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## My art celebrates Iran's feminist rebels; the protests in the country are giving me hope

SOHEILA SOKHANVARI

9 OCT 2022

As women in Iran unite in protest over the death of Mahsa Amini, Soheila Sokhanvari's upcoming Barbican exhibition has gained a new level of pertinence. Here, the artist reflects on the female rebels of Iran's past and present, and the inclusive future of its feminism.



The first woman I admired was my grandmother. She was a veil-wearing, illiterate and godly woman who believed in female education and independence. I called her “Azizi”—beloved in Persian—and considered her my mother, because mine was often away. She sent my mother to university despite my grandfather's disapproval, and looked after me and my siblings while my mother carried out her full-time job. She was kind, hardworking and an incredible force of positive energy.

Then there was Googoosh—our best-loved Persian pop star. I idolised her—her dance moves, her stage presence, her voice and her glamorous clothing. As a young girl, she was everything I wanted to be.

Women like these were a fundamental part of my childhood in Iran in the '60s and '70s – they helped to shape my understanding of womanhood. The country, at the time, was enamoured with the West. Owing to the “modernisation” efforts of Mohammad Reza Shah’s rule, cinemas showed dubbed Hollywood films—*Star Trek* and *Sesame Street* were always on TV. Fashion was eclectic, and women could wear anything from a veil to a miniskirt, sometimes both. My father, a fashion designer, created dresses for my mother in the style of Audrey Hepburn and Elizabeth Taylor, with added Parsi embroidery and patterns.



Soheila Sokhanvari. Image credit: Getty Images

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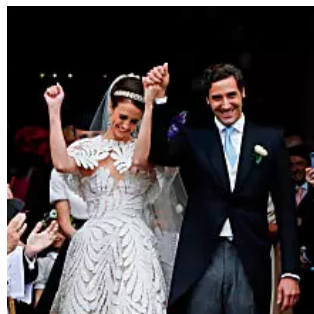
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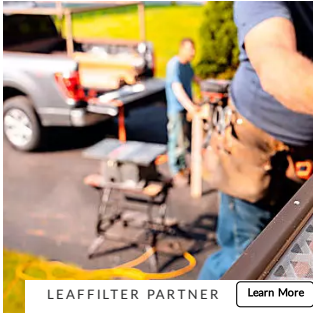


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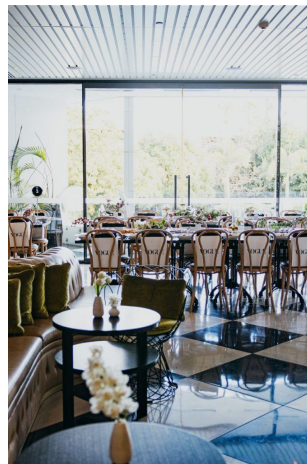
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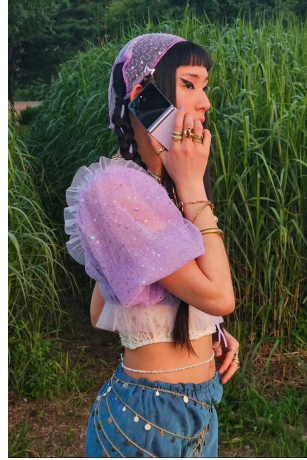
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