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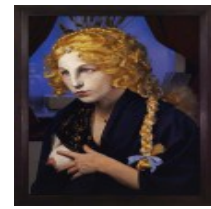


Artist profile Soheila Sokhanvari

Iranian born multi-disciplinary artist [Soheila Sokhanvari](#) is our featured artist this month. Read her Q&A below.

Sokhanvari incorporates political histories and personal narratives to create complex pieces which invite the viewer to investigate further. Her work is rooted in collective trauma and how this can be explored

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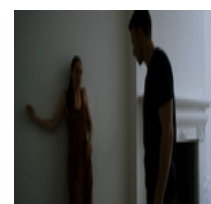


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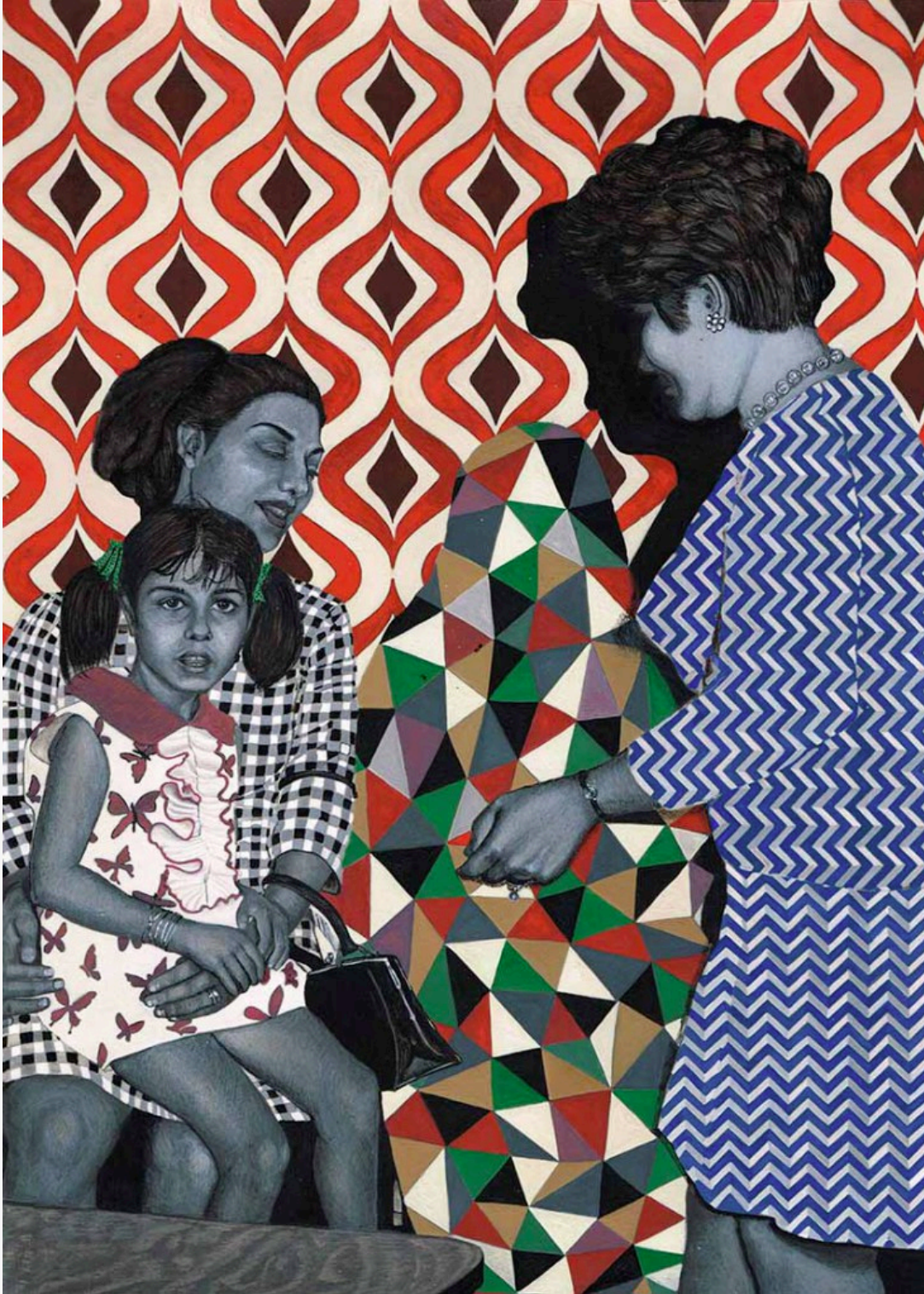
Routine

