



Celebration at Persepolis

"CELEBRATION AT PERSEPOLIS"

Prepared under the Direction
of Michael Stevenson

The 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great, celebrated at Persepolis in 1971: this is the occasion around which this book and exhibition have been prepared.

Persepolis '71 was a party, held over three days by the last Shah of Iran, for invited monarchy and heads of state. It has been described as the most lavish party of the twentieth century. At five and a half hours, this event holds the endurance record in the Guinness Book of Records for the longest state banquet. It was certainly an extraordinary occasion, and one that retrospectively has had many consequences. To some extent at least, the party survives. Today at Persepolis, the luxurious tent city built by a French interior design company to accommodate dignitaries remains standing. The site is now dilapidated, overgrown, and vandalised. The tents themselves exist as ruined, skeletal structures; their tattered cloth coverings have been all but destroyed by the elements.

In June 2007 a reconstruction of one of the guest tents in its current state, at actual scale, was exhibited at Art Basel 38. This was a joint presentation by Arnolfini, Bristol and Vilma Gold, London.

The exhibition in Bristol, the occasion for this publication, is an expanded version of this Basel presentation. The project effectively returns this structure to Europe, but now as folly.

Edited by:

Michael Stevenson with Nav Haq and Elisa Kay

Interview:

a conversation between Michael Stevenson and Rüdiger Ihle

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Burt Glinn / Magnum

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MICHAEL STEVENSON:

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Celebration at Persepolis

by
Michael Stevenson

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Edited by Michael Stevenson with Nav Haq and Elisa Kay

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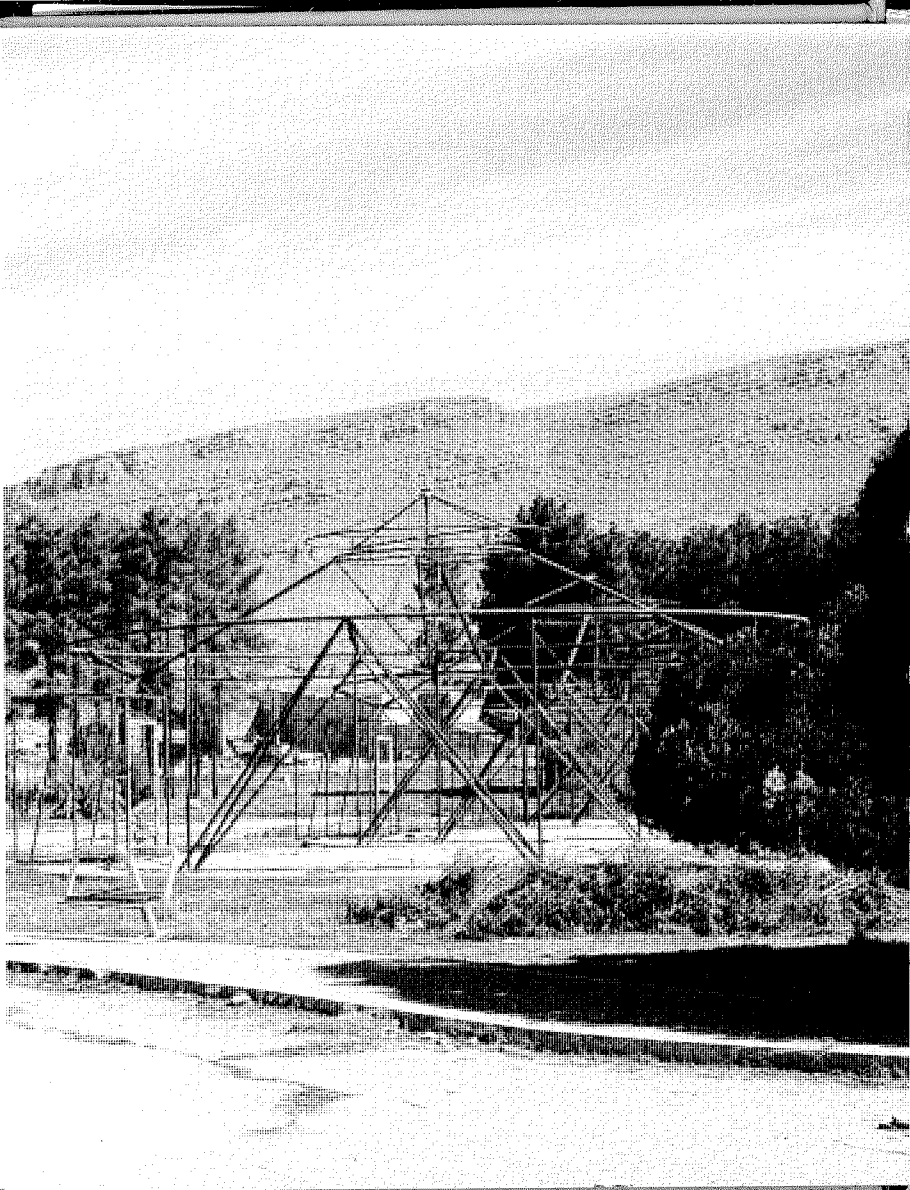
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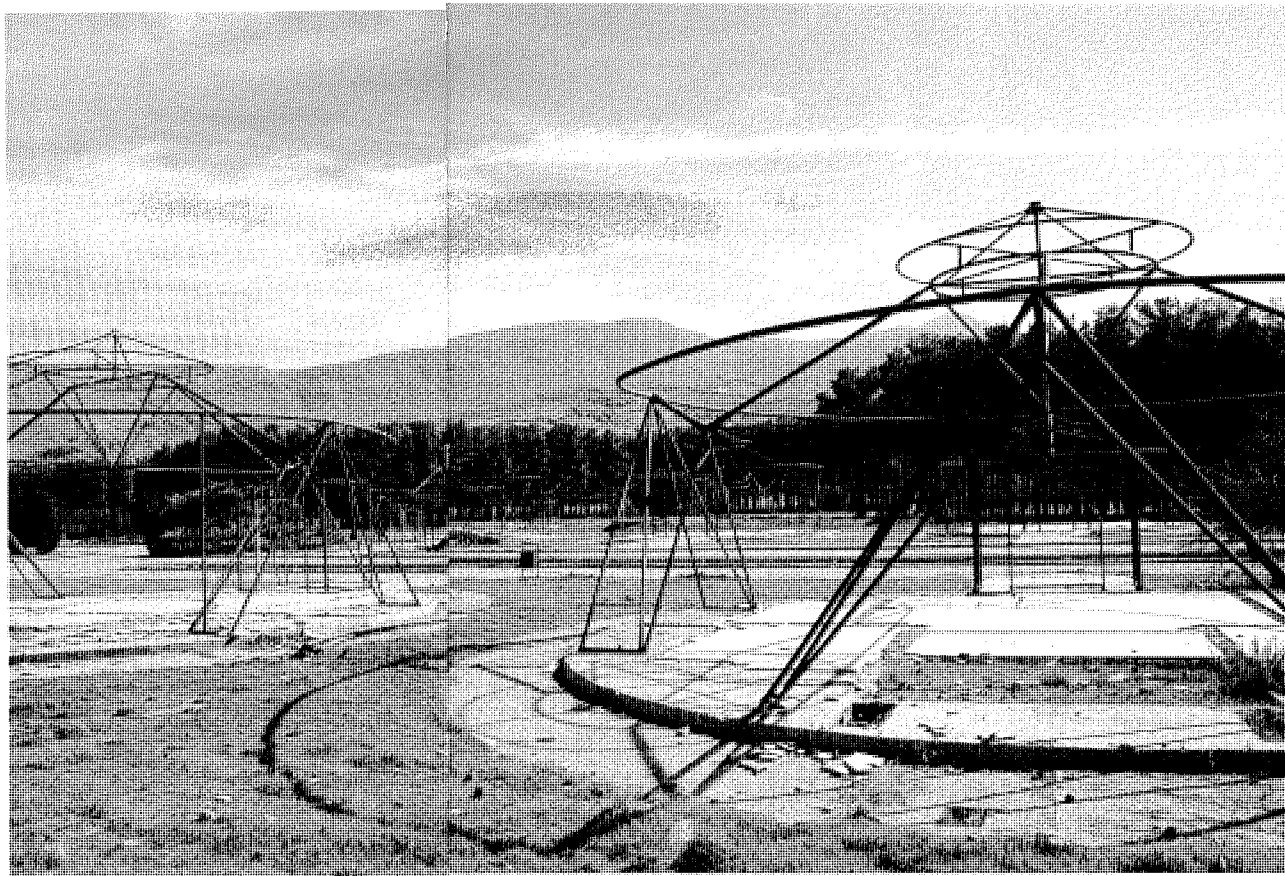
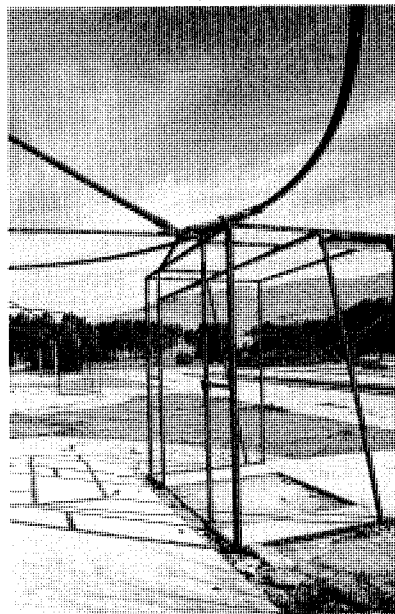
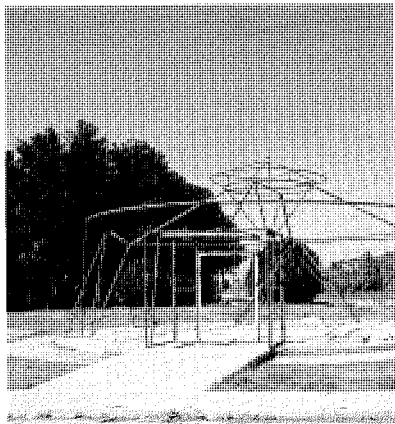
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At the Golden City

Persepolis, 2007

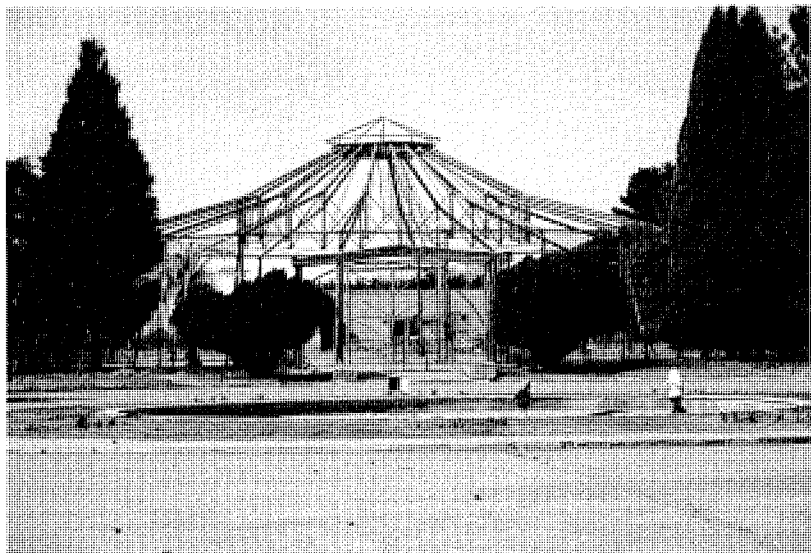
Photographer: Simon Wachsmuth



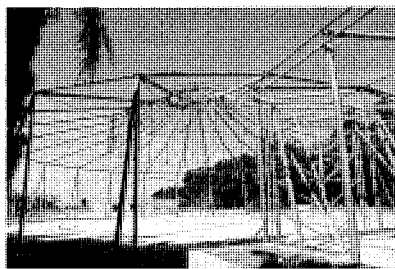
Top Left: One of the guest tents designed by the Paris-based interior design company, Maison Jansen

