

# ey! iran

*Contemporary Iranian Photography*



**14 December 2009–7 February 2010**

Social realities of hope, temptation, nostalgia and  
Introspection through the Persian lens

Timed to coincide with two concurrent exhibitions *The Baha'i Martyrs of Iran* by Shahriar Asdollah-zadeh and *Exiles* by New Zealand artist Rudolf Boelee.  
curated by Scott Pothan.

Above image by Bahman Jalali, *Image of Imagination*

On 12<sup>th</sup> November six million followers of Baha'u'llah, founder of the Baha'i faith across the globe, celebrate the anniversary of his birth in Iran in 1817. A month later the Whangarei Art Museum opens a suite of powerful exhibitions including *The Baha'i Martyrs of Iran* and *Ey! Iran* and *Exiles* on Monday 14 December. The exhibitions will be officially opened by prominent local Baha'i personality and *tohunga whakairo* Te Warihi Heteraka.

*ey! iran* has been touring Australia and New Zealand for 2 years to acclaim and controversy and finally reaches Northland at the conclusion of its national tour when political conflict in Iran continues to simmer and the artistic voice continues to be marginalised. The Whangarei Art Museum has also curated 3 further exhibitions on the theme of creative cultural exile 'at home' and abroad to complement the content of this exhibition.

*ey! iran* – (a commonly used greeting and the first words in the Iranian National Anthem), is the first exhibition to present recent contemporary photography from Iran in New Zealand and was curated by Iranian born and New Zealand raised artist Mandana Mapar who now lives in Queensland. Bridging social and geographical boundaries in the development of this exhibition, Mandana travelled to Tehran to select work and sought to link artists in Iran with audiences globally in a spirit of cultural exchange.

For many of us in New Zealand our understanding of contemporary Iran is immediately connected to images of conflict and tension and the artists take on many of these issues of gender, identity and social restrictions in their photo-media work. They capture an Iran which is in complete contrast to that presented by Western media. The perception that it is a culture closed to the West and culturally isolated is dramatically changing, and artists and filmmakers have been at the cutting edge of this shift.

The exhibition presents the work of 17 artists working in photo media. The art of photography, which was first introduced by the Shah of Iran in the early 1840's, has developed in modern Iran in parallel with the highly regarded art of film making. In the same vein that contemporary Iranian filmmakers portray their vision of Iran with a compelling quiet reserve, the work of artists selected for this exhibition communicates to international audiences with the same subtle boldness.

The artists are based in Iran or as expatriates who have left the country and continue to make work that is informed by their Persian heritage. Artists **Hossein Valamanesh**, who lives in Adelaide, Australia and **Sadegh Tirafkan** who now lives in Toronto, Canada are just two examples of acclaimed artists who deal with major issues of identity, gender, urban life, popular culture and social restrictions within and outside Iran.

*ey! iran* also presents an exciting opportunity for Northland audiences to view work by senior Iranian artists such as **Bahman Jalali**. His series **Image of Imagination** (2003-2006), spans over a hundred years of history with references to the Qajar period collection of daguerreotypes of courtesans and the more recent reactionary responses from a minority of Iran's population.

Bahman Jalali describing his work:

*“94 years ago a photo studio was opened in Isfahan called Chehrehnama. This studio was one of the most important studios in the history of photography in Iran. After the revolution I came across the sign for the Chehrehnama studio (in Persian akashaneh chehrehnama) which had been closed years ago. Someone had drowned with red paint on it in order to ruin it. From what I have heard women’s picture without the veil were taken in that studio and maybe this was in reaction to that. I have been exposed to many images by little known photographers around the country. Those that I could keep, I have held as mementos, and others have left their marks on my imagination.”*

**Exhibition developed by the Gold Coast City Art Gallery  
and toured in New Zealand by Exhibition Services Wellington.**



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