



Light from the Middle East: New Photography

From the Art Fund Collection of Middle Eastern Photography at the V&A and the British Museum

13 November 2012 – 7 April 2013

Light from the Middle East: New Photography is the first major museum exhibition of contemporary photography from and about the Middle East. It will feature more than 90 works by some of the most exciting artists from the region, spanning North Africa to Central Asia.

The exhibition will feature major works of contemporary photography focusing on the Middle East, part of a unique collaboration between the British Museum and the V&A and supported by the Art Fund. In development since 2009, the Collection was built in response to a surge of interest in the visual arts in the region, beginning to remedy the under-representation of Middle Eastern photography in UK collections.

The photographs on display will show the creative responses to the social challenges and political upheavals that have shaped the Middle East over the past 20 years and include up-to-date work made following the recent revolution in Egypt. The photographs will present multiple viewpoints of a region where collisions between personal, social, religious and political life can be emotive and complex.

The exhibition will showcase the work of 30 artists from 13 different countries including internationally established practitioners such as Abbas (Iran), Youssef Nabil (Egypt) and Walid Raad (Lebanon) and emerging talents including Taysir Batniji (Palestine), Shadi Ghadirian (Iran) and Abdunasser Gharem (Saudi Arabia). The work covers a wide range of techniques and subject matter, from photojournalism to staged and digitally manipulated imagery.

Marta Weiss, curator of the exhibition said: *“In the past few years contemporary photographic practice from and about the Middle East has been some of the most exciting, innovative and varied art anywhere in the world. The exhibition will celebrate the creative and sophisticated ways that contemporary artists use photography to respond to the complexities of the Middle East.”*

Stephen Deuchar, Art Fund Director said: “*This new collection of photography created by the V&A and the British Museum with Art Fund support is being formed at a time of profound change in the Middle East. Artists and photographers, as cultural commentators, are themselves amongst the agents of change. We much look forward to the exhibition in the autumn which will showcase highlights from this important new collecting initiative.*”

The exhibition will be structured around three key themes; *Recording, Reframing* and *Resisting*. Each will explore a range of strategies Middle Eastern artists have used to engage with the medium of photography.

The opening section will show how photography can be used as a powerful tool for recording people, places and events. From Newsha Tavakolian’s series *Mothers of Martyrs* (2006) featuring elderly mothers holding framed pictures of their sons who were killed in the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s, to Jananne Al-Ani’s disorienting aerial views of the desert in her video *Shadow Sites II* (2011), this section will demonstrate various ways in which the camera has been used to document and record.

The work in the second section will explore an interest in reframing and reworking pre-existing photographs. Shadi Ghadirian’s series *Qajar* (1998) recreates 19th century Iranian studio portraits, updating them with contemporary props such as sunglasses and Pepsi cans, while Taysr Batniji applies the modernist style of the German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher to his series of photographs of Israeli watchtowers in the West Bank.

The final section will look at practitioners who resist the authority of the photograph, questioning the medium’s ability to record factual information. Whether manipulating or digitally altering images, or physically attacking the print surface by scratching and burning, these artists demonstrate a desire to undermine the legibility and reliability of the photograph. In the intimate and poetic series *Le Retour Imaginaire* (2002), Afghan artist Atiq Rahimi rejects up-to-date technology, opting instead to photograph war-ravished Kabul with a primitive box camera. The recent series *Uphekka* by Nermine Hammam reworks photographs of Egyptian soldiers taken during the protests in Tahrir Square, Cairo in 2011 and transports them to multicoloured fantasy settings that are far removed from the struggles of the Arab Spring.

Light from the Middle East: New Photography is drawn primarily from the Art Fund Collection of Middle Eastern Photography at the V&A and the British Museum, established in 2009. The exhibition is part of a series of geographically-specific shows at the V&A exploring contemporary photography.

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Notes to Editors

- *Light from the Middle East: New Photography* is curated by Marta Weiss, Curator of Photographs at the V&A
- The exhibition takes place in the Porter Gallery
- The exhibition is FREE
- The Museum is open daily 10:00 – 17:45 and until 22:00 every Friday
- The V&A has the oldest museum photography collection in the world and holds the UK's national collection of the art of photography
- The V&A's collection of Islamic art from the Middle East is one of the most important and extensive in the world

About the Art Fund Collection of Middle Eastern Photography

This exhibition has been enabled through the establishment of the Art Fund Collection of Middle Eastern Photography at the V&A and the British Museum. The national collection was established in 2009 to facilitate the V&A and British Museum to jointly build a core collection of Middle Eastern photography, an area previously under represented. The collection includes work by both celebrated and emerging artists across the region, whether in their countries of origin or in diaspora. The works cover a wide range of subject matter spanning the late 20th century to the present day.

About the Art Fund

The Art Fund is the national fundraising charity – supporting museums and galleries across the UK in acquiring works of art. Supported by over 90,000 members, we campaign, fundraise and give money to museums and galleries to buy and show art, and offer many ways of discovering the fascinating, world class collections of art through the National Art Pass and the Art Guide - www.artfund.org

Exhibition Publication

An accompanying exhibition catalogue *Light from the Middle East: New Photography* (edited by Marta Weiss, with essays by Venetia Porter) is available from Steidl. For PRESS information on the book contact +44 (0) 203 077 1167 or press@steidleville.com

For further PRESS information about the V&A exhibition *Light from the Middle East: New Photography* please contact Alice Evans or Amelia Macgregor in the V&A press office on +44 (0) 20 7942 2508 / 2502 or email a.evans@vam.ac.uk / a.macgregor@vam.ac.uk

A selection of press images are available to download free of charge from pressimages.vam.ac.uk