02

صداهای ایران
Voices of IRAN





For Fuck's Sake, Just Fall | *Iranian Artist*

Preface *Nov. 2026*

Since issue one released in June, there has been a lot of news, misinformation, and confusion from the aftermath of the January massacre.[1] The death toll figures are not consistent, and people are grieving. Weeks after this horrific event, the United States and Israel launched a war.[1][2] The facts are hard to get right, and that is a very dangerous game to play, as it seems the world has been repeating history tenfold and attempting to erase it in real time.

In August, Iran's parliament advanced a bill to restrict contact between Iranians and the outside world.[3][4] As of November 18, it is not law yet. Lawmakers approved its general principles by a vote of 183 to 4 and have since passed several of its 33 articles.[3][5][6] These include Article 22, which bans interviews with media the Intelligence Ministry designates as "hostile," punishable by up to two years in prison, fines, and flogging, and Article 20, which provides for up to 10 years in prison for anyone who shares unpublished official information they access through their job with a foreign agent without authorization.[5] Article 21 reportedly allows organizations engaged in unauthorized foreign-linked activity to be dissolved.[6] The remaining articles still need votes, and the full bill needs Guardian Council approval.[3][6] According to UN investigators, the bill as drafted would require Iranians to register and get approval from the Intelligence Ministry and IRGC Intelligence Organization before routine activities such as publishing books and articles, scientific or academic cooperation, joining workshops and arts festivals, and producing or exhibiting films, music, and visual art.[2] The wording is vague, and the UN mission warns that journalists, academics, and activists could face up to 30 years in prison for communicating with foreign persons and entities.[2] Rights groups warn that artists could be affected as well.[2][7]

Meanwhile, people continue to be punished for what they say and do. Human Rights Watch and the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran reported at least 59 political executions from March 18 to the end of August, including at least 29 people arrested in connection with the December 2025 to January 2026 protests. Several of those executed were teenagers aged 18 and 19, and many others were in their early 20s. Five were executed in public.[1]

In October, it was reported that 23-year-old Najmeh Amini had been sentenced to death for "blasphemy" over a social media post. In a separate trial, she was sentenced to 12 years and six months in prison for acting against national security and spreading propaganda against the government. Her death sentence can still be appealed.[8]

According to the Center for Human Rights in Iran, a growing number of artists, writers, and musicians have been arrested, prosecuted, and imprisoned for songs, poems, paintings, books, and other forms of peaceful expression.[9] Art is powerful and the regime knows it:

- **Poet Nima Saffar and writer Rouzbeh Gilasian:** each sentenced to four years and eight months in prison, with online activity cited as evidence against both and Gilasian's writings cited against him.[9]
- **Painter and sculptor Rahim Molaeian:** sentenced to six months in prison, with his paintings and critical social media posts reportedly cited as evidence.[9]

- **At least four Ahwazi Arab cultural activists (Mehdi Naseri, Aref Naseri, Mohammad Kaabi, known as "Abu Idris," and filmmaker Mehdi Khaledi):** arrested in connection with a song produced with official permission, while its two singers were summoned and threatened.[9][10]
- **Singer Parastoo Ahmadi:** sentenced to 74 lashes, a two-year travel ban, and a two-year ban on artistic work for performing without a hijab; an appeals court upheld the flogging sentence.[9][11]

Imagine saying all the negative things we say about our own government in free speech nations, openly and freely, regardless of political side, and being sentenced to prison or death for it.

Imagine the people in this zine risking everything to say what they need to say and express what they need to express.

This constant and violent effort to silence Iranians is why Voices of Iran exists. We took steps to encrypt submission data and protect the lives and voices of the Iranians you are about to read. We did not edit their words to fit any narrative. This is the promise and mission of the project: *to honor their right to speak beyond borders, without judgment, and without suppression.*

This zine includes writing and artwork from Iranians, including people living inside the country. Some authors chose to submit only writing, which we paired with a volunteer artist from an international pool. Each entry is labeled to show whether the art is by the author or a volunteer. The content is heavy, but it is impactful and important. Your eyes on these pages mean everything.

Peace and freedom to Iran!

Notes: The front and back covers of this zine were also created by Iranian artists. All identities are anonymous for their protection.

Preface Sources *Accessed Oct. 27, 2026*

1. **Human Rights Watch and the Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran.** *"Iran: Ongoing Unlawful Execution Campaign Against Protesters."* September 10, 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/09/10/iran-ongoing-unlawful-execution-campaign-against-protesters

2. **UN Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on Iran.** *"Iran - UN Fact-Finding Mission urges withdrawal of bill criminalizing contact with foreign entities."* Press release, September 3, 2026. https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2026/09/iran-un-fact-finding-mission-urges-withdrawal-bill-criminalizing-contact

3. **Sharifi, Kian.** *"'Infiltration' Bill Exposes Iran's Internal Divisions Over Wartime Security Crackdown."* Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 10, 2026. https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-infiltration-bill-parliament-opposition-qalibaf-/33851689.html

4. **Al Jazeera.** *"Iran's hardline parliament raises concerns with 'foreign infiltration' plan."* August 19, 2026. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/8/19/irans-hardline-parliament-raises-concerns-with-foreign-infiltration-plan

5. **Euronews Persian.** *"Iran parliament votes to criminalise interviews with 'hostile' foreign media."* October 7, 2026. https://www.euronews.com/2026/10/07/iran-parliament-votes-to-criminalise-interviews-with-hostile-foreign-media

6. **Mohammadi, Kamin.** *"How Tehran, Washington and London Are Shutting Out Ordinary Iranians."* Truthdig, October 27, 2026. https://www.truthdig.com/articles/how-tehran-washington-and-london-are-shutting-out-ordinary-iranians/

7. **Center for Human Rights in Iran.** *"Iran's Sweeping New Bill Threatens to Isolate Its People From the World."* September 15, 2026. https://iranhumanrights.org/2026/09/irans-sweeping-new-bill-threatens-to-isolate-its-people-from-the-world/

8. **LBC.** *"Iranian woman, 23, sentenced to death for 'insulting the prophet' in 'blasphemous' social media post."* October 14, 2026. https://www.lbc.co.uk/article/woman-sentenced-death-blasphemy-iran-5Hjdjsk_2/

9. **Center for Human Rights in Iran.** *"Iranian Authorities Target Artists, Writers, and Poets in Escalating Crackdown."* October 6, 2026. https://iranhumanrights.org/2026/10/iranian-authorities-target-artists-writers-and-poets-in-escalating-crackdown/

10. **Hengaw Organization for Human Rights.** *"Arab activists Aref Naseri and Mehdi Naseri arrested by Iranian forces."* September 12, 2026. https://hengaw.org/en/content/article-42725

11. **Agence France-Presse.** *"Iranian singer sentenced to 74 lashes over concert."* CTV News, June 20, 2026. https://www.ctvnews.ca/world/article/iran-singer-artists-sentenced-to-74-lashes-each-over-concert/

Notes on specific sources

• Source 6 (Truthdig) is our source for Article 21, which it reports from Persian-language news. It also supports the bill's status as of late October. Truthdig is a progressive outlet, and this piece is a first-person report by a contributor.
• Source 3 (RFE/RL) is funded by the US government but is editorially independent. This piece is labeled news analysis.
• Sources 9 and 10 are reports from human rights organizations that document cases through local networks and other rights groups. Their details are as reported by those organizations. Hengaw names two of the four Ahwazi activists listed in the preface, and the Center for Human Rights in Iran names all four.

