

Press Release

## GPP Photography Exhibition | Borderlands

*A solo exhibition by multi-media artist Alia Ali, **Borderlands** is a series of portraits that questions the barriers which divide and unite us, all at once.*



*Photo caption: Borderlands, a series by Alia Ali. 2017. Courtesy of Gulf Photo Plus.*

**Artist Workshop:** March 11<sup>th</sup>  
**Exhibition:** March 13 – April 22, 2017  
**Artist talk:** March 14<sup>th</sup>, 5pm

The term “borderland” refers to the crossroads where nations collide. It is a porous zone that diffuses outward from an artificially imposed border that enacts violence on the identity of those living in borderlands. They are both imprints of power and scars of destruction. Borderlands, on the other hand, are the result of naturally occurring interactions among people and of nature trying to forge an existence with those who surround them. In her photographic series, *Borderlands*, Alia Ali, re-examines these demarcated zones as territories of exploration.

The characters in Ali’s portraits, are swathed in layers of fabric from eleven different regions of the world shielding them from interrelating with anything beyond the material. The fabric becomes a borderline between the anonymous subject and the viewer. In relation to this divide the artist aims

to raise questions, on what side of the fabric do we find ourselves? Where does the power lie? Are the individuals portrayed hiding or are they being hidden? What are the fabricated barriers in society that inhibit the inclusion of others? Or are the obstacles just that: ideas, intuitions, fear, discriminations and ‘understandings’? Is exclusion motivated by a primitive fear and search for security? A form of self-preservation? A metamorphosis of the outcast into villain? If so, doesn’t the power lie in being anonymous or is it taken away by imposed categorizations? The theme of duality extends to questioning the moment in which the mysterious becomes apparent, freedom becomes restraint, and illusion becomes reality.

The fabric, like borders, is narrow but long, defined physically and yet interpretative in identity-both have a capacity of exploration. Textiles are products of the earth, canvases through which culture manifests itself at the surface, and objects that become a part of us. Aren’t the borderlands as well?

Borderlands was inspired by the aggressive push to block access, coupled with a strong nationalistic phenomenon taking precedence over providing security and refuge for those in greatest need. This discourse has already begun to build walls around the globe while simultaneously eroding communities built on diversity.

The individuals portrayed are “undocumented” characters- their names are ambiguous and their exact location, a mystery. They are unidentifiable, except for the details displayed such as color, symbolism and texture eventually and simultaneously drawing on a sense of connection and alienation. Their existence questions what the human is and what lies outside and within it.

Fabric, ancient in its invention, is archival with the passage of time. The fabric, like the human beneath it, or the border it symbolizes within this body of work, is also vulnerable to the elements and to time. When all is said and done, borders shift and textiles disintegrate, but if well preserved and nurtured with culture, knowledge and grace they remain intact. Borderlands, like textiles, are territories of exploration and zones in which we will be judged for our humanity.

The exhibition will be hosted at Gulf Photo Plus, unit D36 in Alserkal Avenue, opening March 13<sup>th</sup> at 6:30pm and running through to April 22, 2017. The exhibition is free to attend and open to the public.

### **Workshop with Alia Ali**

Alia Ali will lead an interactive workshop focused on the process of communicating imaginative ideas into two-dimensional form. By engaging participants with discussions, brainstorming, group work and digital media, individuals will leave feeling enriched and have a more confident understanding of the image as a language and a medium for documenting their story, manifesting personal expression, and building an audience. Ali will also present experiences from her own portfolio of travel and fine art photography.

This workshop has been presented to a variety of audiences, including the Harvard Graduate School of Education (USA) and the Marrakech Museum of Photography & Visual Art (Morocco). The workshop will be held on Saturday March 11<sup>th</sup>.

For more info and to register, visit our [website](#).



## **About Alia Ali**

Alia Ali (Austria, 1985) is a Yemeni-Bosnian-American multi-media artist. She is a graduate of the United World College of the Atlantic (UWCAC) and holds a BA in Studio Art and Middle Eastern Studies from Wellesley College. Her recent work has been featured at the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, PhotoNOLA, the Marrakech Biennale as part of the Swiss-Moroccan KE'CH Collective, and PhotoLondon 2016 as part of the LensCulture Exposure Awards. Most recently, she was awarded the Alice C. Cole '42 Grant of Wellesley College, LensCulture's Emerging Talent Awards 2016 and Gold Winner in the Fine Art Category of the Tokyo International Foto Awards.

For more info about Alia Ali please visit [www.alia-ali.com](http://www.alia-ali.com).

## **About Gulf Photo Plus**

[Gulf Photo Plus](#) (GPP) is the only dedicated center for photography in Dubai, UAE. With an expansive education programme, ambitious calendar of events, thought-provoking exhibitions and state-of-the-art printing facilities, GPP has long been established as the go-to place for both beginners and professionals to discover, enjoy, and learn more about photography.

## **Media Contact**

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**High res images available upon request.**