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Soheila Sokhanvari: *Rebel Rebel*

The Curve, Barbican Centre

7 October 2022 – 26 February 2023

Media View: Thursday 6 October, 10am-1pm

Free Admission

#SoheilaSokhanvari @barbicancentre

The exhibition has been commissioned by the Barbican, and is generously supported by the Bagri Foundation, Arts Council England, and the Soheila Sokhanvari Exhibition Circle: Marie Laure de Clermont-Tonnerre (Spirit Now London), Sayeh Ghanbari, Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, Elizabeth and J. Jeffry Louis, Pat and Pierre Maugüé, Hugh Monk, and those who wish to remain anonymous.



Soheila Sokhanvari, *Wild at Heart (Portrait of Pouran Shopoori)*, 2019, © Soheila Sokhanvari. Courtesy of the artist and Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery.

Barbican Art Gallery presents ***Rebel Rebel***, a site-specific installation for The Curve and the first major UK commission by Iranian artist **Soheila Sokhanvari**.

The exhibition features a series of 27 exquisite portraits of feminist icons from pre-revolutionary Iran, painted in egg tempera onto calf vellum with a squirrel-hair brush. Each of Sokhanvari's miniatures – hung against a hand-painted mural based on Islamic geometries decorating the

90-metre gallery – is a labour of love, as she transforms The Curve into a devotional space in which these rarely told feminist histories can be contemplated.

The exhibition title, *Rebel Rebel*, borrows from David Bowie's 1974 cult pop song and pays tribute to the significant courage of these 27 female icons, who pursued their careers in a culture enamoured with Western style but not its freedoms. These women include Roohangiz Saminejad, the first unveiled actress to appear in a Persian language film; the controversial modernist poet Forough Farrokhzad; and the leading intellectual and writer Simin Dāneshvar. The title also serves as a lament to the fate of these women, after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the subsequent establishment of a conservative Islamic theocracy, left them with a stark choice: to renounce any role in public life, or be forced into exile.

Flowing through the exhibition is a new soundtrack, composed by **Marios Aristopoulos**, which weaves together songs by celebrated Iranian singers from the mid-20th century, including Ramesh and Googoosh – a poignant gesture given that it remains illegal for a woman's voice to be broadcast in Iran. *Rebel Rebel* culminates in extravagant sculptural forms, made of mirror and featuring internal projections drawn from classic Iranian cinema. The exhibition will be accompanied by a publication featuring an interview with Barbican curator **Eleanor Nairne**, alongside a new text by **Dr Jordan Amirkhani**.

Soheila Sokhanvari said: *'The Curve has always been a magical space for me, where artists are given the freedom to tell stories in an immersive way. When I was invited for this commission, I knew immediately how I wanted to respond: with a body of work that would transport visitors to the pulse of life in pre-revolutionary Iran and to the women at the heart of that culture. I hope that visitors will revel in the opportunity to learn about the lives of these formidable women, who gave up everything to pursue their creativity.'*

Sokhanvari's previous work has addressed the pervasive influence of Western culture in the Middle East. Portraiture has been an enduring concern, from a series of expired passports adorned with handmade stamps drawn from vintage advertising slogans – 'Just for men – won't let you down' and 'reveal your inner goddess' – to paintings of her father Ali Mohammed dressed as the Hollywood actor James Dean. Humour is always just beneath the surface, as a subversive means to consider the violent legacies of Western politics in Iran.

Eleanor Nairne, Curator, Barbican said: *'I am delighted that we have commissioned Soheila Sokhanvari to make this ambitious project for our free programme in The Curve. Soheila's dazzling reimagining of the space, in which visitors can commune with these extraordinary creatives from pre-revolutionary Iran, will no doubt be a revelation for many.'*

Soheila Sokhanvari was born in Shiraz, Iran, and currently lives and works in Cambridge, where she is a studio artist at **Wysing Arts Centre**. Sokhanvari has exhibited internationally, with recent projects including participation in The NGV Triennial, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (2020-2021); *Addicted to Love*, a solo exhibition at Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery, London (2019); *Salam Salam*, an installation commissioned by the Magic of Persia Foundation (2018); *LDWN*, an installation at Victoria Station, which was a collaboration between the Tate Collective and City Hall (2018); *Heart of Glass*, a solo exhibition at the New Art Gallery Walsall (2017); *Paradise Lost*, a solo exhibition at Jerwood Project Space (2017); and *Homeland* at the Kunsthalle Osnabrück in Germany. In 2018 she won the Derek Hill Foundation Scholarship at the British School at Rome. Her work now features in major permanent collections, including the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Saatchi Gallery Collection. Sokhanvari gained her postgraduate diploma in fine art from Chelsea College of Art and Design and her MFA from Goldsmiths College. She has been represented by Kristin Hjellegjerde Gallery since 2012.

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Press Information

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For the Barbican press office please contact visualartspress@barbican.org.uk

Barbican Press room

All Barbican Centre press releases, news announcements and the Communication team's contact details are listed on our website at <https://www.barbican.org.uk/our-story/press-room>

Public Information

The Curve, Barbican, London
Barbican, Silk Street, London EC2Y 8DS

www.barbican.org.uk/artgallery

There will be no entry fee charged for this exhibition.

For more information on Barbican membership please visit:

<https://www.barbican.org.uk/membership>

Detailed visitor information will be available on the Barbican's [website](#).

The Curve opening times

Monday – Sunday: 11am – 7pm, Bank Holidays 12pm – 7pm

The Barbican Centre is closed 24-26 December

Exhibition

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Book

A fully illustrated catalogue to accompany the exhibition *Soheila Sokhanvari: Rebel Rebel* will be available. Featuring a commissioned text in response to Sokhanvari's work by writer and curator Jordan Amirkhani and an interview with the artist by curator Eleanor Nairne, this title belongs to a publication series by Barbican Art Gallery that focuses on The Curve exhibition programme. Pre-order the catalogue in the Barbican Shop on Level G or online at www.barbican.org.uk/shop for £12.

