Gender and Exposure in Contemporary Iranian Photography

Samira Eskandarfar
Amirali Ghasemi
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CURATED BY ANDREA FITZPATRICK

MAY 4 TO JUNE 16 2012

G44 CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

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GALLERY HOURS
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11 am to 5 pm

cover
(FRONT) SADEGH TIRAFKAN, from the *Zoorkhaneh* series, 70 x 100 cm, 2003-2004

(BACK) ZEINAB SALARVAND, *Google Maps series* (detail), 50 x 36 cm colour photograph, 2008 (Text reads: Shari'ati St. – Taleqani St. / Female: 23 years old – Single – Photographer)

> ABBAS KOWSARI, *Tehran Police Academy series, No.* 10, colour photograph, 70 x 105 cm, 2006

GALLERY 44 *CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY* is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to photography as a multi-faceted and ever-changing artform. Founded in 1979 to establish a supportive environment for the development of photography, Gallery 44's mandate is to provide a context for reflection and dialogue on contemporary photography and its related practices. Gallery 44 offers exhibition and publication opportunities to national and international artists, award-winning education programs, and affordable production facilities for artists. Through its programs, Gallery 44 is engaged in changing conceptions of the photographic image and its modes of production.

GALLERY 44 acknowledges the Exhibition Programming Committee: Lise Beaudry, Elisa Coish, Dianne Davis, Alice Dixon, Colwyn Griffith, Alex Kisilevich, Isabel M. Martínez.

ANDREA FITZPATRICK would like to thank the Javaheri family (Setareh, Saleh, Siamak, Ivan, and Ahmed) of Ottawa and Tehran, for their generosity and hospitality. I would also like to thank Amir Mahmoodi and Farzeneh Abrahimian for providing guidance through Tehran's cultural sites.

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It is our great pleasure to present *Gender and Exposure in Contemporary Iranian Photography* as part of Gallery 44's program of exhibitions. The exhibition has been curated by Andrea Fitzpatrick whose interest in Iranian lens-based artists has grown from an initial curiosity into extensive academic research. Previously specializing in contemporary western photography, Fitzpatrick developed a passionate interest in work by artists from the Middle East and in creating space where their voices could be heard within the dominant discourse on contemporary art.

For this exhibition, she chose the works of Iranian artists Samira Eskandarfar, Amirali Ghasemi, Abbas Kowsari, Zeinab Salarvand, Arman Stepanian, and Sadegh Tirafkan, all of whom live and work in Tehran. The curator's focus on exposure of gendered bodies in Iran includes images that express the wit, elegance and sensitivity of the culture, and the individuality of the artists. Gallery 44 hopes that this exhibition will be a process of discovery for the viewer, and an exploration of artmaking as an increasingly important tool in social and political engagement.

We are grateful to the many people who have supported this exhibition starting with Taimaz Moslemian, an artist and board member of Gallery 44 who has secured donations from local Iranian business leaders to help bring some of the artists and their work to Toronto. Thank you to Jubin Asgarian of Caspian Travel & Tours, Moe Rahimian of Desjardins Financial Security, and Shahrvand Publications for its media sponsorship. We also thank Mani Mazinani from Parya, a community centre for Iranian-Canadians in the GTA.

We warmly acknowledge each of the participating artists for sharing unflinching viewpoints through their impressive bodies of work. We also give special thanks to Andrea Fitzpatrick for her thoughtful curation and tireless efforts in bringing this work to Canadian audiences.

Gallery 44 is deeply appreciative of the generous financial support of our funders, The Canada Council for the Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, and the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council.

LISE BEAUDRY, *Director*
ALICE DIXON, *Exhibition Coordinator*

Tavanir- Nezami Ganjavi St.

توانیر_ خ نظامی‌گنجوی

Male- 24 years old- Single- Soldier

مرد_ ۲۴ساله_ مجرد_ سرباز

ZEINAB SALARVAND,
Google Maps series,
50 x 36 cm colour
photograph, 2008

GENDER AND EXPOSURE IN CONTEMPORARY IRANIAN PHOTOGRAPHY

by ANDREA FITZPATRICK
Ph.D., Department of Visual Arts, University of Ottawa

The distance between Western news stories about Iran and the alternative realities disseminated by diasporic Iranian writers had been fuelling my interest for years. For me, and millions internationally, some best-selling memoirs by female authors "lifted a veil" (so to speak) of ignorance about Iran and the situation of women, intellectuals, and artists there, before and after the Revolution of 1979. Encouraging this awareness were my Canadian-Iranian friends who have a love of dancing, traditional music, poetry, and delicious food, and who implored me to "visit Iran!" The dream became a plan after my discovery that Iran was the first Middle-Eastern country to support photography and photographic artists locally (rather than as colonial tourists), and that Iran has a rich history of photographic portraiture, revolutionary and war photography, and contemporary lens-based art.[1] Rose Issa's book *Iranian Photography Now* (published in 2008) overturned the fact that previously Shirin Neshat was the only Iranian photographic artist whose name came readily to mind. A visa application was made and granted, thus allowing me to visit Tehran for a glorious month during the summer of 2010. There, a network of friends and contacts made it possible for me to meet some of Iran's greatest photographic artists, researchers, and gallerists. *Gender and Exposure*—the first exhibition of its kind in Canada—is the result of the collaboration of Iranian artists who so generously shared their work, as well as the inspired Canadian artists at Gallery 44.

