

Observing the Ritual

Ammar Al Attar, Nicoló Degiorgis, Natalie Naccache

Opening night **May 16, 2016, 7 PM**

Exhibition runs through **August 27, 2016**

Alserkal Avenue, Unit 36, Street 8, Al Quoz, Dubai



About the exhibition

The group exhibition “Observing the Ritual” unites three distinct series by three distinct photographers to explore the spaces in which the rituals fundamental to Muslim culture occur. From communal prayer held in a secret mosque to the breaking of the fast in a family home during Ramadan, the exhibition’s contributing photographers shed light on the most intimate moments of life for practicing Muslims.

Hidden Islam

One of the series displayed in the “Observing the Ritual” exhibition is “Hidden Islam”, a long-term independent project by Italian photographer Nicoló Degiorgis, who is based in Bolzano Bozen. Although Italy is home to 1.35 million Muslims, there are only eight mosques in the entire country. Islam is not officially recognized as a religion by the state. Unsurprisingly, this has led to a proliferation of improvised, makeshift mosques “hiding” in old factories, abandoned structures, garages, shops, and even gyms. Degiorgis has spent the last several years following the Muslim communities of northern Italy, an area where deep-seated cultural tensions persist between the Muslim minority and their neighbours. As he

explored the communities and gained the confidence of their members, he was granted permission to document these temporary places of worship.

The culmination of his work is a highly sought-after, self-published book titled Hidden Islam. Each page of the book is folded to show the outside of one of the buildings that house these temporary mosques. Once the page is unfolded, the viewer is let “inside” the building to see what’s hidden – large and small rooms and enclosures, packed with people praying. Presented for the first time in 2012, the book is now in its third edition. In 2014, the book was the winner of the Paris Photo–Aperture Foundation Photo Book Awards and was named “Book of the Year” by the jurors of the prestigious Rencontres d’Arles photography festival in France. The book will be available for sale at the gallery and the book signing will take place during the opening night on May 16, 2016.

Prayer Rooms

Self-taught, UAE-based photographer Ammar Al Attar has a very different approach to photographing places of worship, as demonstrated in his “Prayer Room” series. Like Degiorgis, Al Attar searched for hidden spaces of worship. Unlike Degiorgis, however, the spaces he shot were located in the Gulf and were anything but secret. Tucked away inside of shopping malls, business centres, and parking lots, the prayer rooms Al Attar photographed are compulsory in the region – obligatory spaces for faithful worshippers to gather for the five prayers each day.

Al Attar’s work concentrates on the serenity of the prayer room and the overwhelming sense of peace created by the space itself, which he photographs without alteration or staging. The viewer’s ability to engage with the space is only enhanced by Al Attar’s decision to photograph the prayer rooms when they are completely empty. The photographs capture every detail of these humble interiors, from the pattern of a rug to the relentless clock on the wall to a waiting Quran. Al Attar sees these hidden spaces as a refuge from the fast growing urban environment of the Gulf, and his work honours the idea of the community that is achieved in the moment of prayer.

Iftar

British-Lebanese photographer Natalie Naccache breaks outside of the prayer room in her series “Iftar” as she explores the idea of ritual as a manifestation of spiritual equality. A widely published photojournalist and documentary photographer represented by Getty Reportage agency, grantee of The Arab Fund for Arts and Culture in 2014, Naccache uses her series to document families of very different social and economic backgrounds as they prepare for Iftar, the evening meal by which Muslims break their daily Ramadan fast. Naccache brings the viewer before the richly set Iftar tables of wealthy families to the simply laid meals of Syrian refugees with equal attentiveness. Whether the photographs in Naccache’s series depict women decorating the table with expensive silverware or workers sitting down beside their vegetable stalls for a simple meal, each image is carefully paired to elevate the communal sense of anticipation and the equal joy of the ritualized meal at hand.

“Observing the Ritual” exhibition will be accompanied by a program of events, including artist talks with participating photographers, portfolio review, book signing and a specialty workshop with Nicolás Degiorgis.

About Gulf Photo Plus

Gulf Photo Plus (GPP) is Dubai’s Photography Centre, dedicated to developing the knowledge and appreciation of photography through education, exhibitions, and a variety of events held throughout the year. Over the course of ten years, GPP has garnered an international reputation as a leader in photography events. It exists at the epicenter of the photography community in the MENA region, and continues to develop its international presence through its GPP PopUp events held around the world from Seattle to Singapore. GPP’s annual calendar includes photography exhibitions, movie nights, free artist talks, regular photography workshops, and Slidefest evenings where local creatives can share personal projects and find new inspiration.

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