

Collective Traumas and Future Fantasies: The Power of (Visual) Art for Social and Political Transition in Iran

International Hybrid Workshop

**Conception and organization:
Raika Khorshidian, Birgit Mersmann**

Place:

**Institute of Art History, University of Bonn
Großer Übungsraum 1.041 (Schloss)
Regina-Pacis-Weg 1, 53113 Bonn**

Date: 16 -17 November 2023

Workshop Booklet

Panel 1

Chair: Birgit Mersmann

Iranian Public Art: Reclaiming the “Public” From Oppressed to Insurgent

Narcisse M. Sohrabi¹

Public art can have a role as an action in the public arena and can exert a form of creative intervention in the public space. Protest art, to express a point of view, is sometimes interpretable with art, and sometimes acts sharp and direct. Pointing out the shortcomings and distortions and questioning are two complementary approaches in various forms of protest art. Questioning can be a step to solving a problem and diagnosing the situation in which the society is located. Protest art has been flowing in various forms in the public space of Iranian cities, especially in Tehran, which has become more colorful or less colorful in periods according to socio-political and economic issues.

In the past year, After the death of *Mahsa Amini* and the formation of the movement *Women, Life, Freedom* protest art in Iran began a new chapter. This movement is widely seen inside and outside of Iran. Iran’s protest art has grown and expanded into new areas with the growth of the movement, and even the definition of art itself has also changed due to emerging creative styles and new forms of expression in Iran. Famous or unknown artists as activists have reflected the bitter events and their consequences in different ways. In the meantime, virtual space and social networks act as a supplement to protest art in the street.

This study aims to examine several issues in the field of Iranian protest art and the relationship between public and virtual space and to answer the following questions: How does the urban art of Iran empower marginalized voices and subjects in the city? What is the origin of this form of expression? How do women artistic activists express their message in the public space?

Narciss M.Sohrabi received a Ph.D. degree at Management of space and society from the Paris Nanterre University. She is a visiting research fellow, in LADYSS. Her PhD dissertation was structured around public space theory, and focused on documenting the ways in which geopolitics affects revolution changing and the urbanization processes of Tehran and more generally cities of the global south in the 20th century. She has published papers the different journals and conferences. Narciss’s works focuses on abstraction of public space, socio-political movement, Public art and urban review, and analysis of art capacity for place making urban justice and cultural impacts. Her last research is on the role of the public art in the socio-political movement in the public space and social networks in Iran.

¹ Université Paris Ouest - Nanterre - La Défense-Laboratoire LADYSS-UMR7533

A Community of Disobedient Bodies. Political Dimensions of Picturing Dance in Contemporary Iran

Sebastian Hammerschmidt

Thinking about the current political situation in Iran and its iconography, it is striking that – apart from a few iconic images – a whole series of recurring motifs come to mind: Women with loose hair in a militant pose, people spray-painting revolutionary slogans on houses, families mourning at the graves of their murdered loved ones. In the face of a constantly changing and ever more dramatically escalating political-economic situation, the moment of repetition is difficult to bear and yet important to emphasise: the images persist, perhaps even insist. In their connection with individual biographies and fates, most often so horrifying that it is hard to even talk about, these images remind us to do just that, remind us of what must not be forgotten.

Each of these motifs would justify a more detailed treatment, however, in my presentation I would like to focus on just one subject: those short snippets that mostly show young people, barely of age, in a private setting, in the moment of dancing. Obviously, these are very different videos: Jina Mahsa Amini, shown dancing in the community of her family, Sarina Esmailzadeh, who recorded her own life – impressively reflecting – on a vlog, Abolfazl Amiratayi, who, almost still a child, is lost in thought, swaying to the music with closed eyes.

In their documentary character various aspects can be accentuated: In the moment of recording, the aspect of transgression, which may have been the reason for the videos in the first place; in the moment of reception, the aspect of context shift, making the videos so ambivalent because showing people in frisky liveliness who were brutally murdered; in the moment of circulation, however, also the aspect of disobedience and emancipation, which shows precisely what the regime is actually trying to suppress.

Having said this, in my presentation I am not so much concerned with questions of signification, but with the body itself as a site of resistance and solidarity, as a starting point for forming new communities. This is to be grounded on two strands of theory: on the concept of vulnerability as prominently developed by Judith Butler, from which resistance may be mobilised, and on questioning the connection between the secular and the body as posed above all by Talal Asad and Charles Hirschkind. Last but not least, dance is to be thought as a practice that hiddenly connects various historical moments of protest and which beyond that has to be understood in its relevance as a cross-societal phenomenon reaching back to pre-revolutionary Iran.

Sebastian Hammerschmidt is an art historian, writer and PhD candidate based in Cologne. His PhD thesis explores “Gottlieb Friedrich Reber (1880 – 1959): Collecting as a Form of Art History”. His research interests include “world art history” around 1900 and contemporary forms of transcultural art history and postcolonial theory, as well as modernism as an artistic and political project in Europe and the MENA region. He is working closely with contemporary artists and has written texts for numerous projects, especially in the field of painting and sculpture. In 2021 he was co-organizer of the online-conference “trans_positionen” that attempted to critically interrogate the concept of global art history. In 2023 he is co-organizer of the conference “(De)Politicising Art Studies. Marxist Traditions since 1968” at Technical University Berlin. For 2024 he was granted the Research Fellowship DFK Paris | INHA (Deutsches Forum für Kunstgeschichte Paris | Institut national d’histoire de l’art).

