

In the studio

Ramin Haerizadeh



The Iranian artist tells us about his works currently on show at B21

Tell us about 'Bad Hijab', which you're exhibiting at B21 at the moment. What's happening in these scenes, who are these people and where did you get the photos from? I started working on Bad Hijab after my Men of Allah series of works, and I took the photographs from weblogs during the period immediately after Ahmadinejad came into power. The photographs show women being taken away for not wearing the hijab properly in the street. A van would take them away. In that period because it was so hard for the people they always had the pictures. Like photojournalists would take the photographs but then bloggers would take them and put them on their own blogs.

What do these scenes express about life in Tehran and why have you focused on this?

There is a big difference, a gap, between the life inside and outside the house in Tehran. As soon as you come outside you have to be a different person in society, and there's a clash that occurs when these two sides of life meet.

This is an outspoken show that comes at a very outspoken time for Iran. How do you perceive recent events over there?

We were originally going to have this exhibition a month before the elections and we didn't know that anything like this was going to happen. It's funny that it's come just at the same time as this situation.

As I see it, we always have a ruler at the head of things with any different dynasties that come in. All the time there is a ruler, one person that says yes or no to the people.

Is it beginning to change?

I'm always terrified about a civil war in Iran. The main problem is that the hard-liners are ruling, they're all together, but the intellectuals and the common people don't have one leader to lead the people. Everybody wants their rights and I worry that a civil war may happen.

You're working in Dubai permanently now?

After a show I was part of at Charles Saatchi's gallery in London, the catalogue got to the censorship office in Iran. Authorities started coming to some galleries that I used to work with and asking for me and my brother [Rokni Haerizadeh]. I was here for Art Dubai at the time and some of my friends called me saying, "don't come back to Iran for a couple of months". At least until after the elections. It's good here, I have my studio and there's not the tension that you have in Tehran. It's relaxed and you have more time to think about your work.

Bad Hijab by Ramin Haerizadeh appears in Keeping Up Appearances at B21 Gallery until September 10