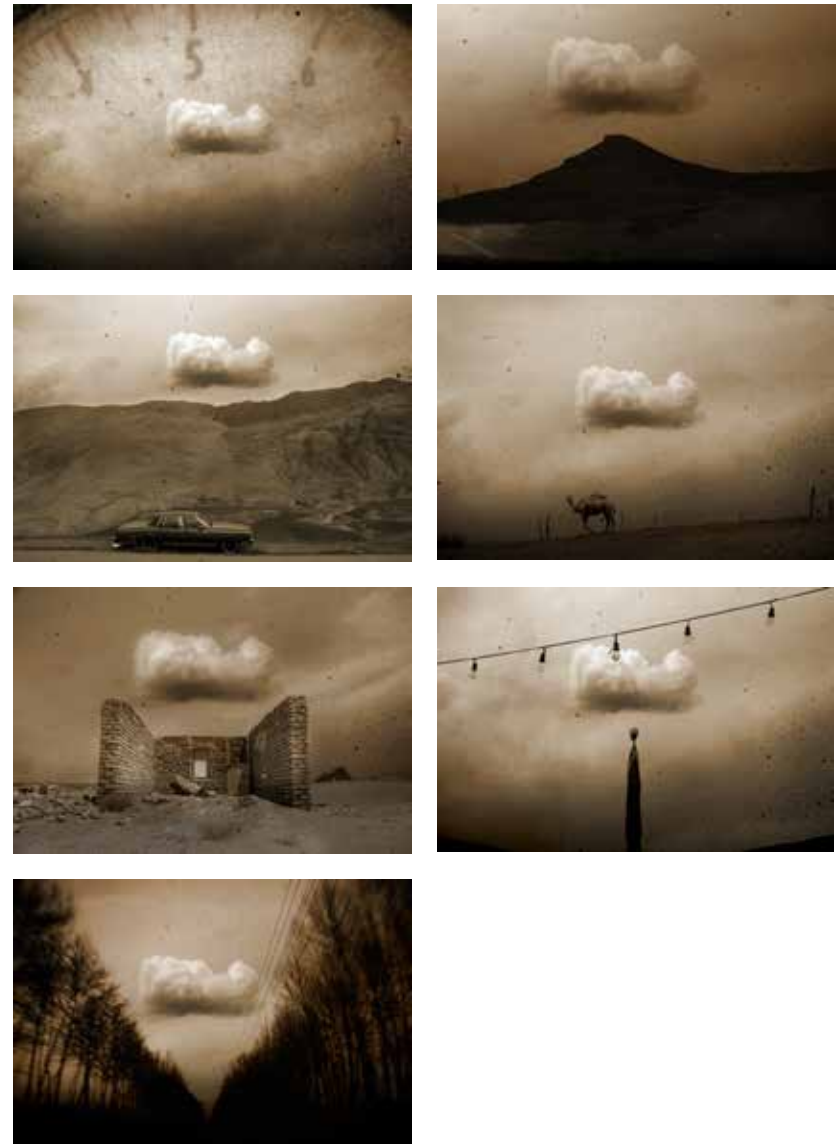


“A lot of people around the world have misconceptions about Iran. If you just watch the news, it’s hard to imagine what life is like or what love is like here. Some people leave the country-because they’re homosexual or they love each other but don’t want to get married.”

—Babak Kazemi



“There is a lot of silence about many of the deaths that have occurred in Iran in recent times. For many my photographs were a moment when the silence was finally broken.” —Azadeh Akhlaghi



**Azadeh Akhlaghi, b. 1978**

Azadeh Akhlaghi was born in Shiraz. A graduate of the RMIT University, Melbourne (Australia), Azadeh worked as an Assistant Director to Abbas Kiarostami and Manijeh Hekmat between 2005 and 2008 while she made a couple of short films that were screened in numerous film festivals at the Berkeley Art Museum, Pusan and Oslo. Since 2009 her interests shifted to conceptual art and staged photography. From 2001 Akhlaghi has participated in numerous art exhibitions in Iran, Turkey, France, India, Australia, UK and USA. Azadeh will be exhibiting at the Shanghai Biennale in November 2016, and lives and works between Tehran and Melbourne.