Interweaving Landscapes, Interfacing Voices: On Transperipheral Performance as Diasporic Activism

Julia Stenzel

The proposed paper focuses on spatial imagination as a tool of diasporic activism: How can artistic strategies of blending landscapes increase the perceptibility of marginalization, oppression, and subalternization and, by this, model transperipheral spaces of appearance? How can they make societal and political circumstances presented by European mainstream media as distant and abstract experienceable as matters of concern and urgency? Departing from a recent audio walk by the Iranian activist, performance artist, and theatre scholar Azadeh Ganjeh, I will explore the narrative evocation of dystopian realities.

In the last couple of months, I have been working on a theoretical approach toward figurations that bear the potential of being repeated, transformed, and reenacted in practices of protest. In my paper, I will focus on the spatiality of these figurations: Applying the agora model as a metoecic space of appearance, I aim to analyze the transperipheral aspect of activist practices. Alluding to the non-citizen foreigners of the Athenian *polis*, the *metoecs*, I describe the dense figurations of protest as metoecic constellations.

In 2021, 2022, and 2023 editions of the international theatre festival Ruhrtriennale, in a project entitled WEGE – WAYS (Aljoscha Begrich), participants were invited to explore the Ruhr Area beyond the actual venues of the festival. It made experienceable the spaces between the world heritage sites of *Zeche Zollverein* and *Jahrhunderthalle*: the suburbs, the landscapes, and the *begegnungskanten* of the urban and the rural. In 2022, artists from Mexico, Argentina, and Iran presented projects on routes in the Ruhr area, interweaving them with individual stories and refracting sensations from other landscapes.

Azadeh Ganjeh's explorative journey guides the participant through the outskirts of Mülheim/Ruhr, overwriting it with the history and presence of Haft Tepe. Haft Tepe is an archeological site in southwestern Iran buried under decennials of agro-industrial invasion. Azadeh's walking performance undertakes a performative counter-mapping of a multi-layered environment in Iran in the Ruhr area, asking how the co-existence and co-evolution of human civilization and the ecosystem affect each other.

Moreover, it augments the materiality of the landscape with intangible and imperceptible stories and histories, thus, imagining transperipheral entanglements of a post-industrial, post-urban area in Germany and landscapes of exploitation and inequality in Iranian agro-industries. Azadeh's project evokes multiple perspectives on the history and presence of Haft Tepe, especially against the backdrop of the recent 'Gina Revolution' in Iran: The last days of Azadeh's project coincided with the forceful death of Gina Mahsa Amini in Tehran. Besides tackling the pressing questions of the destruction of natural resources, climate crisis, and industrialized collapse of natural and cultural world heritage, the neglect of basic human needs and rights by a

state-approved agro-industry parallel in a disturbing way with the suppression of the woman-life-freedom movement during the last year.

Since 2012, **Julia Stenzel** has been a junior professor of Theatre Studies at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz. In 2019, she was a visiting professor of religion and society at the Forum Internationale Wissenschaft of RWU Bonn, and from October 2021 to September 2022 of Theatre Studies at LMU Munich. She graduated in dramaturgy, comparative literature, and German studies at LMU Munich, receiving her Dr. phil. in 2007 and Venia Legendi in 2017. Her current research interests are theatre, religion, and society from a global perspective; theatre and democracy theory; pre-modern theatricality and its pluralization in (late) modern societies; Environmental Theatre; Iranian Contemporary Theatre.

Recent publications:

Politics of the Oberammergau Passion Play: Tradition as Trademark.

Edited by Jan Mohr, Julia Stenzel. London: Routledge, 2023. DOI: 10.4324/9781003106319

Agora abbauen: Theater als metökische Konstellation, by Julia Stenzel

Forum Modernes Theater 2023 (1) 34, pp 127-141; DOI: 10.24053/FMTh-2023-0011

The Ways of Things: Mobilizing Charismatic Objects in Oberammergau and Its Passion Play, by Jan Mohr and Julia Stenzel

Religions 2022, 13(1), 71; <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13010071>

The empowerment of exile art-activism in times of socio-political movements in Iran

Cathrine Bublatzky

Living and working in Germany since the early 1990s, artist and human right activist Parastou Forouhar is a powerful voice of resistance in the Iranian exile and diaspora.

With her art that includes different media from calligraphy, photography, to digital drawing and site-specific installations, Parastou Forouhar addresses themes such as human rights violation, political repression and religion, gender, identity, and migration.

After the political motivated murder of her parents and well-known opposition politicians, Dariush and Parwaneh Forouhar, in 1998, Parastou Forouhar's practice became autobiographical and activistic in many ways. A major part of her resistance is the fight for justice and the demand for investigations into the political murders in Iran, also known as Chain Murders and whose victims include her parents and many others. In this context, she organises, among other things, the annual day of remembrance at her parents' home in Tehran, but also contributes to maintaining visibility and solidarity with the people in Iran through her tireless efforts and presence in the German, Iranian and international public and social media.

Based on data from a long-term ethnographic collaboration with the artist, I provide insights into Parastou Forouhar's various forms of representation and depiction to maintain and increase the visibility of the ongoing socio-political hardship and oppression in Iran and to express her ongoing solidarity with the people of Iran who stand up for their human rights.

With some examples from Forouhar's art, I will show that art or art-activism does not simply preserve, maintain, or contribute to a certain state of "embodied" and "shared" knowledge e. g. of human rights violation. Nor does art stand on its own and by its display in museum exhibitions. Rather, I want to show that art activism should be understood as part of ongoing cultural practices of resistance embedded in a wider variety of cross-cultural practices of communication, mediation, and representation, shaped by the longstanding engagement with ongoing socio-political movements and revolutions in Iran by actors in the country itself and by individuals and communities in the diaspora and exile.

