

The International Center of Photography Presents *Sheida Soleimani: Panjereh*

The International Center of Photography | 84 Ludlow Street, New York
On View June 19–September 28, 2025
Public Opening June 19, 5–8PM



Sheida Soleimani, *Affinity*, 2024. © Sheida Soleimani, Courtesy Edel Assanti, London and Harlan Levey Projects, Brussels

The International Center of Photography (ICP) is proud to present *Panjereh*, an exhibition by Iranian-American artist Sheida Soleimani. *Panjereh*—which means ‘window’ or ‘passageway’ in Farsi—builds on Soleimani’s ongoing *Ghostwriter* series, in which she explores her parents’ experiences of political exile and migration as a lens to examine broader systems of geopolitics. Known for her intricate, studio-based compositions that combine photographs, props, live animals and even her own parents in surreal, magical realist scenes, Soleimani expands her practice in *Panjereh* with the debut of a new body of work featuring injured birds. These images draw from her work as a wildlife rehabilitator and founder of

Congress of the Birds, a federally licensed wild bird rehabilitation center in Rhode Island. The exhibition will also include a new site-specific wall drawing created specifically for ICP's galleries.

Curated by Elisabeth Sherman, Guest Curator, the exhibition will bring together more than forty photographs, the vast majority of which have never before been shown in New York. Sherman states, "In her work, Soleimani uniquely braids together the complex particularities of her family's history, deep research into geopolitics and her inherited passion for care work into a visual language completely her own. The magically inventive spaces she creates allow for complexity in telling these stories, honoring their richness and continually unfolding nature. It is truly an honor to be presenting her first solo exhibition in New York, specifically at an institution historically dedicated to photography that engages with the politics of our time."

The *Ghostwriter* series takes Soleimani's family history—specifically that of her parents' flight from Iran as political refugees following the 1979 revolution—as an overarching conceptual framework that informs her creative process, from the significance of the objects and family ephemera she uses to the compositions of the photographs themselves. The series carries out a form of 'ghostwriting' in the way it both narrates and reconstructs the lives of Soleimani's parents without utilizing their voices directly. The works focus on their lives in Iran as pro-democracy activists before then being forced to flee the country, enduring both physical and psychological hardship on their way to eventual resettlement in the United States. Soleimani's mother was forced to give up being a practicing nurse, leading her to begin caring for wild birds, a skill which she would eventually pass along to her daughter.

With their personal emphasis, the *Ghostwriter* works present a distinct expression of Soleimani's longstanding interest in Iranian history and the contemporary geopolitics between the West and the Middle East. Rather than address this history using a strictly documentary approach, Soleimani instead examines storytelling and memory as the primary means through which these stories are transmitted; the construction of her pictures captures the way that detail and meaning are often obscured, transformed or difficult to fully grasp. This process is expressed by the degree of visual compression and accumulation of detail that Soleimani's photographs contain, as specific passages, details or textures—wildlife and plants, architecture and landscape—regularly function as stand-ins and metaphors rather than straightforward description. Soleimani situates artifacts from her parents' journey against backgrounds made up of imagery pulled from a variety of archival family photographs, resulting in works that are layered composites of multiple stories, documenting factual traces of history within newly imagined spaces.

A new development within the *Ghostwriter* series are the *Flyways* photographs, which draw attention to the plight of migratory birds, many of whom are wounded on their long journeys through populated areas. Soleimani's work as a federally licensed wildlife rehabilitator grew out of a care practice that she learned from her mother and forms part of a larger cultural inheritance that has been passed down to her. Assuming the position of primary characters, the birds that Soleimani photographs and places within her tableaux provide a metaphor for the many social, political and environmental obstructions met by people forced into flights of their own.

This new group of analog photographs that Soleimani made of rehabilitated birds presents a unique kind of maximalism despite their small scale while also forgoing

the complex layering of reference and imagery typical of the *Ghostwriter* series. Shot in extreme close-up, these works render the bodies of birds as intensely detailed and complex worlds unto themselves, where feathers, talons and eyes are as richly described as Soleimani's family history is explored. The acts of care contained within these images highlights the relationship between care and political resistance that has unfolded not only with Soleimani's own family, but which remains critically important for our present moment.

About Sheida Soleimani

Sheida Soleimani (b. 1990) is an Iranian-American artist, educator and activist. The daughter of political refugees who escaped Iran in the early 1980s, Soleimani makes work that excavates the histories of violence linking Iran, the United States and the Greater SWANA Region. In working across form and medium—especially photography, sculpture, collage and film—she often appropriates source images from popular/digital media and resituates them within defamiliarizing tableaux. The composition depends on the question at hand. For example, how can one do justice to survivor testimony and to the survivors themselves (*To Oblivion*)? What are the connections between oil, corruption and human rights abuses among OPEC nations (*Medium of Exchange*)? How do nations work out reparations deals that often turn the ethics of historical injustice into playing fields for their own economic interests (*Reparations Packages*)? How may the layering of memory and familial history both report fact and produce a reckoning with the intimate resonances of a geopolitics of violence (*Ghostwriter*)? In contrast to Western news, which rarely covers these problems, Soleimani makes work that persuades spectators to address them directly and effectively.

Soleimani's work is held in permanent collections including the Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Boston, Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, MIT List Visual Art Center and Kadist Paris. Her work has been recognized internationally in both exhibitions and publications such as *The New York Times*, *Financial Times*, *Art in America*, *Interview Magazine*, and many others. Based in Providence, Rhode Island, Soleimani is also an Associate Professor of Studio Art at Brandeis University and a federally licensed wildlife rehabilitator.

Exhibition Support

The exhibition *Sheida Soleimani: Panjereh* is generously supported by ICP Exhibitions Committee members Luana Alesio, Deborah Brown, Romy Cohen, Marguerite Gelfman, Vasant Nayak, Elizabeth Rea, Benita Sakin, Magali Smith, Helena Sokoloff, and Richard Stern.

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About The International Center of Photography

The International Center of Photography (ICP) is the world's leading institution dedicated to photography and visual culture. Cornell Capa founded ICP in 1974 to champion "concerned photography"—socially and politically minded images that can educate and change the world. Through exhibitions, education programs, community outreach, and public programs, ICP offers an open forum for dialogue about the power of the image. Since its inception, ICP has presented more than 700 exhibitions, provided thousands of classes, and hosted a wide variety of public programs. ICP launched its new integrated center at 84 Ludlow Street on Manhattan's Lower East Side in January 2020. ICP pays respect to the original stewards of this land, the Lenape people, and other Indigenous communities. Visit icp.org to learn more about the museum and its programs.

