

DASTAN

**FRIEZE
LONDON**

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Frieze London 2026
Date: October 14 – 18, 2026
Booth No: A06
Location: The Regent's park

At Booth A06 of Frieze London 2026, Dastan presents "Letters from Iran". The evolving presentation includes works by Behjat Sadr, Parviz Tanavoli, Ali Akbar Sadeghi, Farideh Lashai, Koorosh Shishegaran, Fereydoun Ave, Mohammad Hossein Maher, Bitā Fayyazi, Reza Aramesh, Farrokh Mahdavi, Pooya Aryanpour, Sahand Hesamiyan, Meghdad Lorpour, Mamali Shafahi & Domenico Gutknecht, Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar, Arghavan Khosravi, Maryam Ayeen & Abbas Shahsavar, Asal Peirovi, and Maryam Hoseini. The booth brings together artists from different generations whose practices have developed across shifting historical and social conditions in Iran.

The presentation considers resilience not as endurance in the face of adversity, but as a continual process of transformation, through which memory, loss, violence, and displacement are absorbed into the image and given another form. In bringing together practices spanning several decades, Dastan foregrounds individual artistic trajectories and how they have persisted while continually adapting to new historical realities.

Envisioned as a collection of letters, the presentation takes into account the unique individuality of each artwork and its artist's practice, rather than merely contextualizing it within the scope of a specific setting. In this sense, the works transcend time and space to focus on a persisting force: resilience.

Born in 1984 in Shahr-e Kord, Arghavan Khosravi's practice emerges directly from the restrictions and contradictions of life in post-revolutionary Iran. Her work repeatedly addresses the division between public and private life, restrictions on women's bodies, patriarchy, exile, and the tension between freedom and constraint. Khosravi was also detained by the morality police in 2011 for not wearing the hijab properly, a common yet traumatizing experience for a lot of women in Iran. She moved to the United States in 2015, where she continued her education and developed an increasingly international practice. Her paintings retain Persian miniature traditions while using surreal, often claustrophobic constructions to articulate experiences of limitation and displacement. Migration in her case therefore becomes part of the artistic vocabulary itself. She transformed her previous living conditions into a sustained exploration of memory, gender and freedom.

For Reza Aramesh, resilience can be understood through both migration and the sustained political engagement of his practice. Born in Ahwaz in 1970, Aramesh left Iran for London at the age of fifteen in the midst of the Iran-Iraq war, eventually studying at Goldsmiths and establishing a practice between London and New York. His work has consistently returned to violence, displacement and political conflict, re-framing images of war and the subjected body through sculpture, photography and performance. Rather than treating distance from Iran as a break with his origins, Aramesh has used the position of the migrant to examine how violence is represented across different historical and cultural contexts. His trajectory illustrates another form of resilience: the ability to transform displacement into an enduring artistic language.

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Pooya Aryanpour offers a quieter but significant form of resilience: the sustained continuation of an experimental artistic practice while remaining in Iran through decades of profound political, social and cultural change. Born in Tehran in 1971, Aryanpour has lived and worked in the city throughout his career. His work draws deeply on Iranian visual traditions, particularly Ayineh-kari (mirror-work), calligraphic forms and Persian cultural symbolism, but transforms these inherited languages into abstract painting, sculpture and immersive installations. His persistence is particularly visible in his refusal to treat tradition and contemporary abstraction as oppositional: instead, he continually reconstructs familiar Iranian forms through new materials, spatial arrangements and processes. His 2014 exhibition *Remainder*, for example, explicitly addressed social circumstances, regret and unfinished stories, describing an experience of being confronted by events that produce a sense of passive inaction. At the same time, his continued teaching at Azad University and his sustained production and exhibition both inside and outside Iran demonstrate a commitment to maintaining an artistic and educational practice within the country rather than withdrawing from it. In this sense, Aryanpour's resilience is less expressed through overt political imagery than through continuity, adaptation and the preservation of an active artistic language under changing circumstances.

Bitā Fayyāzi represents a different form of resilience: remaining in Iran and persistently expanding what could constitute an artistic practice within the country.

After living in England, she returned to Iran in 1980 and established herself in Tehran, where she subsequently worked across ceramics, sculpture, installation and performance. She is described as having struggled to show her work amid the traditionalism and academicism of the Iranian art scene, particularly in the 1990s; her response was to move beyond conventional exhibition spaces and work in streets, abandoned buildings and through collaborations with artists and non-artists. Projects such as *Road Kill* and *Cockroaches* challenged established definitions of art while making social participation part of the work itself.