Business as Usual

Paired Art with Iranian Author

وارد کافه‌ای نه‌چندان کوچک می‌شود.
آن‌قدر جا دارد که شش میز بزرگ را راحت در خودش جا بدهد. اما فقط سه میز کوچک چیده‌اند و هر سه نفر اطراف حرف می‌زنند؛ از آن مدل حرف‌زدن‌هایی که انگار قرار نیست تمام شوند.
طول دیوار قهوه‌ای و رنگ‌ورورفته کافه را طی می‌کند تا به پیشخوان برسد.
بارستا مشغول جا دادن چیزی در یک کیسه‌ی بزرگ است.
سلام می‌کند.
بارستا بدون اینکه سرش را بلند کند جواب می‌دهد.
می‌گوید می‌خواهد برای فردا کافه را رزرو کند.
می‌پرسد: «پر نشده؟»
مکث کوتاهی می‌کند.
ادامه می‌دهد:
«مهمون هم دارین؟ مدتیه پیدا کردن مهمون سخت شده.»
این بار بارستا نگاهش می‌کند.
«زنده؟»
کمی فکر می‌کند.
«اگه صرف داشته باشه.»
بارستا دستمالش را به دستمال کنار گاز می‌کشد.
«اتفاقاً زنده معمولاً ارزون‌تر درمیاد.»
بعد برگه‌های جلوش می‌گذارد. چند ستون دارد: تعداد، سن، مدت حضور، زنده، مرده.
بارستا کیسه را از روی زمین بلند می‌کند.
«انتخاب کن. منم این مهمونو بندازم آشغالی الان برمی‌گردم.»
چند دقیقه بعد دست خالی برمی‌گردد.
می‌گوید:
«این یکی دیگه داشت دیرش می‌شد.»
برگه را می‌گیرد.
چند سؤال می‌پرسد. چند تیک می‌زنند و چند جا را خط می‌کشند. در نهایت روی ترکیب مهمان‌های زنده و تعداد کمی مرده - فقط برای ظاهر کار - توافق می‌کنند.
مشتری می‌گوید:
«فقط می‌خوام قبل از ما رسیده باشن.»

بارستا به برگه نگاه می‌کند.
«سه صبح...»
زیر لب تکرار می‌کند:
«پر از مهمونای زنده و مرده...»
بعد سرش را تکان می‌دهد.
«نگران نباش.»
لبخندی از سر خاطر جمعی می‌زند.
«اونا همیشه همین‌جان.»



A customer walks into a not so small café.
There is enough room for six large tables, easily, yet only three small ones have been set up, and all three are occupied.
A few people speak quietly; the kind of conversations that seem as though they were never meant to end.
The faded brown wall stretches all the way to the counter, where the café owner is busy fitting something into a large bag.
“Hello.”
The owner answers without looking up.
“I’d like to reserve the café for tomorrow. Is it too late?”
A brief pause.
“Are you having guests too? It’s been getting harder to find guests lately.”
This time, the owner looks up.
“Alive?”
A moment of consideration.
“If it’s not too expensive.”
The owner wipes both hands on the cloth tucked at the waist.
“Actually, live ones usually work out cheaper.”
A sheet of paper is placed on the counter.
Several columns: quantity, age, length of stay, alive, dead.
The owner picks up the bag from the floor.
“Choose. I’ll throw this guest out with the trash and be right back.”
A few minutes later, the owner returns empty-handed.

“This one was starting to smell.”
The sheet is taken back.
A few questions. A few boxes checked. A few lines crossed out.
In the end, they settle on a combination of live guests and a small number of dead ones—just for appearances.
“I just want them to have arrived before we do.”
The owner looks over the sheet.
“Three in the morning...”
Under the breath:
“Full of live and dead guests...”
A slight shake of the head.
“Don’t worry.”
A reassuring smile.
“They’re always here.”

Trouble Land

Paired Art with Iranian Author

My kin, I act awful
I stand still as sins flow, words of past chiming tomorrow
GAS IT GAS IT GAS IT
Undo that episode

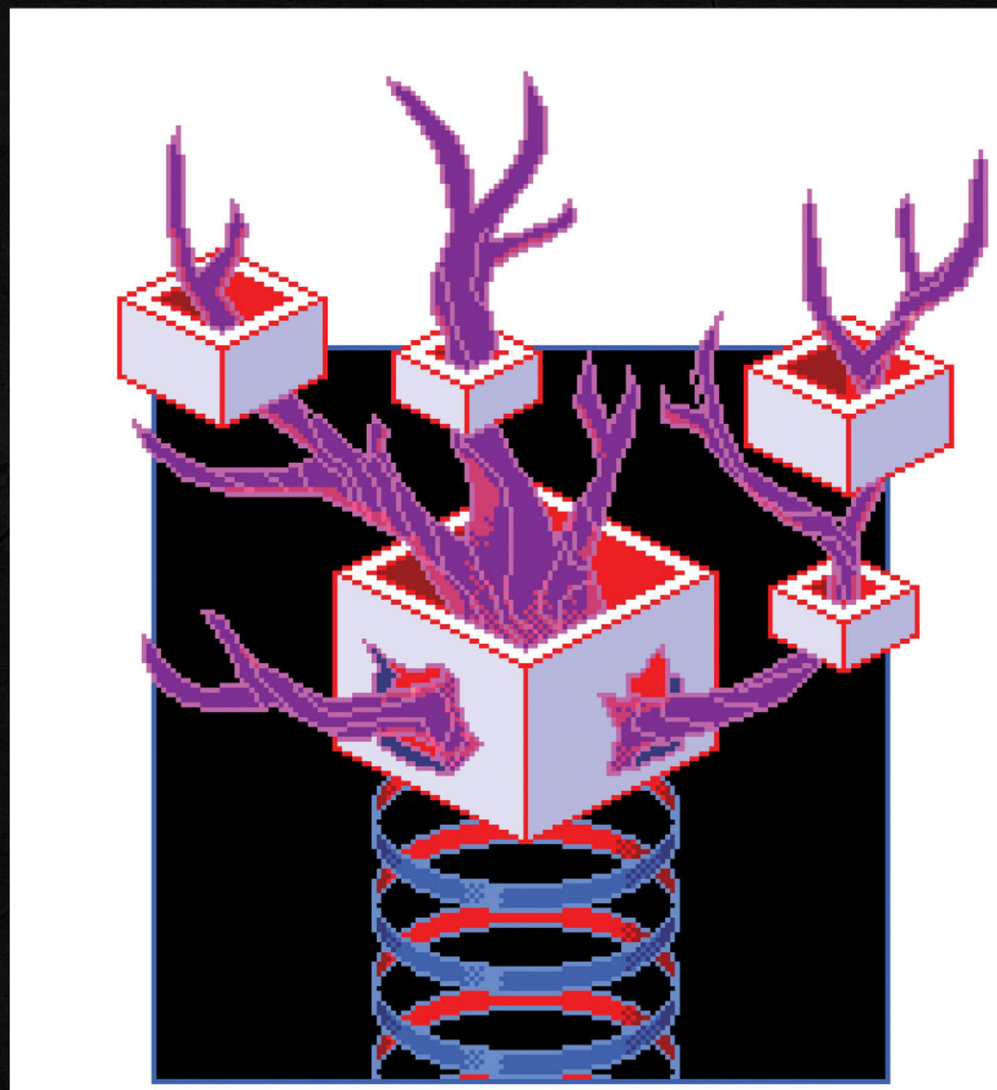
Take that step dash, sun may reach you in land

