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## The Lonely "Look" of Iranian Photographer Newsha Tavakolian

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A photo from Newsha Tavakolian's "Look" series

A new photography exhibition, which opened Thursday April 11, 2013 at the [Thomas Erben Gallery](#) in New York City, showcases the talent of world-renowned, award-winning Iranian artist Newsha Tavakolian.

Her latest series, entitled "Look" (and a sort of a sequel to her previous project "Listen"), in the words of the exhibition's [press release](#), "consists of staged large-scale photographs in which lone subjects are framed against a window view of high-rise buildings. All shot at the same evening hour, the images are permeated with a cold bluish note, giving them a richly cinematic quality. Seen together, the individual photographs form a collective." Describing the "mood and a condition" of the photo series, Tavakolian says:

Look began with my desire to look deeply into the lives of people around me whom I have known for over ten years, and who live in my building. I wanted to bring to life the story of a nation of middle class youths who are constantly battling with themselves, their isolated conformed society, their lack of hope for the future and each of their individual stories. Over a period of six months, at 8 pm, I fixed my camera on a tripod in front of the window where I had watched the same view of the city for ten years. I tried to capture a moment of each of their stories, within the frame of a window looking out onto the cold concrete buildings which surround us daily.

Born in Tehran in 1981, Tavakolian "started her career as a self-taught photojournalist at the age of 16," working for five years as a photographer for Iranian media outlets, including the now-banned women's magazine, *Zan*. She "has covered wars and natural disasters, and produced photo documentaries in Iran, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, Pakistan and Yemen. One of few female photographers in this context, she gained international success with work published in magazines and newspapers such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Stern*, *Le Figaro*, *New York Times*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde* and *National Geographic*."



In recent years, Tavakolian "developed several art projects – still maintaining a largely documentary style – focusing particularly on women's issues, through projects such as *Mother of Martyrs* (2006) and *The Day I Became a Woman* (2010)."

Her work has been [exhibited](#) all over the world: Tehran, London, Vienna, Dubai, Rome, New York, Turin, Moscow, Paris, Amsterdam, Florence, Oslo, Berlin, Los Angeles, and elsewhere.

In a recent [interview](#) with the online journal *Roads and Kingdoms*, Tavakolian – who lives and works in Tehran – describes how "Look" depicts

"a mix of universal anxieties and a depressed feeling specific to Iran because of the sanctions and mismanagement."

"It's not about protests," she explains, "but about feelings."

When asked how she thinks the American audience will respond to the series and "seeing the emotional afterlife of their sanctions on Iran," Tavakolian replies:

Naturally the sanctions are hurting people, as they add to their feelings of isolation. But while making this project, sanctions were not the main thing on my mind. LOOK deals with emotions that, in my view, are shared by people all over the world: loneliness, uncertainty, guilt, suspicion and so on. When you also feel isolated, such feelings become even more powerful.

Newsha Tavakolian's "Look" will be shown at the Thomas Erben Gallery through May 11, 2013.