

FILM AT REDCAT PRESENTS

Mon Oct 27 and Tuesday Oct 28

Jack H. Skirball Series

\$11 [members \$9]

a woman is worth a thousand questions. Alternative Media from Iran

Presented as part of the LA/Islam Arts Initiative led by the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs

The citywide LA/Islam Art Initiative arrives at REDCAT with two evenings of powerful, eye-opening works that deconstruct and recontextualize women's complex relationship with Islam in Iranian culture and society. Running the gamut from experimental film to video and performance art, from animation to documentary, the featured projects draw special attention to the ways in which women—and women's bodies—are posited both *within* Islam and *at its border*, with the codes of sexual propriety, veiling and separation functioning as signifiers of a condition fraught with contradiction and hope.

*Launching this fall, the **Los Angeles / Islam Arts Initiative (LA/IAI)** brings together nearly 30 cultural institutions throughout Los Angeles to tell various stories of traditional and contemporary art from multiple Islamic regions and their significant global diasporas. LA/IAI is the first-of-its kind, wide-scale citywide initiative on Islamic arts producing and presenting programming such as art exhibitions, panels, discussions, and performances.*

"Middle Eastern artists do not need heroes. They are tired of sacred portraits and they actively tear them down. They despise halos of sacredness be it based on religious, historical or political ideologies - even if they are based on traditional or modern artistic concepts."
- Jinoos Taghizadeh

If there is a thread that runs through [contemporary Iranian video works], it's their self-conscious fragility as carriers of meaning. They invoke collectivity only to underscore its absence, and they hint at a historical narrative only to shrug off any shared ideals of progress.
- *Bidoun*

I say this woman. Holderlin, Mallarme and all poets whose theme is the essence of poetry have felt that the act of naming is disquieting and marvelous. A word may give me its meaning, but first it suppresses it. For me to be able to say "This woman," I must somehow take her flesh and blood reality from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her. – Maurice Blanchot, quoted by Nikoo Tarkhani

Mon Oct 27 |8:30 pm|

**a woman is worth a thousand questions.
Alternative Media from Iran
Program I: experimental work, performance
art, body art**

In Lobby:

**Jinoos Taghizadeh: *Fatness & Fatness 100*
(*Chaghi & Chaghi* – 100)**

2009, 2 monitor installation, 20 min loop

In a particularly poignant moment in Iran's history, following the 2009 elections, multi-media artist Jinoos Taghizadeh humorously unfolds her ambivalent relationship to the city of Tehran (where she lives) and the image of her own body (which she inhabits). An ironical spin-off on the concept of "process art," the piece could also be described as a "devouring passion."

Haleh Anvari: *Power of a Cliché*

25:20 min, 2009, digital video

"*Power of a Cliché* uses images gathered from the Internet to deconstruct both Western and Iranian myths manufactured to interpret the image of the chador-wearing woman. The piece "opens with Anvari's strong, compelling voice laying claim to her intersectional identities – 'I am Haleh, I am Iranian, I am a woman, I am a liberal.' Representing Iranian women without resistance, without agency, is not only to deny them the strength and humour with which they have faced the 'dreadful things that have happened to them as mothers and sisters', Anvari argues, it also has grave political implications... Libby Purves nicely captured the tone of the piece when she described it, on BBC Radio 4, as 'poetically angry.'" (*The Guardian*)

Jinoos Taghizadeh: *Forugh Performance (Ejraye Forough)*

May 2008. 5:51 min, digital video)

A "performative" homage to the female poet/filmmaker Forugh Farrokhzad (1935-1967).

People gathered, started reading or checking it out. The elders, the same ones who for a lifetime had forbidden Forugh to their sons and daughters, quickly recognized the face and the poetry—perhaps in secret many had read her. And the younger people seemed to have seen her before... During a three-hour-long walk, the route was filled with posters, even though twice the city workers and police tore the papers off the walls and took away the glue and brush with threats... If you had followed the images here and there, you reached her grave, under the light snowfall, and a small crowd was celebrating her birthday with a small cake. (JT)

Pooya Razi: *The Noise*

Animation by Marjan Razavi and Mina Poorkarimi

17:30 min, 2011-2013, digital video

A young man's life in an Iranian apartment building gets invaded by public norms when a neighbor accuses him of leading an immoral lifestyle and demands that other residents intervene. Mixing documentary audio recording and animation, the film explores the line between individual privacy and public "noise".

Samira Eskandarfar: *Rugs and Men (Farshha va Mardha)*

3:15 min, 2006, digital video

A meditation on the visible and the invisible in representation, based on a selection of photographs dating from the Qajar dynasty of the late Persian Empire (1781-1925).

