Press release

Shadi Ghadirian
Cherchez La Femme

Opening 9 November, 2012, 7 pm

The photographer Shadi Ghadirian (b. Tehran 1974) is internationally recognised as a pioneering figure of the new wave of Iranian artists who flourished during the eight-year era of relative reform under President Khatami (1997 – 2005). Today, after a decade of exhibiting locally and internationally, promoting Iranian photography through her Fanoos.com portal and exerting considerable influence upon a new generation of Iranian artists, Ghadirian’s dynamic practise continues to evolve, oscillating around issues of contemporary Iranian society.

A photographer who conjures poignant, enigmatic imagery by weaving history, gender politics and social commentary with wit and penetrating insight, Ghadirian’s work resonates with prescient truths. Her photographs commonly begin with the lives of women in modern-day Tehran. But upon deeper investigation, she discusses - through layers of representation, allusion and irony - situations which resonate with viewers around the world.

In ’Cherchez La Femme’, her Berlin solo debut at Podbielski Contemporary this November, the gallery presents a selected overview of Ghadirian’s photographic career, with new pieces alongside works dating back to 1998. These older works include the near-iconic ‘Qajar’ and ‘West By East’ sets, in which women are photographed as subjects within ironic scenes devised by Ghadirian, often inspired by her own experiences, as a woman living and working in modern-day Iran. Eschewing didacticism or preaching, she subtly conveys an attitude of resourcefulness and irony, in a society that is simultaneously shackled to tradition, whilst fully aware of its position in a hyper-connected 21st century world.

In this exhibition, these works are joined by an example (‘51’) from the series ‘Unfocused’ (2002) in which a minimalist, monochromatic composition frames a blurred figure of a long-haired woman, posed in motion. This series was a major turning point in the artist’s practise and Ghadirian’s depersonalizing of the vibrant, emotionally-charged subject echoes again, the anonymous public face women are obliged to adopt in Iran, at its most extreme, negating her feminine quintessence, cancelling her very essence.

For Western audiences, probably amongst the best-known examples of Ghadirian’s work come from the ‘Qajar’ series (1998 – 99). In these images, the artist’s depictions of female archetypes, creates vivid collisions between the deceptive grace and aesthetic splendour of 19th century Qajar-era symbolism with deadpan positioning of 21st century consumer goods. Again, the anachronous nature of life in modern-day Iran – the tension between the new and traditional - informs these engaging works, addressing this paradox with acuity amidst evocative historical/feminist context.

Clearly, Ghadirian relishes in confounding neo-Orientalist Western clichés and stereotypes, through the multi-layered complexity of her pieces. In recent works from the monochromatic ‘Madame Papillon’ series, she moves in an exciting new direction, implying a narrative formed of dark, suggestive spaces and constrained scenarios that develop from common signifiers of ‘Iran’ and
instead, discuss emancipation and enlightenment with women attempting to tear through vast webs, impediments between subject and representations of that universally-understood metaphor – daylight.

Moving way beyond the one-dimensional representations of what some refer to as ‘chador-art’, ‘Cherchez La Femme’ at Podbielski Contemporary demonstrates exactly how Ghadirian’s dramatic images have, and continue to, graphically explore the realities of a generation of empowered Iranian female artists, whose story insists on being told.

The exhibition is curated by Arsalan Mohammad.

Selected Exhibitions

2012  Museum of Contemporary Art, Isfahan, Iran
      Queen Gallery, Canada
      Silk Road Gallery, Tehran
      The French Cultural Center in Yangon, Burma
      Photo Espana Festival, Spain
      Cool Art Café, Brussels
      Boghossian Foundation, Brussels
      Zendegi, Beirut Exhibition Center, Lebanon
      Artespacio CAF, Bolivia
      Staging Identity, Galerie Kashya Hildebrand, Switzerland
      Face Contact, PhotoEspana, Madrid, Spain
      Idols and Icons, Yavuz Fine Art, Singapore
      Pool, Mohsen Gallery, Tehran
      Tehran Monoxide Project, Kherad School, Tehran
      Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2011  Museum of Contemporary Art, Isfahan, Iran
      Queen Gallery, Canada
      Silk Road Gallery, Tehran
      The French Cultural Center in Yangon, Burma
      Photo Espana Festival, Spain
      Cool Art Café, Brussels
      Boghossian Foundation, Brussels
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      Oi Futuro, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

