

BODY POLITICS

Curated by
Mania Akbari & AmirAli Ghasemi

Assistant Curator
Neda Mohamadi

Mehraneh Atashi
Negar Behbahani
Bahar Behbahani
Nebras Hoveizavi
Mona Kakanj
Simin Keramati
Shahrzad Malekian
Bahar Noorizadeh
Anahita Razmi
Bahar Samadi
Niloofar Taatizadeh
Maryam Tafakory
Jinoos Taghizadeh

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Whitechapel Gallery

Body Politics brings together thirteen contemporary Iranian artist-filmmakers whose work explore notions of womanhood, female gaze, body-memory and body technology, informed by geographical and geopolitical conditions.

Curated by Mania Akbari and AmirAli Ghasemi, this program hopes to provide a counter narrative to the tired image of the Iranian female artist as seen not only in the mainstream media but also in the art world. Featuring work by Mehraneh Atashi, Negar Behbahani, Bahar Behbahani, Nebras Hoveizavi, Mona Kakanj, Simin Keramati, Shahrzad Malekian, Bahar Noorizadeh, Anahita Razmi, Bahar Samadi, Niloofar Taatizadeh, Jinoos Taghizadeh and Maryam Tafakory, this program is defined not by the films' location-specificity but a diversity of conceptual and experiential approaches in tackling the question of body as the site of politics.

A panel discussion with Mania Akbari, Minou Norouzi, Bahar Noorizadeh and Maryam Tafakory will follow the screenings.

Mania Akbari (b. Tehran, 1974) is an internationally acclaimed artist and filmmaker. Her provocative, revolutionary and radical films were recently the subject of retrospectives at the BFI, London (2013), the DFI, Denmark (2014), Oldenburg International Film Festival, Germany (2014), Cyprus Film Festival (2014) and Nottingham Contemporary UK (2018). Her films have screened at festivals around the world and have received numerous awards including German Independence Honorary Award, Oldenberg (2014), Best Film, Digital Section, Venice Film Festival (2004), Nantes Special Public Award Best Film (2007) and Best Director and Best film at Kerala Film Festival (2007), Best Film and Best Actress, Barcelona Film Festival (2007). Akbari was exiled from Iran and currently lives and works in London, a theme addressed in 'Life May Be' (2014), co-directed with Mark Cousins. This film was released at Karlovy Vary Film Festival and was nominated for Best Documentary at Edinburgh International Film Festival (2014) and Asia Pacific Film Festival (2014). Akbari's latest film 'A Moon For My Father', made in collaboration with British artist Douglas White, premiered at CPH:DOX where it won the NEW:VISION Award 2019. The film also received a FIPRESCI International Critics Award at the Flying Broom Festival, Ankara. She is currently working on a new project 'Libido' with her son Amin Maher.

AmirAli Ghasemi (b.1980, Iran) is a curator, media artist and a graphic designer based between Tehran & Berlin. He graduated in 2004 with a BA in graphic design from Central Tehran Azad University, with an emphasis on research in digital art history. In 1998, Ghasemi founded *Parkingallery*, an independent project space in Tehran and in 2002 he set up Parkingallery.com, an online platform for young Iranian artists. Ghasemi has shown his photographs, videos, design works in various festivals and exhibitions internationally. As a curator he has been directing many exhibitions, workshops, and talks for Parkingallery projects, such as *Deep Depression (2004-06), Sideways (2008). He has co-curated The Urban Jealousy, 1st International Roaming Biennial of Tehran (2008-09) and seven editions of Limited Access Festival for Video and Performance (2007-17), followed by his involvement in a variety of projects for institutions, project spaces and universities in Germany, Netherlands, Serbia, UK, Egypt, Turkey, United States, Brazil, Canada, France, Sweden, and India. He was the guest curator for the CCBRUGGE in 2010 and along with his independently curated programs like "The invisible present" (Brazil, USA) which he guest-programmed a video art section for Rotterdam and Goteborg film festivals in Jan- Feb 2013. And the most recent programs like "Monument in flux" at w139, Amsterdam, "(un)broadcasted event" shown at the new Horizon Film Festival, Wroclaw and finally "detour to Tehran" in Vienna in Nov 2018. He is currently writing on the Tehran art scene and contemporary Iranian art for various magazines and on his own art-log. IRAN&CO is his ongoing curatorial project, an ongoing exhibition, and archive of Iranian art representation beyond its border. In summer 2014, Ghasemi co-funded New Media Society, a network-based research platform and library. He joined the Postgraduate M.A. Course "Art in Context" at the Berlin University of the Arts in 2015, and in 2017 left it unfinished to return to Iran and focus on his curatorial projects at New Media Society and Tamaas Foundation for Media Arts.



