



Paradise Lost, Persia from Above

By Georg Gerster

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In 1976 and 1978, aerial photographer Georg Gerster had the rare opportunity to record the landscape of Iran on over 100 flights and 300 flying hours. This unique photographic project resulted in a near-complete documentation of the major archaeological sites and important landscapes in the region.

The book includes spectacular images of ancient citadels, desert ruins, and rice fields spreading like a vast patchwork quilt in a river delta. There are many unexpected sights, such as the bird's-eye view of a crowded ski resort in the Elburz Mountains, within easy reach of Tehran. Iran's densely packed cities, such as Bushehr, located on the Persian Gulf, are elegantly captured by Gerster. They appear so very different from Western European or North American cities of the same period; the complex, interlocking flat-roofed buildings are both timeless and timely, with architecture that has stood unchanged for thousands of years, along with brightly-colored 1970s cars parked in the colonnaded courtyards. Even the Iranian landscape contains surprises: on closer inspection, the elaborate patterns made in fields with tractors and ploughs turn out to have more to do with politics than agriculture or land art. A law at the time Gerster was photographing allowed people to claim unused land by planting crops on it, and this type of "agridoodle" was apparently enough to support such a claim.

Persia is the ancient name of the region we now know as Iran. We still reference the country's long and rich cultural heritage when we speak of Persian carpets and Persian miniatures, of Persian language, history, and literature. In her introduction to this book, Iranian-born writer Maryam Sachs lists some words borrowed from the Persian language by English speakers, including *azure*, *bazaar*, *gazelle*, *magic*, *musk*, *tapestry*, *scarlet*, *narcissus*, and *paradise*. These words offer insight into the country's landscape, inhabitants, and traditions - influences that have indirectly shaped the photos in the book. *Paradise Lost* vividly brings to life a place, time, and culture that few people outside of Iran were able to witness.

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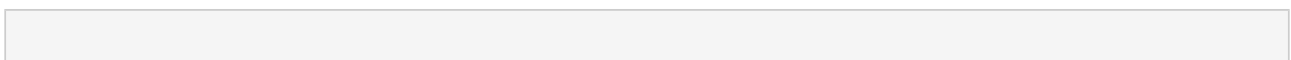
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Editorial Review

Review

"Extraordinary."-Sue Norris, Financial Times "Astonishing aerial photographs of Iran... Images of the country's diverse, rugged beauty are finally seeing the light of day."-Horatia Harrod, Sunday Telegraph "An intriguing collection... Transformed into strange and intricate tapestries and patchworks, the rich complexity of Iran's natural and cultural landscapes [...] have a humbling, otherworldly beauty."-Metro

About the Author

Maryam Sachs (b. 1962) was born in Iran and educated at the Sorbonne in Paris. She has a Masters in Economic Development from Columbia University, New York, and her books include the anthologies *The Kiss*, *The Moon*, *The Wild Emperor* (with her husband, designer Rolf Sachs), and *Sans te dire adieu*, a novel. She lives in London.

Georg Gerster (b. 1928) is a pioneer in aerial photography. For over 50 years he has taken breathtaking pictures of mountains and deserts, coasts and lakes, and agrarian and industrial landscapes all over the world. He took his first aerial photographs in the Sudan in 1963, and since then he has taken photographs in 111 countries on all continents, covering all types of territories from the Amazon to Antarctica. He has photographed some of the world's most spectacular archaeological sites and ancient monuments, from the temple at Karnak, Egypt and the Acropolis in Athens to the Great Wall of China. From 1975 to 1995, Gerster shot a series of now highly-collectible advertising posters for Swissair. Gerster sees his work as a philosophical instrument: "distance creates an overview, and an overview creates insight." Based near Zürich, Switzerland, he also works as a journalist, and is a regular contributor to the *Neue Züricher Zeitung* and *National Geographic*.

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