

CONTEMPORARY CULTURE FROM THE ARAB WORLD
VISUAL ART / LITERATURE / FILM / MUSIC / FOOD

the
mosaic
rooms



PRESS PACK
07 January 2013

Last of the Dictionary Men
01 February - 22 March 2013
Private view Saturday 2nd February 2013, 12.30-2.30pm
The Mosaic Rooms, 226 Cromwell Road, London, SW5 0SW



Bridge + Tunnel Productions / Voices

LAST OF THE DICTIONARY MEN: An Introduction

Our land (Yemen) is the dictionary of our people – this land of far horizons where the graves of our ancestor sleep, this earth trodden by processions of sons and sons of sons.

Abdulla al-Baradduni, 1995



Muslim Parade - End of Ramadan Bridge + Tunnel Productions / Voices.

The North East of England boasts a proud maritime and industrial heritage that has all but disappeared from today's landscape along the River Tyne. Within this heritage lies a remarkable Middle Eastern connection. Over the course of 100 years, thousands of seamen from Yemen settled in the small town of South Shields and made it their home.

This multimedia exhibition features interviews with and portraits of 14 of these sailors, the last survivors of the first-generation who settled in South Shields.

From the accounts of 800 Yemeni men from Tyneside who died at sea in WW2, to the trade union riots at the Customs House, to the little-known (or long-forgotten) wedding of legendary boxer, Muhammad Ali in one of the country's first purpose built mosques - this is an inspiring and unheard story!

In 2005, the Iranian film director, Tina Gharavi, embarked on a journey to discover the legacy of Mohammed Ali's visit to South Shields in 1977 (one day after the Queen's Jubilee tour to the region!). While filming she met with the Yemeni elders at the Al-Azhar mosque who shared glimpses of their amazing lives, previously unknown and untold.

Over the last three years, Bridge + Tunnel Productions has developed a unique project, engaging two international artists (Tina Gharavi and Youssef Nabil) to work collaboratively with 14 Yemeni sailors, the last survivors of the first-generation who settled in South Shields.

Mohammad Nasser told me of his time in the Royal Navy during the Falkland conflict when he was captured and tortured. As I filmed, he shared his scars and told me of his fight to get recognition and compensation.



**AN A.M. QATTAN
FOUNDATION PROJECT**

The Mosaic Rooms
A.M. Qattan Foundation
Tower House
226 Cromwell Road
London SW5 0SW

T. 020 7370 9990
www.mosaicrooms.org
info@mosaicrooms.org
facebook.com/mosaicrooms
twitter.com/TheMosaicRooms

My heart sank the morning I got a call that Mohammad Nasser had passed away in November 2006. The history of the Yemeni in South Shields could only really be read in the Harton Cemetery where intriguing names and dates speak of a long history that is both enchanting and important and now there was one less who could tell us that story.

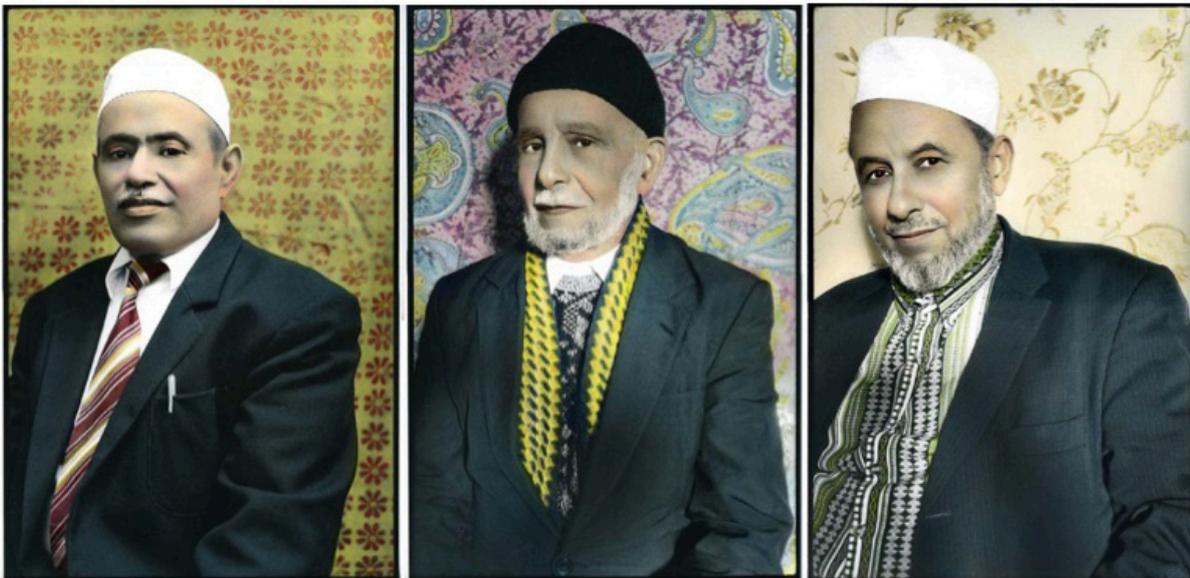
Tina Gharavi.