Gulistan* | 6 mins | 2011 | colour - video

Mehraneh Atashi

Born in 1980, Mehraneh is an Iranian artist living and working in Amsterdam. Since her BFA education in photography in Tehran, and her post-graduate education at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, she has developed a body of work consisting of assemblages, sculpture, photography and video. Shifting between conceptualism and materiality, imagery and iconography, her work explores the possibility of becoming within static systems as well as concepts of gaze. Her work is awarded with the Mondrian Stipendium for Established Artists in 2014, and presented in solo and group exhibitions in, Reykjavic, Berlin, London, Salzburger, Graz, Losangels and Amsterdam.

Rose Garden *

The night was spent at the garden with a friend; such pleasant setting with tree branches meeting above, as if pieces of crystal and the cluster of pleiades were hanging from its vines. In the morning, when the thought of return exceeded the desire to stay, I saw my friend ready to leave for the city with a lapful of flowers, basil, and hyacinth. I said: “as you know, flowers do not last and unfulfilled are the promises of the garden. Men of wisdom advise against attachment to that which is ephemeral.” “So, what is to be done?” asked my friend. I replied: “For the pleasure of observers and the delight of those present, I shall compose the gulistan (‘The flower garden’) whose pages the autumnal wind cannot rend and whose vernal bliss the passage of time cannot turn to the woes of winter.”

* Saadi 13th century



Behind the Mirrors | 2014 | 18 min | Video

In *Behind the Mirrors*, the protagonist reflects displacement and alienation by contemplating contemporary culture and history stored in the landscape.

As author, subject, and observer of the past and present, Behbahani plays a poignant, yet elusive role in this poetic narrative. Describing the transition from passive to active resistance, *Behind the Mirrors* calls for establishing a sense of spectacle in both content and composition.

Bahar Behbahani's research-based practice, approaches landscape as a metaphor for politics and poetics. Born in Iran and based in New York City, her work has been featured in a solo exhibition, *Let the Garden Eram Flourish*, curated by Ugochukwu-Smooth Nzewi, at the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, USA. She has also exhibited in Thomas Erben Gallery in New York and the 11th Shanghai Biennale, China as well as in the 7th Moscow Biennale, Russia and Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center in Athens, Greece, and many others.

Behbahani has also been awarded a fellowship at the MacDowell Colony, NH; and Open Sessions fellowship at the Drawing Center, NY. She is a 2019 Creative Capital awardee.



LifeStrand is documenting my interactive sound installation of the same title.

This is a musical sculpture and self-portrait based on my nature, body, memory and background, told through the universal language of music. The instrument/sculpture's key features are the sound, the screen, and the hair, which mirrors the challenges I endured in life. My instrument connects with the intimate experience of touching my hair and playing a music which embodies my very intimate memories and dreams.

LifeStrand is for a general art audience and has been shown in different art spaces in New York.



A Musical Self-portrait | 2 min | 2015 | video

Negar Behbahani

Born in 1983 in Tehran, multidisciplinary artist, Negar Behbahani lives in Brooklyn, New York. She received her B.A. in Music in Tehran and MPS from New York University, Tisch School of Arts. Behbahani has exhibited videos and installations in locations including #6 Berlinale Talent Campus, Berlin, Germany; Women's Film and Media Arts Festival, the National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington D.C.; Women's Voices from the Muslim World, Los Angeles; DUMBO Arts Festival, New York; Here Arts Center, New York. Featured in Art in America, The Huffington Post, Jadaliyya, and Theater of One World. Behbahani also was part of the Global Groove, highlighting artists from the Far East, Middle East, Africa, and Europe at The Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum.

Sometime in January or Maybe June

Sometime in January, Nakhodka Mammad was singing his songs while smuggling fabrics. It was sometime in June when I was born out of fabrics made by a loom. Time and Place are in snooze mood, and the sleeping zone brought realistic form of talking about smuggling in Iran.