My kin, I am awful
I let it pass me by
Make it into your hand, take it to mine
Screens hills absurd velveteen ovens cooking rookies

I cram it into a box
My kin, you died and no recycle truck rang any bells
Pierces in flesh
I take you for a kiss and we shuffle

The heat takes away the memories
In an instant I am here only to sit and then I am to act
I crammed you
Boxes alone could not hold you

I took a step in sun ridden fields
Night took a hold of me
Struck as a tree yet no lightning came to prove my point
Nimble sprouts yelling warcry





Ocean of Hair

Paired Art with Iranian Author

At the restless edge of the sea, where turquoise waves kiss the sand, a woman stands with her wild, raven-black hair whipping like a storm across the sky. Strands of deep black curls trail behind her like a tide she has carried her entire life.

In “Ocean of Hair”, the hair is more than beauty. It is a symbol of a life shaped by the expectations of others. For as long as she can remember, someone else has decided what should be done with it, how it should look, and what it should mean. Though admired by everyone around her, it has never truly belonged to her.

Each strand that seemed to grant her beauty and praise became, over time, a delicate chain. Worn for years through love, judgment, tradition, and expectation, those dark curls slowly transformed from ornament into burden. What appeared to be freedom was often control; what appeared to be admiration was often ownership.

Standing before the sea, she confronts the weight of everything she has carried. The ocean becomes a mirror of the years spent living inside an image that others created for her.

And so, carried by the salt wind, comes a quiet question:

“If I cut it all away… who would disapprove? And who would stay?”

Raw, luminous, and deeply liberating, “Ocean of Hair” is a meditation on reclaiming ownership of oneself. It is an ode to the courage required to let go of a beauty that once defined you, controlled you, and spoke in your place. It is a message to finally become the author of your own reflection.

War

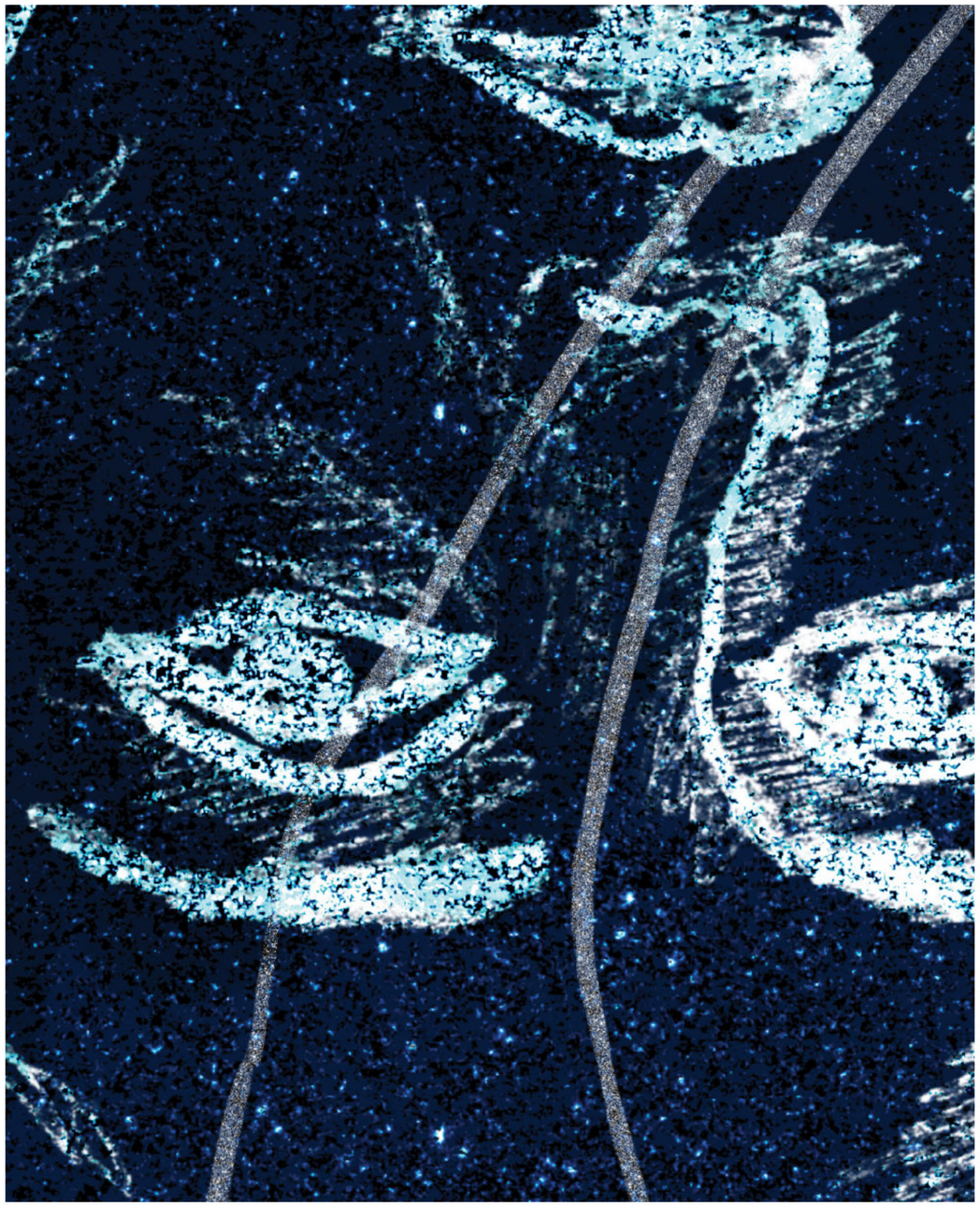
Art and Writing by Iranian Artist

This painting is part of my series “War”, a body of work shaped by the experience of living through conditions in which anxiety, uncertainty, and a sense of loss become part of everyday life. In these works, war is not understood only as an external event, but also as an internal and psychological experience—something that remains in the body, memory, and way we perceive the world.

