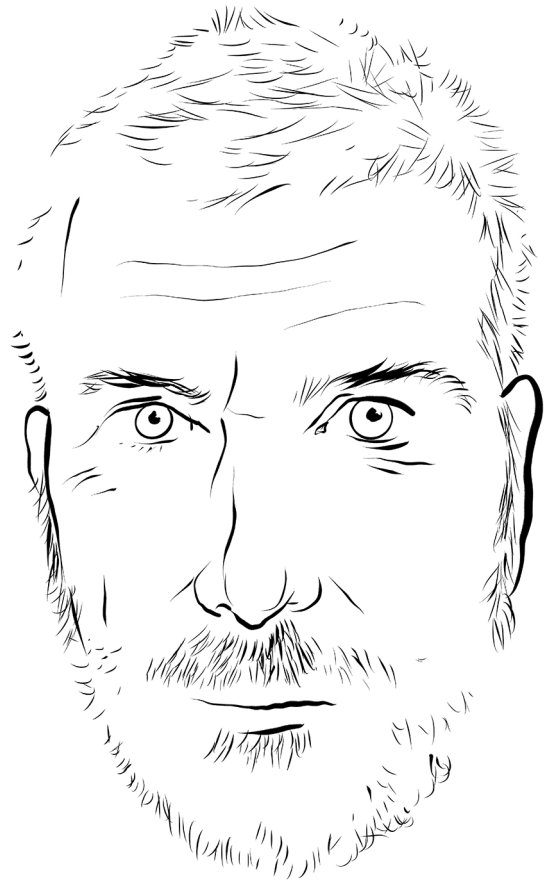


OLDER ARTIST



I want a trans Iranian president.
I want a person who was tortured in Evin prison as a democratically elected president for Iran. I want a dancer who has never been allowed to dance in public because she's a woman, for president. I want a director who was placed under house arrest for making an honest documentary. I want a Kurdish woman who's experienced years of discrimination due to being an ethnic minority for president. I want a Baha'i, a christian, a Zoroastrian or a Jewish Iranian who's grown up afraid of declaring their faith.
I want a divorced woman who fought hard for her divorce and had to give up her 7 year old son in exchange for her freedom for president. I want a young woman who has never been allowed to leave the country without her father's permission. I want a president who knows what it feels like to be shamed for sexwork. I want a gay president who lived their whole life afraid of kissing their lover in public. I want a group of teens fearlessly ripping up photos of the "leader" off of their classroom walls. A woman falsely accused of a crime and put on the death row, just because a man said she was guilty.
I want a child of executed or exiled parents for president. Or a fifteen year old girl who was forced to marry and told there was nothing more to her life.
I want a gay person who was manipulated and forced into sex reassignment surgery to hide their queerness. I want a trans man who was forced to wear compulsory hijab for most of his life for president. And I want to know how revolutions become about exclusion, instead of giving a voice to those who have always been silenced, and why we can't still have a dyke for president.

I Stopped Reading For a Year

And I thought I would lose my words. I did not read books nor magazines, nor the subtitles on TV shows. I ignored texts and watched recipe videos. I sat by the mangrove and heard cicadas, their buzz deafening after the monsoon. I lost myself in lovers' gossip that they whispered between shifts. I thought I'd forget "proclivity", "variegated" and "ambivalence" but realised I didn't need them. I left paragraphs behind because we didn't speak them; I stutter when I teach anyway. Are those pauses periods or commas? Why did I ever read to begin with? The Prophet was illiterate, and neither did he write. He spoke the divine revelations as his followers wrote them on palm leaves and camel bones. Ananta's Buru Quartet was narrated to fellow prisoners, who brought the stories when they left exile. So I narrate to my brother, who types it and reads it back to me. I listen for words that sing, for consonants that ring. Has text ever killed someone? Are death sentences written down? Don't get me wrong, I'm grateful that you're reading this, but I can no longer run away. Like many, I found comfort in the written word: I can stop reading if it gets too hard. I threw away your letters. I read the sweet ones again and the bitter ones can't echo in my head. I didn't stop by choice, but my words can no longer turn into ash.