Dr. Jordan Amirkhani is Curator of the Rivers Institute for Contemporary Art & Thought – a non-profit institute for research, publishing, and exhibitions of contemporary art based in New Orleans, Louisiana. Prior to taking on this role, Amirkhani was a Professorial Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Art at American University in Washington, DC from 2018-2021. Amirkhani has published scholarship on the Dada painter and polemicist Francis Picabia, the British conceptual art collective Art & Language, Crow artist Wendy Red Star, and the Nashville-based photographer Vesna Pavlović. Recent curatorial projects include *Troy Montes-Michie: Rock of Eye* for the California African American Museum in Los Angeles; *Yto Barrada: Ways to Baffle the Wind* at MASS MoCA; and the *2021 Atlanta Biennial: Of Care and Destruction* for the Atlanta Contemporary. Amirkhani's writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *Baltimore Arts*, *Boston Art Review*, *X-Tra*, and *Burnaway.org*.

The Curve

The Curve is the Barbican's free exhibition space that wraps around the back of the Concert Hall. Launched in May 2006, Curve Art is a series of new commissions in which contemporary artists respond to the distinctive architecture of the space. Artists who have previously made new commissions for The Curve include Tomás Saraceno (Argentina); Richard Wilson (Britain); Jeppe Hein (Denmark); Marjetica Potrč (Slovenia); Shirana Shahbazi (Switzerland/Iran); Hans Schabus (Austria); Huang Yong Ping (France/China); Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (Canada/Mexico); Peter Coffin (US); Clemens von Wedemeyer (Germany); Robert Kusmirowski (Poland); Céleste Boursier-Mougenot (France); John Bock (Germany); Damián Ortega (Mexico); Cory Arcangel (US); Junya Ishigami (Japan); Song Dong (China); rAndom International (Britain); Geoffrey Farmer (Canada); Ayşe Erkmen (Germany/Turkey); United Visual Artists (Britain); Walead Beshty (US/Britain); Roman Signer (Switzerland); Eddie Peake (Britain); Imran Qureshi (Pakistan); Bedwyr Williams (Wales); Richard Mosse (Ireland); John Akomfrah (Britain); Yto Barrada (Morocco), Francis Upritchard (New Zealand) Daria Martin (US), Trevor Paglen (US), Toyin Ojih Odutola (Nigeria/US) and most recently Shilpa Gupta (India).

Barbican Art Gallery and The Curve

Our visual arts programme embraces art, architecture, design, fashion, photography and film. Many of our exhibitions explore the interconnections between disciplines, periods and cultures, and aim to imagine the world in new ways. Designers, artists and architects are our collaborators in this process.

We invest in the artists of today and tomorrow; The Curve is one of the few galleries in London devoted to the commissioning of new work. Through our activities we aim to inspire more people to discover and love the arts. Entrance to The Curve is free. Through Young Barbican we offer £5 tickets to 14–25 year olds for our paid exhibitions, children under 14 attend for free.

Our exhibitions are complemented by comprehensively researched catalogues and a full range of public events. We develop engaging online content for audiences and offer special tours for schools. In partnership with renowned museums and art galleries, many of our exhibitions travel to reach both national and international audiences.

The Barbican believes in creating space for people and ideas to connect through its international arts programme, community events and learning activity. To keep its programme accessible to everyone, and to keep investing in the artists it works with, the Barbican needs to raise more than 60% of its income through ticket sales, commercial activities and fundraising every year. Donations can be made here: www.barbican.org.uk/join-support/support-us/for-individuals/make-a-donation

About the Barbican

A world-class arts and learning organisation, the [Barbican](#) pushes the boundaries of all major art forms including dance, film, music, theatre and visual arts. Its creative learning programme further underpins everything it does. Over a million people attend events annually, hundreds of artists and performers are featured, and more than 300 [staff](#) work onsite. The architecturally renowned centre opened in 1982 and comprises the Barbican Hall, the Barbican Theatre, The Pit, Cinemas 1, 2 and 3, Barbican Art Gallery, a second gallery The Curve, public spaces, a library, the Lakeside Terrace, [a glasshouse conservatory](#), conference facilities and three restaurants. The City of London Corporation is the founder and principal funder of the Barbican Centre.

The Barbican is home to Resident Orchestra, [London Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Orchestra, [BBC Symphony Orchestra](#); Associate Ensembles the [Academy of Ancient Music](#) and [Britten Sinfonia](#), Associate Producer [Serious](#), and Artistic Partner [Create](#). Our Artistic Associates include [Boy Blue](#), [Cheek by Jowl](#), Deborah Warner, [Drum Works](#) and [Michael Clark](#). The [Los Angeles Philharmonic](#) are the Barbican's International Orchestral Partner, the [Australian Chamber Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble at Milton Court, and [Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra](#) are International Associate Ensemble.

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About the Bagri Foundation

The Bagri Foundation is a UK registered charity whose main mission is to realise unique, unexpected ideas from and on Asia, weaving traditional culture with contemporary thinking. The Foundation provides support towards artistic and educational projects and establishes collaborative partnerships with institutions that range in scale—from small cultural organisations that share our ethos and mission to large national and international partners like the British Museum and Hayward Gallery in London, Artes Mundi Prize in Cardiff, The Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, and La Biennale di Venezia. The Foundation's supported projects include film, visual arts, music, literature, courses and lectures, and each of them aims at giving artists and experts from across Asia and the diaspora, or those inspired by the continent, wider visibility on the global stage. www.bagrifoundation.org