

## Faceless Women and Portrait Multiplicity: Representation of the Self in Contemporary Iranian Women Artists' Self-Portraits

Elnaz Rostami-Gharagozloo<sup>1\*</sup> , Faegheh Shirazi<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Creative Arts, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia;  
De Institute of Creative Arts and Design, University College Sedaya International, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Email: [ellie.rostami@gmail.com](mailto:ellie.rostami@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Dept. of Middle Eastern Studies, The University of Texas at Austin, Texas, USA

Email: [fshirazi@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:fshirazi@austin.utexas.edu)

### ABSTRACT

This article explores the representation of the self in self-portraiture, focusing on analysing the artwork of several contemporary Iranian women artists. It delves into how the Iranian government's enforcement of specific appearances for women, as part of shaping an Islamic identity, has compelled Iranian women artists to challenge conventional notions of women's self and identity in their self-portraits. The article demonstrates that the concept of "self" for these artists is not a singular or objective entity, but rather a collective construct. This research employs dramaturgy theory, a sociological framework that situates the self within the context of compliance with controlling social behaviors and religious laws aligned with the governmental political agenda. It aims to explore how Iranian women artists challenge political and women's rights issues in Iran's society. This approach is explored through the concepts of "faceless women" and "portrait multiplicity", emphasizing its unique approach to the theme of self-portraiture.

### CORRESPONDING

#### AUTHOR (\*):

Elnaz Rostami-Gharagozloo  
([ellie.rostami@gmail.com](mailto:ellie.rostami@gmail.com))

### KEYWORDS:

Iranian women artists  
Self-portrait  
Veiling/hijab  
Faceless women  
Portrait multiplicity  
Women in Iranian politics

### CITATION:

Rostami-Gharagozloo, E., & Shirazi, F. (2024). Faceless Women and Portrait Multiplicity: Representation of the Self in Contemporary Iranian Women Artists' Self-Portraits. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 9(11), e003083.  
<https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v9i11.3083>

**Contribution/Originality:** This study pioneers an exploration of conceptual self-portraiture by Iranian women artists, focusing on the symbolic use of mirrors to challenge traditional self-portrait iconography. By capturing resilience against oppression, it contributes to global discussions on identity, feminism, and women's rights in the Muslim world and similar societies.

## 1. Introduction

Ever since the Islamic Republic of Iran toppled the Iranian monarchy rulership of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi in 1978, almost everything changed in Iranian people's life. The sharia (Islamic law) became the constitutional rule of the land. Since the Islamic Republic came into existence, Iran has continually imposed rules about what women can and cannot wear, in addition to many other forms of discriminatory laws against women that violate human rights. In this context, *"Other discriminatory actions against women*

*relate to employment, fevering [sic] men despite Iranian women being more highly educated. In all such "official" discriminatory actions, the physical hijab/veiling, and its link to the traditional patriarchal concept of the role of motherhood became an essential part of the post-revolutionary system, which was not initially a law, but was forced on women and then became a law. A wide range of legal and cultural misogyny is imposed on women by the current government in Iran" (Shirazi, 2019).*

The veil remains a rigid aspect of women's lives, and the regime often tightens these rules to assert control. In protest, some women symbolically defy the dress codes, such as by removing the headscarf, though these acts have led to violent reprisals by groups like the *Hezbollahi*, (affiliated with the party of God), *Sepah* (a multi-service branch of the Iranian Armed Forces, also known as the *Pasdaran*), acting under the directives of Ayatollah Khamenei (Afshar, 1998, p. 197).

Enforcing a lifelong dress code and dictating behaviours can profoundly impact a person's identity. Some women willingly accept the prescribed appearance and identity required by the government, including the compulsory hijab, either out of genuine belief or conformity. However, for those women compelled to wear the hijab against their will, their self-perception as Iranian women in the mirror does not reflect their true identities, as they are subjugated and oppressed for the benefit of the Islamic regime. The government's imposition of appearance on women who do not choose to adhere to the dress code is a disrespectful act that diminishes the uniqueness and authentic desires of all women. The government encourages women to adopt the most conservative form of the *hijab*, i.e., the *maghnaeh*, a one-piece head covering made of plain fabric in dark colors covering the chest and back shoulders and a long one-piece chador worn over it. However, "...the young generation is more interested in wearing what is labelled by the government as the "westernized hijab," called variously the "loose hijab" (*shol hijab*), "improper hijab" (*bad hijab*), or "without hijab" (*bi hijab*)" (Shirazi, 2023).

This is why young generations of Iranian women manipulate the official "dress code" requirements by creating many new individual styles with various accessories using fashionable seasonal hues made with patterned fabric designs. These innovative young women wear what they like to wear with minimal consideration for the hijab, as they want to make sure they look different from those *Hezbollahi* government-hired women wearing multiple layers of black or dark colors on their head and bodies. These young women are representing their controlled public images to express their dissatisfaction with the compulsory hijab. In their private lives, they do not worry about their hijab at all. What they stage in public is far away from what their private image is. This serves a perfect example of dramaturgy and public representations of the Iranian women performed for the past 46 years (Shirazi, 1995).

In addition, control and censorship in Iran on any form of print and non-print media is a well-known policy and "Iran has reinforced its position as one of the world's most repressive countries in terms of press freedom since a huge wave of protests began in reaction to the death, on 16 September 2022, of Mahsa Amini, a student arrested for being 'inappropriately dressed'. Iran is now also one of the world's biggest jailers of journalists" (Reporters Without Borders, 2022).

Within print media, paintings (original or printed) and poster art are highly controlled, since, as the saying goes, "a picture is worth a thousand words,". In response, several female painters in Iran have opted for "self-censorship," particularly when their work

subject is related to women and matters of womanhood. This deliberate form of censorship seeks to avoid repercussions and severe consequences that artists otherwise frequently face.

Building on this context, this article examines contemporary Iranian women artists' self-portraits, situating the research within the feminist movement ignited by the death of Mahsa Amini on September 16, 2022. It further engages with debates surrounding the veil and hijab through the lens of Iranian feminism.

We argue that Iranian women artists who use a self-image or portrait of other women in their work may not refer to this as a self-portrait but, in many ways, represent themselves nonetheless. Simultaneously, their self-portraits can be seen as their external female viewer's portrait. From [Goffman's \(1959\)](#) dramaturgical point of view, such representation is a symbolic representation in which, with the use of cultural codes, such as those associated with the hijab, one can represent the community ([Kaiser, 1998, pp. 54, 523](#)). Thus, the self in the self-portrait using this approach, is not the individual self but a collective self.

We realize that such symbolic representation of self is used by Iranian women artists not to promote this collective religious identity, but rather to critique it. We argue that in the case of Iranian women artists, the issue of self-representation goes beyond cultural, religious, and social expectations, evolving into a political statement. We observe a consistent exploration of the challenge of self in self-portraits across two generations of Iranian artists, spanning from the early Islamic revolution to the last decade (2011-2021). Metaphorically, these artists delve into the complexities of self, even if their works are not explicitly titled as such. Furthermore, the aim is to question conventional assumptions about self-portraiture, specifically within the Iranian context. This investigation offers new perspectives on the genre within a distinct cultural and social context.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. What is a Portrait, and What Is a Self-Portrait? Can an Artist Be Absent from Her Self-Portrait?

