


**INSTITUTION  
AS  
PRAXIS**



Edited by Carolina Rito and Bill Balaskas

**NEW  
CURATORIAL  
DIRECTIONS  
FOR  
COLLABORATIVE  
RESEARCH**

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AS PRAXIS**

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NEW CURATORIAL  
DIRECTIONS FOR  
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Carolina Rito and Bill Balaskas  
(Eds.)

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& CULTURE FORUM

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# ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FINAL DECADE:

## THE CASE OF THE CITADEL

Vali Mahlouji

In heeding the call of the late German philosopher Walter Benjamin to “brush history against the grain,” the curatorial and research platform Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD), set up in 2010, has committed to a radical investigation of silences, absences, black holes, and blind spots of cultural history.<sup>1</sup> The forensic efforts in excavating such sites of disappearance aim to militate against systems of totalitarian control, to process experiences of collective trauma, and to elucidate the associated coping mechanisms. These coping mechanisms are responses to prolonged violence—namely the demand to normalise violence on a social and cultural level.

In any violent historical condition truth becomes the prime suspect and target, voices are silenced, and many untold histories are purged or asphyxiated. The viciousness of organised and prolonged violence takes in its stride and obliterates truths, aspirations, innocence, individual lives, and total histories. The remains—the detritus and the debris—constitute ripe sites for excavation. That is at the core of AOTFD’s commitment, i.e., to liberate repressed historical memories from the point of view of the defeated and memorialise those who were subject to historical erasure.<sup>2</sup> To access such repressed material and to order, leak, and release them back into consciousness becomes a way to combat the tainted nature of history as transmitted from victor to victor. Such an introjection—deliberately acts to dismantle narrative hegemonies of oppression.

1 ó Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969) 256–57.

2 ó *Ibid.*, 257, 260, 261.

By definition, re-engagements with traumatic historical fragments involve themselves with issues pertaining to power, conflict, activism, and radical democracy and they extend to art and cultural projects that evince a radical social and political commitment. For Benjamin, the critique of violence was not simply the interrogation of physical acts but also involved exposing those symbolic values that are associated with forms of domination and power relations.<sup>3</sup> Culture is not understood as a communal space of harmonious existence; it is approached, instead, as a conflict-filled field of negotiations. AOTFD intends to situate art itself in that crossfire, in order to realise its historical meaning. To reinsert and to activate the violated object or cultural artefact back into the public sphere is a conscious and calculated form of contamination. In other words, the elucidated contested sites act as 'dangerous supplements' (to borrow from Derrida) that emerge with the potential to complicate and dismantle distortions of histories.<sup>4</sup> They dismantle the historical distortions standardised by totalising systems of power, which otherwise purport to stand in as coherent, intact, unadulterated accounts of the past.

AOTFD postulates that the retrieval and redistribution of side-lined materialsó visual and documentary fragmentsó are inherently capable of activating resistance in the face of organised hegemonic violence. In particular, we believe that a constructive reanimation of microecologies of collective trauma empowers those subjected to sustained

<sup>3</sup> ó Walter Benjamin, 'On the Critique of Violence,' in *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, trans. J. A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2009), 11-28.

<sup>4</sup> ó The notion of the supplement corresponds to Derrida's 'supplement': that which, ostensibly 'fills a gap'

in relation to a whole, reveals the incompleteness of the whole, and agitates/complexifies it. See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

violence; it has the power to call out perpetrators and demand reparation and justice. In effect, AOTFD is founded upon the austere demands and repercussions of motivating such action. There are ethical implications associated with the process. The return to sites of trauma is driven by a kind of truth impulseó engaging in the attribution/redistribution of justice (often outside the legislative system), redirecting attention onto crimes, calling out perpetrators by name, and recognising and witnessing the victim as a victim. Attribution/redistribution of justice is a crucial requisiteó a necessary, not incidental, by-product of the forensic procedure. The audience is inevitably implicated as witnesses.