Cathrine Bublatzky is photographer, anthropologist of Visual and Media Anthropology, and historian of South Asia. As senior lecturer she teaches and researches at Tübingen University on visual and (digital) media cultures, migration and exile, and ethnographic methods.

Cathrine was speaker of the interdisciplinary Network “Entangled Histories of Art and Migration: Forms, Visibilities, Agents” (2018–2022, funded by DFG) and received a grant for her PostDoc project on Iranian photographers by the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung (2017-2023). She recently published the article “Mobile Belonging in Digital Exile: Methodological Reflection on Doing Ethnography on (Social) Media Practices” (2022) and co-edited a Special Issue “(Un)sighted Archives of Migration: Spaces of Encounter and Resistance” (2021). She is currently co-editing the book “Entangled Histories of Art and Migration: Theories, Sites, and Research Practices” (forthcoming 2024 with Intellect), and is also a Research-Fellow at the Käthe-Hamburger-Research-Centre “The Global Dis:connect” (LMU Munich, 2023–24).

Panel 2

Chair: Julia Stenzel

The Burning Man Festival in Iran: Mohammad Hassan Forouzanfar and a New Generation of Radical Imagineers

Raika Khorshidian

Within the borders of a country where theocratic kleptocracy, international isolation, and restricted freedom of expression and thought have constricted turning plans into reality, young architect Mohammad Hassan Forouzanfar (1993-) visualizes his dreams in the overlap between architecture, digital art, heritage management, and history. Most of his dreams that are gathered under the title of "Retrofuturism" are not only unfeasible in their time and geography, but also forbidden. According to his website, he endeavors to break the architectural limitations in his collages and illustrations. The young architect believes that Iranian architecture "needs to be freed from the shackles of traditional views and be prepared for future needs, regardless of any restrictions".

After re-functionalizing religious sites (e.g., hanging Rothko paintings in the Sheiklotfollah Museum (mosque) (2022) and arraying hospital beds around the Kaaba (Muslim Qibla) (2020)), his ongoing collection *Imagine #burningmanfestival in Iran!* juxtaposes men and women in avant-garde outfits while celebrating joy, radical self-expression, and self-reliance in historical sites including Naqshe-Rostam, Persepolis, Sarvestan Palace, Alexander's Prison (Ziaiye School), Taq Kasra, and the Buddhas of Bamiyan. Even though international festivals are not something new in the history of these sites (e.g., from Nowruz festival (in the Achaemenid period) to the Shiraz art festival (1967-1977) at Persepolis), these photomontages are shocking in the era of radical Islamists in the Middle East.

Forouzanfar, born and educated in Qom, renowned as the most religious city in Iran, founded his online studio, Archi-Graph, in 2017. Here, transdisciplinary emerging architects, designers, and artists from different provinces of Iran exercise foresight to challenge clichés in Iran's architecture and activate other liberating possibilities, at least in virtual space. I had an interview with him to learn about his intention in defamiliarization/ostranenie of historical sites and sacred architecture. Besides, I was curious to know what are his aims in founding such an educational studio and why do young aspiring designers apply for these courses. My rudimentary question was: how has he been able to develop his project in Iran which fundamentally criticizes the Iranian-Islamic doctrine?

During the revolutionary moments of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, the unprecedented genre of future fantasies containing collective dreams, hopes, and visions, thanks to digital visualization technologies, overcame the dominant sense of nostalgia in Iranian art. Most of these imaginary futures were produced by diasporic Iranians. They were about the dream of returning to a free homeland, reclaiming the public spaces in Iran, and defamiliarizing conventional images about contemporary Iran to trigger critical thinking. This burgeoning trend invites viewers to imagine radical futures, motivates present action, enables unexplored forms of solidarity, and perhaps creates possibilities of emancipation. For my first phase of study, I selected Forouzanfar and Archi-Graph's speculative art to trace the role of young radical

imagineers inside Iran in world-building (as a language that critically examines Iran's present) and social transition. I was curious whether Forouzanfar and his team are seeking to escape into a creative placeless alternative; or whether they are developing an Irano-futurist movement.

Raika Khorshidian (Georg Forster Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Bonn) is an art scholar, critic and independent curator. Her postdoctoral research project "From National to Transnational Art: Displacement, Identity and Belonging in Iranian Contemporary Art" explores the transformation of Iranian artists' identities by analysing their *œuvres* and (auto)biographies, concentrating on four main concepts: place, estrangement, displacement and multiple belonging. She is the main organizer of the international workshop *Collective Traumas and Future Fantasies: The Power of (Visual) Art for Social and Political Transition in Iran* at the University of Bonn and curator of the two exhibitions "Kannst du mich hören? (Can you hear me?)" (Galerie Gublia, Essen) and "Hear / There" (Brotfabrik, Bonn). These exhibitions are part of a larger curatorial project that aims to open a space to question media, mediation and the metamorphosis of detached cultural concepts by focusing on the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement. From 2018 to 2021, Khorshidian worked as a critic, researcher, curator and artist manager exploring experiences of estrangement and belonging surrounding Iranian identity at Tehran-based art galleries.