Bottom Left: Entryway detail

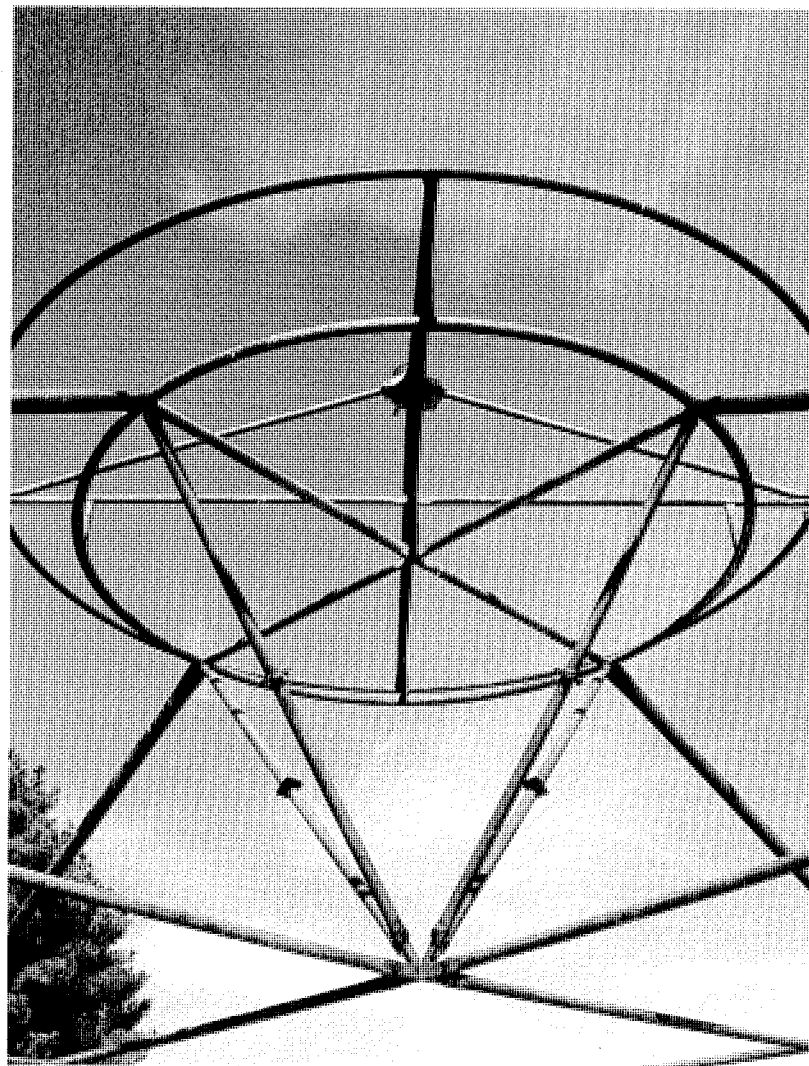
Above: View of the tent city, also known as the Golden City, at Persepolis



Above and Right:
 'Tent of Honour', the official residence
 of the Shah and Shahbanou

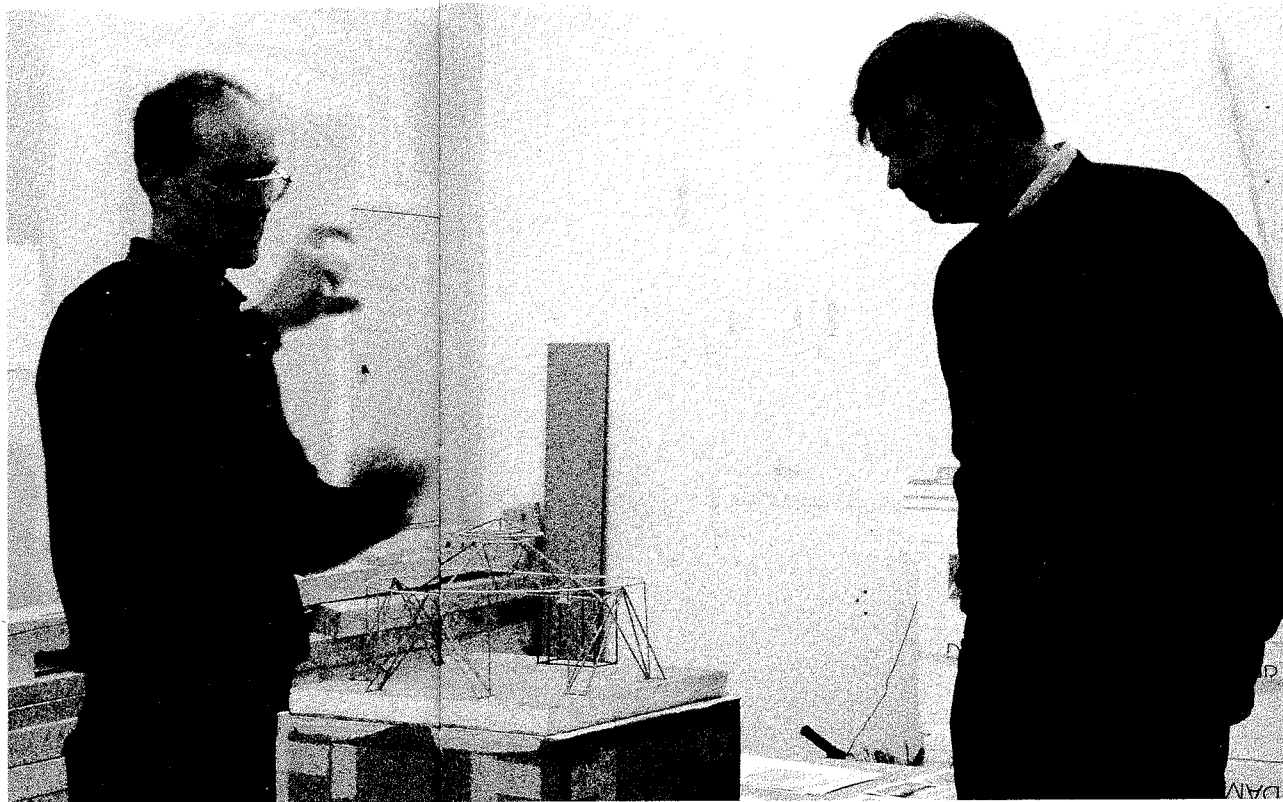


Right:
 Roof truss construction
 from a guest tent



Michael Stevenson in conversation
with Rüdiger Ihle

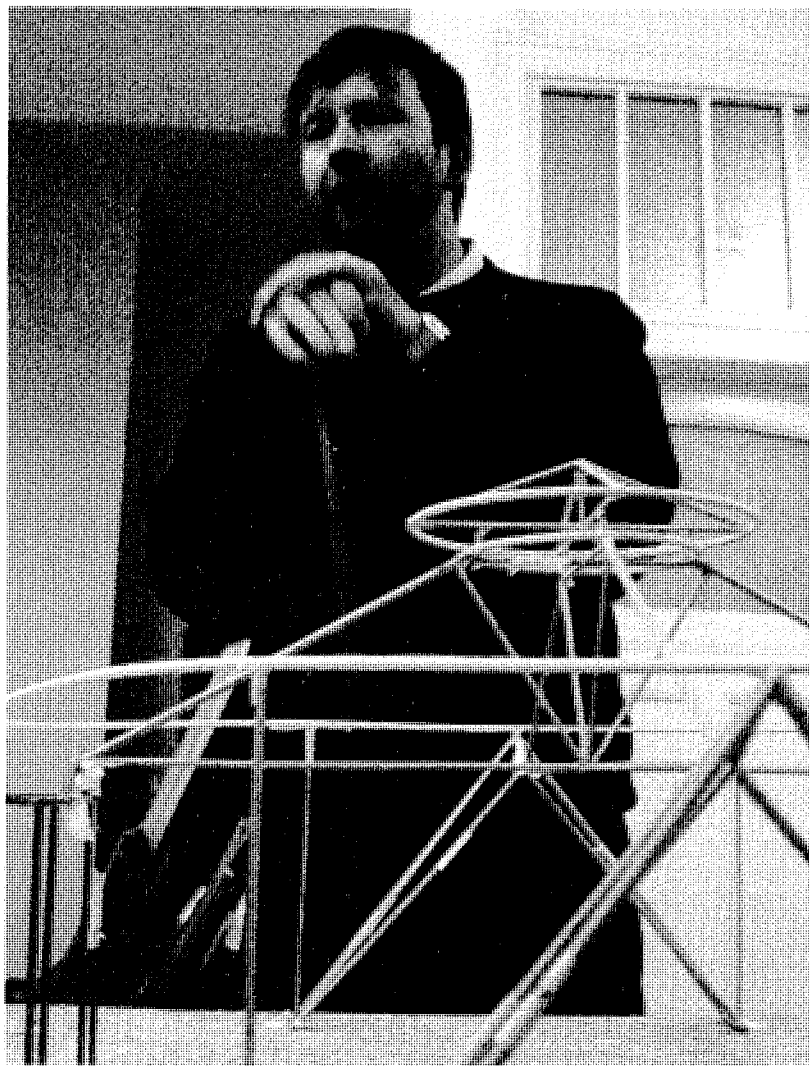
Photographs:
Cornelia Schmidt-Bleek



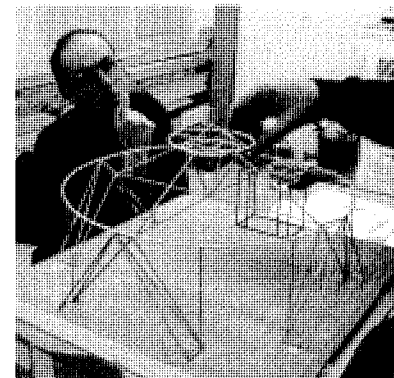
Collapse

During the construction phase of the project, I came into contact with a structural engineer – a neighbour in the building where I have my studio. On several occasions we talked about the tent construction I was building and if it would be structurally sound. The tent itself was based on structures I found at Persepolis, built in 1971 for the lavish celebrations held by the last Shah of Iran. The occasion was the 2,500th anniversary of the

Persian Empire. My structure was to be identical in design and scale to the originals, but it was not built from steel pipe. Instead I was using a variety of materials including cardboard tube. While Rüdiger and I studied the maquette, a conversation unfolded. What follows are some of the closing remarks from this longer discussion.



Rüdiger Ihle and Michael Stevenson
in the artist's studio



Michael: ... are there any other ways this structure can fail?

Rüdiger: I have described one possible collapse, but there is another. It involves the failure of the structure as a whole. This failure mechanism results in the total collapse of the structure. Such collapses involve a circular movement or revolution. In this case it is actually a spiral turning downward in three dimensions.

M: Is this a very particular structure then?

R: Yes, you have a special class of structure here. When I see roof trusses like this, it is, for me as an engineer, a problem because I really must consider them in 3 dimensions.

M: What does that involve?

R: It is to do with the Turning Moment.

M: Turning Moment?

R: This is the power of a lever system to induce a revolutionary force. The levers here are the truss elements themselves. When the forces from the load operate only in the 2-dimensional plane of the truss, there is stability. But when the forces act outside this plane, then we have a very dangerous Turning Moment. It pulls the truss in 3 dimensions around its lower point. This leads to the spiralling movement and collapse.

M: Can you describe the anatomy of this type of collapse?

R: You have here two roof trusses set in two vertical, perpendicular planes connected by the upper ring. In this mechanism of failure, the upper ring revolves, while lower points remain fixed. This happens when there is simultaneous failure of all four critical joints connecting the ring to the trusses.

M: How can this be?

R: It is the Turning Moments... they act in union. It is their combined force that buckles the critical joints and turns the structure.

M: This circular movement, it is not just a few degrees... it sounds very dramatic.

R: Yes, here it could possibly require a complete revolution to bring the roof trusses from their vertical planes to the point of total collapse.

M: Once it has started, can you describe what happens as this movement gains momentum?

