

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FINAL DECADE

RECREATING THE CITADEL

Kaveh Golestan, Prostitute 1975-77

Curated by Vali Mahlouji

Prostitute and *Recreating the* *Citadel* at Tate Modern

Opposite page: Kaveh Golestan *Prostitute* & AOTFD *Recreating the Citadel* exhibition instalation, Tate Modern, 2017, Courtesy Kaveh Golestan Estate and Archaeology of the Final Decade.



The first ever room to be dedicated to an Iranian artist in the permanent collection of **Tate Modern** was created around **Archaeology of the Final Decade's** project *Recreating the Citadel*, pivoting on Iranian documentary photographer **Kaveh Golestan's** (1950-2003) vintage silver gelatin prints from the *Prostitute* series (1975-77).

The *Prostitute* series had only ever been publicly exhibited for two weeks in 1978 until they were unearthed by **Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD)** and **Vali Mahlouji** nearly forty years later, and subsequently 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)**.

The documentary material - *Recreating the Citadel* - sheds new light upon Tehran's former red light district, from its formation in the 1920s, to its torching and forced destruction in an epic act of erasure in 1979 as part of a widespread project of Islamising cultural cleansing following the Iranian revolution of 1979.



Recreating the Citadel

Recreating the Citadel presents sixty-one vintage photographs, from the *Prostitute* series of women working in the Citadel of Shahr-e No, the former red light ghetto of Tehran, documented by **Kaveh Golestan** (1950-2003) between 1975 and 1977. Using the *Prostitute* series, unseen since 1978, as a point of departure the project focuses on intersections of art, society, law and religion during the political shifts of 1960-80s Iran. The portraits are framed within an archive of research around the formation and destruction of the Citadel of Shahr-e No.

This research – a documentary of a documentary – is part of **Archaeology of the Final Decade**, a platform which identifies, investigates and re-circulates significant cultural and artistic materials that have remained obscure, under represented, endangered, banned or destroyed. The retracing and reintegration of these materials into cultural memory activates latent knowledge stored within the object and constitutes an act of historical reconciliation.

Kaveh Golestan and the Intimate Politics of the Marginal exhibition installation shot, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 2014 © Haupt & Binder, Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade

Following pages: *Kaveh Golestan Prostitute* series (1975-77), Tehran © Kaveh Golestan, Courtesy Kaveh Golestan Estate and Archaeology of the Final Decade

