

# Art in Iran: 'Breaking Barriers' exhibit in Sausalito

By Isabella Cook | Mar 28, 2023



PICTURE 'For me, following the rules is an anathema. I'd like to delve into reality, discover and expose it, to create an individual and alternate interpretation,' says photographer Dariush Nehdaran.

In Marin County, there is a singular shared culture that brings everyone together: the culture of celebrating art as well as the artists who create it.

Across the board, the Bay Area is famous for its inclusive and incredibly diverse display of artistic expression, and local galleries are known to showcase exhibitions that represent not only the most local of artists, but pieces with origins spanning across the globe as well.

Starting April 7 through April 23, a new exhibition of Persian art will be showcased at the Sausalito Center for the Arts. This exhibition, entitled "Breaking Barriers: Art in Iran," will display the art of past and present Persian artists, with works drawn from a wide range of artistic mediums, such as paintings, photography, music and more.

“The premise of this show is to bring a spotlight to Iran to counteract the horrifying imagery that we see as a result of the government,” explained Shiva Pakdel, a Marin local and the curator of the “Art in Iran” exhibit. “The exhibit will have around 240 pieces of art in the gallery—it is a very large display of art and will include everything from textiles to Persian rugs to ceramics and photographs, modern art, old art, objects and all kinds of things.”

Pakdel, who grew up in southern Iran, moved to the United States in 1976 to attend Tulsa University, where she studied and earned her degree in commercial art. Though both of her parents were physicians, the arts were an integral part of her childhood, and the focus of her household was often centered on pursuits such as literature, art, photography and poetry.

Following the wake of the Iranian Revolution, Pakdel (who had just recently graduated) and a group of her friends moved together to the Bay Area, where they rented a place, became roommates and settled into a new life.

“The day after graduating university, four or five of my roommates traveled to California in a caravan of cars and moved out to the Bay Area,” said Pakdel. “The reason for this is because it became a settlement for the Persians who left, and we all had family and friends. My generation was sort of displaced after the revolution in 1979.”

In the Bay Area, Pakdel made a new home for herself in what she described as “a

magical, wholesome, inclusive and awesome area,” where she settled down, worked in marketing for 30 years and recently celebrated her 40th wedding anniversary. But, in all this time, her passion for the arts and the lingering knowledge of the misrepresentation of Persian people and culture remained on her mind.

“After I came to California and even after all these years, I still had it in the back of my head and suffered because there was never a positive conversation about Iran—it was all negative, negative, negative, and the art and culture ended up marginalized through the dark image of Iran,” explained Pakdel. “Iran went through a darkness; the conversation wasn’t there, and most of us who are here in the United States longed for the ability to introduce the positive sides of our culture and of the country.”

In 2016, Pakdel made the leap and left her job in marketing in order to devote her focus to the arts and artistic pursuits. And, when a friend working for a Napa winery offered her the space to put up a show in the winery’s new tasting room in Sausalito, she jumped at the opportunity. In the span of four and a half years, she ended up hosting 40 art shows of local Bay Area artists at the Sausalito location. Alongside this ongoing project, she also had another large-scale exhibition of Persian art on display at the Dominican University of California.

“I feel like this change in career paths was a rebirth, because you usually don’t get two chances at two different careers,” said Pakdel. “I feel so grateful that I got this

opportunity to be all-in with art. I want to give kudos to Sausalito Center for Arts, since they opened their doors to us—I'm just so grateful to them for letting us Persians share our art and have these conversations. I'm just grateful since this is a tricky subject.”

Pakdel's own artistic creations will be on display at the “Breaking Barriers: Art in Iran” exhibit alongside pieces from Shahla Bebe, Amir Salamat, Yazdan Saadi, Simin Massoudi, Farnaz Zabetian, Darius Nehdaran, Jaleh Etemad, Sadegh Miri Photography, Babak Daleki, Azita Panahpour, Yari Ostovany, Haleh Douraghy, Mamad Housain Zolghahari, Keyvan Mahjoor, Nasrollah Kasraian and Bahram Dabiri.

“I have four artists from Marin County and one from Sonoma County, and the rest are from the rest of the Bay Area, Concord and San Jose and so on,” said Pakdel. “But keep in mind that I'm running this show on two tracks—one of modern Iran and today's Iranian artists, and then there's the historical track. This is really a collective effort, and I'm grateful to all of the artists who have shared their work and to the cause.”

Alongside visual art, the “Breaking Barriers: Art in Iran” exhibit will host a special event on Sunday, April 16 from 4 to 6pm to explore the music of Persia. This program features Amir Etemadzadeh and a team who, together, will take the audience on a musical journey through Iran in an effort to highlight the ethnic diversity of the country. Different musical instruments and types of music will be

performed to help reflect various regions and their respective cultures.

The opening night celebration for “Breaking Barriers: Art in Iran” is set to take place on April 7 and will feature authentic Persian cuisine, live Persian music and Azari Vineyards wine. Opening night is currently sold out, and no further tickets are available for purchase.

“The most important part of this show is that it offers a place to begin the conversation of Iran and Iranians,” concluded Pakdel. “We want people to look at the beauty of the country and understand the movement of the women in Iran and how it comes from a place of culture and history and art that’s been suppressed by the government. So, we want to put a spotlight on Iran and embrace the movement that is happening. And, by now, it really is a global movement.”

*The Sausalito Center for the Arts is located at 750 Bridgeway and its hours of operation run from 11am to 5pm Thursday through Sunday. The center is closed Monday through Wednesday. For more information, visit the website at [sausalitocenterforthearts.org](https://sausalitocenterforthearts.org) or send an email to [info@sausalitocenterforthearts.org](mailto:info@sausalitocenterforthearts.org).*