R: Now we have to think what is happening at the bottom of the trusses, the fixed points. During collapse, forces exerted by the Turning Moment increase exponentially... they also change direction. The lower elements are only stable under tension, but now there is compression. It is similar to a rope: it's strength is in one direction only.

M: Would the trusses eventually end up on the floor then?

R: I am thinking that the lower elements of the roof trusses could very well act as a safety net catching the collapsing sections.

M: I think it is very interesting that you look at a structure like this and immediately fantasise about its demise. For a profession that is all about ensuring structures stay standing, perversely, you seem to spend a lot of time imagining collapse.

R: Well yes... you could say this is our occupational disease.

M: This disease seems very creative... what are the early signs or signals that this kind of failure might happen?

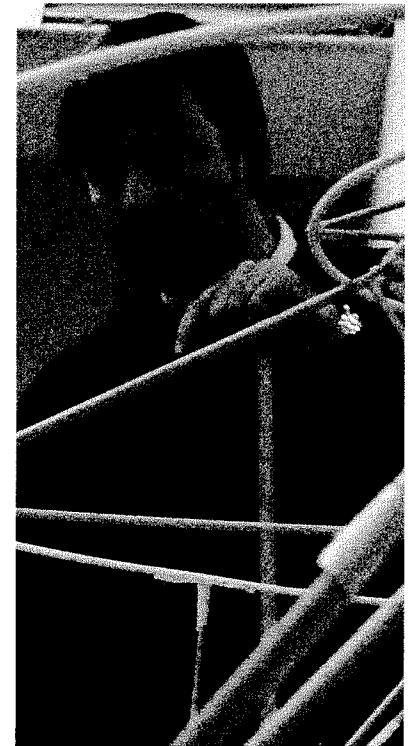
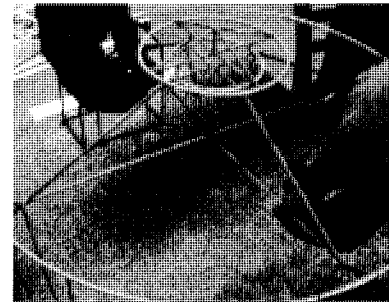
R: The structures we build... they do not fit perfectly the theoretical world of mathematical planes. Always, we have imperfect geometry. So this is the start, then it comes down to how you have fixed the four critical joints... you know a collapse like this begins very, very slowly.

M: What determines the direction of the revolution?

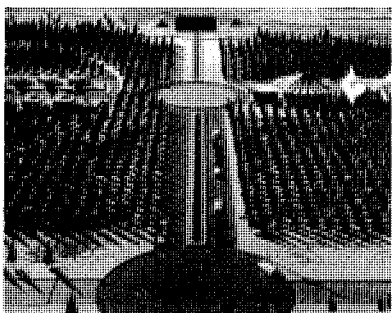
R: The direction is already given by the imperfections. The trusses will have inherent leanings, slight deflections... it favours a turn one way over the other.

M: This kind of collapse, is it unusual?

R: These kinds of simultaneous failures, involving circular, symmetrical structures, collapsing in revolutionary movement... it is one of the classical themes of engineering studies.



A close look at the model:
The roof trusses showing the four
critical joints and the connection ring



Top Left: HIH Princess Ashraf greets guests in the 'Tent of Honour'.
Photographer: Abbas / Magnum

Bottom Left: Maison Jansen model.
Looking down the main access way to the guest tents, the 'Tent of Honour' and the banqueting tent.
Courtesy James Archer Abbott

Right: View of the Tent City from the ruins of Persepolis.
Photographer: Abbas / Magnum

The Party

by Martin Clark





Left: Model of the proposed city of tents, as displayed at Maison Jansen, Paris
 Courtesy James Archer Abbott

Following Page: The formal banquet, described as the greatest party of the 20th century.
 Photographer: Bruno Barbey / Magnum

On the 12th October 1971 Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, supreme Monarch of Iran, threw a party in the Iranian desert. The occasion was the 2500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire by Cyrus the Great, a figure with whom the King had begun to grow increasingly obsessed. Over the three days of celebrations the Shah wanted to focus the eyes of the world on his country, presenting modern Iran as a forward-thinking, liberal, Westernised power. At the same time he would show off the richness and grandeur of Persian Imperial history and, more importantly, position himself as its legitimate heir and successor.

The party was held amongst the ruins of Persepolis, the great Imperial city founded by Darius I, Cyrus's successor, in 518 BC, and then sacked and burned by Alexander the Great 200 years later. To accommodate the festivities – and the guests – the Shah commissioned an extraordinary tented city, adjacent to the ancient site, which was designed and constructed by the flamboyant Parisian decorators Maison Jansen. All of the leaders of the world were invited. For those few days in October Persepolis was to be, in the Shah's own words, "the centre of gravity of the world".



In retrospect, the first indications of a worrying gap between the Shah's somewhat inflated ambitions for his big party and its political and social reality appeared early. For a start, not everyone could come. An internal briefing from the UK Foreign Office advised that it might not be a suitable event for Queen Elizabeth II to attend. It warned that "the ceremonies, taking place in Persepolis and Tehran in the presence of a motley collection of heads of state, or more likely their representatives, are likely to be arduous, disorganised and possibly undignified and insecure". The private secretary to the then Prime Minister of Britain, Edward Heath, added, "It would be difficult to ensure either her security or comfort".

They might have been right to some extent about the guest-list – Nixon didn't attend, sending vice-president Spiro Agnew in his place, nor indeed did Pompidou, President of France – however, there was a pretty impressive roll-call nonetheless: nine kings, three ruling princes, two crown princes, thirteen presidents, ten sheiks and two sultans, along with prime ministers, vice presidents and other friends of the court from around the globe. Nicolae Ceausescu from Romania and Marshal Tito from Yugoslavia rubbed shoulders with Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, the Kings of Belgium, Denmark and Greece, and Imelda and Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines. In the end the British Queen sent Prince Philip and her daughter Princess Anne. But if the Foreign Office were somewhat justified in their concern over the company she might have been keeping, they certainly needn't have worried about her comfort.

The fully landscaped complex occupied a 160 acre site and radiated out along five grand avenues in a huge star formation, culminating in the Shah and Shahbanou's 'Tent of Honour'. Immediately adjoining this was the grand banqueting tent, where the focus of the evening celebrations would take place. Each of the 54 air-conditioned guest tents included a sitting room, two bedrooms, two bathrooms and a service room for a maid. The interiors were decorated in various styles ranging from Louis XVI to contemporary. The floors were carpeted with priceless Persian rugs, the marble bathrooms were stocked with the finest French toiletries and all of the linen and towels were supplied by Porthault of Paris. In fact, aside from the guests, almost everything else at the party was flown in from France. Top hairdressers arrived from the Paris salons Carita and Alexandre, Elizabeth Arden produced new makeup, named Farah after the Shah's wife, and Lanvin created extravagant new uniforms for the gentlemen of the court, hand stitched with over a mile of gold thread. Perhaps most auspiciously, the famous French restaurateurs, Maxim's, were charged with catering the entire affair. They closed their Paris restaurant for two weeks and sent 165 chefs to prepare the lavish feasts.

On the 14th October, the Shahbanou's 33rd birthday, the most important of the two banquets took place. The meal began with poached quails' eggs stuffed with caviar, followed in succession by crayfish mousse; a champagne sorbet (MOËT 1911); roast lamb with truffles; roast partridge stuffed with foie gras and truffles; and finally oporto glazed figs with raspberries. The wines were equally impressive, and French of course: Vin Nature de la Champagne, Château de Saran; Château Haut-Brion Blanc 1964; Château Lafite-Rothschild 1945; Musigny Comte de Vogüé 1945; Dom Pérignon Rosé 1959 Cuvée Ravissime; and, with the coffee, Cognac Prince Eugène, Réserve des Caves Maxim's. The 92 serving platters were anchored by taxidermy peacocks (the symbol of the Iranian monarchy), and surrounded by dozens of cold quails set in aspic. Lasting over five and a half hours, it was described by one Spanish journalist as "an expression of the most absolute luxury ... and the most complete refinement. It was the greatest of all the parties of the twentieth century and it is very possible that a similar one is never organised again."

Right: Press photographers waiting
on one of the tented avenues.
Photographer: Abbas / Magnum

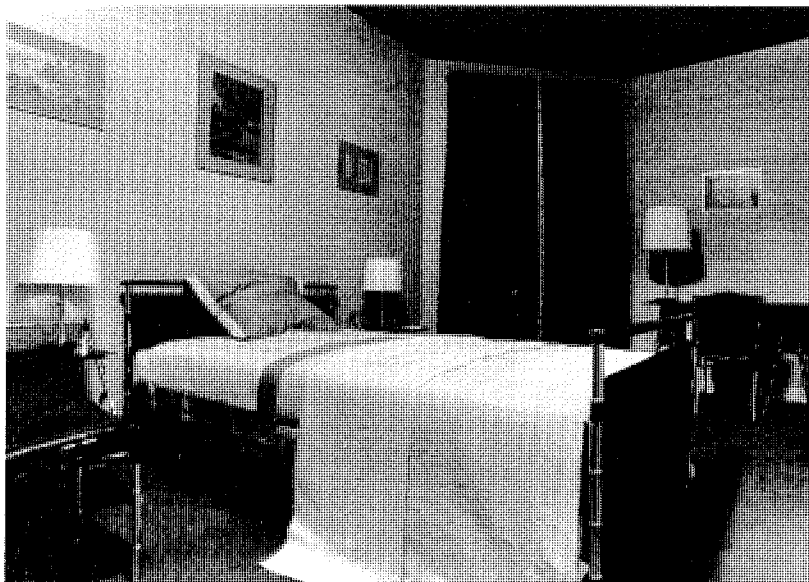


After the meal the guests moved out into the ruins of Persepolis itself and were treated to a theatrical display of lights, music and fireworks. The Greek avant-garde composer Iannis Xenakis had been commissioned to produce a major new work to be premiered that night. Quite what this leftist, political revolutionary – a figure-head of the May '68 uprisings in Paris – was doing associating with the aggressively hardline monarchy of the Pahlavi dynasty remains somewhat

murky. He had first struck up a relationship with the Shah and Shahbanou – both enthusiastic collectors of contemporary art and supporters of the avant-garde – a few years before when he had been invited to perform at the annual Shiraz Music Festival, also held at Persepolis, and which had included Merce Cunningham, David Tudor and John Cage on the bill. But it wasn't just musicians who seemed surprisingly untroubled about courting this repressive but apparently benevolent

dictatorship. Andy Warhol was a frequent visitor and friend – almost the court painter for a few brief years – and it's rumoured that plans were underway for a huge Dennis Oppenheim earthwork to be constructed somewhere in that vast desert. Joseph Kosuth had dropped by too, and the New York artist-turned-dealer Tony Shafrazi was opening a gallery in Tehran, hungry to tap into the millions of petro-dollars flooding the upper echelons of society. So, under the clear black

skies, amongst the magnificent stones, Xenakis's hour-long electronic tape work was performed for the illustrious, and in some cases infamous, audience. They sat under blankets, clutching hot-water bottles, digesting their dinners. There were flaming torches, towering projections and a dramatic light show. It was an unlikely, but spectacular, climax to the lavish evening.



Above: Bedroom in one of the guest tents, Persepolis.
Courtesy James Archer Abbott

Right: Maid's service room in a guest tent.
Courtesy James Archer Abbott



The next day the Shah was to take the amateur dramatics one step further.

