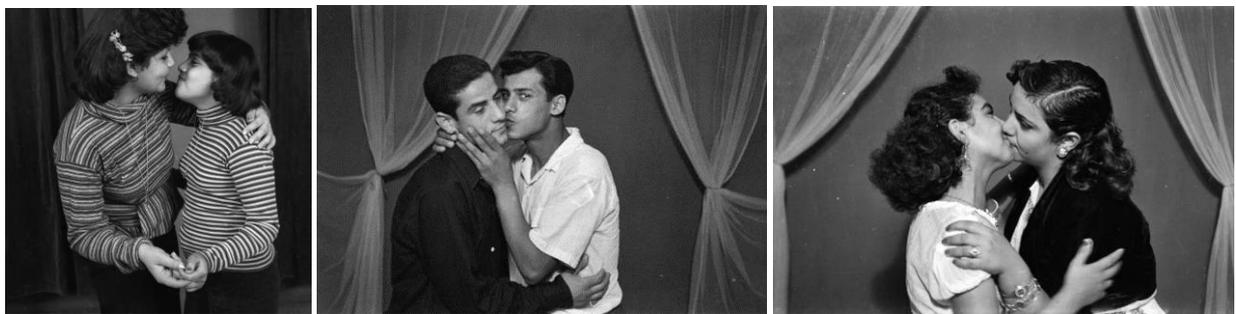


Press Release

Thursday 30 March 2017

**DOUBLE TAKE:
AKRAM ZAATARI AND THE ARAB IMAGE FOUNDATION**

30 March - 3 September 2017, National Portrait Gallery, London, Free Admission

Supported by The Ampersand Foundation

From *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices* by Akram Zaatari, 2007: Anonymous. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, early 1970s. Hashem el Madani. Tate: Presented by Tate International Council 2008 © Akram Zaatari, courtesy of Hashem el Madani and Arab Image Foundation, Beirut; **Tarho and El Masri. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, 1958.** Hashem el Madani. Tate: Presented by Tate International Council 2008 © Akram Zaatari, courtesy of Hashem el Madani and Arab Image Foundation, Beirut; **Bashasha (left) and a friend. Studio Shehrazade, Saida, Lebanon, late 1950s.** Hashem el Madani. Tate: Presented by Tate International Council 2008 © Akram Zaatari, courtesy of Hashem el Madani and Arab Image Foundation, Beirut

Photographs taken in a studio above a cinema in Lebanon and showing people of the same sex kissing or tenderly embracing have gone on display at the National Portrait Gallery, London, it was announced today, Thursday 30 March 2017.

Double Take: Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation (27 March-3 September 2017) comprises photographs taken from the early 1950s to the 1970s at Studio Shehrazade, a popular photographic studio run by Hashem el Madanin Saida, Lebanon.

The photographs were discovered in 1998 by the contemporary Lebanese artist Akram Zaatari and incorporated into the collection of the Arab Image Foundation, an organisation co-founded by Zaatari to collect and study images from the Arab world. As part of an ongoing archeological project, *Hashem el Madani: Studio Practices*, Zaatari has selected images from Madani's archive to put back into circulation today. Madani's studio became a theatre for people to act out different identities. The poses may have been influenced by popular films, which were screened in the cinema underneath Studio Shehrazade, and the element of performance is reinforced by the studio backdrops and props.

By returning to these historical documents, Zaatari explores the specific cultural and political histories contained within Madani's portraits. Saida's conservative culture in the 1950s and 1960s did not permit men and women to socialise outside marriage, and physical contact was strongly discouraged. Tactile gestures were rehearsed among members of the same sex, often friends or relatives, not necessarily couples. Madani recalls that 'people were willing to play the kiss between two people of the same sex, but very rarely between a man and a woman.' He remembers this happening only once.

Akram Zaatari (born in 1966 Sidon, Lebanon) is a filmmaker, photographer and curator. In 1997, he co-founded the Arab Image Foundation with photographers Fouad Elkoury, Walid Raad, and Samer Mohdad. His work is largely based on collecting, studying and archiving the photographic history of the Arab World. Akram Zaatari was selected to represent Lebanon at the 2013 Venice Biennale by Sam Bardaouil and Till Fellrath, curators for the Lebanese Pavilion.