The zone that give Time opportunities to give us reference to our own history and current moments it's not working anymore; and the zone that place known as a border for itself its getting wide enough to lose the boundary and flow. If this video was able to not provide enough information about smuggling in Iran it's definitely reach the stage that was aiming for. It brought the sense of how much this subject it's complicated and vague to be describe.

The reality keep getting sweep from the eyes and pass through the hands. The hand that now try to tell you manipulated story of smuggling. The question is how one could talk about smuggling and the economy of the county who had been deal with the sanctions more than decades? In not one way to describe it, but the stage of uncertainty could subjective it for each viewers? It doesn't prove anything, nor taking any side, it narrow it to one piece of moving poetry that was almost impossible without making Time and Place flowing in dream stage.



Sometimes in January or Maybe June | 17 min | 2018 | video

Nebras Hoveizavi

Born in Ahavaz, and lived in United States since her 20s, Hoveizavi graduated from California Institute of the Arts with a B.F.A. in Photo-Media in May 2014, and got her M.F.A. from the same University in May 2016. With her background in photography, she started working with moving image as her medium along performance and installation.

Incorporating elements of photography, sculpture, architecture, and installation, her current work is more distances from a traditional photographer. Her art explores, issues of identity, culture, and dislocation among other things.

In 2012, Nebras joined Virtual Verite, a performance troupe established by renowned Los Angeles-based artist, Harry Gamboa Jr. She has been thought in Community Art Partnership in Valencia, California and photography and criticism in Tehran. Her works has been shown internationally and inside her home country, to name a few: Comfort Zone at Villa Kuriosum, Berlin, Limited Access Festival for video, sound and performance and the room parallel program at Fajr International film festival in Tehran. She currently divides her time between Middle East, and Southern California.



Elephant | 4 min | 2014 | 16mm video

The film reflects on inner and outer perceptual connections. In a low light situation accompanied by vague sound, three different actions in three different settings take place. As the camera pans over, flashes of light reveal the actions. By way of displacing signs Elephant frames an unusual viewpoint on the relationship of body, objects and their context. Furthermore, Elephant engages light and sound to create an uneasy vibe. Due to its special lighting techniques, Elephant originally was shot on 16mm film. This version has been scanned and digitalized for the screening purposes.

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The experimental video 'Elephant' present a viewpoint on perception. It is about the things, which are not to be seen but to be perceived. Each scenery starts with a dark-pitched image and as the camera pans, flashes of light reveal the plot. Hence sound is a very distinctive part of the video, yet it can also be deceptive.

'Elephant' engages human body to unfold the story of each plot. Human body is exhibited in unfamiliar situations. By disturbing conventional relations between body, object and context the video aims to study effects of this disturbance on our perception. The physical body hence works with other visual elements to communicate certain emotions. 'Elephant' frames an inexpressible nature of a story, when there is deficit of information.

Mona Kakanj is an Iranian media artist based in Cologne. After receiving DAAD scholarship in 2007, she moved from Iran to Germany to continue her studies. She holds a MFA in painting from Alanus Academy, and a MA in media art from Academy Of Media Arts Cologne. In her works, Kakanj explores personal and public perception. By questioning and displacing conventional norms, she desires to evoke emotional reaction from viewers. Her projects largely consist of experimental movies, video installation as well as site specific public installations.

The space in between all the physical objects

This work is about the cause of migration, when people must flee their homes due to war and hunger, and about the experience of being in a transitional, displaced state.

The images are all about the floating people in the middle of nowhere. Here I am trying to portrait the very last seconds of the life of a drowning body and that last breath that instead of the air breathes water. The middle image resembles the drawn corpse that eventually will be thrown to the shore by the waves and the sea. However you will find all these moments as a beautiful poetic dance with the sound of the waves.

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This video art is about the people fleeing war and hunger at their homeland, yet most of them drawn into the sea. Here in this video that is divided into three frames, you can see bodies floating in the middle of nowhere and then this one still body that resembles the corpse that the sea has brought to the shore. To me the floating bodies are showing the last moment of getting drawn into the water, the very last breath that is breathed and the moment that the lungs are fully filled with water instead of the air. This is the trauma that the body is physically engaged with. And the still body shows the after math of this trauma. Yet you see all of them happy, they all are keeping a smile on their lips and you can find their gestures as if they are getting relieved from this body trauma..., they are not afraid of anything anymore.

