

making the POSTCARD WOMEN'S IMAGINARIUM II THEN; NOW; ?

Jewels, dreams and
songs of our futures

22 September - 4 October 2022
London @ Camden Image Gallery

Postcard Women can be found on colonial postcards from the Middle East and North Africa, 'captured' and frozen, placed in an unchanging medium, the static colonial space-time, like so many creatures fixed like butterflies, 'preserved' in a false amber, where they have been misrepresented, mislabelled and objectified. The violence of the gaze underlies every image. Their bodies are shown having to hold positions they would never have held, clutching water vessels or other cultural objects cast as Orientalist and colonial 'props', and forced or coerced through unequal power relations and conditions, to gaze provocatively or mysteriously, or be shown naked and stripped of their privacy. Their body adornments – jewellery, textiles, patterns, body markings, were used to display the women as 'exotic', 'erotic', 'primitive', and 'tribal', without contextualisation or understanding, brutishly framed to serve European colonial aspirations.

These water vessels, jewels, and clothes all carry deeply within them cultural histories of women, specific knowledges and ways of being that would have been handed down to each woman from her female ancestors, vessels of identity and selfhood. The Postcard Women hold, like the family photographs of our ancestors, haunting traces of vanished things and ways of life, still vividly present in our collective memory: the jewellery and clothing, luminous and alive with our songs, our poetry, our complicated histories and our stories.

In this multi-media exhibition, artists Salma Ahmad Caller, Afsoon, Alia Derouiche Cherif, Hala Ghellali, Hamida Zourgui and CritTeam (Eugenia López Reus and Miguel Jaime) respond to postcards of women from Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco.

We are delighted to also be showing work from our guest contributors:

A film by Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, an essay by Stephanie Nic Cárthaigh, photography from Dr. Reem El Mutwalli of The Zay Initiative and satirical drawings by Anastasia Kashian.

Exhibition curated by Salma Ahmad Caller.

Making The Postcard Women's Imaginarium is a project created and founded by Egyptian British artist, art historian and writer Salma Ahmad Caller, in 2018, to decolonise the representations of women from the Middle East and North Africa on colonial postcards from the late 19th century to the mid 20th century. The *Imaginarium* postcard project was created as a place for artists, academics, writers, and researchers to personally engage with the Postcard Women and their potential ways of being, and to meditate upon different histories and geographies, to become intercessors on behalf of the Postcard Women, rewriting histories and incorporating new perspectives and visions and reclaiming cultural riches and richnesses.

The book of the project, *Making the POSTCARD WOMEN'S IMAGINARIUM dreaming our futures out of our past*, is available to purchase at www.peculiaritypress.com.



You can find out more about the project at
www.salmaahmadcaller.com/making-the-postcard-womens-imaginarium

BIOGRAPHIES 1

Salma Ahmad Caller was born in Iraq to an Egyptian father and a British mother, and grew up in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia. She now lives in the UK. An artist, art historian and writer, Salma considers herself a disruptive body, a hybrid of cultures and faiths. Her work explores her mixed- race identity, cross-cultural experiences, text/image relationships and forms of embodiment, materiality and memory, drawing on personal intimate family histories and vulnerability as a way to destabilise larger narratives. Uncanny juxtapositions and hybrid forms are used to investigate how the private and political collide and intertwine, using techniques of collage, assemblage, drawing, watercolour, photography, projection, installation/sound, and more recently, film. Salma also writes art theory, poetry and creative non-fiction. Her theoretical background in research on the meanings of ornament in non-Western cultures through frameworks of anthropology of art and cognitive science/physiology, is used to decolonise and break down boundaries, categories, typologies and terminology that characterise hegemonic colonial and patriarchal formations. With a master's in art history and art theory, and a background in medicine and pharmacology, and after several years teaching cross-cultural ways of seeing via non-Western artefacts at Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, she now works as an independent artist and teacher.

Afsoon is an Iranian-born, London-based artist. She works predominantly in collage but has used various media such as linocut, watercolour, photography, ceramic, pastel, and etching. She usually spends long periods researching her chosen subject to make pieces that often combine text with images while merging Occidental and Oriental ideas. Her work is humorous, playful, and sophisticated, and feels simultaneously familiar and foreign. Afsoon has taken part in numerous solo and group shows, biennales and museum exhibitions. Her pieces can be found in prominent collections such as the British Museum, LACMA (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), and the Berger/YSL Collection.

Hala Ghellali was born and grew up in Tripoli, Libya. She lived in France where she completed her undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Comparative Literature. After several years of teaching at the University of Tripoli, she lived in Italy, Egypt, and Syria before settling in the USA. She is particularly interested in Libyan history, cultural heritage, vernacular poetry, and the contemporary art scene. Hala's family ancestral connection to the art of weaving and traditional clothes has been a source of inspiration for her own research and work. Passionate about Libyan adornment and jewellery making, she has extensively researched its history, meanings, and ties to neighbouring countries. Her research and writing also embrace photography, with a focus on Orientalist photographs and postcards made in local studios during the period of the Italian colonisation of Libya, and she has co-curated an exhibition on the theme of jewellery in Orientalist photography and related postcards. Hala's book on Libyan adornment and jewellery, the outcome of years of intensive research, will soon be published by BLKVLD.

