



An interior view of Silk Road Art Gallery in Tehran.

TEHRAN GALLERY GUIDE

We head to the Iranian capital to source out some of the top galleries among Tehran's 179 registered art spaces. **Tahereh Sariban** reports on 14 of our favourites



ASSAR ART GALLERY

f. 1999

Go to for: A great show and a high-value purchase. A purchase from Assar is always a safe bet.

In their own words: *We'd still choose to be where we are located now. Assar was the first private art gallery that moved downtown. Gradually other galleries followed suit and today central Tehran is a hub for galleries and art lovers.*

The worn, silky feel of the concrete staircase leading to the first-floor gallery says it all: these steps have seen many a visitor. Assar Gallery began in 1999 in the hilltop location of Darakeh and relocated closer to the city four years later. Now nestled in the heart of Tehran's cultural heart—the House of Artists is across the street and the City Theatre just down the road—Assar is a must-stop on the (growing) list of Friday openings. Assar has built a solid domestic and international reputation based on impeccable presentation of its artists, quality conservation, archiving and publication as well as active support and sponsorship of numerous art projects. As part of Assar's dedication to cultural and educational enhancement of the city and its commitment to making some of the country's best kept collections accessible to growing audiences, its team is involved in organising and setting up large scale exhibitions—mainly of Iranian Modern art. assarartgallery.com

SILK ROAD

f. 2001

Go to for: Photography! Silk Road Gallery is Iran's first art gallery devoted exclusively to photography and photo-based media.

In their own words: *"Our artists invite audiences on a journey into different worlds and times. Through photographic dialogue, they create an argument. With poetry and humour, with criticism and observation and away from the usual stereotypes, each of the works tells a story from Iran's past and present."*

Over the years, Silk Road Gallery has played a crucial role in actively helping the development of a new artistic movement in Iranian photography and promoting the best of Iranian photographers. Today, far from being just a commercial institution, the gallery avidly acts as an incubator where new ideas and experiences are exchanged, discussed and take shape.

Silk Road's position as pioneer in its field, combined with the explosion of digital photography

as an art form and an ever-growing interest in Iran from all corners, has translated into fresh international opportunities for the gallery, such as the Shadi Ghadirian retrospective at the Municipal Library of Lyon last fall and the recent opening of a second Silk Road Art Gallery in the heart of downtown Tehran where larger, more ambitious projects are staged. silkroadartgallery.com



ETEMAD

f.2002

Go to for: Following certain artists. Etemad has been consistent in representing its artists over the years.

In their own words: *We can confidently say that the ethos of what we do is fostering artistic exchange and forging new connections.*

After years of art consulting in France and Dubai, Etemad's founders came back home to contribute and engage with the burgeoning art scene, bringing with them their experiences of the art world beyond Iran. For over a decade, Etemad has been living its mission of fostering artistic exchanges and forging new connections beyond borders, resulting in many of "its" artists—



AUN GALLERY

f.2009

Go to for: A museum-like experience.

In their own words: *In addition to Aun, Aun Foundation assures the promotion of Iranian arts internationally through exchange/residency programmes; Aun Dast represents art gifts and handicrafts and an in-house advertising and publishing company have all helped create a comprehensive group of cultural institutions.*

Deh-Vanak used to be a village on the western side of the growing city of Tehran, which has now engulfed it. The neighbourhood is known for its car mechanics, paint depots and for Aun Gallery. It is here, on a plot of narrow land, that architect Afarin Neyssari built the city's first art space. Shaped like a warehouse, the gallery brings the presentation of art and its viewing experience to a whole new level. Aside from regular monthly solo art exhibitions, the space also ideally lends itself to art installations and performances. A few years later, Aun Foundation was founded to promote Iranian art internationally and set up exchange and residency programmes; then followed Aun Dast, an art and handicrafts gift shop. aungallery.com

such as Mahmoud Bakhshi—finding recognition in the global art market and community. The gallery is an active participant in art fairs around the world, including Art Basel, Hong Kong, Art Dubai and Contemporary Istanbul. galleryetemad.com

SHIRIN ART GALLERY

f. 2005

Go for: A mixture of emerging and established Iranian artists. From Ali Akbar Sadeghi to contemporary names such as Afsoon and Koorosh Shishegaran,

Shirin Art Gallery is constantly pushing the boundaries of formal and conceptual visual representation.