Simin Keramati

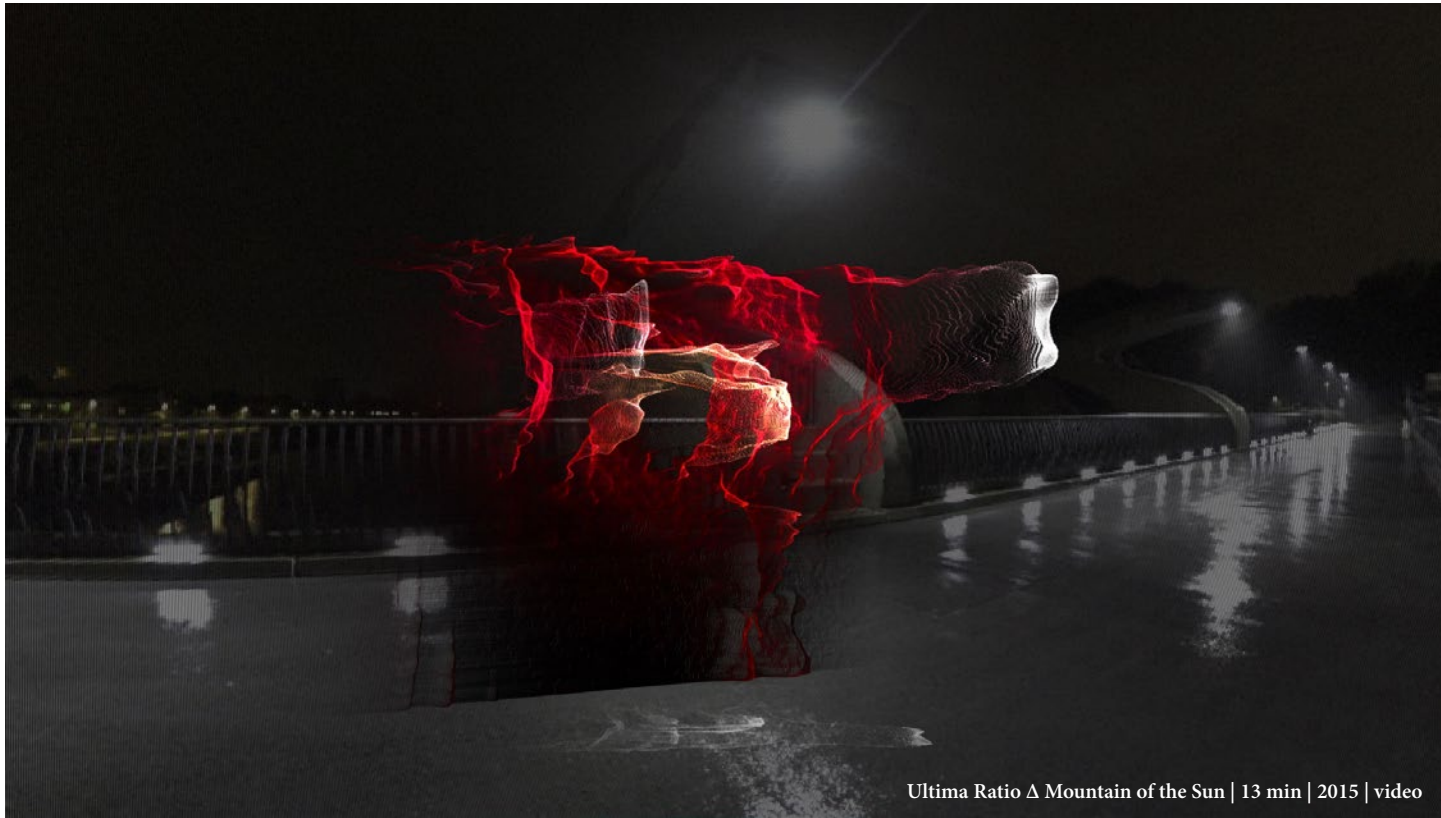
A multidisciplinary Artist, Keramati was born in Tehran, Iran and is currently living and working in Toronto, Canada. She holds a Master's degree in fine arts from Art university of Tehran and was awarded the Grand Prize from Dhaka biennial 2003-4. Her work has been shown in more than 50 group and solo exhibitions internationally.



