

## LATIF AL ANI

*Vetera Novis Augere*

18 November – 28 December 2019

Preview: Monday, 18 November from 6 to 10 pm

*Latif at Sulaimaniya, North Iraq, 1957*

Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, in collaboration with the Arab Image Foundation, Beirut, is delighted to announce Latif Al Ani's first exhibition at the gallery.

With the title *Vetera Novis Augere* - 'augment the old with the new' - Latif Al Ani's exhibition interrogates the complex relationship between past and present. It also inaugurates a transmission process from older to younger generations, revealing a past and visual imagery mostly unknown to Iraqis themselves.

Through the four exhibited series bringing to attention the themes of Architecture, Landscape, as well as illustrating Modernity along with Daily Life and Portrait photography, Latif Al Ani captured, mostly in black and white, the transformations in urban and rural Iraqi society, offering a unique gaze and testimony of the late 50s and early 70s in Iraq. The tragic modern history of Iraq has bared witness to revolutions, coups, wars, and sanctions, interwoven with some brief periods of peace and prosperity. Latif Al Ani captured the

optimistic aspects of these periods, showing women at work, girls in gym classes, mechanical engineering students, high-speed urbanization, modern architecture, tall office towers, western tourists strolling through archaeological vestiges... During these two decades, the photographer produced an extensive and invaluable archive and document of a radical shifting socio-political, economical and cultural landscape in Iraq.

Whilst on assignment for the Iraq Petroleum Company to document the modernisation and industrializing of Iraq during a window of socioeconomic boom, Al Ani criss-crossed the country by foot, by car and by plane. He was the first photographer to have the opportunity to shoot aerial views of Iraq's archaeological sites, its capital city of Baghdad, or the luxuriant palm groves. On the side, he developed a singular aesthetic language that challenged the social and documentary photography canons of that time. Instead, through the plurality of subjects, Al Ani looked for beauty and the uncanny in the portraits of 'his own people', historical monuments, street scenes and imposing landscapes. The unconventional frames broken by architectural sharp lines, or the visual emphasis of his compositions with hard light casting shadows, demonstrate the experimental approach of the photographer.

Premiering in *Vetera Novis Augere* is the photographer's personal selection of 80 images from his wider oeuvre, displayed as a continuous carousel slide show. The succession of handpicked works forming this deeply individual edit reflects Al Ani's will to represent "all aspects of life in Iraq." The diversity of images gliding by – education, nature, industry, modernist architecture – projects a past to be seen less through the prism of nostalgia, than as a reactivation of an irrefutable reality, salvaged from oblivion.

The outbreak of the Iran-Iraq war prompted his decision to cease his photographic journey once and for good. In 2000, artist Yto Barrada met Latif Al Ani during a research mission in Iraq with Wilfried Blanchard from which Barrada brought his practice to the attention of the Arab Image Foundation in Beirut. Since then the foundation has acted as custodian preserving Al Ani's archives.

The work of Latif Al Ani (b. 1932) has been presented in many group exhibitions including the National Pavilion of Iraq, organized by the Ruya Foundation and curated by Philippe Van Cauteren, at the 56th Venice Biennale (2015) that toured to S.M.A.K. (Museum for Contemporary Art), Ghent (2016) and the Erbil Citadel, Iraq (2017), as well as *Bagdad Mon Amour* at Institut des Cultures d'Islam, Paris (2018) curated by Morad Montazami. An important survey exhibition curated by Hoor Al Qasimi entitled *Latif Al Ani: Through the Lens 1953 – 1979*, was presented at Sharjah Art Foundation, UAE (2018), while he also participated in *Crude*, the inaugural exhibition of Jameel Arts Centre, UAE (2019), curated by Murtaza Vali. Al Ani's first eponymous monograph, published in 2017 by Hannibal Publishing (and Hatje Cantz), won the prestigious 2017 Historical Books Award at Rencontres d'Arles. Al Ani is also the subject of a documentary

dedicated to his unique visual archive of Iraq during the 1950s through the 1970s, produced by Iraqi film director Sahim Omar Khalifa and Belgian filmmaker Jurgen Buedts entitled *Iraq Invisible Beauty*. In 2015, Al Ani became a Prince Claus Laureate.

### **The Arab Image Foundation**

The Arab Image Foundation (AIF) is an independent association forging new pathways for photography and image practices. Uniquely positioned at the intersection of artistic creation, research, and archiving, AIF explores, questions and confronts the complex social and political realities of our times. Established in 1997 and based in Beirut, their collection of over 500,000 photographic objects and documents from and related to the Middle East, North Africa and the Arab diaspora has been gradually assembled over the last 20 years by artists and researchers and through donations. With a critical and innovative approach, AIF collects, rethinks, preserves, activates and understands these photographs through their multiple strata, and enrich the collection in the process.



*Housing project office, Yarmouk, Baghdad, 1962*

### **Majlis Talk by FOLIO**

*Monday, 18 November at 4.30 pm  
Warehouse 58, Alserkal Avenue*

Latif Al Ani's solo exhibition *Vetera Novis Augere* - 'augment the old with the new' – not only celebrates the organic continuity between past and present (and into the future), but also the transmission process from older to younger generations. In this context, Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde, in collaboration with Alserkal Avenue, is pleased to announce a coinciding public talk between Al Ani and young Beirut-based Iraqi photographer Tamara Abdul Hadi, connecting two generations and artistic voices whilst providing further scope and insight into Al Ani's widely celebrated documentary archive. The conversation will be conducted in Arabic and translated by Iraqi writer and researcher Maryam Wissam Al Dabbagh.

### **Gallery Isabelle van den Eynde**

After establishing B21 Gallery in 2006, one of the first contemporary art spaces in the United Arab Emirates, Isabelle van den Eynde launched her eponymous space in Dubai's Alserkal Avenue in 2010, representing a pluralistic roster of artists from the Middle East and North Africa.

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**Public Talk: Majlis Talk by FOLIO, 18 November at 4.30 pm**

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