Prostitute 1975-77

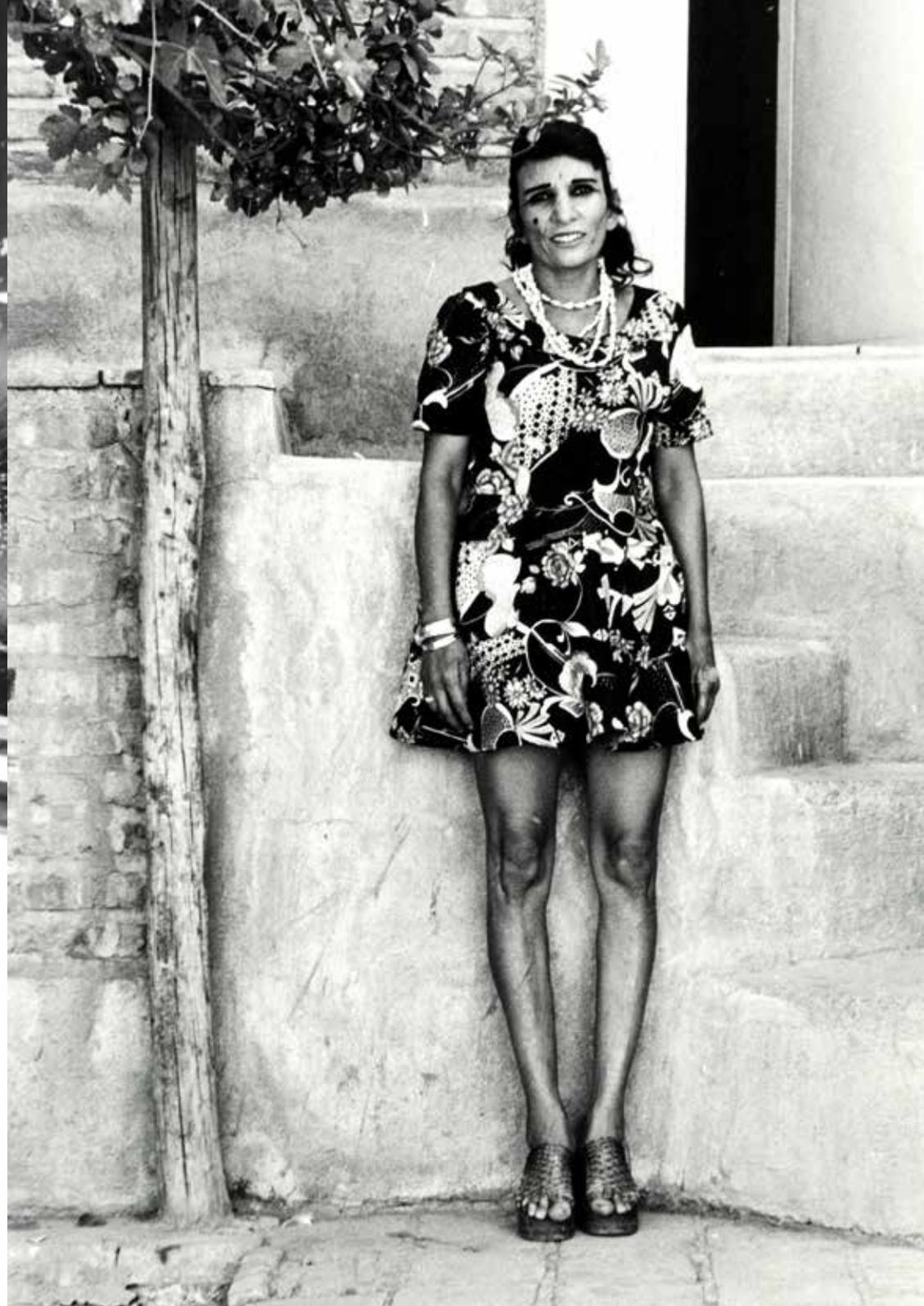


The creation of *Prostitute* involved several years of study and research, long visits to the site of the Citadel and the befriending of the residents. It took Kaveh Golestan a year and a half to carefully compose the portraits. His meticulous observation and empathetic sensitivity to the individual subjectivities of the women of the Citadel has produced one of the strongest photographic studies of femaleness composed in Iran.

Golestan's *Prostitute* series is the last extant photographic record of the residents of the Citadel recorded only a few years before the district was torched by mobs in 1979.

Kaveh Golestan (1950-2003) was a prolific pioneer of Iranian documentary photography. He documented major historical events from the conflict in Northern Ireland, to 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". Golestan stepped on a fatal landmine on 2 April 2003 while on a BBC assignment in Iraq and died in Kifri in Northern Iraq.

















CONTEXT

Exposure of the photographs attracts censorship.

When Golestan exhibits his photographs at an exhibition entitled *Three Reports: Prostitute, Worker, Asylum* at Tehran University, an unprecedented number of visitors turn up. It is also widely covered in the media. The opening is held on 1 May 1978, International Workers' Day.

The exhibition is prematurely shut down after fourteen days. No reason is provided, despite demands for explanation. Two university employees resign following the forced closure, the closure is widely reported in the media and demands for explanation reappear two months after the event.

The Prostitute series was briefly shown in a sneak exposition in the same year at the Seyhoun Gallery stand at the Tehran Art Fair at Farah Park. This was the last time the vintage photographs were exhibited.

[...And some suppose] that art must not be corrupted by social and political agendas. And yet, has art ever been about anything but this? And will it ever be about anything but this?

- Kaveh Golestan, extract from a notebook, 1975-77

Previous page, above: Newspaper article, *The Citadel: An Alternative View (1) - And So They Build A Cage*, Ayandegan, 11 September 1977, Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Previous page, below: Newspaper article, *The Citadel: An Alternative View (2) - Prostitutes, Victims of Traders*, Ayandegan, 12 September 1977, Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Exhibition Installation Photograph. *Three Reports: Prostitute, Worker, Asylum*. Obeid Gallery. Tehran University, May 1978. ©Kaveh Golestan Estate, Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade.