Boundless Game | 2 min | 2015 | video

Boundless Game on one hand is an experimental dance and on the other hand can be read as movement study and the interrelation of bodies, objects and space. An object designed to be worn by performers. This wearable piece, which marks the borderline between the private and public is used as a vehicle to create a new dynamic for bodies on the conversation. The two are bound together through this vehicle which in its turn creates a boundless situation. *Boundless Game* is an attempt to portray this potential aspect of relationships in a playful, curious and improvised way.

Shahrzad Malekian (1983/ Iran) is an interdisciplinary artist working with video, performance and sculpture. Shahrzad's works often embody contemporary human focusing on relations, power structure, and gender and transitions from private to public domain. Her work has been shown internationally in group exhibitions in Brazil, USA, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland and London. Her video piece was selected for International Film Festival Rotterdam and Göteborg International Film Festival in Jan 2013. She was finalist for MOP CAP 2015 prize. She lives and works in Oslo and Tehran.



Ultima Ratio Δ Mountain of the Sun | 13 min | 2015 | video

Cinema devolved into the slow-motion industry: spectacles repeat. *Ultima Ratio* speeds up by slowing down the image-fix. Traversing the crime-enriched Bekaa valley, the camera uncovers the age-old industries of hashish, models for altering what we see. So too, the camera follows futures, a flash-forwarded optic that seeks to perceive what can be seen anew, cut, particled into vivid fields of matter. "In hashish there is no likeness," only zero-sites for vision-production then, now as visual senses submitted to the rule of reason. The new reason, as this cinematic skin sees it, is not dead old technology, power and blood, not accelerated nothingness, hype and retro-fascism, but technology, each and every instance, as a talking with the dead--emotions, optics, hashish, radio transmitters, melo-dramas, fiber optic telecommunications, ideologies--and now, hashish as primitive technology, the Now as a science-fiction beyond the double binds, the bad infinities of u-/dys-topia. Instead, a tension-less state, a lack of anxiety over demarcating sapience from sentience, automation from human, intelligence farms from organic machines. They--these name voyagers of the ultimate reason--have no story, it has already happened, spirit became mainframe. Bodies metamorph into databanks. A cinema mixing 3-D objects and documentary footage views this state ahead of the state Δ the future returning as past--Mountain of the Sun.

Bahar Noorizadeh

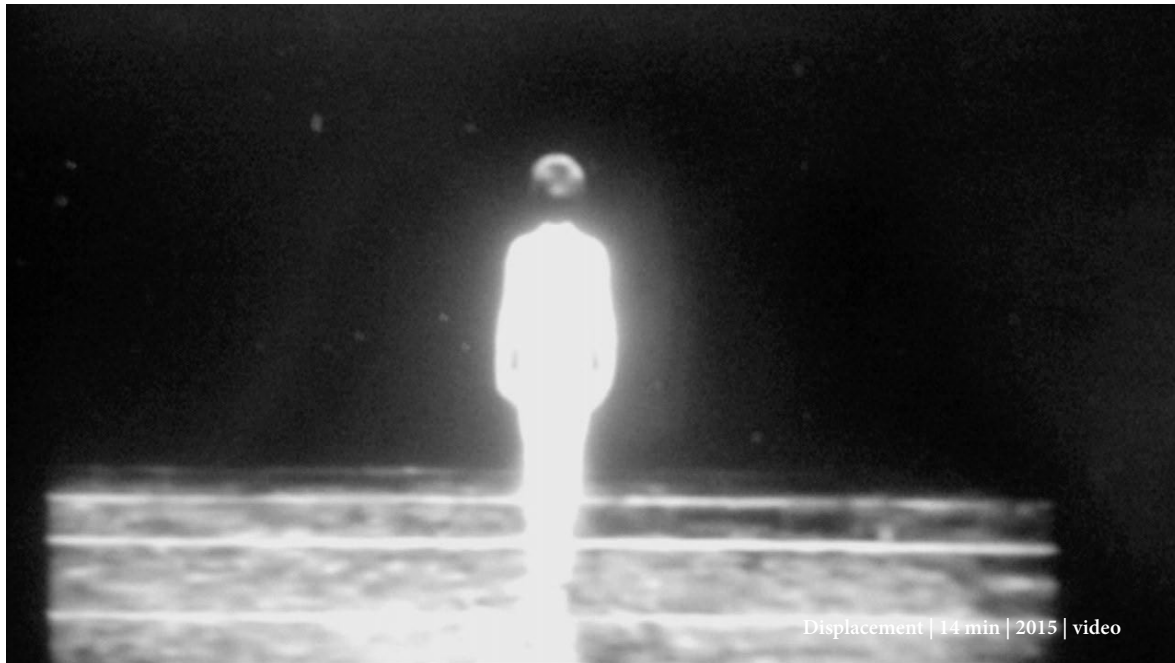
Bahar Noorizadeh is an artist, writer and filmmaker. She works on the reformulation of hegemonic time narratives as they collapse in the face of speculation: philosophical, financial, legal, futural, etc. Her work has appeared in the Tate Modern Artists' Cinema Program; Berlinale Forum Expanded; Biennale of Moving Images, Geneva; Toronto International Film Festival; Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art; Nanjing International Art Festival, Beirut Art Center, and Mercer Union, Toronto; among others. Noorizadeh is a founding member of BLOCC (Building Leverage over Creative Capitalism), a research and education platform that proposes pedagogy as strategy, to alter the relationship between Contemporary Art and the planetary phenomena of urban renewal and social cleansing. Her current research examines the intersections of finance, Contemporary Art and emerging technology, building on the notion of "Weird Economies" to precipitate a cross-disciplinary approach to economic futurism and post-financialization imaginaries. She is pursuing this work as a PhD candidate in Art Practice+Theory at Goldsmiths, University of London.



