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## ARTS

# Portraits of Iranian women featured in exhibit 'IRAN: WOMEN ONLY'

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A photo exhibit showcasing life in the Islamic Republic of Iran opened at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's (MIT) Center for International Studies on Feb. 3. The exhibit, titled "IRAN: WOMEN ONLY," features work from photographer Randy Goodman's time in the country during three historical moments: the hostage crisis, the Iran-Iraq war and the recent signing of the Iran nuclear agreement.

Between 1980 and 1983, Goodman made two different trips to Iran, reporting for CBS and TIME magazine. In addition to photographing politically significant figures such as the Ayatollah Khomeini, she captured images of Iranian women, from schoolgirls playing in the streets to university students holding U.S. embassy employees hostage. More than three decades later, she returned to the country, photographing Iranian women

as their country experienced another turning point: this time, the signing of the international nuclear pact.

In the Islamic Republic of Iran, women face injustice in the legal system, segregation in public spaces and compulsory modesty laws (with harsh punishments for failing to comply). Yet the status of women in the country is not so simple; Iranian women enjoy relative freedom in many spheres that other women in the region do not. For example, as in the United States, women make up a majority of college students. The exhibit highlights the contradictions that exist in a country that officially constrains how much women can do, while at the same time women live out lively internal and public lives in society.

Unfortunately, the venue does little service to Goodman's exhibit, as her photographs share space with flyers and office furniture, which detracted from the power of the images.

The exhibit includes both black-and-white and color photographs. Goodman also makes smart use of texture in her photographs of prayer services in both 1981 and 2015, where a monochromatic expanse of women in prostration fills the frame. One photograph features a female driver of an eye-popping lime green "Women's Taxi," and in another, identical green taxis pepper the traffic in Vanak Square, a contrast to the surrounding sea of yellow taxis and black cars. Many photographs place an emphasis on the color green, perhaps referencing the Iranian Green Movement that followed the 2009 elections.

A photograph titled "Embassy Girls" shows young college students at the U.S. embassy in Tehran smiling and sharing food. In a note on the side, Goodman details how one of the women pictured became the first female Vice President of Iran. Another was responsible for painstakingly translating the reconstructed, shredded documents taken from the U.S. Embassy after the

Iranian Revolution, which were then published as a book in Iran and widely distributed. Goodman, along with journalists William Worthy and Teresa Taylor, later sued the FBI after their copies of the book were seized at Logan International Airport, according to [a Jan. 20, 1982 Harvard Crimson story](#).

Goodman's photography is intimate without being heavy-handed. Many photographs feature women sharing closed-lipped smiles and knowing looks with the camera, as if revealing a secret to the viewer. One image exemplifies this. The subject stands on a "Women Only" bus, looking into the camera, though her eyes are obscured by large-framed sunglasses. Her hijab is pushed back, revealing her hair, and several other women's scarves in the background are bedazzled — far cries from the unembellished chadors of the '80s. "In Transit," the name of the photograph, is appropriate for a photograph epitomizing an exhibit that captures the blurring of fundamentalism with modernity during yet another transitional period in Iran.

The exhibit is on display until March 31. The gallery is free and open to the public from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. On Feb. 26 at 3 p.m., a reception and gallery talk will be held in MIT's Lucian Pye Conference Room.