

WHO IS IRAN

And Why Do Flashbulbs Pop



By Eric Newill

Iran Issa-Khan is like the sphinx: seen by all but perceived by few. Of course, since she is everywhere, anyone with the *slightest* social schedule comes within her sway, and, if you are worthy, she'll embrace you and introduce you all around and pronounce you "fabulous" in whatever your chosen field. If you have no field, you may be beautiful, which is

just as good or better. Or you may be a champion socialite, charming and sleek and good at making the rounds of a room. If the latter is the case, of course you and Iran have known each other for quite a while—but the question remains: Do you really know her? Or, more precisely, do you know what it is she *does*?

Yes, she has a camera, and takes eight hundred million photos, and you may by now be weary of the thought that you'll never see those

pictures. You probably know the tired bon mot that "there's no film in the camera." First of all, before we proceed, we must dispute that: There *was* film in the camera, and we have seen the images. The social pictures are kaleidoscopic in their variety and color, their movement and impact, capturing the whirl of Miami in all its carnal incarnations and implications. She knows everyone and goes anywhere, from an art opening in Miami's warehouse badlands to an

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ISSA-KHAN?

Every Time She Enters a Room?



With Shareef Malik.



With Michele Oka Doner.



The center of the action, as always.

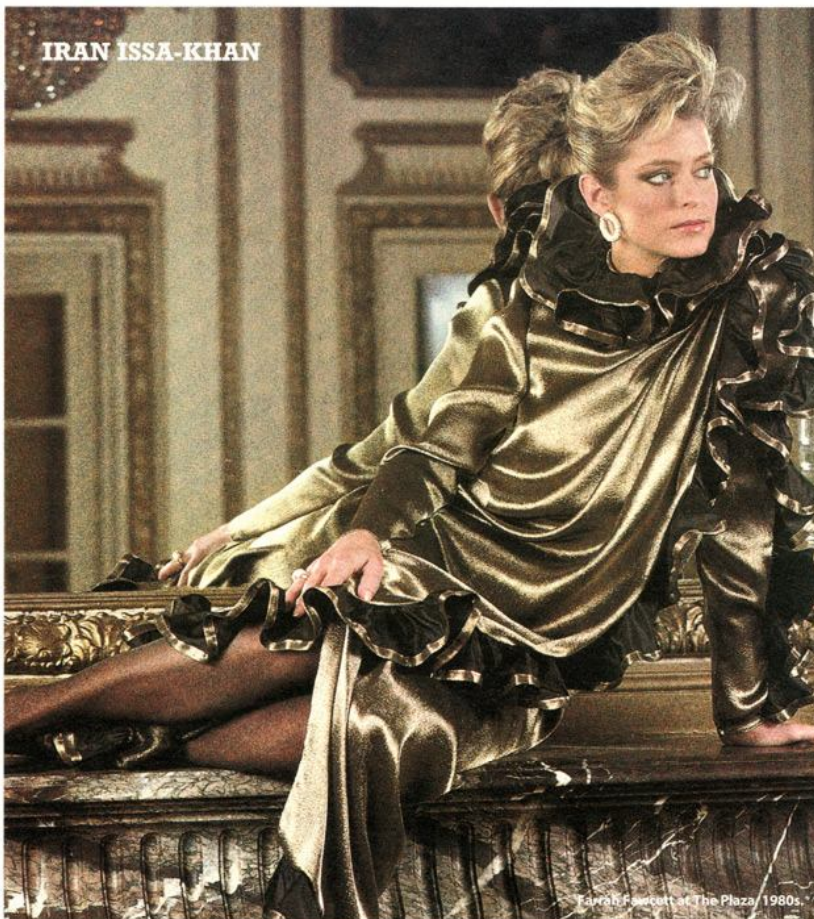
overhyped Delano rampage to the lowdown knockdown Club Deuce to a chicly perfumed Coral Gables dinner party—and usually all on the same night. Her photos capture these moments, summing up this city at the turn of the century, and why they have never been seen is anyone's guess. But flip a few pages and you will finally encounter them in her new column, "Social Studies," on 314. This will continue as a monthly documentation of everything and everyone you need to know if you intend to have a cosmopolitan life in this subtropical burg.

