

## Art Blart

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### Exhibition: 'Light from the Middle East: New Photography' at the Victoria and Albert Museum, London

By [Dr Marcus Bunyan](#) [Leave a Comment](#)

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Exhibition dates: 13th November 2012 – 7th April 2013

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



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/newsha\\_tavakolian\\_from\\_the\\_series\\_mothers\\_of\\_martyrs\\_2006\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/newsha_tavakolian_from_the_series_mothers_of_martyrs_2006_web.jpg)).

**Newsha Tavakolian** (Iranian, b. 1981)  
From the series *Mothers of Martyrs*  
2006

Digital C-print

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

A massive posting on a fascinating subject. I know little about this area of (sometimes postcolonial) photography. The images are really strong, powerful and laden with symbology – the signifier (photograph) and signified (meaning of the photograph) evidencing signs that interrogate “*the creative responses to the social challenges and political upheavals that have shaped the Middle East over the past 20 years.*” The three concepts *Recording, Reframing and Resisting* are critical to understanding the practices of these artists as they investigate the historicity, sacrifice, repression and persecution of their peoples.

Many thanks to the Victoria and Albert Museum for allowing me to publish the photographs in the posting. Please click on the photographs for a larger version of the image.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/nermine\\_hammam\\_from\\_the\\_series\\_upekkha\\_2011\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/nermine_hammam_from_the_series_upekkha_2011_web.jpg))

**Nermine Hammam** (Egyptian, b. 1967)

*The Break*

2011

from the series *Upekkha*

Archival inkjet print

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

*Light from the Middle East: New Photography* is the first major museum exhibition of contemporary photography from and about the Middle East. It features more than 90 works by some of the most exciting artists from the region, spanning North Africa to Central Asia. The exhibition is part of a collaboration between the British Museum and the V&A, which has over the last three years seen the development of a major collection of Middle Eastern photography thanks to substantial funding from the Art Fund. The collection of 95 works has been built in response to a surge of interest in the visual arts in the region and is beginning to remedy the under-representation of Middle Eastern photography in UK collections. *Light from the Middle East* includes 87 of the works from this shared collection.

The photographs on display show the creative responses to the social challenges and political upheavals that have shaped the Middle East over the past 20 years and include work made following the recent revolution in Egypt. The photographs present multiple viewpoints of a region where collisions between personal, social, religious and political life can be emotive and complex. The exhibition showcases the work of 30 artists

from 13 different countries including internationally established practitioners such as Abbas (Iran), Youssef Nabil (Egypt) and Walid Raad (Lebanon) as well as emerging talents such as 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 celebrates the creative and sophisticated ways that contemporary artists use photography to respond to the complexities of the Middle East."

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

The opening section shows 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 demonstrates various ways in which the camera has been used to document and record. The work in the second section explores an interest in reframing and reworking preexisting 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 Taysir 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 looks 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 new technology, opting instead to photograph war-ravished Kabul with a primitive box camera. The recent series *Uphekkka* 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.

Press release from the V&A website

## Recording

Photography is a seemingly accurate means of recording people, places and events. A photograph can serve a commemorative purpose or document a historic moment. It can reveal something not otherwise visible, such as a place or event the viewer would not have access to, or a particular vantage point available only to the photographer. It can also create a lasting image of a fleeting performance, or of a scene staged only for the camera.

But how reliable is a photograph? Despite the apparent authority of photographic images, they can trick or disorient. They can be ambiguous and difficult to decipher. Their meaning can shift according to context, cropping or captioning. What are the limitations of photography?

The photographers in this section use a range of approaches to exploit and explore the camera's capacity to record.



[rioters-burn-a-portrait-of-the-shah-as-a-sign-of-protest-against-his-regime-web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/abbas-rioters-burn-a-portrait-of-the-shah-as-a-sign-of-protest-against-his-regime-web.jpg)

(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/abbas-rioters-burn-a-portrait-of-the-shah-as-a-sign-of-protest-against-his-regime-web.jpg>)

**Abbas** (Iranian, 1944-2018)

*Rioters burn a portrait of the Shah as a sign of protest against his regime. Tehran, December 1978*

1978-9

From the series *Iran Diary*

Gelatin silver print

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

Abbas@Magnum Photos, courtesy Magnum Gallery



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/issa-touma-from-the-series-sufis-the-day-of-al-ziyara-web.jpg>).

