



Emerging Iranian Artists Take the Spotlight at Farhang Foundation in Los Angeles

ART EXHIBITIONS

## *Emerging Iranian Artists Take the Spotlight at Farhang Foundation in Los Angeles*

BY Danielle Shang / May 2, 2019

Share

/ [f](#) [in](#) [t](#) [✉](#)

*Focus Iran 3, a juried exhibition by Craft Contemporary and Farhang Foundation in Los Angeles, puts a lens on contemporary Iranian youth culture*

The biennial opened on 25 January at **Craft Contemporary** in Los Angeles—home to nearly half a million Iranian immigrants, the largest Iranian population outside Iran. The show, staged by the LA-based “non-religious, non-political and not-for-profit” Farhang Foundation, was welcomed by an exuberant crowd consisting of mostly Iranians and Iranian-Americans. When a woman spotted her mother’s image from decades ago in a photograph, the audience became even more electrified with nostalgia and affection. The artists whose works are included in the exhibition not only share similar concerns regarding social change, political conditions, cultural identity, gender issues, historical narratives, and stories of everyday lives, but also share a common humanitarian impulse to use their images to educate the world about Iran.

Their lenses capture ordinary young people, mostly, in public places: a boy selling lettuce at a street corner, a women’s volleyball team practicing in the gym, passengers sharing a hookah pipe between two vehicles in the slow traffic, and many other fleeting moments. Two of the three prize winning works are photographs that push the boundaries of stereotypical masculinity (*The Brotherhood*, 2018, by Hushidar Mortezaie and Jiyān Zandi) and sexual taboos (*The Kiss*, 2016, by Milad Karamooz). While subject matters are various, the unequivocal pride of the Iranian heritage is the heart and soul of each work selected for the **exhibition**. If one could look past the excessively moralising





*Hushidar Mortezaie and Jijan Zandi. Brotherhood. 2018.  
Courtesy of The Farhang Foundation*

Pouya Afshar's animation *Mourn Baby Mourn* (2017), which derives from the Shi'ite's mourning rituals and the theatre of *ta'ziya*—the performance of grief—was previously included in the Los Angeles County Museum (LACMA)'s *Art's In the Fields of Empty Days: The Intersection of Past and Present in Iranian Art*, curated by LACMA's in-house curator Linda Komaroff in 2018. Despite the awkward single channel display on a small monitor looping together with two other unrelated videos in sequence at Craft Contemporary, this time, Afshar's animation surprisingly emits a sense of sincerity, as do most of the works on display at the biennial. *Focus Iran*, in contrast to LACMA's **Iranian art** show, does not cast Iran as the primitive, violent, despotic and perverse 'Other' through the gaze of white Americans. Instead, it brings people together to celebrate Iran's history, land, arts and its youth culture.



# BAZAAR<sup>Harper's</sup>

The foundation decided on the form of competition for the biennial to encourage not only established artists but also undiscovered talents. Farhang Foundation has been for over a decade the driving force behind many arts and culture projects that promote the Iranian legacy.



*Linda Dorigo. Volleyball Iran. 2010. Courtesy of The Farhang Foundation*

Collaborating with institutions and communities in South **California**, Farhang Foundation introduces Iranian arts and culture to a broad audience in the US. Eight years ago, the foundation began to sponsor the UCLA Film & Television Archive's programme UCLA Celebration of Iranian Cinema, initiated in the 1990s. The partnership has secured a stellar lineup of new and classic films with a few premiered in the US each year. It has been one of the most critically acclaimed campaigns. In 2018, the Archive brought a handful of winning pieces from the 2017 Fajr International Film Festival to the West Coast, such as *The Home, 2017*, by Asghar Yousefinejad, and *No Date, No Signature, 2017*, by Vahid Jalilvand.

In a statement by the foundation's spokeswoman Roxie Sarhangi and executive director Alireza Ardekani, the future looks even more luminous for their ambassadorial endeavor. "In 2018, the fine arts council was very busy with many projects, including the Iranian Urban Mural Project in Los Angeles and the Shirin Neshat and Mohsen Namjoo multimedia production *On the String of the Tear's Bow*. In 2019, we will continue with presenting *Focus Iran 3* in the city of Irvine for a second run of the exhibition. In addition, the fine arts council is currently working on a future fine

If we could learn anything from Farhang and its cultural programmes, it is that arts have the agency to unite communities at a time of political division and diplomatic crisis. Some, like many Iranian cinematic works, for their intellectual bravura and transcendental wit will stand as enduring testaments to be the inspiration of a generation.

*Press play to go behind-the-scenes on Bazaar's cover shoot with Dutch-Iranian beauty entrepreneur Negin Mirsalehi*

Share / [f](#) [in](#) [t](#) [✉](#)

## WHAT'S TRENDING



ART EXHIBITIONS

**Floating On Silence, A Solo Exhibition Of Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar Opens At Setareh, Berlin**



ART EXHIBITIONS

**Christian Louboutin Latest Capsule Collection LouBhou Is Art On Heels**