

Art in Review



SHADI GHADIRIAN/
HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY

'The Middle East Revealed'

'A Female Perspective'

Margaret Bourke-White

'Syria in 1940'

Howard Greenberg Gallery
41 East 57th Street, Manhattan
Through Saturday

The four-artist show called "The Middle East Revealed: A Female Perspective" is an apt addendum to the New Museum's "Here and Elsewhere," an exhibition of contemporary art from the Arab world. But this show deals in "Middle Eastern" and "Arab" stereotypes, intending to criticize them, but only, in some cases, reinforcing them.

The Yemeni photographer Boushra Almutawakel takes themes of female "veiling," overworked by now, as a subject. She has done interesting things with it, including a series of pictures in which a man and a woman swap sartorial roles: She sheds black robes, and he puts them on. Ms. Almutawakel's photograph of a woman wearing a hijab, or head scarf, made from an American flag gains sharpness from its date: 2001, post-Sept. 11. But the more recent portrait series called "Mother, Daughter, Doll" — or at least the examples chosen for the show — seems to be mostly about formal polish and the implicit exoticism of fashion photography.

Shadi Ghadirian, based in Tehran, tackles the overlap of tradition and modernity by applying a little history. She poses women in staged 19th-century settings redolent of the Qajar dynasty of Persia (1794-1925), dressing the models in period fashions but posing them with boomboxes and vacuum cleaners.

Rania Matar, born in Lebanon, photographs young Lebanese and Palestinian women in their bedrooms, illustrating the varying degrees to which Western popular and consumer cultures now define their lives.

The most impressive work here, though, is by Reem al-Faisal, who divides her time between Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where she was born, and Paris, where she studied photography. Her black-and-white photographs are primarily of landscapes or cityscapes. Her high,



REEM AL-FAISAL/HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY

Top left, "Qajar" (1998), by Shadi Ghadirian, and above, "Syria" (2006), by Reem al-Faisal, in the exhibition "The Middle East Revealed: A Female Perspective," at Howard Greenberg.

distant, panoramic view of the Kaaba shrine in Mecca, encircled by tens of thousands of pilgrims, is an astonishing thing. The photographer Andreas Gursky needed digital help to create his images of inconceivable multiplicity. Ms. Faisal simply shot it from life.

Her picture finds a counterpart in a photograph of a large, gravestone-packed Muslim cemetery in Damascus, taken by Margaret Bourke-White on assignment in Syria for Life magazine in 1940. It's one of a dozen or so vintage prints from the Life shoot that form a mini-show within the

Greenberg show.

And her images of French Foreign Legion troops, a Bedouin camel cavalry, Senegalese soldiers and citizens of Damascus, Aleppo and Homs going about their lives speak of explosions in the making more than seven decades ago. **HOLLAND COTTER**