SONIA BALASSANIAN

HOSTAGES: A DIARY

"Self Portrait", 1980, Collage and Acrylic on Paper, 39½ x 27½

Front Cover: "Hostages I", 1980, Collage and Acrylic on Paper, 39½ x 27½

ICONS OF CRISIS

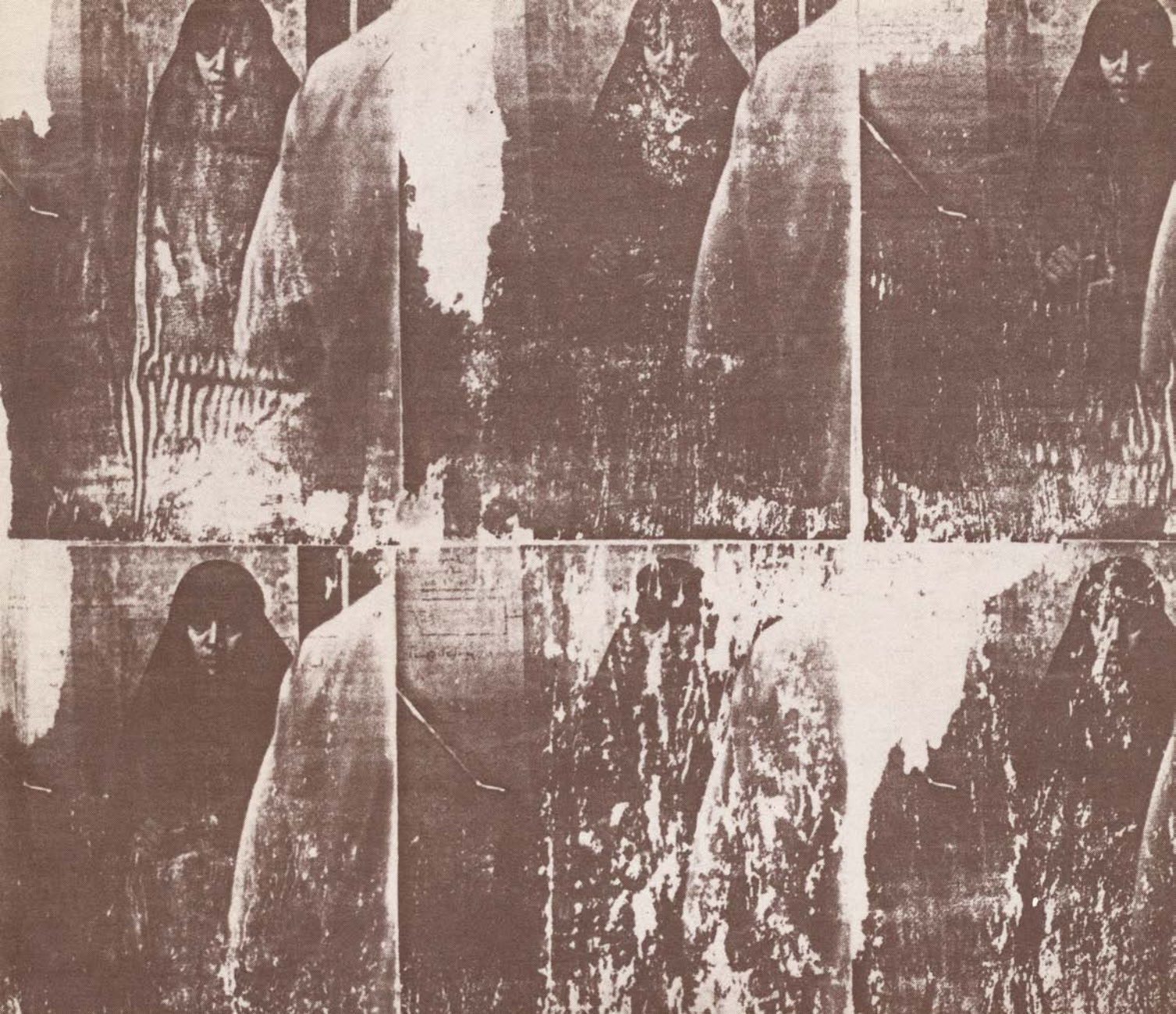
One of Iran's foremost artists, Sonia Balassanian has long joined together in her work elements of poetry, calligraphy, and field painting. Until the beginning of the recent revolution, she was content to occupy herself with the tenets of modernist painting, dwelling on timeless abstract images that are neither writing nor drawing, but both. The youngest member of "NOR 'EJ" (New Page), the famed group of Tehran Armenian poets, she evolved a poetry that sounds almost surrealistic to Western ears but is actually filled with the same warm erotic images that imbued Arshile Gorky's work.

In the past few years Balassanian's art has changed significantly. Instead of hovering, radiating fields of calligraphic-like strokes, she has turned her attention to the Iranian Revolution in general and the American hostage crisis in particular. 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 disconsonant 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 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 effects everyone coming in contact with it. She has symbolized this fact appropriately by turning herself into hostage. She is blindfolded, locked into situations beyond her reckoning.

The Iranian Revolution, perhaps is more profound than any recent revolts in the name of progress because it involves a knowing rejection of aspects of westernization and modernism and an affirmation of age-old human values. In her art Balassanian neither accepts nor rejects this change; she manifests it in compositions that look as if they are present-day mummies of a now antiquated modernism.