Samira Eskandarfar:

Breathing under Water (Nafas Keshidan Zire AAb)

5:54 min, 2011, digital video

"The piece pairs video footage of fishmongers scaling and gutting fish with an evocative, harrowing image of a young woman inhaling and exhaling from within a plastic bag that covers her head. Eskandarfar's images of pathos and abjection, evisceration and suffocation are given an incongruent soundtrack fit for a cabaret or clown. Issues of representation are central: how to speak; how to show; how to be

seen and heard. French theorist Luce Irigaray questioned: 'How [to] find a voice, make a choice strong enough, subtle enough to cut through all those layers of ornamental style, that decorative sepulcher, where even her breath is lost.' In Eskandarfar's nightmarish video collage, another question arises but seems to deflate in a chamber of distortions. How can one speak when there is no more oxygen in the room?" – Andrea Fitzpatrick

Samira Eskandarfar: *I'm not here (Man Inja Nistam)*

6:18min, 2011, digital video

The swings I used to play with, the slides I used to slither down, the ladders I used to climb. They were very high. From up there, I used to wave to my city. The park I grew up with, where I return after 23 years. It has changed a lot. Kids are playing on the swings and slides but there is no ladder to climb anymore. I've been there before. This place had stayed in mind, intact, and now I see that it has changed. Had I been there before or not? I am here now, I am not here now.

Samira Eskandarfar: *I am here (Man Inja Hastam)*

5.45 min, 2012, digital video

It's like taking bandage from a wound. It hurts to be yourself of your true self. Every so often. I am strong. I am not strong. I am strong. I am not strong. I want to be strong. I am afraid. I pretend. I preserve myself. Every so often.

My skin is delicate. My skin is hard. So delicate that with the slightest scratch muscles and veins and blood pour out. As delicate as a balloon that is blown up. I pretend that I can take care of myself. Every so often...

I am what I am. I choose. I decide. I choose my own masks. Although it might not appear so. But in a shameful way I am free. I am free. Even if I am not free I am my own prisoner. Prisoner of my own fears. Every so often. I fight with myself. I loathe myself. I run from myself. I teach myself. I run from me. I return to me. I release myself. Even if I am not Me. Every So often.

Nassrin Nasser: *Raining Ashes (Khakestar Mibarad)*

7.40 min, 2011, digital video

The film is an illustration of an illusionary connection between a prisoner in solitary confinement and a man who may be an activist or a writer. In the dark solitude of the cell, the prisoner imagines the man somewhere beyond the boundaries of the cell, writing to her out of

concern and sympathy and she follows his glowing words with her eyes as they float in the air glittering and flying towards her. Filmed while tied to a chair, the prisoner is disturbed by memories of torture. Maybe the illusion is more that of the writer than the prisoner... *Raining Ashes* was made in sympathy with the political prisoners who were jailed and tortured after Iran's 2009 presidential election.

Nikoo Tarkhani: *Childless Woman (Zan e bi Farzand)*

3:50, 2013, video performance

Shot in the Maranjab desert, in Iran's Kashan County, and inspired by a poem by Sylvia Plath:

The womb

Rattles its pod, the moon

Discharges itself from the tree with nowhere to go...

Nikoo Tarkhani: *The Scarlet Letter (Daghe Nang)*

13.25, 2012, video performance

In this radical re-interpretation of Nathaniel Hawthorne's classic novel, the "scarlet letter" is no longer embroidered on the woman's garment, but reinscribed on the woman's body; tellingly, it is the letter that signifies "I" in Farsi. The disturbing performative aspect of the piece presents an inverted mirror to a situation of patriarchal cultural violence. *I tried to translate this "I" into a matter of shame in the society I'm living in. Saying "I" am a woman! is hard in the society that expects you to cover the curves of your body, i.e. hide your womanhood.* (NK) Must a woman sacrifice her body for the right to speak?

TRT: 95 minutes

In person: Haleh Anvari, Samira Eskandarfar

Tuesday Oct 28 | 8:30 pm |

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Program II: independent documentaries

Firouzeh Khosrovani: *Rough Cut*

22:00 min, 2007, digital video

What if the mannequin of everyday commerce became an object of contention? This is the story behind *Rough Cut*, which traces the post-revolutionary history of the shop-front mannequins, from the metal pipes with cross-bar shoulders used in the 1980s to the fiberglass dolls of the post Iran-Iraq war period. Later, government officials charged with defending "morality in public places" found fault with displays in shop windows, accusing retailers of breaching Koranic edicts against the display of the human, particularly female, form. Realistic designs had to be replaced by half-heads, absent limbs, and sawn-off breasts.