Poetics of Platforms: Popular Performative Poetry on Social Media in Iran

Yasamin Rezaei

My dissertation focuses on the emerging wave of popular Persian poetry on social media, particularly on Twitter and Instagram, commonly referred to as "instapoetry." This phenomenon has garnered attention from scholars in media studies, literary studies, and communication studies. However, my research aims to explore the context of instapoetry within Iran, acknowledging Instagram's unique role as the only uncensored social media platform in the country and considering its diasporic elements. I also investigate how instapoetry has become a powerful tool for challenging the narratives of the Islamic Republic and its propaganda.

The Women Life Freedom Movement has significantly influenced the direction of my work, leading me to study ongoing case studies related to this movement on social media. Additionally, I analyze instapoetry works from a performance studies perspective, examining their digital aspects.

One of my dissertation chapters delves into the @barkhi_az_honarmandan activist protest visual art, exploring the presence of nostalgic elements in its dissident works. Another chapter focuses on the collective work of instapoetry in Baraye, which emerged during the Mahsa Amini revolution and involved contributions from various individuals on Twitter in its early weeks. This work eventually transformed into lyrics for a song composed by Shervin Hajipour, becoming a defining anthem of the revolution and earning him a Grammy for social change.

Through my research, I aim to shed light on the significance of instapoetry in the Persian context, its potential as a means of resistance and subversion, and its role in shaping public discourse and social movements, particularly during times of political upheaval. To achieve this, I utilize a research methodology involving close reading of works on Instagram and the Twitter account "Baraye." For gathering data from the latter, I employ digital humanities methods, utilizing Twitter (now known as X) scraping to create a comprehensive dataset.

The theoretical framework of the study draws from feminist studies, performance studies, and a cultural studies approach. Through these lenses, I aim to highlight how art and poetic expressions, deeply rooted in Iranian culture, have found a new platform in the digital realm, serving as a means of resistance and empowerment for Iranians. This research demonstrates how art and poetry on digital platforms amplify the voices of Iranians, enabling them to express their demands at national and international levels and facilitating connections between individuals inside Iran and members of the diaspora.

An essential aspect of this research involves exploring Baraye poetry, which exemplifies how individuals practice dreaming of a free Iran through poetic expressions. This aspect of the study offers insights into the aspirations and collective desires of the Iranian people as they envision a better future for their nation.

By combining close reading and digital humanities methodologies with theoretical frameworks of feminist studies, performance studies, and cultural studies, this dissertation provides a

comprehensive understanding of the role of art and poetic expressions in shaping public discourse, resisting oppression, and fostering connections within the Iranian community, both within the country and across the diaspora.

Yasamin Rezai (she/they/او) is a Ph.D. candidate in *Cultural, Literary, and Linguistic Studies* with experience teaching French, Persian, and Italian on campus. She employs digital humanities tools and data-driven approaches to study social media platforms, and her work is theoretically situated at the intersection of critical data feminist studies, new media, and performance studies. Her dissertation analyzes the genre of instapoetry on social media and digital platforms as an emerging literary and cultural wave, exploring its poeticness, performativity, and subversiveness in the Iranian social media ecosystem and diaspora.

She also works on the #MeToo movement, and part of her collaborative research on the #metoo movement has been published as a book chapter in the collection "MeToo Movement in Iran" by Bloomsbury Publishing in the series Sex, Family and Culture in the Middle East.

She is the co-founder of Instasociety.org, an open-access research resource investigating how social media influences popular culture.

Her work has appeared in various academic journals such as *European Journal of English Studies*, *Digital Humanities Quarterly*, and *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. She co-organized panels such as Data Performance and has presented at conferences hosted by organizations such as *Cultural Studies Association*, *International Federation of Theatre Research*, and *Modern Languages Association*.

Yasamin has been the recipient of various fellowships and grants, such as Ugrow, Digital Humanities at UM, and the Institute for Data Science and Computing (IDSC) grant. She is also a HASTAC scholar from 2021- 2023.

Moreover, Yasamin co-founded and chaired the Iranian Association at the University of Miami to advocate for Iranian students and the Iranian American diaspora on campus.

To learn more about Yasamin or to contact her, visit yasaminrezai.com.

Cannot Unsee

Ramin Etemadi Bozorg & Esha Sadr

Introduction: The Women, Life, Freedom movement in Iran has been marked by tremendous struggles, bravery, and resilience. As two artists living in the diaspora based in Washington DC, committed to utilizing performance art as a platform for social change, we aim to explore how our three impactful performance art pieces have contributed to empowering society and voicing the collective pain of the Iranian people following the untimely death of Mahsa Amini.

Over the past year, we (Ramin Etemadi and Esha Sadr) have performed three emotionally charged and thought-provoking performance art pieces in Washinton, DC, and New York.

a. Long-term performance art and installation *Paradox of Choice* by Esha Sadr:

Choice is fundamental to every human's life. Still, Humans are questioned, ridiculed, tortured, and even killed for what to wear and not to wear. In my home country, Iran, people are fighting for "Woman, Life, Freedom.

Unsilenced voices: This project delves into the suppressed voices of people in Iran and brings to light the challenges they face in pursuing freedom and equality.

This exhibition happened in memory of Mahsa Amini and all youth victims of protests in Iran at the DC Art Center from October to November 2022.

b. Performance art, *Blood Will Never Washed Out* by Esha Sadr and Ramin Etemadi Bozorg:

It happened on the 5th day of the sit-in in front of the U.S. Capital in Washington DC, on November 5th, 2022, 12:00 pm, from the Ulysses S. Grant memoria of The United States Capital through the National Mall to the National Gallery of Art in DC (dedicated to Baktash Abtin).