### RECREATING THE CITADEL

Since 2010, one of our ongoing forensic investigations, 'Recreating the Citadel,' has recovered data and selected material culture, historical documents, artefacts, and testimonies to expose and analyse the social and political landscape of the district of Shahr-e No, Tehran. In *Recreating the Citadel*, AOTFD excavates the history of the now-demolished urban neighbourhood of Shahr-e No ('new town'), or the Qaleh-e Shahr-e No (citadel of Shahr-e No), the former red-light ghetto of Tehran. AOTFD's approach is based on the premise that the violence inflicted on Shahr-e No was part of a larger political and social project. In pushing back against censorship around the disappeared, the research poses a broader query: what are the long-term effects of the systemic amputations of cultural memory? AOTFD considers the site as a subterranean repository of information, a microecology of trauma, and believes that its reactivation sheds light on how we might understand the present condition from a macro, systemic perspective.



View of Razi Park, formerly the site of the citadel of Shahr-e No.  
© Vali Mahlouji. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD).

## PROSTITUTE (1975–77)

Recreating the Citadel's point of departure is the retrieval and recirculation of a found art object to a seminal series of photographs produced by the late Iranian documentary photographer Kaveh Golestan (1950–2003) between 1975 and 1977. The series, entitled *Prostitute*, constitutes the last extant visual document of Shahr-e No and its inhabitants. By the mid-twentieth century the neighbourhood was enshrined by a wall, a form of urban zoning, within which the sex-workers lived and worked, the 'Citadel.' That urban quarter was burnt down by anonymous mobs in 1979 and subsequently bulldozed out of sight soon after the establishment of the Islamic regime. AOTFD reexposed the photographic series in a series of exhibitions organised in various public art institutions across Europe (2014–18). The artworks were recovered from the photographer's house in Tehran; the site of their original processing and printing in 1977 and where held under lock and key they remained archived for forty years, since their last public appearance in 1978.

From the outset, our focus was to raise awareness about the artistic and aesthetic significance of the artworks, to reintroduce them into the public domain and to reincorporate them into cultural discourse as an act of healthy historical reconciliation. The exhibitions took place at: FOAM, Amsterdam; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris (MAM); MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome; Photo London; and Tate Modern, London. Our reexposure of the works through consecutive exhibitions initiated Golestan, and his *Prostitute* series, into a direct dialogue with international art history and



Kaveh Golestan, images from the *Prostitute* series, 1975-77, Tehran.  
© Kaveh Golestan Estate. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD).

the contemporary circulation of art objects. Thus far, we have successfully negotiated the inclusion of Golestan's works into the permanent collections of several major international institutions, including MAM, Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), and Tate Modern. Publicly exhibited by all institutions that have acquired them, the works have reached wide and diverse audiences over the last few years. This growing attention attests to the artistic merit of the series. Collectively, the portraits constitute, in my view, one of the strongest topographies of femaleness produced photographically in Iran, a groundbreaking work of modern Iranian documentary photography and portraiture.

#### THE CONSTELLATIONAL RESTAGING OF HISTORY

If excavating the photographic artworks establishes a direct form of *vertical* archaeology—digging up an art object or an historical fragment out of obscurity—then our extended contextual research, which uncovers sociological, demographic, juridical, geographical, psychological, and spiritual histories, constitutes a *horizontal* archaeology of meaning, association, and affect. Both vertical and horizontal procedures disclose alternative historical experiences and readings that have the creative power to subvert established official narratives.

