Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD) is a non-profit organisation created in 2010 for the purpose of deeper research into the histories of nations condemned by social displacement, cultural annihilation or deliberate disappearance. Conducted by founder Vali Mahlouji, a London-based curator and independent advisor to the British Museum, the research identifies, investigates and re-circulates significant cultural and artistic materials that have remained obscure, under-exposed, endangered, banned or in some instances destroyed.

AOTFD offers a curatorial and educational platform that engages with these accounts of culture, which have been lost through material destruction, acts of censorship, political, economic or human contingencies. To date the organisation has achieved significant exposure for its projects that include exhibitions at Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam, Musee d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XX1 secolo, Whitechapel Gallery, Photo London, Art Dubai Modern, Bergen Triennial, Open Eye Gallery and Dhaka Art Summit 2018.

One of the major breakthroughs of 2017 includes a significant acquisition by Tate Modern. Acting on behalf of the Kaveh Golestan Estate, AOTFD placed a series of photographs by Iranian photographer Kaveh Golestan in its permanent collection. Twenty vintage silver gelatin prints from the Prostitute series (1975-77) have been put on display alongside Vali Mahlouji’s curatorial and documentary material from Recreating the Citadel, research text that gives context to the project and subsequent disappearance. The display marks the first time in its history that Tate Modern has dedicated a room to an Iranian artist in its permanent collection.

Speaking on behalf of Kaveh Golestan Estate, of which he is Director, Vali Mahlouji comments “this is a major breakthrough for the estate of this Iranian reportage photographer. Not only is this work achieving the recognition it deserves for the first
time, it has also been elevated beyond the photography medium to art-form status with cultural significance.” He adds “We are beyond delighted with this achievement which sets an exciting precedent for future AOTFD projects”

Until the work of AOTFD brought this project to light the Prostitute series had only ever been publicly exhibited for two weeks in 1978. The curatorial and documentary materials discovered by AOTFD via Recreating the Citadel has shed new light upon historical facts about Tehran's former red light district, from its formation in the 1920s to its torching and subsequent forced destruction by religious decree in 1979.

Since its re-discovery, re-exposure and the formation of the estate, the series has been exhibited at Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam (2014); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2014); MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome (2014-15); and Photo London (2015). AOTFD has also placed works by Kaveh Golestan at Musée d’art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

Notes for Editors

Kaveh Golestan - The Prostitute series

The Prostitute series had only ever been publicly exhibited for two weeks in 1978 until they were unearthed by Vali Mahlouji and exhibited at Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam (2014); Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (2014); MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome (2014-15); and Photo London (2015). Vali Mahlouji / AOTFD have also placed works by Kaveh Golestan at Musée d’art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). The curatorial and documentary materials discovered by AOTFD via Recreating the Citadel has shed new light upon historical facts about Tehran's former red light district, from its formation in the 1920s to its torching and subsequent forced destruction by religious decree in 1979.


Kaveh Golestan was an important and prolific Iranian pioneer of documentary photography. His photographic practice has hugely informed the work of future generations of Iranian artists, but until now remained seriously over-looked by institutions inside and outside of his home country.

Besides numerous socially motivated projects such as the Prostitute series, Kaveh Golestan documented many major historical events, including the conflict in Northern Ireland, the Iranian revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and the Gulf Wars. In 1979 he was awarded the Robert Capa Gold Medal for "superlative photography requiring exceptional courage and enterprise abroad". He wasn't able to pick up the award until thirteen years later, at a time when the work was no longer considered a threat to the Iranian government.
Golestan’s life and work was cut short when he stepped on a fatal landmine on 2 April 2003, while on a BBC assignment in Iraq. He died in Kifri in Northern Iraq.

**Kaveh Golestan Estate**

Kaveh Golestan Estate is owned by Hengameh Golestan, the photographer’s widow, and directed by Vali Mahlouji as agent and curator to the estate since its formation. The estate is dedicated to conserving and promoting the work of Kaveh Golestan.

The estate is supported through donations and fundraising, and some funds are raised through the sale of a limited number of stamped editions. Conservation and digitisation of the historical archive is the estate’s central mission. The archive constitutes one of the most significant visual documents of the social, cultural and political history of Iran during the second half of the twentieth century, comprising almost 200,000 negatives, most of which have remained unseen to date.

**Vali Mahlouji / Archaeology of the Final Decade**

**About the Prostitute series (1975-77)**

Golestan’s photographs from the Citadel of Shahr-e No are the result of a very personal mission. He entered the Citadel without an official permit, seeking to publicly expose its interior in three consecutive photo-essays in the Iranian daily newspaper *Ayandegan* in 1977. The sixty-one portraits which went on to form the final project were edited down from a substantially larger pool of negatives.
The creation of the series involved several years (1975-77) of study and research, long visits to the site of the Citadel, and a cultivation of friendships with the residents which played into the carefully composed portraits. Golestan’s meticulous observation and empathetic sensitivity to the individual subjectivities of the women produced one of the strongest photographic studies of femaleness composed in Iran.

Revisiting the work of Kaveh Golestan not only highlights the uncomfortable relationship between the Iranian state and the Citadel of Shahr-e No, but also sheds light on the nature of the totalising post-revolutionary narrative. Golestan’s original aim was to rupture metropolitan complacency and to confront his audience with the darker face of their society.

Much of his artistic ethos was directed towards shifting public opinion and motivating democratic civic action. In the face of political restrictions, Golestan and an active intellectual milieu in the 1960s and 1970s, especially on the Left, were driven by a social conscientiousness that strove to expose and incorporate the marginal into the mainstream as an act of political motivation. His transgressive lens became a conduit for the marginalised to interact with the mainstream, to overcome public denial about the truth of their experiences. The photographer consciously identified with the excluded. His aim was to summon us to action, to move, to radicalise and politicise his audience.

Curated by Vali Mahlouji / Archaeology of the Final Decade:
Kaveh Golestan - *Prostitute*, Tate Modern (permanent collection), August 2017–.


*Kaveh Golestan: The Citadel*, FOAM, Amsterdam, 21 March – 4 May 2014

**Kaveh Golestan – Selected Exhibitions:**

*Kaveh Golestan*, Seyhoun Gallery, 1975

*Az Div O Dad*, Seyhoun Gallery, 1976

*Rouspi, Kargar, Majoun*, Tehran University, 1978


For any further enquiries, including image requests, please contact helen@helenedwardspr.com