

the mosaic rooms



THE MOSAIC ROOMS
ARE AN A.M. QATTAN
FOUNDATION PROJECT

ROSE ISSA PROJECTS



From the *Upekkha* series



From the *Unfolding* series

Press release

For immediate release, 10 May 2012

Nermine Hammam, Cairo, Year One

20 July - 24 August 2012 (Private view, 6.30-8.30pm, Thursday 19 July 2012)

The Mosaic Rooms, 226 Cromwell Road, London, SW5 0SW

The Mosaic Rooms, in association with Rose Issa Projects in London, is delighted to present the first UK solo show by Egyptian artist Nermine Hammam. Hammam is based in Cairo. Her works are intricate composites of layered images and symbols, using a distinctive aesthetic that combines digital manipulation and painting to form a rich and highly personal tapestry. This timely solo exhibition will feature two of her most recent series, *Upekkha* and *Unfolding*, which look at the recent civil unrest and uprisings in Egypt.

Upekkha features images of soldiers from the Egyptian army taken in Tahrir Square, reset against utopian landscapes of luminous blue skies, verdant fields, snow peaked mountains and still bodies of water. The series examines youth in war, masculine frailty, and notions of power. By reclaiming these soldiers as individuals, the artist seeks to reveal the vulnerability of youth parading behind the weaponry and masculinity of the military, questioning the reality of power and its construction.

Referencing a peculiar nostalgia in their hand-painted postcard format, the images suggest a desire to capture a moment whilst also acknowledging its passing, anticipating the fading of revolutionary dreams into mundane political history. By signifying a delicacy and transience in memory, the artist seeks to question traditional representations of civil unrest.

“What is power and who, ultimately, wields it? Power is a myth, a construct. It resides only in the images that we hold of it, rather than in its inherent reality,” Hammam writes.

The term *Upekkha* refers to a Buddhist aspiration of experiencing the world through a lens of equanimity. It is believed that through detachment one acquires the possibility to notice contradictions, question the accepted, and reorganize society. By showing us a different view of the uprisings and military might, the artist hopes the viewer will take the chance to consider the coquettish smile of a soldier in khaki or the precariousness of a paradisiacal landscape and to question what he or she, and society, readily assume.

Similar in *Unfolding*, realized a year later on a more intimate scale, Hammam aims to re-sensitize the viewer to the power of images, feeling that the constantly circulated media portrayals of violence, suffering, death and war in repeatedly similar formats, build up society’s immunity to their resonance, reduce the viewer’s potential for empathy, and disconnect us from their realness and the individuals they depict. The concept for this series emerged from the artist’s own experience of watching a young protester die in Tahrir Square, while less than a kilometer away city life continued undisturbed.

Unfolding consists of stylized Japanese landscapes, intersected with explicit footage, downloaded from the web, of police brutality in the year following Egypt’s 2011 revolt. Using the form of ancient Japanese screens gave the artist the emotional distance she needed to navigate what she had witnessed. It rendered the reality of the revolt into a fictitious place, a land somewhere between medieval Japan and contemporary Egypt. In her desire to make the pain and suffering of her images more intensely felt, she discovered an alternative to the media’s use of graphic representation. The refined traditional aesthetics of the screen allowed the artist to explore the power of suggestion and of artfulness. In *Unfolding* the moment of impact becomes hidden behind foliage, or ornamentation and instantaneous gratification are frustrated. Instead the viewer is asked to become active in their viewing, to look closer, and re-examine the surface in front of them to realize the full violence of what is being portrayed.

Nermine Hammam was born in Cairo (1967), and received her BFA in filmmaking from the Tisch School of Arts at New York University. She then worked with Simon & Goodman and renowned film director Youssef Chahine. In the past 10 years, Hammam has taken part in more than 50 solo and group exhibitions around the world, and her work features in several international public and private collections. She also participated in the international photography biennales in Bamako, Mali (2011), Cuenca Ecuador (2009), and Thessalonike (2009).

For further information contact:
Danielle or Rachael at The Mosaic Rooms
Tel: 020 7370 9990
press@mosaicrooms.org

Notes to editors

- Nermin Hammam is available for interview via The Mosaic Rooms
- Images from the exhibition are available via The Mosaic Rooms
- Entry to the exhibition is free
- Copies of the exhibition catalogue will be available to buy from The Mosaic Rooms' bookshop.
- The Mosaic Rooms are open from 11am – 6pm Tuesday to Saturday. It will also hold an Open Sunday from 12-5pm on Sunday August 19 2012.
- The Mosaic Rooms, a leading independent arts space in west London, deliver a high quality, contemporary and progressive cultural programme from the Arab world and internationally. They are managed by the A.M. Qattan Foundation, a UK charity dedicated to the support of culture and education in Palestine and the Arab world. The Foundation's London office, headed by one of its trustees, Omar Al-Qattan, is responsible for the Mosaic Rooms' programme. The Rooms are part of the Culture and Arts Programme of the A.M. Qattan Foundation.
- The Mosaic Rooms is situated on the corner of the Cromwell Road and Earl's Court Road in Kensington, London, a short walk from Earl's Court Underground Station and Exhibition Centre.
- For further information about The Mosaic Rooms and the A.M. Qattan Foundation visit www.mosaicrooms.org
- Rose Issa is a curator, writer and producer who has championed visual art and film from the Arab world and Iran for nearly 30 years. She has lived in Iran, Lebanon, France and, for the last 25 years, London, where from her private project space in Kensington she showcases upcoming and established artists, and produces exhibitions and publications with public and private institutions worldwide. For further information about Rose Issa Projects visit www.roseissa.com