In an attempt to advance the issues that have preoccupied the discourses of Middle Eastern art for the last decade (namely: femininity, the veil, gender inequity, Islamic religious traditions, the calligraphic impulse, and revolutionary violence), this exhibition addresses the occlusion of some—and alternatively, the exposure of other—gendered bodies in Iranian lens-based art. Gender is viewed here not as a singular or monolithic concept, but as a spectrum of possible identifications with and responses to culturally imposed norms, which involve local, national, and transnational images and ideals, and produce shifting and hybrid identities. The chosen artists (who range from emerging to senior, and who all live and work in Iran) shift the emphases to: masculinity as well as femininity; female agency and deft political critique; secular activities (for example, café culture or amateur athletics); Persian traditions; and a focus on the situation of Iran in particular (rather than a survey that would also include the Arab cultures and concerns of a larger spectrum of the Middle East and North Africa). *Gender and Exposure* contributes to the many international projects of cultural exchange with Iranian artists already taking place in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates. Exhibitions are, of course, a dynamic and invaluable means of working around the situation of frozen international diplomacy, and to enable dialogue between communities, artists, and other cultural professionals.

The pervasive scrutiny of all cultural creations, journalistic output, and media representations is a reality affecting many aspects of creative and intellectual life in Iran, as well as in many other countries. It is an issue that affects the choice of artworks for the present exhibition and the writing of this essay. As ironic and comedic as this may sound—an exhibition attempting to address issues that should

ARMAN STEPANIAN,
The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran (Sohrab), colour photograph, 100 x 70 cm, 2011

not be named or shown directly—I persist, partly out of immense admiration for the Iranian artists and writers who have already achieved fluency in these visual and written languages of layering, ambiguity, and subtlety (involving poetry, metaphor, allegory, abstraction, and at times caricature). I have tried to learn the rules, speak in code, bite my tongue, and censor the self. Aside from some compelling ideological issues that must be negotiated, and a few professional and political agendas that have had to be abandoned, it is not altogether difficult. Such modes of communication have been in development in Iran not only since 1979, but also in previous centuries and other countries (think, for example, of Molière, Rabelais, Hogarth, Goya, Daumier, and Eisenstein). Rather than an explicit articulation of information and critical viewpoints (as is usually the Anglo-American approach),

ARMAN STEPANIAN,
The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran (Nazanin 1), colour photograph, 100 x 70 cm, 2010

here I offer some allusions and sketched details. Despite some frustrating but necessary ellipses, I trust that the visitor's prior knowledge of world news and history, in addition to her or his imagination and visual literacy, will allow ideas and opinions to emerge. I invite the viewer and reader to contemplate who and what is not named and shown as much as who and what is shown.

This involves a slightly different way of viewing and reading art for those familiar with European or Anglo-American paradigms of transgressive gesture, explicit imagery, and other expressive hyperbole. As Rose Issa so eloquently proposes: "Although poetry is traditionally the principle means of artistic expression in Iran, photographers here have now transformed the medium into the poetics of the image. [...] It is also a country in which people communicate mostly with

ARMAN STEPANIAN,
The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran (Anahita),
colour photograph,
100 x 70 cm, 2011

ARMAN STEPANIAN,
The Hidden Meaning of Photography in Iran (Nazli),
colour photograph,
100 x 70 cm, 2010

their eyes, which express what society prevents from being written or spoken. This language of the eyes is highly developed and sophisticated, and photography is now its tool."[2]

A degree of clarity may thus be lacking in the curatorial presentation of the exhibition, partly due to my inexperience writing in these unfamiliar conditions (where no guide book or manual exists). The stakes are high, the challenges daunting and most often unforeseen, and at every turn there seem to be compromises and sacrifices, never in terms of ethical imperatives or quality, but of chosen agendas and stated allegiances. Nonetheless, the rewards glimmer and suggest that the effort is worthwhile. While the prohibition of any political critique, sexualized images of women, and subjects deemed "un-Islamic" has been synonymous with oppression, it has also produced nuanced artistic strategies involving: metaphor and allegory; the blurring of boundaries between staged fiction and documentary evidence; recourse to the enchantment of everyday life as subject matter; and the visual styles of fashion, advertising, and graphic design. Rather than speaking decisively, the artworks convey ambiguous, ambivalent, or coded messages, which will, however, leave strong impressions (some of them unintended) due to their sophisticated (even seductive) aesthetics.

