

# The Blue Dome

## Selina Ershadi

### 25 April – 4 July 2026

“Under the blue dome one was, one was not” is a phrase that appears time and again in Iranian folklore. This phrase invokes perception and travels through time, shared mouth to mouth between generations. The blue dome is of course the night sky, but it is also a void, an opening, an aperture. Apertures, both natural and mechanical, direct our gaze: what is made visible? What remains out of sight? This act of drawing attention sits at the heart of Selina Ershadi’s practice as she explores the telling of personal stories that hover at the periphery of dominant historical narratives. Grappling with the apparatuses often used to tell these stories—the camera, the microphone—she interrogates standards of veracity associated with documentary processes. She teases out the narrative friction between notions of the minor, the often over-looked, and major, the often over-emphasised, and how these registers affect our understanding of character, site, and form. Ershadi works with her body, camera, and the women in her family; exploring the ways in which our proximity to power, place, and language radically informs our perspective and ability to tell our stories.

*The Blue Dome* (2026) is constructed out of audio visual material produced in two recent visits to Tehran, Ershadi’s first home which she now mostly experiences at a distance. The film, which moves between digital and analogue formats, unravels the assumption that the recording of people and their lives via an apparatus will create a stable account. Against this, *The Blue Dome* braids an inverted shape of time into its structure to explore this impossibility and loops between two alternating endings. In between these deviations from standard timelines the audience spends 30 minutes (a day, a year, a lifetime?) with Ershadi, her aunts, and grandmother who discuss the making of the film at the same time as considering familial relations within a wider social context. The film offers glimpses into this family’s orbit—and scenes that graze the edges of Tehran, as if from the perspective of the aperture itself.

Artspace Aotearoa is a public contemporary art gallery, founded in 1987 by artists and arts workers. We platform contemporary art practice, develop discourse, provide resources for artists, and connect the Aotearoa context with international conversations. Our mission is to critically explore contemporary life, led by artists.

Artspace Aotearoa  
292 Karangahape Road  
Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland

artspace-aotearoa.nz  
+64 9 303 4965

Artspace Aotearoa

Hannah Arendt's text *Human Condition* describes conversation as essential to avoiding behaviours that enable authoritarianism. Similarly, pioneering Indigenous filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin has asserted that her process always begins with listening to those she is working with. Arendt and Obomsawin draw us into a manner of constructing the world predicated on relationships rather than individualism. They propose that participating in society—specifically from their experience as cultural producers who document life—requires relinquishing the prioritisation of the enclosed individual and going towards the other, differences and all. Weaving these positions together, “one is, one isn't”, Ershadi constructs an environment through her embodied methodologies that activate the tenderness of listening and the fragility of conversation. This position offers a potent alternative to the pervasive tone of our current moment, which could be described as the age of the monologue, slogan, or diatribe. In *The Blue Dome* the entire gallery becomes a site to play out this alternative, as it acts as an instrument to transmit both image and sound that is susceptible to the variabilities of the world around us.

The exhibition leads with listening. It begins as an aural experience, with a new audio work as its prelude. It underscores Ershadi's understanding of sound as a physical, poetic, and political material contingent on relationships. Sound takes on a three-dimensional quality as it constructs a space made up of field recordings from diverse localities that include a ticking clock, darkness, breath, clothes, sleep, as well as the human voice from whisper to song. Ershadi emphasises the paradox of forming a whole out of fragments, whether audio or visual, drawing our attention to the subjectivity of the editing process.

If the blue dome is a night sky and aperture, it surely must also be an eye. *An eye, open* (2026) explores the same paradox of forming a whole from a drawn-out glimpse. The film renders the eye of Ershadi's mother, Azita, its major character. Shot over three years, this film documents the regular medical imaging of Azita's eye as her ocular tuberculosis is monitored. Only fragments of this footage are usable, mirroring this rare condition which can lead to blindness if left untreated. The looping image repeatedly shows a target, throwing into stark relief the ways image-making can quickly replicate mechanisms of power and discipline regardless of the fragility of the content encountered.

