

Kaveh Golestan - The Citadel

Foam Fotografiemuseum, Amsterdam

21 March – 4 May 2014



Photo © Christian van der Kooy

Kaveh Golestan - *The Citadel* is the first iteration of an ongoing curatorial and research project founded by Mahlouji entitled **ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FINAL DECADE**. This larger project investigates cultural and artistic material which were destroyed, forgotten or under-represented and yet are historically significant from the final decade before 1979 - the pre-revolutionary moment - in Iran. By revisiting these sites of culture the project re-circulates and reincorporates the material back into cultural memory and discourse and retrospectively complexifies their compounded meanings. **ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FINAL DECADE** aims to situate Golestan beyond photojournalism firmly within a museum and art historical context.

Kaveh Golestan (1950-2003) was an important and prolific Iranian documentary photographer and a pioneer of street photography. His photographic practice has hugely informed the work of future generations of Iranian artists but has remained seriously over-looked in Europe. *Kaveh Golestan - The Citadel* presents 45 vintage photographs from the series entitled Prostitute taken between 1975-1977 of women working in the Citadel of Shahr-e No, the red light district of Teheran. The photographs will be exhibited for the first time as a vintage set since 1978. Alongside the photographs, the exhibition includes original notebooks of Golestan, newspaper clippings and audio interviews relating to the area.

The Citadel of Shahr-e No (literally translated as 'New Town') was an old walled neighbourhood in Tehran, which was accessed through a gate. The inhabitants were around 1500 women and only men were allowed to visit the Citadel. Kaveh Golestan's record of the area is the last photographic documents of this urban space. The series of portraits Golestan produced are a testament to an intimate, humane gaze into the lives and personalities of the resident women. They constitute one of the strongest photographic studies of femaleness in Iran.

Prostitute series

Kaveh Golestan belonged to a very active intellectual and artistic milieu, socially driven and deeply committed to social issues. He published several groups of photographs from his Prostitute series in three extensive essays in the daily Iranian newspaper *Ayandegan* exposing and drawing attention to the living conditions of the women. In 1978 he exhibited the photographs at the University of Teheran for a short period lasting fourteen days. The exhibition was abruptly shut down, most probably under the pressure of the intelligence services, but without any official explanation. The series was also briefly shown in a sneak exposition in the *Seyhoun Gallery* stand at the Tehran Art Fair in the same year. This was the last time the vintage photographs were exhibited and they have never been seen again. However, this is not the only reason why this exhibition is of great importance.

Demolished

The district of the Citadel was set on fire (some weeks before the fall of the shah) and demolished within weeks of the Iranian revolution in 1979 through official decree. 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 1980. The area was flattened in an grand act of erasure and converted into a park which stands today.

Historical events

Besides Shahr-e No, Kaveh Golestan also documented many other major historical events like 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, as by then the work was no longer considered a threat to the Iranian government. While he was on an assignment in Iraq Golestan stepped on a fatal landmine on 2 April 2003. He died in Kifri in Northern Iraq. He was 53 years old. His documentary photographs have mainly been featured in reportages and books and his work has not been exhibited often. The Kunsthal Rotterdam showed the exhibition *Kaveh Golestan: Recording the Truth in Iran 1950-2003* in 2008.

Curated by Vali Mahlouji

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Hours: Daily 10am-6pm, Thursday and Friday 10am-6pm

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Installation photographs

