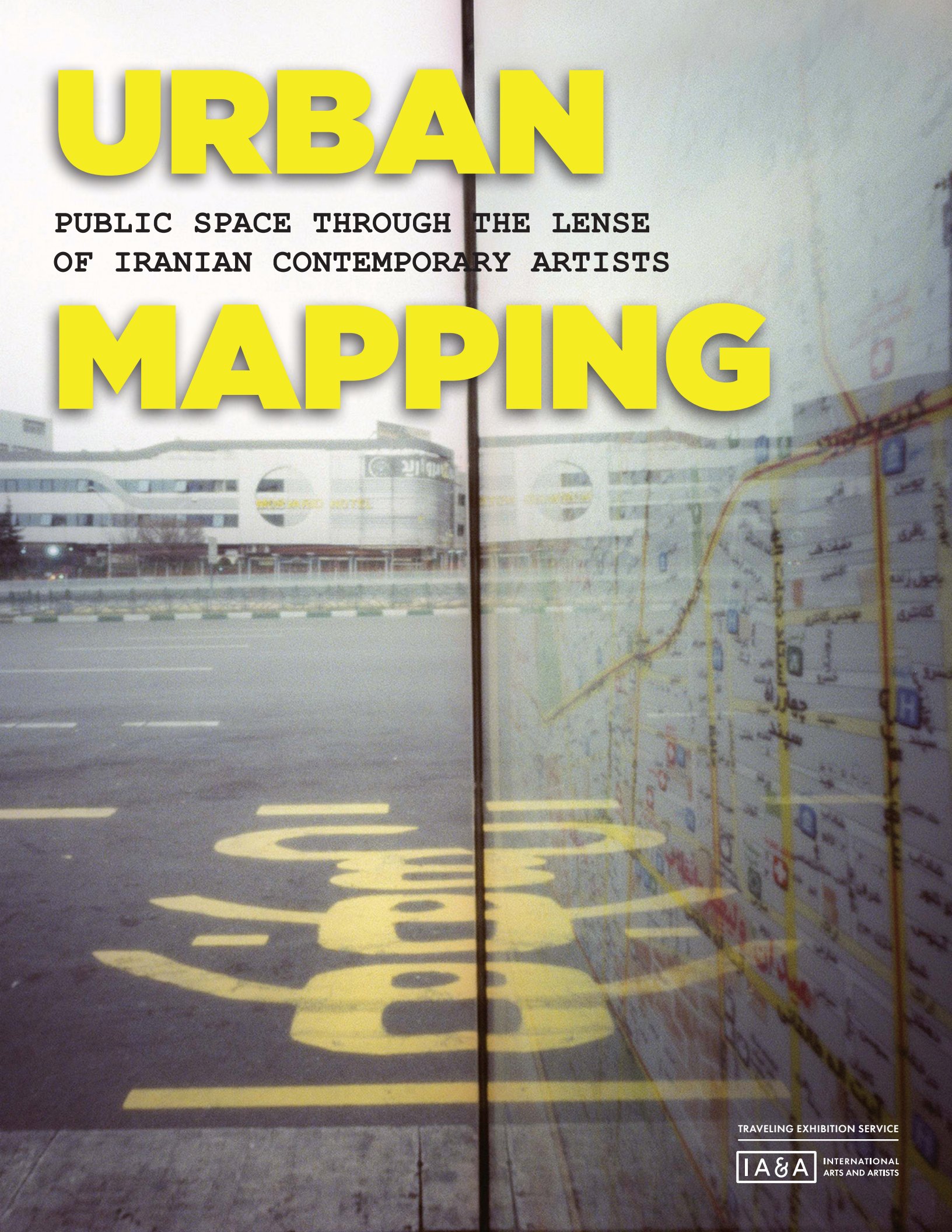


# URBAN

PUBLIC SPACE THROUGH THE LENSE  
OF IRANIAN CONTEMPORARY ARTISTS

# MAPPING



TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE

IA&A

INTERNATIONAL  
ARTS AND ARTISTS





# URBAN MAPPING

By turning our gaze to public and private spaces, *Urban Mapping: Public Space Through the Lens of Contemporary Iranian Artists* shines a light into depths of the Iranian experience normally hidden from the outside world. Comprising 40 photographs and 4 video installations, the exhibition features the work of 10 essential voices in contemporary Iranian art who explore the notion of urban space as a nexus of social communication and political transformation: a place where personal and collective identity converge.