Blood of resilience: Focusing on the strength of people on the street inside Iran, This performance expresses the compassion and grief experienced after the death of Mahsa Amini, Nika Shakarami, Sarina Esmail Zadeh, etc. It was becoming a symbol of solidarity.

c. Performance art, *The Mourning of Rehearsal* from historical documents series by Ramin Eteamdi Bozorg:

It happened on December 14th, on day 88 of nationwide protests in Iran, at 10 am when the 54-member UN economic and social council (ECOSOC) was voting on whether to oust the Islamic Republic from the UN Commission on status of women at Grand Central Station, New York City (dedicated to Kian Pirfalak).

Esha Sadr-Eshkevari is an Iranian artist and writer. Born in Nooshahr in 1983, Esha spent her childhood in port cities of Iran, attending exceptional talents school 1994-2001. She attended Art and Architecture University and graduated with MA degree, she divides her time between Prague, Vienna and Tehran during her PhD. in Theatre, Film and Media.

Esha has been working in many Intercultural and interdisciplinary art projects. She works in a variety of media including documentary film, theatre, performance art, video art and writing.

Esha has exhibited performances throughout Iran, USA, France, Germany, Morocco, since 2012. She has also begun a video art & text series which she named "Little Confessions of Life" more than 100 less than 1 minute mute videos since 2011. In addition, she has been published numerous art critics in new media and theatre in medias within.

Ramin Etemadi-Bozorg is an Iranian conceptual artist. Born in 1977 Tehran, He produces work in a variety of media predominantly sculpture, including painting, performance art, video art and installation. He has been involved in many new-media projects that have emerged in Iran for the first time.

Through Ramin's work he expresses the compassion which has been partly banned or forgotten due to the characteristics of his society. He constantly documents anything from the social-political events to the most intimate personal unspoken.

Ramin had fourteen solo exhibitions (painting, sculpture, video art), fifteen performance arts, and also attending more than seventy group exhibition, art festivals, Expo and Biennale in Iran, USA, Canada, Germany, Switzerland, Australia, Turkey, Morocco, UAF, Armenia and China.

The Politics of Artistic Production in Iran

Hannah Jacobi

This presentation outlines various modes of political art production in Iran since 1979 and will draw connections between artistic representations in relation to the revolutionary feminist movement, currently underway. While unexpected entanglements between art and politics can be examined in various contexts all over the world, the political climate in which the Iranian artist produces their work has been for decades a perennial presence, regardless of whether or not it is directly addressed.

The Propaganda Dilemma: How do artists mediate state funding and public commissions and discern the boundaries of propaganda art? We will examine artists who have produced what has been considered propagandist art in the years during and after the Iranian Revolution and assess the current classification of their works.

Dealing with Censorship: Here, we will explore how artists grapple with censorship in Iran. We track the evolving boundaries of censorship, shedding light on strategies employed by artists and galleries to navigate this complex and shifting landscape and its impact upon artistic production. The terms that govern collaborations between the independent art scene with official/governmental art institutions continually fluctuate, the effects of which are ultimately evident in the emergent artwork.

Artistic Responses to Global Expectations: The work of Iranian artists continues to be particularly in demand when it clearly conveys political content or engages with the ideas and projections of a Western/global audience, which can still be described as orientalist. This has resulted in a movement among Iranian artists which decidedly eschews the politicization of their work.

The Democratization of Art borne out of a Political Movement: Art that is created in the artist's studio or in an academic setting, exhibited in established galleries and institutions, navigates around and through the multi-layered and nuanced relationship between art and politics. However, art emanating from the revolutionary streets is inextricably political. The feminist liberation movement has democratized artistic production and gained widespread recognition and celebration within the Iranian art community. We will conclude with an examination of the Woman, Life, Freedom-movement which has sparked a discourse about the future role of art in society and politics in Iran.

Hannah Jacobi is an art historian, author and curator specializing in global art. Together with Bernd Fechner, she has founded mohit.art in 2021, a transcultural network and platform for dialog and cooperation between art contexts in West Asia and Europe. In 2017, she published a collection of interviews with Tehran-based artists, theorists and gallery owners entitled *Stimmen aus Teheran. Interviews zur zeitgenössischen Kunst im Iran* (Voices from Tehran. Interviews on Contemporary Art in Iran, Edition Faust). Between 2011 and 2021, she has developed and organized projects at Haus der Kulturen der Welt – HKW in Berlin, connecting theory and art. Her texts about contemporary art in Iran were published in *Canvas*, *Il Sole 24 Ore*, *Herfeh: Honarmand*, *Tagesspiegel*, and *taz*, among others.

Panel 3

Chair: Mirjam Künkler

Mirjam Künkler is Research Professor at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies at the University of London and a Fellow at the Institut d'Études Avancées de Nantes. Her recent books include *Female Religious Authority in Shi'i Islam: Past and Present* (Edinburgh University Press, 2021) and *A Secular Age beyond the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2018). She has published on comparative relations between religion and state in modern Iran, on questions of law and constitutionalism, Islamic authority, religious education, and female religious authority. In 2002 and 2003 she lived in Iran where she was a visiting scholar to the Department of Sociology and Demography of the University of Tehran. She is a founder and principal investigator of the Iran Data Portal and sits on the editorial boards of journals in Iranian studies, Middle Eastern studies, law, and the sociology of religion. Some of her books have been translated into Arabic and Persian.

