

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE FINAL DECADE

RECREATING THE CITADEL

Kaveh Golestan, Prostitute 1975-77

Curated by Vali Mahlouji



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 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 cultural 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.

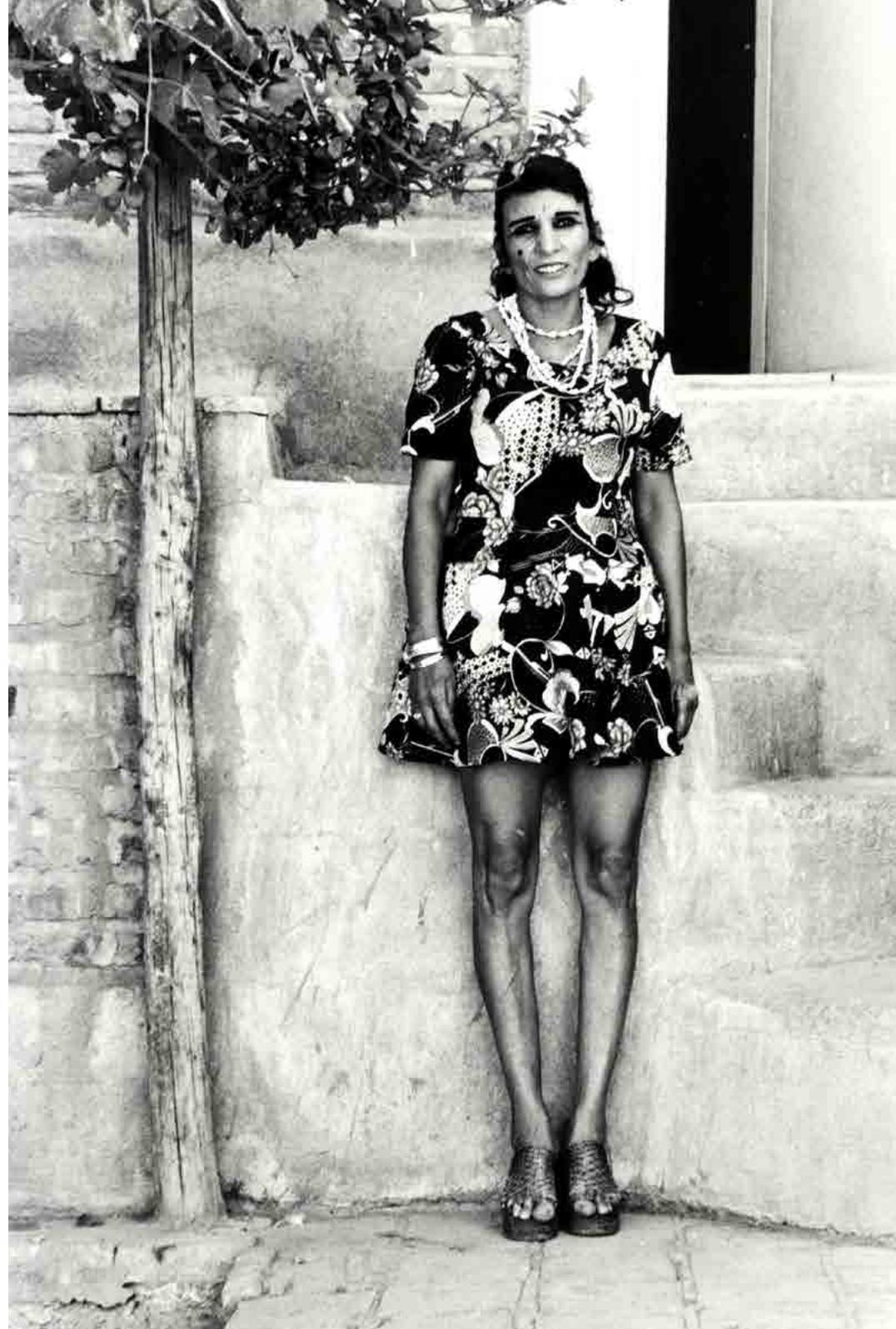
Prostitute 1975-77



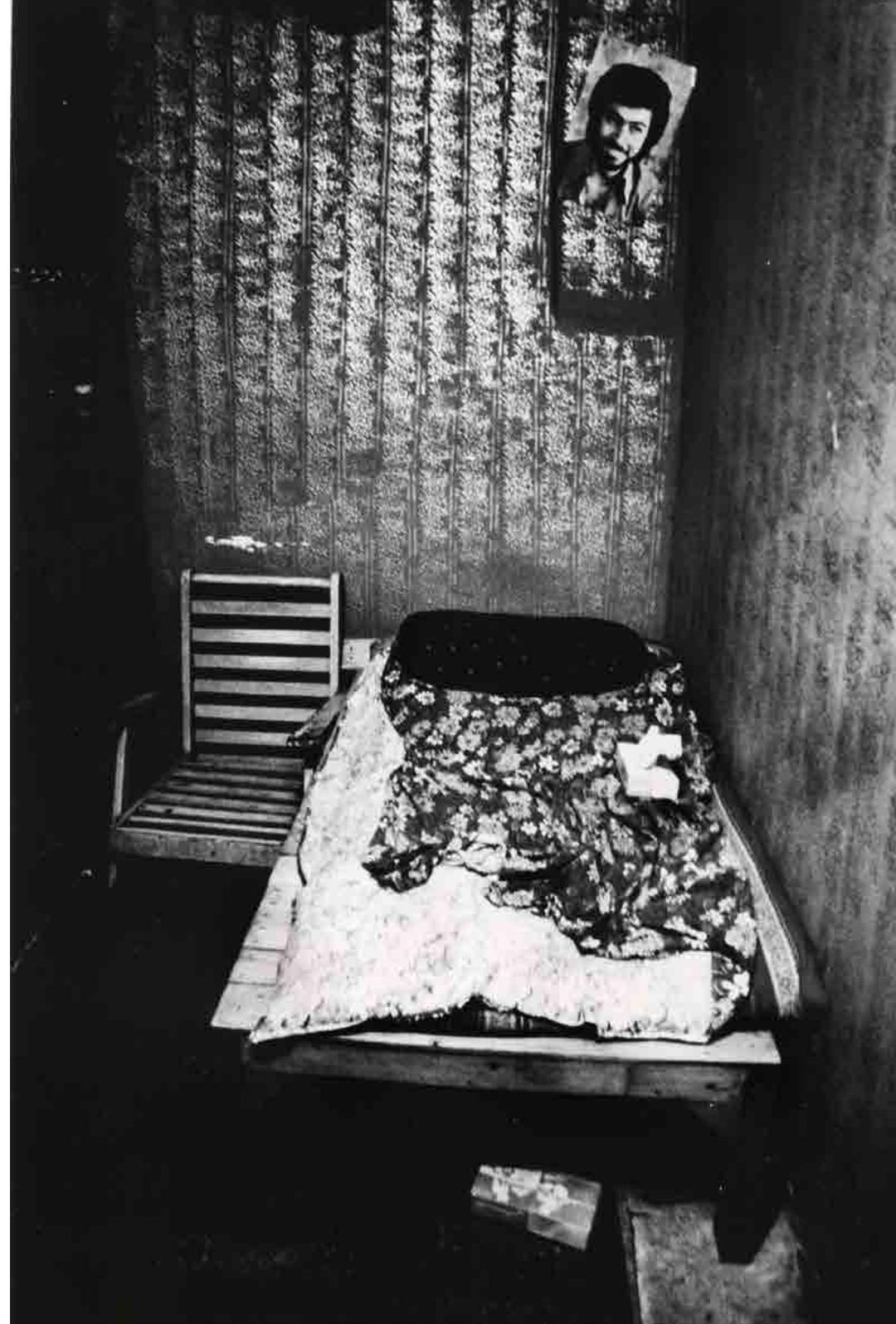
The creation of *Prostitute* involved several years of study and research, long visits to the site of the Citadel and the befriending of the residents. It took Golestan a year and a half to carefully compose the portraits. His meticulous observation and empathetic sensitivity to the individual subjectivities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

Golestan's portraits are 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.















Media is used as a site of operation.



Golestan exposes the interior life of the Citadel in three consecutive photo-essays in the daily *Ayandegan* in 1977. The transgressive act of public exposure is integral to Golestan's practice. Here, Golestan aims to rupture metropolitan complacency and confront his audience with the darker face of their society. Much of his artistic ethos is directed towards shifting public opinion and motivating democratic civic action. Focussing on those robbed of citizenship and engagement with the marginalised and socially excluded was in line with a distinct prevalent trajectory that had artistically manifested itself, especially in cinema in the 1960-70s.

The Citadel of Shahr-e No confines some of Tehran's prostitutes within its walls, like a detention centre with a tight beehive of tiny cells. [...] The lives of the residents have plummeted to the lowest depths of human existence... The Citadel of Shahr-e No demands a focused and pragmatic revision, now more than ever. A deeper study can shed light on its issues and facilitate solutions.

-Kaveh Golestan, *The Citadel: An Alternative View* (1), *Ayandegan*, 11 September 1977



Previous page, above: Newspaper article, *The Citadel: An Alternative View (1) - And So They Build A Cage*, Ayandegan, 11 September 1977

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

Exhibition Installation Photograph. *Three Reports: Prostitute, Worker, Asylum*. Obeid Gallery. Tehran University, May 1978. ©Kaveh Golestan Estate

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?

