



A New Vehicle for Human Rights, the PaykanArtCar, Will Be Unveiled October 4 in Support of Iran’s LGBTQ+ Community During the Oslo Freedom Forum in Miami

Historic Iranian Automobile, Used as a Canvas by Expatriate Artist Alireza Shojaian, Will Support LGBTQ+ voices in Iran

Inaugural Unveiling to be Presented in partnership with the Human Rights Foundation

New York, NY (September 17, 2021) – A 1974 Paykan Hillman Hunter limousine, an historic and iconic automobile manufactured in Iran, will be reborn on October 4, 2021 in Miami as a vehicle for human rights, becoming the inaugural [PaykanArtCar](#). Unveiled during the Human Rights Foundation’s Oslo Freedom Forum, the Paykan elaborately painted by expatriate Iranian artist Alireza Shojaian, will raise awareness of the persecution of LGBTQ+ people in Iran.

The nonprofit, non-partisan organization that has acquired the historic automobile and developed this project, PaykanArtCar, intends to periodically commission a different artist of Iranian background to paint the car, with each presentation focusing on another area of human rights abuses in Iran. This year’s PaykanArtCar is presented with support from the Human Rights Foundation.

“Across cultures, art has long been an effective way for people to unify and confront oppression, whether living under tyrannical rule or from afar,” said Ambassador Mark D. Wallace, Chief Executive Officer of PaykanArtCar “The PaykanArtCar is literally a vehicle that Iranian artists will use to drive messages of protest and hope internationally, inspiring people while raising awareness of the ways in which Iranians are silenced and persecuted.”

In a report issued on May 17, 2021, Amnesty International stated that “LGBTQ+ people in Iran face pervasive discrimination, live in the constant fear of harassment, arrest and criminal prosecution, and remain vulnerable to violence and persecution based on their real or perceived sexual orientation and gender identity. Under Iran’s Islamic Penal Code consensual same-sex sexual conduct is criminalized and punished by penalties ranging from flogging to the death penalty.”

The narrative underpinning Alireza Shojaian’s painting of the inaugural PaykanArtCar is one of Iran’s most celebrated texts, the Shahnameh (Book of Kings) written by Ferdowsi in the 10th century. Shojaian uses one of the most prominent tales of Shahnameh, the tragic story of Rostam and his son Sohrab to comment on the murder in 2021 of a 20-year-old Iranian gay man, Ali Fazeli Monfared, who was beheaded by members of his family in an “honor killing.”

“Living in a society that restricts its citizens from presenting their true, authentic selves, and even outright denies their existence, has caused many in our queer community in the Middle East to live in exile,” said Shojaian. “Art is a vehicle to express myself and my essence, and also to engage others. With the PaykanArtCar, I hope to make visible the beauty and emotion of queer culture that has long been hidden in the region and, in doing so, pave the way for a world that is more open to acceptance and more tolerant.”

Following its presentation in Miami, the inaugural PaykanArtCar will be exhibited around the world. Immediately following the Oslo Freedom Forum, the car will travel to Paris where it will be on exhibit from October 21 to October 24 as part of the 7th edition of Asia Now, which this year will highlight art and artists from Iran.

Hiva Feizi, Executive Director of PaykanArtCar, said, “We are honored and delighted that Alireza Shojaian is the first PaykanArtCar artist. First produced in 1967 by Iran National Company, the Paykan continues to be an icon of national pride, modernity, possibility, and industrial capability, both within Iran and in the diaspora. Today, the Paykan remains omnipresent on the streets of Tehran and often appears in films and television programs, and advertisements. And now, the Paykan, will be the voice of the silenced and oppressed inside of Iran.”

About Alireza Shojaian

Alireza Shojaian is an Iranian painter and visual activist. Shojaian was born in Tehran, Iran in 1988. Shojaian depicts his subjects nude or semi-nude in intimate and vulnerable positions. His work aims to fight societal prejudice against LGBT people while making space for non-heteronormative masculine identities. His work reflects on the queer history of the Middle East, the present context, and his own experiences. Shojaian knew he could not continue his work in Iran, where human bodies are censored and sexual identity is scrutinized and politicized. In 2016 he moved to Beirut and held two solo exhibitions in 2017 and 2018. In 2019 Shojaian was offered by the French embassy in Lebanon an art residency with the Académie des beaux-arts and now resides in Paris.

About PaykanArtCar

The PaykanArtCar project unites the talents of contemporary Iranian artists with a beloved symbol of Iranian national pride—the Paykan automobile—to advocate human rights and dignity in Iran. The non-profit, non-partisan [PaykanArtCar](#) is privileged to have acquired an historic Paykan Hillman Hunter limousine. Periodically, PaykanArtCar will choose and commission, an exceptional artist in the Iranian diaspora to use the vehicle as the canvas in support of the ongoing struggle in Iran for human rights. The purpose is simple: to use art and a beloved symbol of national pride to promote the rights of all Iranians no matter their race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

About the Human Rights Foundation

The Human Rights Foundation (HRF) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that promotes and protects human rights globally, with a focus on closed societies. HRF unites people in the common cause of defending human rights and promoting liberal democracy. Their mission is to ensure that freedom is both preserved and promoted around the world. HRF focuses their work on the founding ideas of the human rights movement, those most purely represented in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the 1976 International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

The Oslo Freedom Forum (OFF) is a global conference series produced by the Human Rights Foundation. No event in the world compares to the Oslo Freedom Forum’s unique mix of dissidents,

philanthropists, journalists, artists, entrepreneurs, public intellectuals, and world leaders—all of whom come together each year for an immersive experience focused on making the world more peaceful, prosperous, and free.

Media Contacts

Alison Buchbinder / Brady Littlefield

alison.buchbinder@finnpartners.com / brady.littlefield@finnpartners.com

+1 646 688 7826 / +1 917 836 4193

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