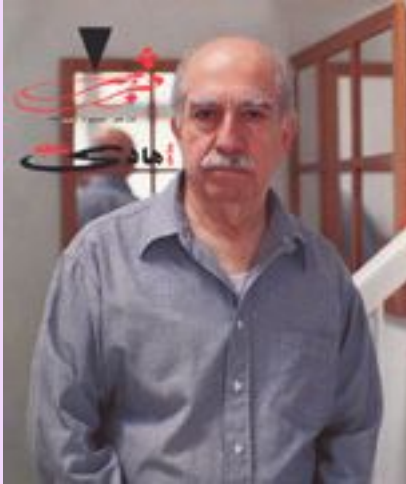


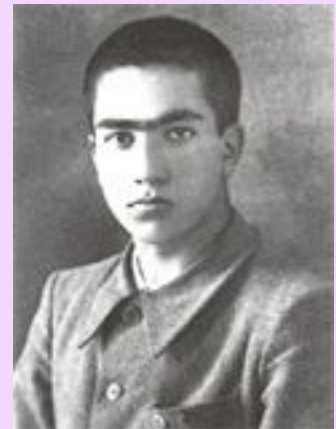


A Brief Note on the Life of Hadi Shafaieh

By Iraj Bashiri
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Known as the "king of photography" in Iran, and deservedly so, Hadi Shafaieh was born to the family of Aqa Mir Shafi' Shafaieh and Marzieh Khanom, in Tabriz, Iran, on 14 August 1923. Shafaieh received his early education in Tabriz and later in Tehran. His career as a photographer began quite early, in 1932, at age 9, when he borrowed his father's camera to take some pictures. Gradually he was drawn into learning more about his father's profession and into the daily operations of the store. He was especially fascinated by the variety of films and papers, as well as the chemicals that were stored there.

After finishing his early education in Tabriz, Shafaieh moved to Tehran to continue his education. He arrived in Tehran in 1939 when the country was taken over by the Allied Forces. Contrary to his own inclination to study surgery, he followed his father's advice and chose pharmacology as his field of concentration. When he decided to continue his studies abroad, due to restrictions imposed by the Allied Forces, his travel was halted in Istanbul, Turkey. Out of necessity, he stayed in Turkey and completed his studies there.



Upon his return to Iran, Shafaieh worked with his brother who after the death of their father (1945) had taken over the pharmacy business and moved it to Tehran. He did not like the new format of selling ready-made drugs as opposed to the old system in which the pharmacologist prepared the drugs on the spot according to the physicians' directions.

In 1955, therefore, Hadi Shafaieh struck out on his own and opened a studio in Tehran; he called it "Studio Hadi." Before long, his studio became the center of attention for its artistic creation of portraits, as well as for its pioneering role in commercial and industrial photography. Some of his contributions at that time grace the works of some of the major literary figures of Iran, including Fereydun Moshiri's *Gonah-i Darya* ("The Sin of the Sea") and Nader Naderpour's *Cheshmha va*

Dastha ("The Eyes and the Hands"). In this way, Hadi Shafaieh became the photographer who introduced the portraits of many of the greats of Persian literature and culture, between 1940 and 1970, into the Iranian media. Prominent among these, of course, are the portraits of the "father of modern Persian poetry," Nima Yushij. Other major figures photographed by the master include Ibrahim Pourdavoud, Mustafa Oskui, Mahin Oskui, Ahmad Shamlu, Roman Ghirshman, and many others.

In 1952, Iran held its first photo competition. The competition was repeated in 1954 and 1955. In all three venues, Shafaieh garnered the first prize for his portraits, as well as for his still life photography. By 1987, he had passed from a participant to a judge, a position in which he served in the following year as well. At this time he met Nima Yushij, befriended him, and produced some of the most memorable pictures that remain as part of Nima's legacy.



In 1962, Shafaieh began to formally instruct his craft via the television. Additionally, between 1963 and 1975, he wrote a number of articles on various subjects related to photography. These articles appeared in *Ferdowsi*, *Honar va Mardom*, and *Negin*. Additionally, in 1963, an appreciation of Shafaieh's work by Maurice Bernard in the November (1963) issue of *Photo cine revue*, boosted Shafaieh's status and brought him to international attention. An exhibition of his works was held in Switzerland and later on in Italy.

