

Rain Ritual in Ilam: Mixing Myth, Music and Community Spirit



CHALAB VILLAGE, Ilam Province – In the remote highlands of Ilam province, the people of Chalab village gather in an ancient ritual that transcends time and drought.

When the skies dry and the earth cracks, the community comes together to perform the Rain-Seeking Ceremony—a vibrant blend of prayer, tradition, and performance that honors their deep connection to nature.

Recognized as an intangible cultural heritage of Iran since 2009, this ceremony embodies the hopes and beliefs of the Shooohan tribe. It unfolds through a series of symbolic acts, each carrying profound meaning rooted in centuries-old customs.

One of the ceremony’s most enchanting moments is the fatir bread ritual. Women bake local flatbreads and hide a small blue bead inside one of them. As the bread is shared among village children, laughter and excitement fill the air, until an elder calls the youngsters to pause their play and join in a heartfelt prayer for rain.

Another striking tradition is the “Gav Robai” or symbolic cattle raid. Groups of women journey to neighboring villages to ‘steal’ cows in a playful yet competitive display. The staged confrontations

are punctuated by prayers and chants, illustrating the community’s earnest appeal to the skies.

The rhythmic game of “Pelan” is a test of skill and strength, where two teams throw stones to topple a standing rock. This ancient contest not only entertains but serves as a metaphor for overcoming hardship—an expression of resilience amid environmental challenges.

The ceremony also includes the spirited “Hel Heloonaki” chant, the solemn sacrifice of a sheep whose meat is shared among the needy, and the symbolic gift of water carried by the poorest villagers from door to door. Each act reflects the community’s intertwined relationship with nature, faith, and social solidarity.

Girls craft rain dolls from fabric and adornments, young men beat their sticks against tent poles, and rams locked in combat symbolize fertility and renewal. These rituals form a living mosaic—dynamic, powerful, and essential.

As climate change threatens traditional lifeways worldwide, the people of Chalab continue to uphold this ceremony—not merely as a cultural relic but as a vital expression of hope and harmony with the environment.

A Tribute to Female Narratives in Iranian Art



The Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran

TEHRAN -- This summer, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran unveils “By Women’s Account,” a multi-layered homage to female creativity and resilience, threading together film, visual art, and memory.

From August 5 through September 21, the museum presents a sweeping exhibition of 125 works by 65 pioneering Iranian women artists, spanning generations and styles—from the abstract to the intimate, the traditional to the avant-garde.

Curated by the trio of Touka Maleki, Afsaneh Kamran, and Sajad Baghban-Maher, the exhibition honors the legacies of martyrs Mansour Alikhani and Mehrangiz Eimanpour, underscoring the courage that underpins artistic expression in a nation where the personal is often political.

Among the luminaries featured are Monir Farmanfarmaian, Behjat Sadr, and Farideh Lashai—artists whose works grapple with identity, nature, and the flux of modern Iranian life.

Complementing the visual spectacle, the museum’s Cinematheque offers a weekly Sunday gathering at 4 p.m., showcasing documentaries that illuminate women’s stories at the intersection of art and society.

The program opens on August 5 with two evocative films: How Strange It Is That Both Wound and Salve by Keyvan Alimuhammadi and Omid Bankdar—a lyrical, experimental portrait of the late Iran Darroudi, whose art explored pain, liberation, and self-discovery—and Makrameh: Memories and Dreams by Ebrahim Mokhtari, chronicling the late-blooming artistic journey of a self-taught rural painter from northern Iran.

The exhibition’s second phase unfolds in the galleries of the Iranian Artists Forum, featuring works by painters, pop artists, and ceramists that continue to challenge and expand the narrative of Iranian womanhood.

Unpatriotic Neglect: Iranian Artifacts Given Away to U.S.

TEHRAN/ SANTA BARBARA -- A 13th-century volume of Persian poetry, rare photographs of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and a Qajar-era family photo album have been donated—not to an Iranian archive or museum—but to the Special Research Collections of the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB).

The gift, made by Farrokh Ashti Ashiani, adds to a growing trend in which significant pieces of Iranian cultural memory are absorbed into Western academic institutions rather than returned to Iran for preservation in their rightful cultural context.

The materials, described by the university as “deeply personal and historically rich,” now form part of UCSB Library’s U.S. and International History, Politics, Civilization and Cultures Collection. But for many observers, their relocation is cause for concern, highlighting the ongoing dislocation of Iranian heritage from its origins.

“I initially explored museum donations,” Ashtiani told UCSB, “but while museums preserve materials well, access can be limited. Universities like UCSB offer broader access for global researchers.” His comments suggest that U.S. academic institutions are increasingly viewed as default custodians of non-Western history—a reality that raises ethical questions about cultural ownership, historical accountability, and the long-standing imbalance in the preservation and display of Middle



Persian poet Saadi Shirazi’s 13th-century hand-colored volume.

Eastern artifacts in the West.

At the center of the donation is a hand-colored volume of poetry by Saadi Shirazi, one of Iran’s most revered classical poets. Printed during the reign of Nasserodin Shah Qajar, the book once belonged to Ashtiani’s grandfather, Nasrollah Ashtiani—a high-ranking Mostofian court official during the Qajar era. In an act of both care and cultural intimacy, he painted delicate watercolors into its pages under the dim light of oil lamps, infusing the manuscript with both familial and historical value. Now, that intimate expression of Iranian heritage will reside on shelves thousands of miles from its homeland.

The second piece of the donation is a photographic album documenting the Iranian Revolution. Ashtiani compiled it during a yearlong stay in Iran in 1978–79. Many of the images were published in the Dallas Times Herald, reflecting a Western appetite for visual narratives of Iranian upheaval—though the archive itself now finds permanence in California, not in Iran’s own repositories of revolutionary history.