According to [West \(2004\)](#), from a historical perspective, the artist's self-portrait is a sub-branch of portraiture, which is a Western concept linked to the 15th-century notion of individuality (p.116).

[Brilliant \(1991\)](#), in his seminal publication *Portraiture: Essays in Art and Culture*, has suggested definitions of portraiture and self-portraiture. [Brilliant \(1991\)](#) asserts that a portrait should say something about the person's appearance and likeness and the person's position in society at the time, "...defined by age, gender, race, physical beauty, occupation, social and civic status, and class" (p.15). Moreover, the portrait must describe something about the person's "inner character" (p.16).

A group of Western scholars challenged this definition, advocating for more flexible ways to characterize a portrait ([Maes, 2015, p. 307](#); [Spinicci, 2009, p. 47](#)). They also began to question the necessity of resemblance in portraiture ([Pointon, 2013, p. 11](#)).

[Brilliant \(1991\)](#) outlines two types of self-portraits. The first, traditional self-portraiture, is personal and showcases the artist's identity, including their likeness. The second type,

in a more contemporary approach, delves deeper, aiming to respond to inquiries about the self (Brilliant, 1991, p. 187).

For Western women artists after the 20th century, self-portraiture evolved and moved beyond simple representation to a creative process enabling a journey of self-exploration. Western women artists began challenging stereotypes tied to their cultural history (such as the objectified portrayal of nude female bodies by male artists). They embarked on this journey to explore their identities as both artists and women (Borzello, 2016, pp. 19-22; Meskimmon, 1996, p.7).

In addition, a new category of portraits, "Anti-Portraiture" (Johnstone & Imber, 2020, p. 8) has emerged relatively recently. Scholars argue that in the 21st century, a portrait (including self-portraits) may not need a face or even a human subject. An example of this type of self-portrait is a photograph portraying the artist Swanson (2007) without a visible face, which is covered by a white, foamy substance. The artist stated, "The psychological play between the viewer and myself is what I am most interested in... The idea of hiding to acknowledge the act of looking is fascinating to me" (Lindgren, 2020, p. 195).

The deliberate avoidance of depicting the face also emphasizes presence of the artists in the self-portraits of Iranian women artists. In order to better understand this approach, we must delve deeper into the use of the self in their art, which extends beyond the individual artist to encompass the identity of the artist as an Iranian woman, thus forming a collective identity in a critical manner.

## 2.2. Emergence of the Use of Self-image in the Work of Iranian Women Artists

The use of symbolic self-image by Iranian women artists perhaps began with Neshat (1993-1997), a native Iranian whose internationally known work includes the photographic series, *Women of Allah*, which "...examines the complexities of women's identities in the midst of a changing cultural landscape in the Middle East" (Young, 2017). This photographic series has been widely discussed in the academic world, but not often in the context of self-portrait because the portrait of Neshat (1993-1997) at first glance appears to us as a stereotypical image of a woman from the Middle East. However, she (also) serves as a metaphor for women from the Muslim world, carrying a broader message. Therefore, her personal appearance and identity play a secondary role in the narrative.

For instance, in Neshat's (1994) self-portrait titled *Rebellious Silence*, from *Women of Allah series*, the artist's face is manipulated and covered with Persian calligraphy, diverting our focus from her individuality and, instead, making her "faceless," accentuating her Iranian identity. The use of the veil, in this instance a *chador* (a large piece of cloth placed on the head and wrapped around the entire body), is not about what the artist might choose to express herself with, but to underscore a common mandated dress code imposed on women in Iran (Rostami-Gharagozloo, 2024, p. 11).

As a budding artist in the US, Neshat (1993-1997) drew inspiration from her first visit to Iran in 1990, where she observed the evolving appearance of Iranian women following the Islamic Revolution. For Neshat (1993-1997) these transformations extended beyond what she saw on streets and posters; they resonated within her own home, notably in the comments of her mother and sister. It was during this intimate experience that she felt a

personal connection, sparking the development of her own ideas (Abdi, 2021, p. 66), which a few years later led to the creation of several self-portraits in *Women of Allah* series.

In a 2021 interview, Neshat as cited in Abdi (2021, p. 51), articulated her overarching philosophy regarding her works and the role of the iconic woman within it, stating, “The essence of my work revolves around self-exploration. It consistently portrays a woman on a relentless quest for answers to questions encompassing existence, gender, politics, and social-religious concerns”.

Following Neshat’s (1993-1997) footsteps, a new generation of Iranian women artists has emerged, continuing the journey of self-exploration via the use of self-image. Focussing on women’s self and identity within a culture and political landscape shaped by Islamic influences.

### 3. Self and Its Representation in Dramaturgical Theory

Goffman’s (1959) dramaturgical interpretation, introduced in 1959, provides insight into the representation of the self. He distinguished between self in the “backstage” and “frontstage,” which explains how individuals change as they encounter social life or when in their private space (Goffman, 1959, p. 77). The self in the transformation from backstage to frontstage is identified as unaware (subjectively invisible) (Tseëlon, 1992, p. 502), which individuals learn to adapt according to their cultural expectations and their role in society. The case of Islamic women’s appearances as an example of a symbolic representation has been widely debated in scholarly discourse. However, the self-representation of such symbolic appearance remained unaddressed until the emergence of more self-portraits by women within the Islamic culture.

The self-portraits of Iranian women artists discussed here use a symbolic representation of the self to fit what is expected of them when they are visible in the public. The artist’s self seamlessly intertwines with the self of her female audience. Thus, the question of “whose portrait is it?” becomes irrelevant, rendering the subject faceless. The artist’s “self,” in turn, merges with that of Iranian female audiences. In this sense, the symbolic depiction of the woman functions as a reflective mirror. As seen in Neshat’s (1994) self-portrait, the model’s personal identity before the camera becomes secondary, with the focus shifting to the iconic representation of her appearance.

Symbolic interactionism encompasses both appearance management and appearance perception, emphasizing a two-way interaction focus. In symbolic interactionist terms, information becomes more meaningful if two people process the same bits of information similarly, or jointly construct an interpretation using the same information (Kaiser, 1998, p. 39). This perspective can explain why Iranian female audiences may identify with self-portraits of Iranian women artists.

Another approach employed by the Iranian women artists discussed in this article involves creating a “multiplicity of portraits”, showcasing the diverse iconic looks conveying the public stage of Iranian women’s social life. However, among these variations, the individual self as the one in charge of appearance management remains notably absent. Yet, the artist intentionally invites us to see the absence of this individual through the multiplicity of the portraits.

### 3.1. Problem with the Use of the Term “Self-Portrait”

Self-portraits by Iranian women artists have been studied, under titles like *The Voice and the Silence of the Body* (Cherem, 2016) or *Self-Body Image* (Salah, 2017) but, interestingly, rarely as self-portraiture. Some artists avoid labelling their works as self-portraits for two key reasons. Firstly, unlike traditional self-portraits, these artists often prioritize their bodies over facial features. Women artists use their self-bodies to address issues like freedom, gender discrimination, and Muslim female identity (Salah, 2017, p. 67). This context raises questions about portraiture definitions. Western definitions by scholars like Brilliant (1991) or West (2004) may not align with the absence of representational portraiture vis-à-vis individuality in the work of Iranian women artists. Putting aside the stereotypical orientalist’s perspective of the veiled Muslim women, the historical significance of veiling in Islamic culture complicates the depiction of women in art.