(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/issa-touma-from-the-series-sufis-the-day-of-al-ziyara-web.jpg>).

**Issa Touma** (Syrian, b. 1962)

From the series *Sufis: The day of al-Ziyara*

1995-2005

Gelatin silver print

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

Issa Touma is a prominent figure in the Syrian art scene. Self-taught, he began his career as a photographer in the early 1990s. In 1996 he founded Le Pont Organisation and Gallery, an independent art organisation to promote freedom of expression and stimulate the local art scene through international events.

His series on the day of al-Ziyara documents an annual procession of Sufi pilgrims in northern Syria. Sufism is a mystical path within Islam. Touma photographed the event over the course of ten years, gradually gaining the trust of his subjects. The resulting images convey his sense of immersion in the festival and capture the fervour of the worshippers.



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/waheeda-malullah-from-the-series-light-web.jpg>).

(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/waheeda-malullah-from-the-series-light-web.jpg>).

**Waheeda Malullah** (Bahrain, b. 1978)

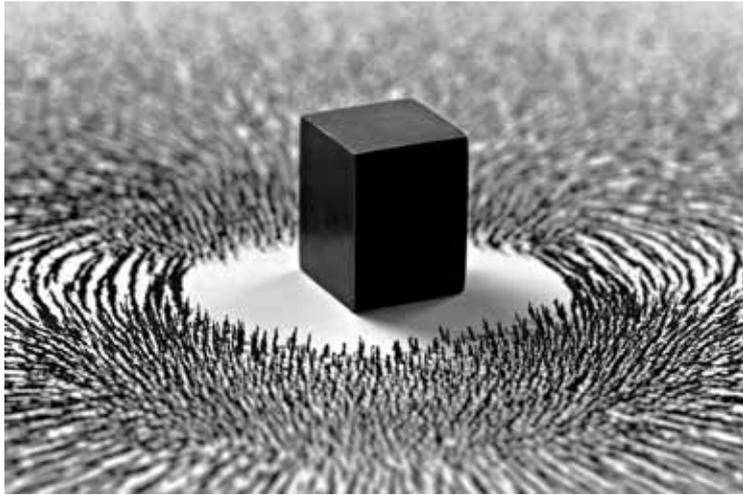
From the series *Light*

2006

Inkjet print on rag paper

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

Waheeda Malullah uses playfulness and humour to explore social rules, and in particular the roles women play in Islamic society. In the series *Light* she records a performance staged expressly for the camera. By lying down next to tombs in Bahrain she exaggerates the Shi'i Muslim custom of seeking blessing by touching the tombs of revered people. These stylised compositions are also studies of form, light and shadow.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/ahmed-mater-](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/ahmed-mater-magnetism-ii-web.jpg)

[magnetism-ii-web.jpg](#)).

**Ahmed Mater** (Saudi Arabian, b. 1979)

*Magnetism II*

2012

Photogravure

Acquired thanks to Mr Abdulaziz al-Turki

Ahmed Mater is a Saudi artist and qualified GP. Working in photography, calligraphy, painting, installation and video, Mater reflects his experiences as a doctor and the ways this has challenged his traditional background and beliefs, and explores wider issues about Islamic culture in an era of globalisation. In the series *Magnetism*, what at first appear to be pilgrims circling the Ka'ba, the sacred building at the heart of the sanctuary at Mecca, are in fact iron filings spiralling around a cube-shaped magnet. Mater refers to the spiritual force that Muslim believers feel during Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. By creating photographs that recall well-known images on a dramatically different scale, Mater also questions the reliability of photography.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/newsha-tavakolian-](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/newsha-tavakolian-from-the-series-mothers-of-martyrs-web.jpg)

[from-the-series-mothers-of-martyrs-web.jpg](#)).

**Newsha Tavakolian** (Iranian, b. 1981)

From the series *Mothers of Martyrs*

2006

Digital C-print

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

Newsha Tavakolian started her career at the age of 16, as a junior photographer for the Iranian women's daily *Zan-e Rooz*. She also worked with other reformist newspapers and by the early 1990s had established herself as one of Tehran's few female photojournalists, working internationally and particularly focussing on women's issues. She is a founder member of the EVE international collective of women photojournalists, established in 2006 and of Rawiya, a collective of women photographers from the Middle East, founded in 2011. Her series *Mothers of Martyrs* shows elderly Iranian women holding framed photographs of their sons who died decades earlier in the Iran-Iraq war (1980-8). The double portraits attest to photography's emotive power.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/abbas-kowsari-](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/abbas-kowsari-halabche-web.jpg)

[halabche-web.jpg](#)).