This exhibition is made up of oblique angles, curves, cuts, gaps, and veils. Its artworks dance along the edge of visibility and stability as “one is and one is not.” Ershadi elides the contemporary compulsion for highly saturated images and high pitched sounds, directing us, instead, to that most fragile of moments when an image or sound is formed. In her hands, the camera and the microphone close in on the whisper, the side-long glance, and the otherwise overlooked, conjuring the potency of the minor. Ultimately, Ershadi reminds us that it is from the so-called minor that life and meaning are constructed.

# Selina Ershadi with Frances Libeau

1.

## *passage, 2026*

2.1-Channel sound, 28'48" looped.

Comprised of field recordings made on Selina Ershadi's recent trips to Tehran and a cassette tape of relatives talking in 1980, this sound work acts as sonic counterpoint to *The Blue Dome*. As it resists audible legibility, it draws in the sounds from Karanghape Road, creating a transition between the world outside the gallery and the world constructed in the gallery as the audience arrives and departs.

Commissioned by Artspace Aotearoa. Courtesy the artist.

# Selina Ershadi

2.

## *The Blue Dome, 2026*

16mm Transferred to data, HD-digital video, colour, 4.1-channel sound, Farsi with English subtitles, 28'48" looped; custom screen, 455 x 245 cm.

Set primarily in Selina Ershadi's family home in Tehran, the film is carried by an ongoing dialogue with her aunt, grandmother, and great aunt set against purposeful gaps, silences and darkness. Glimpses of Tehran are threaded throughout, including the funeral parade for Ershadi's grandfather and trips into the Alborz Mountains that surround the city. With two alternating endings, blending analogue and digital formats in image and sound recordings the film deviates from standard expectations on narrative stability.

Co-commissioned by Artspace Aotearoa and the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. Courtesy the artist.

3.

## *An eye, open, 2026*

16mm Film transferred to data, colour, no sound, 2'44" looped; custom perspex screen, 105 x 78.8 cm.

Shot with a Bolex 16mm-film camera, this film documents the regular medical imaging of Selina Ershadi's mother's eye as her ocular tuberculosis is monitored. Projected onto a semi-transparent screen, this film compresses the roles of the observed and observer; the alcove gallery space becoming the eyeball, the screen the lens.

Co-commissioned by Artspace Aotearoa and the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. Courtesy the artist.

4.

## Paratext

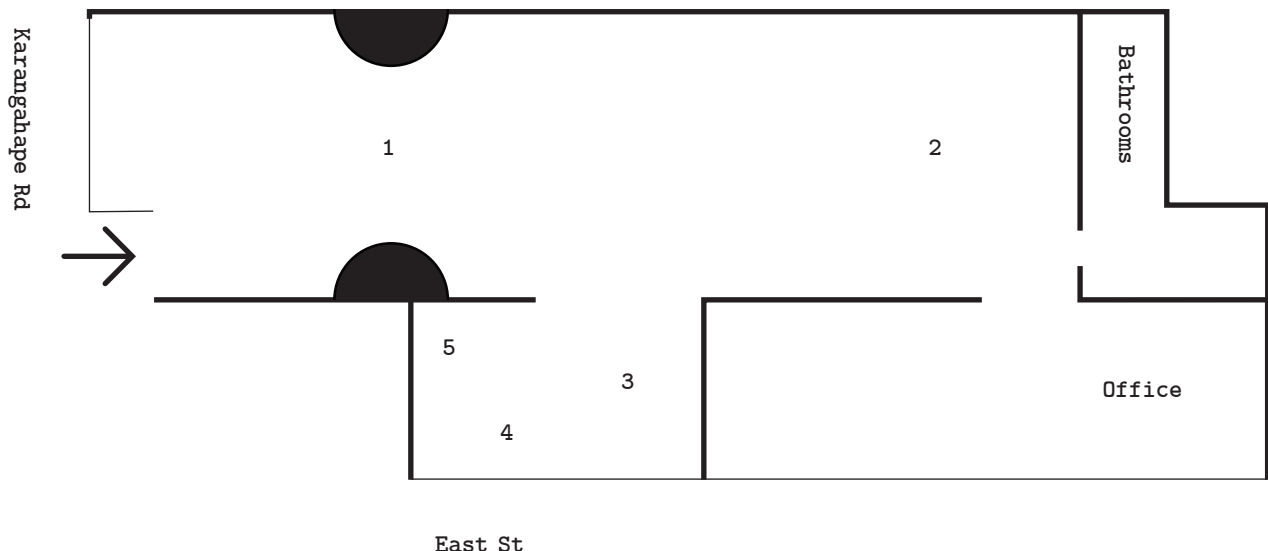
VHS transferred to data, colour, no sound, 3'52" looped.