Her resilience therefore lies less in direct political confrontation than in persistence: continuing to experiment, collaborate and occupy public and alternative spaces despite the limitations of the institutional environment.

Farideh Lashai's practice was shaped by repeated encounters with political upheaval, repression, exile and war, yet she continued to work across painting, literature, translation and later video installation for more than five decades. Connected to revolutionary intellectual circles in Iran and Germany, she was imprisoned in Qasr Prison between 1974 and 1976 for her political activities; she subsequently witnessed the 1979 Revolution, the Iran-Iraq War and the bombing of Tehran in 1986, after which she lived in exile in the United States between 1981 and 1984. These experiences became embedded in her work rather than bringing her practice to a stop: her later installations combined painting with projected animation to address violence, memory and the political conditions of her time. In *When I Count, There Are Only You... But When I Look, There Is Only a Shadow* (2011–13), she placed her own experience of war and Iranian history in dialogue

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with Goya's Disasters of War, while works such as Prelude to Alice in Wonderland drew on her brother's description of people during the Tehran bombardments. Even the cypress trees recurring throughout her work became symbols of endurance, representing Iran's ability to withstand repeated invasions. Lashai's resilience therefore lies not simply in surviving political and personal hardship, but in repeatedly transforming those experiences into new artistic forms, remaining engaged with Iran while moving between local and international contexts.

Mohammad Hossein Maher's resilience is particularly tied to war, displacement and his decision to return repeatedly to the landscapes and memories of southern Iran. Born in Abadan, Maher experienced displacement from his hometown as a child and later spent two years on the front during the Iran-Iraq War. During his military service he continued drawing, producing hundreds of sketches of soldiers, officers and people he encountered in war-torn Khuzestan, while visiting areas including Abadan and Sarbandar. After studying in France, he returned to Iran and developed a sustained body of work around the South, gradually transforming its landscapes, memories and histories into mythological and psychological spaces. His resilience is thus expressed through continued return: to Abadan, to the South, and to painting as a means of processing experiences of war, displacement and historical change.

Ali Akbar Sadeghi's resilience is reflected in the extraordinary continuity of a practice that has remained rooted in Iranian cultural traditions while repeatedly adapting to changing historical circumstances. Active as an artist since the 1950s, Sadeghi has worked across painting, illustration, animation and sculpture, developing a distinctive visual language from Persian miniature, Qahveh-Khaneh painting, Iranian mythology and folklore, while incorporating surrealist tone and approaches. Following the 1979 Revolution, he turned increasingly toward painting and sustained his practice through a period of profound political and social transformation in Iran. War and conflict became recurring subjects within his imagery: examining his work one can identify the repeated appearance of weapons, soldiers, battles and other symbols of war as a means through which Sadeghi addresses violence, conflict and the individual's confrontation with their environment. His resilience can therefore be located in the persistence and transformation of his visual language: rather than abandoning the cultural forms that shaped him, he has continually reworked them to accommodate experiences of conflict, uncertainty and historical change. His practice, sustained across more than six decades, demonstrates how Iranian artistic traditions can remain active and adaptable even as the political and social circumstances surrounding them undergo profound change.

Behjat Sadr's career demonstrates resilience across two very different forms of displacement: first, her decision to return to Iran after studying in Italy, and later her departure from Iran following the 1979 Revolution. After returning to Tehran in 1959, she spent almost two decades teaching and developing an unusually experimental practice, becoming one of the few Iranian women of her generation to achieve substantial international recognition. She remained active

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through the political upheavals preceding and surrounding the Revolution, increasingly experimenting with kinetic works, industrial materials and new forms of abstraction. In 1979 she left Iran for France, where she continued working until her death in 2009. Her persistence across this rupture is significant: exile did not end her practice but became the condition from which a later body of paintings, collages and photographs emerged.

Maryam Ayeen and Abbas Shahsavari demonstrate resilience through continuity: they have remained based in Iran while sustaining a collaborative practice since 2009 and using the historically established language of Persian miniature to address contemporary social and political realities. Living and working in Mashhad, they have developed miniature painting into a vehicle for scenes of middle-class life, domestic experience, gender relations and political tension. Their work does not necessarily respond to political circumstances through overt protest; instead, it embeds social pressures within intimate, everyday situations, allowing the private sphere to become a space for examining wider conditions. The persistence of their collaboration and their continued use of a traditional Iranian form for contemporary subjects can therefore be read as a quiet form of resilience: maintaining artistic production and cultural continuity while continually adapting the language of miniature to the present.