Samira Eskandarfar: *Inside a Room (Tooye Ye Otagh)*

6:30 min, 2007, digital video

Eskandarfar's *Inside a Room* presents an intimate glimpse into the life of Bahareh, a severely disabled woman whose condition is the result of institutional medical neglect. The scene is troubling in its contradictory nature: both haunting and endearing. While Bahareh clearly suffers being denied the ideals of female beauty (represented by the picture of the fashion model on the wall), she is not pathetic but full of charisma and vitality. By taking an ambivalent tone, Eskandarfar walks the fine line between fascination and critique. – Andrea Fitzpatrick

Loghman Khaledi: *Nessa*

52:00 min, 2011-12, digital video

Loghman Khaledi, returned to his hometown of Kermansha (a Kurdish city in the west of Iran) to draw the vérité portrait of a young woman, Nessa, who dreams of being an actress. After years of puppetry and minor parts, she finally lands a major role. While her father reluctantly admires her self-sufficiency, her brother's macho pride incites him to violence when attempts to control his sister fail. Nessa begins showing up late and rattled for rehearsals... Khaledi becomes implicated in the family conflict, as Nessa sees in him the freedom she craves.

TRT: 78.30 minutes

In person: Samira Eskandarfar

The artists

Born in Tehran, writer/photographer **Haleh Anvari** received a joint BA in Politics and Philosophy with honors from the University of Keele, Stratfordshire, UK in 1985. Recent solo exhibitions include Al Riwaq Gallery in Bahrain, Etemad Gallery and Aaran Gallery in Tehran. Group exhibitions include "Contemporary Iranian Art" in New Albion Gallery in Sidney and "Thirty years of Solitude" at Cambridge University and Duomo Assicurazioni in Caserta, Italy. She is the founder of AKSbazi.com, a crowdsourcing site about Iran.

Samira Eskandarfar (b. 1980, Tehran) started painting in 1998 and has had a number of solo exhibitions of her visual art work. In 2003, she graduated from the Iranian Youth Cinema Society. In 2005 she participated in Abbas Kiarostami's film-making workshop, during which she made six short pieces – including *A Dowry for Mahrou* (acquired by London's Tate Modern in 2009) and *Inside a Room*. Eskandarfar has completed a number of short films and videos, which have been shown extensively in festivals, museums and media centers around the world. In 2012, she completed her first experimental feature film, *Root Canal*.

Loghman Khaledi (born 1978 in Kermanshah, Iran) has directed more than 10 documentaries and short films since 2001, including *The Center of an X* (2006), *Without Noise* (2007), *And I am a Passenger* (2009), *Mobile in Tehran* (2010) and *Moving Up* (Prix Premier, FID-Marseille, 2011)

Firouzeh Khosrovani studied art at the Accademia di Belle Arti in Brera, Italy, then moved back to Iran where she worked as a journalist and made two documentaries – the first on child victims of the 2003 Bam earthquake and the second on mothers of soldiers killed during the Iran-Iraq war. In 2012, she participated in the omnibus film *L'archivio a oriente*. She produced and directed an episode of *Profession: Documentarist* (2014), in which seven Iranian female independent documentary makers take us into their personal and professional world, through the political, social and economic crises encountered by their country.

Nassrin Nasser received a BA in Graphic Design from Tehran University of Fine Arts in 2007, then a MA in Communication Design from Central Saint Martins (London) in 2009. Her videos have been shown internationally in film festivals and exhibition spaces in the UK, the United States, Albania, and, more recently, the International Film Festival Rotterdam and the Beijing Independent Film Festival.

Pooya Razi (born 1984, Tehran) studied painting at Azad University in Tehran and graduated with a BA in Fine Arts in 2008. His paintings have been exhibited in several galleries in Tehran, as well as in the Musée d'Art Moderne de la ville de Paris. His first film, *The Noise*, has been screened in international film festivals such as Oberhausen, Sao Paulo, Lisbon and Bern (Switzerland).

Jinoos Taghizadeh works in a variety of media including painting, collage, video and performance and addresses the problematic construction of collective identities in contemporary Iran. Her performances have been considered as "exceptional in their substitutions of private and public, their evocations of personal space in the everyday life in Tehran." Her work has been exhibited internationally: Adelaide Festival; Istanbul Biennial; B21, Dubai; Galleri Box, Göteborg; Art Athena, Athens; NBA Center, La Esmeralda, Mexico City; Kunsthof, Zurich and 18th Street Arts Center, Santa Monica CA, among others. She has published numerous essays.

Nikoo Tarkhani (born June 1, 1981) works with different media such as painting, photography, installation, video art, video performance, performance art and filmmaking. She graduated from medical school. In 2009 she first presented her ongoing "Interactive Painting" series, which presents the story of her life, combined with a critique of contemporary social events. Her trilogy of video performances, "The Songs of Songs," includes *Regeneration* (2011), *The Scarlet Letter* (2011) and *Childless Woman* (2013).

For a complete schedule and description of the events of the LA / Islam Arts Initiative, please visit: www.laislamarts.org

This program is also of part of REDCAT's ongoing Jack H. Skirball Series curated by Steve Anker and Bérénice Reynaud.

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The title of the program is a respectful homage to the memory of Allan Sekula (1951-2013).