

In RICH KIDS: HISTORY OF SHOPPING MALLS IN TEHRAN, The Javaad Alipoor Company creates a global stage. They do this by bridging the gap between the virtual world and the real world. At the same time, they illuminate parallels between American culture and Iranian culture through the dualities of public image and private lives, rich and poor, young and old, sacred and secular, fact and fabrication. As the play's title suggests, the influence of American-style stores and shopping malls has brought a consumerism boom to a country steeped in religious tradition.

To experience RICH KIDS: A HISTORY OF SHOPPING MALLS IN TEHRAN is to travel through time. We go far beyond the history of Iranian shopping malls. We encounter a much larger narrative, that of the Anthropocene era, empires and epochs, the million-year existence of a Styrofoam cup, as well as the brief lifespan of two young Iranian lovers. We travel backwards through a social media feed, where our remembrances are kept in their most accessible yet intangible form. RICH KIDS: A HISTORY OF SHOPPING MALLS IN TEHRAN uses social media to bring us 'face to face' with the relentless impact of globalization, geological time, and climate change on our quotidian existence. The performative 'selfie' is unmasked as our attempt to slow down human history from careening, full speed, towards oblivion.

Jaron Lanier, the father of "Virtual Reality" and social media's biggest critic, wrote in his 2010 manifesto titled *You Are Not a Gadget*: "Computers will get so big and fast and the net so rich with information that people will be obsolete, either left behind like characters in Rapture novels or subsumed into some cyber-superhuman something." Eleven years later, as Lanier's prophesy feels like it's come to fruition with deep fakes, Social Media Personas, personal branding, and hashtags for the idle rich (#richkidsoftehran existed well before this play), The Javaad Alipoor Company embraces the Internet's open range. By harnessing a variety of technologies, the artists put greed, excess, artificiality, and Lanier's notion of "detached human expression" on full blast.

We experience this story through screens, Smartphones, Instagram Live, but also through the theater of the imagination. The play zooms in on two young Iranians, Hossein and Parivash, who die in a car accident, and we follow the traces of two well-curated lives left behind. There are the breadcrumbs—both digital and dramaturgical—we must follow as the story unravels before us. The performative nature of social media has taught us to read between the lines of every post. We fill in the gaps just as we do when we go down other social media rabbit-holes, by scrolling, searching, and snooping. As spectators, we try to find the truth within the digital rubble. Are Hossein and Parivash victims of an overly stringent society or examples of privilege run amok? I see two young people, doing what young people do: driving in a fast car thinking they can live forever.

RICH KIDS: A HISTORY OF SHOPPING MALLS IN TEHRAN shows us that the different versions of ourselves we cultivate on our social media platforms become the digital remnants we leave behind after we're gone. What version of your life will you leave behind? What will future digital archaeologist decide about you?

-Kelly Kerwin, Producer, The Public Theater's Under the Radar Festival