Meanwhile, the point of *this* spread is entirely different. It shows a divergent and more thoughtful side to her art: It might well be called "The Unknown Iran Issa-Khan." They are the portraits and fashion images, art studies and magazine covers that she has produced over

the years. They are compositionally balanced and aesthetically classic—with just a hint of the over-the-top '80s outrageousness that spawned them. But we have forgotten the necessary biography: Born in Teheran, the aptly named Iran arrived in New York and proceeded to take the town by storm, studying with acclaimed photographer William Minor, Jr., and shooting the foremost beauties of the time for Spanish *Harp-er's Bazaar*: Andie MacDowell, Iman, Paulina Porizkova, Stephanie Seymour. Meanwhile, a sampler pack of the world's notables also lined up for her lens: Nancy Reagan, Bill Blass, Carolina and Reinaldo Herrera, David and Olympia de Rothschild, the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough at Bleinheim Palace, Farrah Fawcett, Julio Iglesias, and, of course, Paloma Picasso, whose international ad campaigns Iran

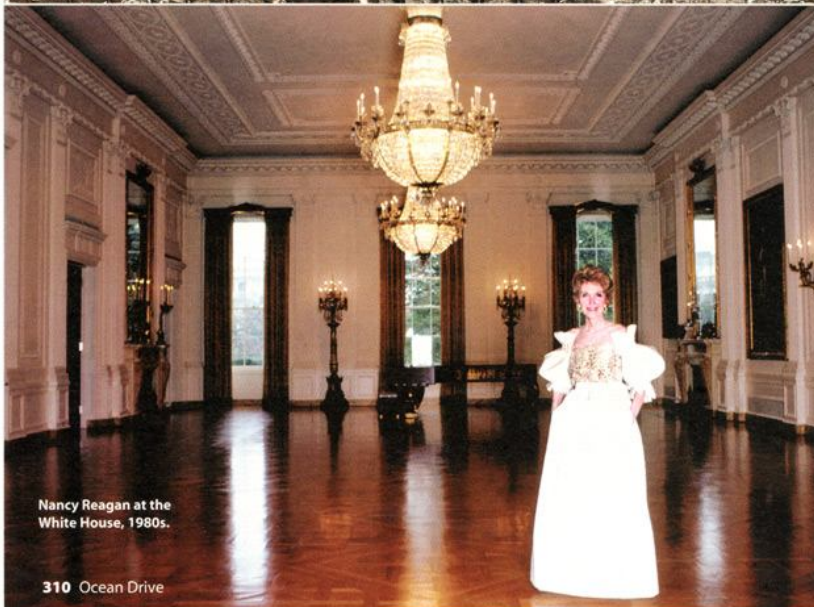
helmed throughout the '80s.

Now, after nearly a decade in Miami, perfecting her socializing at the expense of her work, she has returned to the art fold with a highly acclaimed flower series, which combines her clean, sharp eye and technique with some of South Florida's most fantastic flora. These images can be seen throughout the Hotel Nash on Collins Avenue, where designer Peter Page installed them to reflect a feeling of tropical serenity. A selection of floral pictures was also featured as the inaugural exhibit at the jewellike Room gallery in the Design District, and this month, her work will be on display at the Miami Art Fair in conjunction with the Galeria Diners from Colombia. Here, Iran talks about beauty, growing up in Teheran, and why she spent years away from art photography.



IRAN ISSA-KHAN

Takara Fawcett at the Plaza/1980s



Nancy Reagan at the White House, 1980s.

“After coming from the Middle East and then living in Europe and the U.S., I feel I am of three different worlds. It makes my eyes and senses attuned to a variety of backgrounds.”

How do you define beauty?

It's more than what you see—it's something inside that comes out. In my portraits, I try to highlight someone's character, which is the most important element. But beauty can be found in anything: flowers, architecture, dogs. I shoot anything that makes me happy.

How do you prepare for a shoot?

I think about how to project a person's identity. I talk to them about how they want to see themselves, we go through clothes, I get to know them. So, by the time I'm ready to shoot, we are involved as friends.

In many of your photos, such as your portraits of artist Rufino Tamayo in his studio or Nancy Reagan at the White House, the environment is as important as the subject. Do you feel this is an essential part of your art?

If the person has done many things, I try to capture that in the environment. But I also like to shoot very close to the face, so they can't hide from my lens. It shows their character.

Is it easier to photograph a great beauty?