Parviz Tanavoli's career offers one of the clearest examples of resilience through both resistance and return. Following the 1979 Revolution, he was blacklisted from exhibiting and selling his work and eventually left Iran for Canada in 1989 to rebuild his career abroad. Yet he continued to work with distinctly Iranian symbols, materials and forms, maintaining an artistic vocabulary rooted in Persian poetry, Shi'a visual culture, folk traditions and the language of the bazaar. His return to Iran in the early 2000s, where he mounted a major exhibition at the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, marked a renewed engagement with the country from which he had been effectively excluded. Even after his sculptures were seized by Tehran authorities in 2014 and his passport was confiscated in 2016, Tanavoli continued to work between Iran and Canada. His resilience lies precisely in this refusal of rupture: neither censorship, confiscation nor displacement eliminated his connection to Iranian artistic culture or his continued production.

Asal Peirovi's resilience can be understood through her sustained engagement with memory, place and movement while continuing to live and work in Iran. Born in Sari in 1985 and based in Tehran, Peirovi has developed a practice that draws on repeated journeys between different landscapes, particularly the movement between Tehran and northern Iran, translating these experiences into fragmented architectural and natural environments. Her paintings combine study and improvisation, often using unprimed and unstretched canvas, while bringing together the visual language of Persian miniature with contemporary experiences of landscape, travel and displacement. The recurring structures in her work, mountains, bridges, platforms, buildings and abandoned spaces, hold together memory and change, suggesting places that are familiar but continually altered by movement and time. Her continued practice in Tehran alongside an expanding international exhibi-

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tion history, including presentations in Oslo, New York and Sydney, demonstrates an ability to sustain and develop a distinctly personal visual language across different contexts. In this sense, resilience in Peirovi's work emerges through the preservation and reconstruction of memory: transforming the experience of moving through changing landscapes into an ongoing process of observation, adaptation and artistic construction.

Meghdad Lorpour's resilience is evident in the sustained, research-driven development of his practice and his long-term engagement with Iran's landscapes, histories and cultural memory. Born in Shiraz in 1983 and based in Tehran, Lorpour has worked in Iran since the late 1990s, gradually moving from portraiture toward animals, mythology and, increasingly, the natural environment. Since 2014, he has undertaken an extended investigation of Iran's bodies of water, particularly in the central and southern regions, studying their relationship to geography, human settlement, mythology and cultural history. This process incorporates travel, documentation, literature and oral histories, which he subsequently translates into paintings that combine observed landscapes with imagined and mythological dimensions. His continued return to the same territories over more than a decade has allowed the work to accumulate layers of historical and environmental meaning, while his practice has continued to develop within Iran and circulate internationally. Resilience in Lorpour's practice therefore resides in the persistence of attention itself: returning to the same landscapes, histories and cultural sources and continually finding new ways to understand and reconstruct them through painting.

Sahand Hesamiyan's resilience can be located in his sustained reconstruction of Iranian architectural knowledge within a contemporary sculptural practice. Born in Tehran in 1977 and continuing to live and work there, Hesamiyan has spent more than two decades developing a technically demanding practice based on geometry, construction and the architectural traditions of Iran. His sculptures reinterpret systems such as Yazdibandi and Rasmibandi, historic methods used in the ornamentation of Persian domes, translating them into large-scale metal structures and interactive installations. This sustained engagement requires both preserving complex forms of inherited knowledge and adapting them to materials, technologies and spatial conditions that did not exist within their original contexts. His 24-year engagement with steel, documented in his Prolepsis project, further demonstrates the persistence and refinement of a practice developed over decades. By continuing to work from Tehran while presenting his sculptures internationally, Hesamiyan has maintained an active connection between contemporary artistic production and the architectural histories embedded within Iranian culture. His resilience is therefore expressed through continuity and reconstruction: keeping a complex cultural vocabulary active by repeatedly giving it new physical and conceptual forms.

Mamali Shafahi's resilience can be understood through his sustained ability to move between Iran and international contexts while continually reinventing the forms and technologies through which he works. Born in Tehran in 1982, Shafahi studied at the École Nationale Supérieure des

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Beaux-Arts de Paris-Cergy and has developed a practice spanning film, sculpture, installation, performance and video. His work frequently examines the relationship between generations, memory and technological change, using emerging technologies not simply as tools but as subjects through which questions of identity and cultural continuity can be explored. His Nature Morte project (2014–17), for example, involved his parents as both actors and digitally constructed characters, while later works combined his father's drawings with his own installations and films. His ability to sustain connections between Tehran and Paris, and to continually adapt his practice to new technological and social conditions, demonstrates resilience through transformation: preserving personal and familial histories while finding new forms through which they can remain present within an increasingly changing cultural landscape.