In their own words: *"Materials became scarce and expensive, and promotion became difficult, but the quality and depth of the art produced was never diminished. As a result of the challenges facing Iranians, Iranian art has matured and become more nuanced, using the rich subject matter of their political climate to fuel their self-expression."*

Shirin Gallery used to be located on the first floor of a 100-year old Qajar building surrounded by a beautiful garden in the northern neighbourhood of Farmanieh. The place was commonly called the garden of the House of Calligraphy, because a calligraphy institute (still) occupies the ground floor. Now located more centrally, closer to galleries such as Assar and Aarn, its owner Shirin Partovi ▶



AARAN GALLERY f. 2008

Go to for: The pulse of the younger generation. Never boring; always moving, compelling and electrifying, Aaran's shows are an ongoing conversation on what's happening here, now.

In their own words: *We're in the dead center of town, in the heart of the city, and even the country.*

On Friday openings, a small one-way alley just North of Karim Khan boulevard clogs with traffic. The flow of people between 5-9pm is uninterrupted—so strong is the following and the brand created by Nazila Noebashari. For almost a decade, Aaran has positioned itself as a central pole for a younger generation of contemporary Iranian artists—painters for the most part but also sculptors, photographers and installation artists— acting as a formidable force in the crystallisation and transformation of Iran's contemporary art movement. Aaran has also helped to introduce world audiences to contemporary art from Iran, with many of the gallery's artists now in international private and museum collections. Aaran Projects, located in a historical alley further south, is a second space dedicated to experimental, concept projects. aarangallery.com



GOLESTAN

f.1988

Go to for: An art piece you can “walk out with.” Golestan is known for introducing special payment terms to bring people to art, and art into people’s homes.

In their own words: “Golestan is one of the smallest galleries in Tehran but we have an exhibition every week and the list is full for the next four years.”

Away from the hustle and bustle of Tehran is a small, quiet space. Even the asphalt on Kamasai road glides more easily in this northern, more protected side of town. It’s been close to three decades since “Mrs. Golestan” as everyone knows her opened her gallery with the goal of introducing art to laymen, office workers, shopkeepers, students and housewives—in short, the Iranian public. Golestan wanted people to see art and also be able to purchase it. The gallery showcases Iranian artists of all ages and every summer, her “100 works, 100 artists” initiative allows artists—mostly of the younger generation—to have their work seen by the public and by collectors—most of them for the very first time. golestangallery.com

Tavakolian is constantly thinking up innovative shows and participating in art fairs all over the world. In addition to paintings, sculptures and photography, there is a section for exclusive books and a small gift shop. In 2013 the gallery opened up a space in New York in Chelsea’s gallery district with aims to further promote Iranian modern and contemporary art abroad. shiringallery.com

KHAK GALLERY

f.2002

Go to for: Installation and performance art
The gallery organises monthly exhibitions throughout the year, ranging from photography and painting to installation and performance. Many past cutting-edge events were received by the Iranian art community and critics

as being sharply insightful, contributing to a better understanding of the idea of curatorship and supporting the growing art market in Tehran. The gallery regularly features works by prominent artists but is also open to exceptional young artists. khakgallery.com

AZAD ART GALLERY

f.1999

Go to for: Radical stuff and expressions from the underground.
In their own words: *Artists excluded from the conservative or the commercially-inclined viewpoint of most galleries find in Azad Art Gallery a space of commitment.* Politically, the year 1997 was a turning point for Iran, and a crucial time for the development of an art scene made dormant by years of revolution, war and post-war recovery. Rozita Sharafjahan

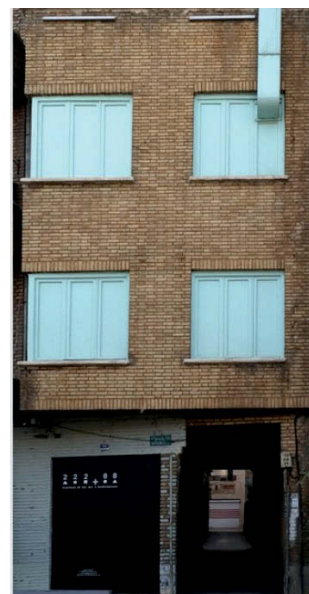
and Mohsen Nabizadeh decided to transform their apartment into a gallery, a space they imagined open for all and for all artists, regardless of their level of commerciality. Fuelled by discussion and interaction, Azad Art Gallery was one of the first to delve into new media. Azad is a backer of the Design Project headed by 16 graphic artists and designed to keep the art of poster-making free of state control. azadartgallery.com