This VHS recording consists of material inadvertently layered over one another in 1998. It contains fragments of a nature documentary about animal navigation, footage documenting Selina Ershadi's return to Tehran with her mother and sister, and a sequence of heavy snowfall in Tehran. Ershadi has worked with this material previously, underscoring her ongoing exploration of personal archive material. Courtesy the artist.

5.

## Reading materials

Reading and writing as active processes are central to Selina Ershadi's practice. The selection of key texts will rotate throughout the exhibitions' duration, providing insight into the thinking behind *The Blue Dome*. By drawing our attention to the role of source material and its status within her practice, Ershadi encourages audiences as readers to spend time with the excerpt and fragment. Courtesy the artist.



Selina Ershadi is an Iranian-born, Aotearoa based artist who works across filmmaking and writing, drawing upon personal and familial histories and archives. Ershadi's work complicates straight-forward autobiography and troubles the camera's relationship to lived reality, making visible the risks and failures that haunt any act of documenting. Her film *Amator* (2019), co-made with her mother Azita Chegini, is the first Farsi language artwork in the Te Papa Tongawera collection. Ershadi's work has been exhibited widely including Bangkok Experimental Film Festival, Te Pātaka Toi Adam Art Gallery, The Physics Room, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, and the 2025 BFI London Film Festival.

## Events

Friday 1 May, 6pm–8pm  
Open late

Sunday 3 May, 11:30am  
Curator's tour at Aotearoa Art Fair

Sunday 3 May 1:30pm  
So you Think you Know About  
Art? Quiz at Aotearoa Art Fair

Friday 8 May, 10am–4pm  
In Focus: The image that moves  
me with Selina Ershadi and Nova  
Paul

Saturday 9 May, 2pm  
Kaitohu Director's Exhibition tour

Thursday 4 June, 6pm  
Deep dive: Lecture by Mahdis  
Azarmandi

Saturday 13 June, 12pm–4pm  
Pinhole camera workshop

Thursday 25 June, 6pm–8pm  
Film screening of fugue notes

Thursday 2 July, 6pm  
Evacuation Tapes, a reading by  
Ruth Buchanan

To learn more about these events, visit  
[artspace-aotearoa.nz](http://artspace-aotearoa.nz)

To request a tour for your group contact  
[info@artspace.org.nz](mailto:info@artspace.org.nz)

## Acknowledgements

This exhibition is presented in association with Nottingham Contemporary and Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art. Artspace Aotearoa extends deep gratitude to Selina Ershadi for her generous engagement with the making of this exhibition. Many thanks for the support to this kaupapa provided by Ruth McDougall and Salma Tuqan. The artist acknowledges the support of the Creative New Zealand Creative Fellowship Fund and wishes to thank Aghdas Chegini, Azita Chegini, Maryam Chegini, Nastaran Moghadam, Parisa Chegini, Zari Chegini, and Sara Ershadi. Many thanks to our production crew: James Duncan, Brad Heappey, HIT, Andreas Muller, Grant Priest, Zak McNeil, Simon Lear of Bsound, Frances Libeau, Makeshop, Gus Fisher Gallery, and Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery. This exhibition is made possible through the generous contributions of our Supporters Circles. Thanks to our hospitality partners ParrotDog, Everyday Wine, and Karama Drinks. Thank you to our lead partners Creative New Zealand Toi o Aotearoa and Auckland Council. Mauri ora!

To support our work and enjoy additional events consider joining a Supporters Circle. To learn more about this programme, visit [artspace-aotearoa.nz/tautoko](http://artspace-aotearoa.nz/tautoko)

The annual question  
Which history?

Each year Artspace Aotearoa sets one question which our exhibitions and events orbit in the company of artists and audiences. Across the year, we explore what this question offers us and what artworks and their authors can weave together. In 2026, we ask “which history?”