In this painting, the figures are intertwined within a dense and unsettled space. Exaggerated forms, sharp lines, and saturated colors create a tension between chaos and fantasy. The use of bright, almost playful, colors alongside the unsettling atmosphere reflects the contrast between the appearance of ordinary life and the anxiety that exists beneath it.

For me, this series is about the human experience of war: fear, instability, loss, and the attempt to continue living when reality is constantly shifting.





The Making of a Tyrant

Paired Art with Iranian Author

Jean watches his own face surrender in the mirror.
Outside, the shadows of rhinos swallow the city.
No one wakes up a monster.
Sometimes, a regime simply teaches a man to stop being human.
And by the time he recognizes himself,
the horns are already there.

The Light That Refuses to Die

Art and Writing by Iranian Artist

In the darkness of the soul,
Where every shadow crawls in search of a weakened light,
Even the smallest spark of hope
Can awaken the strength to rise.

For it is in the deepest dark
That we learn to grow without the sun,
To stand when everything tells us to fall,
And to reach for the light,
Even when we cannot yet see it.

Sometimes, hope is not a light that finds us,
It is the light we become.





The Ones We Could Not Save

Art and Writing by Iranian Artist

December came quietly.
And then January arrived carrying the names of the dead.
The streets were full of voices,
Until some of those voices were taken away.
Young bodies disappeared beneath the weight of violence,
While the rest of us learned how to breathe more quietly,
How to look away,
How to keep walking when someone else had fallen.
Some stood in the streets.
Some stayed behind closed doors.
Some were afraid.
Some were silent.
And some learned how to make a fortune from the blood on the ground.
We became a crowd of broken pieces—
The grieving, the frightened, the indifferent,
The witnesses, the survivors,
And those who pretended they had seen nothing.
But the dead remain among us.
In the empty chair at a friend's table.
In a name that is no longer called from behind a door.
In the messages that will never receive a reply.
My Dear friend Asal Mansoori is one of those names.
She was not a number.
None of them were.
They had laughter.
They had plans.
They had people waiting for them to come home.
Perhaps this is what remains after the streets become quiet:
The names we carry,
The faces we cannot forget,
And a silence that will never truly be silent.

Those Dark Days

Art and Writing by Iranian Artist

Those dark days were a pure nightmare for me.
Not only for me, but for many others as well.
I'm still numb even after months have passed.

Then came the war, another shock.
The pain sank into deeper layers I couldn't even express.

I'm full of trauma, stress, and anxiety.
I've never experienced anything like this before,
and I'm still deeply affected by what happened.

It's too heavy to explain.
Too heavy to put into words.
I'm one of those people who still can't get out of those dark days.

At least my creative space is a place where I can run away from that heaviness, keep myself busy with art — art that has always been a sanctuary for me.

It's *too much* to carry.
It was all a *nightmare*.
What we witnessed here is *beyond imagination*.





A Medical Report on Collective Trauma

Art and Writing by Iranian Artist

Nothing helps you want to keep living.
Not the antidepressants, not the people you love.
You cannot imagine a future for yourself, you cannot hold a wish, and the whispers and shadows never leave you alone. The sound of gunshots, the voices of those who were killed, the image of the black body bags of Kahrizak… everything traumatizes you. When you walk into a supermarket, the ice-cream freezers remind you of Nika, raped and killed behind the Mihān ice-cream truck by regime forces. When you drop ice into a glass of water, you remember nine-year-old Kian, whose mother borrowed ice from the neighbors so the body would not spoil by morning, because she had to keep her child's corpse at home so it would not be stolen by regime forces. Those who lost their eyes. Those who danced while weeping over the graves of their loved ones.
I used to be a writer. I loved writing. Now I hate words. I no longer understand them; it is as if the power to write has been taken from me. My mind is so wounded that I neither want nor am able to write. There were so many things I wanted to say, but I feel it is useless. I feel that human rights and empathy are just performances and hollow words in this world. A few years ago the world abandoned the people of Afghanistan, and now it does not care that an Afghan woman is flogged in a public square for teaching girls online. Now everyone has abandoned Iran as well. Instead of the black body bags of Kahrizak, they see barrels of oil. They negotiate over Iranian blood, and whenever they grow tired of the regime, they exploit the names of the martyrs and the dead of December, only to negotiate over Iranian blood once more.
We are so alone.
Death has filled me so completely that I can no longer feel words, find them, or write them. I have been shot a thousand times in the streets alongside thousands of others. I have been hanged a thousand times to the sound of the call to prayer. I feel that my heart is wounded, that my chest is full of bitter tears, and that I am constantly drowning in them. I cannot go to work or university here because I refuse to wear the hijab, yet the world casually says and imagines that the hijab is now free in Iran. But this is only the courage of Iranian women who risk their lives. I am deeply disappointed in the world. And I feel like a false old person—an old person who every night writes down the oldest griefs, drinks themself drunk, weeps in the dark, and vomits all these dark feelings onto their own future. Everything is clear enough to see; there is no need for words. But it is not in the world's interest to see…
I will never leave my country, and I do not know when my turn will come to die in the street or on the gallows. I only know that I was never happy, and that I never loved this world.

