

Interviews

## Shirana Shahbazi: On Zurich and grappling with the contradictory nature of photography

To mark the beginning of Zurich Art Weekend (June 9-11, 2023) we had a conversation with artist Shirana Shahbazi (\*1974 in Tehran, Iran; lives and works in Zurich). Her exhibition at Galerie Peter Kilchmann from June 9 - July 28, 2023 features all new works. Over the course of her career, Shahbazi has developed a unique approach to the medium of photography to create uncompromising layouts and installations in which her political consciousness comes to the fore. Shahbazi's works are represented in the collections of the Centre Pompidou, Paris; Guggenheim Museum, New York; the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Tate Modern, London.

Photo: Anne Morgenstern



Lara Morrell  
Shirana Shahbazi

This is your fourth solo show at Galerie Peter Kilchmann, could you tell me a little about the concept behind these new works and the materials used?

I began working on this body of work last fall, at the beginning of the protests and the feminist uprising in Iran, this movement has been both powerful and inspiring in so many levels, but also brutal and hard to digest. The Iranian community is going through a harsh time between hope and disorientation. Being part of the Iranian diaspora, has been the mood that has underpinned the work in this show.

The show contains three groups of works and a hybrid visual language is presented, in a similar vein to previous shows. There are large format multipart lithographs in bold colours. A figure which seems to be either falling, hovering or flying, is overprinted with spacial elements. The images are fragmented in themselves. In contrast to these large formats, there is a series of very small black and white photographic prints that I have hand coloured and which are framed in ceramic frames. These two series are accompanied by ceramic plates that transfers the space into a new experience and add to the diversity of the materials used.

Last but not least, there is an installation with moving image. For the first time I have used 16mm film. The projection takes place in a special installation that corresponds to the architectural elements that also appear in both the photographs and lithographs.



How did this shift to the moving image come about?

Having transformed photography into so many different media, such as painting, silk screen, lithography, architecture, carpets, it was just down to a matter of time before I began to work with moving image. Like in my photographic works, I have used multiple exposures and overlapping to create an independent experience of time and space. It was a pleasure to work with Dorit Chrysler, a musician, who's work I adore. This is probably the bigger shift for me, rather than using cinematographic material.



How did you initially approach photography and how has your relationship to the medium changed over the years?

Having been raised in a heavily politicised private and social context, I first wanted to become a photo journalist. But the emigration to Germany and the intellectual grappling with the medium of photography, later on in my studies, helped to familiarise myself with photography's contradictory relationship to outside reality. A clear sense of belonging gradually dissolved and I became aware of the importance of perspective and language, along with the challenges of translation and of the transcultural construction of meaning.

What is it that analogue cameras and traditional printing techniques do for you, that digital does not?

First and foremost: time to think and space to experiment! The parameters are so reduced, that I can be more focused and precise. But this has never been a dogma, just one way of working. For the lithographs, I use digital images which then are translated into other media, such as lithography in this show. I think the encounter with art through a social experience is what I care for.



Your works are closely related to their spatial surroundings and usually intervene with the architecture of the exhibition space. Do you have a background in architecture or design?

My father is an architect and I have been raised in a very art friendly surrounding. Also 2 decades of collaboration with my partner Manuel Krebs, who is a brilliant designer, has definitely influenced my work.