

March 5 to April 17, 2005

Akbar Nazemi:

Unsent Dispatches from the Iranian Revolution, 1978 - 1979

Akbar Nazemi was a young photographer studying in Dusseldorf when the Iranian Revolution began in June 1978. He returned to Tehran immediately and spent the next eight months recording the daily street scene during those extraordinary times. Nazemi's photographs of that watershed moment document an event that continues to have a powerful global impact to this day.

If the Middle East is now the most dominant item on the global news, it was not so prior to the 1970s, even though resentment at the colonizing powers in the region had been simmering for decades. The historical trajectory of the region has been modified by many events, probably none greater than the Iranian Revolution of 1978 and 1979. That upheaval erased a monarchical system that had been in place for many hundreds of years and eventually gave birth to the current government, the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Revolution was originally very broad-based, with support coming from nearly all of the country's pre-1978 political parties. The primary goal of the resistance was the transformation of the political system in a nation with one of the largest armies in the world. Opinions about the benefits of the change of government differ, but as it turned out the revolution seems to have resulted not in a new freedom, but, after a great loss of life and material wealth, rather a system that shares some of the repressive qualities with the one it replaced.

During the months of upheaval in Iran photographers took risks not only by documenting daily events in the streets, but also by processing their film and making prints, much of which was done surreptitiously at night. Images of the Revolution 'from the inside' were not widely published in North America at the time; film was not easy to obtain once the revolution was underway and, as a result, some of Nazemi's still images were shot on 35mm motion picture film stock. The negatives from which this exhibition was created were smuggled out of Iran in the 1980s.

Presentation House Gallery's exhibition presents a small sample of the 3,600 photographs Nazemi made during the time of the Revolution. He documented the Revolution on a daily basis during the events of 1978-79 and continued working in the streets afterward, recording many of the key events up to and during the Iran – Iraq war. Many of Nazemi's photographs were seen publicly at the time of the Revolution in Tehran. There were few or no newspapers being published and 'current events' were reported to the population by texts and images taped up on the walls of the University of Tehran, where they would last for a few hours before being torn down by government forces. At the time, these images were treated as 'news' in the truest sense of the word, but because they never went further than that until now, we are calling them 'unsent dispatches'.

Nazemi's comprehensive coverage and understanding of these events makes him one among only a handful of artists who have recorded the pandemonium of those turbulent days. Nazemi has lived in Canada since 1988. The exhibition will be comprised of 140 color photographs and will be accompanied by a 64 page catalogue with forty colour reproductions and texts by R.W. Apple, Asef Bayat, Pantea Haghighi, Homa Hoodfar, Nikki R. Keddie and Bill Jeffries.

Akbar Nazemi lives in Vancouver and operates a photography and video studio in North Vancouver. The exhibition is co-curated by Pantea Haghighi and Bill Jeffries; it will be offered for touring in Canada and the United States.

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Gallery hours: Wednesday to Sunday, noon to 5:00 pm and Thursdays noon to 9:00 pm