Anahita Razmi

The works of Anahita Razmi, Berlin-based artist with Iranian background, revolve around cultural transfers and translocations. Working mainly with video, installation, new media and performance, Razmi's work examines processes of appropriation in which the meanings of existing images, artefacts and thus identities are altered by situating them in another temporal context. In doing so, she often reflects strategies of disarrangement and structures of perception expressed by the mass media against the background of different communities between the West and the Middle East. The Islamic Republic of Iran, with its current political and social conditions and relations, remains an open, ambivalent point of reference.

The video *How your veil can help you in the case of an earthquake* (lesson 1-8) is linked to an event that took place just before the date of origin of the video: the big earthquake in the region of Bam, Iran in December 2003. In the video the chador, the veil, symbol of Muslim women, is used as a mere functional object. Shot in clearly contrasting black and white, the video is showing a rigorous direction in eight steps on how to use your veil as a lifesaver in the case of an earthquake, a dry run, that is reminding of stewardess instructions



A considerable amount of the material in my work is from other people's images and sound archives. Any/thing that can be filmed, re-filmed and filmed over and over, or scanned, re-recorded or downloaded, can become a part of the process. These diverse images are gathered from amateur 8mm films I have found, downloaded videos from cyberspace, or forgotten files on a hard disk. Any camera or imaging device can be incorporated in to my work. There is no limit. It is only through the montage process that the work begins, finds form, and comes to an end. There is no predefined structure or script. The images as they are—or independent from their content which may be nonrepresentational—create the context of their own appearance. Either they impose the necessity of their own repetition, or leave their traces in other arrangements. This repetition transforms an ordinary image to something mysterious. Images are in dialogue with each other and at the same time compete for becoming dominant. One image invites another, passes through it and returns to it, finds its own other, either in resemblance or at variance; introduces it, possesses it, lets go of it, or is replaced by it. A row of windmills.

Images are the main characters here. The image of a tree is not a tree, but an image in which there is a tree.

Here is the fiesta of drunken images/.

It's only through the montage process that the work begins, takes shape and comes to an end. There is no predefined structure or script. The images as they are - or independent from their content which can be non representational- create their own setting. Or they impose the necessity of repetition, or as an indicator of their nature in a different arrangement. This repetition transforms an ordinary image to a mysterious matter. Images are in dialogue with each other and at the same time they compete to become the dominant image. One image invites another one, passes through it and returns to it. Image finds its own "other" presence, either in resemblance or in-distinction; introduces it, possesses it, releases it or is replaced by it. The images are the main characters. The image of a tree is not a tree, but an image in which there is a tree. Here is the fiesta of dancing images.

Every fault and every coarseness is accepted. Coarseness is preserved and if possible is not modified; instead it will appear in another place and form to define a new identity and route. The next image: fast movement of camera from one place to the other, wherever it might be.