Again, for me, character is paramount. Anybody can shoot a beauty. But a person's *essence* is elusive, and that is what must be captured. Even with vampy women, I strive to find what is inside.

How has your background inspired you?

After coming from the Middle East and then living in Europe and the U.S., I feel I am of three different worlds. It makes my eyes and senses attuned to a variety of backgrounds. I can go anywhere and feel comfortable. I call it *l'expérience de la sagesse*, the experience of wisdom. The more you connect with people, the more you understand them and can transmit that to your camera.

What were those days like in Iran?

They were the most fabulous times in the world, with excess like I have never seen anywhere else. Everyone was so over-the-top: If you liked something in someone's house, it was yours when you left. And the architecture was amazing: handmade tiles, high walls, many, many turquoise pools. Of course, every household had a staff, who would stay with you through the generations. They became like family.

And the parties! It was like *Thousand and One Nights*, especially at the palace with the Shah. The parties would last all night. My mother would regularly go to Paris to buy her clothes and come back two days later ready for the events and galas. And then we would all go skiing in the mountains, and spend our summers by the Caspian Sea. After you have lived in

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Teheran, the rest of the world is spoiled.

That's why it is so sad Americans only remember when they took over the embassy. They don't understand how refined the culture was—which made the downfall even more strong.

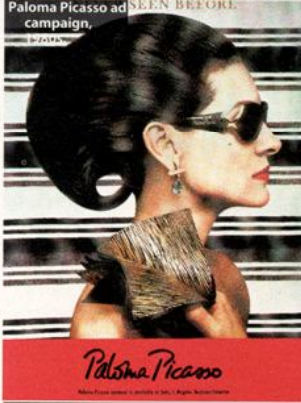
Why did you stop taking fashion pictures and portraits in the early '90s?

I was very professionally involved with Guillermo Herrera. He was my makeup artist, but more than that, he was my soul brother. His insight and support allowed me to grow as a photographer. We worked on everything together—all the *Harper's Bazaar* covers, everything. Then he became ill. After he died, I didn't feel like shooting anymore. Also, by the early '90s, fashion had changed: It was not as glamorous as it had been in the '80s; it had become too asexual. So, between his death and what

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Paloma Picasso styled by André Leon Talley, 1980s.



Paloma Picasso ad campaign, SEEN BEFORE.



Gabrielle Reece, Miami, 1990s.



Hélène Rochas at her home, Paris, 1980s.



The première danseuse at the Paris Ballet, 1980s.



A collection of Spanish Harper's Bazaar covers, including Andie MacDowell, Carolina Herrera, Hunter Reno, Paulina Porizkova and Talisa Soto.

"Anybody can shoot a beauty. But a person's *essence* is elusive. Even with vampy women, I strive to find what is inside."

had happened in style, I decided to take time off. Tell me your impressions of Miami. Over the past ten years, Miami has become immense, with an extremely fast pace. It is almost impossible for anyone to keep up. It is now one of the world's most important international cities, with a mighty push in culture and the arts and such a mix of influences: Any night I am with people who are French, Argentine, Cuban, Italian, Persian, Lebanese. Still, with all this mix, there is an immediate interconnection unlike anything I have seen in any other town. That's why Miami surpasses all the other big cities.

How does Miami influence your aesthetic viewpoint? It awakened my interest in floral photos. I woke up one day and realized we are all surrounded by such majestic natural beauty, which in turn made me more aware of the beauty the city has that we don't even pay attention to half the time: the beauty of the architecture, the beauty of the people. Miami inspired the flower photos—after all, what else can you do after you have photographed so much human beauty?

So the flowers led to your photographic renaissance? You see, I had done so much advertising, so many editorials and covers in such a short span of time, and then I just stopped. Very little impresses me except natural things.

