

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FINAL DECADE

A UTOPIAN STAGE

Curated by Vali Mahlouji

A Utopian Stage

*a cultural atlas
excavated archives of Festival of Arts
a film programme
a transnationally roving amphitheatre*

A Utopian Stage is a project in four distinct parts incorporating an archival exhibition of performance, a cultural atlas of utopian ideals, a performance arena and a film programme.

A *Utopian Stage* revisits the radical aspirations of the hyper-modernist networks of artists, thinkers, cultural practitioners and experimentalists that defined the 1960s and 1970s. It is a multifaceted project, journeying through modernism's euphoric drives: ideals of progress, openness, emancipation, inclusivity, and the overarching notion of a unity of disunities.

The artistic, cultural, political, moral and spiritual landscape of the mid-twentieth century was defined by the collapse of European hegemonies and the rise of the Global South, which opened up new horizons for contact and exchange. It allowed for a fluid artistic exchange across geographies, histories and forms in ways and on a scale that had never been possible before.



The project reconstructs a complex space of international modernity by highlighting the 'third worldist' sensibilities of the immediate post-colonial period and tracing a cultural atlas through which knowledge was exchanged across alternative (often non-European) plateaus. This process of global 'reorientation' takes us through a reconstruction of the gaze - subverting the single 'reading' of West to East into a more cyclical model, engaging in cultural negotiations from East to East, East to West, South to East, South to South - constructing a panoramic exchange of global artistic discourse.



Installation photographs from *A Utopian Stage* at Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Courtesy of Archaeology of the Final Decade and Dhaka Art Summit.



Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD) has unearthed archival materials, audio recordings and film footage which have been destroyed and remain banned since 1979. These document the revolutionary spirit of the international performance Festival of Arts.

SOUND ON THE OTHER SIDE

INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT (1857-1947)

- RANKIN CHANAKA CHATTERJAY (1882-1944)
- SAKOJINI NAIDU (1879-1964)
- RABINDRANATH TAGORE (1861-1941)
- BENGAL THEOSOPHICAL SOCIETY (1882)
- MOHAMMAD ALI JOUHAR (1878-1931)
- KAZI NAZRUL ISLAM (1899-1974)
- SUBRAMANIAM BHARATI (1882-1924)

THE COMMUNIST IN (COMINTERN) (1919-1943)

THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

NEGRIITUDE (1930s)

FRANTZ FANON (1925-1961)

ALAIN LÉVY (1925-1961)

JEAN-PAUL SARTRE (1905-1980)

KERALA KALAMANDALAM (1930)

GAMELAN

VISBA-BHAKTI (1924)

'LA VERITE SUR LES COLONIES' EXPOSITION (1931-32)

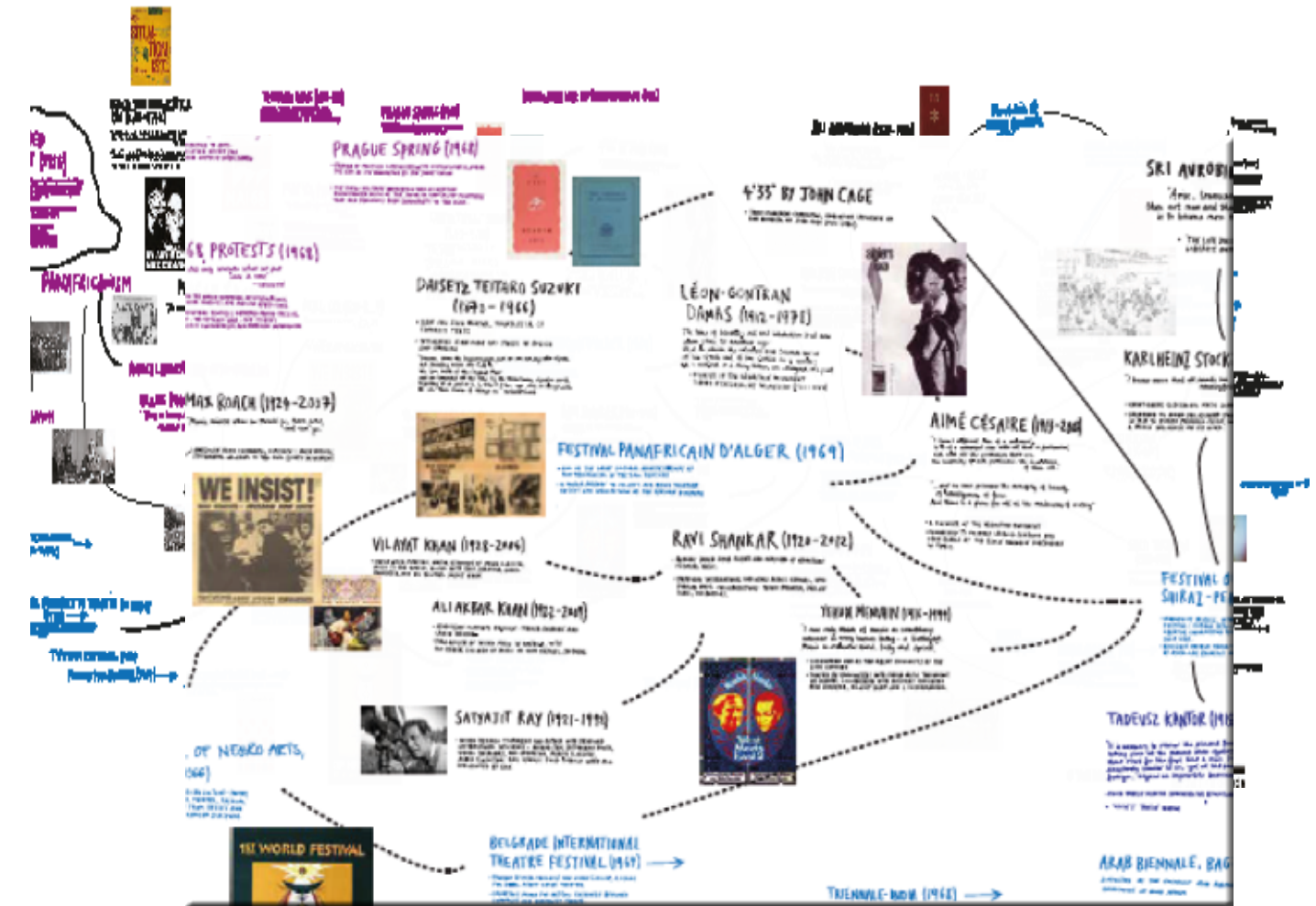
ALGERIAN WAR OF INDEPENDENCE (1954-1962)

