

# Steppin' Out

A SPECIAL FEATURE OF SILICON VALLEY COMMUNITY NEWSPAPERS

## She Who Tells a Story

*Cantor Arts Center features works of 12 women photographers from Iran and the Arab world*

By DIANE LeBOW

Here in the United States, the names "Iran" or "Arab states," conjure images of war, destruction and dictators. But what of the personal and private lives of people, especially of the women, living in this part of the world and how is this revealed through their art?

The author and photographer of this article recently traveled to Iran to become more familiar with the people and culture.

The current exhibition at the Cantor Arts Center at Stanford University makes it convenient for anyone in the Bay Area to explore these concepts through the work of 12 leading women photographers from Iran and the Arab world.

"The 12 prominent photographers featured here address the people, landscapes and cultures of a region in flux," said Kristen Gresh, assistant curator of photographs at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts, which organized the exhibition.

Spanning from the 1990s to today, the images in "She Who Tells a Story" reflect on the power of politics and the legacy of war—and examining the complexities of identity. Ranging in style from fine arts to photojournalism, the exhibition includes 79 photographs and two videos. The Cantor show is the only West Coast viewing.

Iranian photographer Shirin Neshat's startling image, "Roja," depicts a woman gazing at the camera, her entire body and face covered with Persian



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF JOHN MONTGOMERY

Loss of identity: Boushra Almutawakel, Yemen

calligraphy from an ancient epic of heroic deeds.

"In Iran women are quite powerful, unlike their clichéd image," Neshat said. "What I try to convey through my work is that power."

One of Shadi Ghadirian's photos portrays two women whose entire bodies and faces are covered in hijab, holding a mirror that faces the viewer in

which is reflected a bookcase piled high with books, a world these women can only experience in reflection. Another of her images is of an elegant bed with delicate lace linens and soft blankets framing a rifle grenade in the bed's center.

One of many powerful images is Gohar Dashti's photograph

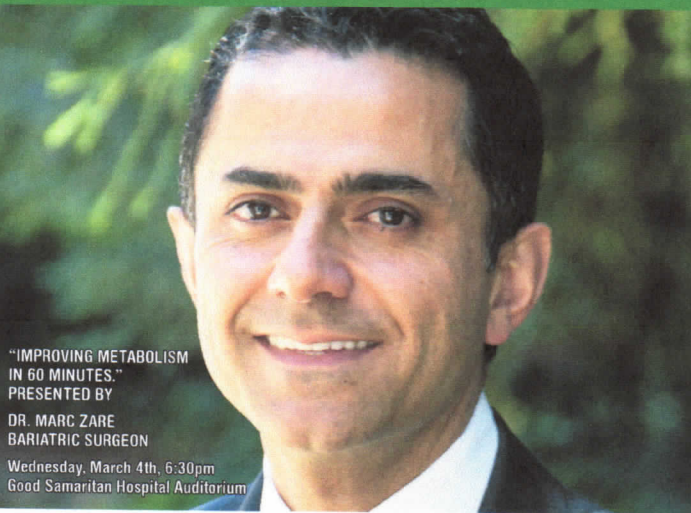
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Wedding happiness amidst war: Gohar Dashti, Iranian



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## Steppin' Out Feature

### Feature

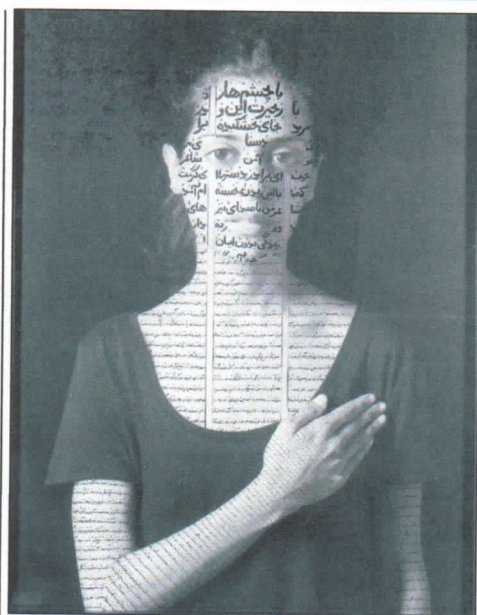
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of a couple in wedding finery, sitting in a destroyed car, surrounded by armored tanks and a war-battered landscape.

Yemeni photographer Boushra Almutwakel's startling series of images shows a mother, daughter and doll as they move from smiling exposed faces to full hijab to an empty pedestal covered with a black cloth—total loss of public identity.

Gallery talks are scheduled on March 5 and 19 and April 30 and include Middle Eastern scholars, panels of artists and multimedia presentations.

"She Who Tells a Story: Women Photographers from Iran and the Arab World," 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Wednesday-Monday, until 8 p.m. Thursday. Through May 4. Cantor Arts Center, Stanford University, 328 Lomita Drive at Museum Way. Admission is free. 650.723.4177. [museum.stanford.edu](http://museum.stanford.edu).



Women as heroes: Shirin Neshat, Iranian



The outside world,  
only a reflection: Shadi  
Ghadirian, Iranian  
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