These endangered stories have been captured with an uncompromising vision to preserve and share with an international audience. Gharavi's new large-scale film installation and Nabil's photographic portraits reveal the heritage of this community, while challenging the boundaries of conventional modes of representation and authorship associated with the social histories and archive.

Last of the Dictionary Men cuts across the North East landscapes: industrial, historic, and natural reaching across continents and generations. It exists to promote pride, recognition and renewed interest in early Diaspora stories from the diverse ex-colonial migrants that made Britain great.

This exhibition also offers a timely exploration and understanding of the complexity of British-Arab identities.

LAST OF THE DICTIONARY MEN: A photographic commission by Youssef Nabil
(C-Type photographic prints)



Youssef Nabil/Bridge + Tunnel Productions

A series of thirteen commissioned hand-coloured portraits by the internationally renowned photographer, Youssef Nabil.

This commission sought to create a different picture of migrant working class communities. Nabil has captured the first-generation of Yemeni sailors with pride they embody as individuals and as a community.



Bridge + Tunnel Productions / Voices.

LAST OF THE DICTIONARY MEN: An interactive audio/ visual installation by Tina Gharavi
(Digital video in Arabic/ English)

A large-scale audio/ visual installation presenting fourteen unique interviews of the men who represent the last of the first-generation of Yemeni sailors in South Shields

Each interview will appear on a television set (a domestic model commonly seen in the British homes across the 1950's to 80's). The sets will be placed upon fourteen bespoke plinths, the individual heights of which will correspond with the heights of the interviewees. The audience will enter the installation to be met by their elders, and will have the choice to interact with the individual interviews on their own terms.

Collectively, this installation creates a historical portrait depicting formerly unheard migration stories that span across the British colonial and post-colonial era.



© James Tolley (BAL TIC)

THE KING OF SOUTH SHIELDS: An experimental documentary by Tina Gharavi

(Digital video, 24 mins, English)



The King of South Shields is the story of how an individual can have a lasting effect on the lives of other people. This film revisits the Yemeni-British men who met Ali when he came to the North East of England in 1977 and had his wedding blessed at the Al Azhar Mosque, the first purpose-built mosque in Britain. South Shields is in many ways one of Britain's more neglected towns, but it has had a vibrant Arab connection stretching back to the 1890s.

LAST OF THE DICTIONARY MEN: Artists' Biographies

TINA GHARAVI is an artist/writer/director/producer who's past films have won several awards, been official selections of the Sundance Film Festival and screened at festivals and broadcasts internationally (including Channel Four in the UK and Showtime in the US). Her work explores the veracity of the image and combines intriguing improvisational and dramatic work as a way of developing new languages for storytelling. Sundance programmer Shari Frilot, commenting on Gharavi's Closer (2000) said '...it takes documentary to the next level'.

For nearly a decade, she has been involved in both formal and informal education. In 2000 Tina setup and established the Kooch Cinema Group, a community media training project, which is made up of asylum seekers and refugee participants from the Middle East based in the North of England. She started this project after returning to Iran to make a Channel Four commissioned documentary, Mother/Country, about revisiting her mothers house 23 years after leaving. Along with several other newspapers, Time Out selected Mother/Country as 'Pick of the Week' and called it 'genuinely moving.' In 2001 she was awarded a prestigious US National Endowment for the Arts residency at Hallwalls, Buffalo, NY where she completed A Town Like Lackawanna, a film about a Muslim/European immigrant community in America post-9/11.

Tina Gharavi was educated in the US and France. She is currently a Lecturer in English (Digital Media) at the Newcastle University. In her spare time, Tina dreams of becoming a beekeeper.