Recreating the Citadel does not claim to be a complete reconstruction of the civic space in all its details. As in a successful novel, the reader is provided with a certain combination of essential details evoking a pictorial or affective setting that may be integrated with their own





Kaveh Golestan, *Prostitute* series contact sheets 1975 77, Tehran.  
© Kaveh Golestan Estate. Courtesy of Archaeology of the  
Final Decade (AOTFD).

imaginative capabilities. Any exhaustive reconstruction of real space would only serve to distract from the essential truth—just as any linear narration of history serves, for Walter Benjamin, to obscure true meaning. Our intention is to wrest fragments from empty historical continuity. Unexpected non-linear connections to the past have the capacity to explode in the present, in the Benjaminian, messianic sense, generating flashes of recognition in the present.<sup>5</sup> In other words, AOTFD critically articulates ensembles of tensions and constellations of attitudes, events, and empirical experiences that link the past to the present, in ways that elucidate knowledge about very particular historical connections and correlations. These pathways of knowledge break through historical silences and subvert accepted narratives. In placing materials in dialogue with each other, the exhibition becomes a performative site of knowledge production and a medium in itself. By allowing our present moment to coalesce explosively with the past, the exhibition encourages novel and practical models for altering the present.<sup>6</sup>

AOTFD considers the exhibition an evocative and affective space of appearance and a crucial space of performance. If erasure of cultural artefacts and historical episodes are epic performative acts of violence, then exposures and reappearances are counter-performative actions. It is precisely such counter-performativity that gives artistic activity a particularly important role at times of war, violence, and vulnerability. Rather than a direct head-on collision, the exhibition process often best performs through an elliptical engagement with history—its radicality

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin refers to these flashes of recognition as messianic moments. See Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, 257–61.

<sup>6</sup> See Benjamin's ideas of "messianic time" and historical "monad." Ibid.

enhanced by an oblique redressal of truths. An exhibition, by definition, is a vanishing monument. There is, thus, an imperative for the audience to actively memorialise and carry forth the implications of what is shown.<sup>7</sup>

### THE TRUTH–POWER DYNAMIC

Recreating the Citadel scrutinises the *Prostitute* series as a memory-object in the exploration of human community and identity. It is anchored within a truth-power dynamic, one which calls us to interrogate: structures of power in lieu of discourses of natural rights; the politics of metropolitan/marginal citizenship; notions of inclusion and exclusion around a constructed moral circle; and social experiences of emancipation, compassion, and community. The transgressive lens required to permeate the citadel acts as a conduit for the marginalised to interact with the mainstream. The photograph constructs a relational dialectic between the image of the impoverished, forgotten, and forbidden-from-sight, and mainstream metropolitan citizenry. The anti-dream is presented against the arcadian lights of the capitalist city in advancement.<sup>8</sup>

The exhibition situates the series within a distinct artistic and intellectual trajectory, which was prevalent in mid-twentieth century Iran. The works of a group of emergent artists to a greater or lesser degree are invested in a

7 ó For further discussions of ideas around the exhibition as a vanishing monument and regarding the audience's self-reflective performativity as witnesses, see James Young, 'The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,' *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 267–299; Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,' trans.

Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, no. 26 (Spring 1989): 7–24; Hannah Arendt, 'Power and the Space of Appearance,' *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998 (1958)), 199–207.

8 ó Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2002).

radical defence of rights and in motivating democratic civic action.<sup>9</sup> Their calls for democratic civic action can be considered an oblique political act of rebellion against authority.<sup>10</sup> The artistic ethos here is directed towards shifting public opinion and motivating democratic, civic action by galvanising a compassionate shift towards the inclusion of marginal citizens within the community.

### PARADIGMATIC SITE, PARADIGMATIC SUBJECT

Recreating the Citadel focuses on the body and space of the prostitute as paradigmatic of the radical site. A shift in attitude towards the body of the prostitute comes into effect with the emergence of women's organisations in the 1950s in Iran. Both Tehran's Madreseh-ye Aali-ye Madadkari Ejtemaei (school of social work) and the Sazman-ye Zanan-ye Iran (the women's organisation of Iran), founded by women in 1958 and 1966 respectively, were highly effective in mobilising a novel attitude to issues of gender and sexuality during the 1960s and 1970s. They advocated at municipal and ministerial levels and lobbied for protective legislation to improve the lives of sex workers—raising awareness about their plight and organising supportive infrastructures. These progressive advancements came