**Abbas Kowsari** (Iranian, b. 1970)

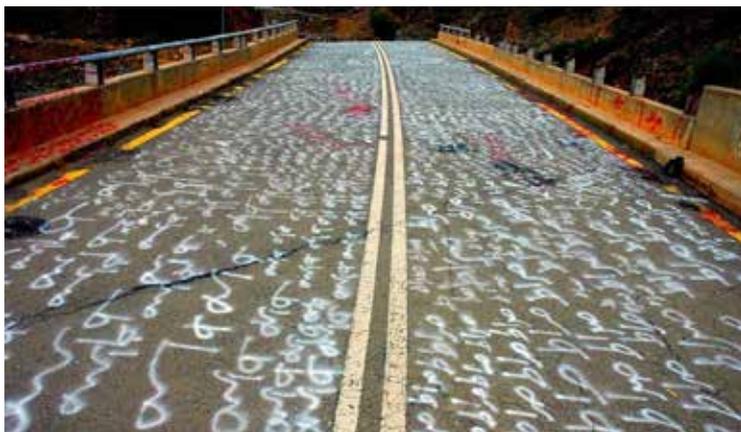
*Halabche*

2003

Digital C-print

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

Abbas Kowsari began his career as a photojournalist for the Tehran Times in 1994 and is currently Senior Picture Editor for *Shargh*, a popular reformist title. This photograph made in northern Iraq presents a portrait within a portrait. The figure of a peshmerga (a Kurdish combatant) is tightly framed to exclude his face. Instead, the face of rock musician Bryan Adams, on the soldier's T-shirt, fills a central portion of the composition. The faded black-and-white image is surrounded by saturated colours and brightly gleaming metal. The contrast reinforces the incongruity between warfare in Iraq and western pop culture.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/abdunasser-gharem-](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/abdunasser-gharem-the-path-siraat-web.jpg)

[the-path-siraat-web.jpg](#)).

**Abdunasser Gharem** (Saudi Arabian, b. 1973)

*The Path (Siraat)*

2009

Inkjet print on aluminium

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

Abdulnasser Gharem works across a variety of media to explore local Saudi issues. Amongst his best-known works are 'stamp paintings', made from industrial paint on rubber stamps, a technique devised to negotiate and comment on censorship. He combines service in the Saudi armed forces (he is currently Lieutenant Colonel) with his activities as an artist.

The subject of this photograph is a bridge in southern Saudi Arabia that was severely damaged in the early 1980s when villagers attempted to take shelter on it during a flash flood. Instead of providing a safe high ground above the floodwaters the bridge collapsed, resulting in the loss of many lives. Gharem spray-painted the word *siraat* repeatedly on the bridge. The word means path, and in the Qur'an it refers to 'the path to God'.



[pomegranate-web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/tal-shochat-pomegranate-web.jpg)

(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/tal-shochat-pomegranate-web.jpg>)

**Tal Shochat** (Israeli, b. 1974)

*Pomegranate (Rimon)*

2010

C-print

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

In her photographs Shochat stages both figures and objects to create symbolically-laden images that often question the boundary between nature and artifice. Here she applies the conventions of studio portraiture to photographing trees. The first stage in her meticulous process is to identify the perfect specimen of a particular type of tree. When the fruit is at the height of maturity, she cleans the dust off the branches, leaves and fruit. Finally, Shochat photographs the tree, artificially lit and isolated against a black cloth background. The photographs present a view of nature that would never actually exist in a natural environment. The work highlights the tensions in photography between reality and artifice.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/yto-barrada-bricks-](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/yto-barrada-bricks-web.jpg)

[web.jpg](#)).