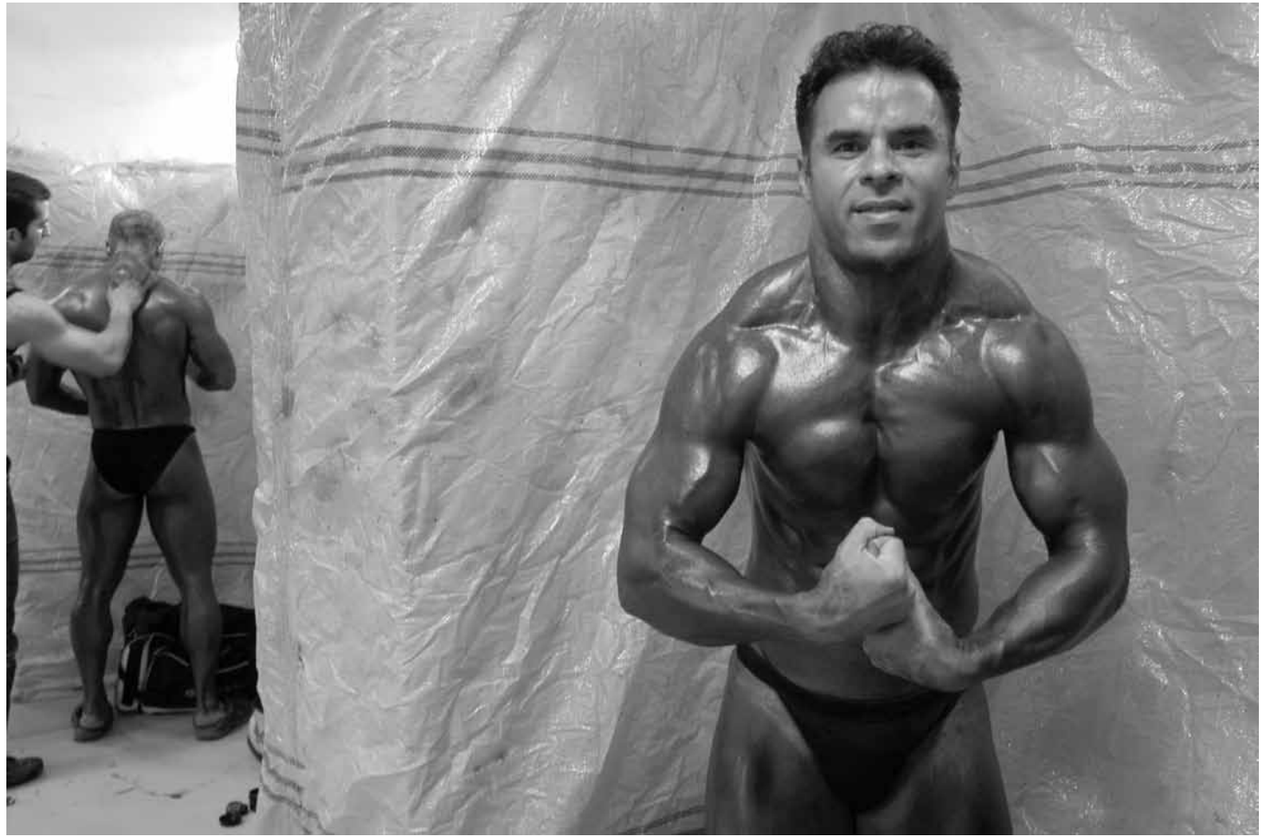
The different understandings of the artworks from perspectives inside and outside of Iran make the viewing of Iranian art equally challenging and rewarding. Yet, while exploring these interrelated issues of gender, agency, and exposure, is it possible to achieve a dialogue with international art audiences while respecting Iranian cultural specificity? The exhibition *Gender and Exposure*, with a theme distinct from but nevertheless complimentary to the exhibition *Ciphers: Tension with Tradition in Contemporary Iranian Photography*, launching simultaneously in Ottawa at the artist-run centre SAW Gallery, attempts

to meet these challenges by presenting to Canadian audiences some of Iran's most celebrated lens-based artists, whose work (with the exception of Sadegh Tirafkan's) has never before been shown in Canada. New insights and old assumptions are revealed not only about Iranian culture(s), but also about Canadian and North American culture(s).