through the story of the individual. She is interested in the use of metaphor and magical realism to enable artists to reference political and historical events which they may not be able to discuss openly.



Soheila Sokhanvari, *Moje Sabz* 2011

Sokhanvari's taxidermied horse *Moje Sabz* was exhibited in [Saatchi's *Champagne Life*](#) this year. She was part of [Crossroads Art Fair](#). This month she appears at Peace on Paper at the [Contemporary Art Biennale Iran](#) (4 Dec – 3 Jan 17). Currently working on a series of crude oil and gold drawings, which will be exhibited at the [Jerwood Gallery](#) in January. She also has an upcoming solo show at the [New Contemporary Art Museum](#) in Walsall in May and will be taking part in I AM, Caravan Arts, [Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts](#), Amman Touring (2017) and I AM, Caravan Arts, [St Martin's in the Field](#), London Touring (2017).



Untitled 2015 egg tempera on calf vellum 17x235cm (c) the artist

What are you doing today?

I am in my studio at Wysing Arts Centre. My table is facing the country and the beautiful trees and I am enjoying the autumnal sun shinning on the golden tree in front of my studio.



Soheila Sokhanvari, Iran 1960, 2014. Crude oil on paper
21.5×29.5cm (c) the artist

Tell us about your creative process

I often start my day in my studio around 7.30 am and work through till 8 or 9pm. I use the medieval technique of egg-tempera on calf vellum. This technique traditionally involves the structure of a workshop, where an assistant grinds pigment, adds egg yolk and basically makes the colour for the master. Since I work alone the process is very time consuming so that is why I need to work long hours. Also I am a workaholic so I really enjoy the Zen quality of the work process. Being shut up in my studio is a joy.



Soheila Sokhanvari, Touba 2015. Egg tempera on calf vellum
15x205cm (c) the artist

Describe where you do most of your creative work

I do most of my work in my studio at Wysing Arts Centre, which is an educational research contemporary art centre outside Cambridge. It is a great place for artists to do residencies, retreats and educational programmes and I am a studio artist there. I have a reasonable size studio to myself and my window faces beautiful fields and greenery.

What's the most exciting project you've worked on?

Presently I am working on a project for Jerwood Space for January 2017 and also working for a solo show at the New Art Gallery Walsall in May 2017. I am very excited about the freedom and the space I have been given and I find it exhilarating.



Soheila Sokhanvari, Honky Tonk Woman ii Pouri Banayi 2015
egg tempera on vellum 14x19cm 30x40cm framed (c) the artist

What made you decide to become an artist?

I used to be a biochemist and before I became an artist I was working at Cambridge University researching human Leukaemia as a Cytogeneticist. My father was a fashion designer, model and a miniature artist. He taught me to paint, so the creativity passion was

already burning in me from an early age. I just had to wait for the right time to realise who I really was.

What are you currently working on?

I have started on a new body of drawings on paper using crude oil and gold for an exhibition that will be open in early January 2017 in Jerwood Drawing Space.



Soheila Sohanvari, Beach Boys iii, 2015. Iranian crude oil on paper 37x37cm framed (c) the artist

What are the key themes in your

work?

My themes are rooted in the notions of collective trauma, power and hope told through the narrative of the individual. As an exile I am much interested in the way artists create from the place of the “Insider Outside”. Artists like James Joyce who, after leaving Dublin, became obsessed with writing about his country and Dublin became a fodder for his creativity. So most of my work is based on my family photographs and images from pre-revolutionary Iran because Iran has frozen for me in its pre-revolutionary bubble and I create and recreate it in my art. However, I have done other projects based on American politics, as well as the passports portrait series and much more.



