

Paintings around New York get people talking about fairness in the world

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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NEW YORK, N.Y. — A painting on the side of a building shows a woman wearing a head scarf. On another building, a flock of birds breaks free. In a different part of the city, a teal gazelle is painted against a black background. The picture also shows bare trees and a peacock feather.

They are among about a half-dozen large paintings in New York City and Jersey City, New Jersey. The paintings draw attention to reporter Maziar Bahari and the group he began.

Bahari spent 118 days in jail in Iran. He was charged with spying after he appeared on "The Daily Show with Jon Stewart," a United States television show.

Emphasizing Freedoms

Bahari's story was told in Stewart's film "Rosewater." Bahari's group is called Not A Crime. The group wants Iran to let newspapers publish freely. Iran's government is anti-Western and does not allow freedom of speech. Newspapers cannot print news against the government, Islam and other matters.

It also wants the Iranian government to let Baha'i students attend universities. Baha'i is a religion. Baha'is believe in one God. They emphasize that humans are equal and that differences among them should be welcomed.

Bahari hopes world leaders will pay attention to the art. Presidents and prime ministers will be in New York in September for the United Nations General Assembly, the world government body. He hopes the art will lead them to talk about human rights.

Reporters Risk Being Sent To Jail

Bahari was working for Newsweek magazine in Iran in 2009. Iranian soldiers took him from his mother's home in Tehran, the capital of the Middle Eastern country. He was charged with spying. The charges were based on a video of him joking on the "Daily Show" about being a spy. In jail, he was beaten, kept in a cell by himself and treated very badly, he said.

Bahari was released and he left the country. He later was sentenced to more than 13 years in prison. The charges included spreading false information about Iran, collecting secret documents and insulting Iran's supreme leader.

Iran has put 30 journalists in prison. It is second only to China in jailing reporters, says the Committee to Protect Journalists. Cases like those of Bahari and Jason Rezaian have brought attention to the problem. Rezaian is a Washington Post reporter who has been held in an Iranian prison for more than a year on spy charges.

Each Picture Has A Story

The woman in the wall painting is named Atena Farghadani. She is an artist serving a 12-year sentence in Iran. She created a cartoon that criticized a law. The painting, created by artist Faith47, shows her without a mouth.

Another artist, Ron English, is painting a picture of a large, official-looking warning. It will say that photography is not permitted.

Street art gets people's attention he said.

Argentine artist Marina Zumi painted the gazelle. She said she hopes the painting will lead people to talk about social justice and fairness.

Parris Douglas was walking by and went to look at the gazelle Zumi was painting. He asked her what it was about.

"I feel like this is liberating," he said. "It's the fact we're allowed to express how we feel with anyone saying or telling us what we can and can't do."