Cairo Days 3

2011 · Photography

I did not go out to make art. I went out because the street was where everything was happening.

For weeks I walked the same few kilometres around Tahrir every day, camera in hand, and came back with hundreds of frames. I shot them as snapshots. I was not looking for the photograph that would stand for the revolution. Those were already being made, in enormous numbers, by people who knew exactly what the world wanted to see. I wanted the hour before and the hour after. The tea. The sleeping. The boy adjusting his collar. The particular boredom that sits inside historic events and is never photographed because it does not look like history.

What I had was proximity. People let me close. They arranged themselves for me, flirted, performed, softened. The square changed slightly when I raised the camera, and that change is in the pictures too.

Cairo Days is the material as it came. Nothing is layered, nothing is transported, nothing is redeemed. Everything I made afterwards came out of these frames — soldiers lifted into postcard paradises, violence folded into painted screens — because I could not bear to leave the image alone. Here I have left it alone. This is the ground floor of that year, the evidence before I began arguing with it.

Later, I stopped trusting what a photograph appeared to know. In 2011 I had not reached that point. I still believed, or believed enough to keep pressing the shutter every day through the hope and the disgust and the hope again, never certain from one morning to the next which of them was the truth.

What remains is the days themselves. A duration, unevenly lit, holding celebration and dread in the same afternoon. A country in upheaval is still made of ordinary time, and ordinary time is what gets discarded first.

I kept it. That is all this work is. I kept the days.

About this portfolio

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Series: https://www.nerminehammam.com/work-cairo-days-3

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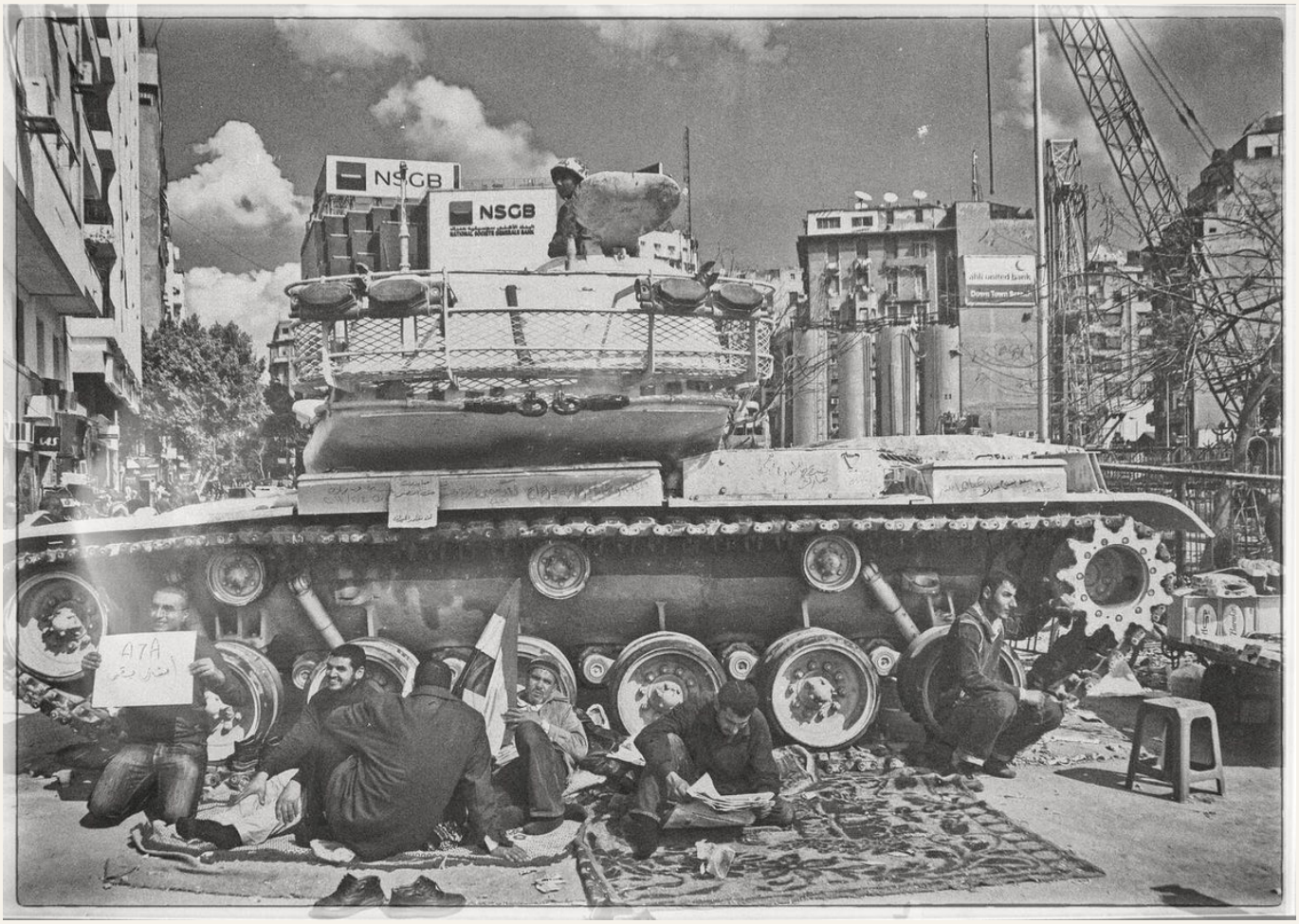