Secondly, the reluctance to label their works as self-portraits might stem from the absence of a suggested, culturally specific definition of self in self-portraiture from a feminist Middle Eastern or Iranian scholarly perspective. Existing definitions primarily originate from a Western viewpoint.

Analysing Iranian women artist self-portraits necessitates considering the aforementioned factors. The portrayal of women in these artists’ works revolves around the unresolved concept of the self as a free individual. It is inherently political, aiming to confront the veil and hijab dilemma within Islamic society and the pursuit of freedom through the exploration of the concealed self.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Mahsa Amini’s Hashtag as the Meaning of “Self”

Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year-old Iranian woman was arrested on September 14, 2022 by the morality police for wearing what the authorities deemed an “improper” hijab. Tragically, she passed away two days later while still in police custody, with allegations of severe police brutality, although the police have denied these claims with the Iranian government’s backing. This incident sparked widespread protests in Iran and online, and was widely covered by international media (Nimoni, 2023).

While a comprehensive analysis of these protests is beyond the scope of this article, it is essential to highlight that the primary demand of protestors aligns with the argument in this article. Chants like “Mahsa Amini” and “Woman-Life-Freedom” resonated, and social media campaigns, such as “I am #MahsaAmini,” showcased solidarity among Iranian women, emphasizing the importance of self-determination in appearance. This self-determination is also apparent in the self-portrait of Iranian women as a form of resistance to the tyranny of authorities who control every aspect of their lives including their bodies.

The use of Mahsa Amini’s hashtag serves as a symbolic reference to the self, highlighting the individual challenges faced by Iranian women. Many, adopted her photo as their social media profile picture. One specific image, shown in Figure 1 (this photo was originally shared publicly by her family), gained significant traction on social media, street posters, and graffiti. In this three-quarter view photograph, Amini wears a black headscarf, revealing two angles of her hair: one atop her head, half touching her forehead, and the

other, a simple braided hanging over her shoulder with the rest concealed by the scarf. For most Iranian women, the hijab doesn't fully cover their hair but serves as a loose token signifying adherence to the law. This attitude, as explained earlier, is a way of resistance to the compulsory hijab, thus on the "public stage" they minimally adhere to the religious enforcement, and otherwise have no choice. However, even in this limited expression, they are pretending to be following what is expected of them.

Figure 1: Portrait of Mahsa Amini



Source: [The Guardian \(2023\)](#)

Amini's young and innocent portrait, with her black headscarf and *manteau*, represents the contemporary Iranian women's appearance— a familiar face that all Iranian women have seen in mirrors before leaving home, in outdoor photographs, or reflections in shop and car windows as they walk.

Today, countless women stand in solidarity behind Amini's photograph without the need for a face or identity. In other words, they are rejecting such forced appearance of self in Iran's society's "public stage". Numerous other young women and men lost their lives in subsequent protests, their names now adopted as hashtags by Iranian social media users. Nonetheless, Mahsa Amini's hashtag and portrait persist as a unifying symbol and the face of these protests.

#### 4.1.2. Women Artists Respond to #MahasaAmini

Tavakolian, born in 1981, was one of the earliest visual artists to respond to this activism movement. A few days after Amini's death, [Tavakolian \(2022\)](#) posted one of her well-known photographs from her series titled *Listen: Giving Voice to Iranian Women* (hereafter referred to as "Listen") on her Instagram account with the caption "#MahsaAmini #Iran". This photograph is believed by some sources to be self-posed by the artist ([Cherem, 2016](#)). This photo, however, does not fit the model of traditional Western portraiture or self-portraiture, as the identity and likeness of the model are not central. Like [Neshat's](#)

(1994) *Rebellious Silence*, it could be any Iranian woman's portrait, symbolizing Mahsa Amini's image today. In fact, the woman in the photo is the artist's sister (Tavakolian, 2010) resembling her from a distance. She wears a black *manteau* similar to Amini's and stands alone in a wide street, wearing red boxing gloves and a determined gaze, ready for a fight. Tavakolian (2022) as cited in Khaknezhad (2017) aimed for a universally relatable appearance, stating, "A common look that every Iranian woman from all classes could relate to her".

The demonstrations and police violence against protesters started about the time Tavakolian (2022) posted this photo, which was shared among Iranian social media users as one of the most relevant images for the protests. This photo fittingly demonstrates the self-view of Iranian women, including the artist herself, concerning the unjust treatment of women in Iran and their yearning for change.

Part of the same photography series by Tavakolian (2011) titled *Listen*, includes a video featuring six female singers captured in a single frame divided into six squares, though their voices are not audible. This series serves as a commentary on the prohibition of solo singing by women following Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979. The portrait multiplicity of voiceless women in this series symbolizes all Iranian women who are aware of their inability to sing, including Tavakolian, who had once aspired to be a singer during her childhood (Khaknezhad, 2017). These artworks, comprising photographs and video art by Tavakolian, offer insights into the self-perception of Iranian women, presenting a narrative of self despite the absence of the artist herself in the works.

#### 4.1.3. Why Faceless or Portrait Multiplicity?

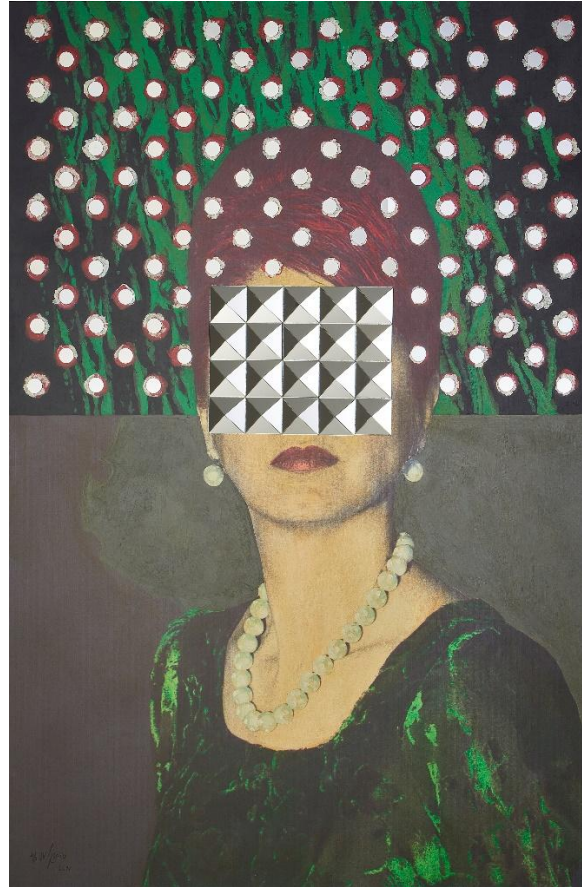
Alikhanzadeh's (2013) self-portrait, shown in Figure 2, illustrates the concept of multiple selves. She labels some of her work as self-portraits, even when facial features are absent, or the face of another woman is depicted. In this series, as per what the Alikhanzadeh (2023) stated, she delves into the themes of identity and reality in contemporary Iran. Alikhanzadeh (2023) selected the women featured in her self-portraits from unknown vintage women's photographs dating back to the 1940s and 1950s. These photos depict Iranian women who were unveiled in the era when Reza Shah Pahlavi enforced the mandatory unveiling of women in 1936 as part of his modernization efforts, which considered the veil and hijab as symbols of backwardness.