ARMAN STEPANIAN (b. 1956) creates poetic images by using symbolic objects that resonate with cultural associations, but remain ambiguous. The contentious place of photography in Iran today is referenced by Stepanian by including the Farsi word for photography (*aks*) written in red or green neon calligraphy in studio works staged with models and props. The transparent veils emerge as metaphors for what can be simultaneously revealed and hidden. In *Anahita*, one sees masculinity (or the patriarchy) weighing down on femininity; the protective (or oppressive) wisdom of age against the optimism of youth; the emergence of a new generation and a symbol of mourning and death. These competing associations hover around Stepanian's image, but remain ambiguous.

One of Stepanian's most daring works depicts the rooftop of an apartment building where disconnected satellite dishes—a dinosaur of the pre-Revolutionary era—lie rusty with age and disuse. While digital satellite channels are common in Iran, they are frequently scrambled. Superimposed on these beckoning discs (like flowers offering the impossible promise of unfettered global media access) are photographic fragments of the watchful eyes of various men who work in artistic professions (including the artist). These ciphers of the male gaze comprise an uncanny garden of disembodied looks that surveil the scene. Against these Orwellian eyes, lounges a young women whose short dress exposes her legs, transgressing the dress code for women in Iran. The woman's eyes are covered by a digitally-superimposed black

SADEGH TIRAFKAN, from the *Zoorkhaneh* series, 70 x 100 cm, 2003-2004



ABBAS KOWSARI, *Masculinity A series, No. 3*, colour photograph, 70 x 105 cm, 2006

band. Who can see and be seen, and what can be shown and transmitted across national borders are all at stake.

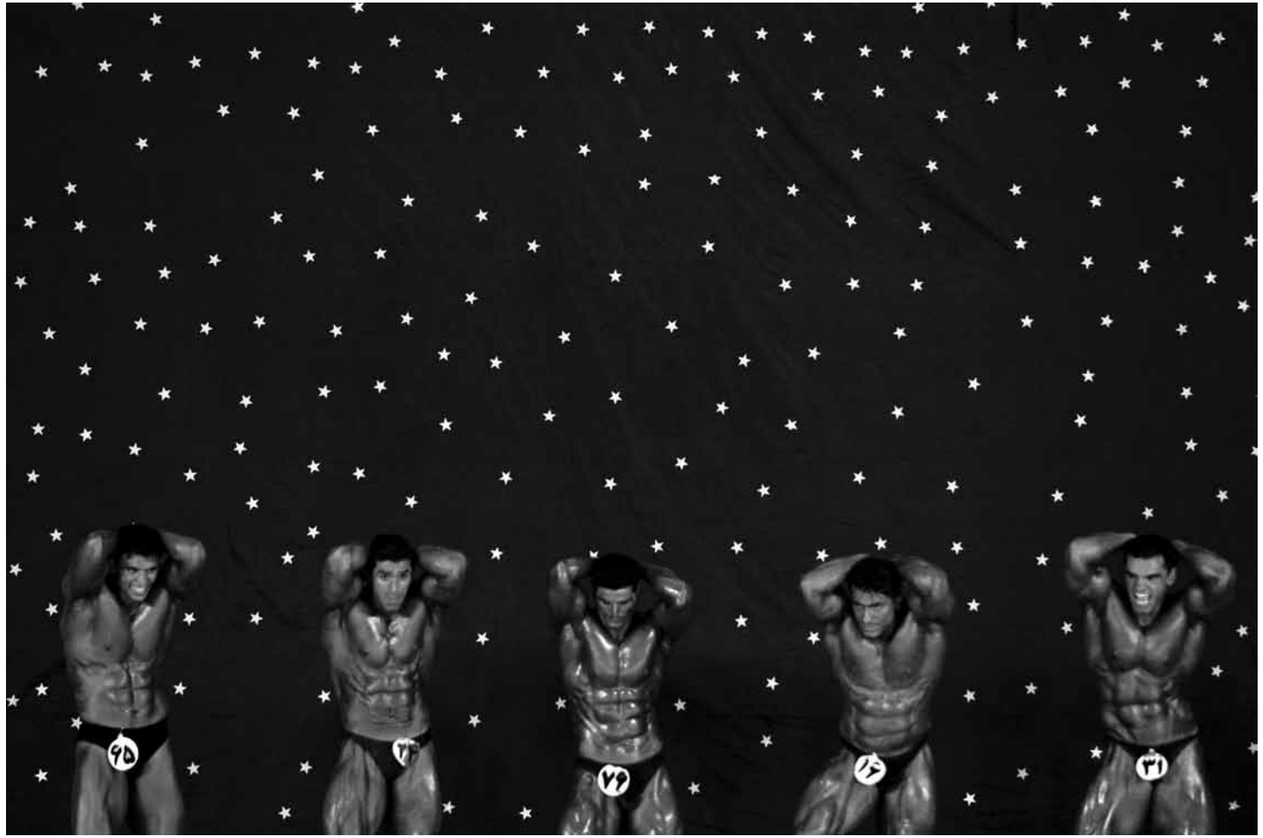
The birdcage in *Nazli* can be read as a cross-cultural and centuries-old metaphor for female coming-of-age. It also suggests imprisonment. To this, Stepanian introduces a standing woman who wears a black dress (which she raises to expose naked legs) and a black veil (which is lowered to cover her face). Her gestures are both demure and assertive. The green neon *Aks* sign is dusted with oak leaves. Projected on the wall is a photograph of an unveiled Armenian girl from Stepanian's collection of vintage Qajar-era photographs. The Armenian community in Iran is a religious minority of Christians with a tradition of educating girls in the early twentieth century, in contrast to the Qajars, who did not. Stepanian's apparent concern for female literacy and freedom continues with *Sohrab*, where a woman perched on a chair affixed to the studio wall (suspended like a living painting) reads a book behind a white veil and under a green light bulb. Does the name *Sohrab* refer to Sohrab Sepehri, the great modern poet of love and painterly verse? Or does it refer to the heroic but tragic Sohrab of Firdawsi's epic poem *Shahnama* (the Persian *Book of Kings*) completed one millennium ago? In either case, the woman has an intellectual life that is private and uncensored.