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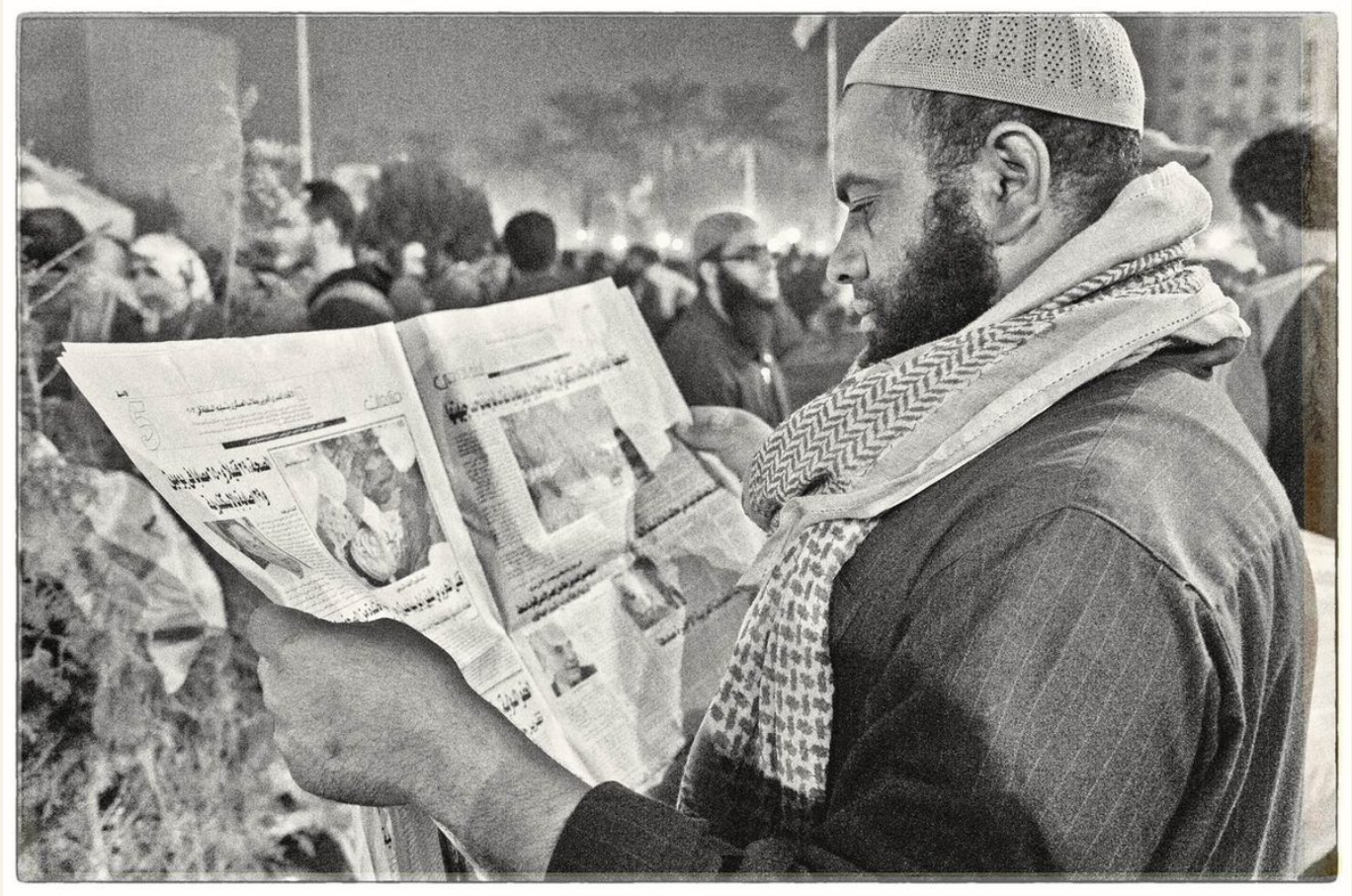