To grasp Alikhanzadeh's (2013) self-portraits, we must consider the historical context beyond the era in which she chose her photographs. Following Reza Shah, his son and successor, Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1941-1978), allowed women the choice to wear or not to wear the hijab. However, his reign came with its own political complexities. Women were divided into two groups: veiled and unveiled. The unveiled appearance of women was associated with Western influence, while veiled women were emblematic of traditional Iran and Islam (Najmabadi, 2005, p. 133). These distinctions were part of the discourse on Western imperialism. During the later years of Muhammad Reza Shah's rule, wearing the hijab became a political statement, reflecting women's opposition to the Pahlavi dynasty's modernization project. After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini enforced the compulsory hijab (Fathzadeh, 2021, p. 154) as a symbol of Islamic Iran.

As history illustrates clearly, men in power used women's images, veiled or unveiled, as political symbols in the last century in Iran. Simultaneously, this approach impacted

women's desire to veil or unveil as a political response (Zahedi, 2007, p. 76). The bottom line is that the period when Iranian women can self-determine their appearance without political or cultural pressure—a period yearned for by many women—has yet to come.

Figure 2: Self-Portrait



Source: [Alikhanzadeh \(2013\)](#)

Alikhanzadeh, born in 1967, witnessed the shift in women's appearance from unveiled to veiled during her upbringing. In her 2013 self-portrait project shown in [Figure 2](#), she sought to discover her true self, reflecting the identity of Iranian women. Recognizing her being used as a political symbol throughout history, vacillating between veiled and unveiled to align with the era, she replaced her face with small mirror fragments. This invites viewers to consider their own portrait multiplicity, creating surreal reflections within this self-portrait, thus also reflecting the complexities she faces when thinking about herself and her place in her history.

Like in [Tavakolian's \(2011\)](#) work discussed above, [Alikhanzadeh \(2013\)](#) aim is to explore the uncharted, revealing, forbidden realms—the “veiled face” and the “banned/veiled voice.” The use of small mirror fragments in her work draws from Iran's cultural heritage where mirrors have been traditionally used for interior decoration in palaces and sacred spaces ([Shkolna, 2019](#)). This mirror art invites individuals to see multiple reflections of themselves, akin to the theme in Rumi's verse: ‘Of these two thousand I's and we's, I wonder, which one am I? ([Rumi, 2009, p. 188](#)).

Thus, both artists, without employing literal self-portraits, established portrait multiplicity, inviting viewers to join them on this journey of self-discovery.

## 5. Artwork Analysis

### 5.1. More Examples of Self-Portraiture: 2000-2011

Another exemplar from the last two decades, where we see the same patterns of portrait multiplicity, is Ghadirian (2001), who created a series of photographs titled *Like Everyday*. In Ghadirian's (2001) series, women's veiled faces are concealed by household items. The inspiration for this series comes from the artist's own experiences, particularly the household items she received as wedding gifts. To explain her work, she stated "Everything that happened in my life comes to my photographs" (Ghadirian, 2019).

Without additional insights from the artist, it becomes apparent that Ghadirian's (2001) series communicates the societal expectations placed upon women, portraying them as conforming to stereotypes. Ghadirian (2019) revealed that when she exhibited this series, female viewers could relate to these images, appreciating her for shedding light on aspects of their lives. However, male viewers disliked it, perceiving the portraits as representing a male patriarchal perspective. The Iranian government also criticized her for showcasing this series internationally.

Ghadirian's (2001), *Like Everyday* series employs irony and humour to represent the multiplicity of self and portraiture without the presence of either. The series satirizes the patriarchal cultural perception of women's images in Iran. The artist's self-portrayal mirrors this perspective, illustrating her awareness of the situation. This can be seen as a faceless self-portrait, referencing her personal memory of marriage, when women are expected to become a homemaker. It also serves as a portrait multiplicity of Iranian female observers, who can relate to the societal stereotypes. Here, the physical presence of the artist or any individual with a specific face and identity is unnecessary. Only her Iranian and female essence is essential.

In 2007, Hakimi-Schüler, born in 1977, created a self-portrait series, shown in Figure 3, which differs from Alikhanzadeh's (2013) and Ghadirian's (2001) work. Her face remains identifiable in her portraits, but she prompts viewers to question her identity by presenting twelve frames simultaneously, each featuring a front-facing view. This approach embodies self-portrait multiplicity, showcasing various outfits and characteristics, from unveiled, stylish appearances with makeup, to half-veiled and fully covered depictions. Iranian women can readily relate to this hybrid portrayal, as they have encountered similar contrasting looks when gazing into a mirror, stemming from their living circumstances rather than differing tastes.

The degree of veiling in Iran depends on the spaces with which women are associated. For instance, women working in government sectors, schools, and universities face stricter dress code restrictions. Any governmental business or governmental space not only enforces the common veiled uniform but also requires a black chador (Afshar, 1998, p. 201). For women who wish to develop their professional life to work as, for example, the head of a ministry or a politician, a chador over a *maghnaeh* is a requirement with no other options.

Therefore, Iranian women, willingly or unwillingly, experience moments when they must learn to switch from one look and identity to another to meet necessary requirements. In doing so, as per Goffman's (1959) interpretation of the dramaturgy, they must change their "costumes" to fit the "stage" they happen to be on. Women have become masterful

in the art of switching their dress to meet the requirements of each situation. This dynamic extends to family settings, where they may veil in front of elderly or strange men. Conversely, they explore unveiled looks within their homes, personal lives, or during international travel. However, none of these personas or visages represent their true selves, as depicted by [Hakimi-Schüler \(2007\)](#). Instead, they are on a continual journey of self-exploration, echoing the quest for the free self. These self-portraits symbolize the shared experience of Iranian women, navigating the concept of “self,” embracing multiplicity.

Figure 3. Self-portrait series



Source: [Hakimi-Schüler \(2007\)](#)

The artists reviewed above, all reacted to the uprising protest on their social media accounts by tagging their artwork concerning their self-view of Iranian women with Mahsa Amini and Woman-Life-Freedom hashtags.

## 5.2. Self-Portrait in the Last Decade in Iran and Its Social Context

In recent times, as the plight of women in Iran persists, women artists have persisted in addressing self-related issues while evolving their metaphorical approach to reflect the contemporary challenges they face. The post-Islamic revolution generation of artists has firsthand experience of the injustice and violence inflicted upon women by the regime. Over the past decade, women's rights activists have engaged in various forms of civil

disobedience, often resulting in imprisonment or coerced confessions, even death as a form of punishment.