Embodiments of the Rupture: Art and Women in Iran

Sussan Babaie

The women's protest movement that burst asunder, since the death of Mahsa Jina Amini on 16 September 2022, the mandatory wearing of the Islamic hijab in Iran is the embodiment of demands for the restoration of the Iranians' aspirations for a life beyond what is movingly invoked by Shervin Hajipour's song *Baraye*. There is a long history to women leading the lexes of protest and resistance through expressive and oft-aestheticized representations of the human imagination. Today's visual and performative expressions inspired by the Woman, Life, Freedom movement may be especially well suited to the new social media platforms, but their progenitors were equally powerful in conceptualizing the traumas associated with the regime of the Islamic Republic since its establishment in 1979. What are the pasts of this momentous wave of energy that has emerged for the first time as a collective aspiration? The Islamic Republic has spent forty plus years raising walls of separation, dispelling knowledge of the history of pre-1979 Iran, including its art histories. While distant pasts are considered benign and hence acceptable, the more recent pasts pose oppositional postures: the protest and reform movements of the 19th and 20th centuries are left in the dark and their related artistic expressions rarely acknowledged. Such amnesia has become almost habitual: we don't think any longer of the unveiling by Tahirih Qurrat al-Ayn, or the traumas of imposed unveilings, re-veilings, and earlier women's movements in the street protests of 1978-79; or the artistic interventions by Forough Farrokhzad, Farideh Lashai, Parastou Forouhar, or Shirin Neshat, to name a few. Excavating visual and performative memories of women's protest movements, this talk looks for indigenous powers of Iranian women through the arts before we come to speak of such west-centric concepts as Feminism and Human Rights.

Sussan Babaie is Professor of the Arts of Iran and Islam at The Courtauld, University of London. She was trained as a graphic designer at Tehran University before she went on to study Art History and receive her PhD from New York University's Institute of Fine Arts.

She has curated exhibitions on Persian and Islamic arts at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, at Harvard Art Museums, and with her students at Smith College, University of Michigan Museum of Art, and at the Calouste Gulbenkian Museum in Lisbon. Her publications include *Isfahan and Its Palaces*, *Persian Kingship and Architecture*, *Shirin Neshat*, *Honar: The Afkhami Collection of Modern and Contemporary Iranian Art*, and *Geometry and Art in the Modern Middle East*. Sussan is currently working on a co-curated exhibition about arts of the Great Mongol State for The Royal Academy, London, and on a book about Persian art and food.

Law and Freedom in Contemporary Iranian Performing Arts

Shirin Naef

This paper looks at the visualizations of the concepts of law (qanun) and freedom (azadi) in contemporary Iranian performing arts, and examines their meanings and their transformation from the perspective of the protest movements. Since Mahsa Amini died last September, at the age of 21, while she was detained by the country's morality police for not wearing a proper hijab, mass protests in Iran have been ongoing. What started as protests against the compulsory hijab has turned into calls for an end of the Islamic republic itself and into questioning and criticism of the 1979 revolution. Lives have been lost and many demonstrators are in prison, have been interrogated, suffered inhumane treatment and atrocities by a state that lacks political legitimacy and social foothold - a state that even fears the bodies of the deceased and the influence of their funerals. In the eyes of many Iranians, – both in academic and public discussions – this movement is similar to the Iranian/Persian constitutionalist movement (jonbesh-e mashroteh) that took place between 1906 and 1911 in Iran, and resulted from the efforts of Iranian intellectuals seeking the rule of law, freedom, citizens' rights and national unity during the 19th century Qajar dynasty (1779-1925).

The constitutional movement that led to the promulgation of the first Iranian Constitution and the establishment of the first Iranian National Parliament in 1906, played an important role in the formation of Iranian civil society and the public sphere. Many modern performing arts in Iran have their roots in the constitutional era (doran-e mashroteh) and have been cultivated and emerged in the context of society and its social trends. In this paper, I first look at how the concepts of law (qanun) and freedom (azadi) have been visualized in the performing arts during the constitutional era. Based on this analysis, the second part of this paper traces the evolution of these concepts and examines the role of performing arts in promoting the liberal values in transitional politics against the backdrop of the Iran's protest movement "Woman – Life – Liberty".

Shirin Naef (University of Fribourg) is currently working on her habilitation project on the relationship between law, economy and religion according to the studies of culture in the context of Iranian history and politics. She was lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences, University of Fribourg, Switzerland, where she taught on the relationship between law and religion, legal and economic anthropology, and bioethics. Her research interests focus on sociology and anthropology of law, European legal history and traditions, and on history of ideas, rule of law, legislation, legal practices, religion, economy and ethics in Iran. An examination of regulation and practice of reproductive technologies in Iran was the subject of her doctoral thesis. She was fellow at the Käthe Hamburger Center for Advanced Study in the Humanities "Law as Culture" at the University of Bonn; fellow at the School of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester and the Brocher Foundation in Geneva. She received her Ph.D. in Social Anthropology from the University of Zürich, and completed her postgraduate training in Bioethics at the International Centre for Ethics in the Sciences and Humanities (IZEW) at the University of Tübingen. She studied Social Anthropology, Islamic Studies and General Linguistics at the University of Bern, Switzerland. Prior to that, she had studied Theatre and Literature in Tehran.

Panel 4

Chair: Cathrine Bublatzky

Map of the Absentees

Bahar Majdzadeh

About thirty years ago, the French writer Patrick Modiano found an ad published in the Paris-Soir newspaper, dated 31st December 1941, in which the Bruder Family were looking for their 15 years old daughter, Dora. This ad led Mondiano to do researches about the circumstances of the disappearance of this teenager, and this quest in Paris constituted his book entitled Dora Bruder. As Mondiano, my mapping of the absent persons; <http://www.mapoftheabsentees.net> , the 1980's exiled political militants of Iran, grew out of a personal experience. It originates from what Maurice Halbwachs calls the inherited history², or the trans-generational³ memory as Paul Ricoeur defines it or in Jan Assmann's words, the communicative memory⁴. Indeed in the memories told by my parents, and in their photo albums, there were people who I knew they were not dead, but yet they were absent. There was no trace left of their presence in the city where we lived. In fact important historical events such as revolutions sometimes lead to changes in the relationships that individuals have with places. Streets and buildings are one of the most stable social frameworks, they are the one that lasted through wars, riots, and revolutions play a key role in the process of recollecting memories.