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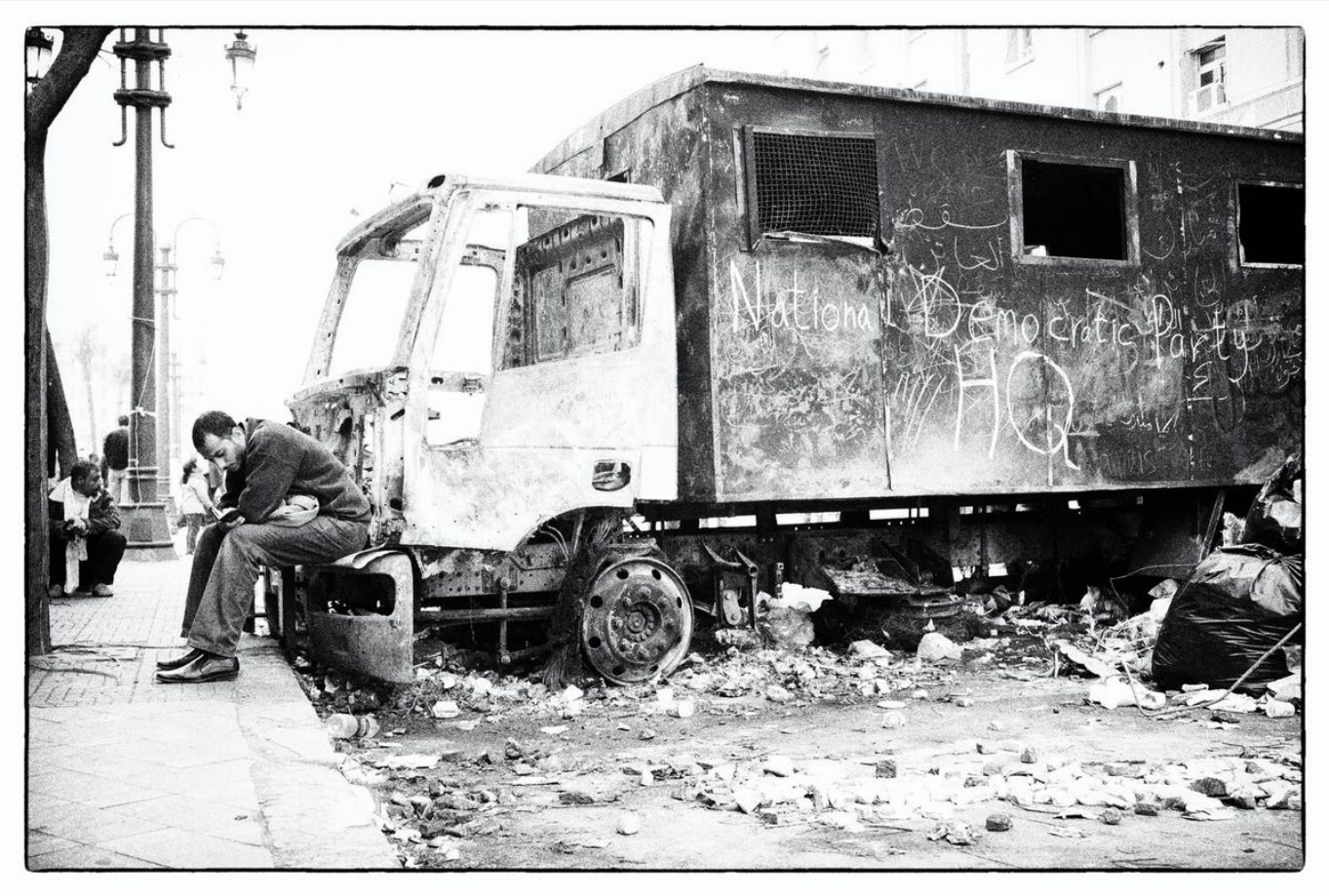

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