To highlight a few examples among the many available, on December 27, 2017, a woman named Vida Movahed staged a symbolic protest against the compulsory hijab in Tehran by waving a white scarf tied to a stick on Enghelab Street. Her video went viral with hashtags like #WhereIsTheGirlOfEnghelabStreet? Movahed was arrested on the same day, and her identity remained unknown for days. This led to concerns for her safety. Responding to the hashtag, other women, including those wearing hijabs, joined the movement by waving scarves tied to sticks in different parts of the city (Shirazi, 2019).

Nasrin Sotodeh, a prominent women's rights activist and lawyer, later revealed Movahed's identity and supported the cause. She, too, was arrested and jailed (RFE/RL, 2021). Subsequently, other women who participated in the symbolic protest, were identified and imprisoned.

In August 2018, Saba Kord Afshari, a 20-year-old human rights activist, posted selfie photos and videos without a hijab online, advocating for women's freedom in appearance choice. She was sentenced to 24 years in prison charged with "promoting corruption" and "propaganda against the state." Her mother, who recorded a video supporting her with a headscarf, was also arrested and imprisoned (IranWire, 2021).

In July 2022, a viral video captured the confrontation of Sepideh Rashnu, a graphic designer and graduate student of painting, with a preaching woman on a bus, propelling her into activism against Iran's mandatory hijab law. A few weeks later, a "confession" video featuring Rashnu was aired on Iran's national TV and social media (Tayebi, 2022). In this video, Rashnu's hair was veiled by a dark brown shawl, pallid with noticeable bruising around her eye. She was positioned squarely in front of the camera but, deliberately averting her gaze, avoided direct eye contact. Speaking in a hushed tone, she expresses remorse for having sent the video from a bus altercation to Masih Alinejad the women's rights activist based in the United States. Alinejad promptly shared the video and praised Rashnu's courage (Rezaei, 2022).

Rashnu's emaciated appearance and body language suggested that, like others before her, she may have been coerced into reciting a scripted statement. Following a November 22, 2023 ruling by Branch 26 of The Tehran Revolutionary Court, Rashnu received a three-year and seven-month sentence for "gathering and colluding against national security (Frontline Defenders, 2024) and an additional four months for "propaganda" against the state. These severe penalties were imposed on Rashnu due to her subsequent act of solidarity with the Woman-Life-Freedom movement. She deliberately appeared without the mandatory hijab opting instead for a suit and tie that emphasized her independent choice of clothing (Iran International News, 2023). This act of disobedience contributed to the harsh consequences. The aforementioned examples are merely a handful among numerous ongoing cases.

Prior to Amini's tragic death and the subsequent widespread protests, both within Iran and on the global stage, women had struggled in isolation against the oppressive regime's silencing of their voices. This plight finds a poignant visual representation in one of Khosravi's (2022a) paintings from her series *The Garden*. Born in 1984, Khosravi is a new-generation artist whose work features a half-veiled woman with sewn lips, as shown in

**Figure 4.** The sewn lips serve as a powerful metaphor for women's rights activists and anyone addressing the sensitive issue of the hijab in Iran.

Figure 4. The Garden



Source: [Khosravi \(2022a\)](#)

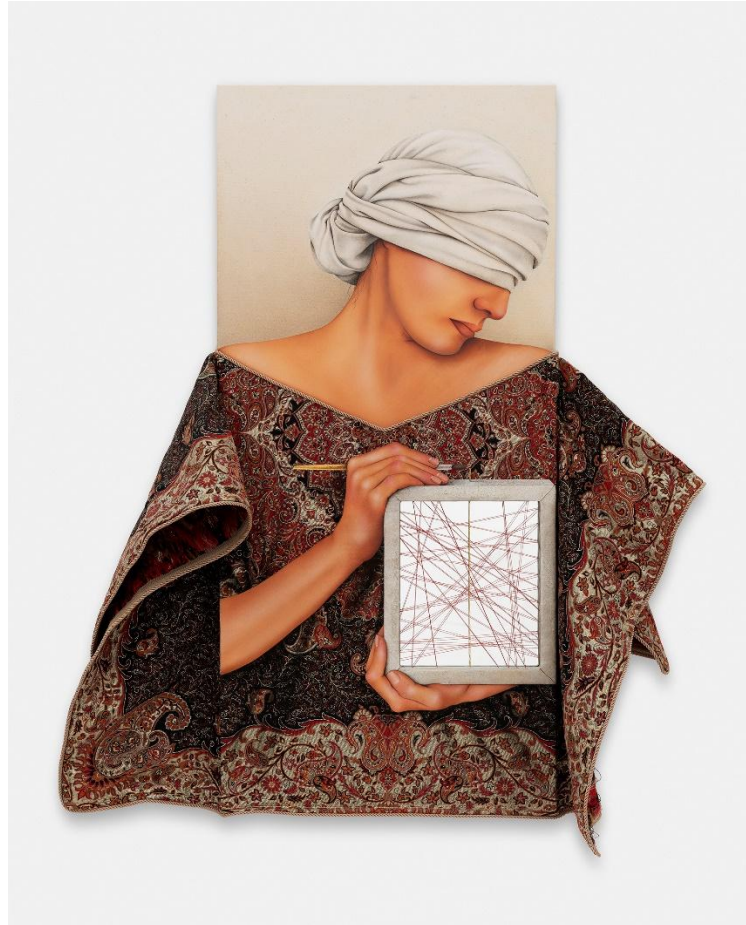
We do not imply that [Khosravi \(2022a\)](#) had the activists, mentioned earlier, in mind when creating her work. However, we are emphasizing the artist's connection to her era and its impact on her identity. She understands the potential consequences for Iranian women, including herself, when they voice their opinions. The artwork itself expresses her concerns. In a 2017 interview, [Khosravi \(2022a\)](#), as cited in [Brara \(2017\)](#) stated that in her paintings she reflects on her life experiences and memories from Iran where human rights and women's rights are in dire straits.

The depictions of female bodies in [Khosravi's \(2020\)](#) artworks can be interpreted as self-portraits, despite her not titling any of her works as such. The resemblance between the artist and the women in her paintings piques audience curiosity. In fact, in 2021, during an interview, she was asked about one of her paintings, *The Anatomy of a Woman Series #4*, shown in [Figure 5](#), whether the faceless woman depicted was a self-portrait. Her response in the interview provided clarity: "No, this is not a self-portrait" ([Mayhabal-Davis, 2021](#)). The woman depicted in her painting is neither a self-portrait nor a representation of any specific individual.

In this piece, [Khosravi \(2020\)](#) obscures the woman's face, making her identity unimportant within the frame. The faceless figure holds a framed mirror with a red thread and an art brush. Holding a brush next to a mirror is an old gesture in Western self-portraiture, i.e., *Artists at Work* ([Hall, 2014, p. 133](#)) (or artists with their professional tools). However, [Khosravi's \(2020\)](#) use of the mirror serves a different purpose, as it allows viewers to see themselves and engage with the multiplicity of self. The brush in the

woman's hand, according to [Khosravi \(2020\)](#), signifies the narrator. In other words, the artist is present as the narrator of this interaction between herself as an Iranian woman and her audience's selves ([Mayhabal-Davis, 2021](#)).