The history of the Citadel is intertwined with politics.

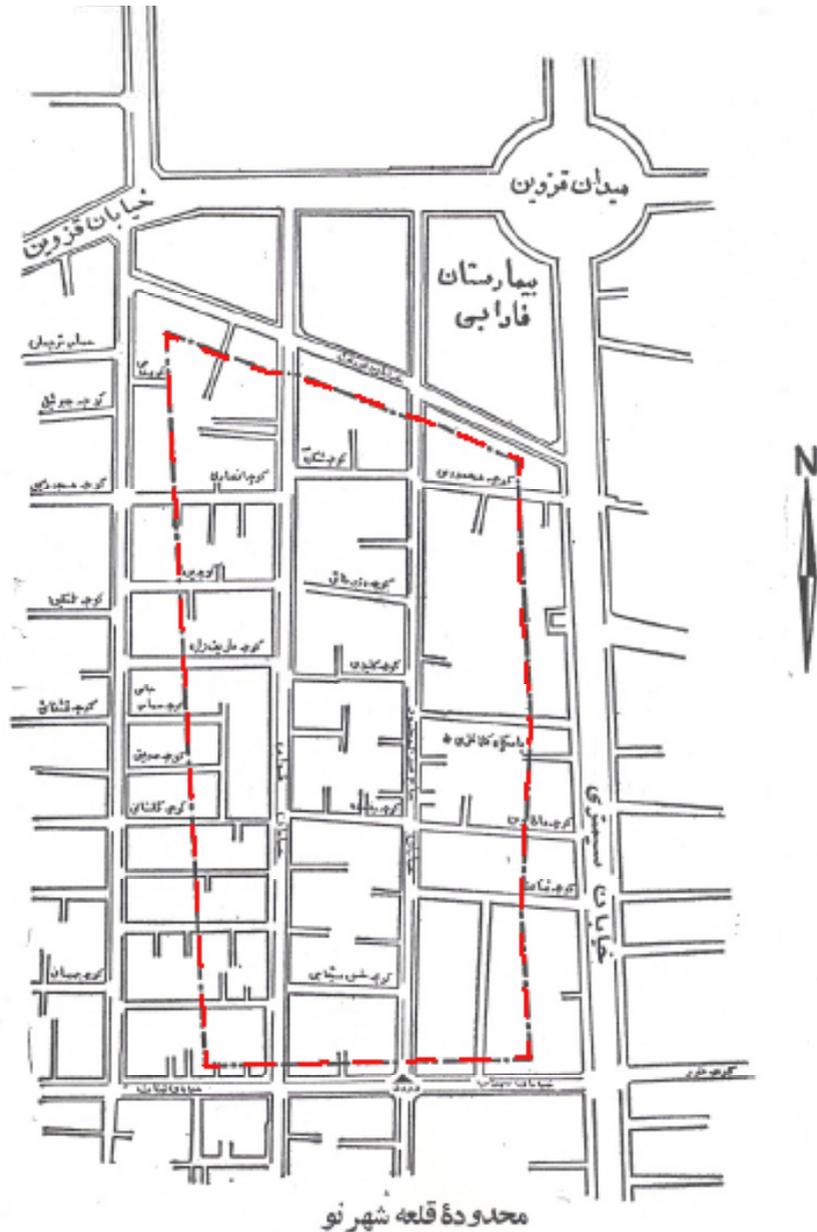
In 1921, Tehran is a walled city. Shahr-e No (“New Town”) is established outside the Qazvin gate to house scores of prostitutes who are expelled from the city by the orders of the Commander of the Iranian Armed Forces, Reza Khan (later Reza Shah Pahlavi). Historical anecdotes claim this is orchestrated as a political show of cleansing that follows a scandalous entrapment and expulsion of two British diplomats arrested in a well-known brothel in the company of Iranian prostitutes.

After his coronation, Reza Shah orders the demolition of the city wall in the move to modernise. Shahr-e No becomes part of Tehran.