LA BATAILLE D'ALGER

AFRICAN MEDIEVAL

A Cultural Atlas

beyond the bounds on the other side



The interactive and ongoing cultural atlas conjures a fragmented history of the long twentieth century through the ambitions and contradictions of countless utopian universalist episodes and ideals: transcendental internationalisms; radical liberations; emancipating solidarities.

By the middle of the last century, the demise of the old European empires revealed a new horizon of opportunities and encounters for people and cultures across the world. The atlas serves as an evocation of the constantly evolving dreams and possibilities that emerged and dissolved during the period.



Installation photograph from A Tropical Stage at Dhaka Art Summit 2018, and Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Excavated Archives of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis

thrust open the heavens and start anew

The exhibition takes the landscape of the radically revolutionary international Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis (1967-1977) as a seminal modernist event as a case study and point of departure. It explores the reverberations of 20th century modernist universalisms, its ideals and its highs and lows from the vantage point of the international avant-garde and the sensibilities and urgencies of the emerging Global South.

The festival juxtaposed a wide range of world artists including:

Ravi Shankar, Bismillah Khan, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Iannis Xenakis, Olivier Messiaen, Shuji Terayama, Peter Brook, Andrei Serban, Robert Wilson, Robert Serumaga, Shanta Rao, Maurice Bejart, Tadeusz Kantor, Jerzy Grotowski, Joseph Chaikin, Nuria Espert Yehudi Menuhin, National Ballet of Senegal, Rwanda Drum Ensemble, Sardono Kusomo, Balinese Gamelan musicians and dancers, Kathakali dancers, Japanese Noh theatre, and many more leading performers.



Caligula, Albert Camus (playwright), Arby Ovanessian (director), Kargah-e Namayesh, Persepolis, 1974. Courtesy Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Mehdi Khonsari; Archaeology of the Final Decade.

By the 1970s it became the main crucible of cultural exchange between the international avant-garde and the experimentalists and nativists from the Global South. Its unique space of meeting and exchange - outside of colonial dynamics - echoed the high ambitions of modernism and responded to aspirations for an emancipated, democratic and liberal space beyond the hierarchical structures of the dominant European discourses.

The Festival was declared decadent and anti-Islamic through a religious decree by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1977 and interrupted by the revolution in 1978-79. All materials and archives associated were destroyed or removed from public access and remain officially banned in Iran to date.



Caligula, Albert Camus (playwright), Arby Ovanessian (director), Kargah-e Namayesh, Persepolis, 1974. Courtesy Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Mehdi Khonsari; Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Orghast Parts I and II, Ted Hughes and Mahin Tadjadod (playwrights) Peter Brook (co-director with Arby Ovanessian, Geoffrey Reeves, Andrei Serban), International Centre for Theatre Research, commissioned by the Festival and the French Ministry of Culture, Persepolis, 1971. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Modernity Looking South and East

The Festival's purview resonated with the expansive notion of the objects of the **Non-Aligned Movement** and the rise of the Global South. The Festival asserted a democratic relational sphere, highlighting an international discourse around marginalised communities. As a means to progress and emancipate, the Festival of Arts turned consciously towards Asian philosophies, a trend followed by many later twentieth century intellectuals after the fall of the old European empires.

The genealogies and rhetoric of the festival are demonstrative of its aim to re-invigorate and modernise local art forms per an exchange with **South Asia, East Asia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, Latin America, North** and **sub-Saharan Africa**. Here, they turned to the South and East for inspiration.

The Festival introduced artists and expressions from the Global South into international cultural discourse on an unprecedented scale, radically dismantling the hierarchies of local and international hegemonies. It proposed a paradigm shift in opposition to, and beyond, the authoritarian hierarchical model of the European civility by shifting attention towards the re-emerging others in the immediate aftermath of decolonisation.

