

SHADI GHADIRIAN

Witness of her place and time

This fall Cafesjian Center for the Arts, in cooperation with the Muscari Association, presented an exhibition of prominent Iranian art photographer Shadi Ghadirian. Fifty-three of her works, in seven series, are shown for the first time in Armenia. Regional Post talked to the artist on the day of exhibition's official opening.

INTERVIEW : DIANA MARTIROSYAN / PHOTO : SHADI GHADIRIAN, MUSCARI ASSOCIATION

You've had close to 100 exhibitions in Europe and in the Middle East, and this is your first exhibition in Armenia. How do you choose?

— Actually, it's not me who chooses where I should go and where I should exhibit. My exhibitions outside of my country usually are festivals or biennales. Often it's a group exhibition, where my works are part of the bigger thing. But when it comes to my personal exhibitions, then galleries and museums like Cafesjian Center for the Arts want to show the different sides of me and my art, show how I've started and where I am now. So here, in Armenia, I have the retrospective of my works, brought here from Lyon. I have to say it wouldn't be possible without the Muscari Foundation and Manoug, whom I met there in France. It was his idea to organize my first Armenian exhibition.

As Armenia and Iran are connected historically and geographically, do you think that the feedback of the audience will be stronger than in Europe?

— I totally agree with you, here it makes me feel at home. I feel that people are so close to me, it seems that we understand each other. And, it looks like we have the same issues. I do believe that people all over the world are the same and the problems



are the same, especially for women. But in such countries like mine or yours we can feel it more directly. We have more women in our universities, more than men, because men usually decide to work and just have money without any educational background. But women still want to study, although among hundreds of graduates there are just few men and women who still work in art photography. Anyway, we have a huge number of galleries in Tehran, it's like a new gallery opening every weekend, numerous

➤ Shadi Ghadirian in Yerevan

▼ Opening ceremony of the exhibition in Cafesjian Center for the Arts

SHADI GHADIRIAN

Ghadirian is a contemporary photographer living and working in Tehran. Through her work, she critically comments on the pushes and pulls between tradition and modernity for women living in Iran, as well as other contradictions that exist in everyday life. Ghadirian gained international recognition through the series Qajar and Like Every Day in 1998 and 2001, respectively, and is now represented by the Aeroplastics Gallery in Brussels, the Kashya Hildebrand in London, etc. She has produced nine photographic series to date: Miss Butterfly, Nil, Nil, Be Colourful, Like Every Day, Qajar, Ctrl+Alt+Delete, My Press Photo, Out of Focus, and West by East. These series attempt to work through and reveal the issues that women face living in contemporary Iran while also bringing to light the complexities of negative stereotypes that these same women face coming from abroad.



artists and photographers. But that doesn't mean that they don't need another job to continue their art.

You have this powerful series, with these kitchen utensils instead of women faces. Do you think it's a common problem everywhere, not only in our region?

— I think yes, it's everywhere the same, but in some countries like ours, you know, we have very powerful and strong traditions. Women should take care of their children. And, while the best husbands in the world can help them, taking care of children is the responsibility of women. In Armenia and Iran we should talk about women's rights, work on this issue.

What's the war issue for you? We can see war in your White Square series.

— We've had the Iran-Iraq War for eight years, but I believe that we still live with war. I think that when a country has a war it takes about hundred years to let it go, "clear" all the effect. I was a teenager when the war happened and still I have some memories, still in my everyday life I can feel my fear. It is with me even in my dreams. The war effect is still continuing. And,



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I think this feeling is common for my generation. Our neighbors also had war: things that happened in Iraq, Turkey, Afghanistan, everywhere... And here in my photos I wanted to show that war is not only on the border, it's also in our houses, for women who are waiting their men to come back. It's really next to us, beside us, in our houses. This is the other point of view.

It's clear about the ideological inspiration. Can you name the esthetic part of your inspiration, how you create not the idea but the visual part of your art, what's the inspiration and what is the next?

