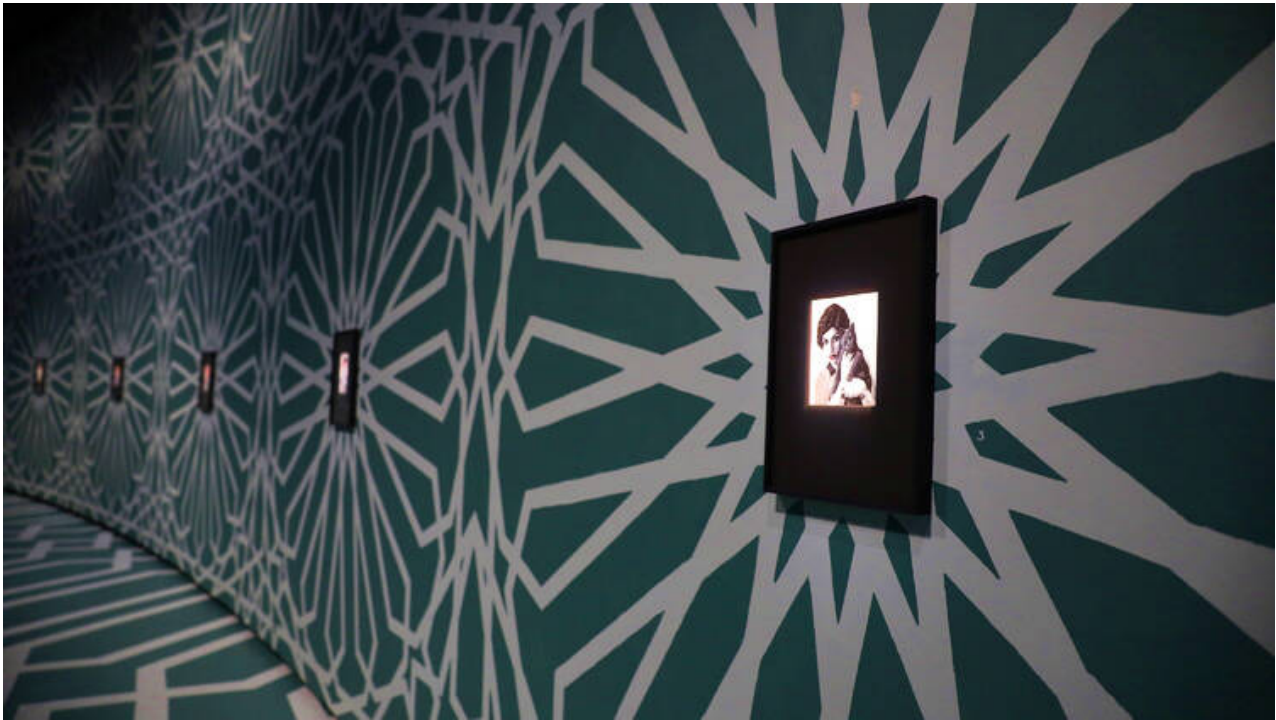


Soheila Sokhanvari: Rebel Rebel

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Eddy Frankel



Soheila Sokhanvari: Rebel Rebel Installation view Barbican Art Gallery, 2022 © Lia Toby / Getty Images

The Barbican Curve is full of ghosts, the spectres of bold, creative, amazing women from pre-revolution Iran, captured on fragile vellum in painstaking detail by Soheila Sokhanvari.

These 28 cultural figures worked, created, lived and loved with a freedom that was taken away with the 1979 revolution, and still hasn't been won back.

Sokhanvari's own family emigrated from Iran when she was a kid, so this show functions as a love letter to that country's past, and a celebration of lost culture.

The paintings are tiny and bursting with colour and detail. Pouri Banayi stands with purple hair against a glittering night sky, actress Faranak Mirgahari points a revolver like a Wild West cowboy, Kobra Saeedi languidly smokes a ciggie. Each painting is a collision of Western fashion, 1970s interior decor and beautiful Iranian traditional aesthetics.

Syrupy, string-drenched pop songs by Googoosh and Ramesh flow through the space, the walls are covered in Islamic geometric patterns, there are glittering mirrored sculptures. It's all seductive, psychedelic, smoke-choked nightclub vibes, freedom and dancing in the face of imminent oppression.

Even though the geometric patterns that swirl across the room are dizzying, you don't end up in hypnotised delirium but locked instead in quiet, sad, mystical contemplation. This isn't just a place of worship and celebration, it's a mausoleum. As Iranian women protest

once again for their rights, you just hope there'll be more to celebrate in the future, and less to mourn.