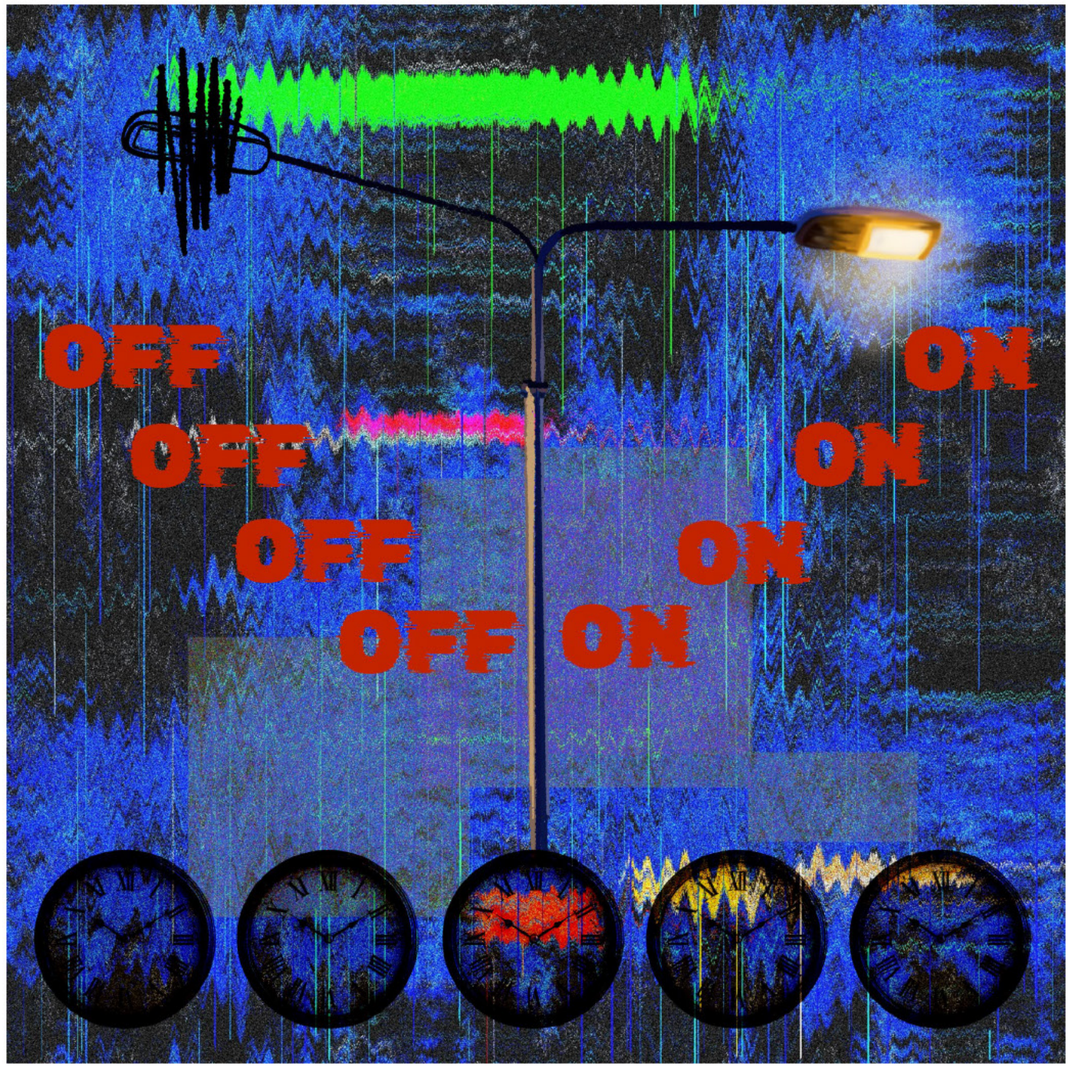
They Cut Our Power

Paired Art with Iranian Author

We don’t have many human rights in Iran.

They cut the power and impose rolling blackouts, not only in summer but even in winter, imagine that!

This started about four years ago. At first, it was only in workplaces, once a week for one hour during the summer. Then the next summer, it extended to houses as well. Last year, it became an everyday occurrence, two hours even in winter. It turned out they were mining cryptocurrency. And this year, with the excuse of war, we have rolling blackouts every day for two hours. The result is freezer burn, and I have to eat vegetables that taste bad.





The Obstacles Iranians Face when Traveling Abroad

Paired Art with Iranian Author

Here in Iran, we can't make plans even for the next day, let alone for a trip. Because of the war, we can't make any plans at all.
Neither inside the country nor abroad.
It's really pathetic what the politicians have done to us.
It feels like the Covid period is still continuing.
It seems the lockdown during Covid wasn't enough for Iranian people, maybe.

Everybody in the world, except Iranians, can book their hotel and flight at least three months in advance.
But because of the war, we can't decide anything.
And even before that, we didn't dare to, because as we say here, you can't rely on this country.

Moreover, in this country, if we want to travel outside Iran, first we have to pay a tax.
If we travel abroad a second time in the same year, the tax doubles.
For a third trip, it triples, and it keeps increasing…
It feels like they're punishing us.

I Survived the Massacre

Art and Writing by Iranian Artist

I survived the massacre that took place on January 8 and 9.

Many others didn't.

While we were protesting, armed forces or rather, mercenaries dressed as police, came for us.

As we ran, a family opened their doors to a group of complete strangers.
They gave us shelter.
If it weren't for them, I wouldn't be here today.

As I waited to make sure everyone had made it inside, two men appeared.

The moment I shut the door, they shattered the glass. For a split second, I locked eyes with the man in front. Without hesitation, and without knowing who or how many people were inside, he fired into the house.

If I hadn't pressed myself against the wall beside the door, the shotgun blast would have torn through my chest.
Instead, the person behind me, who was running up the stairs, was struck in the foot.

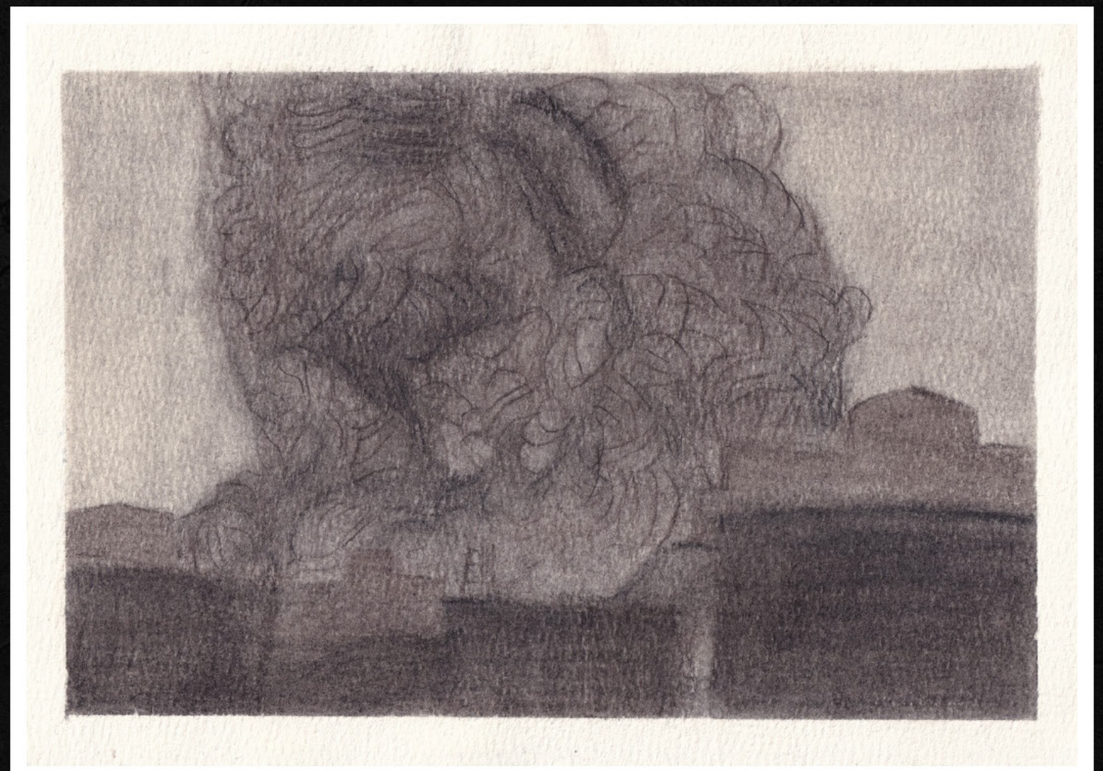
That moment.
That flash.