In her essay “Twitch” Tina Makereti begins with an early childhood memory, where questions about “where do I come from?” lead her to go out into the dark night with her father and study the moon. Folding this memory into her now decades of lived experience she clarifies the consideration: “The internal world: the external world. How do we know our place in the universe?”<sup>1</sup> She answers this question with the word *whakapapa*. The essay goes on to unfold *whakapapa* as a practical, poetic, and embodied framework to consider and equally discover ourselves in the world. This unfolding of *whakapapa* enlivens a sense of time—and therefore also history—as something that does not happen to us, but something we are braided into as co-creators. In this paradigm we are both receptacles and actors who move within an arena. *Whakapapa* provides a dynamic and Aotearoa-specific lens to consider this toggling between actor and receptacle within society. This toggling activates the consideration: how can I act fully toward my place in time? How can I act in lively conversation with history?

<sup>1</sup> Tina Makereti. “Twitch”, *This Compulsion in Us*. (Te Herenga Waka Press, 2025), pg 57.

Being ‘in time’ in the embodied way that *whakapapa* encourages is also a way of describing context. That is to say, what are the circumstances that impact the environment in which I find myself and my capacity to understand that? As a leading forum and platform for contemporary art, Artspace Aotearoa must necessarily scrutinise its own context, the arena and the frameworks in which it operates. Since 2023 we have approached one question at a time to do this, drawing a line between the work we do, artists who inspire, artworks that catalyse, and the world in which we live. So far we have probed three areas of life: body, territory, and language. Each of these areas came with their own conventions and boundaries that encircle much of daily life: assumptions around private and public space, division of labour, and which words are used where. These very same conventions, established over time and through repetition, play a significant role in our individual capacity to participate in our context.

These conventions are deeply bound to and informed by history. They span the *what*, *how*, and *who* of documenting and sharing ritual, experiences, and lives. In asking “which history?” we test history as an open form, insisting—like many other forms—that it is malleable, with multiple versions, available for interrogation by artists, writers, critical thinkers, and indeed, our organisation. After all, nothing is ever really closed, not even history. Our programme approaches the paradox of history: the certain value of standardised operations and methods within Western frameworks

at the same time as exploring the friction, the jouissance, that the expanding of tones and tenors, bring to bear. In the 2026 programme we tackle Indigenous sovereignty and the colonial experience; so-called minor histories; art education—arguably the crucible of the contemporary art context and perspectives from emergent artists working in Tāmaki Makaurau today. Across 2026, we also consider the organisation’s legacy and the metaphorical and physical ways we can reconsider our own standards of behaviour.

At the heart of Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide’s November 2025 lecture *That Time You Were Not There*<sup>2</sup> was that as artists, curators, writers, and other engaged society members it is essential to understand that “our horizon is not the institution. It is elsewhere, and otherwise.” Implied in the consideration of “which history?” is a sister question that expands the horizon, bends it ever so slightly: “which future?” Through an intergenerational programme of activity that includes painting, performance, film, sculpture, workshops, tours, symposium, and much more, we scratch into both sides of the temporal coin, seeking out continuity rather than fragmentation.

If the Artspace Aotearoa mission is to explore contemporary life, led by artists, it feels timely in a world characterised by tumult and an ever flattening of nuance to look at how

we got here. The 2026 programme invites audiences to engage through a holistic lens that includes the deep ungraspable time of spiralling whakapapa, that moon gazed at by a young child, our current moment, and where we see ourselves tomorrow and beyond. In asking “which history?” Artspace Aotearoa casts out a hopeful call to the endless possibility for the critical and creative imagination to play an essential role in shaping what comes next.

Kaitohu Director, Ruth Buchanan  
January 2026

## Bibliography

Rachel Buchanan. *Te Motonui Epa* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2022).

Annie Ernaux. *The Years* (London: Fitzcolorado, 2018).

Carl Mika. *Indigenous Education and the Metaphysics of Presence: A Worlded Philosophy* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2017).

Diane di Prima. *Revolutionary Letters*. (London: Silver Press, 2021).

<sup>2</sup> This lecture was held at Artspace Aotearoa as part of the Creative New Zealand Toi o Aotearoa Te Manu Ka Tau International Visitors Programme.

Each year Artspace Aotearoa asks one question. Across the year, this question is explored by artworks, artists, and audiences. In 2026, we ask, “which history?” You can think of our annual exhibition programme as a connected inquiry, in four parts and with many possible answers. Join us.

2026

Which history?