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Review | Mohammad Ghazali: Persepolis: 2560-2580 by Celia Bailey

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Mohammad Ghazali - Lost 2021-2001 , 017# Analog Photography Gelatin Silver Print 13.5 x 20.5 cm (MGH15 21)

Review | Mohammad Ghazali: Persepolis: 2560-2580

by Celia Bailey

If history is often a fiction ‘written by the victors’, then what we accept as truth might often more accurately be described as the accumulated observations of a host of unreliable witnesses. Perceptions of truth and the histories that spool out from them are just some of the tools which Iranian conceptual photographer, Mohammad Ghazali, utilises in his work. Whilst we have become used to regarding photography as the documentation and preservation of a true moment in time, Ghazali’s work intends to trigger doubt.

There is nothing passive in the act of viewing these images; starting with the premise that our choices and interpretations of images aren’t set in stone, Ghazali’s photographs play with the viewers shifting perceptions of narrative and we are invited to become an active participant in constructing a world just outside normal reality. These deceptively simple and modest images, often recording aspects of everyday life in his native Tehran, help us to see through ‘impossible’ eyes, with previous works borrowing the exact viewing point of public statues – or empty shop windows – triggering a sequence of unanswered questions in the viewer.



Mohammad Ghazali – Lost 2021-2001 , 027# Analog Photography, Gelatin Silver Print, 13.5 x 20.5 cm (MGH25 21)

In ***Persepolis: 2560-2580*** the viewer is presented with a grid of 38 small monochromatic images which taken at face value, along with documentation used to reinforce their authenticity, are a photo-documentary of the construction of the ancient Persian city of Persepolis. The date, 2560-2580 – refers to the solar calendar of Iran and the coronation date of Cyrus, the first Achaemenid king of Persepolis in 559 BC, fusing a point in ancient history with now. Are the girders, pipes and metal ropes we see really images from the margins of imagined time and if they are, what might it be like to stand in that place and observe as Ghazali's camera has?

Ghazali also ponders on the dual meaning of the structures we observe in these works, which are actually a sequence of images of the construction site of a modern road in Teran. Roads are also devices of communication, conveying goods as well as ideas, language and culture. Persepolis was once the ceremonial capital of the vast Persian/ Achaemenid Empire and stood on the silk Road, a route connecting the East and West of the Ancient world and an artery for the transmission of ideas and culture. Where is our modern road taking us to and from and in this world of instant communication, how do we truly share and listen to ideas outside our immediate lived experience?



Mohammad Ghazali – Lost 2021-2001 , 046# Analog Photography, Gelatin Silver Print, 13.5 x 20.5 cm, (MGH44 21)

Contemporary media constantly intercepts and manipulates our understanding of the world around us. We may feel that we are being presented with facts but how much of this is actually a creative act with an agenda? Ghazali refers to George Orwell's dystopian masterpiece, 1984 to underline the importance of history making: "Does the past exist concretely, in space? Is there somewhere or other a place, a world of solid objects, where the past is still happening?'.....(if) we control all memories. Then we control the past, do we not?>(1)

Perversely, what history actually teaches us throughout the millennia, is that in the art of propaganda, the bigger the lie, the more likely we are to believe it. Even the quote at the start of this review is part of the careful construct which has grown up around the post-war legacy of Winston Churchill (whom it is also usually wrongly attributed to.)

Ghazali wants to sow the seeds of doubt and for us to question what we believe we see and how we choose to understand and interpret it – both in front of these simple black and white images but also when we leave the gallery and go out into the technicolour of the world. Like the photographer, we are all really authors, re-writing our experience and understanding of the world around us. We are in fact standing in a continual process of history making and the world we inhabit today exists as an echo chamber of sights, patterns and experience which could be recognised and interpreted 2,000 years in the past – or in the future.

Words by Celia Bailey.

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(1) George Orwell, 1984

Celia Bailey is an art advisor and former publisher of international magazines including Art Review and Apollo.

About Mohammad Ghazali:

Mohammad Ghazali (b. 1980, Iran) holds a BA in photography from the Islamic Azad Art and Architecture University of Iran and has lived and worked in France and Germany. In his photography, Ghazali engages with the relationship between urban spaces and individual life stories, often with Tehran as his subject. He has exhibited in more than 20 national international shows and was awarded 1st prize in the 9th Tehran Photography Biennale in 2004 for his work 'Self Portrait' which was acquired by the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art for its permanent collection. mohammadghazali.com

Link to works:

Mohammad Ghazali | Persepolis: 2560-2580 | PrivateViews

For more information on Persepolis: 2560-2580 and other exhibitions at Ab-Anbar, visit: <https://ab-anbar.com/>