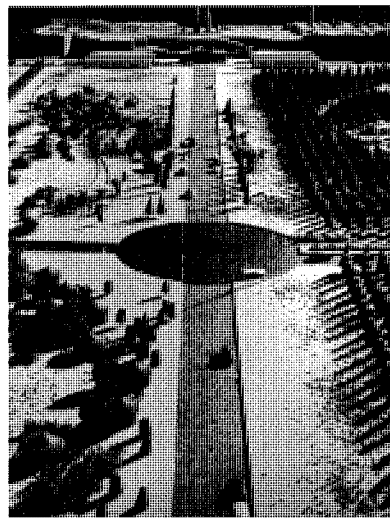
He had arranged a Grand Parade, reflecting his own very particular take on two and a half millennia of Persian history. Against the backdrop of the ruined city, thousands of soldiers marched in procession, dressed in costumes representing the waves of tribes and civilisations that had invaded and settled in Iran: Sassanians and Achaemenids, Parthians and Seleucids, Medes and Safavids; foot-guards, chariots and cavalry mounted on camels, all filed past in the blazing sun. The men had been ordered not to shave for a month, to add to the 'authenticity' of the spectacle. The Shah was remodelling history to his own political and personal ends, presenting it as a kind of Hollywood epic. But if the slightly camp theatricality of the parade was not entirely lost on many of the guests, they were almost certainly unaware of the far more serious ramifications of his exotic, but incomplete, production. To the fury of the mullahs, and many of his people, the Shah had almost entirely ignored the centuries of Islamic history and influence in Iran, not simply failing to properly represent them, but effectively writing them out of this revised, widescreen, technicolour version. For the religious right and the embattled clergy, it was to prove a step too far.

That evening there was another banquet, though it was less formal and not quite as extravagant as the previous one. The programme continued the next day in Tehran, culminating in the unveiling of a huge monument, dedicated to the Shah. Then, it was time to go home. The decorations were coming down and the festivities were over. For many of the guests it had all been a bit much – sumptuous at times, but tedious and ostentatious at others. Nevertheless, all had gone there to flatter the Shah, to indulge him, to win his favour; all desperate to take advantage of the astronomical amount of oil-money pouring into the country. Even the artists, the poets, and the revolutionaries had got caught up in the unsavoury clamour. For his part, the Shah was delighted with his party and hailed it a triumphant success: "The whole world from the United Nations to every capital paid tribute to Cyrus and his Kingdom... the seeds of international cooperation were well sown at Persepolis...". To those who dared criticise the opulence of the proceedings he answered angrily, "what was I supposed to do, give them bread and radishes?".

But the King had misjudged the mood amongst his people. He was growing increasingly self-obsessed and detached as his fantasies of his own glorious Imperial inheritance became ever more delusional. Even more damagingly, his failure to deliver on the promises of his feted 'White Revolution' – increased literacy, land reform, redistribution of wealth, enfranchisement of women – was stirring up widespread unrest and increasingly vocal criticism. At a time when the average income per head in Iran was around \$500 per year, the celebrations had cost a reputed \$300 million. To his frustrated and still impoverished subjects – yet to enjoy the benefits of the escalating oil-wealth – the whole affair seemed to represent the most squanderous indulgence.

The embittered religious leaders were quick to exploit the situation, loudly denouncing the godless, self-centered excesses of Pahlavi's corrupt and decadent regime. From his imposed exile in Iraq, Ayatollah Khomeini launched a stinging attack on the Shah. Defiant, Pahlavi grew increasingly stubborn and provocative. In the next few years he angered and alienated them still further when he invoked the celebrations of Persepolis '71 as a kind of year zero, attempting to justify his eccentric decision to replace the Islamic calendar with the ancient Persian one. Overnight he reset the clock to the year 2535 declaring "from now on they (1976 Europe) will look forward to us (2535 Iran)".

Events were overtaking him, he was losing sympathy, support and control. Eight years after the abandon and excess of the party at Persepolis, it was finally time for the Shah to count the true cost. In the end the bill wouldn't be measured in the millions of dollars spent on fine food, vintage wines, architectural extravagances and theatrical spectacles; these he could afford. What he didn't account for, and what would eventually ruin him, was the vigorous discontent the whole affair had bred amongst his own people. Instead of drawing his country together under a shared and glorious secular nationalism, it had done the very opposite, re-invigorating support for the religious radicals and coming to symbolise all the failures and follies of the current regime. On the 8th September 1978 the Shah's troops opened fire on anti-monarchist demonstrators, killing 89 people. By the 16th January 1979, he and his family were on a plane bound for Egypt, denounced and deposed. In the days in-between, the streets of Tehran echoed with the slogans of the French political philosopher Frantz Fanon – the man whose writings had spurred on numerous African coups and revolutions – and which had been heard ringing out during the Paris riots a decade earlier. It seems it was not just the Champagne, chefs and chiffon that arrived from Paris those eight years previously, so too had the slogans of a religious revolution and the seeds of Imperial decline and fall.



Postscript

When the mullahs took back control of Iran there were calls from some to flatten not just the great Tent City, but Persepolis itself along with it. The locals objected, so the place was left to the elements, slowly rusting in the desert sun. In 1982, the site became a military training camp. The tents were turned into dormitories to house the teenage soldiers engaged in the war with Iraq, and the bullet-proof windows of the Shah's 'Tent of Honour' were used for target practice. Today, little remains aside from the skeletal steel frames and the scraps of bleached and tattered fabrics, flapping in the wind. There are vague plans to turn the site into a holiday camp. For now the only subsequent addition is a hand-painted sign, erected by the current regime. A quote from the Qur'an, it warns the curious visitor: "examine what your predecessors did and learn a lesson".

Below: Maison Jansen model showing proposed structures for the Grand Parade. Courtesy James Archer Abbott

Monarchy



by Michael Stevenson

and the 38th Basel Art Fair



THE ART NEWSPAPER

ART BASEL DAILY EDITION THURSDAY 14 JUNE 2007

There was one very red face among yesterday's preview crowd at the Schaulager's stupendous Robert Gober show when a linguistically-challenged art writer—who shall remain nameless—asked the Royal Academy's multilingual Norman Rosenthal if he knew the identity of a certain Besitz des Künstlers who was cropping up on so many of the wall labels. On receiving the frosty reply that it meant "collection of the artist", the mortified hack received some comfort from a kindly collector who revealed that he had once spent several days after visiting the cathedral museum in Granada extolling the stylistic virtuosity of a certain medieval master who went by the name of "Anónimo".

■ Iran remembered

Surviving members of the Persian royal family—including the Shah's first cousin and the sister of the Empress—have been having a roller-coaster ride through their family history while visiting the fair this year. There were apparently some long faces while viewing English artist Michael Stevenson's tattered memorial to the Shah of Persia's ill-fated 1971 desert extravaganza celebrating

the 2,500th anniversary of the Iranian monarchy in the ruins of Persepolis, in Art Unlimited (H10). But everyone cheered up on Tony Shafrazi's stand (M1) where happier memories were found in Andy Warhol's portraits of the Shah (1977); the Empress (1977) and Farah Ashraf, Princess of Iran (1978). The royal visit must have also conjured up some Persian memories for Shafrazi himself who ran a gallery in Tehran in the late 1970s.



■ Dutch treats

Getting back to her South American roots, Princess Máxima of the Netherlands, who is of Argentine stock (née Zorreguieta Cerruti), was spotted at Bâlelatina yesterday with her royal hubby, Prince Willem-Alexander, Prince of Orange (above). The couple may have been initially

HIM

"Her... it was Her..." was his response to my question.

Babak and I were standing beside a water feature, a long, flowing course of reflecting pools and babbling sluices lined in turquoise ceramic. It was set in the beautiful park-like grounds of the Niavaran Cultural Centre, situated in the foothills of the mythic Alborz, which, due to its more agreeable climate, was the favoured city quarter for the affluent of Tehran. I had just asked who had founded the complex, and my friend's response had taken me aback. It was Babak's style of address, his refusal to verbalise the common name, it came with an implied reverence. What made the moment all the more poignant was that I knew instinctively to whom Babak was referring. There was an echo of something Great. Only later did I realise it was also compatible with HIM, Her Imperial Majesty, or more correctly, Her Imperial Majesty Shahbanou (Empress) Farah of Iran. This was, after all, the (former) full title of the person to whom Babak was referring. Perhaps it was a misunderstanding on my part but the sense of something lingering was not so easily dismissed. This was my first encounter with the former monarchy.

Left: The Art Newspaper,
Art Basel Daily Edition,
Thursday 14th June 2007

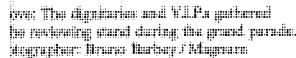
Previous Page: In the 'Tent of Honour'
the Shah and the Shahbanou greet
Prince Bernhardt of the Netherlands.
Photographer: Abbas / Magnum

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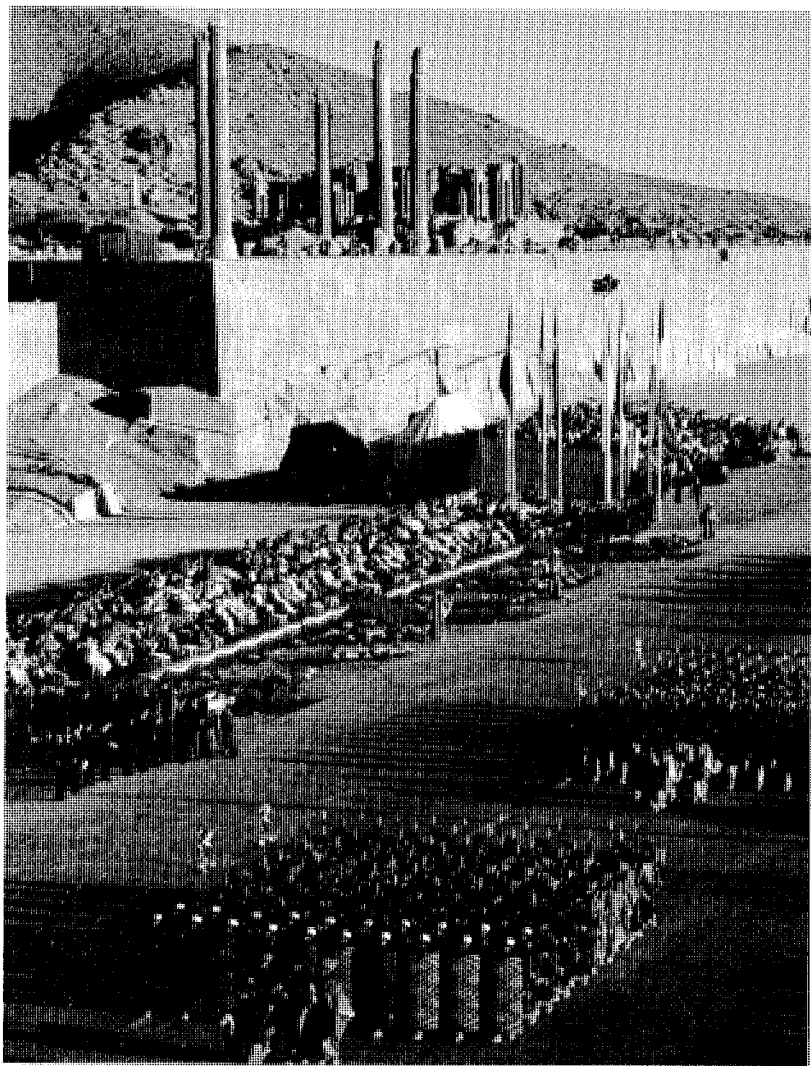
Stiff Collar

And my interest in these artworks? In their retailing they can sometimes credit overlooked details: of the sitter and the artist – coincidences perhaps, where the artist's hand has slipped beyond the canvas.

My attention is drawn back to the centrepiece. He is choking on conceit, but gravity, to HIM; captured here in splendor, reveals nothing. His lips are a horizontal military atire. The date is I think 1977 or thereabouts, a discrete definition of zero emotion. The last days of the Peacock Throne. His lips the corners reveal a slight tension: they have come down to divine right. He concentrates to maintain such a pose now only to Cyrus the Great: founder of an empire of expression. Persia, the First Empire, of which Persepolis was also required in regard has become a symbol. He has overreached. His height: He was not tall – a general flaw in his jurisdiction. Formally, He can command the most powerful rulers. To compensate, photographic portraits were taken with the camera at a distance and He had done this many times. Nervicular angle to increase His stature. The result, His power is collapsing. HIM, the portrait I am viewing is cropped so tightly that the ruler, whose eyes were once described as His face that such trickery cannot be seen as gleaming pieces of dark onyx, now confirmed, nor whether elevator shoes were back at me from the canvas with a blade (as they often were) to further boost



I am looking at paintings by Andy Warhol. Royalty fascinated Warhol. However, the constitutional monarchies of Europe – concerned as they were with service to the state – were no longer particularly disposed to the idea of an artist in the throne room. This was perhaps why he looked further afield to Tehran for a more tangible display of status and title. This and the deluge of petrodollars that engulfed Iran in the 1970s.