MEHRVA

f.2006

Go to for: Perhaps falling in love with a total (art) stranger. Mehrva selects all her artists with her heart. Founded by Mehrva Azin, Mehrva Gallery began three years after she founded Cafe 78, a warm, friendly café which instantly became a meeting place of artists, friends, writers and scholars in Tehran. Located right below the café, Mehrva Gallery exhibits very affordable contemporary art in a mix of media, primarily painting and photography, and usually from artists coming straight out of the two universities just nearby. The gallery has a friendly, unpretentious air in the image of Mehrva herself, who preserves an unparalleled spirit of youth and energy. mehrvaartgallery.com

THE NEWCOMERS



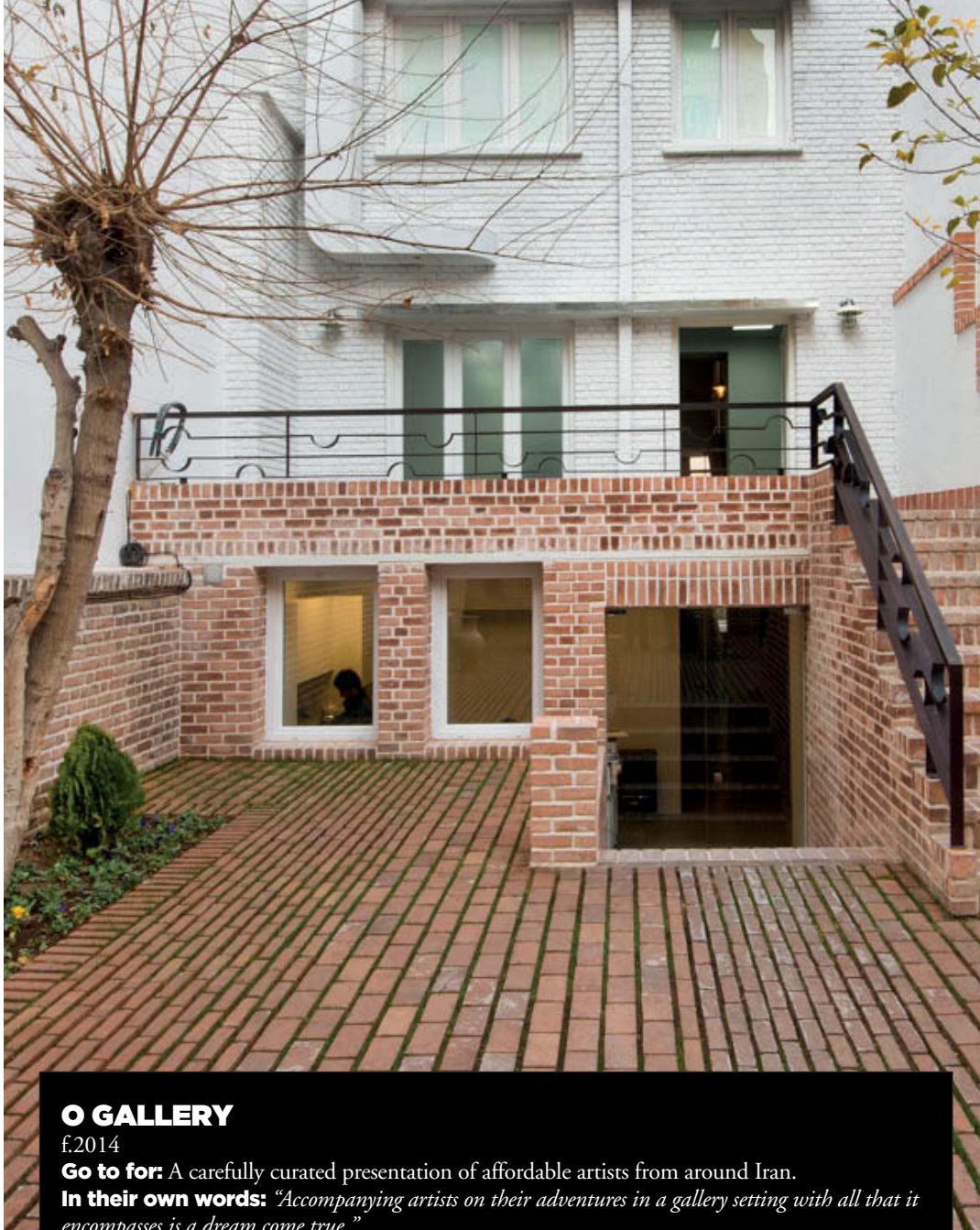
AB-ANBAR

f.2014

Go to for: Ab-Anbar is an art and architectural project, all wrapped in one cool look and feel.

In their own words: “We try to establish a contemporary environment within the old envelope of our 80-year-old building.”

Central Tehran is a place where decades of changes juxtapose themselves in the urban landscape. It is also a place of rapid decay. Located in one of the city’s oldest neighbourhoods, Ab-Anbar was established to breathe new life into its immediate surroundings through the power of art. Modest in size, the building’s architecture has been maximized to enhance and create changing spatial possibilities. Ab-Anbar focuses on linking Iranian artists of the diaspora with their home country as well as fellow local artists and publishes high quality catalogues and books. In keeping with the history of the neighbourhood, the gallery was named after an existing ‘Ab Anbar’, a vernacular space used decades ago to store water beneath the building. ab-anbar.com



O GALLERY

f.2014

Go to for: A carefully curated presentation of affordable artists from around Iran.

In their own words: *"Accompanying artists on their adventures in a gallery setting with all that it encompasses is a dream come true."*

A relative newcomer to the scene, O Gallery opened its doors in the heart of central Tehran, contributing to the ongoing cultural revival of the city centre. Through careful selection of artists and a rigorous gallery focus, O aims to introduce and further establish young and emerging artists in all media to the primary market both locally and internationally. A must-see gallery of the downtown circuit. ogallery.net

MOHSEN GALLERY

f.2010