**Babak Kazemi, b. 1983**

Babak Kazemi is a self-taught photographer from Tehran. His hometown, Ahvaz, located near the first-discovered oil well in the Middle East which was greatly affected during the Iran-Iraq war, is a recurring subject in his work. He uses collage techniques and even experiments with chemical products, sometimes calling his form, “petroleum printing”, as he douses his sheets. His works have appeared in numerous publications and over fifty solo and group exhibitions internationally, including Tehran - Homa, Silkroad, and Mehrva galleries; Hinterland, Vienna; The Burnt Generation, Somerset House, London; Calgary Museum, Canada; Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago, USA; as well as Turkey, Kuwait, India and Switzerland.

**Art Heritage**

Since its inception in 1977 with Ebrahim and Roshan Alkazi at the helm, Art Heritage has contributed to shaping the future of an arts practice in India by discovering new talent and nurturing it. Side-by-side, Art Heritage has undertaken retrospectives of major inter-disciplinary artists, interspersing them with carefully selected group shows, where thematic concerns and styles help to define and forge contemporary trends.

Supporting a wide-range of artistic genres through carefully curated exhibitions on painting, sculpture, graphic art, ceramic art and photography that are programmed along with illustrated talks and lectures by eminent scholars, Art Heritage continues to be committed to embracing and disseminating a wholistic and comprehensive vision of the arts. Alternating its role as a private art gallery with a growing collection, Art Heritage is a space where discourse and criticism are encouraged - so required of a burgeoning democracy in the 21st century.

FRONT COVER Azadeh Akhlaghi - *By an Eyewitness* (series), 2012: Hamid Ashraf, South Mehrabad House, Tehran, 29 June 1976

BACK COVER Babak Kazemi - *Bodies* (series), Tehran, 2007



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Designed by Misha Oberoi



ART HERITAGE  
October 2016

## INTRODUCTION

### EXPOSURE AND PRIVACY

The history of photography in Iran volunteers an established lineage with the documentary form. As a powerful tool in the hands of every citizen today, the medium has functioned as a mirror in a country with a unique geopolitical condition – the desire to be a sovereign republic through a transparent and accountable system – the failing of which marks the beginning of our resistance through popular media. During the last decade, without any critical change in our socio-political circumstances, photography has undergone a process of its own conditioning – a situation in which there is a tendency towards ‘staged’ imagery, a renewed form of the tableau.

The Iranian manifestation of ‘staged photography’ as a unique practice-oriented genre, is a ‘behaviour’ of photography that allows a free interface with the remaking of a picture, that was originally shot in documentary mode. Accordingly, a public atmosphere is reconditioned to a private order.

Such a tendency in ‘Iranian’ photography, a term I use specifically to identify with the resident practitioners of the medium, is occasioned by international developments in new media, in which conceptual stances have taken precedence. Our particular blending of the digitally morphed image and fine art has managed to underscore and emphasize an intellectual frontier – that of the image as a potent metaphor and private message. Such an achievement in countries like Iran, where the current generation lays great emphasis on contemporary practice as a bridge to the outside world – has consequences within the country which are difficult to envision, preempt or even control.

This tendency towards the staged format, then also points to state enforced restrictions and artistic freedom, and hence the artists’ commitment as a reactionary voice. For some, the presence of professional photographers in urban spaces has stirred resentment and morphed the very sense of an active ‘photo journalism’ into a taboo, i.e. something that is practiced with trepidation. The photographer then is not merely a reporter of realities, but a prism or a filter through which his/her ideas may be refracted, and his aesthetic, explored. This is where Iranian society has an ephemeral understanding of itself, incessantly experiencing the cultural gap between public and private spaces. This gap has given birth to various types of subcultures, casting its influence over ideology, politics and gender-based studies, escaping the fetters of conventionality and thereby, eventually experiencing a freedom of expression.