9 ó A most notable example is Forough Farrokhzad's 1963 seminal cinematic masterpiece *Khaneh Siah Ast* ('The House Is Black'). Other cinematic works by Ahmad Faruqi Qajar, Ebrahim Golestan, and Kamran Shirdel are also notable. Kamran Shirdel's *Qaleh* (known in English more recently with the subtitle 'The Women's Quarter') is a documentary film about the citadel, which was filmed in 1967 and which was commissioned by the newly founded NGO, Sazman-ye Zanan-ye Iran (the

women's organisation of Iran). It was subsequently censored by the ministry of culture until after the revolution. Shirdel retrieved a small portion of his original rushes and completed his film by animating within it some of Kaveh Golestan's stills from the *Prostitute* series.

10 ó Morris Dickstein, cited in: Susie Linfield, *The Cruel Radiance: Photography and Political Violence* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 234.

about as part of wider democratic, legislative, and economic transformations during the early and mid-twentieth century in Iran. The emancipation of women and advances in gender and family laws during that period significantly boosted notions of social welfare. Despite those advances, an uneasy ambivalence characterised contemporary society's (state and public) relationship to prostitution. Moralising (especially religious) and medicalising narratives condemned both the body and the practices associated with sex-work. Those arguments held the body and the space of prostitution as carriers and perpetrators of immorality and disease. Ultimately, those views perpetuated abolitionist approaches in favour of the social exclusion of sex-workers and the demolition of the citadel.

Both state and public attitudes in favour of the inclusion of sex-workers as legitimate citizens have to contend with, and occasionally succumb to, such negative projections thrust onto the body of the prostitute and the site of prostitution. That tension characterised the immediate pre-revolutionary period in Iran. The exhibition draws from this tension to trace the landscape of Shahr-e No, as paradigmatic of much wider issues pertaining to citizenship, civic rights, social welfare, and the politics of inclusion and exclusion of marginal individuals and communities. The show articulates the critical and fundamental shift that takes place with the torching of the citadel in the course of the Iranian revolution and the demolition of the neighbourhood in its aftermath.

## SITUATING ART IN THE CROSSFIRE

On January 29, 1979, three days before the arrival of the Islamist revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini, the citadel of Shahr-e No is set on fire by mobs whipped up by rhetorical hysteria. An undisclosed number of residents trapped inside are burnt to death. No individual or group claims responsibility. The daily newspapers report the torching in detail. A front-page headline in the daily broadsheet *Ettela'at*, printed the next day, declares: 'West and South of Tehran in Flames of Fire.'<sup>11</sup> The article reports crowds gathering outside the citadel, attacking it at about 6 p.m., and, subsequently, setting it on fire. The report describes the fire brigade passively watching the blaze. They later issue a statement to justify their nonaction, saying that they would not act against fires that are ignited by the will of the people.<sup>12</sup> On the same page the main headline reads, 'Vast Preparations for the Moment of the Imam's [Khomeini's] Arrival.' The juxtaposition of the two news headlines is symbolically powerful. The preparations for the arrival of the religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, and the violent eradication of these targeted urban spaces are concurrent. The newspaper sets up a visual dialectic between the two occurrences.

11 ó 'Gharb va Jonub-e Tehran dar Sholeha-ye Atash' [The west and south of Tehran in flames of fire], *Ettela'at*, January 30, 1979.

12 ó Ibid. The statement published by the fire brigade declaring that it would not fight fires that are ignited by the will of the people speaks volumes. Gestures like the one of the fire brigade are designed to bring discipline to the public space and the attitudes that are performed

within it. As deficient as such claims to represent 'the people' clearly are, this signalled a new order whereby the price of moral insubordination risked unaccountable government sanctioned annihilation. Crucially, the eradication and evisceration of community liberties within urban space directly cohered with and were intrinsic to a political system that transformed public space and thus attitudes in order to dominate and control.



