

PERFORMANCE:

Iranian Vocalist Mahyar Fazeli



Event August 8, 2026, 3 – 5 pm
Performance, 4 pm

Sara Rahanjam; Iran, b. 1984; *Hanging Garden Series*, 2026; Performance, photography, soft sculpture; Variable dimensions

Kavi Gupta, and Zaryab Art Labs are pleased to announce a performance taking place on Saturday, August 8, 2026, from 3:00 PM to 5:00 PM at 835 W. Washington Blvd. in Chicago's West Loop. The closing event surrounding Kavi Gupta's *MENASA+: Thresholds of Representation* exhibition will feature a musical performance by special guest Mahyar Fazeli, celebrated Iranian musician and vocalist.

Soulful musician and vocalist Mahyar Fazeli has been hailed by Iranian critics as the "Iranian Stevie Wonder," and his rare private performances in Iran are widely regarded as remarkable musical experiences. Having arrived in the United States from war-stricken Iran just days prior, Fazeli is performing to honor the Iranian artists represented in Kavi Gupta's *MENASA+: Thresholds of Representation* exhibition; Sara Rahanjam, Alemeh Bagherian, Karim Abu Shakra, Shahpari Rahmani, and members of the Rewind Collective. His performance will include a selection of numbers sung in Persian, alongside several surprise selections performed in English. Kavi Gupta is thrilled to host Fazeli.

The *MENASA+: Thresholds of Representation* presentation extends the gallery's commitment to amplifying global voices that shape the contemporary moment. It brings together artists from across the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Asian diaspora—artists whose lived experiences of migration, hybridity, gender, and belonging redefine what global contemporary art can be. This curatorial framework positions *MENASA+* and Asian diasporic dialogues not as categories, but as interconnected conditions of making, translation, survival, inheritance, reinvention, and resistance. It reflects a belief that identity in art is not fixed but continuously negotiated across borders, languages, and histories of gendered power.

At a time when geopolitics continues to compress complex identities into binaries of "us" and "them," the art world has mirrored similar patterns of exclusion and invisibility. This presentation resists that logic. It centers practitioners—particularly female and femme-identifying artists from *MENASA+* and Asian regions—whose voices have emerged from unforgiving cultural and political contexts, yet continue to embody resilience, autonomy, and creative power.

Michael Joo, Alemeh Bagherian, Haya Zaidi, Sara Rahanjam, Shahpari Rahmani, Karim Abu Shakra, Gordon Cheung, Manish Nai and the Rewind Collective

This exhibition was made possible with curatorial assistance from Narimon Safavi, an Iranian-American entrepreneur and cultural commentator; and Rosa Matinfar, curator and writer whose work focuses on contemporary art from the MENASA region.

Narimon Safavi is a social entrepreneur and a media personality/arts commentator with appearances at WBEZ-NPR CHICAGO, BBC, PBS. El Diario Vasco and Telecinco. He's the founder of Zaryab Art Labs, an innovation artcenter focused on the intersection of art and technology to be located at a historic building in downtown Chicago and to open in Feb 2027.

Nari attended Illinois State University studying Chemistry and Philosophy with a keen interest in Philosophy of sciences. His current area of exploration is the epistemology of creativity and innovation. His community engagements have included board memberships at Siskel Film Center (Art Institute of Chicago), Harris School of Public Policy at University of Chicago,



Karim Abu Shakra b. 1982; *Cactus in Blue*, 2021; Oil on canvas; 19 5/8 x 13 3/4 in; (50 x 35 cm)

Latino Film Festival of Chicago and a stint as a panelist at National Endowment for the Arts of USA for the approval of grants.

Narimon speaks English and Persian languages fluently and is conversant in Spanish and Azari Turkish.

Rosa Matinfar is an art curator, advisor, and critic whose practice bridges scholarly research, institutional engagement, and cultural strategy. She holds a Master's degree in Art Studies from the University of Tehran, where her thesis examined the role of museums in legitimizing political ideology, and brings an interdisciplinary methodology shaped by earlier training in Molecular Biology. Matinfar has held curatorial and advisory roles across museums, galleries, and private collections, including the Carpet Museum of Iran, where in 2025 she curated an exhibition integrating digital art with traditional carpet motifs, as well as ongoing consultancy work with the Anthropology Museum of Nowshahr and the National Carpet Museum of Iran. Her gallery experience includes curatorial and advisory positions at Ragadid Gallery, Nian Art Gallery, and Idea Gallery, where she has developed exhibitions, conducted art-historical and market research, and advised collectors on acquisition and collection-building. She has curated and co-curated international exhibition projects, and is currently developing *Chel-Negar: Unity in Multiplicity* for the National Museum of Iranian Art.

Alongside her curatorial practice, Matinfar is an active art critic and researcher, publishing widely on contemporary and Middle Eastern art and contributing to institutional discourse through writing, research, and jury service.

Kavi Gupta amplifies voices of diverse and underrepresented artists to expand the canon of art history. Through innovative and ambitious exhibitions, multimedia programming, and rigorous publications, we foster an evolving conversation among international communities about art and ideas.