In Iran, the tumult of modern history has coincided with an explosion in urbanization. The exhibition offers not only a documentary account of urban life, but also an expression of the subjective experience of life in Iran: the contradictions, beauty, and vital pulse of its cities, its people, and its history. *Urban Mapping* portrays the streets, squares, alleys, and private spaces of the city, where particular and collective identity mingle, evolve, and are expressed in the shadow of oppressive forces. The result is a nuanced chronicle of urban life in Iran, where physical sites and environments become corollaries for shared experience—as well as unique access points to the inner lives and evolving collective consciousness of its citizens. This one-of-a-kind exhibition reveals the impact of political and social transformations of public space on the collective experience of Iranian citizens through the lens of artists living and working within the country.

Curated by respected Iranian photographer Gohar Dashti, *Urban Mapping* features photography and video installations by 10 contemporary Iranian artists. The artists range in age from 25 to 60 years, offering a wide and varied purview of life in the ancient city. Some are among the most celebrated contemporary artists in Iran, while others are just beginning their careers—forging a fresh artistic voice for younger generations for whom the 1978 revolution is only an inherited memory.

1

1. Saba Alizadeh, *Light and Soil Series*, 2011, archival inkjet print. Photo credit Saba Alizadeh.





2

*Urban Mapping* is organized by artist and spans 10 collections of photographs and videos, each with its own distinct vision, but all bound by an interest in the nature of personal and collective identity, the experience of urban space, and the artist's response to history.

In the photographic collection *Light and Soil*, Saba Alizadeh projects images from the Iran-Iraq war (ones familiar from their use in political propaganda) on the most intimate spaces of houses. By juxtaposing politicized images of violence to the inner sanctum of the home, Alizadeh seeks to return the images to their original significations.

In Raoof Dashti's video installation *Collective Action*, the bodies of (living) human beings lie on a pavement, arranged in a choreographed tableau. Ribbons of "blood" slowly fill the grid-like crevices of the pavement. In Dashti's words, "The blood circulatory system is not confined to bodies. The vessels and capillaries are connected to the stone-pavements and asphalt concretes, like a red ribbon on the map of the city."

In his disquieting photographs, Arash Fayezi utilizes Charles Baudelaire's concept of the *flâneur*, a passionate spectator who wants "to be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the center of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world." Fayezi writes, "Rather than joyful, the *flâneur* in Tehran feels sorrow. He has to capture his city, not for the joy of watching, but because only through productive activity does he find ways to resist the state and tolerate the pain of this life under it." Wandering the city as a keen yet alienated observer, Fayezi is a watcher and chronicler of his city's "voluptuous extremes."

Ghazaleh Hedayat's *Snake and Ladder* is part of a series titled *Endgame*, which explores the theme of suspension. Each photograph focuses on a section of a bright red cord suspended above a gray cityscape. As Hedayat remarks: "there is no starting or final point, no winner or loser, no destiny or desire [...] you can neither go up nor fall down." Hedayat's photo series is a haunting rumination on spiritual stasis in modern Iran.

If the younger generations of artists in *Urban Mapping* seek an artistic response to past events, then Rana Javadi is the artist emeritus who has already chronicled that history. Born in 1953, Javadi recorded the events of the *Iranian Revolution* in 1978, an event which continues to reverberate in Iran, and whose presence and legacy loom throughout the exhibition. Iran's Revolution is a photographic record of the upheaval spanning 64 days, from the first anti-Shah demonstration to February 11, 1979, when the Iranian army withdrew from Tehran, spelling the collapse of the Shah's regime.

Born in Tehran in 1964, Mehran Mohajer is another (albeit younger) member of the generation of photographers who

lived through the 1979 revolution. Mohajer concentrates on both the semiotic nature of photography and the photographic act per se. In his collection *Tehran*, Mohajer photographs objects and scenes within the metropolis through a pinhole square format camera. The long exposure and low image quality of the photographs mean that they do not fit the pure documentary genre. Mohajer writes: "I have used this device to sweep out the crowd, to show a deserted city, and to create an apocalyptic atmosphere."

Born in 1987, Siavash Naghshbandi is part of a younger generation of artists who mine the mundane for hidden political content. In his *Daily Life in Tehran*, an underwater video camera captures the pale, maudering torsos and legs of people cavorting in a public pool. The water line obscures the upper halves of these "headless people [who] continue to wander around free of any individuality."