For days, it was all I could see.

Until I painted it.

The moment I survived.
The moment luck was the only thing standing between life and death.





Between Ruin and Freedom

Paired Art with Iranian Author

I wrote these words seconds after a missile struck only a few hundred meters from my home.

I didn't just see the explosion; I felt it. The shockwave rattled my chest before my mind could comprehend what had happened. I heard the dreadful sound of concrete and steel twisting under pressure, mixed with the sharp shattering of glass. The ground beneath my feet trembled. The air itself felt torn apart. And there I stood, witnessing the immediate collapse of peace.

What made this moment even more surreal was the absolute silence that followed. No internet. No phone signal. No connection to the outside world. Every invisible line that normally connects a human to humanity had been severed. No calls. No messages. No news. Just me, completely alone inside a collapsing moment, with no way of knowing who else was alive, who was buried under the rubble, or what was coming next.

There is a very specific, suffocating kind of loneliness in war. It is not just physical isolation, but psychological detachment, a feeling that your reality has suddenly broken off from the rest of the world.

And then comes the agonizing contradiction: How do you process the longing for freedom from a system that has suffocated your people for decades… while simultaneously watching your homeland burn?

How do you hold relief and grief in the same hand?
How do you wish for a collapse, but not destruction?
For liberation, but not death?

That is the quiet cruelty of our situation. You can hate what rules your country, and still love every grain of its soil with everything you have. You can dream of change, and still feel your heart break into pieces seeing innocent people trapped under the weight of conflict.

Outsiders often see war in simplistic terms: victory or defeat, good or evil, liberation or oppression. But reality is far uglier. Sometimes there are no clean sides, only ordinary people trapped between massive forces beyond their control.

This is not just about the smoke from an explosion. It is the raw, visual form of a human contradiction: of fear, survival, rage, grief… and a strange, stubborn hope that refuses to die.

I survived that moment. Many didn't. And that is a burden that changes you forever.

Sometimes, freedom arrives dressed as a catastrophe.

— Isfahan, Iran

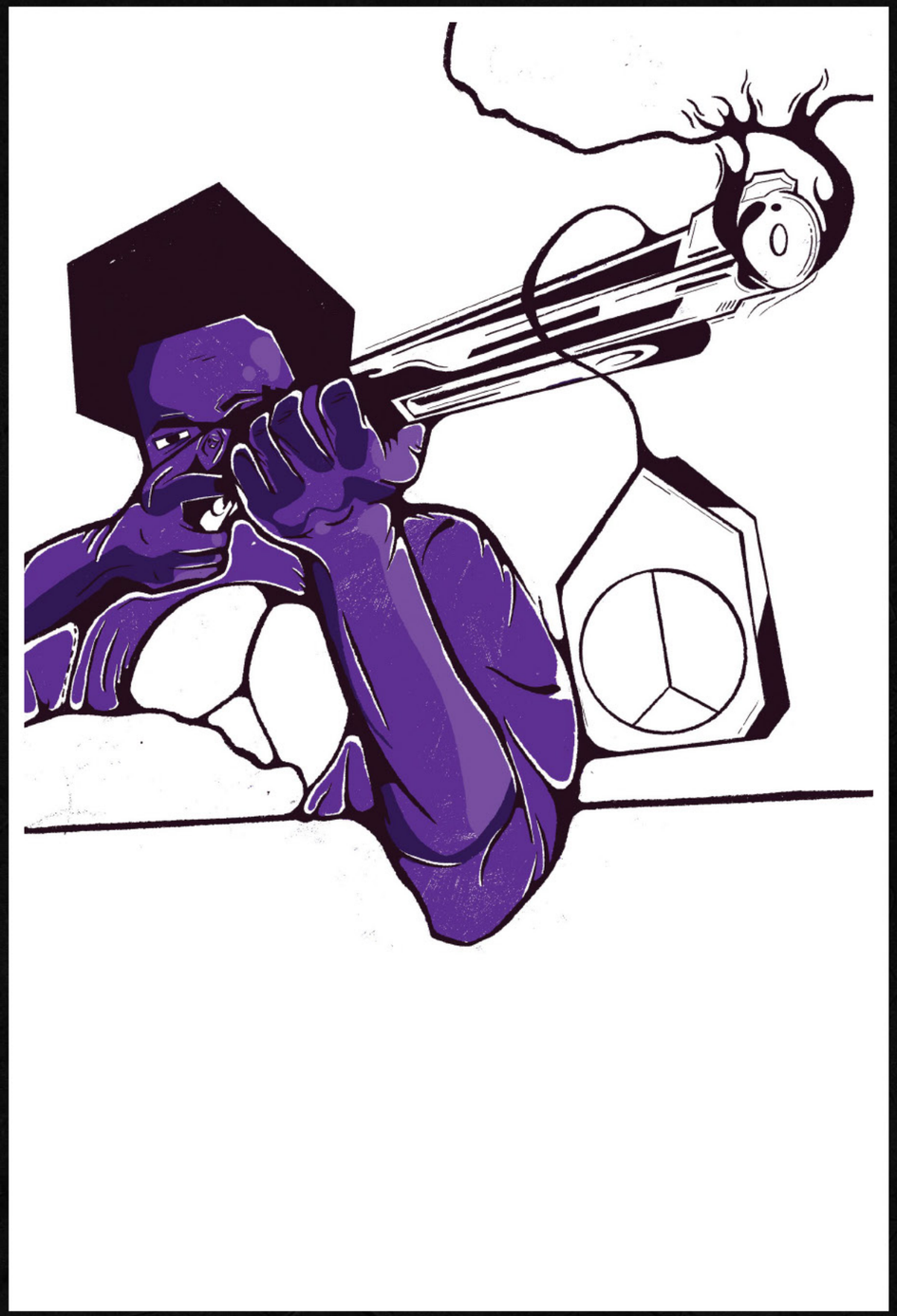
Voice

Art and Writing by Iranian Artist



The sounds are fading away.
Maybe I'm making a mistake.
A mirage of screams lies before me.
I thought I had to distance myself.
But the only thing that was growing was the sound.
Forough wrote truly, "Only sound remains.
But why am I not going deaf?"

صداها دور می شوند
شاید دارم اشتباه می کنم
سرابی از فریادها پیش رویم هست
فکرمی‌کردم باید خودم رو دور کنم
اما تنها چیزی که زیاد می شد صدا بود
فروغ راست می سرود، تنها صداست که می ماند
اما چرا کر نمی شوم؟!