2010  Guild Art, Mumbai, India
      Galerie Ernst Hilger, Austria
      CMOOA Gallery, Morocco
      LTMH Gallery, New York

Shadi Ghadirian, Miss Butterfly #1, 2011, Digital print, 100 x 150 cm
Stare at the Other Side, Albareh Art Gallery, Bahrain
Barakat, Stefan Stux Gallery, New York
Waterhouse & Dodd, London
The Silk Road, Saatchi Gallery, Lille, France
Festival Images, Vevey, Switzerland
IRAN: Preview Of The Past, University of Applied Arts, Vienna
Act of Faith, Abdijdmuseum Ten Duinen in Koksijde, Belgium

2009
Aeroplastics Contemporary, Belgium
FCG Dusseldorf, Germany
Co2 Gallery, Rome
Boudin Lebon Gallery, Paris
Masques of Shahruzad, Mall Gallery, London
Purdy Hicks Gallery, London
165 Years Of Iranian Photography, Italian School, Tehran
Rebelle: Art & Feminism 1969-2009, Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, Netherlands
Du Quai Branly Museum, Paris
Routes, Waterhouse & Dodd Gallery, London
Guild Art Gallery, New York
Arario Gallery New York
The Seen and the Hidden, Austrian Cultural Forum, New York

2008
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California
Silk Road, Tehran
Tasweer Gallery, India
Word Into Art, DIFC, Dubai
Cramer Contemporary, Switzerland
Exprmntl gallery, Toulouse, France
Women of Light, Galerie Davide Gallo, Berlin

2007
B21 Gallery, Dubai
Photography Festival of Istanbul, Turkey
Noorderlicht Photo Festival, Netherlands
La Paz, Bolivia
FotoEncuentro
San Diego Convention Centre, California
Silk Road, Tehran

2006
French Cultural Center, Damascus, Syria
Al Mamal Foundation 2, Jerusalem, Palestine
Word into Art: Artists of the Modern Middle East, The British Museum, London
Image of Middle East, dccd, Denmark

2002
Villa Moda, Kuwait

1999
Golestan Gallery, Tehran,
Leighton House Museum, London

Selected Collections

The British Museum, London
Muse des Arts Contemporariness, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris
Mumok (Museum Modern Kunst Stiftung Ludwig), Vienna
Los Angeles County Museum of Art, California
The Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian institution, Washington DC
Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Museum of contemporary Art, Tehran
Musée d’art et d’archéologie de la ville d’Aurillac, France
Devi Art Foundation, India
**Gallery program**

The emphasis of Podbielski Contemporary's programme is to represent contemporary artists who address the geopolitics of the Balkans, the Middle East, Italy and Germany in transcultural perspectives. Although the Balkans and the Middle East can be seen and read as two transitional geographic areas between East and West, they do represent more than geographic borders and situations. Crude geographic groupings and labels do not, however, give a true representation of the divisions that may exist between countries in these areas and fail to address the inner economic, social and cultural realities that exist in the face of external political pressures. These are the issues the artists of Podbielski Contemporary will address. In a context in which geographies are possibly losing importance, the figure of the artist has been increasingly assimilated to that of a nomadic individual, travelling the world. The resulted exhibited work frames his / her experience of migration and displacement, and subsequent reflection on homeland. As an act of survival, the artist confronts and challenges the globalization of culture.

Berlin, long known for its division is now a city that although unified is also a multicultural landscape whose influence, in a time of globalization, reaches far beyond the boundaries of Europe. This has contributed to the city's unique cultural make-up, increasing development and visibility at an international level.

Podbielski Contemporary seeks to promote transnational work (mostly contemporary photography and video installations) with exhibitions, scholarly catalogues and by addressing this work to international private and museum collections. Its founders strongly believe that a gallery, besides representing artists and promoting their works in the optimal way, should serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas about art and culture.

Podbielski Contemporary aims to merge art dealing activities with academic research, presenting special events such as artists talks, performances, conferences and screening evenings, to become not only a lively space for art lovers and art collectors, but also a cultural destination for young scholars and the Berlin art community in general. May its small-scale intervention help sustain wider efforts to overcome the compartmentalization of the art field between public and private institutions.