

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Asian Heritage Month 2026 at the Vancouver Art Gallery

The Gallery Hosts a Month of Talks, Tours and Workshops Celebrating Asian Art and Ideas, Looking Ahead to a Landmark Exhibition on Iranian Modernism



May 1, 2026, VANCOUVER, BC // Traditional Coast Salish Lands including the xʷməθkʷəy̅əm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səliwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

In honour of Asian Heritage Month, the Vancouver Art Gallery presents a dynamic program of talks, tours and workshops that spotlight the depth, richness and ongoing influence of Asian art and cultural expression across time and place.

Throughout May, audiences are invited to engage with the Gallery's collection and exhibitions through a series of dedicated events. Weekly *Lunchtime Look* tours offer fresh perspectives from experts across the Gallery, with highlights including a focused tour on Asian art led by Senior Curator **Diana Freundl**, and a Mandarin-language tour guided by Public Programs Coordinator **Lynn Chen**, opening up new ways of connecting with the Gallery's latest exhibition, *Highlights from the Collection*.

The program continues with *Modernity in Translation: Art, Architecture and Poetry in Iran*, a thought-provoking panel moderated by curator **Pantea Haghighi**. Bringing together renowned architect **Hossein Amanat** and **Dr. Jeff Derksen**, Professor at Simon Fraser University, the conversation explores how tradition and modernity

intersect in Iranian culture, inviting audiences to reconsider modernity as an ongoing process of cultural translation and exchange.

For those looking to get creative, on May 31 artist **Vanessa Lam** leads a special edition of The Making Place: Freedom of Expressive Collage and Drawing, a hands-on workshop that encourages participants to experiment with intuitive mark-making, painting and collage. Designed for all experience levels, the session fosters creativity, confidence and playful exploration. In the Gallery Lobby, families can discover a special tissue paper landscapes activity, inspired by the work of Takao Tanabe and Lui Shou-Kwan in *Highlights from the Collection*.

“We are proud to mark Asian Heritage Month through the work of the Centre for Global Asias as a platform that is attuned to the present. Our exhibitions, conversations, tours and workshops open up spaces for critical reflection and exchange,” says **Sirish Rao**, Interim Co-CEO of the Vancouver Art Gallery and Director of the Centre for Global Asias. “At a time when Asia is central to so many of the world’s cultural, political and geopolitical currents, this work recognizes the many Asias that exist (across regions, diasporas and futures yet to be imagined). We invite audiences to move between languages, contexts and lived realities to understand how local and global Asian communities shape our world today.”

May’s panel discussion also offers a preview of one of the Gallery’s most significant forthcoming exhibitions, *Modern Iran and the Avant-Gardes, 1948–78*. Opening December 11, 2026, this landmark exhibition—guest curated by **Pantea Haghighi**—is the largest presentation of Iranian modernism ever mounted in Canada. Bringing together more than 30 artists and approximately 100 works across painting, sculpture, drawing and architecture, the exhibition explores how complex cultural tensions of this period led to artistic innovation.

Modern Iran and the Avant-Gardes, 1948–78 also foregrounds the contributions of women artists, several of whom have been overlooked by major surveys of the period until now, and traces how many artists continued their practices in exile following the seismic shifts of the 1970s. Together, the exhibition offers an unprecedented view of a transformative period in Iran’s cultural history, when artists developed a distinctly Iranian modernism shaped by the interplay of tradition and innovation.

“Presenting *Modern Iran and the Avant-Gardes, 1948–78* is part of our commitment to broaden the story of modern art across geographies,” says **Eva Respini**, Interim Co-CEO and Curator at Large at the Vancouver Art Gallery. “The exhibition invites audiences into a pivotal moment of cultural transformation in Iran, where tradition and transformation meet and where modern art emerges not as a fixed idea, but as something that continues to be shaped.”

Modern Iran and the Avant-Gardes, 1948–78 is organized by the Vancouver Art Gallery and guest curated by **Pantea Haghighi**. The exhibition will open on December 11, 2026, and runs until May 2, 2027.

