

"I READ, I WRITE": The Photographs of Laura Boushnak





Fatmah, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper, 50 x 75 cm, Ed 8, 2012

"I was mocked at my University and looked at in puzzlement"

"In terms of basic indicators, the Arab region has one of the highest rates of female illiteracy (as much as one half, compared to only one third among males). It also displays one of the lowest rates of enrolment at the various levels of education."

- **Source: The Arab Human Development Report 2005, UNDP**

"Through my on-going project, which so far took me to five Arab countries –Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen and Tunisia – I want to show the importance of literacy in enriching women's lives, while examining the major barriers women and girls face in accessing education, for example poverty, cultural constraints, minimal public spending on education, and outdated teaching methods."

- **Laura Boushnak**

Opposite:

Wafa (Jordan – Homebound students), Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper, 50 x 75 cm, Ed 8, 2012

"My mom had to work at the airport and my siblings were young. I stayed home instead of my mother. I used to wash, cook and clean the whole house. My dream is to become an architect."



I READ, I WRITE

An exhibition by Laura Boushnak

FROM TUNISIA through Egypt, Jordan, Kuwait and Yemen, "I Read, I Write: The Photographs of Laura Boushnak" explores the relationship between female literacy, happiness and development in the Arab world. Opening June 19 at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute, "I Read, I Write" draws together a selection of nearly five years of artist Laura Boushnak's contemporary portrait photography, and demonstrates her on-going interest in Arab women's place in society.

Nourished by her relationship with her environment, (Boushnak is a Palestinian raised in Kuwait and educated in Lebanon), Boushnak's stunning photography reflects the beauty and depth she finds in Arab women who beat the odds to become literate. Although her passion for the subject is evident, her pictures do not pass judgment, nor do they attempt to persuade. The photographer acts as an invested observer, taking a compassionate view of her subjects by superimposing the writing of women on their portraits, and letting them speak to us.

Boushnak's art speaks to us in multiple layers, each building on the other to provide additional depth, perspectives and points of views. Portraits of women committed to becoming literate, each with a poignant story of how she came to read and write, are initially manipulated by superimposing written sentences in the subject's own hand. The handwriting brings a new dimension, allowing the subject to comment on her experiences, and further drawing us into her mind. In certain cases, photographs are then combined into installations to amplify and broaden meanings and themes. Equally meaningful, other photographs are presented as stand-alone portraits when the artist either wants to emphasize the subject's story, or wants the portrait to speak to up itself.

Opposite:

I read I write - Egypt Illiteracy Classes - Samira,
Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper, 30 x 45 cm, 7 prints installed as one set, Ed 4/5, 2011.

"I learn I'm enlightened".



I read I write - Egypt Illiteracy Classes

Digital Archival Print on Photo
Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper
20 x 30 cm
Ed 4/5 (set of 7 prints)
2011



I read I write - Egypt Illiteracy Classes

Digital Archival Print on Photo
Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper
20 x 30 cm
Ed 4/5 (set of 7 prints)
2011



I read I write - Egypt Illiteracy Classes

Digital Archival Print on Photo
Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper
20 x 30 cm
Ed 4/5 (set of 7 prints)
2011



Through an intelligent use of context and environment, Boushnak's photographs and installations are sophisticated readings of major barriers standing between women and literacy.

Some highlight poverty, others cultural constraints, minimal public spending on education and outdated teaching methods that women and girls face in accessing education. Her work reminds us of Arab women's resilience in the face of fundamental challenges to their human rights, and of their ability to transcend their sometimes debilitating social environment.

Boushnak's commentary travels seamlessly to South East Asia as well: While Arab countries exhibit alarming illiteracy rates among women and girls, in Indonesia for example, according to UNESCO, some 18% of women aged 15 or older are illiterate.



Arab Classrooms, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper, 30 x 45 cm, 7 prints installed as one set, Ed 5, 2013

Opposite:

Arab Classrooms

Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag
Bright White Fine Art Paper
30 x 45 cm
Ed 5 (set of 7 prints)
2013

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Boushnak uses a digital 35 mm SLR camera, typically with a tripod. Critical to her approach to her subjects is not to intimidate them with a lot of equipment and to keep a low profile in a region where there might be some fear of cameras. This suits Boushnak's considerate approach to her subject.

Boushnak never uses artificial light and counts on natural light as a value in itself in her "environmental portraits". She uses no manipulation, filtering or resolution changes. Instead, she shoots raw image files before precise adjustments are made through colour and image-processing.

Boushnak's photographs are digital archival prints on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag Bright White fine art paper.



Aya, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper,
60 x 90 cm, Ed 8, 2012

"I want to be a pediatrician to treat the poor and cure their pain."



ان تبقى المدارس الجامعة مختلفة (بين-بنات) فهذا يعطيهن فرصة العمل معاً
بدون خلق مناخ مزعج ، لئلا تم فصلهم عن بعضهن يكون دور ان يجمعنا كهيئة الغالب
مع الجنس الآخر بسلاسة

Aliaa, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper, 40 x 60 cm, Ed 8, 2010

"keeping the private schools mixed between boys and girls, gives them the chance to work together without creating an uncomfortable environment. If the kids were separated at a young age, they'll grow up without knowing how to comfortably deal with each other."

"I read, I write" is Boushnak's first solo exhibition in Asia and features more than 40 prints.

This exhibition is organized by Sana Gallery and curated by Assaad W. Razzouk.

The exhibition debuts on 19 June 2013 at the National University of Singapore's Middle East Institute.

Front Cover (Six prints installed as one set, total dimension 140 x 315cm):

Top right: **I read I write -Yemen - Azhar**, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper , 70 x 105cm, Ed 5 + 2 AP, 2012

"I want to inspire other girls in my family as I'm the only one who completed her education. I refuse the idea that marriage is more important than education as repeated the saying "the husband is my guarantor, so there is no need to educate me."

Bottom left: **I read I write -Yemen - Ghadah**, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper , 70 x 105cm, Ed 5 + 2 AP, 2012

"My ambition was to study political science because I love to travel. But because of our society I didn't receive enough support and decided to study finance. I would like to get married after my graduation."



I Read I Write - Yemen, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper, 70 x 105 cm, Ed 8 + 2 AP, 2012

Back Cover:

Fayza, Digital Archival Print on Photo Rag Bright White Fine Art Paper , 70 x 105cm, Ed 8 + 2 AP, 2012. *"I love reading children's books. I oppose child marriage. Traditions and customs have oppressed Yemeni women. "*



I READ, I WRITE
AN EXHIBITION BY LAURA BOUSHNAK
19 June – 28 July 2013



Laura Boushnak is an award-winning Palestinian artist born in Kuwait and educated in Lebanon. She received the Washington, D.C. Peace Media Award in 2011 and her work was recently acquired by the British Museum.

Boushnak began her career as a photojournalist covering news for the Associated Press and for Agence France-Presse (AFP). Her nine-year wire service photojournalism experience included covering hard news in conflicts such as the war in Iraq and the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, and credits in the New York Times, The Guardian, The National Geographic, Le Monde and elsewhere.

Boushnak migrated to thematically focused fine art photography in 2008. Her current focus is on Arab women and education.



South-East Asia's First Middle Eastern Contemporary Art Gallery

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