Iranians Have Three Enemies

Paired Art with Iranian Author

Iranians have three enemies:
Iran's own regime, Israel, and America.
In August, people all over the world are taking vacations, sometimes for three weeks or more. But here, we can't live like that.
We are constantly living under the shadow of war, as our politicians keep saying.
We can't simply pack our bags, go to the beach, and relax like people in other countries.
I'm a human being too. I want to feel the sun on my skin, sit by the sea, breathe freely, and forget about everything for a few days.
I want an ordinary, peaceful life.

But even when there is no attack, we can't truly relax, because there is always that terrifying question in the back of our minds: What if Israel suddenly decides to attack again? What if civilian airplanes are caught in the middle of it?

Even something as basic as having internet has become a privilege here. In Iran, internet access feels almost like gold. Internet providers sell it at high prices, give us very limited service, and whenever they want, the authorities can simply cut it off.

Most of the time, the connection is so painfully slow that I can't even send a short video on WhatsApp, and that's with a VPN. Imagine being so frustrated that even sending a few seconds of a video becomes a struggle.

Sometimes I get so angry and frustrated that I start yelling at my family. And then, afterward, I feel terrible. I regret it because I know that this is exactly what the authorities want, the poor internet makes people frustrated and angry.

Sometimes I wonder:
Are we even considered human beings, living here?
Do our lives matter to anyone?
When we were cut off from the internet for three months, why did the world simply watch?
Why hasn't the world sent satellite internet to us?
And what guarantee do we have that it won't happen again?
Meanwhile, inflation continues to destroy our lives. The regime talks about removing four zeros from our banknotes.
Our money and savings keep losing their value while we struggle just to maintain a normal life.
The average salary in Iran is only around $150 a month, while prices keep rising, the currency keeps losing its value, the government is raising gasoline prices too.
This war seems to benefit all three of our enemies in different ways.
But ordinary Iranians are the ones who pay the price.

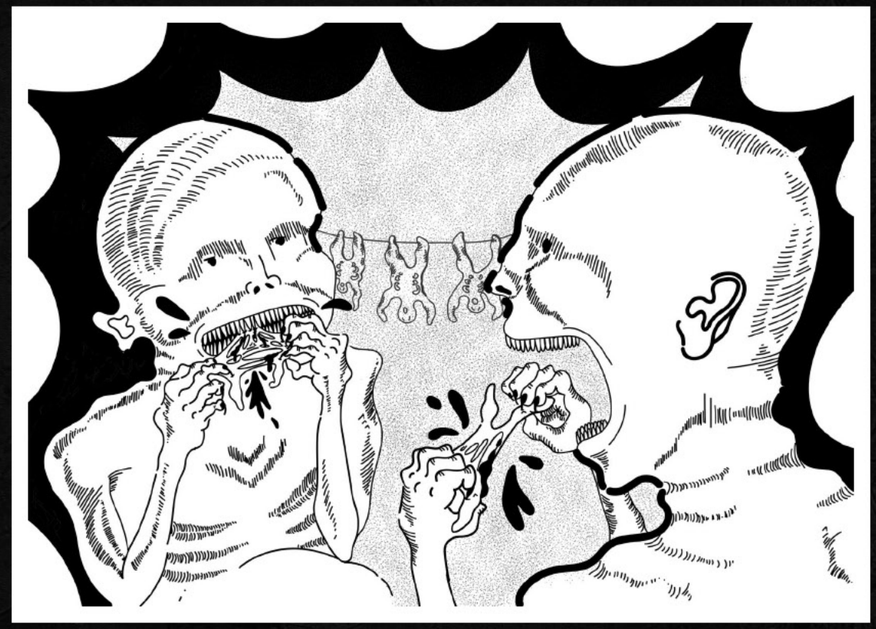
I'm writing this while lying in bed without power because of the rolling blackouts.
After eight exhausting hours at work, I came home, ate lunch as quickly as I could, and rushed to bed just so I could get a little sleep before they cut the electricity again.
I was even afraid to take a proper nap because I knew that if the power went out, I'd wake up drenched in sweat, lying in a hot room without the air conditioner.
We ordinary Iranians work six days a week. Friday is our only day off, while the judges and government officials have a two-day weekend.

Khodkhori

Art and Writing by Iranian Artist

Have you always had this appetite for innocence and powerlessness? See, you never gained any power, you only inflicted torture and horror and shoved your own head into the crown.

These screams are food to your soul and the soft flesh moving around your gum remind you of how proud father is! For you to carry his legacy. To prey is to enjoy god given bliss.





This and That

Paired Art with Iranian Author

Hey how are you? This is me, this is us. I'm here, we are here. I saw you did so much in the past few years, you should really be proud of yourself; we've been through so much.

I see all of your love and all of your efforts. I know you didn't know better when you did that bad thing and I know things can get really tough. I want you to know I love you regardless of what happens. I love you regardless of this and that.

هی، خوبی؟ این منم، این ماییم. من اینجام، ما اینجاییم. دیدم که توی چند سال گذشته چقدر کار کردی و چقدر پیش رفتی. واقعاً باید به خودت افتخار کنی، ما از خیلی چیزها با هم عبور کردیم.

من تمام عشقت رو می‌بینم، تمام تلاش‌هات رو می‌بینم. می‌دونم وقتی اون کار بد رو کردی، چیز بیشتری نمی‌دونستی و بهترِ از اون نمی‌تونستی عمل کنی. و می‌دونم که اوضاع اطراف آدم می‌تونه واقعاً واقعاً سخت بشه. می‌خوام بدونی که دوستت دارم، فارغ از اینکه چه اتفاقی بیفته. دوستت دارم، فارغ از این و اون، فارغ از هر چیزی.