YOUSSEF NABIL was born in Cairo in 1972. He lives and works in New York. Nabil grew up in Cairo drenched in the cinema of the golden age of 'Hollywood on the Nile', and he recalls with nostalgia the glamour, ease, elegance and melodrama of this world of black and white film.

Nabil's early attachment to the cinema lives on in his photos in a special fondness for mise en scène and choice of settings. He started his photography career in 1992, asking friends to pose for him and act in scenes that he wrote and directed, mostly about loneliness, death and sexuality. He took the photos in black and white, then hand-coloured them using the old-fashioned technique popular in Cairo. "Until very recently you could still find hand-painted movie posters on the streets of Cairo, and in most houses a hand-coloured black and white family portrait. This was so much a part of my world that I decided to incorporate it into my work and combine this old technique with my contemporary images."

Nabil's work has been presented on numerous solo and group exhibitions at venues including the British Museum, London; Fries Museum, Leeward; Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town; Townhouse Gallery, Cairo; FotoFest Houston, Texas; Centre de Cultura Contemporànea de Barcelona; Institut du Monde Arabe, Paris; Third Line Gallery, Dubai; Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo, Sevilla and Aperture Foundation, New York.

Related events

The exhibition will be accompanied by a programme of talks, events, and screenings looking at contemporary Yemeni culture. The Mosaic Rooms has also commissioned a new short video to be developed by Bridge + Tunnel, which will be screened during the latter part of the exhibition. This video will capture oral histories recorded from a range of participants from the Yemeni community in London.

The exhibition will be open Tuesday-Saturday, 11am-6pm, entrance free.

Producer's Talk

Saturday 2nd March 2013, 12pm.

Producer Tina Gharavi will be in conversation with Venetia Porter, Assistant Keeper (curator) of Islamic and contemporary Middle East at The British Museum, about *Last of the Dictionary Men* and *The King of South Shields*. The discussion will be followed by a Q & A session. Free event, rsvp@mosaicrooms.org.

Special Sunday Opening

17 March 2013, 12-5pm.

Notes to editors

- Producer Tina Gharavi as well as some of the participant sailors from the project will be available for interview via The Mosaic Rooms. Contact Rachael or Danielle on 020 7370 9990 or email press@mosaicrooms.org.
- Images from the exhibition are available via The Mosaic Rooms.
- Bridge + Tunnel Productions is an independent media production company based in Newcastle upon Tyne. Their projects revolve around the themes of identity, migration and equality, inspired by our ethos of uncompromising creative vision and social relevance.
- Bridge + Tunnel Productions' work ranges from mainstream broadcast documentaries to gallery installations. Their training initiatives include workshops with young refugees and multimedia initiatives with octogenarian members of the Yemeni community. Their unique, exciting and challenging projects make a difference to the lives of audiences and everyone involved in making them.
- Tina Gharavi, the founder and Creative Director of Bridge + Tunnel, was educated in the US and France. She is currently a Lecturer in English (Digital Media) at the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.
- *The King of South Shields* Trailer is available to view on YouTube and will be screened for the duration of the exhibition.
- Members of the Yemeni community who are interested in participating in the London video project should contact Rachael on 020 7370 9990 or email rachael@mosaicrooms.org.
- A DVD of the project is available from The Mosaic Rooms bookshop.

- The reference to 'Dictionary Men' owes its inspiration to the Yemeni poet and writer Abdullah al-Baradduni, who wrote in 1995: 'Our land is the dictionary of our people – this land of far horizons where the graves of our ancestors sleep, this earth trodden by processions of sons and sons of sons.'
- Follow the exhibition on twitter [#dictionarymen](#).
- The exhibition was previously shown at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, UK; Al-Saeed Cultural Centre in Taiz, Yemen; and the National Museum, Sana'a, Yemen in 2008.
- The Mosaic Rooms, a leading independent arts space in west London, deliver a high quality, contemporary and progressive cultural programme from the Arab world and internationally. They are managed by the A.M. Qattan Foundation, a UK charity dedicated to the support of culture and education in Palestine and the Arab world. The Foundation's London office, headed by one of its trustees, Omar Al-Qattan, is responsible for the Mosaic Rooms' programme. The Rooms are part of the Culture and Arts Programme of the A.M. Qattan Foundation.
- The Mosaic Rooms is situated on the corner of the Cromwell Road and Earl's Court Road in Kensington, London, a short walk from Earl's Court Underground Station and Exhibition Centre. For further information about The Mosaic Rooms and the A.M. Qattan Foundation visit www.mosaicrooms.org.