Robert C. Hobbs

"Rescue Mision II", 1980, Collage and Acrylic on Paper, 39½ x 27½
"Woman" (Detail), 1980, Collage and Acrylic on Paper, 39½ x 27½



JOHN D. HARVEY, 21
Marine Corps sergeant from
Roanoke, Va.

JAMES T. MCMILLAN II, 28
Air Force captain from
Cookeville, Tenn.

LYN D. MCINTOSH, 23
Air Force captain from
Valdosta, Ga.

RICHARD L. BAKKE, 33
Air Force captain from
Long Beach, Calif.

GEORGE E. HOLMES JR., 22
Marine Corps corporal from
Oakland, Calif.

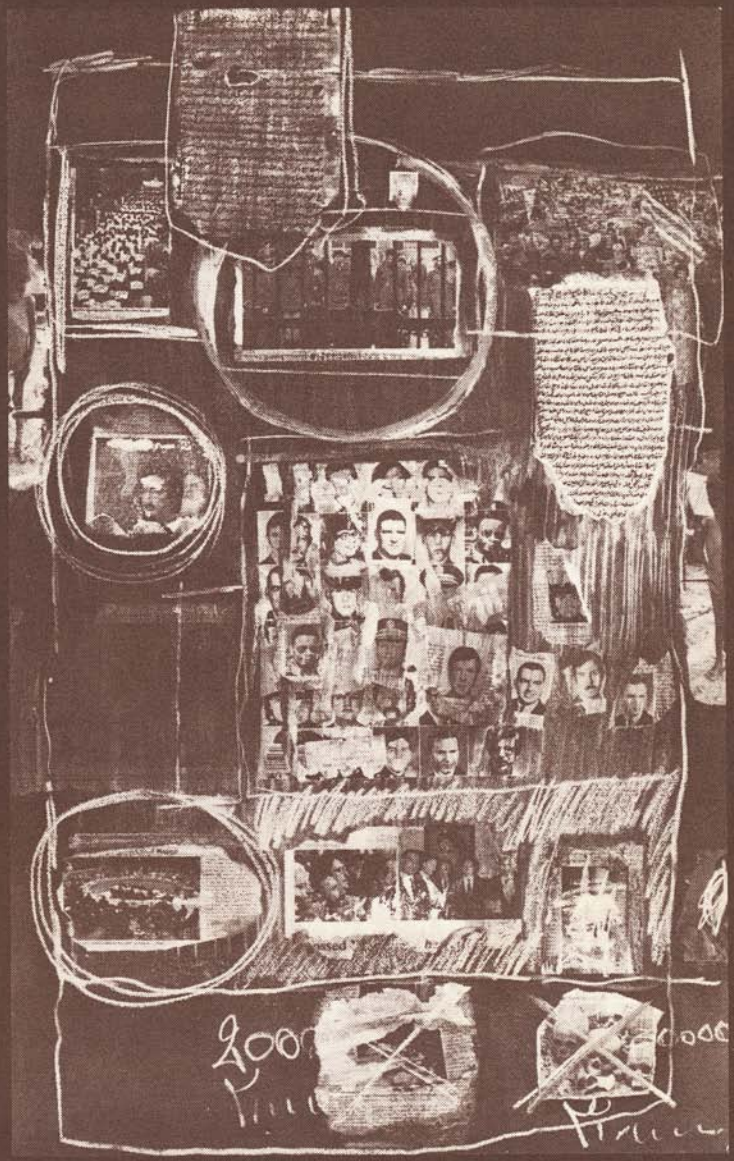
HAROLD L. LEWIS, 26
Air Force captain from
Mansfield, Conn.

SIDNEY L. JOHNSON, 31
Marine Corps staff sergeant
from Jacksonville, N.C.

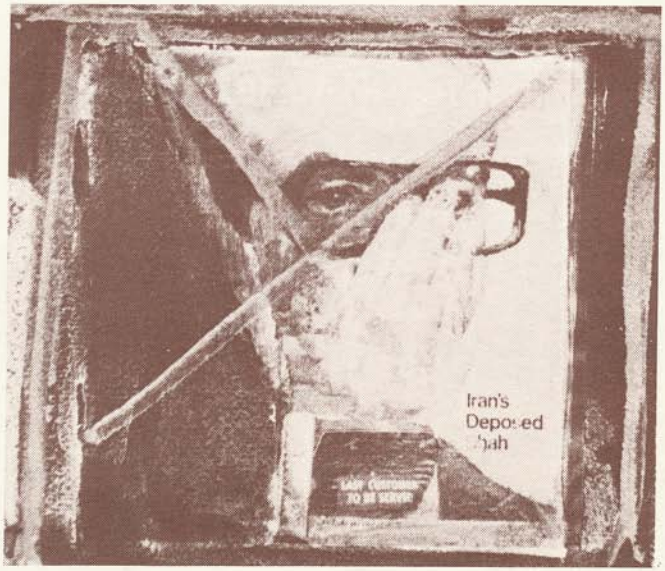
JOEL C. MAYO, 34
Air Force technical sergeant
from Bunkie, Fla.

"Day 182", 1980, Collage and Acrylic on Paper, 39½ x 27½

"Centre of the Storm", 1980, Collage and Acrylic on Paper, 39½ x 27½



"Thirty Thousand", 1980, Collage and Acrylic on Paper, 39½ x 27½



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