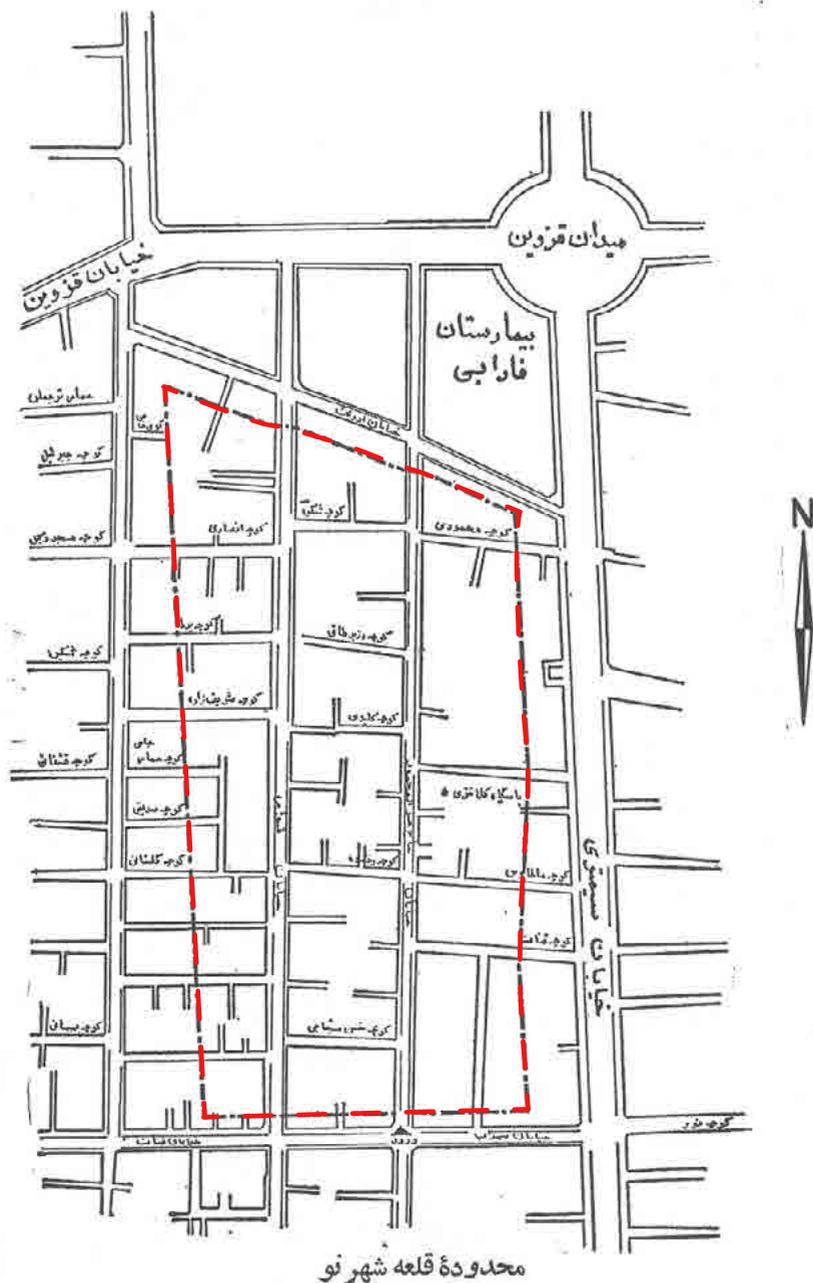
- Kaveh Golestan, extract from a notebook, 1975-77

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.

By the mid 1940s, the neighbourhood consists of two main avenues and a plethora of side streets. One of the avenues serves as a living quarter and the other for working. The area is open to the public and access is free. After the overthrow of the government of Dr. Mossadegh and the coup d’etat 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 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.

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

Map of Shahr-e No District, Tehran, 1969 from S. Farman Farmaian, *On Prostitution in the City of Tehran*, 1969 ©Ty Aur Press

- 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 Tuesday, 30 January, 1979, two days before the arrival of Ayatollah Khomeini and ten days before the victory of the revolution (with an undisclosed number of residents trapped inside) and then demolished shortly after through an 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 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 hospital and park which stand 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 reterritorialisa- tion

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.

