

Nermine Hammam

Artist Statement

Egyptian photo artist | Cairo and London | PDF for curators and institutions

The edge of the photograph can exclude as much as it includes. That is what I trust least about the photograph, and what the work begins with.

The photograph is taken, then altered, layered, painted through, and returned changed. The final image is not a record. It is the residue of what the image was trying to conceal.

There is a moment when a symbol stops obeying itself — when the soldier appears fragile, when ceremony reveals violence, when the body in trance becomes political. Familiar images are where power hides most effectively, and where it can also be undone. The work returns again and again to bodies caught at the threshold: between fear and ritual, military and tender, public and private. That threshold is where the surface begins to break.

My foundation is cinematic — sequences, cuts, silences, suspended frames. Even when the work is still, it holds the tension of something just outside view, something happening, or about to happen, at the edge.

Beauty is never neutral. Seductive surfaces, ornament and painterly colour slow the eye down, not to soften violence but to bring the viewer in through pleasure and leave them with the structures beneath it: gender, militarism, faith, empire.

Since the revolutions, the mechanism of trust between the image and the viewer has collapsed. I do not try to restore it. The work asks what remains when the image no longer obeys the story it was made to serve.

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