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Amir H. Fallah Shining A Spotlight On Women's Rights Protestors In Iran

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Artist's rendering of Amir H. Fallah "Woman, Life, Freedom" neon artwork. Amir H Fallah

A woman's face. An unshrouded woman's face in Iran and that government's medieval response to it have launched the women's rights and freedom protests which have swept that nation since the September 2022 arrest of [22-year-old Jina "Mahsa" Amini](#) by Iran's morality police. She died three days later in police custody. [The state continues killing Iranians](#) voicing their demands for regime change, equality and opportunity.

L.A.-based Iranian American artist Amir H. Fallah (b. 1979) will be using an image of a woman's face inside of a sun—a visual once seen on the Iranian flag—as the centerpiece of an art project he intends to keep the ongoing humanitarian crisis there in the consciousness of Americans.

Fallah remembers little of his homeland. His family left Iran in the wake of the Iranian Revolution when he was four, first moving to Turkey and then Italy before arriving in America at age seven. He has been following the protests in Iran daily since their beginning, constantly communicating with family and friends there via social media.



Tehran, Iran - October 01: (Editors Note: Image taken with mobile phone camera.) Iranian protesters set their scarves on fire while marching down a street on October 1, 2022 in Tehran, Iran. Protests over the death of 22-year-old Iranian Mahsa Amini have continued to intensify despite crackdowns by the authorities, The 22-year-old Iranian fell into a coma and died after being arrested in Tehran by the morality police, for allegedly violating the countries hijab rules. (Photo by Getty Images)

“When you speak to the Iranians in Iran, the number one thing they say, ‘We don't want America or anyone to interfere with what's happening. We don't want to get invaded, (to) get quote, unquote ‘rescued,’” Fallah told Forbes.com. “The number one thing they want is for people to amplify their message, to not forget them, to just be vocal about them and don't let them fade away and what they're fighting for fade away.”

Directly supporting protesters in Iran proves difficult. The country is mostly closed to outsiders and humanitarian groups. It's state-run media censors news coverage.

“There's a lot of horrible stuff that happens in the world where you can kind of throw money at it and at least have some peace of mind that I did something, like a natural disaster, you can donate money and be able to sleep at night, but in this situation, there's nobody to really directly give money to, there's no agencies to support, it's literally all grassroots people, everyday people from all walks of life in Iran,” Fallah said.

What to do? What could he do to support the protesters. That's the question Fallah obsessed over.

“I can create something to amplify the message, stand in solidarity with them, and then eventually raise money that will go towards human rights charities, not necessarily human rights charities working directly in Iran, but just human rights as a whole because what the people of Iran want is what all humans desire,” Fallah explained. “They want to be free, they want to be able to make their own decisions, they want to make their own decisions about religion, travel, dress—very basic human rights and that's a global goal, it's not an Iranian goal or an American goal, that's what all humans everywhere in the world desire.”

Fallah has designed a circular neon billboard, seven-and-a-half-feet in diameter, which will be placed atop [the Shulamit Nazarian art gallery in Los Angeles](#) representing his work. The gallery occupies prime real estate in the heart of Hollywood at the corner of Melrose Avenue and North La Brea Avenue.

The artwork features a feminine face inside of the sun. Khorshid Khanoom (Sun Lady) has a long history in Iranian culture.

“I wanted to bring this symbol of femininity and life and energy and mix that with what's happening in Iran and the whole cause of this, this fight for equal rights,” Fallah said.

Encircling the sun, animated to alternate, are three different texts all reading “women, life, freedom,” the Iranian protest movement’s de facto motto. A motto [banned from display](#) at [the recent World Cup](#) in Qatar. The words are spelled out in English, Farsi and phonetically sounded out in Farsi with English letters.

“I did that because a lot of Iranian youth, especially people like me who grew up in America, but from an Iranian background, a lot of us text message and (post) on social media using this kind of hybrid language that’s evolved out of popular culture,” Fallah explained. “It’s a nod to [people like me who are in a cultural limbo](#) of not necessarily being fully Iranian, and not being fully American, and embracing both parts of our identity.”

The text flashes back and forth between the three languages, colored to match the three stripes in [the Iranian flag](#): green, red and white.

He imagines a “beautiful, glowing beacon supporting (the) protests” shining over Los Angeles which serves as ground-zero in the United States for [visible encouragement of the movement in Iran](#).

Fallah, a highly successful contemporary artist regularly featured in museum exhibitions around the country including [at UCLA’s Fowler Museum](#) debuting later this month, has never worked in neon before. It’s expensive, particularly at this scale. To cover the costs of fabrication and transport, he launched [a GoFundMe campaign](#) in December. To date, it has raised over \$61,000 with a stated goal of \$70,000 to create two artworks.



Helping Fallah with the manufacture is childhood friend Matt Dilling, owner of [Brooklyn's Lite Brite Neon studio](#).

As luck would have it, Dilling is one of the world's premiere neon fabricators having worked with artist Glenn Ligon, historic pieces from Bruce Nauman, MASS MoCA and the Storm King Art Center on projects to name a few.

The art piece is currently under construction with a debut scheduled for mid-February to coincide with L.A.'s top art fair—Frieze L.A.—and a show of Fallah's work at Shulamit Nazarian.

Fallah and the gallery will sell the artwork following its public display with 100% of proceeds being donated to international human rights charities. Fallah's hopes a museum or public institution acquires the work for continued public display with his dream recipient being L.A.'s Hammer Museum.

"The reason what's happening in Iran is so important is it is the biggest women's rights, feminist movement since the invention of the word feminist. Literally millions of people in Iran are protesting for the last three months straight, over 100 days, for equality for women," Fallah said. "When these people go and protest, they are risking their lives. It's not like going to a woman's rights march (in America) and hearing a bunch of cool bands play. They're getting shot at, killed, women are getting arrested and raped in prison. The bravery is outstanding and it's shocking to me that it's not getting covered more because I think we're going to look back after this is all over at a moment in time where, from the place you least expected it, people were putting everything on the line for equality for women."

For anyone interested in keeping up with developments from Iran, Fallah recommends the following Instagram accounts: [@iraniandisasporacollective](#), [@centerforhumanrights](#), [@from_iran](#) and [@globaliranian](#).

"I have lots of young cousins—teenagers—who have given up because they feel like they don't have a future there under the current regime, because they're so stifled," Fallah said. "They can't dance in public—the most basic things that we take for granted. They're sick of being ruled by religion. It's a highly educated, young population in Iran (and) they don't want religion to rule their lives, they want to deal with religion on their terms."

Like the ruling elites of the country.

"The most (expletive deleted)-up part is all these religious clerics, their children live in the West and enjoy all the freedoms that they take away from Iran," Fallah said. "A lot of their kids have been [outed recently on social media](#) where they show up on yachts with champagne bottles in their hands while people are getting killed in Iran. They're crooks of the highest order."