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 Dec – 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

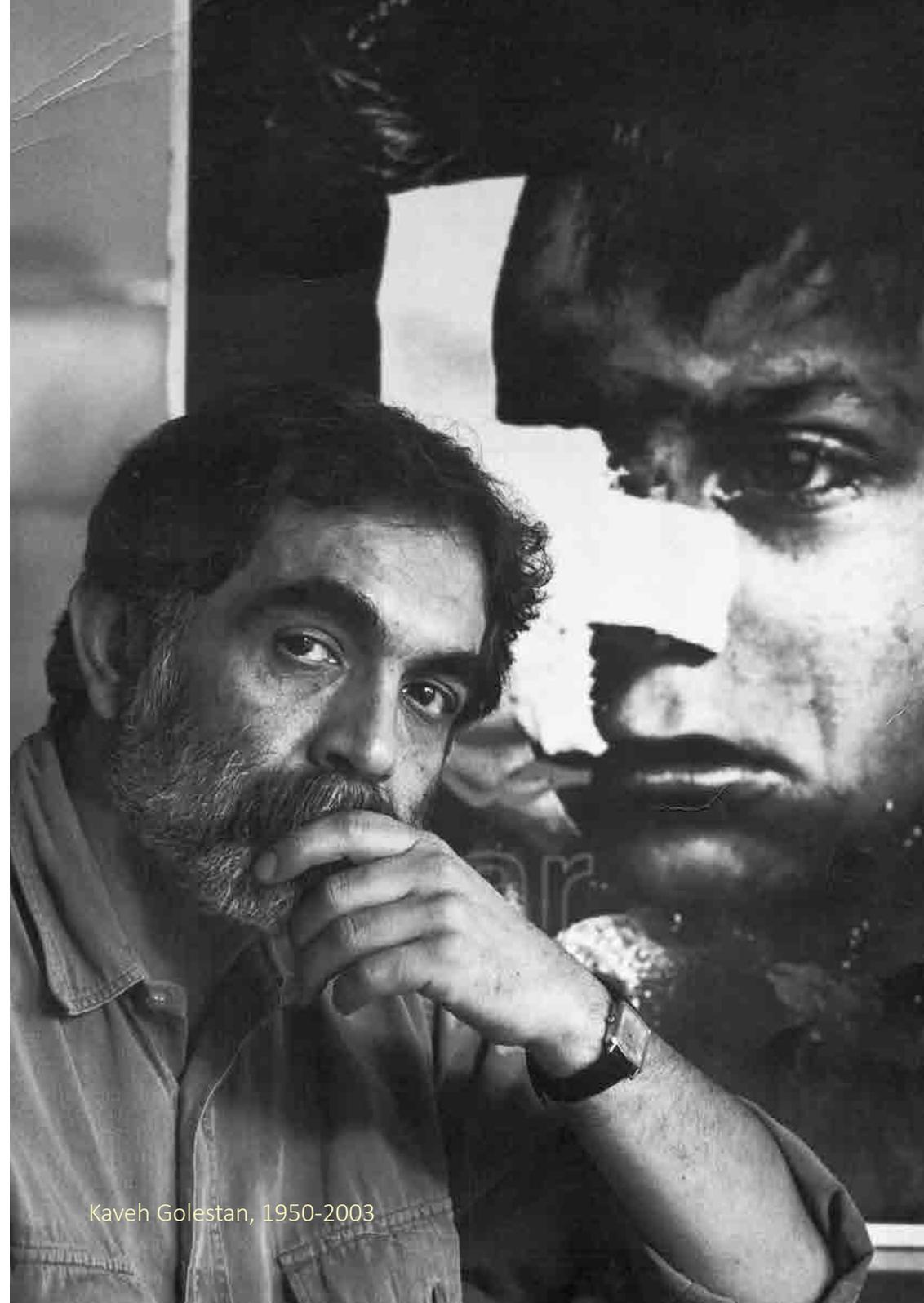
Biography: Kaveh Golestan

Kaveh Golestan (1950-2003) was an important and prolific pioneer of Iranian documentary photography. His photographic practice has hugely informed the work of future generations of Iranian artists but has remained seriously over-looked by institutions inside and outside his home country.

Besides socially motivated projects such as *Prostitute*, *Worker*, *Asylum* in the 1970s, Kaveh Golestan 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”. He collected the award thirteen years later when it was no longer considered a threat to the Iranian government.

Golestan stepped on a fatal landmine on 2 April 2003 while on a BBC assignment in Iraq and died in Kifri in Northern Iraq.

All images from the Kaveh Golestan *Prostitute* series are copyright protected and may not be reproduced without permission from the Kaveh Golestan Estate.



Kaveh Golestan, 1950-2003

Vali Mahlouji is an independent curator, writer, and advisor to the British Museum . He serves as agent and curator of Kaveh Golestan Estate. He is founder of the research and curatorial platform **Archaeology of the Final Decade**, a non-profit organisation which identifies, investigates and re-circulates significant cultural and artistic materials that have remained obscure, under-exposed, endangered, banned or in some instances destroyed. Mahlouji's recent curatorial work includes exhibitions at FOAM (Amsterdam), Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Whitechapel Gallery, Photo London and Prince Claus Fund.

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