Shabnam pairs a young woman wearing jeans and a tank top (modern clothes for indoor life) with a Persian carpet, emblem of the continued reverence for cultural tradition. The glow of the red neon *aks* sign infuses the image and suggests how photography, a newer digital technology, is in tension with a sacred craft that seems to symbolically knot together a nation's history against various contemporary rifts and upheavals. But what of the awkward place of women within Stepanian's staged scenarios? Do his images imply the immobility of pedestal-reverence accorded to iconic female subjects like Christianity's Saint Mary, who has also been represented

by Stepanian, or quiet, unleashed agency? Some of Stepanian's models are emerging photographic artists. Stepanian's ruse of images of young, attractive women does not necessarily return us to a retrograde masculinist prerogative of female submission to the male gaze, but calls for freedoms of all kind, and a recognition that some of these have already been claimed by women, or are active sites of struggle.

SADEGH TIRAFKAN (b. 1965) is an internationally-acclaimed artist who has been exhibiting photography, videos, and conceptual sculptures exploring issues of Iranian identity for nearly twenty-five years. His focus on masculinity (and its dignification and heroization in Iran's patriarchal culture) in tension with his critique of the violence that forms a leitmotif of Iranian cultural history is achieved by him in many related series. Tirafkan's *Zoorkhaneh* series (2003-2004) represents members of the traditional sports clubs who practice centuries-old techniques of wrestling, fitness of mind and body, and weight training. Tirafkan decontextualizes the men from the richly cacophonous environments (involving unique circular architecture with training pits and decorative tiles, large mirrors, and pictures of Imams for inspiration), which so closely define their activities. Studio portraits of *zoorkhaneh* wrestlers are abundant in the history of Iranian photography, and many exist in the royal collection of the Naser al-din Shah (who ruled from 1848-1896). Tirafkan's white studio setting removes his subjects from the traditions specific to Iran, and links them to an international fashion and art paradigm (emblematic of the portraits of Richard Avedon, for example), which holds the photographed subject up for visual (and possibly ethnographic) speculation, and delectation.[3] Nudity in Iran of the male body is still rather taboo. In Tirafkan's unflinching scrutiny, issues of fraternity, normative masculinity, and a national identity are brought to the forefront, as are

ABBAS KOWSARI, *Masculinity A series, No. 1*, colour photograph, 70 x 105 cm, 2006



AMIRALI GHASEMI, *Coffee Shop Ladies, No. 7*, digitally altered colour photograph, 50 x 70 cm, 2004-2005

issues of exoticism or eroticism, depending on one's perspective.

The two series of photographs by ABBAS KOWSARI (b. 1970) chosen for Gallery 44 can both be described as depicting "Iranian society's absurdities [...]."[4] Unlike an earlier series depicting bodybuilders in which Kowsari included the gawking male audience members at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran where a competition was being held, in his *Masculinity A* series (2006), he focuses only on the overblown, steroidal bodybuilders themselves, behind the scenes and on stage. These colourful works suggest the denaturalization of the traditional Iranian male body (excessively chiselled muscles and superhero proportions are waxed and tanned with makeup) in favour of a globalized homogenized masculinity whose ideals reflect commercial magazines and televised competitions. Kowsari's humorous study of hyperbolic masculinity captures the slide from the cosmetically artificial to the culturally shallow, and thus becomes an allegory for the evacuation of moral qualities associated with traditional Iranian masculinity (such as dignity, integrity, and restraint, etc. . .) in lieu of Western style excess, competitive individualism, and celebrity. While Tirafkan's strong men are staged and sublimated by their classic poses into a timeless frozen existence, Kowsari's bodybuilders are both Herculean and human, shown on stage grimacing with adrenaline, as well as backstage in intimate moments applying makeup and flexing for the artist.