Bahar Samadi

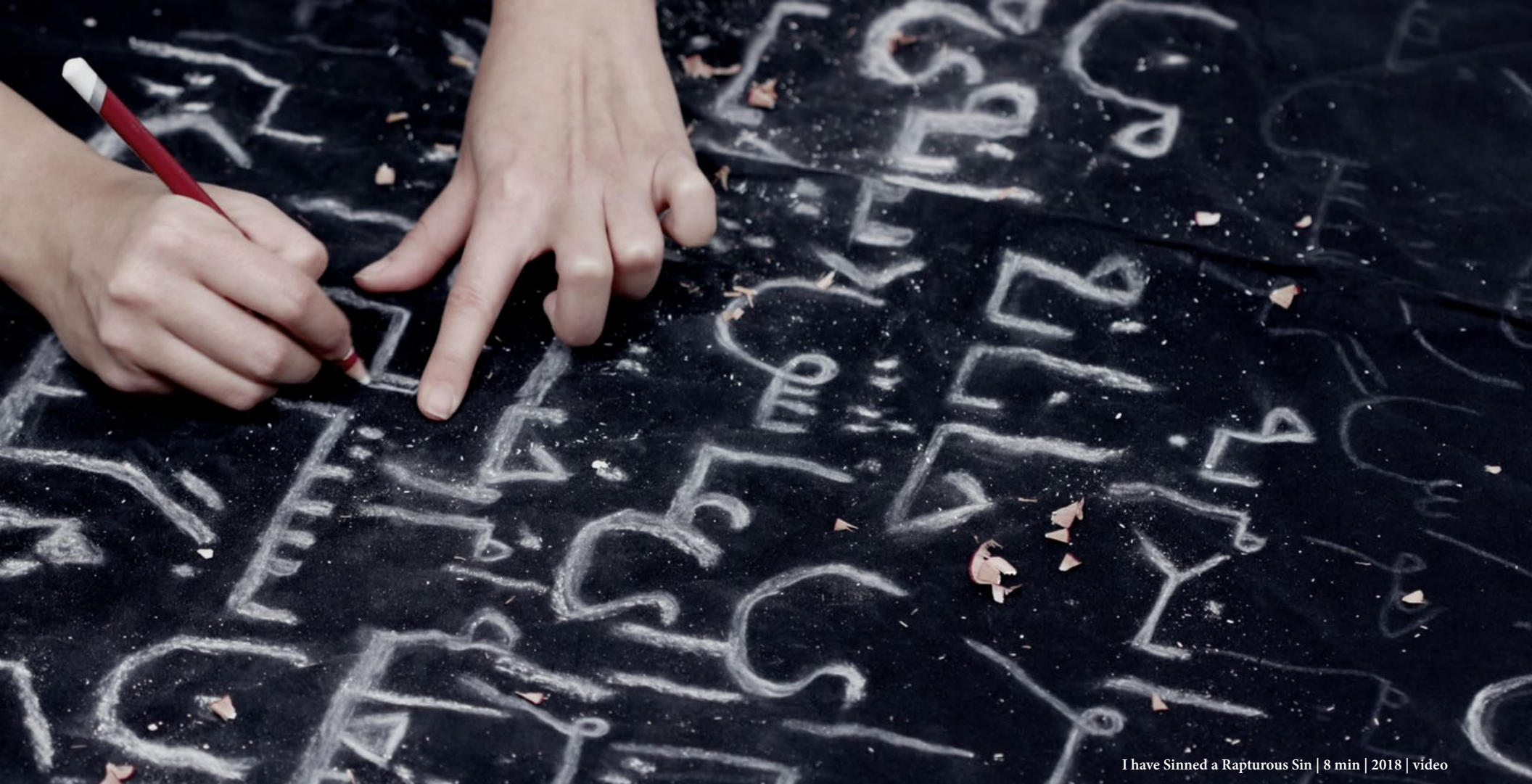
Bahar Samadi (b.1981, Tehran) is a Tehran - Paris based filmmaker and artist. She studied Architecture at the Art Faculty of Azad University - central Tehran, Iran and has graduated in Filmmaking from EICAR School in Paris, France in 2012. In her works, she primarily reaches for found footages and what she has in her archive, using structural techniques like cinematic omission and narrative form diversion to rewrite the pictorial memory. Her attempt to decode the probable life of images, embarks an imaginary journey between the author and the spectator. Since 2014, Navid Salajegheh and Bahar Samadi, have been working together and ran «Studio 51». www.baharsamadi.com



Nowhere to Hide | 2 min | 2017 | video

This video installation is a composition of three originally independent projects that together explore the interface of mind and body, inner and outer, physical and virtual. These opposing dimensions embodied in human experience are alluded to by the blurry moving image of the artist's head in front of the forest scene. The arbitrary, natural arrangement of the trees is echoed by the imperfect lines of the wire structure to evoke the randomness of the connections we make between these worlds. In the main image the camera does not enter the forest but hovers outside of it, underlining a fear of the unknown. This, together with the negative effect and the slowed down soundtrack create a dreamy quality, a sense of the uncanny, that nudges us into a suspended moment of reflection on the parallel materiality and immateriality of conscious experience.