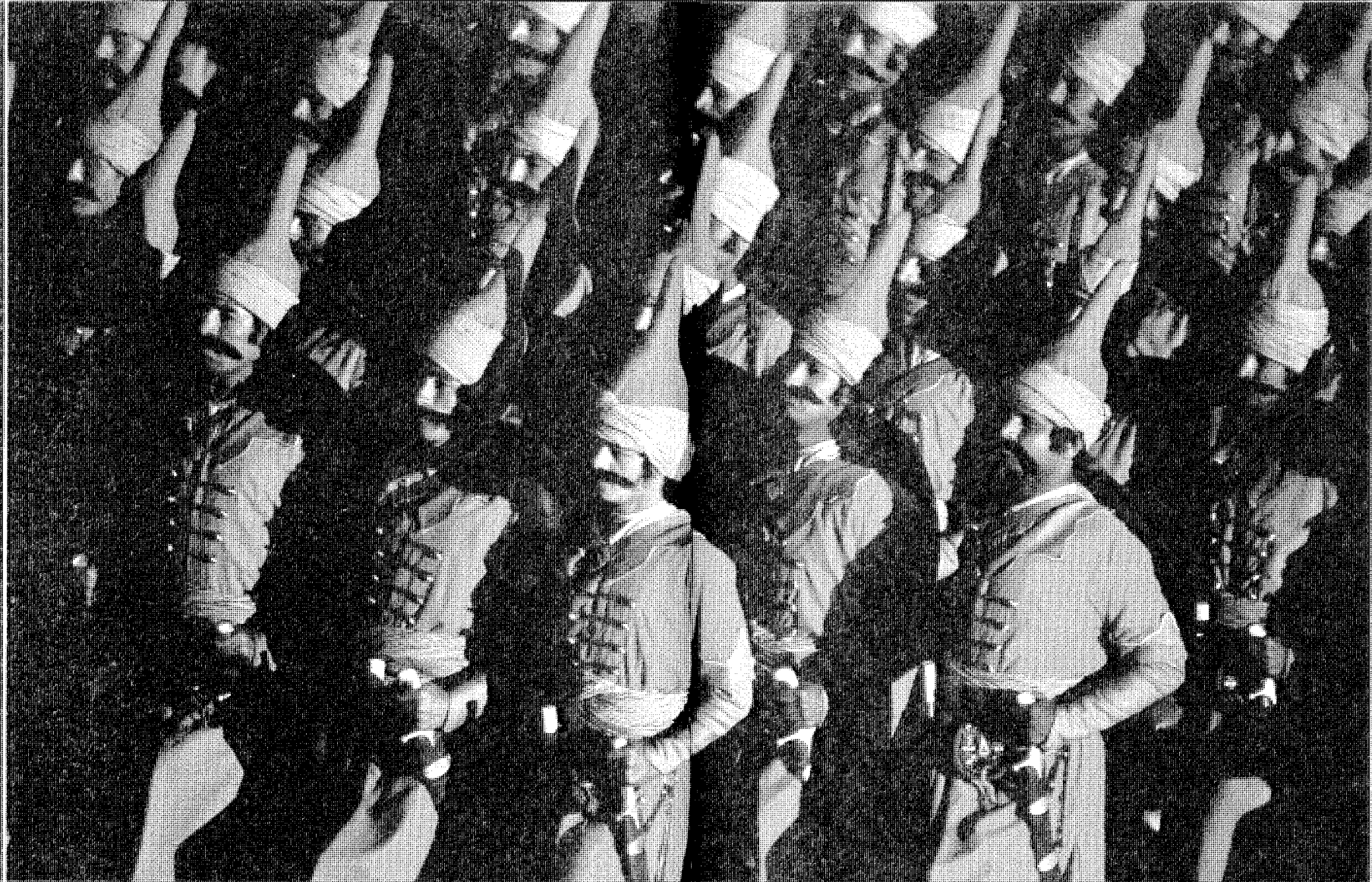


His ambition was to become nothing short of 'official portrait painter' to the Pahlavi court.

I should add that a striking feature of this rather dull likeness is the attention given to the uniform. Even in this cropped view, the garish military attire lures the eye. It is said that some of His ceremonial coats required over a mile of golden thread. Such splendours were a resolute reminder of His military rank – indeed His most cherished role – as Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Armed Forces. Perhaps it is a kind of defence, but He appears often in a uniform. Certainly, the military was His true passion, the role to which He devoted most time. The military was the centre of the Great Civilization, His grandiose invention of a Western aligned modern monarchy. This was especially so in the latter years, when progress in other fields became more and more stymied. Therefore the modern monarchy was shored up, not with factories, but with hardware. It was His last line of defence – saluting His years of passionate devotion. By the end, He had amassed one of the largest military machines in the world. The purchases were fantastic. No port facility was large enough to handle the volume. Nor was there anywhere to store such excess, apart from lining it up in the desert. And then there are the photographs of HIM at the controls, in the cockpit of a new F-14 Tomcat perhaps. How many countries have the F-14? Just two! For decades He could only dream of such military power. He passed the time reading arms catalogues. Then, when the price of oil escalated, He could have everything (in fact, the West insisted He did).

In 1971, just prior to the oil price hike, He engaged His military prowess in a more creative pursuit: a three-day celebration at Persepolis. The occasion was the 2,500th anniversary of the founding of the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great. Described as perhaps the most lavish party of the entire 20th century, it was indeed His great aesthetic statement. The main event was the Grand Parade, a military review in fancy dress: ten epochs of Iranian military history, in fully reconstructed battle dress marched past the ruins. And the audience? HIM and His honoured international guests: kings and queens, princes and princesses, presidents and first ladies and other foreign state representatives. Television relayed the events to the uninvited. For millions of Iranians, this was the closest they would come to His grand vision. It was therefore the Great Civilization incarnate. He had manoeuvred His throne forward by looking back. It was His creative moment. Monarchy was, by definition, now modern, resurgent, authentic and legitimate. These temporal shifts had other effects too. For Islamic history they brought obscurity. Persepolis was His stage, His shortcut to the future.

Left: Modern monarchy and ancient civilisation played out on the historic stage of Persepolis. Photographer: Bruno Barbey / Magnum



Previous Page: Modern Iranian troops dressed as 16th century Safavid soldiers during the Grand Parade.
Photographer: Burt Glinn / Magnum

Right: Meg Harper and Merce Cunningham in Rainforest, 1968.
Photographer: James Klosty
Courtesy Cunningham Dance Foundation Archive



Her

Now I look to the Warhol portrait on the right (His left), to Her, the Shahbanou, His third wife, Empress Farah of Iran: HIM. And I see something I have not seen before. I don't want to exaggerate – of course surface is everything – but in this case there seems to be something deeper. Perhaps it is because this portrait is based on a photograph taken by the artist himself – Warhol and Her Imperial Majesty, separated only by a lens, the brief audience confirming (in his eyes at least) the title of 'court painter'.

The use of the terms 'painting' and 'painter' might, however, be misleading. These portraits could equally well be categorised as photographs. Warhol began, as I have just explained, with a photograph taken during a sitting. The resultant Polaroid image was then transferred to canvas by means of photo-silkscreen. The photograph therefore determines the likeness of the sitter; any painterly considerations only relate to the under-painting. Warhol attached great importance to the sittings, though among the Pahlavi's, it was possibly only Her who actually sat for him.

HIM, by comparison, was executed from a photograph supplied by the Embassy – one from an approved selection – with height correction. Unofficially at least, there were further guidelines: no eye shadow, no lip-

stick! When Warhol saw the Embassy photographs he was shocked. Eventually he succumbed to the only image where he saw the hint of a smile. I study His lips to see what the artist saw. I see only disengagement.

Below: Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Persepolis Event, 1972.
Courtesy Cunningham Dance Foundation Archive



She is not like this. She was not born into Her role but married into it, aged 21. Her expression as She looks straight into the camera – straight at Warhol – is poised but not arrogant; there is even tenderness. It was Her who eventually gave Warhol this audience in Tehran in 1976, and it was Her who commissioned the portraits.

But now I am thinking back to 1972. The setting is Persepolis again. Collections of Warhol's Silver Clouds (his helium inflated silver pillows) are seen floating over the ruins of the ancient capital. The occasion is the Shiraz International Arts Festival, one of the great cultural flagships under Her high patronage, and an annual event supporting some of the finest international avant-garde theatre, music and dance. It was part of the Special Bureau, a space carefully partitioned off from political power. This was Her arena. From here She founded a vast array of cultural initiatives, and, on several occasions, Persepolis became Her stage. In 1972, Warhol's pillows provided the scenery. The event was "Rainforest", a performance by the Merce Cunningham Dance Company with a musical composition by David Tudor.

I have seen a photograph of this event but this time a performance in America in 1968 – a very different context indeed. Cunningham, a central figure in the artistic rebellion of the day, drew his inspiration, in part, from the student revolts sweeping America at the time. For the 1976 festival, he was invited to re-stage the performance at Persepolis. In 1976 in Iran, there were also student revolts, but of a different kind. Erupting from Tehran University, the students demonstrated their opposition to HIM and His Great Civilization – even the festival itself!

Just prior to this second performance, Cunningham came across Warhol's pillows stored in a room full of machine guns. In entering this storeroom in Persepolis, it would perhaps be possible to see the grand summation of the passions of the Shah and Shahbanou, vividly juxtaposed.

One further photograph comes to mind. It is of the Shahbanou, but from a much later date – after the collapse of the Great Civilization. I think it is in America, but I cannot be sure. The former Empress is playing with Her granddaughter on a carpeted floor. She holds something shiny to the child who is moved to laughter – or tears – in its presence. The object is silver and unadorned; it is pillow shaped and seems to be inflated. What is it? For the time being it is a toy, befitting a regal infant.

"Her"

Not HIM – "Her". I look to His right, the place of highest honour, to the other "Her" – His twin sister, HIH Princess Ashraf. "Her" head is flung back slightly in a flamboyant gesture, as if "She" were the sole spectacle at a sumptuous party. There is liveliness to the brushwork too, especially in the hair. Of the three likenesses, the Princess's is the most exaggerated, and not just in "Her" pose. The whole image is characterised by boldness, audacity and a sexual allure befitting "Her" fiery reputation. After HIM, this is a considerable relief.

A coincidence: "Her" positioned to His right – the place of highest honour? If the attention in the hanging were to solely converge the portrait's gazes towards the centre, then this would be the inevitable slight. However, there were many rumours about the Princess and "Her" ambitions for the throne. One concerned "Her" conception. The story goes that the twins' genes were mixed up and it was Ashraf who should have borne the title HIM. Certainly "She" was the more robust and more imposing of the two. With Her, "She" was darkly competitive, as "She" was

with all His wives. "She" had several husbands and many lovers, but "Her" life's pursuit seems to have been the preservation of His attention. "Her" cosmology imagined a position directly in line to the throne, closer in fact to HIM than Her, than any of them; and, as only twins can be, "She" was possessive and un-sharing, especially for His intimacy. This was particularly true in the last years, when "Her" power seemed to be on the wane.

It was "Her" that helped convince HIM to accept the CIA counter-revolutionary plan during a crisis in 1953. His monarchy was restored (while He holidayed in Rome) though thereafter it would be shackled to U.S. foreign policy.

Even in the portraits' hanging arrangement, "Her" eyes seem to search for His approval. Or perhaps "Her" gaze is directed towards Warhol. Did "She", in fact, agree to a sitting with the artist? Was "She" momentarily distracted from "Her" main pursuit?



