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**Seminar: Iran Is Not As It Is Told:
Contemporary Persian Art and Culture**

Abstracts

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Co-Organizer: Christopher Larkosh, UMass Dartmouth**



March, 2016, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

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For almost forty years, discussions about contemporary Iran have been overshadowed by political issues and the tumultuous atmosphere of the Middle East. Media coverage of the Islamic Revolution (1979), the Iran hostage crisis (1979-1981), the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), presidential elections (1997, 2009, 2013) and the Iran nuclear deal (2015) on the one hand, and the explosive growth of social networks propagating political and human rights issues on the other, marginalized to some extent the art and popular culture produced within Iran's geographical borders. After Hedayat and Farrokhzad, new generations of Modernists are introduced to Persian literature. Women find a new voice in cinema and popular literature. Many bestsellers are written by women, ranging from the secular novels of Pirzad and Rahimi to the ideologically charged war narratives of Hoseyni and Abad. Post-revolutionary Iran announces international painters like Farshchian and film directors who have been Oscar, Golden Globe, Cannes and Berlin festival winners, such as Farhadi, Kiarostami, Majidi, Panahi, Makhmalbaf and others. This seminar thus seeks to explore the complexities of Iranian contemporary art and culture, discuss its religious, artistic, and sociopolitical dimensions, and even trace the emergence of discourses perhaps neglected to some extent by Western academia until now. Advocating a comparative cultural approach, this seminar aims to reflect the apparent contradictions between subversive and reinforcing discourses embedded in many cultural products in a seemingly inflexible structure. The process of their cultural formation may well reflect not only what might be considered Iran's 'central values' but also the continuously evolving and revisionist qualities of those beliefs as acted out in culture. Our seminar will address these new possibilities: the less immediately perceptible narrative versions of Iran as produced by Iranians themselves for (inter)national audiences, whether in Iran or in its diaspora, as manifested in post-Revolution literature, cinema, music, fine art, popular culture and mass media.