



Fonds

Prince Claus Fund for
Culture and Development



2015 Principal Prince Claus Award
Newsha Tavakolian
Iran
Visual Art, Photography, Media & Journalism
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Newsha Tavakolian (1981, Tehran) is a trailblazing artist and photojournalist whose work offers a compelling insider's perspective on contemporary life in Iran and the Middle East. Putting people at the centre of her practice, she fuses artistic work and documentary reportage to create intimate portraits and unexpected human stories that enable us to look deeply inside societies.

A self-taught photographer, Tavakolian started working at age 16 when there were only a handful of professional female photojournalists in Iran and since then she has shown her commitment to bring news from her country and beyond, despite numerous challenges. She covered the 1999 student riots in Tehran, worked for reformist newspapers and extended her practice to Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Yemen. Fearlessly recording events in often dangerous situations, her photographs have been widely published in international media.

When it became difficult to work as a photojournalist in Tehran after the 2009 elections, Tavakolian searched for quieter, more allegorical ways to evoke Iranian realities. Moving seamlessly between photojournalism and visual photographic art and referencing contemporary global art discourses, she developed a strong, personal aesthetic and visual vocabulary. The complex layered narratives expressed in Tavakolian's stills, videos, installations and photobooks challenge stereotypes and the simplification of Iranian lives and perspectives. *Look*, a series of candid images of her friends and neighbours, conveys the uncertainty and insecurity of middle-class youth. *Listen* enables Iranian women, forbidden to sing in public or to record CDs, to perform silently through her camera. Other series explore female Kurdish fighters, the measures governments take to influence youth, Iranians affected by sanctions, and elderly women whose sons died in the Iran-Iraq war.

Deeply committed to her society, Tavakolian actively mentors young Iranian photographers and her art is inspiring a new generation of photographers across the Middle East. She is a founding member of the EVE international collective of women photojournalists, and facilitated the formation of the Rawiyah collective of photographers.

Newsha Tavakolian is awarded for her beautiful and moving testimony of the complexities and ambiguities of contemporary Iran; for effectively combining photojournalism and art in a potent visual language; for her commitment to women's voices and her support of young photographers; for courageously persevering in conveying social and political realities of Iran's history and culture, providing critical insight; and for evoking human bonds through photography, creating intercultural understanding and compassion.