

## A Rebel with a Cause

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*Kobra*, Soheila Sokhanvari's portrait of the revolutionary Iranian filmmaker Kobra Saeedi, on show now at the Barbican, in London.



In the midst of protests in Iran, a London show by the artist Soheila Sokhanvari spotlights the country's early feminist icons

Never one to adhere to social mores, the Iranian filmmaker Kobra Saeedi wasn't about to start when Ayatollah Khomeini's regime took power in Iran. On International Women's Day in 1979, she protested the compulsory hijab and made her feelings well known by filming it. For the insubordination, Khomeini's *Gasht-e Ershad*, or morality police, sent Saeedi to the notorious Evin Prison for political dissidents, which was followed by several years in psychiatric institutions. Some time in the mid-80s, the regime released her, and she fled to Germany, a refugee.



Sokhanvari at the opening of her Barbican exhibition, "Rebel, Rebel."

But looking at *Kobra*, Soheila Sokhanvari's 2022 painting of Saeedi, who went by the *nom de théâtre* Shahrzad, one sees a self-assured catalyst, her hair half-covered, cigarette between her bright-red-polished nails, looking lost in thought, as if plotting her next act. Saeedi is just one of 31 radical women painted by Sokhanvari for her show "Rebel, Rebel," on now at the Barbican Centre's Curve Gallery, in London. If the scheduling of the show seems calculated, it's not. The Barbican had "Rebel, Rebel" on the books long before the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in *Gasht-e Ershad* custody sparked the demonstrations that have swept Iran since.

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