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Simurgh. Ten Woman Artists from Iran.
curated by Basak Senova

<https://www.gallery-weekend-berlin.de/journal/crone-ongoing/>



The exhibition *Simurgh. Ten Women Artists from Iran.* addresses issues of memory, surveillance, identity politics, economic and social changes. It was curated by Başak Şenova, professor of research at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna, and is inspired by the legend of the Simurgh.

The Simurgh is a magnificent bird endowed with mysterious powers from Persian mythology. It has appeared in various traditions, stories, and variations for thousands of years. The most famous one goes back to the Islamic poet Attar of Nishapur and his epic “The Conference of the Birds” from the 12th century.

At Attar, thousands of birds meet to elect their king. An agreement seems impossible, so the clever hoopoe suggests that they should look for the great and mighty Simurgh and elect him king. The birds thus set off on a journey to Mount Qaf, a mountain that is said to be the home of Simurgh and the seat of wisdom.

On the way, they have to cross seven valleys: the valleys of desire, love, knowledge, renunciation, unity, amazement, and destruction. The flight is so arduous that more and more birds give up and only thirty remain. These thirty birds, each representing a character obstacle to self-knowledge, overcome all of the barriers and reach Mount Qaf. Once there, they head for the Simurgh's nest, but find only a large, glittering mountain lake in which their own heads are reflected. This gives the legend of the Simurgh a twist, which the poet connects with a play on words: *si* means “thirty” in Persian, and *murg* “bird.”

The arduous journey to find the Simurgh can be seen both as emblematic of the lives of hundreds of thousands of Iranians in the diaspora and of the current situation in Iran itself, which is the result of a long and complex development.

The exhibition therefore deliberately focuses not on striking, flashy images, but on multilayered, subtle works that encompass a broad spectrum of themes and forms, deal with personal or overarching questions of identity, and build bridges between the past and the present. Equally deliberately, curator Başak Şenova foregrounds striking positions and meaningful artistic approaches by Iranian women artists from the diaspora: “Most of them began their journey in Iran; two were born outside the country. All, however, carry with them various forms of the intangible heritage of their origins. Through multiple strands of inquiry, research, and cases, they establish nuanced connections in their works that span generations.”

Thus, on display are works by Yalda Afsah, Parastou Forouhar, Anahita Razmi, Neda Saeedi, Farkhondeh Shahroudi, and Soheila Sokhanvari, all of whom live in Germany, Mona Kasra and Mehraneh Atashi, who are active in the United States, Nooshin Farhid, who has her center of life in United Kingdom, and Ramesch Daha, who is based in Austria.

The approaches and production methods of the ten artists are many and diverse. They work in a wide variety of fields and media, including painting, drawing, sculpture, spatial installation, photography, printmaking, video, and film. What they all have in common, however, is the fact that they are recognized worldwide and their work is continually presented in major international art institutions.

The exhibition *Simurgh: Ten Women Artists from Iran* is intended as a modest gesture of solidarity with the women of Iran.