



Fashion Statement

A photographer's artistic response to political control of women's modes of attire **BY MICHELLE BOGRE**

When Tehran-based photojournalist Maryam Rahmanian read an article in the Iranian news about how the so-called morality police—in charge of the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice—were arresting and then taking mug shots of women for the crime of not following proper Islamic dress code in public, she knew she had found her new photo project.

"In other countries people have mug shots taken because they commit a crime," Rahmanian says. "Here in Iran, police were taking mug shots of women because they wore toenail polish."

She decided to create a series of mug shots of women who actually had been arrested and booked for wearing improper attire. She spent two years mining her personal network of family



and friends to find a group of women willing to participate in the project, titled *Crimes Against Fashion*.

A 32-year-old former New Yorker, Rahmanian re-creates the women's original mug shots in her studio with attention to realism, shooting both side and front views with a harsh light. The women stand against a backdrop marked with (inaccurate) height indicators, holding a slate written in Farsi describing the crime and stating whether they changed their behavior after the arrest. They choose how to present themselves. Some refuse to wear a hijab, while others jauntily position a forbidden bright red or blue one far back on their heads, exposing too much hair. Their expressions subtly indicate a range of emotions from defiance to weariness.

"I found it interesting that they all told me that they hadn't changed the way they dress in public after being arrested," Rahmanian says, "even though to be released they had to sign a form promising not to wear improper clothes anymore."

Raised in an artistic family, Rahmanian came to the United States in 1998 to attend Manhattan's LaGuardia High School and to improve her English. In 2005 she earned a degree in Studio Art from Queens College, and the next year she returned to Tehran.

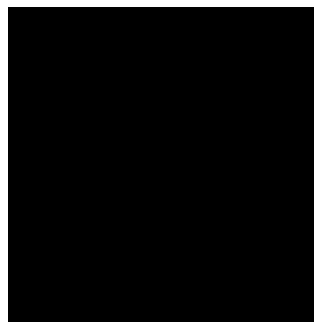
She gained recognition during Iran's 2013 presidential election when she followed the then-candidate and now president Hassan Rouhani, considered an underdog, after none of the more prominent candidates would allow her to trail them. Rouhani's son is a friend, and he connected her to Rouhani's brother, who approved her access. When Rouhani won the election, Rahmanian possessed a trove of images sought after and published in international newspapers and magazines including *Time*, *Paris Match*, and *Le Monde*. She parlayed that work into a robust freelance career in Iran shooting for such media outlets as UPI, *The Washington Post*, and *The National*, a leading English-language paper in the Middle East.

She readily points out the challenges of being a female photojournalist in Iran. "You have to fight for everything, even the simple act of standing next to a male photographer at a news event," Rahmanian says. "During the elections, one of the candidates had a campaign meeting inside a mosque. The male photographers were allowed in, but not the female photographers. We had to wait

for hours outside the mosque until the meeting ended."

Nonetheless, Rahmanian adds, "I love photography and if I were born again, I would still be a photographer and I would still live in Iran. Even though we face restrictions, it's easier working as a woman now that Rouhani is in power."

Along with *Crimes Against Fashion* and news assignments, Rahmanian is shooting another long-term project—*I was born a woman, let me die as a man*—focusing on a transsexual couple in Tehran, both undergoing sex-change surgeries. Though homosexuality is banned in Iran, transsexuals have the right to this procedure. Yet many of them are ostracized and rejected by their families, and they face social harassment and financial problems. Rahmanian hopes her project will educate Iranians about the transsexual community. She says she wants "to be the sound of people whose voices are not heard." **AP**



Opposite and above: Maryam Rahmanian's re-created mug shots from her series *Crimes Against Fashion*, depicting women in her native Iran who have been arrested for not following the proper Islamic dress code.

CLOSE-UP

Maryam Rahmanian

Lives In Tehran, Iran
Studied At Queens College,
New York, NY

Honors Include International Photography Awards (IPA), Exhibit A Photography Contest, Honorable Mention, 2013 and 2010; exhibitions in Edinburgh International Photo Festival and Toronto International Salon of Photography

Publications Include *Global Post*, *Le Monde*, *Le Point*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, *Paris Match*, *Rolling Stone*, *Time*, *The Washington Post*
In the Bag Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF lenses (16–35mm f/2.8L II, 24–70mm f/2.8L II, 70–200mm f/2.8L IS); external hard drive and card reader; CF and SD memory cards; cell phone, lipstick