Soheila Sokhanvari, No Place Better Than This, 2013. Crude oil on paper 215x295cm (c) the artist

What would you like people to notice in your work?

My work often involves the viewer having to Google the title of the work to research the topics that I am dealing with and come to their own conclusion and decide for themselves how they judge the topic that I am dealing with. For instance, my last series of paintings were called MKUltra and once the viewer searched the meaning online the paintings made sense.

What attracts you to the mediums you work in?

I work with a variety of materials. Crude oil is a very interesting material. It is very flexible and different effects can be achieved with it. It behaves like ink as it dries quickly but it looks quite oily so has a satin finish, but it is very unforgiving and moody.

Egg tempera because it gives a very specific texture that can only be enjoyed in the real life. It is very zen as making your own colour means one can become spiritually connected to the mark makings.

Also I enjoy sculpting because it gives me a tactile relationship to my work process that provides a complete contrast to my paintings.

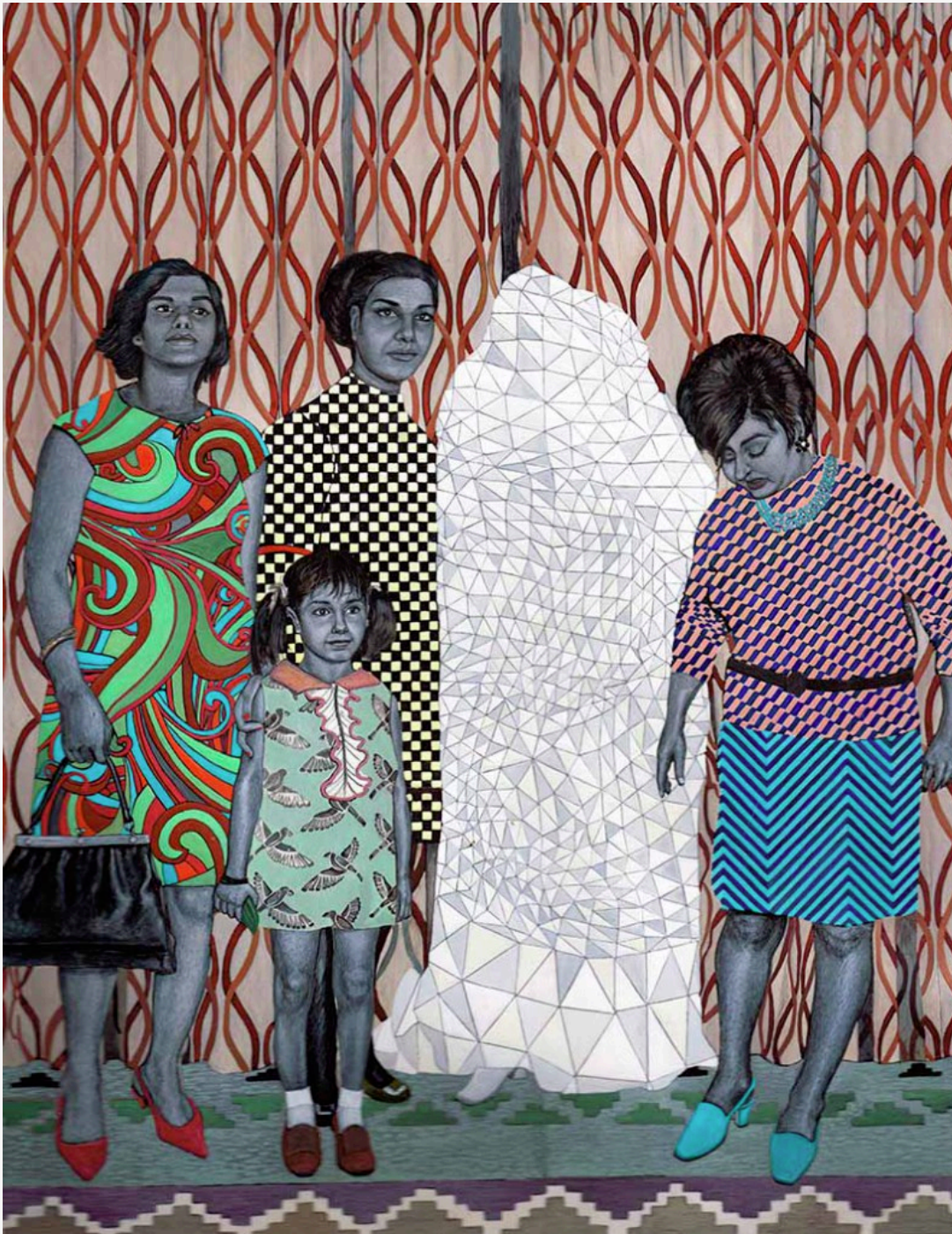
What equipment could you not do without?