Go to for: A multi-level art experience.

In their own words: *"The gallery was founded by Ehsan Rasoulof in memory of Mohsen Rasoulof, his younger brother and photographer who died in a plane crash in 2008. Hence, the gallery was founded with the aim of promoting younger artists and for this, we are ready to push back any boundary."*

From the day it opened, Mohsen's selection of bold new artists and establishment of a clear brand identity turned the gallery into the talk of the town. Mohsen

follows a rigorous curatorial model and in 2015 considerably enlarged its space to provide a variety of art experiences all under one roof. The gallery represents an international group of leading contemporary artists and estates, embracing diverse artistic practices, from painting, sculpture and photography to video, performing art and new media. Mohsen supports both the Kooshk Residency, partnering with similar initiatives worldwide to promote exchanges between local and foreign artists and TADAEX, Tehran's Annual Digital Art Exhibition. mohsengallery.com



DASTAN GALLERY/ BASEMENT

f.2012

Go to for: Discovery. Dastan's artists are off the beaten track.

In their own words: *"There is a long list of artists who took a chance on Dastan and trusted us with their works. Now in turn, Dastan is here to give emerging artists a chance to do as they wish."*

Fereshteh is a beautiful, if complicated, maze of leafy alleys and dead-ends located north of Tehran. Chances are, if you've visited the city, that you've been there and chances are, you've accidentally passed by Dastan gallery, innocuously located in a basement home of yellow bricks. Dastan gallery was also built on chance, but one of a different kind. Four years ago, Tehran was close to overdosing on the number of art galleries. Backed by his family and leading personalities of Tehran's art scene, Hormoz Hematian took his chance and opened Dastan, a space dedicated "to providing emerging artists with a chance". Four years later, Dastan's carefully-curated exhibitions and impeccable presentation throughout platforms and media have been game-changers in elevating young Iranian artists and in shifting commonly-held notions of commercial art. This year, Dastan opened a second space called Dastan +2, participated in Saatchi Gallery's START art fair, presented three artists under the age of 30 at Art Dubai and will participate in Contemporary Istanbul 2016. dastangallery.com