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Iranian Arts Now

BY: ROXANE ZAND | July 3, 2012 11:19 AM

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Shadi Ghadirian, Nil Nil #04, 2008.

PARIS - Paris was well overdue for a festival of Iranian arts. *Iranian Arts Now*, which runs until 24 July at the Cité Internationale des Arts, is a welcome programme of visual and video arts, film, performance, dance and music. Half a dozen curators have brought together approximately 50 artists in different disciplines, making this a veritable collaboration of scale. The project was the brainchild of American University Professor Margery Arent

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Safir of *Arts Arena* fame, whose enthusiasm enabled this project to happen at short notice and on a small budget.

I managed to dash to Paris right after our Contemporary Art Evening sale to catch part of this festival. Arriving mid-afternoon on Tuesday, I had unfortunately missed the buzz of the Saturday opening event, which had had the artists present as well as such personalities as Sheikha Paula Al Sabah, Dr. Farhad Farjam, Jerome de Noirement and his wife Emmanuelle, co-organiser Leila Heller and Annie Cohen-Solal - among 800 others! The entrance halls of the Cité des Arts were dedicated to a selection of haunting and symbolic works by Shoja Azari and Shahram Karimi, while the mood of political commentary continued upstairs with Arash Favez' *My Expired Utopia*, highlighting the urban sites of Tehran as tragic memorials.



Azari & Karimi, *Burning Moon (from the Oil Paintings series)*, 2009. Courtesy Leila Heller Gallery, NY.

What really caught my eye however, was a series of six large photographic works by Australian-Iranian artist Azadeh Akhlaghi, reconstructing political assassinations in pre-Revolutionary Iran. Barbad Golshiri, curator of the photographic section, points out the loaded detail in each work that is a painstaking mise en scène of a violent event. It struck me that the waste and carnage of the Mehdi Bakeri tableau could have been an illustration of a scene from Yeats' *Dulce et Decorum Est*. Tragedy and deep suffering are clearly not culture-specific.



Hushhh! *Die Slowly-Urban Intervention*, from the series *Monoxyde of Tehran*, 2011.

But all was not dark and gloomy! Anxious to know about the title-work *Marry Me to the End of Love* by Amir Baradaran, I called my good friend and curator Dr Feri Daftari who took time in her frantic schedule to talk to me. This performance piece addresses the institution of temporary marriage in Iran and the transactional basis of all relationships. Amir's take was a witty re-enactment in which people were able to enter an agreement for the duration of one, three or five minutes to fulfil a number of duties such as 'move furniture together,' 'stare deeply into each other's eyes' or 'tell a secret' in exchange for one centime or other payment. Only the female party was entitled to terminate the marriage and 'keep whatever monies or dowry exchange that has been agreed

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