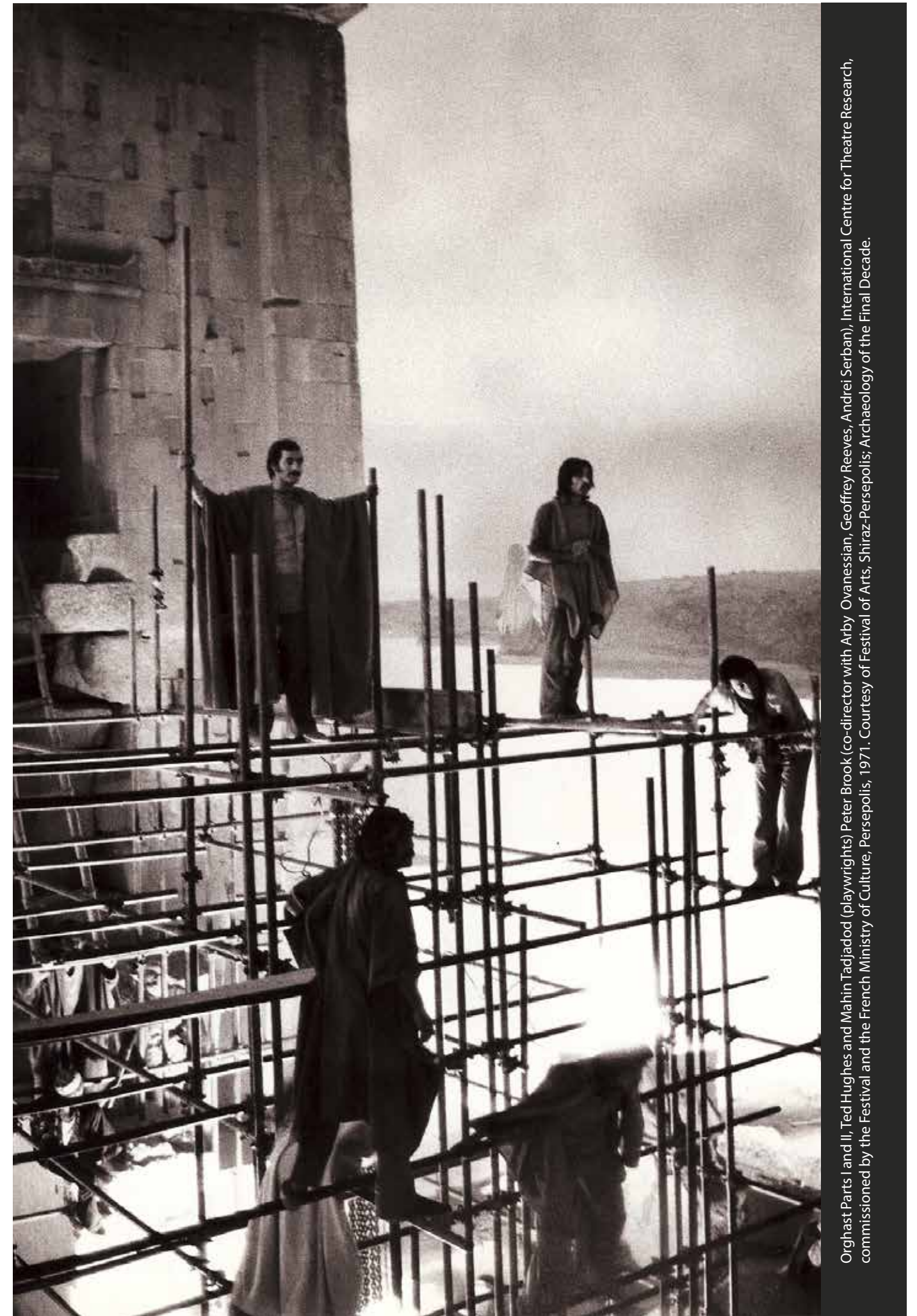


Uma Sharma performing Kathak, Classical Indian Dances, Open Air Theatre, 1969. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.

A Nexus for Modernising Nativists and Ritualising Modernists

Striving for authenticity through nativist drives, modernisers from the 'Third World' were keen to base their investigations on native rituals, traditions and folklores. The process of rediscovery, deconstruction and reorientation found a natural ally in the internationally fluid and subversive Western avant-garde, whose modernities sought a break from the constraints and stabilities of their own traditions.

The festival became an authentic nexus for the 'Third World' modernising drives that rooted themselves in a hive of local tradition, folklore and ritual and the Eastern and Western European and American modernists who were experimenting with ritualisations and encounters with other cultures in an effort to break away from the strictures of European artistic traditions.