The third artifact—a Qajar-era family photo album—contains some of the only known images of important figures and palaces, including what may be the sole surviving childhood photo of Ahmad Shah Qajar. This al-

bum survived decades of displacement and even the 2008 Tea Fire in Santa Barbara. Its return to Iran could have contributed significantly to national collections already working to preserve Qajar history. Instead, it joins a long list of Iranian archival materials scattered across private and institutional holdings in the West.

While UCSB and donor Ashtiani emphasize access and preservation as reasons for the transfer, the decision speaks to deeper issues: U.S. institutions continue to benefit from and build prestige through the possession of materials from nations affected by war, sanctions, and displacement—nations whose own cultural infrastructure is often undermined by the same geopolitical dynamics.

Iran, with its extensive network of museums, libraries, and archival institutions—including the National Library and Archives of Iran and the Museum of Contemporary Art Tehran—has both the expertise and the historical mandate to serve as guardian of its own heritage. Critics argue that such items, particularly those of royal lineage and national significance, belong in Iranian collections—not in American ones.

“The collection makes three valuable and unique historical resources available for research and teaching at UCSB,” said Yolanda Blue, curator of the receiving collection. But whose history, and for whose benefit, remains a pressing question.

Galleries Spotlight: Discover Tehran’s Latest Art Exhibitions

TEHRAN -- This weekend, Tehran’s galleries offer a rich tapestry of contemporary visual culture through a range of solo and group exhibitions, engaging themes from memory and identity to abstraction and the environment.

“Only I Remember the Light”

Opening Friday, August 1, Shah Maqsd Teymouri presents an intimate solo exhibition at Gallery Thaleth. His paintings evoke a quiet contemplation, suffused with the delicate tension between illumination and shadow. The show runs through August 17. Thaleth is located at 148 Karim Khan Zand St., and remains open daily.

“By Women’s Account”

The Museum of Contemporary Art inaugurates a landmark exhibition dedicated to pioneering Iranian women artists. Featuring 125 works from 65 artists, including Monir Farmanfarmaian, Behjat Sadr, Iran Darroudi, and Parvaneh Ettemadi, the show traces modernist trajectories across portraiture, abstraction, and landscape. A parallel exhibition with works by women painters, pop artists, and ceramists continues at the House of Artists, further deepening this vital discourse on gender and modernity.

“Engar”

Fereydoun Abedinzadeh’s solo exhibition continues at Gallery O (Sanayi St., Shahin Alley 18). Abedinzadeh’s work wrestles with figuration and the ephemeral, offering a complex negotiation of memory and presence. Open Tuesday through Friday, noon to 8 pm.

“Release”

At Gallery Shirin, Alireza Khatibi’s paintings assert a forceful engagement with the materiality of paint and existential themes, navigating psychological and formal tensions. Through August 5.

“Shallow Depth”

At Gallery Homa, Atefeh Namavar’s solo exhibition explores surface and depth, blending abstraction with figurative elements. The show invites viewers to interrogate the boundaries of perception and reality. Open daily, 11 am to 7 pm.

“Climate”

Hamid Fam’s solo exhibition at Gallery Etamad 1 (Haft Tir Sq.) offers a nuanced meditation on environment and geography, probing the politics of space through painterly gestures and symbolic forms. Closed Mondays.

“Tehran”

Gallery Artibition presents a group show titled simply “Tehran,” through August 12, a multilayered exploration of urban life, memory, and socio-political narratives unfolding in the capital.

“Portrait”

Ardalan Sadeghi Kivi’s solo show at Argue Factory Gallery (Ferdowsi St.) unveils a series of compelling portraits marked by introspective gazes and textured surfaces. Runs through August 8.

“Ehuli”

Arman Sadeghat’s exhibition at Gallery Siyhoon offers a subtle and poetic

ETEMAD ETEMAD GALLERY

حمید فام | Hamid Fam

آلیم | Clime

۲۷ تیرماه تا ۱۴ مردادماه ۱۴۰۴
روزهای هفته: ۱۲ تا ۸ شب
جمعهها ۱۲ تا ۸ شب
گالری دوشنبهها تعطیل است.
نیان هفتکبر، خیابان مفتح جنوبی، پیرست نیرویی، پلاک ۲۵
۰۲۱-۸۸۲۱۱۷۱۱ - ۰۲۱-۸۸۲۱۷۱۱۱ - ۰۲۱-۸۸۲۱۷۱۱۱

JUL 18 until AUG 05, 2025
Weekdays 12 to 8 pm.
Fridays 3 to 8 pm.
The Gallery is closed on Mondays.
No. 25, Shiroodi Dead End, Mofateh Ave., Haft-e Tir Sq.,
Tehran-Iran. +9821 88212711 - +9821 88229017 - +98212084322

exploration of form and materiality, blending tradition with contemporary gestures. Through August 6.

“Three Views, Three Paths”

Gallery Emkan hosts a group photography exhibition, juxtaposing diverse perspectives and visual narratives. Open Wednesday to Friday evenings.

“Alalia: My Lost Language”

Maryam Madani Fard’s solo exhibition at Gallery Vista meditates on absence and language through layered imagery and symbolic motifs. Open through August 4.

“Nature is Unrepresentable”

Saye Mansour’s solo show at Gallery Sharif investigates the elusive qualities of the natural world through abstraction and conceptual inquiry. Runs through August 15.

Picture of the Day



The latest mural design in Tehran’s Enghelab Square has been installed, featuring the battle between legendary Persian hero Rostam and the American dragon, accompanied by the slogan: “Recite the name of Iran, the enemy slayer.”
Photo by Mehr News