



Mahud Climbing Mahud, Blank Pages of an Iranian Photo Album series (2014)



The Future Outdoor Cinema, Tochal Mahud, BPIPA series (2014)



Naghme (2013)



The Girl in Red Freefalling in Samburu series (2014)



The Girl at the Desk Accra (2014)



Adnan 35, Chel Agha Syria series (2015)



I KNOW WHY THE REBEL SINGS

From the terror of war to the oft-forgotten realities of those forced to pick up the pieces in its aftermath, this expansive exhibition of Newsha Tavakolian's photography creates a fluid dialogue between her moving coverage of conflicts, her candid exposé of humanitarian tragedies and her aesthetic explorations of life in Tehran with intimate forays into the private lives of friends and acquaintances.

I know why the rebel sings, for the first time, integrates Tavakolian's stirring warzone images and NGO projects with her more formally conceived portraits. It considers her photographic practice as a whole and examines her journalism as an integral component of it.

Meditative journeys of daily experiences in *Blank Pages of an Iranian Photo Album* and self-consciously staged, ordered scenes of characters in the *Look* series, sharply contrast with the raw urgency captured in a bloody ambush in Iraq or the harsh reality of a training camp of Syrian Kurdish female militias preparing to fight ISIS, featured in *On the War Trail*.

Tavakolian's journalistic output is considered beyond the narrative and visual strictures inherent in press formats, in relation to the wider themes that inform her oeuvre. Masterfully composed moments of quietude under the omnipotent shadow of terror are highlighted in *The Girl in Red*. *The Girl at the Desk* dominates the Ghana room, a moving image drawing attention to the human figure.

Iran Walls breaks away from formal serial compositions and creates new visual dialogues across series, allowing for previously unmade connections.

The exhibition ends with a selection of her prolific publications and news stories right up to the recent terror attack in Paris.

Vali Mahlouji

MAIN GALLERY

In these projects, Tavakolian examines the contemporary complexities of Iranian society through intimate forays into the private environments and experiences of a group of friends who share her own aspirations and struggles. In these works, as in much of her practice, the lone figure seemingly suspended in timelessness takes centre stage. Embedded within the meticulously *mise-en-scened* portraits (whether photographic stills or films-without-action) is a haunting disorientation of an unresolved past and an unknown future.

Blank Pages of an Iranian Photo Album (Tehran, 2014)

Blank Pages is based on the childhood family albums of eight friends (six of whom are presented here). These found albums contained many happy records of each individual's early childhood, especially those idealised and celebratory moments, such as anniversaries or special family events. In every case, the collection of memories had been discontinued and the albums abandoned, with most pages

left blank. The blank pages serve as a metaphor for the un-lived dreams. Taking the biographic silence as a point of departure, Tavakolian follows each individual in their daily affairs, and documents quotidian scenes. In each series, the first image is a reproduction of a found photograph from the original album and the rest reflect the gritty, ordinary realities of everyday encounters in Tehran.

These expanded albums subvert the dreams of an idyllic childhood, which are disconnected from the reality of the present.

The subjects are brought to life in films shot on a hillside in Tehran, where the characters remain compellingly motionless and suspended in time.

Look (Tehran, 2013)

Tavakolian keeps her gaze focused on an intimate relationship with the individual in these self-consciously theatrical and ordered scenes, which are Hopperian in aura. Tavakolian turns her own bedroom into the studio stage where she situates the static individuals and their associated props directly in front of the lens with the view of the surrounding tower blocks as a backdrop. The portraits are arranged as a sequence to emphasise the impersonal nature and monotonous repetitiveness of the scenes.

Opposite the series of portraits is the near life size view of the same window and the urban landscape beyond. As viewers, we find ourselves in the same space as the subjects in the portraits. A single figure observes us from the end of the narrow hallway.

Here, the installation plays on the mechanisms of gaze and subjectivities. There is a voyeuristic interplay between the viewer and the viewed. Once again, the subjects are condemned to a crippling motionlessness in the films.

GROUND FLOOR AND LANDING

Freefalling in Samburu (Samburu, Kenya, 2014)

The lightbox displays segments of a photo essay, entitled *Freefalling in Samburu*. This was commissioned by The Girls Generation, an African NGO based in Kenya and fighting to end the inhumane practice of female genital mutilation, which is still prevalent in many societies, especially across Africa. Over one hundred girls have been rescued from being forced into marriages following a forced mutilation of the genitalia.