It is this experience of absence, that, different from the absence of an object or of a dead person, can broaden the scope of loss and trauma. I resorted to the official map of Tehran as a possible support of representation on which I showed traces and marks of the life these people had in the city of Tehran. This official map reflects only one of the tragedies of the 1980s (the Iran-Iraq war). In my artistic work, the question is how, the map of Tehran can also be used to show the absence of the ones who were excluded from the political life, I studied how the I.R.I took control of the public realm by way of renaming the streets, destructing some buildings and constructing new ones. At the same time I pointed out that the official map of Tehran that reflects these transformations and which very essence is to serve the current political power, however echoes the «obstinate» memories of the militants of the 1980's. I asked these exiles to tell me a memory linked to a place in Tehran. The search for these traces led me to more complex issues; the archives, the counter-archives, the amputated memories. I will analyse in my presentation, through my artistic project, how it is possible to use absence as a mean to represent what has been lost and to find a new way of collecting and preserving it.

² Maurice Halbwachs, *La mémoire collective*, édition critique établie par Gérard Namer, Paris, Albin Michel, 1977.

³ Paul Ricoeur, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Paris, le Seuil, 2000.

⁴ Jan Assmann, *La Mémoire Culturelle, écriture, souvenir et imaginaire politique dans les civilisations antiques*, traduit de l'allemand par Diane Meur, Paris, Flammarion, 2010.

Bahar Majdzhadeh is an Iranian artist-researcher who lives and works between Paris and Marseille. After finishing a thesis in Art at Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University in 2019, she is now a Temporary Research and Teaching Assistant (ATER) at Aix-Marseille University. She's following a "practice-based research" approach that implies a theorized practice. She makes use of multimedia tools, at the crossroads of the fine arts and digital arts. Her hybrid projects include radical cartography, drawings, photographic images, sound, volume and video. While in this interdisciplinary approach the creative process remains the main instrument, writing is apprehended as a research method. It aims to enrich our knowledge and understanding through a sensitive investigation.

Unearthing “Sites of Disappearance” – Writing Histories of/for the Defeated in the Case of the Citadel

Vali Mahlouji

Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD), which I founded in 2010, is a non-profit research/curatorial platform dedicated to unearthing subaltern, erased, violated, forgotten, absented and contested histories of spaces condemned by social displacement, cultural annihilation or deliberate disappearance. AOTFD engages with accounts of culture lost through material destruction, acts of censorship, and political, economic or human contingencies, intentionally or unintentionally.

Archaeological excavations, vertical and horizontal, work through the debris of histories, summoning the *audience as witness* in the *redistribution of justice*. We must consider *culture-at-large* not as a communal space of harmonious existence but as a conflict-filled field of negotiations, where art itself must be situated in this crossfire to realise its historical meaning.

In critically evaluating the photographic series *Prostitute* (Tehran, 1975-77), by the documentary photographer Kaveh Golestan, I have been primarily interested in the various ways in which one can critically engage with, what I call, *auratic traces* and the mechanisms by which those traces stand in as object, event or evidence. I am acutely aware of my self-identification with the situations that I depict and the interplay between my worlds of ideas and aesthetics, and the social and political encounters that have shaped my own life. The dynamic interplay between the two is integral to our understanding. When considering such meticulously tight focus, it is also vital to consider the psychologically and politically layered topographies of speaking on behalf of the other and the complex psychoanalytic and power relationships constructed and negotiated between the photographic lens and the ‘object/subject’. As such, they appear as mappings of emotional territories embedded in the materiality of spaces.

I draw attention to the relationship between trace and memory, photograph and document, fragment and whole, ruin and monument, and on the visibility of the invisible, the relationship between absence and presence, the *absent-presence* when engaging with forms and methods of historicization. This workshop considers the relational dynamics between chronicle and history, fact and discourse, and objective truth and narrative/experience. Often darkly auratic and haunted, I am interested in how images capture the aura of events. I am constantly conscious of topographies of grief when analysing the material. A central question beckons the viewer: do the photographs, individually or in series, constitute eulogies/elegies or act/stand as incontestable forms of resistance/militancy? The two need not be mutually exclusive – and that is where the *absent-presence* is potentially at its most potent.

Although it is beyond the remit of the present workshop to investigate the complex meanings or nature of trauma, it is crucial to claim that the matrix linking trace, time and trauma provides possibly the most stable line of connection and auratic undertone through much of the work of AOTFD. More often than not, the representational concerns directly investigate the memory imprints and sensory experiences of individual (or collective) trauma displaced across time.

AOTFD's investigations in *Recreating the Citadel* tap into trauma research and memory studies, into protest art/art activism and art-based disobedience, which are relevant to exploring Iran's contemporary "Women, Life, Freedom" movement.

