

XIV Biennale Donna

MEMORIE VELATE / VEILED MEMOIRS **Contemporary Art from Iran**

Curated by Silvia Cirelli

Ferrara, Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea
18 April – 13 June 2010

Press Release

The XIV edition of the Biennale Donna presents the collective exhibition **MEMORIE VELATE, Contemporary Art from Iran** at the Padiglione d'Arte Contemporanea in Ferrara. Organized by the Ferrara chapter of UDI – Unione Donne in Italia, in collaboration with the Gallerie d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea and the Musei Civici di Arte Antica of the Comune di Ferrara, the exhibition runs from **April 18th to June 13th 2010**.

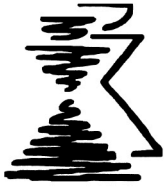
The exhibition retraces the experiences of six internationally recognized contemporary Iranian artists: **Shirin Fakhim, Ghazel, Firouzeh Khosrovani, Shadi Ghadirian, Mandana Moghaddam** and **Parastou Forouhar**. Six women who, in addition to having lived through difficult times, from the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988, can testify as to the difficult conditions women face in this highly conservative Middle Eastern country. In Iran, discrimination against women is a fact of daily life, and even though there have been attempts at change, Iranian women are still on the bottom rung of the social scale, considered to be second class citizens.

Memories of the past and a present which still hovers between the desire for modernization and the desire to safeguard Islamic religious and cultural traditions are common threads running through the exhibition. These themes are channelled through the vision of daring women, tireless voices articulating a reality that wants to be heard.

This survey follows the experiences of artists who have taken different paths, presenting the thoughts of those who chose to remain in Iran and those who chose exile, a state of enforced geographical nomadism but in which they never lose their strong cultural identity.

The exhibition explores the themes of the social and familial role of women in the Islamic world, their ties to their home countries and their hopes for change to a more democratic future, through a wide range of expressive languages including video installations, photographs, site specific installations made expressly for the Biennale Donna, and documentaries.

The exhibition opens with some of the most remarkable works, shown for the first time in Italy, by the young artist, **Shirin Fakhim**, whose life size sculptures confront the increasing problem of prostitution in Teheran with audacity and evident provocation; this is the unhappy lot of women, who



as a result of being disowned, domestic abuse or widowhood, have "lost their own dignity" under the socio-religious rules. The exhibition continues with a complex video-installation by **Ghazel**, an artist of international reputation who brings to the Biennale a work shown for the first time in Italy, a strongly intimate autobiographical diary that recounts the gestures, attitudes and moments of a woman's life in all its complex and multiple identities. The only documentary presented in the exhibition is by the young journalist and documentarist, **Firouzeh Khosrovani**, which traces the idea of the female body from the Islamic Revolution to today, where in Tehran, even the female mannequin in the shop windows have become objects of controversy, which is expressed through incredible mutilations of the female form.

Private reflections of feminine individuality find their expression in the photographic works of **Shadi Ghadirian**, original and suggestive snapshots that expose the contradictions of present day Iran, revealing the incoherencies and supporting the contention that power in the world cannot be achieved as long social backwardness is still evident. The inherently conceptual works composed of cement, real hair and mirrors by **Mandana Moghaddam** have great visual impact; her installations take their strong creative tension from the unexpected balance between the masculine forces and the feminine. Closing the exhibition are the works of **Parastou Forouhar**, a controversial artist who experienced first hand the violation of human rights with the brutal murder of her parents, who were part of the political opposition in Iran at the time. Forouhar's art, undoubtedly influenced by her unhappy personal history, focuses on the themes of freedom of thought and the struggle for women's rights.

The exhibition, organized by the UDI committee of Lola Bonora, Anna Maria Fioravanti Baraldi, Dida Spano, Anna Quarzi, Ansaldo Siroli, Antonia Trasforini, Liviana Zaganoni is curated by Silvia Cirelli and supported by the Comune di Ferrara, the Provincia di Ferrara and the Regione Emilia-Romagna.

A bilingual catalogue in Italian and English will be available, containing photographs of all the works together with biographical notes of the artists and critical essays by Silvia Cirelli and Rose Issa.

The Biennale Donna also offers a series of events tied to the exhibition, such as films, lectures and debates.