Eugenia López Reus and Miguel Jaime are an art and research duo that emerged as CritTeam in the UAE in 2013. They explore intersections of art, architecture, and culture, questioning common notions of tradition, ornament, and identity. CritTeam's work is rooted in digital and traditional media such as photography, collage, and drawing which they expand to include theoretical writings, video, installations, and design proposals. Their practice explores post avant-garde discourses of colonialism, Orientalism, Modernism, and non-Western ornamental art. They both hold PhDs in architectural design and have been educators and researchers at universities in Europe, America, and the Middle East. Their work has been published and exhibited at various institutions in Europe and the Middle East, such as the Sharjah Art Foundation (2016 & 2017), the University of Edinburgh (2017), the XIV Spanish Biennial of Architecture and Urbanism (Santander 2018), the VIII Biennial of Contemporary Textile Art (World Textile Art Organisation) at Costume Museum Madrid (2019), 'The Best Design of the Year' at the Barcelona Design Museum DHUB (2021), among others. CritTeam was nominated for the Art FAD Awards 2021. Since 2018, CritTeam has been based in Barcelona.

Alia Derouiche Cherif is a visual artist who was born and grew up in Tunis. In 1991, Alia obtained her MA in Interior Design, and in 1997 she obtained her DEA (MPhil) in Sciences et techniques des arts at the ITAAUT. She has been teaching fashion design for over 20 years and has participated in various significant group exhibitions in Tunisia, including the Bardo museum, Alain Nadaud Gallery, Musk and Amber Gallery, Elbirou Art Gallery, Effesto Gallery, Le Cap Gallery, and the City of Culture of Tunisia. Alia's solo exhibitions took place at the Musk and Amber Gallery in Tunisia in September 2018 & 2019 and October 2021. Her rich work collages together many layers of Tunisian cultural heritage, both past and contemporary, and her painting fiercely reclaims ornamental techniques from Orientalist painting by asserting the complex meanings and cultural contexts of Islamic and multi-ethnic Tunisian patterns and calligraphic forms.



BIOGRAPHIES 2

Hamida Zourgui is a French-Algerian mixed media artist based in London. After completing her MA in Art History and Sociology she worked in museums and art spaces as a mediator and freelance art journalist. Growing up in France with an Algerian background has always played a major role in the construction of her identity, which then became the core and heart of her artistic expression. Hamida's mixed media artwork focuses on the creation of bridges between her two cultures. Dual citizenship is echoed in the duality of references, and in the inspiration behind her themes and preoccupations. For Hamida, her work is crucially an homage to colonised women and colonised bodies. 'Orientalism' is a word anchored in her research, as it is often the only lens employed to represent and misrepresent Algerian women in art and imagery. Her digital and analogue photographs are incorporated and transformed within collage works. These Arabic pop-art inspired transformations aim to narrate a new Algerian woman, giving her a renewed potent visual presence. Nostalgia, womanhood, and colonisation are three themes to constantly grapple with and reconcile with the present realities of Algerian women. As part of the Muslim female artists' collective Variant Space, Hamida has shown her work in London at The Foundry (June 2018) and in New York (September 2018). Her talks were an important feature of the Pop Art from North Africa Collective exhibition at the P21 Gallery in London in 2017.

Ariella Aïsha Azoulay is a professor of Modern Culture and Media and Comparative Literature (Brown University), film essayist, and curator of archives and exhibitions. Her books include: *Potential History – Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), *Civil Imagination: The Political Ontology of Photography* (Verso, 2012), *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone Books, 2008). Among her films:

The World like a Jewel in the Hand (2022), *Un-documented: Unlearning Imperial Plunder* (2019), *Civil Alliances, Palestine, 47–48* (2012). Among her exhibitions: *Errata* (Fundació Tàpies, 2019, HKW, Berlin, 2020), and *Enough! The Natural Violence of New World Order*, (F/Stop photography festival, Leipzig, 2016). Her book, *Algerian Letters – The Jewelers of the Oumma*, will be published by Verso in 2023.

Stephanie Nic Cárthaigh was born in Canada to a German mother and an Irish father. She returned to Ireland in 1987, living in Cork and Killarney. Following a BA in French and Philosophy at University College Cork, she emigrated to France in 1999, bringing her MA in French, also from UCC, with her, which she completed there. She taught English at various universities, and she has also been working as a translator and proofreader. She is working on a doctoral thesis on George Sand for the Paris-Sorbonne University. An active member of the Paris-based branch of Conradh na Gaeilge (the Gaelic League), An Ghaeltacht-sur-Seine (The Irish-speaking region on the Seine), since 2017, she enjoys singing, particularly in Irish, in the sean-nós tradition.

Dr Reem El Mutwalli is a published author, curator, and public speaker. With over 30 years of experience, she is an expert consultant in Islamic art and architecture, interior design, historic dress, and UAE heritage. She is also the founder of the Zay Initiative, which is a non-profit UK-registered initiative advancing the preservation of cultural heritage, through the collection, documentation, and digital archiving of Arab historical attire and their stories, whose goal is to empower and sustain global cross-cultural dialogue to inspire creative minds.

Anastasia Kashian. "I am an artist with a particular interest both in narrative and in the many ways in which visual materials may be 'read'. I have a degree in Anthropology from University College London (the home of the 1930s Eugenics movement – Fun Fact!) where I spent most of my time hiding in the Folklore Society Library (recommended) and the Petrie Museum – I am permanently intrigued by the concept, and the aesthetics, of museums, the theft and repurposing of artefacts, of whole civilisations sealed up in glass-fronted cases like butterflies, and the place of the Museum in formulating and presenting a Victorian hierarchical model of world order that is still entrenched in the Western cultural mind today. (And I also once lived with a very famous art thief...). Currently I am very focused on the visual symbolic language of the Tarot, particularly the Tarot de Marseille, and the way visual imagery can be used to transmit codified information, from the justifiably cautious Humanist networks of the European Renaissance to the conspiratorial occultism that has such a hold on the modern imagination. The modern Tarot deck has a long and complicated association with the themes of cultural appropriation and Western Orientalism. The card titled 'L'Empire' is one of a projected three pieces reimagining the Postcard Women as Tarot Cards." Born Cheltenham 1969