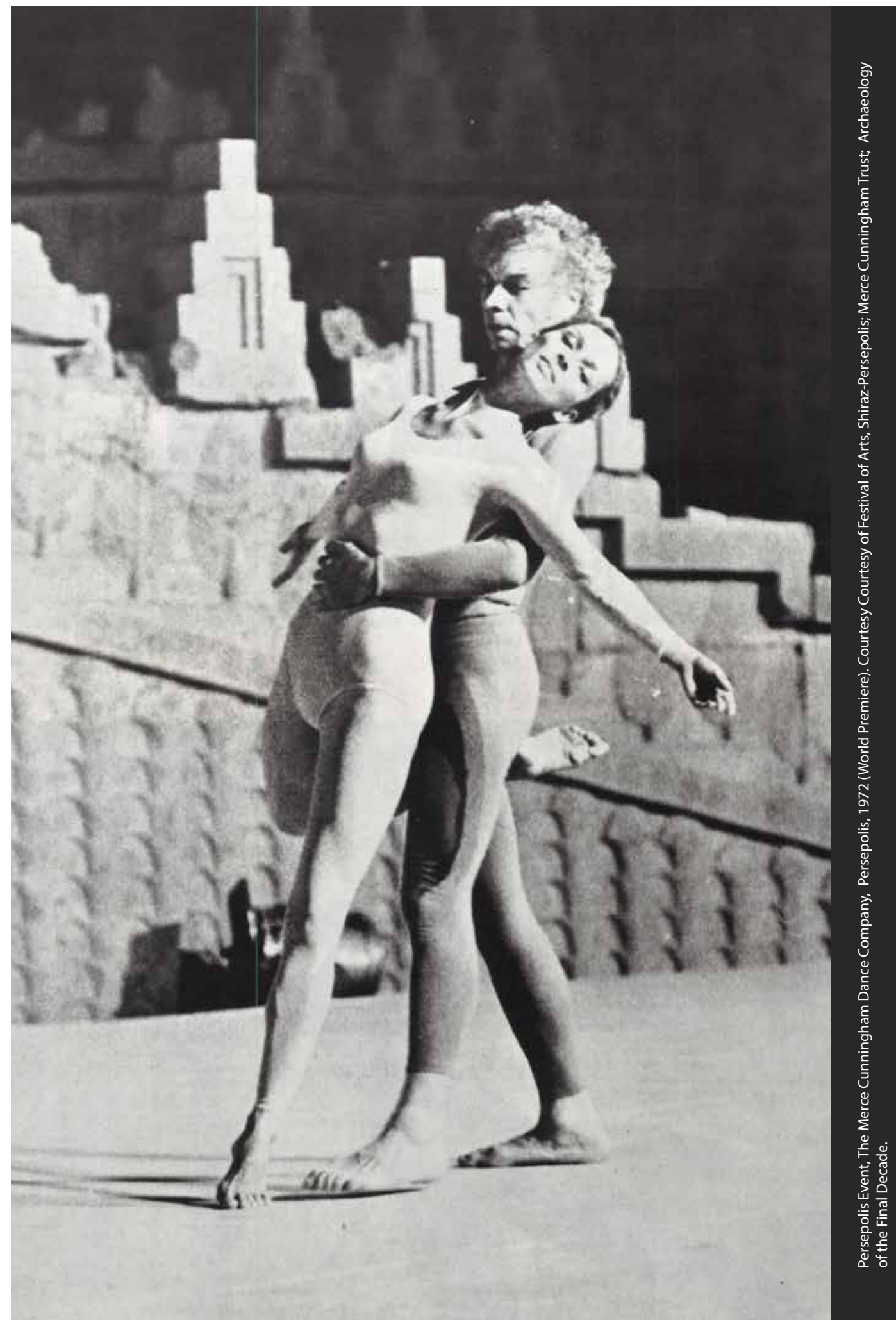
Orghast Parts I and II, Ted Hughes and Mahin Tadjadod (playwrights) Peter Brook (co-director with Arby Ovanessian, Geoffrey Reeves, Andrei Serban), International Centre for Theatre Research, commissioned by the Festival and the French Ministry of Culture, Persepolis, 1971. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.

Avant-Gardes Facilitate a Reverse Transmission of Knowledge

The curating underscored the reverse transmission of knowledge from the so-called periphery to the centre, highlighting the depth of Asian philosophical influence on Europe. Important experimental practitioners were aligned with non-European traditions to which they were indebted. **John Cage** had studied with Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki, a theologian of Zen Buddhism. With **Merce Cunningham**, they drew inspiration from the Chinese divination text I Ching (Book of Chance) to explore notions of chance and indeterminacy. **Karlheinz Stockhausen**'s compositions aimed at reaching a state of inner asceticism and spirituality correlating with philosophies of Hinduism.

Our societies have been evolving in recent years under the shadow of the technologically dynamic West. Our cultures are becoming recast in a new crucible. The impact of the West is a force we must contend with. Our responses to it should well be witnessed, both for the mutual edification of non-Western countries, through which we can study precedents and solutions in reasserting our age-old cultural heritages, and for the interest of Western artists, who might draw inspiration from the perspectives of other cultural arenas.

- 7th Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis Programme



Persepolis Event, The Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Persepolis, 1972 (World Premiere). Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Merce Cunningham Trust; Archaeology of the Final Decade.

The Case of Africa

The festival's inclusion of indigenous African forms of dance and drama coincided with African cultural emancipation. With the inclusion of these artists, the Festival implicitly entered into an intercultural dialogue with contemporaneous African platforms, most notably the **First World Festival of Negro Arts** (1966) in Dakar and the **Festival pan-Africain d'Alger** (1969). The ethnographic nature and purposes of these appear to contrast with an inclusive, panoramic view of a universalist world culture as it was articulated at Shiraz-Persepolis.