— As an artist who lives and works in Iran, in Tehran, which is the capital, Iranian symbols come naturally to my works. I am living with these

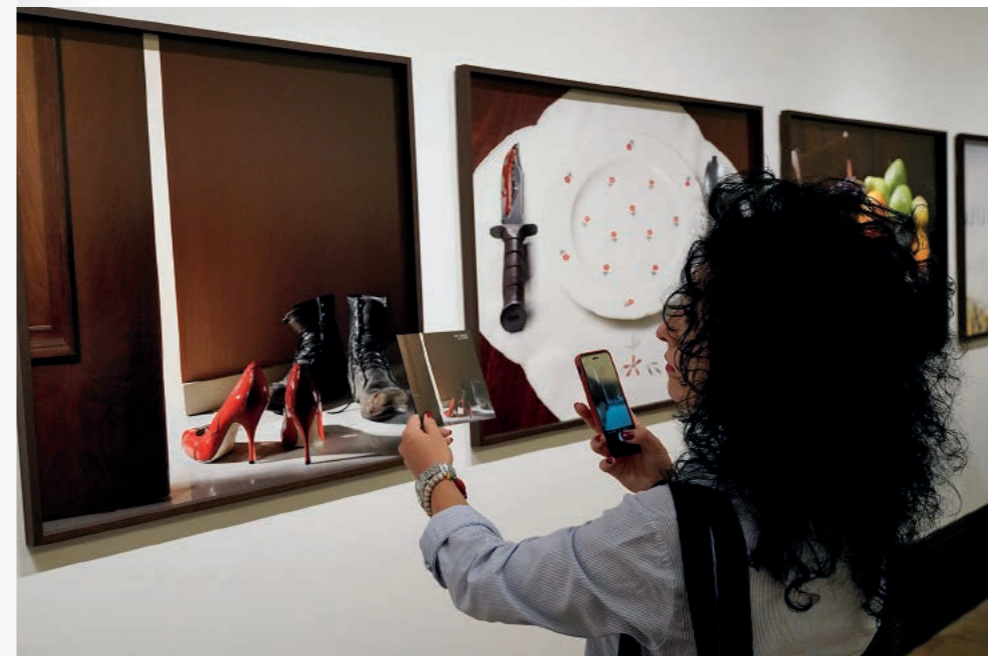
issues, I am inside. So this "Iranism" comes inevitably. When I had a daughter, the issues of women's rights became very important for me. I was really worried about her future. Now, as she is older, I want to talk about human rights. I am talking about the subject of loneliness, I feel that people have become so lonely now...

And you made series about internet, social media...

— Social media made us so close to each other. There is just a mobile phone: no friends, so, no people around. So, this is a topic that I am going to think about. But it's a dream that an artist can change the situation, it's a dream. All the artists want to change the world, but in my opinion it will not happen. Artists can show, make people think about something. And these people are limited. Our works are in the galleries and in the museums, so who goes to the galleries and the museums? If it was outside, like a billboard in the center of the downtown for walking people, then yes, it could be. But not now. We just can be witnesses of our places and our time.

SHADI GHADIRIAN, PRAISE OF THE OXYMORON
BY MANOUG PAMOKDJIAN

"One of Shadi Ghadirian's photographic techniques to break the infertile codes of tradition is based on the oxymoron, that is to say, the meeting of opposites. Where the eye is used to see images of normality, Shadi Ghadirian imposes a vision that contradicts the generally accepted rules. This marriage of opposites produces on the audience a psychological discomfort of such brutality that it enters its mind to the point of causing a real puncture of awareness. Thus her portraits of veiled women, completely covered, while their figure remains masked by a daily utensil: iron, teapot, cleaning glove, rasp, etc. It is to show, in this way, that the woman is reduced to her domestic function to the detriment of her identity. De facto, Shadi Ghadirian plays ironically on marriage of tradition with modernity, knowing that this marriage is impossible in a society where modernity is the exclusive property of men. In other words, the photographer shows the cruelty of the situation: men having full freedom to enjoy technological innovations or elementary leisure while the woman is forced to languish in the unchanged and the dogma of a sclerotic mentality. Universal photographer because she introduces the debate in the heart of societies that humiliate, manipulate and trap the living in the name of unnatural interests, Shadi Ghadirian summarizes her time by taking the woman as the paragon of the worst offenses made to life, to the joy of living, to the beauty of a world that has no other vocation than to escape to the shackles and oppressions."



> Manoug Pamokdjian

