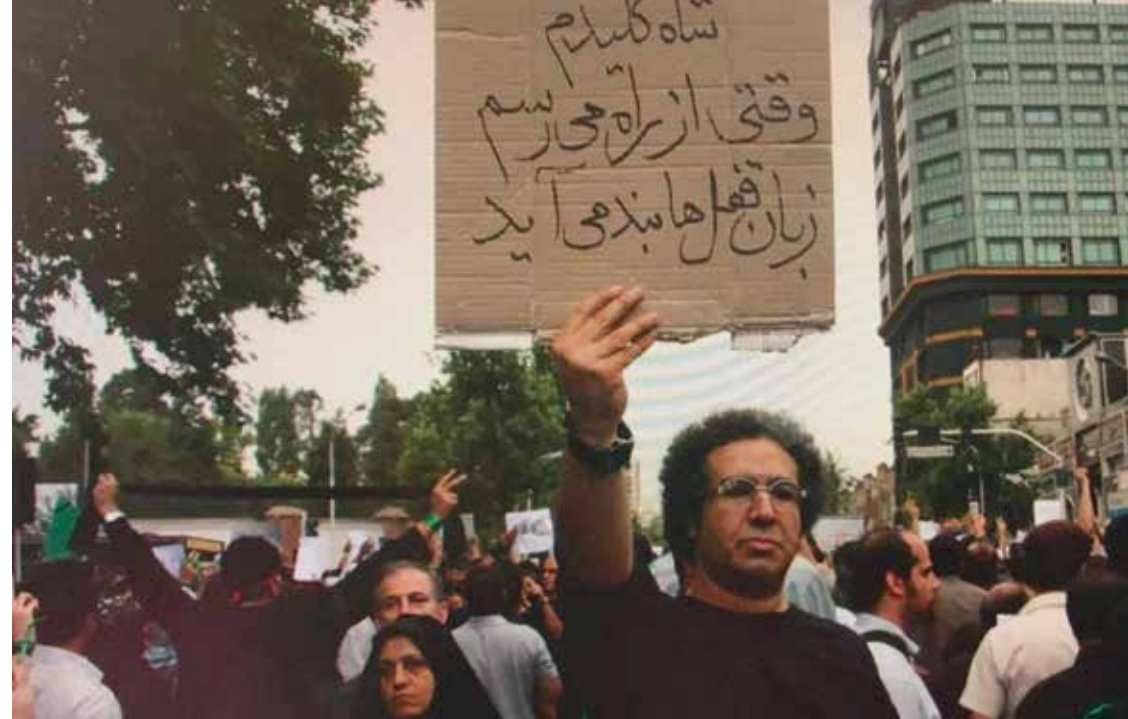
SECURITY BREACH

Nesar Mohammadi

Friday afternoons
SECURITY BREACH
Saturday mornings
SECURITY BREACH
kisses
cigarettes
two chairs
curtains
windows
bridges
sidewalks
seeing
laughing
greetings
and even goodbyes
SECURITY BREACH
transmission towers
colors
and even
choosing silence
SECURITY BREACH
the book and glasses
newspapers
water wells

house plaques
utility bills
the graveyard and maternity
wards
words
SECURITY BREACH
here living in life
living in death
dying in life
SECURITY BREACH
life and death
SECURITY BREACH within
SECURITY BREACH

February2020



Thirsty River

By Baktash Abtin
2021 PEN/Barbey
Freedom to Write Honoree

The thought of you is like a cooling river
in a thirsty summer.
In you, I bathe and
Swim to endlessness
It is raining and the ancient memories
cool off the moments
I draw another tally mark on the injured wall of my
prison cell
Summer is sweating nonstop and
My parched lips long for you

Translated by Parisa Saranj

^ 2009. Baktash Abtin
attending a protest for the
Green Movement in Iran.

The Artists at Risk Connection (ARC), a project of PEN America, safeguards the right to artistic freedom of expression and works to build a world where artists and cultural professionals everywhere can live and work without fear. ARC primarily achieves this by:

- Acting as a liaison between artists and direct service providers in the art and human rights fields, helping artists to secure critical resources, including emergency funding, legal assistance, and residency programs.
- Building protective networks in core regions around the world (Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America, and the Middle East) to fortify protection and advocacy efforts for artists at the grassroots level.
- Disseminating emergency and resilience grants to at-risk artists in need of financial assistance, including a major grantmaking initiative for Ukrainian and Eurasian visual artists.
- Raising awareness around artistic freedom issues at the national, regional, international, and multilateral levels and advocating for increased protection and resources for at-risk artists.

Learn more: artistsatriskconnection.org



PEN America's latest Freedom to Write Index, released on April 27, found that Iran's government jailed almost three times the number of writers in 2022 from the previous year, propelling it into second place behind China as the most repressive country for writers worldwide. The crackdown on anti-government protests after the death in custody of 22-year-old Mahsa (Jina) Amini in September was accompanied by the pre-emptive targeting of writers and artists, increasing those jailed to 57, from 22 the previous year. One-third of those behind bars are now women, whose numbers rose to 16 of 42 worldwide, or more than one-third of the global total. The development reflects the fact that women have been at the forefront of the 2022 anti-government protest movement, either actively and/or by writing in support of it.

Learn more about the writers jailed in Iran and take action to support them at: <https://pen.org/issue/writers-at-risk/>



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