Hamed Noori, born in 1979, the second year of the Iranian Revolution, has "always been concerned with the historical-cultural contrasts in various cultures and specifically of his own Iran." Noori seeks to reveal individuality against the frame of collective identity. *Urban Mapping* presents his three-minute video installation *Turmoil*, in which the city of Tehran, viewed from some distant perch, quivers and undulates as if it is immersed in a capricious sea. As Noori writes, "Tehran is like the sea, full of turmoil. Its tide could suddenly take you with it, as it is always on the move and its current is always daunting. I simply can't have faith in its serenity."

Behnam Sadighi's work is founded in documentary photography. By documenting present, apparently mundane situations, Sadighi seeks to reveal the sociopolitical and cultural complexities suspended in the ordinary. In his series *Ekbatan*, west of Tehran, Sadighi turns his lens to the desolate concrete monuments and squares of the town of Ekbatan. Sadighi's images of Ekbatan are devoid of people, highlighting the "systemic distance" imposed upon individuals by the urban environment, where "all human relations exist akin to the thick and concrete walls strictly surrounding them."

Mehdi Vosoughnia's *Pamenar* chronicles the dilapidated remnants of a neighborhood as old as the city of Tehran. Mehdi writes, "I beheld forms and colors—manifesting themselves on doors, walls, and passageways—to reach empty spaces that, more than anything else, connected me to a 'past and present.'"

*Urban Mapping* offers a deep and variegated vision of life in Iran through the lens of artists who call it home. Far from a voyeuristic look into an exoticized orient, the exhibition holds up a fractured mirror to modern Iran and invites us to behold its complicated beauty and history. *Urban Mapping* represents a unique opportunity to witness urban life in Iran from the viewpoints of its citizen artists.



3

2. Ghazaleh Hedayat, *Snake and Ladder*, from the series *Endgame*, 2012, archival inkjet print. Photo credit Ghazaleh Hedayat.

3. Arash Fayezi, *Four Megaphones in Four Cardinal Directions*, from the series *Ramblings of a Flâneur*, 2008-11, archival inkjet print of expired polaroid. Photo Credit Arash Fayezi.





# ABOUT THE CURATOR

**Gohar Dashti** is an internationally-acclaimed photographer who has had exhibitions at prominent museums and galleries around the world, including the Victoria and Albert Museum (London), the Mori Art Museum (Japan), the Museum of Fine Arts (Boston), and the Contemporary Art Museum (Tehran), to name a few. She received her MA in photography from the Fine Art University of Tehran in 2005. She has spent the last 12 years exploring social issues, with a particular interest in history and culture viewed through an anthropological and sociological lens. In her work, Dashti continuously mines life events for connections between the personal and the universal, the political and the fantastic.

"Public spaces have long been the nurturers of urban life, economic and political transformations, and citizens' social communications. When we utilize the public space composition, it means that we are considering the close relationship between the private space and the public space. People are always moving between these two spaces and the relations governing the two, bringing out fears and ties. The severity of these crises is revealed when the two grow further apart."

-Gohar Dashti

4. Rana Javadi, *Engelab Street, Tehran*, from the series *Iran's Revolution*, 1978-79, archival inkjet print. Photo credit Rana Javadi.



# THE ARTISTS

“Tehran is like the sea, full of turmoil. Its tide could suddenly take you with it, as it is always on the move and its current is always daunting. I simply can’t have faith in its serenity.”

—Hamed Noori



5

5. Behnam Sadighi, *Ekbatan, west of Tehran*, 2004-08, archival inkjet print. Photo credit Behnam Sadighi.

**ARASH FAYEZ** is an artist and curator who is stateless and without location at the moment. Spanning live situations, video, and objects, his art methods intertwine to create parafictional and multi-layered projects informed by notions of displacement, distraction, and bicamerality. Through storytelling based on partial memories and notions of interstitial space, his works confront sociopolitical issues while engaging the role of a schizophrenic protagonist in constructing these narratives.

**BEHNAM SADIGHI**’s work is founded in documentary photography. He develops his ideas through the phenomena of his surroundings, particularly their sociopolitical and cultural aspects; and is drawn to those experiences that impinge most powerfully on Iranian lifestyles and relationships, particularly in urban environments. These changes in phenomena and self are pivotal to his personal artistic interpretation of life and living. His work is the documentation of present situations—many seemingly mundane and ordinary, but others charged with drama and immediacy, whether by design or as a result of happenstance. In this regard, his resolve to preserve them is critical, aiming to open up a window into the real world.