Figure 5: The Anatomy of a Woman Series #4



Source: [Khosravi \(2020\)](#)

This approach diverges from Western self-portraiture and represents a unique self-portrait from an Iranian woman's artistic and feminist perspective. Like [Alikhanzadeh \(2013\)](#), [Khosravi \(2020\)](#) invites viewers to introspect, but the reflection is intricate. In *The Anatomy of a Woman Series #4*, the viewer's face in the mirror is intertwined with red lines. The act of seeing, of unveiling, entails the desire to remove this covering from the face and the thread from around the mirror—to glimpse the true self. It mirrors the quest for truth and connection to their true selves, and at this juncture, both the artist's and the viewer's selves remain shrouded in mystery.

[Khosravi's \(2020\)](#) paintings are peaceful and inviting, at first glance carrying echoes of Persian poetry and often incorporating elements from Persian miniatures such as the paisley pattern (Persian = *butteh Jegheh*) ([Fenstermaker, 2019](#)). However, they also reveal a subtle brutality aimed towards women, symbolized by the thin red thread that restricts their movement. This symbolism resonates into the issues relating to the veil and the hijab, which may appear benign on the surface but carry deeper meaning.

While critics in Iran have often downplayed the hijab issue, the government in Iran correlates almost everything to the hijab and women indirectly to divert attention away from Iran's failing economy and political systems.

A case in point is Kord Afshari's innocent selfie video in which she simply expresses how she wishes to dress in an otherwise innocuous appearing act. Cases like Kord Afshari's prison sentence imposed for a seemingly innocuous video serve as a stark reminder that even peaceful dissent against the regime carries consequences, echoing [Khosravi's \(2022a\)](#) portrayal of how it ultimately restricts women's freedom.

[Khosravi \(2022b\)](#) reacted to Mahsa Amini's movement the day after her death (September 17, 2022) by posting details of a painting from her upcoming exhibition with hashtags and the caption "*The fire of our rage will eventually catch you one day and burn you to ashes from beginning to the end*" ([Khosravi, 2022b](#)).

Motallebi (born in 1986) is another relevant artist in the genre of self-portrait as "faceless". Motallebi employs distinctive techniques to convey the invisibility of women. In her series titled *Not Seen* ([Motallebi, 2014](#)), she selects women characters from vintage family photos printed on fabric and employs traditional flora and fauna embroidery patterns to obscure their faces, emphasizing the theme of not being seen.

Embroidery, typically associated with femininity globally, holds a unique significance for Motallebi as she traces its origins to masculine practices ([Anamnesis, 2021](#)). Her introduction to embroidery stemmed from her grandfather's involvement in Muslim Shiia commemoration day ceremonies known as *Ashura*. The *Ashura* entails elaborate mourning rituals and the display of items commemorating the battle (10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram in the year 61 After Hijra) between Imam Husayn ibn Ali's small army and the Umayyad Caliph Yazid I's forces. Among these items, embroidered flags play a vital role, reflecting the deeper significance embroidery holds in [Motallebi's \(2014\)](#) work. Motallebi has not directly criticized the Islamic Republic of Iran's regime; she maintains the idea that her works are not political in nature ([Darz, 2021](#)). Yet, they contain metaphorical elements such as obscuring women's faces and identities in her artwork, critiquing both the Islamic government and the broader patriarchal society in Iran.

The invisibility of girls starts in their families once they compare themselves to their brothers and male cousins. [Motallebi \(2014\)](#) realized this female invisibility in her childhood when she visited her religious grandfather's house, she recounted. As she states in an interview, "*I was the only girl among other grandchildren, and my hijab was not always proper, so I was not seen*" ([Anamnesis, 2021](#)).

On another occasion she has quoted her grandfather as follows: "*Girls are beautiful, but their beauty should not be seen*", and later adds that "*I was sure he meant to tell me to hold bunches of flowers in front of my face*" ([Przybilla, 2014](#)).

This might explain why, according to [Motallebi \(2014\)](#), as cited in [Darz \(2021\)](#) does not see her art as directly tied to current political events. Nevertheless, following Mahsa Amini's death (October 7, 2022), she shared one of her *Not Seen* series artworks, on her Instagram story with the caption, "For all these years, we have not been seen" ([Motallebi, 2022a](#)).

In some of her embroideries titled “People,” [Motallebi \(2022b\)](#) has removed a person’s facial parts and replaced them with birds. Within the same series, she also created an embroidered faceless woman with the title *Self-Portrait* where a bird is sitting on her shoulder ([Motallebi, 2022b](#)). Similarly to other cultures, birds symbolize freedom in Persian culture due to free movement and their ability to fly. Moreover, legendary birds such as the *Homa*, *Qoqnoos* or *Simorgh* signify resistance, prosperity, or sovereignty in Persian mythology. [Motallebi \(2022b\)](#) depicts birds in different poses—flying, observing, communicating, or dead. Birds, in some ways, reflect these characters in her works, not as persons but perhaps as what persons wish to convey.

More artists are emerging in the last decade worth examining in relation to the concept of self in self-portrait, but they are beyond the scope of this article. However, we briefly mention three Iranian women artists in this category. [Eskandarfar \(2021\)](#), like the artists analyzed earlier, uses an indirect approach to explore selfhood. Her paintings symbolize the search for self and metaphorically critique women’s status in Iran. Eskandarfar occasionally conceals her subjects’ faces and titles her works subjectively, as seen in *I am Not Me* ([Eskandarfar, 2021](#)).

Another interesting example of concept of self/self-portrait artistry is Sabzevari, a self-portrait artist who incorporates her likeness into her works ([Sabzevari, 2020](#)). However, her self-portrait series diverges from conventional self-portraiture. Instead of emphasizing her portrait, she surrounds it with surrealistic scenes inspired by Persian miniature art, creating a narrative that tells her story in an imaginative manner.

Finally, [Shahkarami \(2022a\)](#) is a self-portrait artist deeply involved in Iran’s feminist movement, who grappled with a profound loss when her niece, Nika Shahkarami, died September 20, 2022, during a protest shortly after Mahsa Amini’s death. This tragedy intensified her exploration of the concept of self. Following her niece’s passing, [Shahkarami \(2022a\)](#) reposted her earlier self-portraits on Instagram, accompanied by captions that expressed the pain of being a woman in her culture ([Shahkarami, 2022a](#)). She is dedicated to both mourning her niece and advocating for Iranian women’s freedom. Shahkarami has also affirmed her philosophy of the self in her self-portraits, stating, “*I want to become a mirror, that’s all*” ([Shahkarami, 2022b](#)).

## 6. Conclusion

Like the artists discussed already, [Rostami-Gharagozloo \(2024\)](#) has also chosen a revealing title for this article, “Faceless Women and Portrait Multiplicity.” These artworks represent women with distinct faces, symbolically concealed. To unveil the liberated female self, the artists metaphorically removed the face. What’s concealed behind the “facelessness” or “portrait multiplicity” is a question to which the artist knows the answer: a unique individual. However, this individuality remains unattainable due to contemporary circumstances in Iran. We used [Goffman's \(1959\)](#) dramaturgical theory to draw an analogy between the “backstage”, representing the artist's self free from her social restrictions, and the “frontstage”, reflecting the current social conditions in Iran. This analogy highlights how Iranian artists critique these conditions, suggesting that they lead to the disappearance of the individual self and the adoption of a collective self.