Thirty Six Thousand and More

Paired Art with Iranian Author

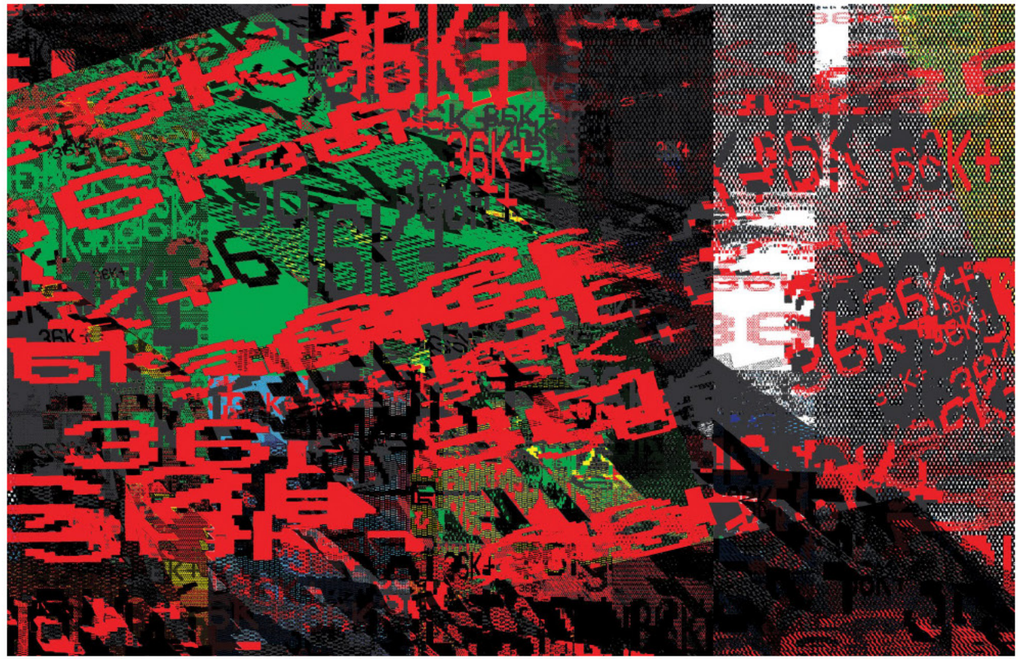
Mum said on the phone today, “Now they say it is 36”.

I heard the speechlessness in her voice. The resignation. The thirty six thousand being the latest estimation that were killed.

She told of the boy who was killed, whose ceremony my aunt had attended. They knew the family from afar. She said, “The ones you kind of know like this boy, you get a feeling of how it is. But then how can you mourn these many? These thousands?” We both feign wonder and muted rage, mainly to hide the gravity of other emotions. Ours is not the type to openly and easily mourn, not over the phone at least, not after an unprecedented massacre at least.

But I ask myself the same question as my Mum over and over as I scroll through my social media accounts over the photos of the killed, the names of the murdered. So far, I might have only seen a dozen. Only up to some hundred have been identified. And yet there seems to be no end to it every time I check. I ask myself if there is any point in knowing their names. If I have a duty not to scroll past too quickly, to stop and look closely into their eyes.

Then if I persist on this train of thought a bit more, things go harsher and much more merciless. My mind goes to the pile of the bodies stacked upon each other, piles of bodies lined up on the ground for the families to find them, and I think of those whose bodies will never be claimed to be buried, to be held and kissed and to be said farewell to. How many of them did have someone who had held them that day, who had kissed them that day? How many had even someone to return to, if they were to survive the massacre? How many names will be lost forever, bodies not claimed, ending up in mass graves. How many lives erased without even a trace?



Love Letters to Iran

We asked people to send messages to Iranians. This is what they had to say:

We think about you
Your struggle is no less than anyone else's
Do not lose hope nor love for others who also have struggles
Much love from India ***- MatNova***

You can take the girl out of Iran, but you can never take Iran out of the girl. Nearly fifty years in exile, and still I dream of returning to my roots, to the land that shaped my soul. Time and distance have never diminished my love for you. I miss you, my dear Iran, and I carry you and my people in my heart wherever I go. ***- Sandy***

"So close, no matter how far
Couldn't be much more from the heart
Forever trusting who we are
And nothing else matters" - James Hetfield / Lars Ulrich
Sending Love to all Iranians. ***- Fellow Human***

I feel deep sorrow and anger about the death and destruction you are suffering. You are not my enemy, you are my brothers and sisters. Sending love and solidarity. ***- AMM***

I send my love, respect, and admiration to Iran, to the great, heroic people of Iran, to the wise and independent leaders of Iran, from the bottom of my heart. ***- Samy***

To the beautiful people of Iran: I wish you a future full of peace and joy. Stay strong. I want to keep hearing all your voices.
- CobwebSaints

Our hearts ache for the suffering people of Iran ***- Lesley***

To the artists of Voices of Iran,

Your pages reached me quietly, the way something true arrives when it doesn't ask permission. They came across the distance like a small, steady pulse, not a call for attention not a spectacle, but a presence that sits beside you and stays.

I read the words you chose to risk on paper, and I saw the images that rose in answer to them. What you sent carries more than testimony; it carries the texture of a life that insists on remaining whole. The precision, the anger, the tenderness, the ordinary details that refuse to vanish form a kind of shelter, one you built while the ground beneath you kept shifting.

Thank you for letting strangers hold what you wrote. Thank you for the courage of offering something made under pressure, something that could have remained hidden but didn't. Those who drew beside your lines, and those who will hold this issue in their hands, are only reflections. The origin, the warmth, the risk is all yours.

I know a letter cannot change the conditions around you. But I want these last pages to carry one quiet truth back to you: you are not speaking into emptiness. There are people outside who are listening with intention, who will keep this issue, pass it forward, and remember both the names and the silences.

May the lion and the sun find you again, not as symbols claimed by others, but as the forms of freedom you choose for yourselves, in whatever shape they arrive, to make the art and life you need to make.

With respect, and with a regard that stays close,

- Pierpaolo x AntrumArtSpace

We breathe the same air, we have dreams, we bleed, our bones are the same, we live on this Earth, we love culture and music and the good things in life, we share in feeling pain, joy, love, anger, etc. The only things that separate us are ocean, borders, and government/politics. We are humans. You are my kin. You deserve love, respect, kindness, joy, and acceptance just as much as anyone else. Someday I hope to meet you. Someday I hope we will unite in celebration of freedom. ***- EL***

It's not your fault. Let's start there.

You didn't neglect to prepare, you didn't fail to perform, you did not choose this.

But you are experiencing it. You don't deserve it. And that experience should have never happened. It shouldn't be happening.

You are a unique soul, a person with dreams and ideas that deserve the room to grow with support. You are creative, and a lot of your creativity is spent in surviving, unfairly. But this does not mean it is permanent. None of it is permanent.

We can dream together, strive for better, choose our moments and our laughter to hold on to on the days and nights when the pressure swallows. Finding joy in spite of the absence of compassion, finding love in each other and ourselves.

We do not have control over others, but we do have control over ourselves. And together each of us can do our part for all of us. Sometimes I wonder, if I have done enough. That my actions have made a difference. I look back at my life and the evidence from others says yes but my body and heart disagree. So I keep trying. And sometimes that is all we can do. Every effort makes a difference even if we cannot see it yet. Those around us and those we may never meet do feel that difference. And like a ripple in a lake, that effort cascades out. Like a leaf on a tree, helping to nourish the whole. Like a steadfast bee, pollinating plants as a byproduct of finding their own joy in the sweet nectar of flowers. We all contribute in our own way. And it makes a difference.

You are deserving of care, support, justice, truth, safety, consistency and resources. You are deserving of space to dream, to dance, to play, to sing, to laugh, and to build. You deserve love and tenderness.

And know, deep in your bones that this is true. That you are loved by so many who you have never met, who do not share your space or tongue. And we want you to thrive. And we build dreams with you. We love you.

- Fellow Dreamer