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1979, **GHAZALEH HEDAYAT** received her MFA in New Genres from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2005 and her BFA in photography from Tehran Azad University in 2002. Hedayat teaches photography at art universities and is a member of the editorial board of *Herfeh Honarmand Art Magazine*. Hedayat’s practice spans photography, video, and object installations. She works with different mediums to explore the theme of “silence” through the human senses. She currently lives and works in Tehran.

Born in Mashhad, Iran, in 1979, **HAMED NOORI** received his BA in applied arts from Kashan University Iran, Faculty of Arts and Architecture, in 2007. He is a former graduate student of Art in Context at Universität der Künste Berlin (Berlin University of the Arts). He has always been concerned with the historical-cultural contrasts in various cultures, particularly that of his native Iran. Although he has never offered specific solutions for such problems within his work, he does try to address these issues through an overlay of the realities of his country.

Born in Qazvin, Iran, in 1971, **MEHDI VOSOUGHNIA** is a graduate of photography from the School of Art and Architecture, Azad University. He started taking photographs at the age of 17 for his classes at the Iranian Youth Cinema Society; his interest in cityscape and documentary photography came from this early involvement. Since 1991, his photo series have won him many prizes. In 2002, the Iranian Photographers House honored him

in the student section. He has held twelve solo exhibitions, and has participated in over fifty group shows across the globe, including ones in Paris, Toronto, and Tehran. He has been a juried member for various photography festivals and has held over forty workshops on documentary photography since 2004.

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1964, **MEHRAN MOHAJER** lives and works in Iran. He received his BA in photography in 1990 and his MA in general linguistics in 1994, both from the University of Tehran. Since then, he has worked as a lecturer of photography and as a translator. Due to his innovative focus on both the semiotic qualities of photography and the photographic act per se, Mohajer’s work exemplifies the evocative dual nature of the medium.

Born in 1953, **RANA JAVADI** works and lives in Tehran, Iran. A self-taught photographer, she went to London in 1975 to study English, and upon her return in 1977 launched her career in documentary photography. Her images of the nascent Iranian Revolution, which broke out in 1978, have been exhibited and published widely. In 1989 she was appointed Director of Photo and Pictorial Studies at the Cultural Research Bureau, and was a founding member of Akshane Shahr—Tehran’s first museum of photography (established 1997)—on which she also served as director and as a member of the board of trustees. She is also the editor of *Aksnameh*, a quarterly journal of photography founded in 1998.

Born in Ahvaz, Iran, in 1984, **RAOOF DASHTI** received his BA in painting from Shahed Art University in Tehran. He has always used a variety of mediums, such as theater, video arts, photography, and painting, to express his artistic vision. Dashti’s plays have been performed in Nepal and Macedonia, and he has participated in numerous exhibitions.

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1983, **SABA ALIZADEH** received his BA in photography from the Azad University of Tehran in 2008, and an MFA in experimental sound practices from Cal Art in California in 2013. His work has been a part of several group and solo exhibitions in Tehran.

Born in Tehran, Iran, in 1987, **SIYAVASH NAGHSBANDI** graduated from the IRIB Art University, Tehran, in 2008, with a degree in animation. He has worked on a number of photography, film editing, and documentary projects, and his films have been shown at a variety of film festivals.





FRONT Mehran Mohajer, *Tehran, undated*, 2009, archival inkjet print. Photo credit Mehran Mohajer.

BACK Raoof Dashti, *Collective Action*, 2013, video.

*Urban Mapping* was curated by Gohar Dashti in cooperation with IA&A at Hillyer, a contemporary arts center based in Washington DC. Hillyer is a program of International Arts & Artists, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing cross-cultural understanding and exposure to the arts internationally through exhibitions, programs, and services to artists, arts institutions, and the public.

## EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

### Number of Works

40 photographs and 4 video installations

### Organized by

Allison Nance, Director of IA&A at Hillyer

### Curator

Gohar Dashti, Artist and Independent Curator

### Requirements

Low Security; 150-200 linear feet

### Participation Fee

Please inquire

### Shipping

Exhibitors pay outgoing shipping costs within the contiguous US

### Booking Period

8 weeks

### Tour

May 2019–Dec 2022

### Publication

A fully illustrated catalogue published by International Arts & Artists is available.

### Contact

TravelingExhibitions@ArtsandArtists.org  
9 Hillyer Court NW  
Washington, DC 20008  
202.338.0680  
ArtsandArtists.org



INTERNATIONAL  
ARTS AND ARTISTS