Dr Nicholas Cullinan, Director of the National Portrait Gallery, London, says: 'Akram Zaatari's project asks fascinating and very relevant questions about the representation of identity, tolerance and cultural understanding. Capturing moments of intimacy between people of the same sex, these tender but enigmatic images question assumptions just as much as they beguile in their simplicity and immediacy.'

Sabina Jaskot-Gill, Curator of ***Double Take: Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation***, and Associate Curator of Photographs, National Portrait Gallery, London, says: 'Zaatari's intervention raises questions about how we read – or misread – portraits when we look at them from a time and a distance far removed from their original moment of production. For Zaatari, these photographs have two authors and two dates, and tell two distinct stories to two different societies and audiences.'

Double Take: Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation forms part of a year-long programme of special displays and events, entitled 'I am me,' at the National Portrait Gallery exploring sexuality, gender, art and identity.

This includes ***David Gwynnutt: Before We Were Men*** (until September 24) a display that chronicles the 1980s London art and club scene of Leigh Bowery, Derek Jarman, Ossie Clark and Gilbert & George. Gwynnutt photographed directors, writers, designers and artists who together formed a vibrant and influential underground gay culture.

There is also ***Speak its Name!*** (until August 6) a display of photographic portraits to marking the fiftieth anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in England and Wales in 1967. This display includes portraits of fashion designer Alexander McQueen and journalist Isabella Blow, politician Angela Eagle, actors Ben Whishaw and Saffron Burrows, poet Jackie Kay, diver Tom Daley and singer Will Young. Their portraits are accompanied by quotations from the sitters who share their experiences of coming out. These range from coming out to friends and family, to wanting to be honest to their fans and the media.

Also as part of the *I am me* season, the Gallery's spring exhibition, ***Gillian Wearing and Claude Cahun: Behind the mask, another mask*** (until May 29) draws together over 100 works by French artist Claude Cahun (1894–1954) and British contemporary artist Gillian Wearing (b.1963). While they were born seventy years apart, they share similar themes around gender, identity, masquerade and performance.

DISPLAY: *Double Take: Akram Zaatari and the Arab Image Foundation*

Supported by Ampersand Foundation

All works lent by Tate: Presented by Tate International Council 2008

Room 33, Admission Free (30 March – 3 September 2017)

EVENT:

8 June 16.30 Screening:

28 Nights and a Poem

£8/£7

Akram Zaatari's film explores the work of photographer Hashem el Madani, who has run a commercial photography studio in southern Lebanon for the last five decades, and examines the changing photographic practice and preservation through various analogue and digital media. Followed by a short talk by the director and Q&A. (Dir. Akram Zaatari 2015, 105 min, Arabic with English subtitles)

(Tickets go on sale in May www.npg.org.uk)

Also in *I am me* - A season exploring art and identity at the National Portrait Gallery:

David Gwynnutt: Before We Were Men Room 39, Admission Free (16 March – 24 September 2017)

Speak its Name! Balcony Gallery, Admission Free (25 November 2016 – 6 August 2017)

Gillian Wearing and Claude Cahun: Behind the Mask, another Mask

Lerner Contemporary Galleries, Admission charge (9 March – 29 May 2017)

For further press information and image requests please contact: Neil Evans, Media Relations Manager, National Portrait Gallery, London Tel: 020 7312 2452 (not for publication) Email: nevans@npg.org.uk **Press images:** npg.org.uk/press

National Portrait Gallery, St Martin's Place WC2H 0HE, opening hours Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Saturday, Sunday: 10am – 6pm (Gallery closure commences at 5.50pm) **Late Opening:** Thursday, Friday: 10am – 9pm (Gallery closure commences at 8.50pm) **Nearest Underground:** Leicester Square/Charing Cross **General information:** 0207 306 0055 **Recorded information:** 020 7312 2463