The artists invite their audience to ponder this absent self and face. In essence, the insignificance of the individual’s face in these works signifies an awareness of the political conditions of women in Iran. This is particularly evident in the artists’ response to the

Mahsa Amini / Woman-Life-Freedom movement, which sheds light on the artists' perspective on the self in the context of Iranian women.

Moreover, it is argued that we can interpret the mentioned artworks as belonging to the self-portrait genre, even when artists do not always use themselves as direct models or avoid the label of self-portrait. This interpretation considers the broader meaning of self-portraits in the 21st century, including conceptual anti-self-portraits discussed at the beginning of this article.

The Iranian women artists' self-portraits serve as a reflective mirror, shedding light on the circumstances of women in Iran. Therefore, by changing the position of the mirror and the artist, this approach also challenges the iconography of the mirror in the self-portrait genre. Here, the artist stands behind the mirror rather than in front of it.

In our concluding remarks, we emphasize that our intention in introducing this new concept of self-portrait in the context of Iranian women artists' work is not to challenge the artists' choice of titles for their artworks. Instead, we mean to provide a different perspective through which we can reconsider both the self-portrait genre and the portrayal of women in Iran from the unique artistic perspective of women themselves.

### **Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

This study analyzed publicly available artworks and artist statements and did not involve human participants or require informed consent. Permission to use the artworks included in this article was obtained. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Malaya.

### **Acknowledgement**

A part of this article was extracted from a doctoral thesis submitted to Universiti Malaya (UM) by the first author.

### **Funding**

This study received no funding.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare no conflict of Interest.

### **References**

- Abdi, M. (2021). *Shirin Neshat in Conversation with Mohamad Abdi*. Tehran: Bidgol.
- Afshar, H. (1998). *Islam and Feminisms: An Iranian Case-Study*. New York.
- Alikhanzadeh, S. (2013). *Self-Portrait* [Digital print, mirror fragments, and acrylic on board, 120 × 80 cm, edition of 3]. <http://samiraalikhanzadeh.com/base/en/work/2-from-my-self-portrait-series-digital-print-mirror-fragments-and-acrylic-on-board-120x80-cm-edition-of-3-2013/>

- Alikhanzadeh, S. (2023, July 1). *Samira Alikhanzadeh artist profile* [Webpage]. Sholeh Abghari Art Gallery. <https://sholehabghari.com/portfolio-item/samira-alikhanzadeh/>
- Anamnesis. (2021, August 21). *Samaneh Motallebi* [video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=koZmxMFYWLg>
- Borzello, F. (2016). *Seeing Ourselves: Women's Self-Portraits*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Brara, N. (2017, July 7), 'I felt in between places': Iranian artist Arghavan Khosravi on studying art in the U.S., and why she paints preoccupied women' [interview]. Artnet News. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/arghavan-khosravi-interview-1986271>
- Brilliant, R. (1991). *Portraiture: Essays in art and culture*. Reaktion Books Ltd, Kindle Edition.
- Cherem, Y. (2016). The absent subversion, the silent transgression: The voice and the silence of the body in some contemporary Iranian and Arab artists. *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History*, 85(4),299–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00233609.2016.1170068>
- Darz. (2021, June 2). *60 Seconds with Samaneh Motallebi*, [video] YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7utCrZ1QYg>.
- Eskandarfar, S. [@samira\_eskandarfar]. (2021, June 8). *Solo exhibition I Am Not Me*, Aran Gallery. [Instagram photo]. [https://www.instagram.com/p/CP00jMMA46e/?img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CP00jMMA46e/?img_index=1)
- Fathzadeh, F. (2021, December ). The Veil: An embodied ethical practice in Iran. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 30, no. 2 , 150–64. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1863194%0A>
- Fenstermaker, W. (2019, October 3). *Facing Duality: Arghavan Khosravi Interviewed* [interview]. BOMB magazine. <https://bombmagazine.org/articles/facing-duality-arghavan-khosravi-interviewed/>
- Ghadirian, S. (2001). *Like Every Day: Shadi Ghadirian explores stereotypes of women in Iran* [Photographic series]. On Art and Aesthetics. <https://onartandaesthetics.com/2017/06/11/like-every-day-shadi-ghadirian-explores-stereotypes-of-women-in-iran/>
- Ghadirian, S. (2019, May 2). *Artist talk* [Video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/yjoHw4wbb74>
- Hakimi-Schüler, M. (2007). *Self-Portrait* series [Oil on canvas, each piece 100 × 80 cm]. <https://art4d.com/2017/07/mona-hakimi-schuler>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Hall, J. (2014). *The Self-Portrait: A cultural history*. London: Thames & Hudson.
- Iran International News (2023, October 10). Hijab activist to serve over four years in prison. *Iran International News*. <https://www.iranintl.com/en/202310299299>
- IranWire. (2021, February 1). Who is Saba Kord Afshari, the activist sentenced to 24 years in prison?. *IranWire*. <https://iranwire.com/en/features/68790/>
- Johnstone, F., & Imber, K. (2020). *Anti-portraiture: Challenging the limits of the portrait*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Kaiser, S. B. (1998). *The social psychology of clothing: symbolic appearances in context*. New York: Fairchild Publications.
- Khaknezhad, F. (2017, July 13). *The sound of silence: About Newsha Tavakolian's photos*. Medium: <https://medium.com/@foaadkhaknezhad/the-sound-of-silence-9a63013717cf>
- Khosravi, A. (2020). *The anatomy of a woman series #4* [Acrylic on cotton canvas and found textile mounted on two shaped wood panels, thread, mirror, 96.52 × 78.74 cm]. <https://foundwork.art/dialogues/arghavan-khosravi>