Conservators removing Shafrazi's graffiti from Picasso's *Guernica*, 1974

Her former advisor

I recognise him. His name is Tony Shafrazi. He is Her former advisor, confidant to the Special Bureau on matters of art and art collecting. Now he is sitting eating his breakfast. His appetite is voracious – and then there are his clothes! Today, he is dressed deliciously in lilac shirtsleeves. While watching him eat like a mad man, I ruminate on matters of

social ambition and whether this might be the cause of such an appetite – in which case he has good reason to be hungry.

The last time I had seen him was on the big screen. He had been given a thinly disguised role, a cameo in a Bill Murray comedy as a Middle-Eastern film producer. I had been in the archive exhuming microfilmed

newspaper articles about his celebrity-saturated life, and, to my surprise, the same evening, I found myself staring directly into his face – now blown up to Hollywood dimensions!

An important date for my research was 1974. The events of that year provided Shafrazi with the social entrée that would match his appetite. At the time, Shafrazi was still a small-time conceptual artist, albeit with revolutionary ambitions. On the 28th of February he entered the New York Museum of Modern Art on 53rd Street carrying a concealed spray can. A few minutes later, he had gained worldwide notoriety as the defacer of Picasso's *Guernica*. Conservators were on the spot in minutes to 'de-revolutionise' (remove) every last trace of Shafrazi's intervention. Apparently, *Guernica* had, as if in preparation for an attack, been covered in a layer of protective varnish. What appeared fleetingly across the painting's familiar, contorted, black and white surface was a scrawl of red, spelling out the words "KILL LIES ALL". Even compared to the wordplay of Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* – which provided the source for Shafrazi's quote – the meaning remains opaque.

The true motives of this complex man may be impenetrable, but the results are clear enough. Following his arrest, beginning with the court arraignment itself, he experienced euphoric support from the wider art community. According to one account, at least, the courtroom is filled with artists who, as bail is fixed, hand around the hat to

demonstrate their support for his revolutionary action. Shafrazi was never prosecuted for the offence. The museum wished to settle out of court. He got 5 years probation. This decision had its detractors, though by now it seemed that this man, with his big social appetite, had many, many more supporters.

And so, no more than two years after these events, he found himself on a plane bound for Tehran armed with suitcases of slides and art history books. He was returning to his homeland, but this time he had an audience with HIM, Himself. The task at hand was the assembly of one of the great fantasy collections of 20th century art. On the back of escalating OPEC prices, the Great Civilization was now expanding to include modern (Western) art collecting. The Shahbanou's long-held dream was coming true, and Shafrazi, with his Iranian background, had been tapped for advice.

If the *Guernica* action had given Shafrazi cult status as an artist, then this switch in alliance from the supply side to the demand side of the equation – spurred on by the Great Civilization – would ultimately make his career as a gallerist. For now, it remained to be seen if social connections alone could legitimise his status as art advisor to the Peacock Throne. After all, at the time, he was known only as an artist (and vandal).

We shall never know how this man ingratiated himself into the Pahlavi court. Passing advice or requests up the chain of command – the reverse of the customary order – had become a special art in itself. It

required resourcefulness as well as a degree of servility. Above all else, however, the Pahlavi's demanded flattery. The courts, which were set up to create a reliable administration system, had, over time, become deformed by the extreme asymmetry of power. In the 1970s, when the torrent of unceasing money supply made its way through this court system, the opportunities for personal gain were exponential. Political power, on the other hand, was still the reserve of HIM alone, but now there were fortunes beyond belief ready to appease the dissenters. Such voices were overwhelmed by the frenzy to catch a share of the extraordinary profits. For those who continued to disagree, there was SAVAK... the fearsome secret police.

Shafrazi laid out for Her the familiar narrative of 20th century Western art. What was unusual about this presentation, however, was that all of the works were now available for purchase. And purchase She did: Johns, Warhol, Lichtenstein, Oldenburg, Stella, Bacon, and later on, Robert Morris, Sol LeWitt, Keith Sonnier. She would joke that the entire collection cost less than one of His beloved Tomcats.

"I will not tolerate criticism of the Shah." This was one of the first statements Shafrazi made when we finally met after our breakfast overture. Something Great echoed in these words. They reverberated through the halls of the 38th Basel Art Fair from where we were standing in Shafrazi's own booth. Since his courtly days, this man of vast appetite has been smiled upon many times. He is now one of the fabled New York gallerists with many celebrity friends. And if his life seems far-fetched then so was this year's Basel Art

Fair. Had the market ever been so Great? Therefore our meeting occurs on the fair floor, awash in high-end re-sale, amongst Bacons, Ruschas and, of course, Warhols. None are really so outstanding, but all of them *seem* outstanding in these heady days. I had been in the booth for some time, as it was Shafrazi who had made the decision to hang Warhol portraits of the (former) Iranian monarchy as a feature in this year's selection. Indeed, these are the paintings I had already been viewing, and it was in front of this hanging that Shafrazi began speaking to me.

I should add that this statement about the Shah was preceded by an even more extravagant pronouncement that tumbled forth from Her former advisor's mouth almost with glee: "I'm a Revolutionary Monarchist". Was this the voice of a political omnivore? To my ear at least, it emerged as a position, inaccessible perhaps, but a point on the political spectrum never the less. It didn't immediately echo with self-conceit toward his achievements in the 1970s, and so I was left wondering what popular uprising could mean if it was actually in the service of re-instating monarchical order, and whether such a thing had a precedent? We parted after several further engagements, one lengthy one spanning the tawdry history of 20th century British/Persian relations, which I can only presume was summoned forth on the premise that I'm English (which I'm not). But in the end I salute the man who can stand in the halls of commerce and still get so passionate about politics. In the times since our meeting, I've engaged in my own attempt to comprehend his far-reaching pronouncements.

Revolutionaries

It is to events before the Great Civilization that I look for a possible ancestry to Shafrazi's words. At a reception in 1921, the British general, Sir Edmund Ironside – possibly the most powerful person in Iran at the time – whispered into the ear of the colonel of the Persian Cossack Brigade. The colonel's name is Reza Khan, a former donkey driver turned soldier, who has resolutely climbed the ranks. The tone of the conversation begins on a flattering note, but continues in the privacy of the garden along



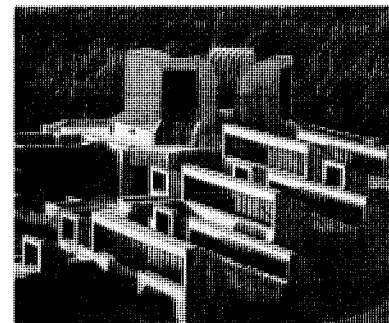
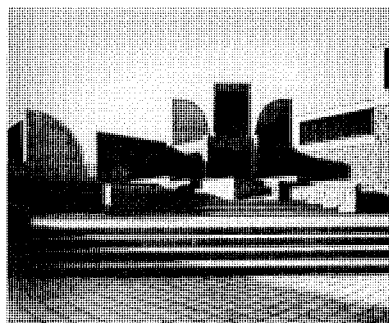
Flag of the Persian Socialist Soviet Republic, established by Mirza Kuchak Khan in the Iranian province of Gilan, June 1920 – September 1921

the lines of: now would be a good time for a *coup d'état*... This military man will finally bring unity to the nation, but his rule will be absolute. After dismissing the Qajar Shah, he crowns himself as absolute ruler, and founds a new dynasty – Pahlavi – named after a pre-Islamic, prestige dialect. He will now be known as Shah Reza the Great. The Pahlavi dynasty however will be relatively brief, a mere 58 years, ending in 1979 with his son, HIM, and revolution.

To understand what happened before Shah Reza's grab for power is to re-configure forces I had once believed to be oppositional. Perhaps in the re-telling of these events, a new understanding of Shafrazi's politics can emerge. Monarchy and revolution – that combustible mix – seem to go hand in hand in 20th century Iran, especially in the chaotic years before Pahlavi rule. And it is here that one of the most fascinating 20th century Iranian political figures emerges. His name is Mirza Kuchak Khan. A true revolutionary. The nation is distraught, enfeebled and bankrupt, having reached a new low amidst a plague of foreign interference. Russia and Britain effectively run the region, extracting concessions from the series of weakened Qajar shahs. In 1906, Mirza plays an active role in the only really successful revolutionary moment of the time. Thousands of men take sanctuary in the grounds of the British Legation, effectively enacting a prolonged strike. The already desperate Shah is forced to bow to the people's demands. A constitution is signed. Now there will be parliamentary representation. Absolute monarchy has finally been overcome; everything seems possible. And so it is that revolutionary and monarchist forces forge the new modern state: a constitutional monarchy – the first of its kind in the Middle East. The elation however cannot be sustained; parliament is almost immediately co-opted, corrupted, and finally, following orders from the new Shah, bombarded by artillery fire.

Twelve years later, the Persian Cossack Colonel marches toward the throne following a period of chaos and collapse. Mirza is holding out in the forests of the Gilani highlands, waging a nationalist guerrilla war for the complete removal of monarchy, and the establishment of a democratic Iranian Republic (which, incidentally, stipulates a separation of religion and state). During this tumultuous time, a red flag can be seen flying over Rasht, north west of Tehran. And so it is that with Bolshevik ammunition, Mirza becomes the undisputed leader of the region of Gilan known now as the Persian Socialist Soviet Republic. This is the first offensive move of the October Revolution. Reza Khan's grasp for monarchy is only possible once Mirza's freedom fighters are finally suppressed. Perhaps this is why some versions of this history end with Mirza's head being presented as an act of servitude to Reza Khan. I have seen the flag for Mirza's P.S.S.R. – a scrawl of text across the familiar red field spells out the word 'KAVEH'. It is the name of a simple blacksmith. In traditional Persian storytelling, this working class hero led his own rebellion against the 1000-year despotic rule of Zakhak. Kaveh the Blacksmith removes his leather apron, raises it on a pole, and, with this flag of protest, sentences the tyrant to a life in the mountains. And so it is that by invoking the name Kaveh the Blacksmith, Mirza refers back to the origins of revolution.

Right: Museum of Contemporary Art Tehran, interior sculpture courtyard and roof structure detail.
Courtesy Kamran Diba



Her 39th birthday

The occasion is the opening of the Contemporary Art Museum in Tehran. In former days, this site was an open field in the city used by the army. Reza Shah would have paraded his soldiers here. Now, under Her high patronage, the avant-garde and the military fall into step once again. The date is the 14th of October, 1977, Her 39th birthday. There have been more extravagant birthdays, 1971 for example. Then, Her birthday coincided with the theatre and pageantry of Persepolis. But, in 1977, the occasion is Her's alone. The museum had been designed to house the by now substantive collection amassed by Her advisor, and it is already full. It had been planned for some ten years or more, but the final realisation had only been possible with Her passionate commitment, and of course the astronomical rise in the price of oil. My visit to the museum comes a full twenty-eight years later. I arrive the day Ahmadinejad wins the presidential vote. Nobody I spoke with that day voted. What value does a vote have when an echelon of

clerics, answerable only unto themselves, can overturn parliamentary decision-making? From the intense heat outside, I enter the building. My first impression is of a rather dishevelled space: I have walked into an impromptu security check. The entrance lobby is littered with equipment, a metal detector, barriers, and makeshift tables for conducting searches. After subjecting myself to this intrusion, I pass to the building's heart. The initial distractions now give way to architecture. The exhibition spaces are beautiful and, I can only imagine, perfect in scale for the collection they were designed to display. I say "imagine" because the original collection, although it survives, was not to be seen. Instead it lay in a vault somewhere beneath where I was standing. Precious few of the pieces collected by Her had seen the light of day since the revolution. What was on view were Persian miniatures, and as I became more and more distracted by what I could not see, I failed to comprehend the full significance of the works in front of me.