My pestle and mortar. I grind my own pigment and I have this flat piece of glass and a flat-based pestle which allows me to completely grind my pigments. The pigments that are already ground are not generally fine enough for use in egg tempera so I need to grind them further and the process of the grinding is very meditative. I often listen to audiobooks when I am grinding. As a child when a story was read to me I would draw the images that rushed to my head. I guess I still enjoy that.

Who or what inspires you?

Nature and everyday life. My inspiration does not have a

specific source. I can find inspiration from watching a film to listening to music or just the colours on an insect that can inspire the colour combination of my paintings.



Soheila Sokhanvari, The Guests 2015. Egg tempera on vellum
245 x 31cm (c) the artist

Does gender affect your work?

I think a lot of women appear in my work because I am drawn to strong women. In my art women are always strong and never a victim. My mother is the dominant parent and my father has always been a feminist which was fantastic for me as a female Iranian growing up. That attitude made all the difference in my life. Allowing your daughter to go alone to another country to start secondary school because you want a better

future and education for her is something that my parents did and I cannot see many people in the West doing that for their daughters now.

What's your favourite gallery, or place to see or experience art?

I really love Kettle's Yard in Cambridge. It is such a unique gallery which was a home of the collector Jim Ede, which he left to Cambridge University and is now open and free to the public. The house part of the gallery is left exactly as when Jim was alive and it is so amazing to have contemporary art in a home-like setting, with Alfred Wallis paintings in the bathroom and Ben Nicholson painting or Brancusi sculpture in the dining room. The gallery which was added on to the house in the 80's shows a regular programme of cutting edge contemporary art. It is a very unique space and I really find it inspirational whenever I visit. I used to volunteer for the gallery and I felt there was a family relationship between the staff which was a joy to work with. That love and family belonging is now replaced with the gallery staff and the artists at Kristin Hjellegjerde gallery. There is a family feeling where we all support each other and go to each other's openings, there is a real community. I think it is so important to belong to a collective of artists where you can meet up for drinks/ meal and to bounce ideas or discuss art.

If you could own one piece of art, what would it be?

I would be happy with any thing done by Joan Mitchell. But if I need to be specific then can I have City Landscape 1955 please, I think she is phenomenon I get goose bumps when I stand in front of her works.

If you could collaborate with one artist, from any time, who would it be?

I would really love to have a show with the Pakistani born artist Shahzia Sikander. I think our stories overlap and I really respect and love her works.

Is there an artist, movement or collective you'd like to see re-evaluated, or a contemporary artist who is underrated?

There is a photograph that really captures female representation in the male dominated art world taken in 1950's of group of American abstract artists labelled the "Irascibles" by the media that appeared in Life magazine. There were meant to be two women in that picture but Louise Bourgeois did not make it on time, so you see one female figure standing alone at the back, her name is Hedda Sterne and she fought with fierce independence in that male dominated world and I feel she is still underrated. I feel female artists are still largely underappreciated so the list goes on however I think other artists that deserve more recognition are Maria Nordman and Lee Bontecou.

What's your favourite colour?

Depends if you mean to wear or to use in my art. I love wearing black and I avoid beige but in my paintings I really love every colour.



Soheila Sokhanvari, Iran 1960 ii, 2014. Crude oil on paper
21.5×29.5cm (c) the artist

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