

American Hostages Are Subject of Current Balassanian Exhibit

NEW YORK, N.Y.— *Hostages: A Diary* is the title of the exhibit of "collage and acrylic on paper" works by Sonia Balassanian which opened on June 14 and will be on display until July 12 at Elise Meyer Inc., 410 West Broadway.

A prominent artist of Iran, Sonia Balassanian has combined elements of poetry, calligraphy and field painting in her work. Prior to the Iranian revolution, her works bore a modernistic stamp, highlighted by timeless abstract images that smack of both writing and drawing. A member of the "Nor Ej" group of Tehran, Armenian poets, she has produced poetry almost surrealistic to the Western ear but which contains the same warm erotic images that characterize Arshile Gorky's work.

The Iranian Revolution has effected a change in Balassanian's art. Particularly the American hostage crisis. Famous art historian Robert C. Hobbs describes her latest work: "Even though her imagery is highly political in focus, it is not partisan in outlook. She treads that narrow line between opposing sides to express her outrage at the eroding human condition. Her images are icons of crisis; they are like weathered billboards containing a variety of dissonant slogans and banners, torn, overlaid, scratched out, and marked up. Her art deals with the look of revolution, with the confluence of personal, historical, cultural, and newsworthy information that has become a part of her own life. Implicit in her work is the suggestion that a revolution is not something that is out there, that is merely political and legislative; a revolution affects every one coming into contact with it. She has symbolized this fact appropriately by turning herself into a hostage. She is blindfolded, locked into situations beyond her reckoning... Her compositions look as if they are present-day mummies of a now antiquated modernism."

Sonia (Amirian) Balassanian was born in Arak, Iran in 1942. In 1970 she graduated from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and also received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree

from the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania, both in Philadelphia. In 1971-2 she was involved in the Independent Painting Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art here. Continuing her education at the same time, she received her Master of Fine Arts from Pratt Institute in May 1978.

A recipient of numerous awards, Sonia was recognized for her talent ever since her student days. In 1967, she won honorable mention in the Annual Art Students Exhibition at Philadelphia's International House and, a year later, she took second prize in that competition. In 1969, she won the M/M Philip Klein Prize in the 38th Annual Rittenhouse Square Exhibition. The next year she was awarded the J. Henry Schiedt European Traveling Prize, the Quaker Prize for Meritorious Achievement and the Thouron Prize for Outstanding Composition. Subsequently she received the Drake Press Prize

and Honorable Mention in the Pennsylvania '71 exhibition of the William Penn Memorial Museum in Harrisburg, Pa.

From 1968-1972, Balassanian's works appeared in group shows at the International House, Peal Gallery of the Penna. Academy of Fine Arts and Woodmere Art Gallery, all in Philadelphia. In 1975-76, she had one-person shows at Zaryan and Saman Art Galleries in Tehran. She also took part in the Woman and Art Group Exhibition and 80 Years of Modern Art in Iran at the Iran-American Cultural Center there. Her work was presented at the Pavillion of Iran at the Basel International Art Fair in Basel, Switzerland in June 1976. A showing followed in April 1977 at the Pavillion of Iran at "Wash Art 77" Art Fair, Washington, D.C. Six months later, Balassanian's art was presented at the opening of the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art. Her most recent exhibition was a one-person show at Lotus Gallery here in July 1978.



Above—"Rescue Mission II"; right—"Self Portrait"; below—"Hostages I".