Map of the Naseri Capital City of Teheran, 1891, Cyrus Alai, *Special Maps of Persia 1477-1925* (Leiden : Brill, 2005). © Cyrus Alai and Brill , Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade. (Shahr-e No marked in red)



The walled ghetto and its popular culture.



Map of Shahr-e No District, Tehran, 1969 from S. Farman Farmaian, *On Prostitution in the City of Tehran*, 1969 ©Ty Aur Press, Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade.
(Red border denotes the wall perimeter of the Citadel of Shahr-e No.

By the mid-1940s, the neighbourhood is centred around two main avenues and a maze of side streets. One avenue serves mainly as a living quarter, the other as a working quarter. The area is initially open to the public, and access is free.

After the overthrow of the government of Dr. Mossadegh and the coup d'état of 1953 a wall is erected around the neighbourhood by the military government of General Zahedi. The neighbourhood becomes a segregated ghetto known as the Citadel of Shahr-e No or the Zahedi Citadel. Access is eventually controlled through a single gate. The Citadel becomes a thriving ghetto, housing a tapestry of popular culture rich with drinking taverns and cabarets. Crime is rife.

During its history Shahr-e No captures the imagination of many writers and intellectuals. The area serves as a setting for several novels written between the 1940s and 1970s and popular films, recording or fictionalising details of its characters, shops, bars and theatres. It was also visited by foreign artists, including Bernardo Bertolucci and Peter Brook.

پیرامون روسپیگری در شهر تهران

به اهتمام
ساره فرمانفرمایان

قلعه

QALEH
A Film By Kamran Shirdel

Sattareh Farman Farmaian, *On Prostitution in the City of Tehran*, first published 1969, (re-edited by Ty Aur Press: Massachusetts, CA, 2012). Courtesy Ty Aur Press and Archaeology of the Final Decade.

The emancipation of women and a shift in attitude.

Women's emancipation in the 1960s initiates a shift in attitude towards Shahr-e No. This is driven by the founding of institutions such as the Women's Organisation and the Tehran School of Social Work. In 1967, the Womens' Organisation commissions a documentary film about the Citadel, which is funded by the Ministry of Culture and directed by Kamran Shirdel. The project is intercepted and banned by the ministry in the same year, indicative of the ambivalent nature of official attitudes regarding the Citadel. The following year, a comprehensive research is commissioned by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and conducted by the Tehran School of Social Work. The report is published in 1969. Golestan studies the report and conducts interviews with the director of the school, Mrs. Sattareh Farman Farmaian.

Until fifteen years ago, there was no drinking water in the Citadel. Now the Citadel has asphalted streets, electricity and running drinking water. Our aim is to provide other services such as health insurance and retirement pensions.

- Sattareh Farman Farmaian, founder and director of Tehran School of Social Work, interviewed by Kaveh Golestan 1976



The destruction and erasure of the Citadel.



The Citadel was set on fire Monday, 29 January, 1979, three days before the arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini and thirteen days before the victory of the revolution (with an undisclosed number of residents trapped inside) and then demolished shortly after in line with an official programme of cultural cleansing. Some of the women were tragically charred to death during the blaze and several others were arrested and later faced the revolutionary firing squads in the summer of 1979.

The erasure of the urban neighbourhood signified the initiation of a programme of cultural cleansing that transformed the Iranian landscape. At the core of this cultural revolution was a forced redefining of sexual and gender urban mores. The area was flattened a year later in an act of memory erasure and converted into a park which stands today.

Above: A revolutionary mob exhibits the burned body of a presumed prostitute, ©Abbas/Magnum Photos

Below: *Untitled* (Burning of the Citadel), 1979 ©Kamran Shirdel



Cultural reterritorialisation

Six months after scorching, the remnants of the inhabited quarters were destroyed and the entire neighbourhood was bulldozed flat and out of sight in an act of Islamic cleansing. In keeping with authoritarian erasures, the exterritorial space was reorganised and the physical scars of its destroyed landscape were transformed into a park complete with a lake. Today, what the visitor sees is an empty stretch of nature - cypress trees, geese floating on the water surface of the lake.