**Yto Barrada** (French, b. 1971)

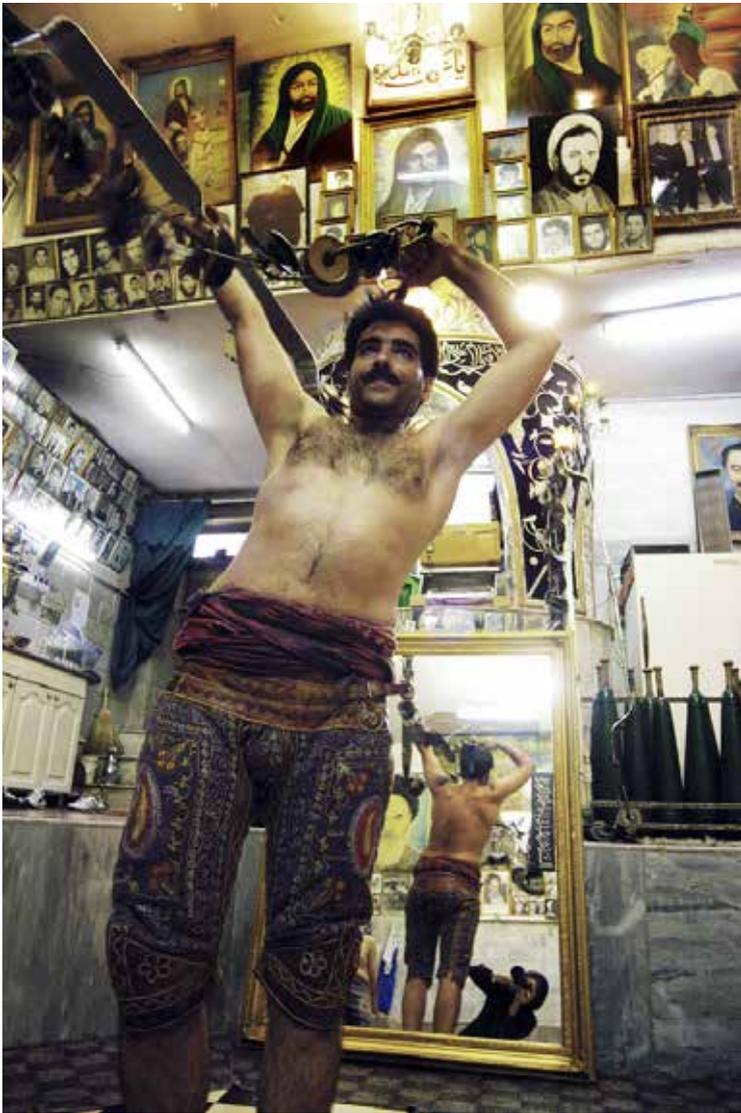
*Bricks (Briques)*

2003/2011

C-print

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

Yto Barrada grew up in Paris and Tangier and studied in Paris and New York. Since 2006 she has directed the Cinématèque de Tanger, a cultural centre home to an archive of Maghrebi and Arabic film and video. Barrada's hometown of Tangier is the subject of much of her work. In this view, recently constructed buildings in various states of completion are scattered across the hillsides. The pile of bricks in the foreground seems to parallel the haphazard nature of the surrounding building projects. The untidy man-made heap echoes the form of the natural hills in the background.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/mehraneh\\_atashi\\_bodiless\\_i\\_from\\_the\\_series\\_zourkhaneh\\_project\\_house\\_of\\_strength\\_2004\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/mehraneh_atashi_bodiless_i_from_the_series_zourkhaneh_project_house_of_strength_2004_web.jpg)).

**Mehraneh Atashi** (Iranian, b. 1980)

*Bodiless I*

2004

From the series *Zourkhaneh Project (House of Strength)*

Digital C-print

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

Mehraneh Atashi explores the relationship between photography and power in her ongoing investigation into the possibilities of self-portraiture. Her photographic series reveal lesser-known aspects of Iranian life.

This photograph shows the inside of a zurkhana, a traditional Iranian wrestling gym, in Tehran. The artist has explained that 'tradition forbids the breath of women' in the zurkhana. Atashi includes herself in the scene through a reflection in a mirror. This picture within a picture emphasises her incongruous presence in a place from which women are normally excluded.

## Reframing

The artists in this section appropriate or imitate images from the past in order to make statements about the present. Their sources range from studio portraiture to fashion photography, from Old Master paintings to Modernist photographs. Using a variety of techniques, they update and interrogate, knowingly combining past and present, East and West, fact and fiction. Whether emulating or critiquing, these artists reframe existing images to new ends.