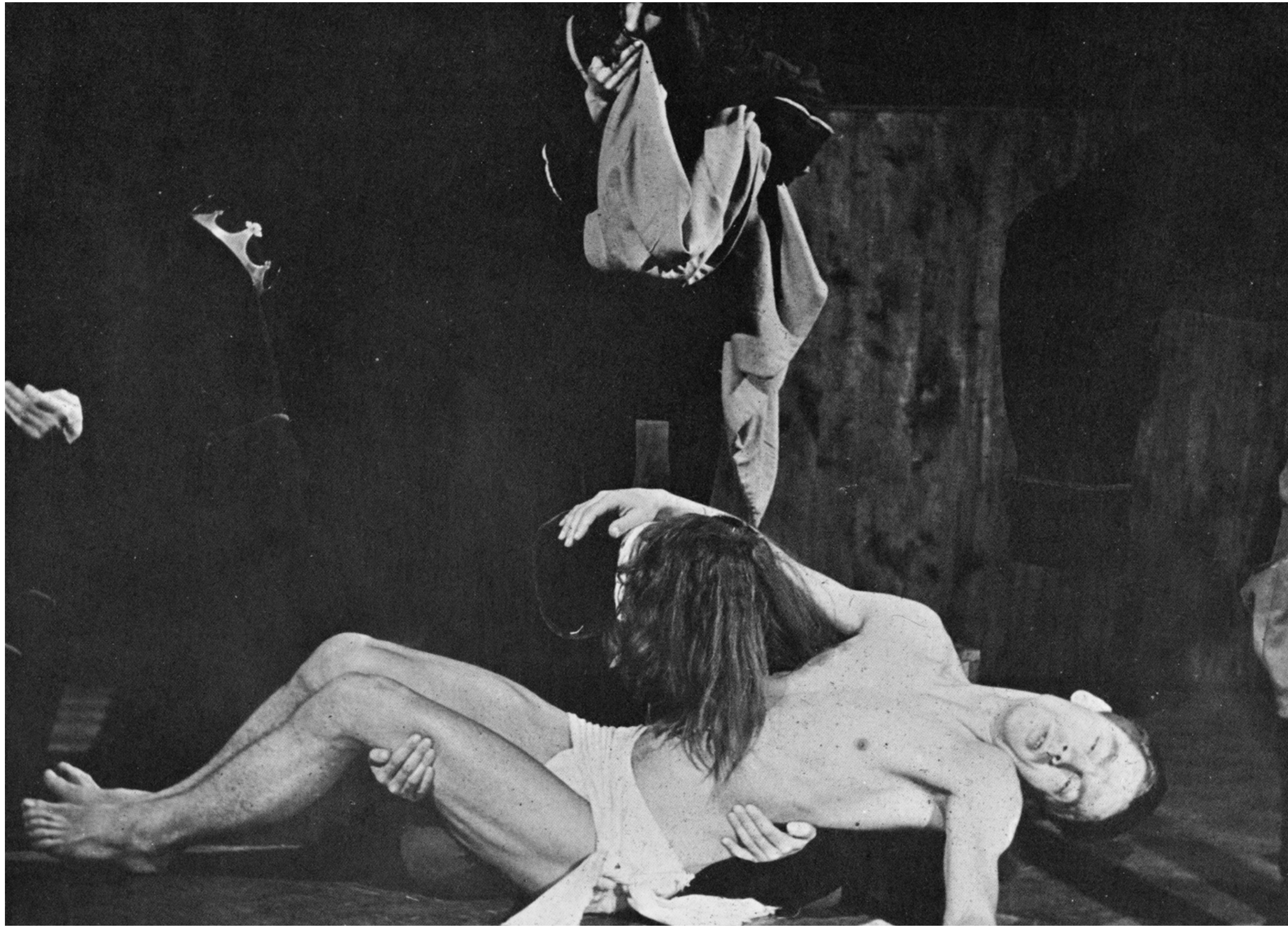
A new post-colonial generation of African dramatists, including the well-known **Duro Lapidó**, drew upon indigenous traditions and mythologies. These investigations focused on national revivalist drives within an intercultural discourse which resonated with the directions of the Festival. Artists from Senegal, Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda, all of which gained independence in the early 1960s, represented ritual and contemporary cultural expressions.



Renga Moi, African Dance-Drama, Robert Serumaga (playwright and director), National Theatre of Ugandan, Saray-e Moshir, 1975. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.

The **Ballet National du Sénégal** participated with traditional dances and music in the 4th Festival in 1970, followed by **L'Ensemble Lyrique du Senegal** in 1976. Duro Lapidó's famous opera *Oba Ko So* - a dramatisation of the Yoruba story of Shango the King of Thunder - was staged in 1973.

Robert Serumaga's contemporary dance-drama *Renga Moi* returned to the legend of Acoli.



The Constant Prince, Calderon (playwright), Jerzy Grotowski, (director), Polish Theatre Laboratory, Delgosha Pavilion, 1970. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Vis-o-Ramin, Mahin Tajaddod (play adaptation of Gorgani's 11th century verse), Arby Ovanesian (director), Persepolis, 1970. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.