Vali Mahlouji (PhD) is a curator and founder of Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD). This non-profit curatorial platform excavates accounts of culture which have remained obscure, banned or lost through material destruction. His work has been shown at Tate Modern, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, SAVVY Contemporary, Whitechapel Gallery, Dhaka Art Summit, Arnolfini, FOAM Amsterdam, MAXXI Rome, Musée d'Art Moderne Paris, Bergen Triennial, Open Eye Gallery Liverpool, Sursock Museum, and Asia Cultural Centre, Gwangju. Mahlouji's *A Utopian Stage* at the Whitechapel Gallery, was nominated for Best Exhibition by the Global Fine Arts Awards (2015) and *Kaveh Golestan: Prostitute (1975-77)* and his research artwork *Recreating the Citadel* was acquired and exhibited by Tate Modern in 2017-18. He regularly contributes to academic and art publications and lectures at universities and academies such as the Courtauld Institute of Art and Goldsmiths, University of London.

Self and Other: Subjectivity and Gender in the Works of Iranian Diaspora Artists

Charlotte Bank

This paper discusses the works of contemporary artists of the Iranian diaspora, living in Berlin and Paris. Confronted with conflicting expectations of what it means to be an “Iranian artist” in the diaspora, they have created bodies of work that reflect the variety of positions from which they may speak. Like other migrants, artists are often faced with the reductive, ethnic-culturalist definitions of migration that still prevail in mainstream cultural debates and which often place migrant artists in an uncomfortable position of in-between-ness and leads to the multi-layeredness of their works being disregarded or misrepresented. Yet, the diasporic space also offers chances to re-think common presumptions about cultural identities, such as questions related to gender normativity and representations of masculinity and femininity, as well as articulate social critique.

Creating links between Iranian and European art history and current issues related to gender and sexuality, the artists discussed in this paper reflect on their complex contemporary life situations, as Iranian artists living in the European diaspora. Azar Pajuhandé’s works revolves around her personal experiences, memories and inner life. Drawing on psychoanalysis and art historical analysis, she reflects on issues of subjectivity and the representation of the “Oriental” woman in the works by European, male artists. For Shahram Entekhabi the stereotypical representation of the “Muslim man” in Western mainstream media and Orientalist art is a recurring theme. Creating fictional characters which he then impersonates himself in video works or interventions in public space, he practices what he refers to as “playful self-exoticism”. Taking on the character of the Muslim “other”, the one who is usually subject of the Western gaze, Entekhabi returns the gaze and forces the West to reckon with its own stereotypes.

For a number of artists, the Iranian and Islamic aesthetic traditions offer a space to explore nonconformist gender identities within Islamic cultural expression. Thus, Fereydoun Ave presents critical reflections on ideals of masculinity as propagated by the Iranian regime and celebrated by contemporary Iranian mainstream culture. Through the pre-Islamic hero Rostam of the Persian poet Firdawsi’s 11th century epic *Shahnama* and references to Persian miniature painting his works reflects on the cultural practice of homo-sociality with its implicit possibilities of same-sex sexual relations. Using painting in the Persian miniature tradition, Alireza Shojaian links contemporary queer subjectivities with the history of same sex relations in Western Asia. Thereby, he draws on the rich tradition of Persian legends replete with fantastic and gender ambiguous creatures to create imaginary spaces of fluid expressions of gender and sexuality.

The artists discussed in the frame of this paper use their diasporic position to articulate a double critique: On one hand, they address the rigid gender regimes in the Islamic Republic, on the other, they highlight and criticize stereotypical representations of Iranian and “Oriental” masculinities and femininities in the West.

Charlotte Bank is an art historian and curator. Currently, she is postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Art and Society, University of Kassel. She holds a PhD in Arabic Culture and Language from the University of Geneva and has held academic positions and fellowships at the Universities of Bamberg and Geneva, the Orient Institute Beirut and the Museum of Islamic Art Berlin. Her monograph, titled *The Contemporary Art Scene in Syria: Social Critique and an Artistic Movement* was published in 2020 by Routledge.

Collective trauma, political activism and diasporic aesthetics in Iranian contemporary art: Julia Allerstorfer in conversation with the artists Simin Keramati and Shahram Entekhabi

Julia Allerstorfer

Simin Keramati's and Shahram Entekhabi's multifaceted artistic work is prevalently dealing with self-representations and identity issues within the social and political contexts of Iran and the Iranian diaspora. In the course of the artist talk with the art historian Julia Allerstorfer they will discuss collective trauma in recent Iranian history, visual strategies of political activism as well as artistic practices and aesthetics in transcultural in-between spaces.

Simin Keramati (born in Tehran/Iran) is a multidisciplinary visual artist who completed her M.A. in Fine Arts at the Art University of Tehran in 1997. Her artistic practice engages among others with issues of culture, identity, subjectivity, memory and socio-political issues, and spans across drawing, painting, video art, photography and mixed techniques. Since 2013 she lives and works in Toronto/Canada.

Web: <https://siminkeramati.com>

Shahram Entekhabi (born in Beroujerd/Iran) is an architect, visual artist and curator who lives and works in Berlin and Tehran. He studied graphic-design at the University of Teheran and architecture in Perugia and Reggio Calabria/Italy. In his artistic work he frequently focusses on the marginalization and (self-)ghettoization of migrant communities from the Middle East within the urban domain.

Web: <http://www.entekhabi.org>; <https://www.factorytt.com>

Julia Allerstorfer (born in Linz/Austria) is an art historian, curator and Assistant Professor at the Institute of History and Theory of Art at the Catholic Private University in Linz. Her research comprises contemporary art in Iran, modern art in Austria, artistic practices in the context of migration and transculturality, global art history and postcolonial theory.

Web: <https://ku-linz.at/kunstwissenschaft/personen>