Niloofar Taatizadeh is an Iranian born multidisciplinary artist who explores how the limitless processes of making and creating anew reflect the idea of multiple 'becomings' to reveal what lies beneath the surface of our constructed fixed 'reality'. Her practice combines installation, sculpture, moving image and sound. Based in London, she has recently graduated in Contemporary Photography, Practices and Philosophies from Central Saint Martins School of Art and has participated in exhibitions at Tate exchange, Lethally Gallery, Sluice Biennial and Informal Architects in Switzerland.



I have Sinned a Rapturous Sin | 8 min | 2018 | video

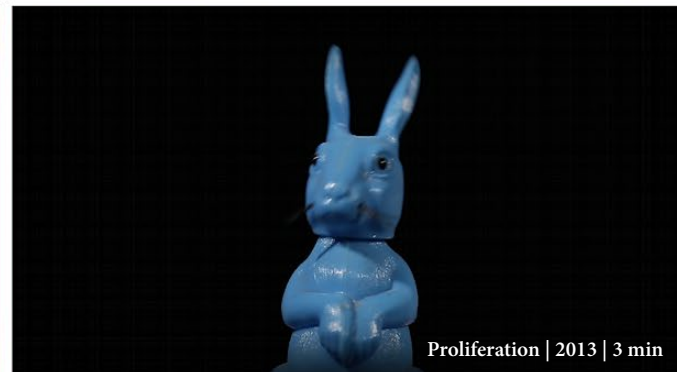
What cures women of sexual promiscuity?

Eating lettuce, of course.

Fragments of Forough Farukhzad's poem, Sin, are read out against Islamic clergies advising women on how to control their lust.

Maryam Tafakory (b. Shiraz, Iran) is an artist-filmmaker based in London. Her work draws on the notion of *personal as political* in a fractured narrative that involves a subtle negotiation between factual and fiction, exploring allegorical forms of visual narrative, using abstracted, symbolic and textual motifs and their on-screen representation. Part performance, her work draws on womanhood and rites of passage, interweaving poetry, (self)-censorship and religion, combining a formal minimalist syntax and figurative mode of representation.

She studied her MFA at Oxford University and her work have exhibited internationally including, Rotterdam IFFR; Edinburgh EIFF; Zurich Film Festival; Melbourne MIFF; ZINEBI; Hamburg IKFF; ICA London; BFI London; Kurzfilmtage Winterthur; Ji.hlava IDFF; Barbican Centre London; New York UnionDocs; and BBC Three. She has received several awards for her films including Best Short Film at Dokumenta-Madrid.



Proliferation | 2013 | 3 min

A silent conversation between a woman and a rabbit; a mass-produced, blue, plastic rabbit and a blue-haired woman. The rabbit says it and the woman confirms it, sometimes begrudgingly and sometimes under compulsion. They multiply rapidly... Without adopting derisive perspectives on the relationship between power and media, the video examines the dynamics between the artist and countless institutions in the modern era, citing Walter Benjamin's essay *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* on the one hand, and Joseph Beuys's *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, on the other.

Jinoos Taghizadeh was born in Tehran in 1971. She received her diploma in graphic design, dramatic literature and ceramics 1992, and subsequently received her graduate degree in sculpture from the fine arts faculty of the university of Tehran in 2000 where she also worked in puppetry and illustration. Since 2001, she has served on the board of editors in various art magazines, as well as a critic and essay writer. She has also been delivering speeches and holding artist-talks in universities and museums around the globe. From 2000 onwards, she has had several solo exhibitions and performances in public spaces in Iran and European galleries. She has also participated in more than a hundred group exhibitions, biennales, museums, foundations and prestigious galleries around the world. Jinoos Taghizadeh lives in Tehran as an artist, storyteller and critic.

BODY POLITICS