Obscured photograph by Abbas. IRAN. Tehran. January 1979. A revolutionary mob exhibits the burned body of a presumed prostitute as evidence of the atrocity of the Shah's regime. The mob had just set fire to the Red Light district in Islamic Purifying Fire. Original photograph and caption published in: Abbas, Iran: la révolution confisquée (Paris: Clartat, 1980). © Abbas/Magnum Photo.

The fire is documented by photojournalists, including the late Iranian Magnum photographer Abbas. Recreating the Citadel retrieves those images and reexposes them alongside the news reports, including an historically significant photograph by Abbas documenting the charred body of a presumed prostitute being carried by the mob.<sup>13</sup> The photograph crystallises an emblematic scene: a dynamic performance of bodies in public space, whereby a male mob assumes the role of judge, jury, and executor of justice. Abbas declined AOTFD's request for the right to display the image in the exhibition, preventing its public circulation. Abbas expressed anxiety that the image would draw renewed political controversy and attention to itself and to the event. Given the emphasis that we place on

13 Abbas published a photographic document depicting the charred body of a presumed prostitute being carried by a mob in his book *Iran: La révolution confisquée*, 1980. He

referred to the fire as an Islamic purifying fire. Later, after the publication of the book, he was interrogated by the Islamic courts.

**اوضاع ایران**  
اوضاع خجندی : اگر ارتش کنار نکشد اعتراضی تعیین میشود

معاونان فرستادند و حافظ امنیت با مردم است

افواج ایران و مصاحبه بختیار در شب در یک جلسه مجلس در حضور امام خمینی بررسی شد

**تظاهرات وسیع امروز تهران**  
گروهی از کارکنان صنایع نفتی انقدر روی پل شاهرضا تا شاهزادگان آذربایجان میزدند

**اوضاع ایران شدت وخیم میشود**  
اعلام جرم دانهنگاه صنعتی علیه بختیار

**برنامه وسیع برای لحظه ورود امام**  
تشکیل کمیته ویژه حفظ جان امام

**اطلاعات**  
سخنرانی ۱۰ دقیقه‌ای ۱۲۴۲ ششمین روز آذرماه ۱۳۵۷

**وضع فرودگاه هروز عادی نیست**  
فرودگاه تا عصر روز ۳۰ آذرماه تعطیل است

**حمله به سرلشکر ژاندارمری**  
سرلشکر علی قلیچ بیگلربیگ در راه فرودگاه کشته شد

**تحصن روحانیون مبارز گسترش یافت**  
روایتی از تحصن روحانیون مبارز در تهران

**گروهی از همافران دستگیر شده اند**  
در پی دستگیری همافران در تهران

**شهر نوسکوفه نو، ۲۰ آبخواسی و دهها مشروب فروشی به آتش کشیده شد**  
سبیل تظاهرکنندگان بسیاری از خیابانها را بست و حوادث بی شماری روی داد

**اتوبوسهاری آتش زنیید**  
کارکنان قسمتی از کمر آریاید بکار بر می روند

**ترکیه بجای ایران پایگاه غرب میشود**  
وزارت دفاع ترکیه اعلام کرد

**اوضاع ایران شدت وخیم میشود**  
اعلام جرم دانهنگاه صنعتی علیه بختیار

دانهنگاه صنعتی علیه بختیار اعلام جرم کرد

Newspaper article marked with a black line. The headline reads 'Gharb va Jonub-e Tehran dar Sholehaye Atash' [The west and south of Tehran in flames of fire] and 'Barnameh Vasi Baraye Lahze Vay Voroud-e Imam' [Vast preparations for the moment of the Imam's arrival]. *Ettela'at*, January 30, 1979. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD).

the necessity of historical re-witnessing and the capacity to break silences of violent erasure, my response is to creatively censor the image and exhibit it in pixelated form. The caption describes the scene according to Abbasī original one, while the image remains censored. The exhibit focuses on the spectacle as an epiphanic signifier of a critical historical shift.