Accra (Ghana, 2014)

Tavakolian travelled to Accra in Ghana on a project commissioned by another NGO to document literacy classes for children. The works in this section were mainly produced outside the scope of the commission.



Portrait with Red Chairs, Darbandikhan, Iraq (2003)



Iran Portraits (2005)



Maria Clutching, Maria series (2007)



Untitled, Skies (2015)



Paris Attack (2015)
All photographs © Newsha Tavakolian

BIOGRAPHIES

Newsha Tavakolian

A self-taught photographer, Newsha began working professionally in the Iranian press at the age of 16.

Her work has been displayed in dozens of international art exhibitions and has been on show in museums such as the Victoria & Albert, LACMA and the British Museum, and the Boston Museum of Fine Art.

In 2014 Newsha was chosen as the fifth laureate of the Carmignac Gestion Photojournalism Award. In 2015 she was chosen as the Principal Prince Claus Laureate. Newsha became a Magnum nominee in 2015.

Vali Mahlouji

An independent curator and writer, Vali Mahlouji is also an advisor to the British Museum. He has curated at FOAM (Amsterdam), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Whitechapel Gallery and Photo London.

He is founder of the curatorial platform Archaeology of the Final Decade, recirculating art and cultural material that have remained under-exposed or in some cases destroyed.

Mahlouji has been published by Encyclopædia Iranica; Asia Society Museum; Athens Museum of Contemporary Art; and Sharjah Biennial, amongst others.

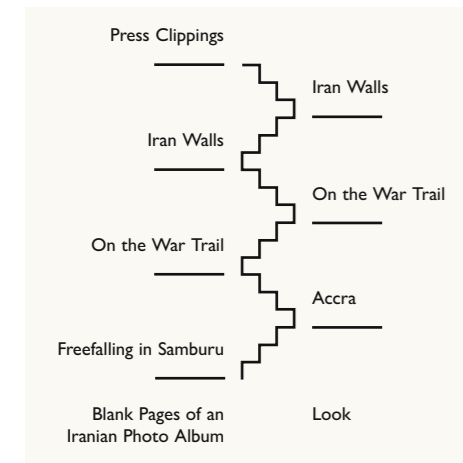
Newsha Tavakolian
I know why the rebel sings
27 November 2015–4 March 2016

Curated by Vali Mahlouji

Newsha Tavakolian

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FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR AND LANDING

On the War Trail (Iraq and Syria, 2003–2015)

The wall is a visual mapping of Tavakolian's experiences across Iraq and Syria, which are today terrorized by ISIS.

They begin in 2003, in the immediate aftermath of the US invasion and overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein and continue to the present day, recording public and private scenes from the tragic consequences of war.

Scenes from 2003 show the arrival of American tanks, the demolition of monuments to Saddam Hussein and the rounding up of Saddam loyalists by American military forces.

Prostitutes are seen in 2004 operating from a series of safe homes set up to serve soldiers loyal to Saddam Hussein. One is seen holding up a portrait of the deposed president and in another a madame carefully grooms a young virgin girl for a special deal.

Her virginity will only be offered to the highest bidder.

The bodies in the morgue belong to Kurdish fighters who had been mistakenly killed by friendly fire in 2003.

During her latest trip to Syria in 2015, Tavakolian spent some time in a militia training camp for Syrian Kurdish girls. They are seen training, relaxing and attending meetings. Portraits of their dead comrades decorate their rooms and serve as a reminder of their collective commitment to combating the terror of ISIS.

SECOND FLOOR AND LANDING

Iran Walls (2009–2015)

The display show photographs ranging from an example of Tavakolian's signature staged portrait (part of a larger Iran Portraits series produced for and published online by New York Times) to street scenes of protest and jubilation, and a military exercise which took place in early

November 2015, commemorating the anniversary of the oft-forgotten Iran-Iraq war (1980–88) that left a staggering million people dead.

Maria (Tehran, 2007) is an engagement with an Iranian transsexual, who became a woman after a life as a male truck driver named Asghar, on the Iran-Europe route. Her ex-wife hid the reality of the sex change from their children and led them to believe that their father left to marry another woman. After she was exposed by one of the tabloid papers, Maria descended into depression. She leads a lonely life in a small room in Tehran and occasionally supports herself through prostitution.

TOP FLOOR

A selection of media cuttings dating from 1998 to the present day represent the wide use and dissemination of images produced by Tavakolian over almost twenty years, since she began as a self-trained photojournalist. Several photographs in the exhibition can be seen reproduced here in the publications.