- Khosravi, A. (2022a). *The garden* [Acrylic on canvas mounted on shaped wood panels, 149.9 × 180.3 × 15.2 cm]. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/arghavan-khosravi-the-garden>
- Khosravi, A. [@arghavan\_khosravi]. (2022b, September 17). “*The fire of our rage will eventually catch you one day and burn you to ashes from beginning to the end*” [photo]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CiktXbHuLLE/?hl=en>
- Lindgren, K. (2020). Hiding in plain sight: Gazing at Laura Swanson’s anti-self-portraits. In F. Johnstone & K. Imber (Eds.), *Anti-portraiture: Challenging the limits of the portrait* (pp. 153–175). Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Maes, H. (2015). What is a portrait? *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 55(3), 303–322. <https://doi.org/10.1093/aesthj/ayv018>
- Mayhabal-Davis, E. (2021, April 21). Arghavan Khosravi [interview]. *Found Work*. <https://foundwork.art/dialogues/arghavan-khosravi>
- Meskimmon, M. (1996). *The art of reflection: Women Artists’ self-portraiture in the twentieth century*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Motallebi, S. (2014). *Not Seen series* [Artworks]. Darz Art. <https://darz.art/en/artists/samaneh-motallebi/artworks/26990>
- Motallebi, S. [@samane.motallebi]. (2022a, October 7). برای همه اون سال هایی که دیده نشدیم (translation: For all these years, we have not been seen). [Instagram story]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/samane.motallebi/?hl=en>
- Motallebi, S. [@samane.motallebi]. (2022b, February 23). Self-portrait. [Instagram photo]. Instagram. [https://www.instagram.com/p/CaUOwlbNLnt/?hl=en&img\\_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/p/CaUOwlbNLnt/?hl=en&img_index=1)
- Najmabadi, A. (2005). *Women with mustaches and men without beards: Gender and sexual anxieties of Iranian modernity*. California: University of California Press.
- Neshat, S. (1993–1997). *Women of Allah series* [Artwork series]. Artsy. <https://www.artsy.net/artist-series/shirin-neshat-women-of-allah>
- Neshat, S. (1994). *Rebellious silence, women of Allah series* [Ink and black-and-white print on RC paper]. Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels. © Shirin Neshat. <https://smarthistory.org/shirin-neshat-rebellious-silence-women-of-allah-series/>
- Nimoni, F. (2023, September 16). *Mahsa Amini: Protesters mark one year since death of Iranian student*. BBC News. [//www.bbc.com/news/world-66834156](https://www.bbc.com/news/world-66834156)
- Pointon, M. (2013). *Portrayal and the search for identity*. London: Reaktion Books Ltd.
- Przybilla, F. (2014). *Good News from Iran: Group art exhibition by Iranian artists in Munich* [Catalogue]. Endjavi-Barbé Art Projects. [http://mojganendjavi.com/pdf/catalogue\\_good\\_news\\_from\\_iran\\_2014.pdf](http://mojganendjavi.com/pdf/catalogue_good_news_from_iran_2014.pdf)
- Reporters Without Borders. (2024, December 3). *RSF Press Freedom Awards in Washington, DC* [Report]. <https://rsf.org/en/country/iran>
- Rezaei, R. (2022, August 1). *State TV Airs Forced Confession by Anti-Forced Hijab Activist*. IranWire. <https://iranwire.com/en/women/106223-state-tv-air-forced-confession-by-anti-forced-hijab/>
- RFE/RL. (2021, July 21). Iran urged to free rights lawyer Sotoudeh arrested three years ago. *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-rights-lawyer-sotoudeh/31318816.html>
- Rostami-Gharagozloo, E. (2024, July). This is not a self-portrait: Exploring the concept of self in the contemporary artistic practices of Middle Eastern women artists. *Tirai Pangung*, 20(1), 1-36. <https://ejournal.um.edu.my/index.php/tiraipangung/article/view/53941/17307>
- Rumi, J. al-D. (2009). *Mystical poems of Rumi* (A. J. Arberry, Trans.; H. Javadi, Ed.; F. D. Lewis, Foreword; E. Yarshater, Gen. Ed.). The University of Chicago Press.
- Sabzevari, B. (2020). *Bahar Sabzevari* [Website]. Wix.com. <https://www.baharsabzevari.com/>

- Salah, O. (2017). Middle Eastern women, media artists and 'self-body image' . *Technoetic Arts*, 15(1), 61–74. [https://doi.org/10.1386/tear.15.1.61\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/tear.15.1.61_1)
- Shahkarami, A. [@atashshahkarami]. (2022a, October 19 and 30, November 6), در زبان لری واژه ای هست به نام " هُرج در نگارشش اش دو ضمه گذاشتم تا به وقت خواندن به تلفظ اصلی (translation: There is a word in Larry's mouth called "Horch".I put two attachments in his painting so that you can [Instagram photo]. Instagram. get <https://www.instagram.com/p/Cj5MDp4tZhc/?hl=en>.
- Shahkarami, A. [@atashshahkarami]. (2022b October 30), میخوام آینه بشوم همین (translation: I want to become a mirror, that's all) [ Instagram photo]. <https://www.instagram.com/p/CkTrbKrtVh2/?hl=en>.
- Shirazi, F. (1995). A dramaturgical approach to hijab in post-revolutionary Iran. *Critique*, 35-51. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/10669929508720073>
- Shirazi, F. (2019). The veiling issue in 20th century Iran in fashion and society, religion, and government. *Religions*, 10(8), 461. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10080461>
- Shirazi, F. (2023, August 4). *Iran's political agenda: women's bodies at the intersection of religion and law*. Canopy Forum on the Interactions of Law & Religion. <https://canopyforum.org/2023/08/04/irans-political-agenda-womens-bodies-at-the-intersection-of-religion-and-law/>
- Shkolna, O. (2019, January ). Mirrored interiors of iran palaces and holy places lustrzane. *Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University*, 76–85. <https://www.ejournals.eu/pliki/art/14469/>
- Spinicci, P. (2009). Portraits: Some phenomenological remarks. *European Society for Aesthetics*, 37–59. <https://www.eurosa.org/volume-1/>
- Swanson, L. (2007). *White from the series anti self-Portraits (2005-2008)* [Inkjet print]. ResearchGate. In Zack Daniel (Ed.), *A contribution to the study of the typology of alternative portraits*. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367478863\\_A\\_contribution\\_to\\_the\\_study\\_of\\_the\\_typology\\_of\\_alternative\\_portraits/figures?lo=1](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367478863_A_contribution_to_the_study_of_the_typology_of_alternative_portraits/figures?lo=1)
- Tavakolian, N. (2010). *Signed - Newsha Tavakolian - My Sister In The Caspian Sea*. Bucklin. <https://www.invaluable.com/auction-lot/signed-newsha-tavakolian-my-sister-in-the-caspian-176-c-57347b2b93>
- Tavakolian, N. (2011). *Listen: Giving voice to Iranian women*. Magnum Photos: <https://www.magnumphotos.com/arts-culture/newsha-tavakolian-listen>
- Tavakolian, N. [@newshatavakolian]. (2022, September 23). #mahsaamini امینا امینی #Iran [photograph]. Instagram. <https://www.instagram.com/p/Ci0Q9BQoEzr/?hl=en>.
- Tayebi, A. (2022, August 1). *Iranian broadcast of woman's 'confession' sparks outrage on social media*. RFE/RL's Radio Farda RFE/RL's Radio Farda: <https://www.rferl.org/a/iranian-broadcast-womans-forced-confession-sparks-outrage/31969195.html>
- The Guardian. (2023, December 12). Mahsa Amini's name is 'secret code for freedom' says mother as EU presents award. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/12/mahsa-amini-woman-who-died-in-iranian-custody-awarded-rights-prize-by-eu>
- Tseëlon, E. (1992). Self presentation through appearance: A manipulative vs. a dramaturgical approach. *Symbolic Interaction*, 15(4), 501-514. <https://doi.org/10.1525/si.1992.15.4.501>
- West, S. (2004). *Portraiture*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Young, A. (2017, April 24). *Shirin Neshat, rebellious silence, women of Allah* series. Smart History, The Center for Public Art History. <https://smarthistory.org/shirin-neshat-rebellious-silence-women-of-allah-series/>

Zahedi, A. (2007). Contested meaning of the veil and political ideologies of Iranian regimes. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 3(3), 75–98.  
<https://doi.org/10.2979/mew.2007.3.3.75>