### RE-PERFORMING REVOLUTIONARY TERROR

Recreating the Citadel retrieves and recirculates materials relating to some ex-residents of the citadel who faced the revolutionary courts in the wake of the revolution. On July 12, 1979, the daily newspaper *Kayhan* reported on the executions of three of the ex-residents of the citadel and the same information was later published by Amnesty International.<sup>14</sup> This event is critical to the reading of modern Iranian history, signifying the 20<sup>th</sup> century initiation of executions of women. AOTFD uncovers a vital piece of historical information: the death sentence was rarely applied to women by Iran's modern judiciary prior to 1979 but the number rises to the region of thousands in the forty-year period since the establishment of the post-1979 Islamic court of law. This reflects a foundational juridical shift: the modern penal code and its enshrined procedures are annulled and replaced by the law of Islamic punishment in post-revolutionary times. That shift is defined in the first

14 6 The names of the executed women were listed in a *Kayhan* newspaper report as: ¶Pari Bolandeh, Soraya Torkeh, and Ashraf Chahar ¶Chashm. ¶Be Hokmeħ Dadgah¶Enghelabe Islami 3 Zan va 4 Mard Tir Baran Shodand, ¶ [By order of the Islamic Revolutionary Court, 3 women and 4 men were sentenced to execution by firing squad] *Kayhan*, July 12, 1979. ¶Post¶Revolutionary Executions till

22 August 1979, ¶ *Law and Human Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Report Covering Events within the Seven Month Period Following the Revolution of February 1979* (London: Amnesty International, 1980). The names of the three women (residents of the citadel of Shahr¶e No) are listed in this report as: ¶Sakineħ Qasemi alias Pari Bolandeh, ¶¶Saheb Afshari alias Soraya Torkeh, ¶ and ¶Zahra Magiha alias Ashraf Cheharcheshm. ¶



ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FINAL DECADE: THE CASE OF THE CITADEL  
Vali Mahlouji

Newspaper article marked with a black line. The headline reads: ¶Se Zan va Chahar Mard Tir¶Baran Shodand¶ [Three women and four men are executed]. The executed women are named as: Pari Bolandeh, Soraya Torkeh, and Ashraf Chahar¶Chashm. *Kayhan*, July 12, 1979. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD).

two articles of the new constitution of the Islamic Republic. In the new system, the rights of citizens as protected by the modern state are stripped away by the hegemony of divine rights, or the principle of private retaliation (*lex talionis*; eye for an eye), under clerical sovereignty.

Citizens become subjects: hitherto equal in the face of a written law, the post-revolutionary citizen is redefined as a mortal in the face of the divine. The new order is institutionalised so as to organise and legitimise the apparatus of systemic violence and the totalising regime of control. The ramifications of that are clear and historically salient. Iran today has the largest number of executions per capita in the world, bar China (there are no reliable and accurate figures available in the case of China). According to Amnesty International, 87% of all executions in the world in 2016, excluding China, took place in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Pakistan.<sup>15</sup>

### DETERRITORIALISATION AND RETERRITORIALISATION

After the torching of the citadel and the executions, the entire neighbourhood is bulldozed and obliterated in 1980. The space is reorganised and the physical scars of its destroyed walls transformed into a park with a lake. The symbolically contrapuntal reorganisation of an exterritorial urban space into a natural reserve is typical of the politics of erasure. It was the brainchild by no means an original strategy of a new cultural project, with a dual purpose. It asserted a new authoritarian project over the citizen, the

<sup>15</sup> The Death Penalty in 2016: Facts and Figures, Amnesty.org, April 11, 2017, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2017/04/death-penalty-2016-facts-and-figures/>.

civic sphere, and the urban space, whilst posturing as the righteous, liberating saviour of the dispossessed and the victims of an unjust, despotic predecessor. This is an epic gesture exercised early on by a cultural revolution set on establishing itself with grand political acts. It dismantles and removes from vision phenomena and agendas that do not comply with or perpetuate its method or practice. The total erasure of Shahr-e No is arguably the grandest act in that context. The sex-workers as well as other stigmatised individuals, marginalised communities, and contested urban spaces are singled out as the first vulnerable, soft targets for the violent imposition of a totalising regime of control. A widespread programme of cultural cleansing and purification is initiated that continues to define an all-encompassing project of ideological domination and cultural control in Iran.