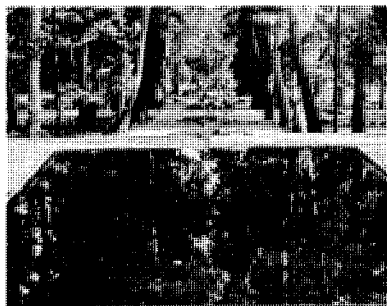


Above: Museum of Contemporary Art Tehran, aerial view of building and sculpture garden. Courtesy Kamran Diba

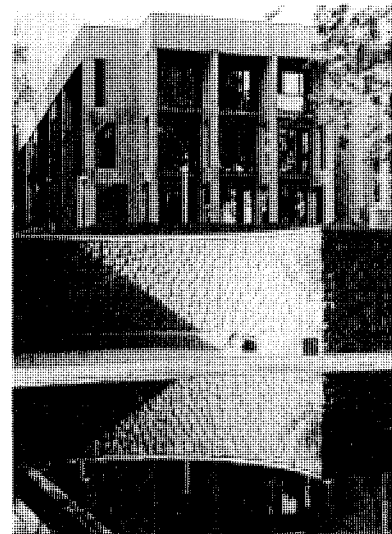
Her architect

"How does it look? Have they looked after it?" Back at the art fair, I have just met Kamran Diba, the man who designed the museum: Her architect. He is anxious to know the current state of the building. My description forms the latest in a string of second-hand reports he has listened to over the last twenty-eight years: the time since he was there in person. We discuss the museum at length, and then other buildings, including the Niavaran Cultural Centre. He is a genial man in his late 60s, open, self-reflective, and, as we talk, I cannot help but notice the family resemblance: he looks like Her. After all, they are first cousins, and almost identical in

age too. And then there are further parallels. Both studied architecture – he in America and She in Paris – and both are also known as collectors of art; indeed, this is how we chanced to meet during these frenzied Basel days. Diba had worked with Her from the beginning. He was Her first advisor and buyer, and then, for matters contemporary, he enlisted Shafrazi. He was also the museum's first director.



Above: The water feature, Garden of Niavaran, Tehran. Courtesy Kamran Diba



Right: Empress Farah's Secretariat, Garden of Niavaran, Tehran. Courtesy Kamran Diba

I am looking at a photograph taken in one of the exhibition halls of the museum shortly after the opening. The space appears exactly as I saw it during my visit, but, in place of Persian miniatures, Diba's original hang of Her collection can now be seen on the walls. Her Rothko, Pollock and Morris Louis are on the right, and, on the left, Her single-panel Bacon and two de Koonings. It is Her de Kooning on the extreme left of the picture that holds my attention. I recognise the painting immediately. It was in an art history book from my childhood. The title is Woman III. It is a frontal nude, brutal in its painterly depiction of naked flesh in a disorientated space. The photograph must have been taken while the museum was open to the public as there are viewers looking at the works on display. A man in flared trousers stands directly in front of Her Woman, gazing directly into her navel – truly an amazing photograph!

A Wesselmann nude was also reputedly hung at this time. One viewer secretly attached a small note to the support. It read, "Next time this will be a bomb!" Such oversights were unseen from the Western perspective, but internally the Great Civilization was riddled with these cognitive gaps. Even though She was annexed from real political power and its consequences, choices made during those heady days, did unwittingly, fan the flames of revolution. In the end, they were to prove unforgivable. The parties, the celebrations, the festivals, etcetera, all were in a vast part inaccessible to the ordinary Iranian. What would happen in the months before 1979 would be a popular uprising. This revolution would, as Mirza himself had proposed, entirely remove the monarchy. But this time it would not garner Western sympathies. Her Woman would be condemned as blasphemous and be banished to a vault, never to be seen in Iran again. The museum itself would survive the revolutionary period, but without the display of the collection. Much speculation would surround the paintings as they lingered in storage under the museum.

"As records were being broken at contemporary art auctions this week, the hedge fund billionaire Steven A. Cohen privately scooped up a de Kooning "Woman" painting for roughly \$137.5 million, adding to the prestige of a personal collection that is fast becoming one of the world's greatest."

Could this be the same Woman? Reading down the newspaper column amongst the long list of record high prices I confirm that indeed it is. The hedge fund billionaire bought his Woman last year from the entertainment magnate (David Geffen), and the entertainment magnate acquired her some 12 years earlier (price \$20 million), but only after a complex trade involving a handoff in the international zone of the Vienna airport. The story goes something like this: one side appears with a 16th century book of Persian miniature paintings (estimated value: \$20 million), the other side brings the Woman. The first side in this cloak and dagger operation is a London art dealer acting on behalf of executors of the estate of one Arthur A. Houghton Jr.; the second is the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art, an institution now literally burdened with Her legacy. The book itself is not really a book, it is more what survives of a volume after Mr. Houghton has cut it, split it and sold off the pieces page by page. Despite these mutilations, it remains the largest intact remnant of the Shah-Nameh of Shah Tahmasp.

The Houghton Shah-Nameh, as it has come to be known, as there are other Shah-Namehs, is the illuminated transcript made for Shah Tahmasp of the enormous 10th century poetic opus by Ferdowsi, the most celebrated Persian poet. Known also as the King's Book of Kings the poem itself tells of

Iran's mythical and historical past from the creation of the world up until the Islamic conquest in the 7th century in 60,000 rhyming couplets. This poem alone sustained the Persian language through its greatest afflictions, and is admired as a national epic. Amongst the Shah-Namehs in existence today, only two survive completely intact. Many of the split volumes have found their way onto the Western art market where they now command record high prices. The Houghton Shah-Nameh is now visible; I saw its sumptuous pages (between other distractions) the day I was in the museum. But what of the Woman? She is no longer being kept hostage by a revolutionary state; but has the market made her any more visible? I return to the Houghton Shah-Nameh, though this time merely in reproduction. Amongst the tales of monarchical ascendancy and courtly intrigue, I find a familiar figure: it is Kaveh the Blacksmith. Transposed now into rhyming couplets this influential revolutionary of old finds a role, in perfect meter with the monarchy. I learn that the Blacksmith's revolution is not against the institution of monarchy, but the tyranny of Zahhak. The revolution ends with the re-instatement of a surviving monarchical line. Fereydu, the anointed ruler, ascends the throne. It is here (and perhaps only here), in this translated reality, that Shafrazi's Revolutionary Monarchist can invoke popular uprising, while still supporting the monarchy.



Left: At the Tomb of Cyrus the Great where the Shahanshah officially opened the 2500th anniversary celebrations. Photographer: Abbas / Magnum

Monarchists

The former palaces of the Pahlavi shahs sit on the northern limits of Tehran, laid out amongst leafy, spacious grounds. From this vantage there are spectacular views onto the city. If it were not for the haze, I could probably see both the Niavaran Cultural Centre and the Museum of Contemporary Art. Above me is the mighty snow-capped peak of Damavand, the highest point in the Alborz. According to the Shah-Nameh, the tyrant Zahhak was, following the Blacksmith's revolution, placed in chains and held under this dormant volcano.

One of the smaller palaces in the complex is preserved for the Crown Prince: the Shahpur, the first-born son of HIM. His name is Reza Pahlavi II, sometimes written

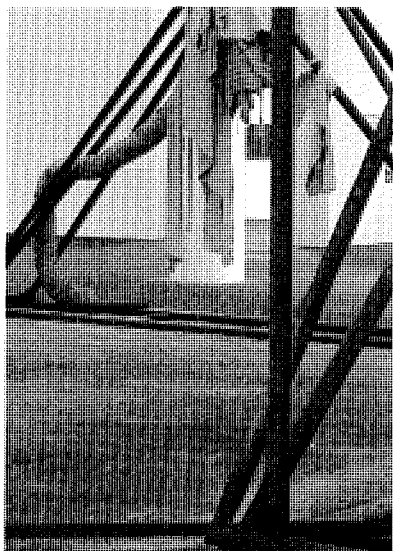
Cyrus Reza Pahlavi. Millions saw the heir apparent, aged eleven, during the televised ceremonies at Persepolis. Cannons fired the salute as he followed his father's stiff, measured steps down the endless blue carpet to the tomb of his namesake: Cyrus the Great. At the tomb, the Cyrus cult took on still grander dimensions. HIM spoke, He gave a speech. With an air of divine authority and unaccustomed emotion He praised the ancient ruler and proclaimed His own succession. During His final words, a wind rose up off the desert floor. It embraced HIM. At the time, this was seen to be a good omen. It was not. The myth of a new Cyrus on a modern throne – the Great Civilization – was a folly.

As 'court painter', Warhol was vying for the chance to paint the young Cyrus's portrait – another folly. The fourth commission was not to be. In 1979 the royal family fled Iran into uncertain exile. The Crown Prince was then 19. Following his father's death in 1981, he crowned himself Shahanshah, successor to Cyrus the Great. He was in Cairo. And so, over the last 28 years, in pockets and networks, and amongst interest groups, the monarchy survives. Indeed, it can even flourish, as Basel attests.

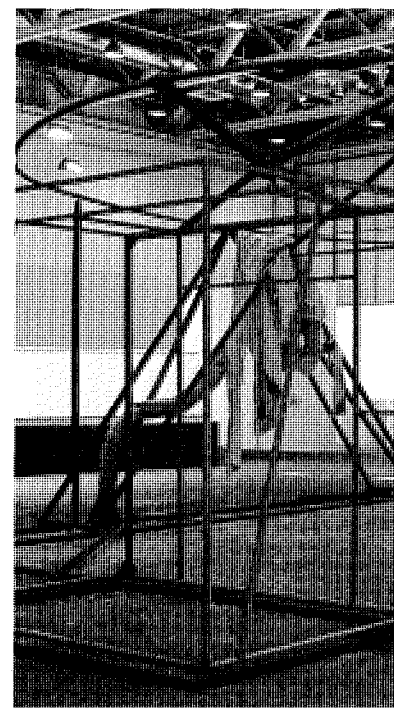
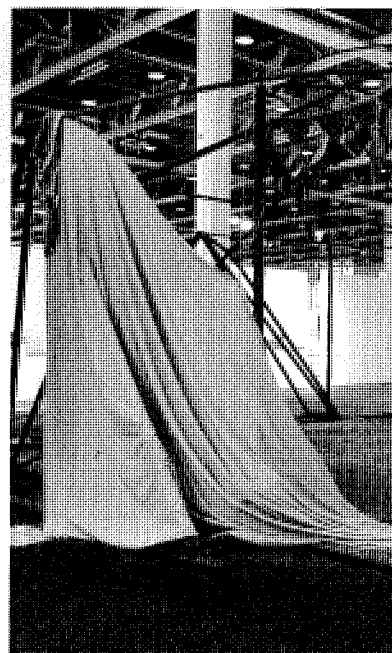
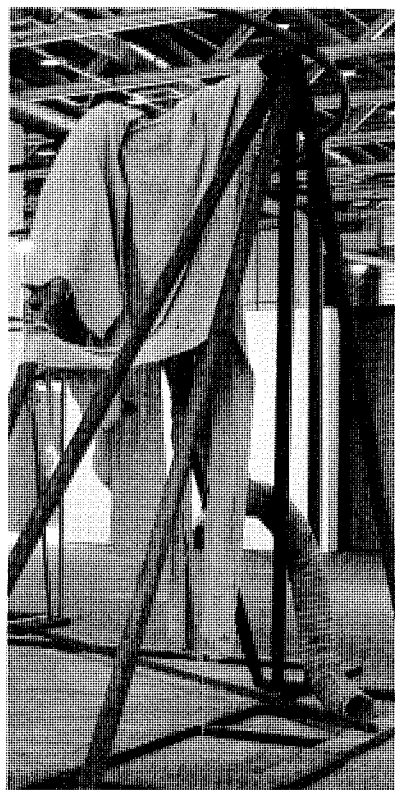
Back at the Prince's palace, and I see it has only recently re-opened after major restoration work. At first, it seems odd that the government would renovate a symbol of the monarchy's survival, but then I recognise

the state of affairs: revolutionary and monarchist forces have come together again. I make the tour. Inside, the rooms are small and the furniture is large. One space I am captivated by is the study. It is filled with manifestations of his recent childhood and his future rule. Toys are set side by side with models from his father's war chest. At the far end, his desk dominates. From here he could imagine his future court: appointments with his advisors, or foreign diplomats, or a presidential delegation, or perhaps a visiting monarch. Honoured guests would be seated in front of him in the large leather chairs provided. They would have to face each other off in front of him over a smoked glass occasional table – it's only ornament: a toy cannon.

