

Photo exhibit shines new light on Iranians



"My Family (Hallelujah 3)" photo by Shahriar Tavakoli, part of the "Persian Visions" exhibit in Cedar Rapids.

"Persian Visions," a traveling exhibition of photos by 20 contemporary artists from Iran, opens Saturday and runs through May 10 at the Cedar Rapids Museum of Art.

The show, the first of its kind to travel to the United States, was organized jointly by the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art and the University of Minnesota and offers a glimpse into daily life in Iran.

"These are Iranians looking at their own world in a way that looks different than if Americans had taken photos in the same places," CRMA curator Seam Ulmer said.

Ulmer, who studied Islamic art in college, said he initially expected to see more traditional themes in the show. But when he started unwrapping the 60-some photos from their shipping crates, he was struck by how fresh they looked.

"I found myself relating immediately to the images - they could be my own family, anyone's family," he said. "We don't hear that much about Iran, and what we do hear is mediated by the government. But this show is a reminder that while our governments disagree, the countries on both sides are made up of people who share more in common than we may know."

— Michael Morain