—Mehdi Moghimnejad

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## AZADEH AKHLAGHI



Azadeh Akhlaghi - *By an Eyewitness* (series), 2012: Taghi Arani, 4 February 1940

In June 2009, a young philosophy student Neda Agha-Soltan was shot dead by security forces in Tehran during protests against Iranian elections. The death of Neda, an innocent bystander, was captured by several eyewitnesses on their mobile phones and swiftly posted online – Neda becoming, in death, an icon of the country’s young. Neda’s death provoked Azadeh to think of others who had died in a tragic manner, but whose deaths had not been recorded as there were no cameras present.

Azadeh Akhlaghi - *By an Eyewitness* (series), 2012: Zar Shariat Razavi, Mostafa Bozorgnia, Ahmad Ghandehi, at the Faculty of Engineering, Tehran University, 7 December 1953



### BY AN EYEWITNESS

Azadeh Akhlaghi is a 38-year-old Iranian conceptual photographer who has made documentary films while also assisting legendary filmmaker, Abbas Kiarostami. Since 2001, her interests shifted to staged photography.

The genesis of the series *By an Eyewitness* came about in 2009. “The world was changing. The Arab Spring was at its peak, and everyday I was busy watching documentary films and pictures concerning Egypt’s Tahrir Square, Tunisia, and other countries in the region....I became more conscious of death...Throughout the history of Iran people have given up their lives for a better tomorrow.”

Her series *By an Eyewitness* (2009) consists of seventeen photographs that reconstruct the tragic deaths of prominent figures, such as politicians, poets, activists, writers and students who were involved in events around the Islamic Revolution of 1979, involving the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty under Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919-80). Recording a past that had been hidden from view given the restrictions on photojournalism, Azadeh spent over three years sitting in libraries and researching eyewitnesses accounts. Thereafter, much like a filmmaker, she hired a cast and crew, spending up to a month in pre-production – selecting actors and even locating people who were present at the actual event, in order to devise the reconstructions. Orchestrating the *mis en scene* through action, lighting, composition – the actual shooting finally took around twenty days. Fascinated by Iran’s complex history, her work informs and animates a renewed iconography of the traumatized nation.

“I wanted to focus on the fact that these images are from my own perspective – the artist’s view. The truth cannot be exactly recreated. Therefore I wanted to emphasize my own presence in the images – as a representative of the next generation...”

...Iran is essentially a mourning nation that, in the course of its tragic history, has had many deaths, but no time to cry for them. It was as if now, with an ‘accurate’ reconstruction of the moment of death, we could say goodbye to the dead and to lay them to rest forever.”

## BABAK KAZEMI



Babak Kazemi - *The Exit of Shirin and Farhad* (series), 2011

### EXIT OF SHIRIN AND FARHAD/BODIES/ PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

“Babak Kazemi is part of a generation that has embraced photography as a way of reflecting on events and considering issues of freedom, censorship, tradition and modernity in Iran with imagination” says Martin Barnes, Curator of Photography at the V&A Museum.

Babak shot to prominence with his series three series, *The Exit of Shirin and Farhad*, *Bodies* and *Past Continuous Tense*. Commenting on the contemporary struggle of couples who must leave their homeland in order to find freedom, Kazemi says, “It’s hard to imagine what life or love is like here. Some people leave the country because they’re homosexual, others because they love each other, but don’t want to get married, as that would be unacceptable”. Revisiting the 16th-century tragedy of Shirin/Farhad, Kazemi reflects on the interlinked issues of forced migration and immigration.

In *Bodies*, Kazemi with equal poetic nuance, allows the entwined bodies of homosexual lovers to splay across sepia-toned landscapes of maps, their bare limbs stretching far beyond the borders of their delineated homeland. Taking the discussion further in *Past Continuous Tense*, Kazemi superimposes a single cellphone photograph of a cloud on locations other than the one where it was shot, with the result that very real places appear imaginary. Kazemi suggests thereby that photographs perhaps have less to do with objective reality than our fantasies.



Babak Kazemi - *Bodies* (series), Tehran, 2007