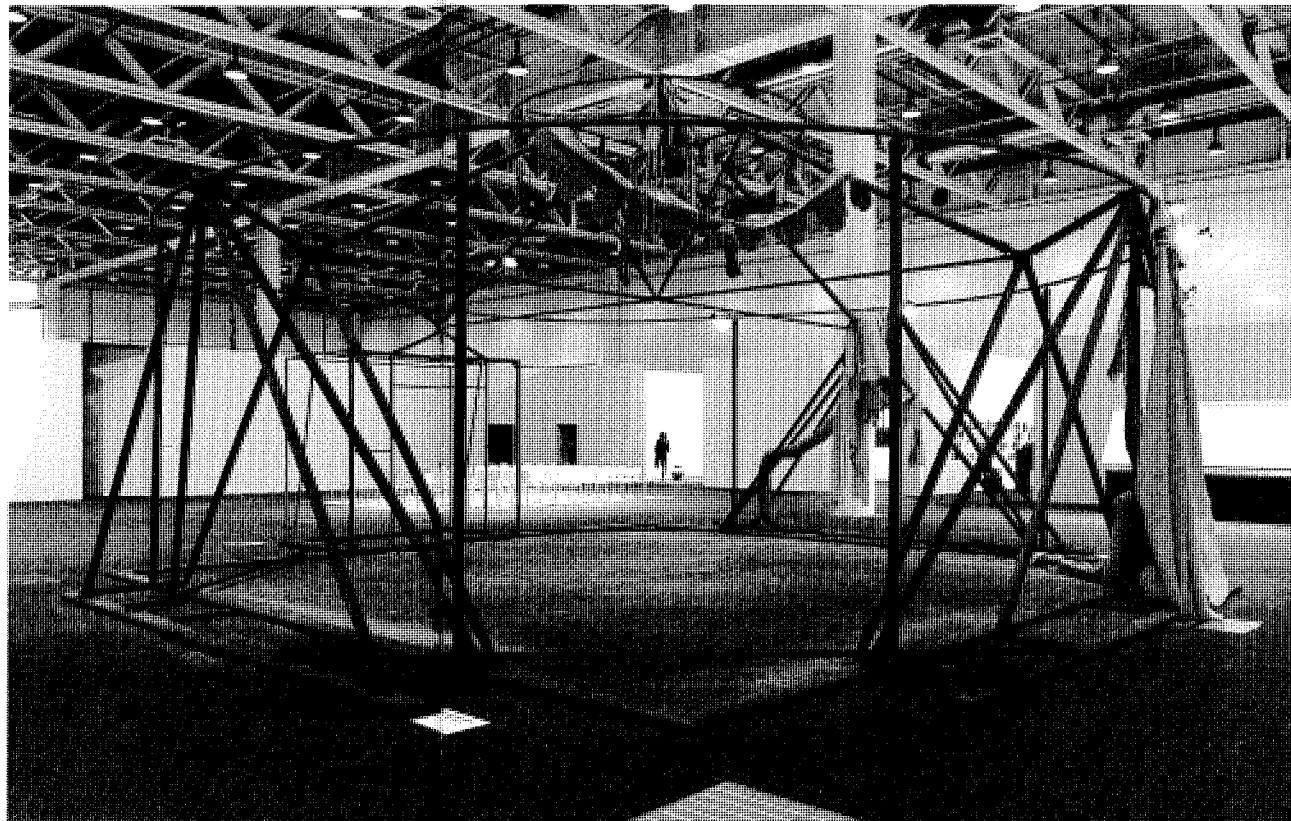
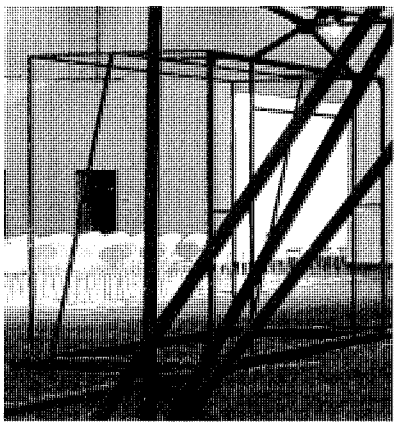
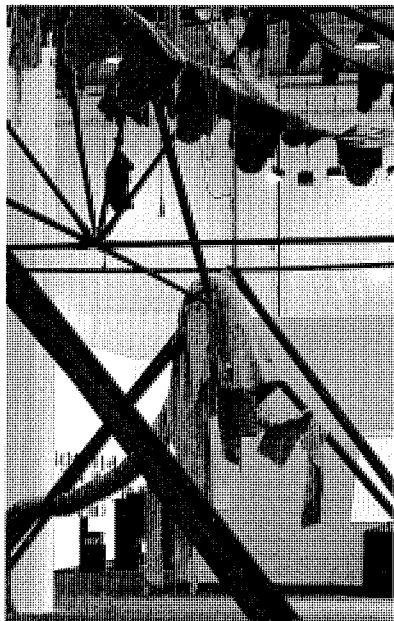
It is an absurd tableau but it is impossible not to imagine the homecoming of Reza Pahlavi II, sometimes Cyrus: pretender to the throne, a 48-year-old man in his teenage bedroom.



A project for Art Unlimited,
Art Basel 38, 2007

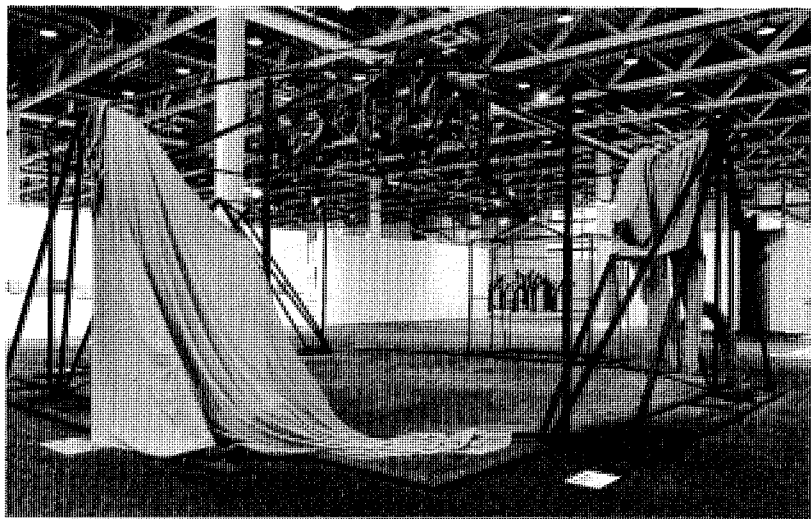


Persepolis 2530

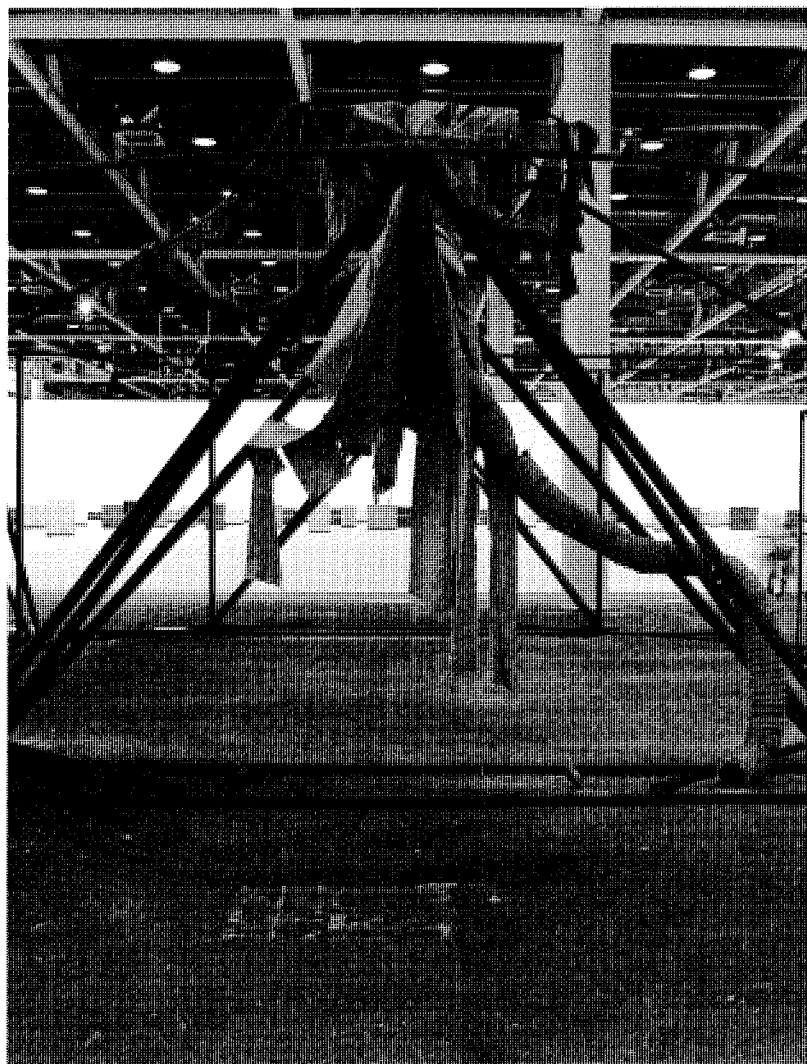
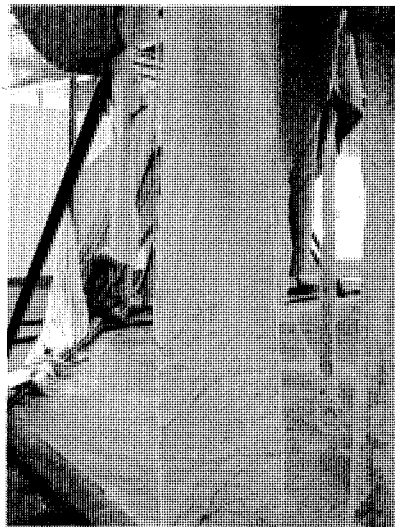


Top and Bottom Left: Persepolis 2530,
installation details

Above: Persepolis 2530, installation view,
Art Unlimited, Art Basel 38, 2007



Above, Bottom and Right:
Persepolis 2530, installation views
and details showing fabric remnants
and air-conditioning ducts



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Thank you.

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MICHAEL STEVENSON

Michael Stevenson is an artist, born in New Zealand and living in Germany, who has become known for his large-scale installations. Often these include objects – obsolete instruments of state or commerce – that hold interest specifically because of their ability to discern the broader political economy. Such objects are often so historically embedded and conceptually discrete that the artist's work is complete merely through reconstruction or relocation. The resulting exhibitions can be analogous to that of an archaeological display without labels.

His projects have recently been seen at Tate Modern, London; Vilma Gold, London; Art Unlimited, Art Basel 38; Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco; Museum Abteiberg, Mönchengladbach; Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane; 50th Venice Biennale. In 2008 the artist will present new projects at the Kröller-Müller Museum, Netherlands, and Panama Art Biennial 8, Panama City. Michael Stevenson is represented by Vilma Gold, London; Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney; and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington.

MARTIN CLARK

Martin Clark is Artistic Director at Tate St Ives. Previously he was Exhibitions Curator at Arnolfini, Bristol (2005–2007) where he worked on the initial production of 'Persepolis 2530' for its exhibition at Art Unlimited, Art Basel 38. Martin Clark has worked with Michael Stevenson on a number of previous projects including 'To Our German Friend', Vilma Gold, London, 2003, and 'Rakit', Herbert Read Gallery, Canterbury, 2004.

ARNOLFINI, BRISTOL

Arnolfini is one of Europe's leading centres for the contemporary arts, founded in 1961. Based in Bristol's harbourside, the organisation aims to present ambitious work by emerging and established practitioners. The visual arts programme looks to create exhibitions that are challenging and innovative, and sees the commissioning process as integral to the process of developing projects. Recent solo exhibitions have included Albert Oehlen, Deimantas Narkevičius and Lucy McKenzie.

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