

## UC San Diego Engineering Professor and Wife Boost the Arts on Campus with \$1 Million Gift

**Honoring Professor Sia Nemat-Nasser's mother, a well-known actor in Iran, the gift will fund the exploration of Persian arts and culture**

UC San Diego Distinguished Professor of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering Siavouche "Sia" Nemat-Nasser and his wife, Éva, recently gave the arts on campus a boost with their \$1 million gift to the Division of Arts and Humanities.

The couple's contribution established the *Roghieh Chehre-Azad Distinguished Professorship*, created to foster new projects and future scholarly works that explore the music, art, literature and history of Persian culture. The fund memorializes Nemat-Nasser's mother, "Chehre-Azad," who pursued her passion of acting at great personal risk when women performing on stage in Iran was taboo. Ultimately, her courage led to her repute as the "Mother of Theatre and Film," in Iran, culminating in her recognition as the best female actress of the year at the age of 80, according to her son.



*Sia Nemat-Nasser's mother, Roghieh Chehre-Azad.*

"The endowed chair will honor the memory of my mother, Roghieh Chehre-Azad—most notably her talented, courageous and astute efforts to defend the freedom and practice the beauty of the arts," explained Nemat-Nasser. "This prestigious award will assure a permanent, visible platform for sharing her dedication to acting in a time and place where a woman risked being stoned to death for appearing on stage."

According to UC San Diego's Dean of the Division of Arts and Humanities, the opportunity to expand one's horizons, to embrace different cultures and times through art is an invaluable experience for humanists and scientists alike.

“We are so grateful to Sia and Éva for their generous gift, and their understanding of the foundational role and enduring value of the Humanities in a STEM-rich campus,” said Della Coletta. “Sia and Éva’s gift will play an important role in our students’ growth as global citizens and well-rounded contributors to the common good.”

Nemat-Nassar shared that a few years ago his wife encouraged him to attend a theatrical production of the “Scarlet Stone,” which revolves around one of the most important mythical stories of a thousand-year-old epic poem, the “Shahnameh.” It is a story about a father and son, both mythic warriors, who unexpectedly meet on the battlefield without recognizing each other. Written by Hakim Abu ’I-Qasim Ferdowsi between the ninth and tenth centuries CE, the Shahnameh is believed to have saved the Persian language and culture after the Islamic takeover of Iran. Seeing it performed awakened something within Nemat-Nassar that ultimately led the engineer to give a million-dollar gift in support of the arts at UC San Diego.

“I am pleased to be able to give back to the university and support work that my mother would have enjoyed,” he said.

Sia Nemat-Nasser, who was born and grew up in Iran and attended undergraduate and graduate school in California, originally joined UC San Diego’s faculty in 1966. He is currently the director of the Center of Excellence for Advanced Materials. His research includes micromechanical and constitutive modeling of nonlinear response and failure modes; analytic and computational mechanics; static and dynamic experimental characterization of materials; advanced metallic and polymeric composites, and high-strength alloys, as well as rocks and geomaterials.

The [UC San Diego Division of Arts and Humanities](#)—comprised of the departments of history, literature, music, philosophy, theatre and dance, and visual arts—is listed among the top 23 globally, according to [U.S. News and World Report](#).

Keep up with campus news by subscribing to *This Week @ UC San Diego*