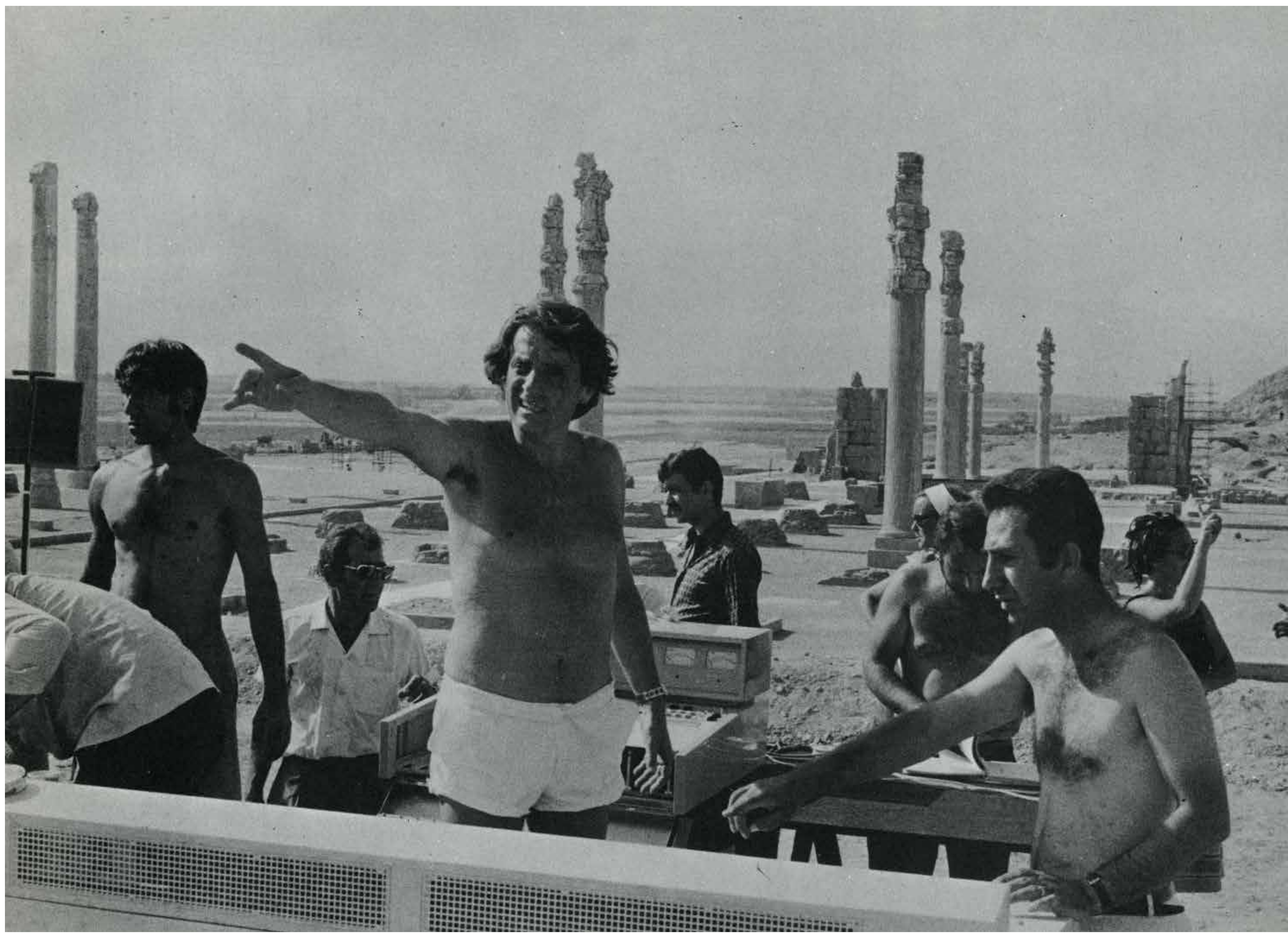
Shahr-e Qesseh (City of Tales), Bijan Mofid (playwright & director), from left: Soheil Souzani, Mehdi Ali Beigi, Jamileh Nedai, Mahmood Ostad Mohamad, Rashid Kanaani, commissioned by the Festival, University Hall, 1968. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Bijan Mofid Foundation; Archaeology of the Final Decade.