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/raeda-saadeh-who-will->

[make-me-real-web.jpg](#)).

**Raeda Saadeh** (Palestinian, b. 1977)

*Who will make me real?*

2003

Digital C-print

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

In her photographs, videos and performances, Raeda Saadeh assumes various roles to explore issues of displacement, gender and identity, with particular reference to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Here the artist lies in a pose that recalls 19th-century European paintings of reclining nudes. These often featured non-European women and 'Orientalist' costumes and scenery. Saadeh is encased in Palestinian newspapers, which conceal her body from neck to ankle while revealing its contours. The covering is both flimsy and apparently immobilising, resembling a papier-mâché body cast. Any sensuality implied by her pose is disrupted by the harsh realities reported in the newspaper.



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/bahman-jalali-image->

[of-imagination-web.jpg](#)).

**Bahman Jalali** (Iranian, 1945-2010)

*Image of Imagination*

2003

C-print

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

© Rana Javadi

Jalali was a photographer and teacher who played a leading role in collecting and preserving historical photographs in Iran. He was an influential teacher, mentored many of the younger generation of Iranian photographers, and was instrumental in setting up Tehran's first Museum of Photography (also known as Akshaneh Shahr).

In this montage he layered Qajar-period (1786-1925) portraits and an enlarged detail of an old photographic studio sign that had been crossed out with red paint. Jalali speculated that this defacement occurred during the Islamic revolution (1978-9), perhaps as an attack on a studio where unveiled women had been photographed.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/shadi\\_ghadirian\\_from\\_the\\_series\\_qajar\\_1998\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/shadi_ghadirian_from_the_series_qajar_1998_web.jpg)).

**Shadi Ghadirian** (Iranian, b. 1974)

From the series *Qajar*

1998

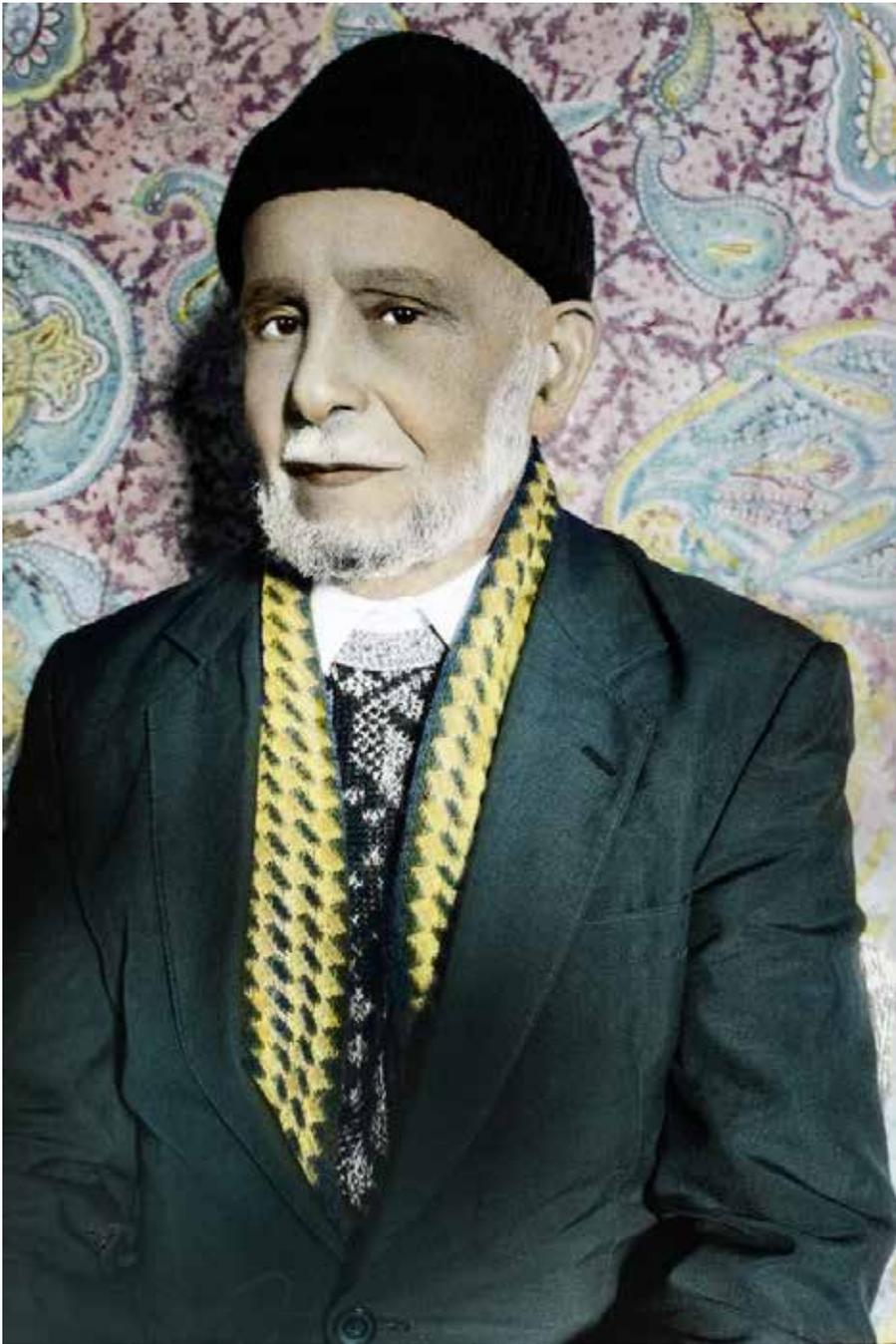
Gelatin silver print

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

Shadi Ghadirian was among the first students to graduate in photography from the Azad University, Tehran. Her work addresses concerns of Iranian women of her generation, exploring ideas such as censorship, religion and modernity, often with a wry humour.

The series *Qajar* is based on a style of photograph made during Iran's Qajar period (1786-1925). In those portraits, sitters posed with props representing their aspirations. Here, the sitters wear costumes that approximate Qajar fashion, but the objects they pose with are jarringly modern and western – a mountain bike, a stereo or a can of Pepsi. The contrast makes a comment on the tensions between tradition and modernity that

women in Iran face today.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/youssef\\_nabil\\_detail\\_from\\_the\\_series\\_the\\_yemeni\\_sailors\\_of\\_south\\_shields\\_2006\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/youssef_nabil_detail_from_the_series_the_yemeni_sailors_of_south_shields_2006_web.jpg)).

**Youssef Nabil** (Egyptian, b. 1972)

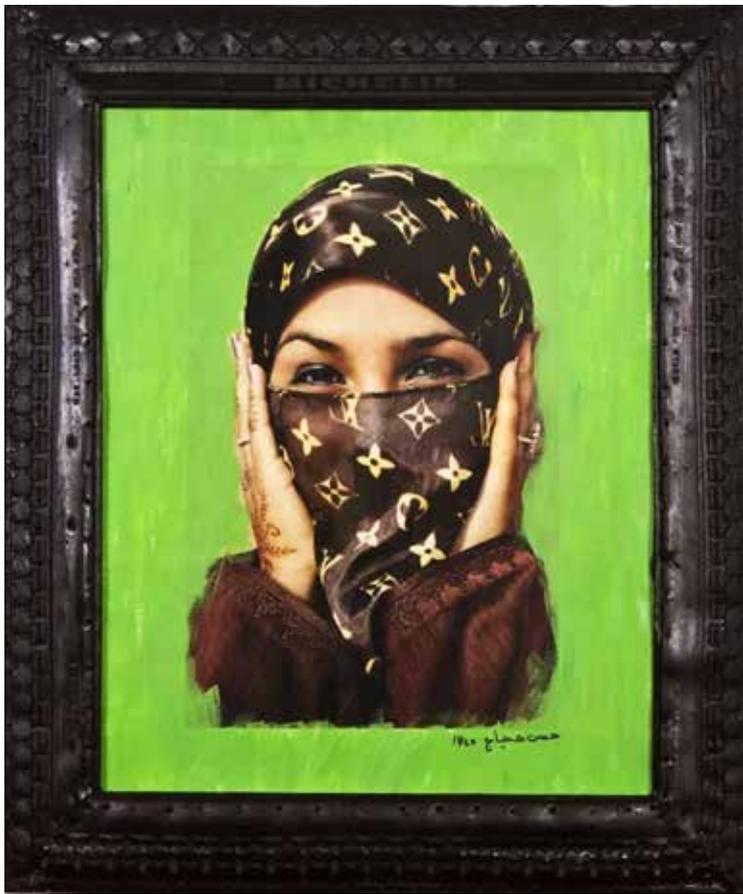
*The Yemeni Sailors of South Shields* (detail)

2006

Hand-coloured gelatin silver print

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

Youssef Nabil's photographs and films evoke the glamour and melodrama of the golden age of Egyptian cinema in the 1940s and 50s, known as *Hollywood on the Nile*. This is one of a dozen portraits made as part of a project to document the last surviving Yemeni men to settle as shipworkers in South Shields, in the north of England. The area is home to one of the oldest Muslim communities in the UK. Nabil hand-coloured the black-and-white photographs in the manner of mid 20th-century Egyptian studio portraiture.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/hassan\\_hajjaj\\_saida\\_in\\_green\\_2000\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/hassan_hajjaj_saida_in_green_2000_web.jpg)).

**Hassan Hajjaj** (Moroccan, b. 1961)

*Saida in Green*

2000

Digital C-print and tyre frame

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

Hajjaj is inspired by fashion photography, while also mocking its methods. He creates playful juxtapositions between global brand names and local motifs such as veils and babouches (traditional Moroccan slippers). The result is an exuberant collision of the stereotypical symbols of western consumerism and Middle Eastern tradition. The frames, which Hajjaj constructs from recycled materials, transform the photographs into three-dimensional, sculptural objects.

## Resisting

The artists in this section question the idea that a photograph can tell the truth. Some digitally alter images. Some scratch negatives and prints, or even burn them. Other artists reject clarity and detail in favour of processes that rely on chance. The results are murky, atmospheric images that require effort to interpret. These manipulations demonstrate the fragility of the photograph, whether at the hands of artists or censors. They also lay bare the power of photographic imagery to influence and control through propaganda or surveillance. These works resist photography's claim to accuracy and authority.



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/atiq-rahimi-on-the-threshold-of-time-web.jpg>)

**Atiq Rahimi** (Afghanistan, b. 1962)

*On the threshold of time (Au seuil du temps)*

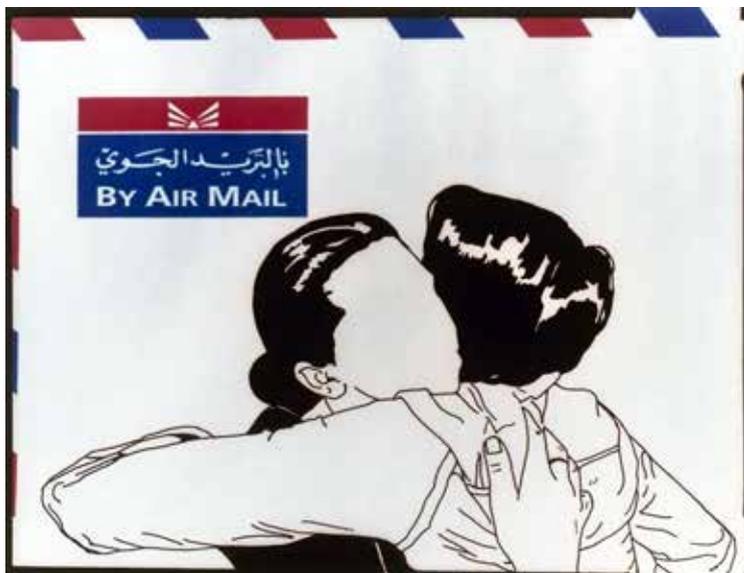
2002

From the series *The Imaginary Return (Le retour imaginaire)*

Gelatin silver print

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

Atiq Rahimi is a writer, film director and photographer who fled Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion in 1984, seeking political refuge in France, where he is now based. He returned to Afghanistan in 2002, after the fall of the Taliban. Confronted by the ruins of Kabul, he decided not to photograph the city with his digital camera. Instead he chose a primitive box camera normally used to take identity portraits in the streets of Kabul. The unpredictable process resulted in dreamlike photographs. They convey the nostalgia and brutal feelings of loss that Rahimi experienced when revisiting the war-wounded city.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/jowhara\\_alsaud\\_airmail\\_from\\_the\\_series\\_out\\_of\\_line\\_2008\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/jowhara_alsaud_airmail_from_the_series_out_of_line_2008_web.jpg))

**Jowhara Al Saud** (Saudi Arabian, b. 1978)

*Airmail*

2008

From the series *Out of Line*

C-print

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

Jowhara Al Saud's photographs explore the language of censorship and the malleability of photography. Al Saud scratches the outlines of figures from her personal photographs into photographic negatives, which she then prints. By reducing the figures to line drawings she renders them anonymous. The embracing figures hint at farewells and longing. The envelopes suggest thwarted attempts at communication. Al Saud's hybrid

technique of drawing and photography critiques the censorship of visual communication in Saudi Arabia.



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/c59fc3bcckran-moral-despair-web.jpg>)

**Şükran Moral** (Turkish, b. 1962)

*Despair*

2003

Digital C-print

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

Şükran Moral works in photography, sculpture, video and performance, creating bold and often controversial works that critique society and its institutions. Violence against women is a major theme. She has also made work about other groups who lack societal power, including the mentally ill, children, immigrants and prostitutes.

In this image, brightly-coloured birds, what Moral calls 'digital nightingales', perch on a group of migrant workers huddled in a boat. According to the artist, in Turkish literature nightingales are a symbol of hope, love and separation. The men and boys are shown in black-and-white, at the mercy of their situation. The birds, however, are free to fly away.



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/nermine-hammam-armed-innocence-ii-web.jpg>)

**Nermine Hammam** (Egyptian, b. 1967)

*Armed Innocence II*

2011

From the series *Upekkha*

Archival inkjet print

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

Influenced by a background in film and graphic design, Nermine Hammam works in series, making prints that combine elements of painting and photography, often digitally manipulating and layering images to represent subjects in states of abandonment or altered consciousness. When the army was called in to respond to the protests in Cairo's Tahrir Square in January 2011, Hammam was struck by the vulnerability of the soldiers. They seemed to want to be anywhere but there. In the *Uppekkha* series she transports these soldiers into vibrant fantasy settings. Reminiscent of postcards, the series likens the events of Tahrir Square to a tourist attraction that drew the world's attention, but was not fully understood.



([https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/joanna\\_hadjithomas\\_kalhil\\_joreige\\_wonder\\_beirut\\_13\\_va\\_web.jpg](https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/joanna_hadjithomas_kalhil_joreige_wonder_beirut_13_va_web.jpg))

**Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige** (Lebanon, b. 1969)

*Wonder Beirut #13, Modern Beirut, International Centre of Water-skiing*  
1997-2006

From the series *Wonder Beirut: The Story of a Pyromaniac Photographer*

C-print mounted on aluminium with face mounting

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

Courtesy of the artists and CRG Gallery, New York and In Situ / Fabienne Leclerc, Paris

Joana Hadjithomas and Khalil Joreige collaborate as filmmakers and artists, producing cinematic and visual art work that intertwine. In the series *Wonder Beirut* they use photography to blur fact and fiction. The artists noticed that tourist postcards of pre-civil war Beirut were still for sale after the war ended in 1990. They invented a fictional photographer named Abdallah Farrah who, in 1968, was commissioned by the tourist board to make postcard views of Beirut's attractions. When the civil war broke out in 1975, he began to burn his negatives to reflect the surrounding destruction. The artists present these works as prints from the fictional photographer's damaged negatives.



(<https://artblart.files.wordpress.com/2013/03/john-jurayj-untitled-large-embassy-with-red-mirror-1-web.jpg>).

**John Jurayj** (American, b. 1968)

*Untitled (Large Embassy with Red Mirror #1)*

2007

Inkjet print on watercolour paper, with burn holes and mirrored Plexiglas

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

Using a variety of media, including painting, print-making, sculpture and video, John Jurayj explores the impact of the Lebanese civil war (1975-90), as both a world conflict and an identity trauma. He often re-works photographs of Lebanon from family albums, press archives and online databases. Here he translates the brutality of war into an attack on the photograph itself. He enlarges to near abstraction a news photograph of the bombed US embassy in Beirut in 1984. The image is further disrupted by the holes burnt into the paper. The holes are then filled in with red, mirrored Plexiglas.

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[V&A Museum website \(https://www.vam.ac.uk/\)](https://www.vam.ac.uk/).

[V&A Light from the Middle East website \(http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/exhibition-light-from-the-middle-east-new-photography/\)](http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/exhibitions/exhibition-light-from-the-middle-east-new-photography/)

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