Koroush Shishegaran's resilience can be seen in the way he continued to experiment with what art could be, even as the social and political conditions around him changed dramatically. Born in Qazvin in 1944 and raised in Tehran, Shishegaran began exhibiting in the 1970s, working across painting, printmaking, photography, conceptual art and graphic design. His Art+Art project of 1977 is a particularly clear example of this approach. Instead of presenting an artwork inside a gallery, he declared Shahreza Avenue itself, along with its people and everything happening there, to be his work. The project was met with confusion and even hostility, yet Shishegaran continued to push his practice beyond conventional forms. He went on to make political and social posters during the years surrounding the 1979 Revolution, followed by war drawings during the Iran-Iraq War, before returning more fully to painting and drawing. His career shows resilience through continued experimentation: as the circumstances around him changed, he repeatedly found new ways to respond to them without abandoning the possibility of making art.

Fereydoon Ave's resilience is deeply connected to his decision to remain engaged with Iran's cultural life through periods of profound political transformation. After returning to Iran in 1970 following his education abroad, Ave became an important figure in Tehran's emerging contemporary art scene, working as a designer, curator, artist, gallerist and collector and contributing to institutions. Following the 1979 Revolution, when many members of Iran's cultural community left the country, Ave remained and established No. 13 Vanak in the early 1980s, an independent space operating from a disused garden shed that provided a platform for emerging artists. His own practice similarly continued to develop through changing circumstances, drawing on Persian mythology, the Shahnameh, personal memory and questions of cultural identity. His Rostam and Sohrab works, for example, return to pre-Islamic Persian mythology as a way of engaging with contemporary questions of masculinity and Iranian identity. Ave's resilience extends beyond the continuation of his own artistic production: it is also expressed through his sustained investment in building spaces, relationships and cultural structures that allowed artistic activity to continue within Iran.

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Tehran-born former wrestler Farrokh Mahdavi begins with the face, then gradually strips it of the characteristics through which an individual can be identified. Working with thick accumulations of fleshy pink paint, he allows eyes, lips and fragments of features to emerge from dense surfaces, producing figures that retain the emotional charge of portraiture while becoming increasingly difficult to locate within categories of gender, race, nationality or identity. The Shavings series developed from Mahdavi's own response to aging: after noticing his hair turning grey, he began shaving every day, an action he describes as a form of revolt against the passage of time, which subsequently became the basis for a sustained investigation in painting. The Persian word for pink, soorati, derives from soorat, meaning face, allowing the color itself to become bound to the body and to a conception of human flesh that transcends political, territorial and social distinctions. This movement between the particular and the universal extends into Mahdavi's working process, which depends on repetition, experimentation and destruction. He has described continuing to make paintings and sometimes destroying them when they do not arrive at what he is looking for, allowing the act of making itself to produce unexpected discoveries. This attitude toward failure became materially present in his installation at the National Gallery of Victoria Triennial in 2023, where paintings he considered flawed or no longer viable, described as rejectamenta, were placed directly on the floor and visitors were invited to walk across them, leaving dust from their feet on the surfaces. In Mahdavi's practice, resilience consequently takes the form of continued experimentation: failure is retained as part of the process, destruction becomes a means of discovery, and the repeated reconstruction of the human figure becomes a way of working through aging, uncertainty and the instability of identity.

Sassan Behnam-Bakhtiar's resilience is closely connected to experiences of displacement, political violence, and imprisonment that shaped his early life. Born in Paris in 1984, he moved to Tehran with his mother as a child and grew up during the Iran-Iraq War. He has described experiencing harassment and violence at school, repeated intimidation by authorities, and imprisonment in Iran, including four weeks spent alone in a small, windowless cell. These experiences entered his artistic practice through works addressing the Iran-Iraq War, personal memory, displacement, and questions of identity.

Behnam-Bakhtiar has described the isolation of imprisonment as an experience that forced him inward and became a source of personal strength. Resilience in his practice therefore emerges through transformation: experiences of war, incarceration, displacement and personal loss are repeatedly processed through painting, memory and Iranian cultural imagery, allowing difficult experiences to become part of an evolving artistic language.