Kowsari's *Tehran Police Academy* (2006) series started as a work of photojournalism capturing the staged-for-media techniques mastered by the first batch of female graduates of a municipal initiative to integrate women into the police force.[5] This stern army of chador-clad women may rekindle fears and fantasies of the Revolutionary era, however, their work is to surveil the *hijab* infractions of women on the streets, and is thus aligned with

AMIRALI GHASEMI, *Coffee Shop Ladies, No. 2*, digitally altered colour photograph, 50 x 70 cm, 2004-2005

mundane, conservative interpretations of Islamic morality. In a country where female rebellion can be expressed by a few too many inches of skin emerging from layers of clothing, these police women—from a Western perspective at least—may be seen to constrict the personal freedoms of others. With *Tehran Police Academy*, the ideological imperatives directed at women in the Islamic Republic are revealed with terrifying clarity, but in a reversal from the West, where often the expectations for women are that they be exposed, sexualized, and passively embodied objects. The Tehran police women are a neo-Revolutionary fantasy dreamt up by the regime: fully covered and militantly poised to act as dark angels of retribution.

The series AMIRALI GHASEMI (b. 1980) calls *Coffee Shop Ladies* (2004-2005) represents—with a degree of nostalgia—a now bygone era, which involved a slight relaxing of cultural norms within the country, attempts towards political diplomacy with the international community, and the emergence of a major population ("the third generation") of educated, Internet-savvy, middle and upper middle class urban youth. Most women of this generation do not wear the religiously conservative black chador, but the *manteau*, a short chic coat paired with jeans and coloured headscarves.

The social context of the coffee shop will be familiar to North Americans who enjoy the Starbucks phenomenon and their Wi-Fi-enabled spaces. As the artist points out, rather than being a recent phenomenon, "Coffee shops have a long history and tradition in Iran and have been originally a place for men to socialize."[6] Coffee shops in Iran are not about corporate homogeneity but are idiosyncratic, bohemian spaces (for music, literature, art, and conversation) to meet with friends and romantic potentials. They are thus liminal spaces, in between the public and the private, and a "safe" place for women to assert their autonomy. Ghasemi's stylized series aligns itself with the digitally-manipulated aesthetic of

advertising, as well as the "snapshot" look of Nan Goldin's portraits of her friends, but Ghasemi's is a more conceptual project due to his whiting out of the women's faces, which leads to nodes of critical debate.

While Ghasemi's intention, conscious of the Internet era where the (mis) appropriation of personal images is commonplace, was to protect the privacy of his female friends, the series resulted in contradictory interpretations from various audiences. Ghasemi writes: "Inside Iran there were two groups. One of them was thinking of me as a person fighting for women's rights and trying to portray the repressed by giving them a voice. On the other side were people criticizing me, [asking] why did you *white out* the faces of women, and why are you *censoring* them, you are a male artist."[7] Ghasemi also notes how a German curator read the series as a statement about the "state of repression of women and censorship," while in an American context, the series was viewed as a "happy and very positive image of Iran" that could help in "mutual understanding."[8]

The fine line between censorship and the desire for the protection of various groups in society from a perceived discursive threat is precisely what is manipulated for strategic purposes in political ideologies. Ghasemi is fully aware of the problem, from many angles: "[…] they are interpreted very differently and associated with subjects such as censorship, women's rights, the *hijab*, and Islam."[9] He has also taken steps to address it. The interactive computer module that compliments the series offers the women's individually inflected voices and micro-narratives that offset the anonymity and the silence of the photographs. It also functions by the interactive curiosity of the gallery visitor, who can pass the mouse over the faces of the women, and hear and read their stories, which are not scripted or profound, but recordings of the women's voices taken from everyday conversations about personal concerns. It is precisely their banality that offers a welcome respite from the news stories of political drama and violence that are so often written about Iran. The unforgettable videos of SAMIRA ESKANDARFAR (b. 1980), *A Dowry for Mahrou* (2006) and *Inside a Room* (2006), are