An initiative of:



Presented by:

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Cultural Partner:



The work of guest curator **Pantea Haghighi** is generously supported by:



Foundation

The Gallery will present the following series of public programs as part of Asian Heritage Month:

Lunchtime Look Tours | Mandarin Language Tour and Asian Art Spotlight

Wednesday, May 6 & May 20, 2026, 12:15 PM

Every week a different expert—from curators and educators to conservators and art handlers—offer a unique perspective on *Highlights from the Collection*, sharing behind-the-scenes insights and stories on selected artworks. On May 6, the Gallery's Senior Curator **Diana Freundl** leads a tour focused on Asian art, followed on May 20 by a Mandarin-language tour with Public Programs Coordinator **Lynn Chen**, who brings her own insights and perspectives to the exhibition.

Book Launch and Panel Discussion | Modernity in Translation: Art, Architecture and Poetry in Iran

Friday, May 29, 2026 | 6:30–8 PM

Join us for a thought-provoking panel exploring the evolving relationship between tradition and modernity in Iranian culture. Moderated by **Pantea Haghighi**, curator of *Modern Iran and the Avant-Gardes, 1948–78*, this conversation brings together **Hossein Amanat**—renowned architect and participating artist—and **Dr. Jeff Derksen**, Professor at Simon Fraser University. Together, they examine how art, architecture and poetry intersect to shape modern Iranian identity, inviting audiences to reconsider modernity as an ongoing process of cultural translation and exchange.

The panel discussion will include the launch of *Modern Iran and the Avant-Gardes, 1948–78*—a richly illustrated volume that extends the exhibition's research and offers an important record of this pivotal moment in global art history.

The Making Place | Workshop: Freedom of Expressive Collage and Drawing

Sunday, May 31, 2026 | 11 AM–12:30 PM & 1:30–3 PM

This hands-on workshop led by artist Vanessa Lam invites participants to explore creativity through intuitive drawing, painting and collage. Through short, free-form exercises, this session encourages experimentation, confidence and curiosity—transforming simple marks into expressive collage works. Open to all levels, this welcoming workshop is designed for anyone ready to loosen up, explore intuitive mark making and experiment with playful collage.

For more information, please visit: <https://www.vanartgallery.bc.ca/events/>

MEDIA CONTACT

Exhibition media package: <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/CV4oyY5ChA>

Program media package: <https://spaces.hightail.com/space/IIRsZLbjsL>

For media requests, email media@vanartgallery.bc.ca

Image: Manoucher Yektai, *Untitled*, 1962, oil on linen, Collection of Karma Gallery, Photo: © The Estate of Manoucher Yektai, Courtesy the Estate and Karma Gallery

ABOUT THE VANCOUVER ART GALLERY

Founded in 1931 on the ancestral and unceded territories of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam), Sḵwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səlilwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, the Vancouver Art Gallery is recognized as one of North America's most innovative visual arts institutions. The Gallery's celebrated exhibitions, extensive public programs and emphasis on advancing scholarship all focus on historical and contemporary art from British Columbia and around the world. Special attention is given to the accomplishments of Indigenous artists, as well as to those of the Asia Pacific region—through the Centre for Global Asias (formerly the Institute of Asian Art) founded in 2014. The Gallery's exhibitions also explore the impact of images in the larger sphere of visual culture, design and architecture.

The Gallery's new Art of Wellbeing lab furthers its commitment to community by promoting the role of art in fostering health and wellbeing. Developed in collaboration with healthcare professionals, researchers and Indigenous Elders, the lab creates opportunities for individuals to engage with art in ways that support mental, emotional and physical wellbeing. Committed to inclusivity and accessibility, the Gallery welcomes hundreds of thousands of visitors each year to share perspectives, build community and shape our collective future through art.

The Vancouver Art Gallery is a charitable not-for-profit organization supported by its members, individual donors, corporate funders, foundations, the City of Vancouver, the Province of British Columbia through the B.C. Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts.