



*The Harvest*, 2019, photogravure blind embossing with transparent ink relief rolled on Stonehenge White 100% rag paper, Edition of 8, 63.5 x

## SAMA ALSHAIBI *STAGING THE IMAGINED*

18 September - 13 November 2019

Ayyam Gallery is pleased to present *Staging the Imagined*, a solo exhibition featuring Sama Alshaibi's latest body of work.

Please join us in the presence of the artist at the opening reception on 18 September from 7 - 9 pm.

"Meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women, and they often do not include who she is herself."  
Marina Warner, *Monuments and Maidens*, London, 1985.

Sama Alshaibi's newest body of work from her solo exhibition *Staging the Imagined*, reflects the relationships of power and authority between photographer and subject. The work investigates how a particular historical period can alter viewers' interpretations of photographs. Through various projects, Alshaibi re-frames historical photographs and moving images that according to Grace Aneiza Ali "reference a grave historic malpractice—the role of photography, both colonial and contemporary, in reducing the body, the life, the desires, the experiences, the hopes and dreams, indeed the very existence, of the Middle Eastern woman to a dangerous single story—one rooted in the primitive and in fear, fantasy, inferiority, and objectification."

In her central project, *Carry Over*, Alshaibi alludes to the 'Oriental' portrait photographs of the region's women made by Western photographers in the late 19th and early 20th century. Produced through historic printing processes of the era, albumen and photogravure, the images depict the female subject carrying sculptural vessels over her head. Ali notes that Alshaibi's use of the Arab female body and notably her own body in her work, "is intentional in fashioning the headdresses as vessels that are overwhelming, if not overpowering... Alshaibi interrogates objects rampant throughout the genre of Orientalist portrait photography—the veil, mashrabiya, smoker's pipe—that have aided a Western gaze."

In her video *Catalogue*, Alshaibi appropriates newsreel cinema rushes filmed between 1935–1955 by the British Pathé news agency. The reportage on the lives of Middle Eastern women is composited with a video of the artist performing as a live human water feature in the tradition of figurative fountain sculptures installed in public spaces. Alshaibi also conjures up public space, propaganda and self-representation through political posters. Mass circulated in the mid to late 20th century by cheap printing technology, *Generation after Generation* and *Affiche* further complicate the staging of Middle Eastern women by presenting the female farmer and revolutionary fighter as a gender equal in the people's popular struggle for Palestine's liberation.

Sama Alshaibi's *Staging the Imagined* is an implicit critique of the social exploitation generated over a century of images of Middle Eastern women, while disrupting the paradigm through a strategy of assigning power through the female body and narration of her stage.

---

Selection of quoted text from exhibition catalogue: *Women's Work: Art & Activism in the 21st Century*, curated and authored by Grace Aneiza Ali (Pen + Brush Gallery, NYC, NY, 2019)

*Generation after Generation* was commissioned by Artpace International Artist Residency.

*Carry Over* was supported in part by the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Arizona Commission of the Arts, the Project Development 1st Prize Award from The Center at Santa Fe, University of Arizona and Artpace International Artist Residency.

---

#### Printing notes

Alshaibi produced *Carry Over* using the same photogravures and albumen historic print process popularized in the late 19th and early 20th century. The albumen printing process was invented by Louis Désiré Blanquart-Evrard in 1850. The technique of making photographic prints are initiated with coating cotton paper with salt and egg whites as a binding mechanism to adhere silver nitrate and other chemicals to the paper's surface. The photographic negative and treated paper are exposed to the sun to print-out the image, followed by development and fixing in a darkroom. Photogravures were invented by William Henry Fox Talbot in 1852 and later developed by Karel Klíč around 1879. Alshaibi's photogravures uses traditional intaglio printmaking methods whereby copper plates are etched by imaged-exposed carbon gelatin. These resulting image-etched copper plates are then inked and run through an etching press over cotton paper.

Sama Alshaibi's multimedia work explores spaces of conflict and the power struggles that arise in the aftermath of war and exile. Alshaibi is particularly interested in how such clashes occur between citizens and the state, creating vexing crises that impact the physical and psychic realms of the individual as resources and land, mobility, political agency, and self-affirmation are compromised. Through performance, video, photography, and installation, Alshaibi positions her own body as an allegorical site that makes the byproducts of war visible.

Born in Basra to an Iraqi father and a Palestinian mother, Sama Alshaibi is based in the United States where she is Chair and Professor of Photography and Video Art at the University of Arizona, Tucson. Alshaibi holds a BA in Photography from Columbia College and an MFA in Photography, Video, and Media Arts from the University of Colorado. She was a recipient of the Fulbright Scholar Fellowship in 2014 as part of a residency at the Palestine Museum, where she developed an educational program while conducting independent research.

Recently, Alshaibi has featured in solo and group exhibitions at Artpace, San Antonio, Texas (2019); Cairo International Biennale (2019); Pen + Brush, New York (2019); Ayyam Gallery, Al Quoz, Dubai (2019, 2018, 2015); Arizona Biennale, Tucson Museum of Art, Tucson, USA (2018); American University Museum, Washington (2018, 2017); Beirut Spring Festival, Beirut, Lebanon (2018); Palazzo Granafei-Nervegna, Brindisi (2017); Tucson Museum of Art, Arizona (2017); Johnson Museum of Art, New York (2017); Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, New York (2017); Marta Herford Museum, Herford (2017); Museum De Wieger, Deurne (2017); Brentwood Arts Exchange, Maryland (2017); Honolulu Biennial, Honolulu (2017, 2014); Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art, Arizona (2016); Desai Matta Gallery - the California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco (2016); FotoFest, Houston (2016, 2014); Pirineos Sur Festival, Lanuza (2015); Palais De La Culture, Constantine (2015); Ayyam Gallery, London (2015); Arab American National Museum, Dearborn (2015); the Maldives Pavilion of the Venice Biennale (2013); University of Southampton, Southampton (2013); Edge of Arabia, London (2012); HilgerBROTKunsthalle, Vienna (2012); Institut Du Monde Arabe, Paris (2012); Maraya Art Centre, Sharjah (2012); and Museum of Modern Art, New York (2012).

Alshaibi's works are housed in public and private collections, including the Nadour Collection; The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Texas; Barjeel Art Foundation, Sharjah; Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Tunis; Light Work Collection, Syracuse; University of Illinois, Chicago; University of Colorado Art Museum, Boulder; The Photo Archive of the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles; and the C.N. Gorman Museum at the University of California, Davis; The Center for Creative Photography, Arizona; Fidelity Corporate Art Collection, Massachusetts; Johnson Museum, New York.

In 2015, Aperture Foundation published Alshaibi's first monograph, *Sand Rushes In*.

Founded in 2006, Ayyam Gallery is a leading arts organization that manages the careers of diverse established and emerging artists. Blue-chip art space in Dubai, a series of collaborative projects in the United States, Europe, Africa and Asia, and a multinational non-profit arts program have furthered the gallery's mandate of expanding the parameters of international art. With its widely respected multilingual publishing division and a custodianship program that manages the estates of pioneering artists, Ayyam Gallery has also contributed to recent efforts that document underrepresented facets of global art history.

### Exhibition Facts

Exhibitions Dates: 18 September - 13 November

Open Reception: 18 September 7 - 9 pm

Regular Hours: Sun - Thur : 10 am - 6 pm

Location: Ayyam Gallery, B11, Alserkal Avenue, Street 8, Al Quoz 1, Dubai

T: +971 4 323 62 42

Email: [maya@ayyamgallery.com](mailto:maya@ayyamgallery.com)