SAMIRA ESKANDARFAR,
still from *A Dowry for Mahrou*,
video, 2006

SAMIRA ESKANDARFAR,
still from *Inside a Room*,
video, 2006

the result of workshops completed with Abbas Kiarostami, the most internationally recognized of all the filmmakers working in Iran today. Unlike Kiarostami, who is famous for extending time, Eskandarfar speeds up the tempo, as well as the music of Philip Glass, to a robotic effect punctuated by moments when ritual events are slowed to a trancelike state. The ethereal climax of *A Dowry for Mahrou* is the unveiling of the heavily made-up but still childish face of the bride, at which point Eskandarfar reveals her age—thirteen—by typing it out in Farsi and in English across the screen. For a non-Iranian viewer, cultural shock finds its *punctum* with this revelation, which is made more complicated by its visual pleasure. The issue of moral judgment lingers. What may come as a surprise to non-Iranians, and possibly reveal hidden Orientalist stereotypes, is that a sense of cultural difference and judgment may be present for Tehran viewers as well. This is a scene from a small village near the city of Hamadan and may evoke a sense of exoticism, provincialism, or opposition. Yet, despite the fact that the bride is melancholic, it is not an unhappy scene. Nor is it a haraam where the presence of beautiful women is for male pleasure, but a female-only space involving generations of mothers, daughters, and relatives who applaud the bride's rite of passage.

Eskandarfar's *Inside a Room* presents an intimate glimpse into the life of Bahareh, a severely disabled woman whose condition is revealed to be the result of institutional medical neglect. The scene is troubling in its contradictory nature: both haunting and endearing. While Bahareh clearly suffers being denied the ideals of female beauty (represented by the picture of the fashion model on the wall), she is not pathetic but full of charisma and vitality. She is also loved and cared for by her female relatives. By taking an ambivalent tone, Eskandarfar walks the fine line between fascination (whether prurient or celebratory) and critique.

Eskandarfar's *Breathing under Water* (2011) pairs video footage of fishmongers scaling and gutting fish with an evocative, harrowing image of a young woman inhaling and exhaling from within a plastic bag that covers her head. Eskandarfar's images of pathos and abjection, evisceration and suffocation are given an incongruent soundtrack fit for a cabaret or clown. Issues of representation are central: how to speak; how to show; how to be seen and heard. French theorist Luce Irigaray once imagined a new utopia for women and with it, a feminine syntax for speech, but questioned: "How [to] find a voice, make a choice strong enough, subtle enough to cut through all those layers of ornamental style, that decorative sepulcher, where even her breath is lost."[10] In Eskandarfar's nightmarish video collage, another question arises but seems to deflate in a chamber of distortions. How can one speak when there is no more oxygen in the room?

With her *Google Maps* series (2008), ZEINAB SALARVAND (b. 1984) suggests the possibility for the freedom of flight, perhaps not so much from the Tehran locations depicted in these aerial views, but from familiar representational perspectives. She juxtaposes intimate images of empty beds, the sheets still wrinkled with the imprint of their inhabitants' presence and relics of their private activities, with distant cityscapes captured by Google, whose

technology enables images that were previously restricted in Iran to military purposes. Text captions convey information about each individual not only in terms of gender, age, marital status, and occupation, but also in terms of the portrait subjects' addresses, which are identified along side the Tehran cross-streets depicted in the maps. Thus without recourse to names or faces, Salarvand achieves a portrait series that is extremely personal.

Some of the individuals' statistical information may surprise international audiences, and reveal non-traditional and egalitarian career opportunities for women and men in Iran, such as the husband and wife who are both civil engineers, and the newlywed couple comprised of a female karate instructor and male shopkeeper. Beds are the free spaces of dreams, love, conversations, confessions, and reading, activities that cannot be policed or coerced by any authority. Distinctions between near and far, private and public (a fundamental social distinction in Iran), are preserved but brought into poetic friction.

Salarvand's series *Hope for the Future: Contentment in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (2008) was created in response to a photography competition held by the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance to celebrate the thirty-year anniversary of the Revolution of 1979, which sent the Pahlavi Shah into exile and brought the Islamic Republic into existence. In each portrait, one sees that the woman is pregnant and that the expectant couples are either happy or concerned. Into what kind of future will these children be born? The belief that the nation will act as a benevolent and caring mother is a cross-cultural trope understood despite the differences of mother tongue, inflection, or accent. Salarvand invokes this maternal metaphor to suggest the prospects of the citizens of a proud nation. Exuberant symbols of nationalism (the flags and kitschy decorations) frame the expressions of the couples. In the end, Salarvand's irony was not appreciated by the evaluators and the series was rejected as inappropriate. These are not simply issues for Iran but for a global network of communities, whose interrelationships may yet hold "Hope for the Future." In the meantime, the capacity of Iranian artists to initiate cross-cultural dialogues and promote understanding holds certain promise.

ZEINAB SALARVAND, *Hope for the Future: Contentment in the Islamic Republic of Iran, No. 2*, colour photograph, 100 cm x 70 cm, 2008

1 As early as 1848, the Qajar Dynasty king, the Naser al-din Shah, became an amateur photographer and avid collector and patron. One of the best books in English on the history of photography in Iran is *Bahman Jalali*, ed. Catherine David (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 2007).