In 1971, Shafaieh was invited to teach photography for Graphics, Industrial Design, Painting, and Sculpture departments of Tehran University. He spent the next seventeen years in that position. In 1972, he was invited to write a book on photography related to technical and professional aspects of teaching photography in Iran. He complied and in 1982 presented a basic textbook on photography. Called *Akkasi*, the volume contributed to the curricula for the 8th and 9th grades, as well as to majors in both *Commercial and Professional Techniques*, and *Graphics* tracks. In 1982, Tehran University established photography as a field and asked Shafaieh to teach the related courses. In 1984, the first class met formally in the Faculty of Fine Arts of Tehran University.

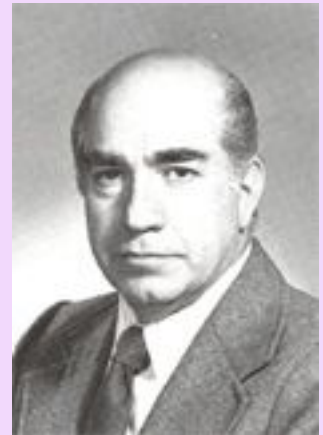
In 1984-85, Shafaieh was asked to examine some of the negatives that had remained in the royal archives from the time of the Qajar Dynasty. In order to learn about restoration and maintenance techniques of those photographs and glass plates/negatives, he traveled to France. There he learned the techniques necessary for the restoration and reproduction of photographic relics. On his return to Tehran, he restored those photos; today, they constitute a major contribution to our understanding of Qajar court life. Some of the photos carry the signatures of prominent figures of the dynasty, including Nasir al-Din Shah.

Between 1972 and 1979, Shafaieh participated in the compilation of a number of works including reproduction of albums, miniatures, and *Qur'ans*. Altogether, an 8-volume work was

presented to the Iranian public. The photographs in these books, at times, look more real and have sharper contrasts than the pictures in the original documents. In 1978, the year before the Islamic Revolution, Shafaieh was approached to participate in the creation of a two-volume set for the Muze-ye Iran-e Bastan (Museum of Ancient Iran). The first volume dealt with ancient relics, the second with more recent times.

Teaching the art of photography in Iran was not easy. It confronted Shafaieh and his students with many problems. Often the authorities questioned the students who took pictures of alleys, streets, or public buildings. Their names were taken down to be contacted if something untoward happened to the buildings, especially mosques, that they used as subjects for their study. To bypass the authorities, some students limited their work to the buildings at the University. But that did not satisfy the authorities. In fact, students who went far into the desert and took pictures encountered difficulties; the gendarmes arrested them.

Shafaieh believed that photography has an international language that must be learned. He even went as far as advocating language courses to enable students of photography to consult foreign sources. He argued since photographers familiar with different languages would contribute to the field, students of photography must be able to study those views in the original language and transfer their contents into Persian.



As a photographer Shafaieh was very strict. He believed, for instance, that as a part of the art and technique of photography, the printing process must be taken very seriously. Consequently, he would not allow his studio to release a picture in which he saw the slightest fault. He spent hours at times finding the exact perspective for taking a photograph of a simple subject like an apple. He believed that, unlike the painter, the photographer couldn't remain stationary and (re)produce good photos by merely creating images or pictures from those imagined objects or subjects --as a painter could!

Similarly, he believed that a camera does not and cannot replace the eye of the photographer behind the camera. After all, he says, cameras are only a means for creating pictures. A skilled photographer then, can, with the simplest of cameras, produce very good pictures. It is the photographer and the perspective he or she brings to the picture that brings the scene or event to life. A camera, therefore, is more like an extension of the photographer's vision.

In 1989, Professor Shafaieh moved to Columbus, Ohio (USA), in order to be closer to his children, and settled there, near his younger son, Nima, and his family. In the late 1980's and early 1990's, Shafaieh visited the Ohio State University and presented some of his works at the university both to the academic members of the university community, as well as to the smaller Iranian community, at various cultural functions held there between 1989 and 1993. In November of 1989, he had suffered a heart attack followed by a stroke. In 1996, he suffered a second stroke. At present, Professor Shafaieh resides in Dublin, Ohio.

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Personal communication with Nima Shafaieh

The Internet



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