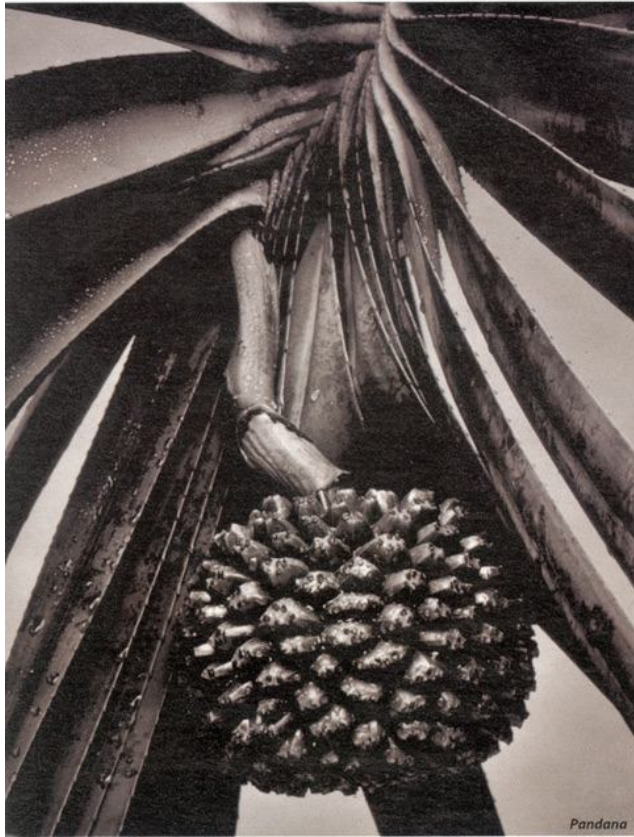
Everyone knows you with a camera out every night at parties. How do you construct these social pictures? What elements are important in them?

The picture has to speak to what the party was all about. The people in action are doing what they do best. I shoot things that really excite me about the event, like guests I especially like, or the moment the birthday cake comes, or a view from a certain angle that shows the whole party in full swing, or someone doing something wild and sexy.

What's next with your art photos? I'm going to begin taking new portraits of people who have made a difference in the world and how we live, as well as more plants. But who knows? I'm just starting all over again.

What has been your greatest photographic moment? When I photographed Rufino Tamayo, I was lucky enough to be allowed to come into his studio in Mexico. I'm in love with artists and art, and to see his humbleness was amazing. He was 80 years old that day.

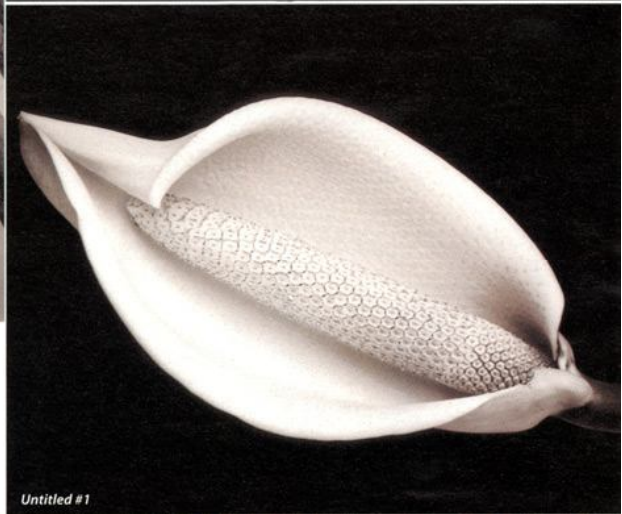
How do you respond to people who think you are just a social photographer? I smile and say, 'Some day you'll see my work and you'll understand. It will be *fabulous!*'



Pandana

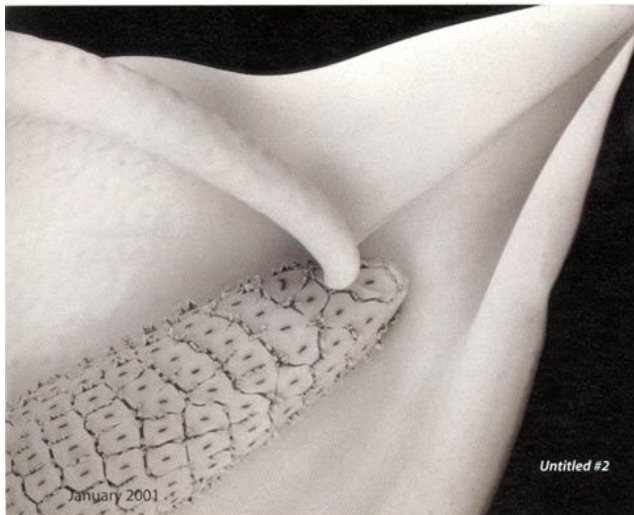


Yuca Yang



Untitled #1

"Miami inspired the flower photos—
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you have photographed so much
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Untitled #2

January 2001



Palm #1

Ocean Drive 313