### THE CURATORIAL APPROACH: THE CONJURED ARCHIVE

The broader AOTFD project aims to re-conjure and reorder sites of disappearance as a form of protest. Recreating the Citadel militates against the erosion of civil rights in recent collective memory. It repeats and re-situates the public display of events and values, outside of sanctioned channels. The display of artworks as memory-objects, especially where the objects have been erased or repressed, performs a form of public declaration, a protest. Public declaration and (providing an opportunity for) public witnessing are inherently linked to the act of protest.<sup>16</sup> Curating here is intrinsically tied to the restaging of dramatic historical

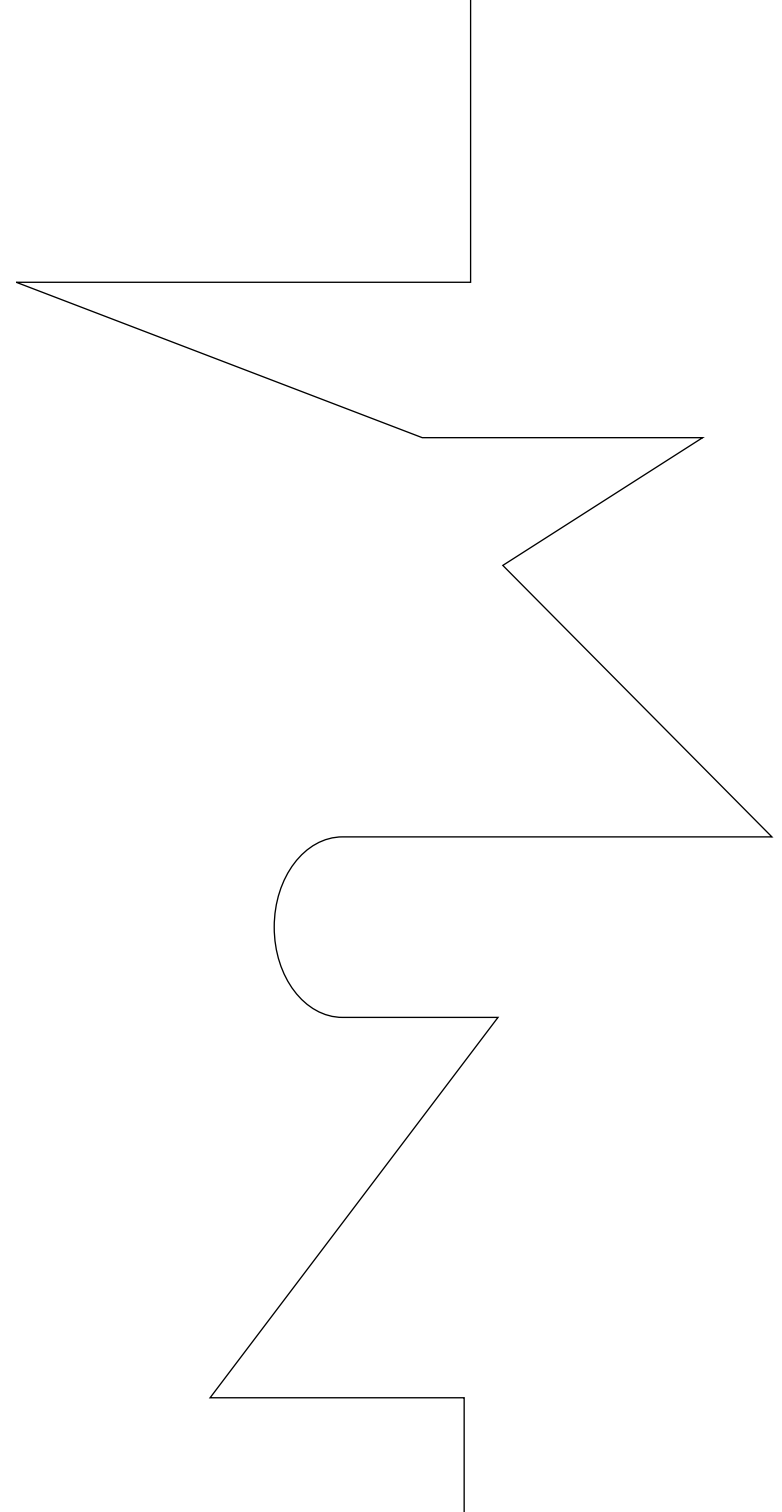
<sup>16</sup> There is a direct etymological link between protest and both declaration and witnessing through the Latin *protestari*. Middle English, from Anglo-French *protester*, from Latin *protestari*, from *pro* forth + *testari* to call to witness. Merriam-Webster, s.v. protest (n.), accessed January 10, 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/protest>.