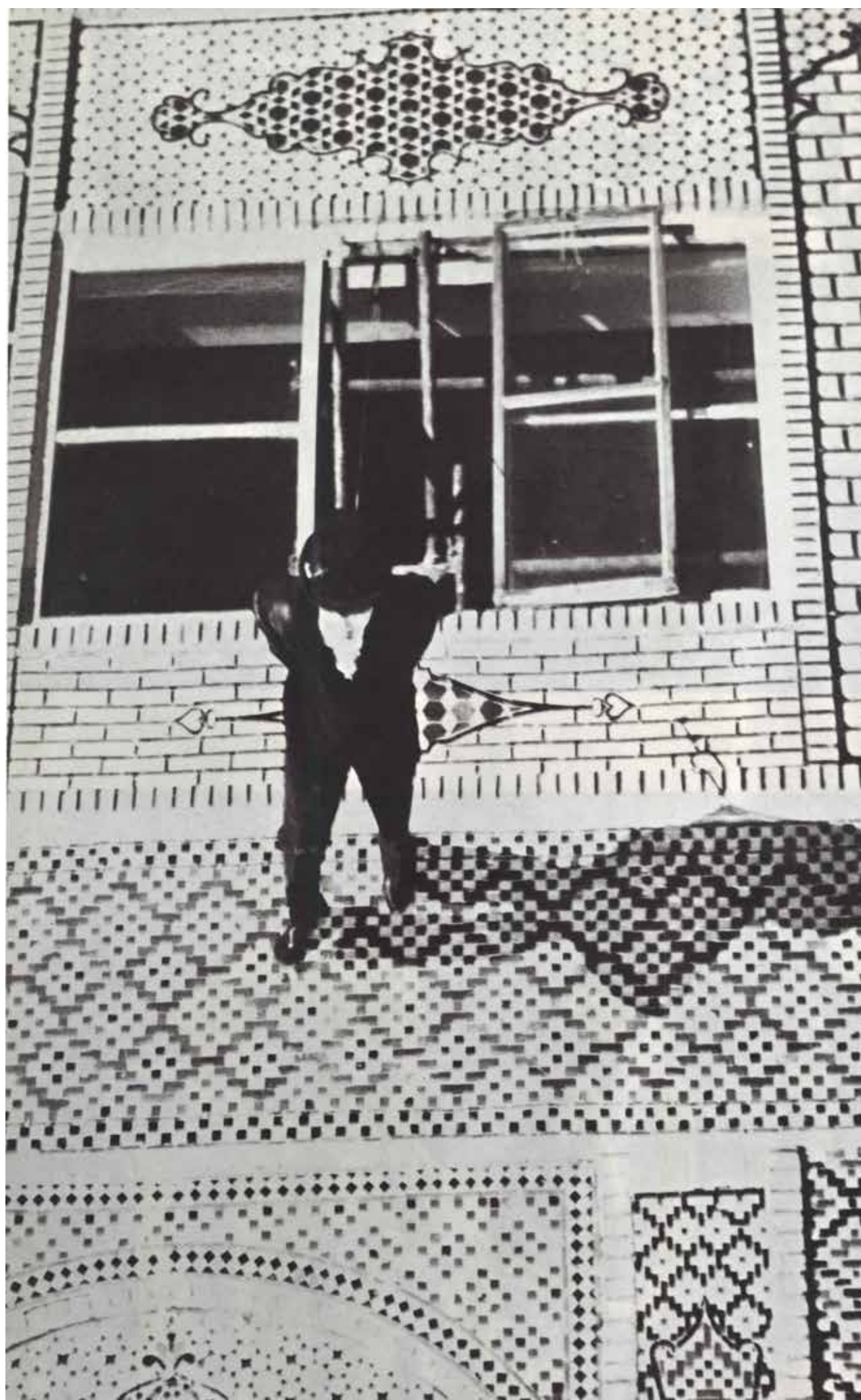
Legong Keraton Dance, Balinese Gamelan and Traditional Dances, Persepolis, 1969. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Malie Letrange; Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Ballet National du Senegal, Music and Dance, A diverse ethnic musical map of Senegal , Open-Air Theatre , Shiraz-Persepolis, Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Iannis Xenakis (composer) in preparations for the premiere of Persepolis music and light spectacle, Persepolis, 1971. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Origin of Blood, Shuji Terayama (creator and director), Tenjo Sajiki Theatre Laboratory , Delgosha Garden , Shiraz-Persepolis, 1973. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Archaeology of the Final Decade.



KA MOUNTAIN AND GUARDENIA TERRACE, a story about a family and some people changing, Robert Wilson and the Byrd Hoffman School of Byrds, Qavam House, 1972. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis; Bahman Jalali and Byrd Hoffman Water Mill Foundation; Archaeology of the Final Decade.

The Transnationally Roving Amphitheatre

below the levels where differences appear

below the levels where differences appear is an ongoing transnationally roving amphitheatre that inclusively incorporates artists, performers and filmmakers within a collective arena of experimentation, echoing the progressive pitch of the 1960-70s and the highs and lows, aspirations and contradistions of 20th century's universalist utopian ideals. Amidst resurgent forces of cultural and political reactionism around the world, *below the levels...* proclaims a radical site of collective exchange.

below the levels... 2018 invited contrubutions from **Hassan Khan, Goshka Macuga with Vali Mahlouji, Silas Riener (Merce Cunningham Trust), Reetu Sattar, Yasmin Jahan Nupur with Santal performers, and Lalon Baul singers**. It took place in Bangladesh sponsored and presented by Dhaka Art Summit '18 and part-funded by Liverpool Biennial 2018 and New North and South.



Like water on hot rocks, Goshka Macuga and Vali Mahlouji, performed at Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Courtesy of the artists, DAS '18, Liverpool Biennial 2018, New North and South and Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Harano Sur (Lost Tune), Reetu Sattar, performed at Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Courtesy of the artist, DAS '18, Liverpool Biennial 2018, New North and South and Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Field Dances, Merce Cunningham, performance conducted by Silas Riener at Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Courtesy of the artist, Merce Cunningham Trust, DAS '18, Liverpool Biennial 2018, New North and South and Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Purity, Hassan Khan, performed at Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Courtesy of the artist, DAS '18, Liverpool Biennial 2018, New North and South and Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Harano Sur (Lost Tune), Reetu Sattar, performed at Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Courtesy of the artist, DAS '18, Liverpool Biennial 2018. New North and South and Archaeology of the Final Decade.