2 Rose Issa, ed. *Iranian Photography Now* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 10.

3 This tendency in Western art has been identified by Julian Stallabrass, "What's in a Face? Blankness and Significance in Contemporary Art Photography," MIT *Press Journals October* 122 (2007), 71-90.

4 Benjamin Genocchio, "Revolution's Long Shadow Over the Tehran Art Scene," *New York Times* on-line edition, March 30, 2011.

5 Samaneh Ghadarkhan, "Dragnet Tehran: These women are the law," with photographs by Abbas Kowsari in *Transit Tehran: young Iran and its inspirations*, eds. Malu Halasa and Maziar Bahari (Reading, UK: Garnet Publishing, 2009).

6 Amirali Ghasemi, transcript of public lecture delivered in Germany, e-mailed to author, August 16, 2010.

7 Ghasemi, transcript.

8 Ghasemi, transcript.

9 Ghasemi, artist's statement, Iranian Photography Now, ed. Rose Issa (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 60.

10 Luce Irigaray, "Any Theory of the 'Subject' Has Always Been Appropriated by the 'Masculine'," in *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell U.P. 1985 [1974]), 143.

SAMIRA ESKANDARFAR was born in Iran in 1980 and lives and works in Tehran. Between 1997 and 2001 she studied ceramic engineering before going on to study filmmaking and finally took an MA in animation. Since 2001, she has had over twelve solo exhibitions and has participated in over fifty group exhibitions and screenings in Tehran and internationally in the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Switzerland, Netherlands, Serbia, and Turkey. Since 2003, she has made over ten videos from which two of her works were purchased by major public collections, including the Tate Modern in London and Neuer Berliner Kunstverein (NBK) in Berlin.

AMIRALI GHASEMI was born in Tehran in 1980. He lives and works in Tehran. Ghasemi is a graphic artist, media artist, and one of the city's most active curators of emerging artists. He has travelled all over the world to speak about the young generation of Iranian artists, and to participate in and curate exhibitions of video, media, and photographic art. He holds a degree in graphic design from the Azad University, Tehran. He is the organizer of the Parking Gallery in Tehran, which provides an independent space for community dialogue about contemporary art.

ABBAS KOWSARI was born in Tehran in 1970. He lives and works in Tehran. Kowsari has been a photojournalist and a photo editor at Iranian newspapers since the early 1990s. For the past ten years, his independent photographic art projects have received significant attention from the international art world. He has exhibited his work in prestigious group exhibitions in Paris, Vienna, London, Los Angeles, New York, and Torino.

ZEINAB SALARVAND was born in Tehran in 1984. She lives and works in Tehran. Salarvand holds a BA in photography from the Art University of Tehran. In 2008, she won the top prize at the First International Photography Biennial of the Islamic World in Tehran. She has been included in group exhibitions at galleries in Tehran including the Aaran Gallery and the Igreg Gallery, as well as at the British Museum, London.

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ABBAS KOWSARI,
Tehran Police Academy series, No. 3, colour photograph, 105 x 70 cm, 2006

ABBAS KOWSARI,
Masculinity A series, No. 7, colour photograph, 105 x 70 cm, 2006

ARMAN STEPANIAN born in 1956 in Abadan, Iran, lives and works in Tehran. This Armenian-Iranian artist holds a BA in graphic design from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Tehran University. He has been included in many important Iranian biennial exhibitions since 1990, as well as international group exhibitions of Iranian photographic art held in New York, Paris, London, and other cities. He is one of Iran's significant researchers into the history of Iranian photography, and has published articles on Qajar-era photography (1848-1925).

SADEGH TIRAFKAN was born in Iraq in 1965 to Iranian parents, and has lived in Tehran since 1970. Tirafkan graduated from the University of Tehran with a BA in 1990, and since that time has been working in photography, video, and sculpture with solo exhibitions in Paris, Luzern, Los Angeles (LACMA), Dubai, and New York. He is considered one of the first Iranian photographic artists to create artwork involving issues of identity in an international paradigm that would be recognized across Iranian borders. His work is in the collection of the Brooklyn Museum of Art; the British Museum; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Maison européenne de la photographie, Paris; and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran.

ANDREA D. FITZPATRICK completed a PhD in contemporary art from McGill University in 2005. Since 2007, she has taught the history and theory of art at the University of Ottawa. The exhibition guest-curated for Gallery 44 is based on a month-long research trip she completed in Tehran in the summer of 2010, as well as years of prior research on Iranian culture. Her most recent essay, "Of Gesture, Erasure, and Exposure: Images of Text in Iranian Photographic Art," was published in the Tehran-based journal Art Tomorrow (Vol. 5) and was translated into Persian.


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