

# HANNAH DARABI

## *Why Don't You Dance?*

June 26 to November 1, 2026

Iranian artist Hannah Darabi (b. 1981) was selected as the laureate of the 2025 Prix Elysée by an international jury. In her work, she uses photographs, videos and archive materials to explore popular dance as a form of identity-based resistance rooted in the social and political history of her native country. Her series set images in dialogue with archives, texts and objects to lay bare the political complexity of contemporary Iran.

### EXHIBITION

Darabi's project *Why Don't You Dance?* is inspired by the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, a recent nationwide protest against the restrictive laws imposed on women by the Iranian government. The exhibition is divided into three sections, each centering on a pivotal figure from the Iranian popular dance scene. The parts function independently while also connecting to the others across time and between Iran and its diaspora.

Mahvash, a leading cabaret figure of the 1950s, forms the foundation of the project. Drawing on *The Secrets of Sexual Fulfillment* (1957), Mahvash's fictional biography, Darabi examines how dance functioned as a tool of protest during the 1979 Revolution, and how women's appearance and self-expression became subject to ever-tighter controls. She produces her own take on this landmark book through a series of collages in which she assembles magazine pages, fragments of text, ephemera and her own photographs.

The second figure is Jamileh, a renowned exponent of belly dance and "Jaheli dance," a popular style rooted in Iranian urban culture. In this part of the exhibition, Darabi explores the fluidity and tension between tradition and modernity in a series of three videos developed in collaboration with a Berlin-based collective of dancers and choreographers.

The third section of the exhibition revolves around Mohammad Khordadian, a dancer and choreographer from the Iranian pop scene in Los Angeles. Here, Darabi turns to the diaspora and to practices developed in exile, documenting the nights at the legendary Cabaret Tehran, a central gathering place for Iranians in Southern California.



Hannah Darabi, from the series *Cabaret Tehran, House of Legends*, from *Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi



Hannah Darabi, from the series *Tehran-Los Angeles, Return Journey*, from *Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi

Drawing on the stories of these three figures, Darabi reveals how dance has endured through a shift in Iranian society – away from traditional gender norms and toward a more modernist discourse. Here, entertainment becomes a political act, archives become tools of resistance, and performance becomes an expression of joyful resilience.

### BIOGRAPHY

Hannah Darabi was born in 1981 in Tehran. She studied at the Faculty of Fine Arts in her native city before continuing her education at Université Paris 8 Vincennes–Saint-Denis. Now based in Paris, she focuses mainly on her country of origin, exploring its social, cultural and political dynamics through images, videos and archive materials.

In 2022, Darabi was awarded the Bernd and Hilla Becher Award by the City of Düsseldorf for her entire artistic output. The following year, she received the Prix de la Photo Madame Figaro for her exhibition at the Rencontres d'Arles.

Her writings and works are held in various public and private collections. Her book *Rue Enghelab: The Revolution Through Books, Iran 1979–1983* (Spector Books/Le Bal, 2019) has received several awards. In 2021, the Centre d'art GwinZegal published *Soleil of Persian Square*, an investigation into the lifestyle and popular music of the Iranian diaspora in Southern California.

### THE PRIX ELYSÉE

The Prix Elysée is awarded every two years and carries a prize of CHF 80,000. Its aim is to support mid-career photographers in developing an original project. It reflects Photo Elysée's commitment to supporting contemporary photography, offering backing to selected artists at a key stage in their careers.

Since its inception in 2014, the prize has been awarded to Hannah Darabi (2025), Debi Cornwall (2023), Kurt Tong (2021), Luis Carlos Tovar (2019), Matthias Bruggmann (2017) and Martin Kollár (2015).

The Prix Elysée is made possible through an exclusive partnership between Photo Elysée and Parmigiani Fleurier.

Curated by Lydia Dorner

### PUBLICATION

The book Hannah Darabi. *Why Don't You Dance?* is co-published by Kodoji Press and Photo Elysée in a bilingual French-English edition.



Hannah Darabi, excerpt from the video "Saeed", from the series *Follow the Beat, Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi



Hannah Darabi, from the series *Cabaret Tehran, House of Legends, Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi

**PRESS CONFERENCE**  
**THURSDAY, JUNE 25 AT 10AM**

**Tour visit of the exhibition with Hannah Darabi, Lydia Dorner and Nathalie Herschdorfer.**

**PRESS CONTACT**  
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**OPENING**  
**THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 6PM ONWARDS**  
**Free**

The Prix Elysée is the result of an exclusive partnership between Photo Elysée and Parmigiani Fleurier.

**PRIX ELYSEE** **PARMIGIANI FLEURIER**

**Exhibition partner**

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Office fédéral de la culture OFC



Hannah Darabi, excerpt from the video *Sina*, from the series *Follow the Beat, Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi



Constitutional Law, Polygamy, Yes / No: In this stage, one man lives with one woman, but the relationship is such that polygamy and occasional infidelity remains the right of the men, even though for economic reasons polygamy is rare, while from the woman the strictest fidelity is generally demanded throughout the time she lives with the man, and adultery on her part is cruelly punished.

Hannah Darabi, from the series *Mahvash's Book of Pleasure, Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi

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Hannah Darabi, excerpt from the video *Sepideh*, from the series *Follow the Beat, Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi



Hannah Darabi, from the series *Cabaret Tehran, House of Legends*, from *Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi



I saw her in the Stasse, and in the Rue as well, pursued her in the High Street, she had me in her spell. "Women and Cats"

Hannah Darabi, from the series *Mahvash's Book of Pleasure*, *Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi



Hannah Darabi, from the series *Cabaret Tehran, House of Legends*, from *Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi



Hannah Darabi, from the series *Tehran-Los Angeles, Return Journey*, from *Why Don't You Dance?*, 2026 © Hannah Darabi