Enej, Yasmin Jahan Nupur with Santal performers at Dhaka Art Summit 2018. Courtesy of the artists, DAS '18, Liverpool Biennial 2018. New North and South and Archaeology of the Final Decade.

A Film Programme

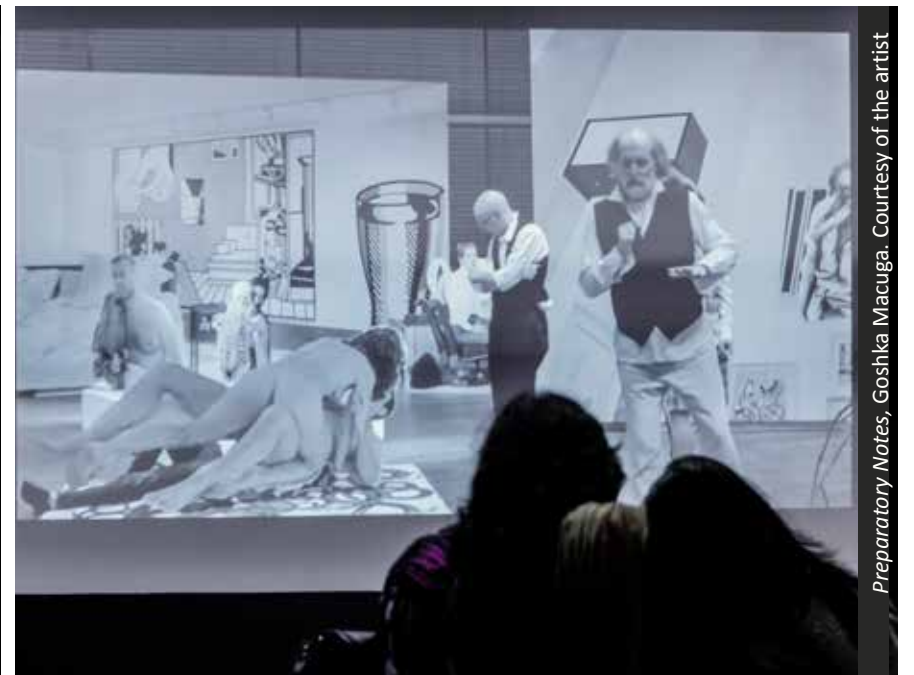
to be free is to lose sight of the shore

The eclectic film programme conflates artist, video documentations of live performances, historical documentaries and feature films to realise an ambivalent, exuberant, universal stage, where ideas and impulses can flourish.

to be free is to lose sight of the shore 2018 brought together works by diverse artists and filmmakers including: **Reza Abdoh, Larry Achiampong & David Blandy, Ashish Avikunthak, Shezad Dawood, Rose English, Rose Finn-Kelcey, William Greaves, Mikhail Kalatozov, Lindsay Kemp, William Klein, Lala Rukh, Goshka Macuga, Simon Moretti, Sergei Parajanov, Gillo Pontecorvo, Ousmane Sembène, Shuji Terayama and Stan VanDerBeek.**



Ornamental Happiness, Rose English, courtesy of the artist



Preparatory Notes, Goshka Macuga. Courtesy of the artist



Hip-Hop Waltz of Eurydice, Reza Abdoh, Courtesy of the artist



The Emergence of Kali, Ashish Avikunthak. Courtesy of the artist



Glory, Rose Finn-Kelcey, Courtesy of the artist



It was a time that was a time, Shezad Dawood. Courtesy of the artist

Exhibiting *A Utopian Stage*

Iterations of *A Utopian Stage* have been exhibited at:

A Utopian Stage

Exhibition and contemporary performance and film programme
Dhaka Art Summit '18, Dhaka
2 February 2018 - 10 February 2018

A Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz–Persepolis (1967-77)

Open Eye Gallery Liverpool
1 February 2017 - 30 June 2017

A Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz–Persepolis (1967-77)

Bergen Assembly, Biennial Foundation, Bergen
1 September - 2 October 2016



Kathakali from Kerala Kalamandalam, Traditional Dance-Drama from South-West India, scenes from Ramayana and Mahabharata, Open-Air Theatre, 1968. Courtesy of Festival of Arts, Shiraz-Persepolis, Archaeology of the Final Decade.

A Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz–Persepolis (1967-77)

Whitechapel Gallery, London
21 April – 4 October 2015

Retracing a Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz – Persepolis (1967-77)

Part of Unedited History (Iran 1960 – 2014)
MAXXI Museo nazionale delle arti del XXI secolo, Rome
11 Dec 2014 – 29 March 2015

Retracing a Utopian Stage: Festival of Arts, Shiraz – Persepolis (1967-77)

Part of Unedited History (Iran 1960 – 2014)
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
16 May – 24 August 2014

archæology 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 2018.

Founded in 2010, Archaeology of the Final Decade (AOTFD) is a non-profit curatorial and research 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 AOTFD's project *Recreating the Citadel* with 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.

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