absences and dissonancesó not primarily to establish facts, but rather to endorse an affective shift.

The sexworkers provide a common thread, enabling the exhibition to foreground alterity as a crucial and thinkable political subject, positioned in relation to multivalent experiences, under continued state suppression. Photographic images and other documentary material are treated as partial testimonies, where new historical links are exposed as part of a truthfinding exercise. Whilst speculation and invented histories play an essential role in contemporary artistsí responses to histories bereft of images, AOTFDís projects attend to the capacity of documentary fragments to remediate and readdress occurrences erased by violence.

The curatorial process and the activation of the horrific and traumatic experiences that befell the women in Golestanís photographic series *Prostitute* are not intended as a eulogy. Nor are they a pornography of the oppressed. Rather they are aimed at contesting moral terrorism and unearthing historical facts. Exhibitionmaking does not attempt merely to bring these narratives to the fore but insists on a potential reconciliation in the present. If the body and the space of sexworkers were instrumentalised to incite the new forms of revolutionary violence, then the *Recreating the Citadel* exhibition recasts them as counterrevolutionary subjects, intended to represent such alterity as the paradigm of citizenship and human rights under siege. As Benjamin put it, they provide a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past, so that object suffering may not exist in vain.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> ó Benjamin, Theses on the Philosophy of History, in *Illuminations*, ed. 263.



Curriculum organises exhibitions, talks, film programmes, and other public activities in addition to leading and conducting research groups and independent investigations. It also indulges in new forms of research in addition to teaching and developing programmes for academic institutions. The Forest Curriculum collaborates with institutions and organisations in south and southeast Asia and beyond, including: the Arts Network Asia (ANA) for 'The Forest As School' Summer Academy programme; SAVVY Contemporary, Berlin; Ghost:2561 art series, Bangkok; SUGAR Contemporary, Toronto; Hanoi DoLab; and IdeasCity, New Museum, New York.

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**ruangrupa** is a Jakarta-based artists' collective established in 2000. It is a nonprofit organisation that strives to support art within urban and cultural contexts by encouraging artists and individuals from other disciplines such as social sciences, politics, technology, and media, amongst others to foster critical views in relation to Indonesian urban contemporary issues. ruangrupa also produces collaborative works in the form of art projects, such as exhibitions, festivals, art labs, workshops, and research, as well as books, magazines, and online journal publications. ruangrupa has been involved in many collaborative and exchange projects, including participating in: Gwangju Biennale, 2002 & 2018; Istanbul Biennial, 2005; Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, 2012; Singapore Biennale, 2011; São Paulo Biennial, 2014; Aichi Triennale, Nagoya, 2016; and Cosmopolis #1 Le Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2017. In 2016, ruangrupa curated Sonsbeek 2016's transACTION, Arnhem, Netherlands. ruangrupa is the curator of documenta 15, 2022.

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FOR COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH**

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