Recreating the Citadel investigates the nature and function of cultural deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation as a tool of political and cultural reordering of society in post-1979 revolutionary Iran. It specifically sheds light on the regressive shifts in legislation and the nature of social control with reference to the erasure of the neighbourhood and the eradication of the subcultures of popular cinema, music, entertainment and socializing that were associated with it. The research pushes back censorship and poses a wider question about the long term effects associated with systemic amputations of cultural memory.

Historical Timeline 1920-80

1920s

Early 1920s - Tehran is a walled city. Shahr-e No (“New Town”) is established outside the Qazvin city gate of Tehran to house scores of prostitutes who are expelled from the city.

City walls and gates are demolished. Shahr-e No becomes part of Tehran.

1930s – 1940s

The neighbourhood is a thriving sex quarter and access is free and open to the public. Prostitutes walk the streets semi-naked and one of the side streets is famous for its young male prostitutes. Crime is rife and murders take place on a weekly basis.

1950s

After the *coup d'état* of 1953 a wall is erected around the neighbourhood. The neighbourhood becomes a ghetto known as the Citadel of Shahr-e No. It becomes easier to control crime and the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

1960s

A social work office is established in the Citadel to deal with the women’s crushing social, family, sexual and financial issues. The area around the Citadel has a thriving nightlife of bars and cabarets.

1970s

Kaveh Golestan makes his thorough study of the Citadel. There are approximately 1,500 women residing and working in the Citadel. Cabarets around the Citadel are at their highest popularity. Golestan publishes three photo essays on the Citadel. He exhibits his photographs at Tehran University. The exhibition is shut down. Weeks before the overthrow of the monarchy mobs set fire to the Citadel. There are no counts of possible deaths. Most of the women escaped. Some ex-residents are arrested and ‘reformed’ according to Islamic guidance. Several of the women are condemned to death by Islamic revolutionary courts and later executed. The Citadel area is bulldozed flat as an act of Islamic cultural cleansing.

1980s

After demolition, a park and lake are built.

Present

Prostitution is estimated at over 3,000,000 in Iran. It is illegal by law and the crime may be punishable by death.

Exhibiting Recreating the Citadel

Archaeology of the Final Decade has exhibited *Recreating the Citadel* in different iterations.

Kaveh Golestan Prostitute & Recreating the Citadel
Tate Modern, London (Permanent Collection)
August 2017 - August 2018

Prostitute (1975-77)
Somerset House, London
21 May – 24 May 2015

Recreating Shahr-e No: The Intimate Politics of the Marginal
Part of *Unedited History (Iran 1960 – 2014)*
MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome
11 December – 29 March 2015



Recreating Shahr-e No: The Intimate Politics of the Marginal
Part of *Unedited History (Iran 1960 – 2014)*
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
16 May – 24 August 2014

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

Prostitute: 1975-77 exhibition installation, Photo London, Somerset House, London 2015 ©Omid Salehi, Courtesy Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Vali Mahlouji is a London-based curator, founder of **Archaeology of the Final Decade**, independent advisor to **the British Museum** and director of **Kaveh Golestan Estate**. Mahlouji's recent work includes exhibitions at Foam Fotografiemuseum Amsterdam, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Whitechapel Gallery, Photo London, Prince Claus Fund, Singapore International Festival of Arts, Art Dubai Modern, Bergen Triennial, Open Eye Gallery and Dhaka Art Summit '18.

Founded in 2010, Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD) is a non-profit curatorial and educational platform, which researches histories of nations condemned by social displacement, cultural annihilation or deliberate disappearance. **AOTFD** engages with accounts of culture, which have been lost through material destruction, acts of censorship, political, economic or human contingencies. 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** materials have been acquired by Tate Modern, Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Smithsonian Institute and Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA).

Tate Modern has dedicated a room in its permanent collection – a first for an Iranian artist - for exhibiting materials from **Vali Mahlouji's** project *Recreating the Citadel* alongside **Kaveh Golestan's** *Prostitute* series from August 2017. **AOTFD's** *A Utopian Stage* at Whitechapel Gallery was nominated for Best Exhibition (Alternative) 2015 by the Global Fine Arts Awards.